

IMAP Action 9.1 Regional Sustainability Targets**Leicester Street Alliance**

Background

The Leicester Street Alliance (LSA) consulting team has been commissioned to conduct a desktop review of water, waste and energy efficiency programs directed at residents and businesses within the IMAP region. The data gathered is to feed into IMAP Action item **9.1: Regional Sustainability Targets**.

Review parameters

1. Collect data regarding the operation, jurisdiction, timeline and current status of non-council programs addressing water, waste or energy efficiency within the IMAP region.
2. Collate council data, provided by the IMAP councils, with non-council data, categorising for program size.
3. Analyse all data, highlighting any gaps and/or overlaps in the program pool and identifying any opportunities for collaboration.

The review should cover any programs available to the community, including business (small and medium), individuals, groups (not-for-profit, sport, environment, etc.).

Data gathered should be as up-to-date as possible, and all entries validated through direct communication rather than relying on web-based information.

Review process

Conducted throughout December 2008 and early January 2009, the review required us to:

1. Conduct a web search of federal, state and local sites to identify current environmental programs, review their criteria and sort as to applicability for residents and businesses in the IMAP region;
2. Interview environmental officers within the four IMAP councils to create a list of specific Council generated and delivered activities (whether directing state and federal funding, or using local funding);
3. Collate the two lists;
4. Check for accuracy and timeliness of data;
5. Identify gaps and overlaps in the provision of services that emerge from the review.

Findings: General

Before we go any further, it is important to note that we have been asked to highlight some of the gaps and overlaps in service delivery. Accordingly, the comments below tend to look critical when taken out of context. The truth is that many people of goodwill and energy are working hard to achieve what needs to be done in this area. They experience difficulties, which they have made clear, because they are working **IN** the problem, not **ON** the problem.

The fully detailed lists that represent the main output of this task are appended as Excel spreadsheets.

The points below describe the main issues, gaps and overlaps that emerged for us during our conduct of the review.

1. Accuracy and timeliness of web-based information. It proved extremely hard to verify information. The various information systems have been automated to the point where it is almost impossible to contact an individual who has detailed program knowledge, particularly about the budget of a program and the length of time funds will be available, and who has the freedom to communicate that information.
2. Information on funding cycles. Many departments are unwilling to provide anything more than the most basic information. Every organisation operates with its own policy and review cycle, which means there is no point in time where decisions about funding, naming and timing of programs align.
3. User-friendly support and interpretation. In both the desktop review and the interviews it emerged that the system did not provide much useful interpretative data for users. What products to buy/install, how to bundle funding opportunities, how to prioritise environmental actions – these critical components of the decision-making process were ignored in the majority of cases. Strict interpretation of Privacy and Competition Policy may be a significant hindrance here. Users look to information sites to provide information that they can act on.
4. Targets and measurement. The past decade has seen major advances in our ability to understand and measure qualitative change in the intersection of environmental and social programs. However, the measurement process still seems to rely heavily on quantitative targets derived from individual events/action. This results in sub-optimisation of resources: potential users are unable to identify ways of achieving synergy (e.g. undertaking group or street-level action, bundling programs strategically, developing a schedule of implementation that results in incremental improvement, understanding the lifestyle trade-offs required). This lack of co-ordination tends to mean evaluation is conducted in terms of outputs (what we did), rather than outcomes (what changed as a result of our actions/investment).
5. Opportunistic or reactive action. At the Council level much good work is being done. However, those interviewed saw their work as opportunistic and reactive – responding to individual questions and requests, identifying an ally with whom to work, attaching an environmental element to a larger pre-existing program. The interviewees were agreed that the system encouraged them to operate in this way: it discourages holistic, systemic action that would remove blockages to large-scale change. (This said, internal or cross-Council collaboration was emerging, but was largely dependent on the will and energy of individuals.)

6. Experimental action. The price of opportunistic action (see point 5 above) is that what we do tends to be experimental – one-off applications of theory to test viability. While a specific action may work, there is not a pathway for standardising, transferring and replicating what was learned. Many existing programs are aimed at experimental action in the sense that they promote the situation of an individual experimenting with a single discreet action. This applies to both citizens who engage in a program and to Council officers interacting with their communities.
7. Demographic data. Each of the Councils in the IMAP region is significantly different in its citizen or business make-up as well as its priorities and resources. At the same time, each conducts its own research and analysis of demographic data, apparently using no shared model or formal sharing process.
8. Focus on 'opt-in' programs. Programs that rely on the participation of interested and committed people alone will not achieve change. It is important to reach and convert those who are NOT on the path to sustainability. Yet most programs are designed for people who are already doing things to reduce their environmental impact. This rests on assumptions about trickle-down or critical mass change that are not justified by the research or literature into environmental change.
9. Related to the above point is an emphasis on programs and blitzes rather than on-going service provision that will take residents through a developmental process that achieves improvement on several fronts.
10. Politics. As an emerging issue, environmental action is hostage to the forces of electoral politics. There is no reason why this should not be the case in a democratic society. However, the degree of variation in commitment to change across Melbourne seems to indicate environmental action is still seen as a discretionary issue rather than one that is at the centre of responsible local government.
11. Council perspectives. Each of the IMAP Councils has a different approach to delivering sustainability. All integrate the three main themes of Behaviour Change, Funding and Information. However, there are differences which emerge from the spreadsheets:
 - a. City of Melbourne programs emphasise funding and information. Behaviour change is not an obvious component of the mix, unless it is seen as likely to emerge from increased awareness and funding incentives. There is not a lot of evidence to support this as a viable community change strategy;
 - b. City of Port Phillip programs rely heavily on information and awareness-raising. However, there are more tightly targeted programs, and additionally, in what the literature tells us is a good move, the community (users) can define their own projects and activities under several programs;

