Equipping Regional Sustainability Education Networks for Creating Change Project

Comparative Evaluation Report Measuring Change Evaluation Report 3

Publication note: *This document is one of three reports produced by the project evaluator for the Creating Change Project Management Group and ultimately for the funding body, the NSW Environmental Trust. The project was independently evaluated by Grahame Collier, T Issues Consultancy[1]. Other reports can be made available through AAEE NSW at* www.aaeensw.org.au

1. Introduction

This report is the third of three reports to the Project Management Group and the NSW Environmental Trust.

1. 'Leadership for Sustainability' Skills Development Program for Regional Sustainability Education Network group (RSEN) members.
   (6 months from Sept 2016 - Feb 2017 – Oct 16 to Mar 17) Essentially Stage1 of the project, reported upon to the Trust, March 2017.
2. Mentoring and Application Period for RSENs (9 months from Feb - Oct 2017 Mar 17 to Mar 18) Stage 2 of the project.
3. Celebration and Evaluation Period (3/6 months from Dec 2017 – Feb 2018 Mar-Jun 2018) Stage 2 of the project.

Reports 1 and 2 provide evidence that the desired project outcomes were achieved both at the mid-term and at the end of the project. Report 1 relating to Stage 1 activity and outcomes and Report 2 relating to Stage 2 activity and outcomes. This report focuses upon providing significant pre and post comparative analysis about the impact of the project on the: structure, functioning and effectiveness of the Regional Sustainability Education Network (RSEN) groups; and on the development of skills in leadership, networking and other related skills among participants.

This information was obtained by comparing benchmark data, from surveys prior to the commencement of the project, to the end of Stage1 data (March 2017) and then the Stage 2 data obtained at the very end of the project (June 2018).

The purpose of this report is to provide information particularly relevant to Project outcomes 2, 4, 5, and 6, where improvements were sought.

This report provides a summary of the key comparative findings at 2 below and the relevant data set upon which these findings are drawn out, at the Appendix below.

2. Summary of Key Comparative Findings

a. Significant Findings – RSENS

As a result of the Creating Change project the RSEN groups across NSW are stronger, more strategic and much more effective.

They meet more often; they are better coordinated and members communicate more in a range of ways, in person and via electronic media.

Through the project RSENs across NSW have reached and engaged more educators within a broad range of sectors (see Report 1 for description of sectors). They have used the resources developed by the project effectively and well to broaden their scope and efficacy. The resources used include guides and templates produced during the life of the project (see report 2).

These groups are maintained by volunteers who take on extra roles, they coordinate meetings, facilitate capacity building activities, organise the development and delivery of joint projects, develop and implement strategic plans. These groups have been mentored and supported effectively during the project and now have the capacity and leadership to provide internal support.

Ongoing support for these committed people is highly important and a significant goal of AAEE NSW. It needs to be noted though that this organisation is also under-resourced and relies on the efforts of volunteers to manage and deliver projects and to support RSENs.

A large about of quantitative data is cited in Appendix 1A to provide the requisite evidence upon which these findings are based. In addition, the following quotes are very few of very many qualitative inputs received by the evaluator that provide complementary evidence.

NRGEE now has a plan, strategy and are all working closely again. Personally, my role has changed somewhat in the region to be more management and strategic, but NE Waste continues to be actively involved in NRGEE.

I feel I have a much better sense of the roles people are playing in my community/region in environmental education. I know who they are and how to find them and they know how to find me and what I do. Instead of feeling competitive and isolated, we all feel very friendly and warm towards one another so we will enjoy working together and our projects will have better outcomes as a result.

RSENs are working more effectively. They are network groups with visibility and commitment where people want to belong.

I was new to environmental education and new to the region when I started. The project opened my eyes to all the many groups of educators that exist in a range of settings from councils to government departments to EECs and small organisations. I had no idea these existed before so I was mentored a little by other participants in the training at first and then a lot more when we started meeting as a regional team.

Some wonderful networks have been established and reinforced by this project.

Education and participation of the wider community, particularly young people and their

families in the regeneration of the nominated Big Scrub sites. Collaborative bonds between local environmental educators, school communities and local university researchers strengthened.