- c. City of Stonnington programs appear to be smaller, more opportunistic, and created more as one-offs in response to interest expressed by groups, businesses and individuals. The emphasis is on a mix of information and behaviour change, often built around events, often with low-cost incentives rather than grants;
- d. City of Yarra again emphasises information and behaviour change. Like Port Phillip, Yarra is also using citizen involvement as a foundation with trial projects and community designed projects.

Findings: Specific

Overlaps and Gaps

There are many overlaps in the provision of services. Usually, where there is an overlap, there is a matching gap.

Some specific overlap areas include:

1. Packaging and marketing of grants and rebates. There are multiple 'versions' of a relatively few total number of interventions. For example: insulation, showerhead replacement, green power, or solar rebates. These are all presented in a variety of guises through many levels of government, mostly as if each offer was unique and different.
2. There are also many websites that operate at the lower end of awareness about environmental matters. These cover off the same issues, tips and reasons for action repeatedly. A structured approach that allowed users to understand the process of engaging in environmental change would be useful (MEFL has a good model).
3. Data use. Most agencies, departments and councils have conducted surveys and data searches to underpin decisions and shape strategy. While the resulting data is shared informally at the officer level, there appears to be no co-ordination through, perhaps, a clearing house, or shared data portal, that enables officers at a variety of levels to compare data and expand their understanding of the situation.
4. Evaluation. Evaluation processes appear to focus on outputs (did we spend the money and produce what we said we would?). This is an administrative and financial measure that has its place and importance but does not illuminate the changing face of community awareness or what the programs achieve for the community.
5. Individual solutions. Another overlap aspect is the emphasis on individual solutions. This is a little harder to describe because it is a reasonable expectation that individual action should drive change. Most programs are geared to the action that individuals can take, rather than communities of

interest. The fallacy of the people-reliant approach is that the literature tells us that individual commitment or willingness to change is critical, it is not enough to guarantee effective action. Action is far easier when effort is directed *as well* to the group/community level. Currently there seem to be too many disconnected individually based programs that do not then link to group programs that can achieve step-change.

6. Website design. Most websites carry similar, repetitive information. They address the very early stages of change: those most concerned with awareness and information rather than the middle and later stages that revolve around action, collaboration and management of change. We could do a lot better, particularly given the social networking capacities of Web 2.0.

Opportunities

Let's call them opportunities rather than gaps. Some key opportunities we saw include:

1. Collaborative action. While some collaborative action is evident, most programs operate either as proprietary or, at best, collegiate, activities. By this we mean that the act of working together is not necessarily collaboration. Agendas and organisational needs still exist and conflict, particularly at the higher levels of decision making. The best examples of true collaboration (sharing, learning and taking action) exist at the individual officer level where we see proactive, responsive and opportunistic change undertaken by individuals not organisations. These should be studied and integrated.
2. The model of change. How does change happen? How long does it take? What helps it emerge? What hinders? Do we want change in behaviour or attitudes, or both? There appears to be no coherent or constant model of change anywhere in this system. Direction seems to be intuitive, personalised and dependent on the energy of the individual. There are hierarchical, top-down assumptions operating alongside bottom-up, community-designed solutions. While the *let a thousand flowers bloom* approach might have benefits, it usually results in wasted resources and poor outcomes if it is promoted without an understanding of the arc of change.
3. Explore the heart and mind of the user. We have argued that most websites and printed material (and possibly workshops) operate at the low end of effective behavioural change. That is, they are not designed to threaten the status quo. It is possible, given a range of evidence we do not have the space for here that the community is in advance of the program funders. How can we test for that and re-gear service provision to better meet the real concerns and needs of people rather than those we assume are their interest?

4. Go where the clients are. The majority of offerings are geared towards those who are already committed to environmental change. Perhaps this is the right approach, but if it is, the information that accompanies the offering is way behind. Those ready to take action want advice – on where to buy, what to pay, which is best, etc. They are making commercial decisions as well as environmental ones and the majority of programs and information avoid this crucial need.
5. A common critique, when we talked to council and agency officers was that they were forced to work with programs that were piecemeal, ad hoc and not geared towards systemic results. The gap here resides around the policy decisions that set boundaries and barriers between programs and agencies. Again, we have observed that while the individuals work to overcome these difficulties, the top-down system design works to institutionalise silos and lack of co-operation.
6. Measurement of progress. Commentary on measurement and evaluation highlighted several opportunities:
 - a. The term 'progress' could be clarified and linked to systemic change;
 - b. Measurement focussed too heavily on quantitative targets (number of units, homes, trees, sites, etc.) and lacked a dimension that dealt with qualitative change;
 - c. Measures were developed to make sense to the funding/delivery organisation, not the consumer;
 - d. There was some confusion about what we should be measuring/evaluating (this is linked to the point above re: the model of change). This fed back into program design when decisions were made about where to apply resources. Do we look at the first, the biggest, the best, the most impactful, the cheapest?
7. Websites
 - a. Provide a single portal/entry point (we understand this is underway at the federal level);
 - b. Reduce the rhetoric and motherhood statements they make the programs and funding hard to find and contextualise;
 - c. Provide bundling opportunities/advice so that users can i) prioritise their action, ii) build synergies in their action;
 - d. Language is often incoherent and inconsistent;
 - e. Provide links and advice on purchasing. Doing so will increase the take up of funding opportunities, as it will be possible to make a link between funding and action via the purchase decision.

Possible action

This was not a detailed review of the effectiveness of programs, nor is it possible to compare the virtues or otherwise of specific programs.

However, beyond simply gathering together a list of available opportunities for funding, it is possible to draw some conclusions from the points above that deal with gaps and overlaps.

The common language of all those we talked to on this project was full of terms such as, ad-hoc, piecemeal, unimportant, irrelevant, inconsistent and incoherent.

It seems that Council planners, environmental officers, project co-ordinators and others can clearly see the need to bundle, organise, redesign or simplify the funding process, but are caught up in a system that seems designed (probably for promotional reasons) without the end user in mind.

We can suggest the following:

Council/officer level:

Councils are the interface between the funder's intent and the citizen's uptake of environmental improvement opportunities. At the officer/ co-ordinator level, there are many experienced and capable people working to deliver services. Their work could be improved by:

- Encouraging upwards negotiation and collaborative processes. Currently, collaboration exists mainly as a result of individual initiative, not as a result of systemic intent;
- The same goes for feedback processes. This review did not look at feedback processes, specifically, but the websites, application forms and guidelines are constructed for the most part to avoid information passing back up the chain from those at the delivery end. In simple terms, a system that does not allow feedback cannot improve.

Information:

- Address problems with the non-use of readily available information, for example rates databases;
- Many programs are designed with a 'blitz' orientation – short, sharp and directed towards specific audiences. As indicated earlier, this methodology is based on assumptions about marketing change, not social change. A service orientation might be preferable, where the consumer/end user is able to make choices against a background of integrated services.

To summarise

While there a vast number of programs, they mostly adhere to two simple types:

- *Post-hoc* technology fixes that are designed as discrete events rather than as a plan of works, and;
- Individual behaviour change based on marketing theory rather than social change theory.

These programs constantly reiterate that people (who produce too much greenhouse gas) and things (that are poorly designed) are the problem; that there is nothing wrong in the broader systems of consumption and lifestyle that those with more influence on the system need to change.

As such, those at the leading edge of commitment to environmental change – whether working inside councils or as members of the general community, find their activism co-opted by a funding disbursement system that focuses on avoiding collective action other than in a narrow political sense.

This is not an unknown approach or result. We have been seeing evidence coming out of the social/welfare sector for more than fifteen years of similar processes. So it is not surprising that we are now seeing a similar institutional response being played out in the social/environmental arena.

Common themes are vague intent, lack of research or modelling, advertising spin at the expense of facts, unnecessary complexity, obfuscation and unjustified promises.

There are effective actions that citizens can take on the basis of some programs and these are important. As we said earlier, much is being done, but the current focus of programs tends to lose the synergies that research overseas has proved can be attained by programs that work across streets, communities and regions. This is at odds with the provision of similar programs for business, where it has long been accepted that the best results emerge from industry and sector based interventions with appropriate incentives and clear regulatory boundaries.

The system has, as a resource, a cadre of committed and capable people who are well used to working across boundaries to achieve results. These people can easily describe the shortfalls of the current system in operational terms.

There are some additional aspects of program design and delivery that could be affected positively by an organisation such as IMAP to reduce overlaps and ensure services are better targeted. These include:

- Co-ordinated and user-friendly web resources that provide levels of information, especially for those ready to make purchasing decisions;
- A funded clearing-house approach to information sharing and strategy development;

- Investigate and apply an integrated change model that can be used to develop future strategy (many are available: CBSM, Stages of Concern, TTM, or Prochaska's model);
- Evaluation of system performance as well as project outputs. There is little information on how and why some things work as opposed to other interventions that fail;
- Negotiate upwards with funders to adapt funding to suit community-level and citizen-designed solutions. This is a missing element currently;
- Review funding descriptors, application processes and forms for consistency of language, purpose, timing cycles and requirements. This should include better bracketing of the amounts available so as to assist applicants.
- Develop a model that helps people achieve synergistic solutions that build to deliver step change. Currently, programs are organised as discrete, unconnected activities, where the really big benefits lie in developing a works program where each step contributes to the next.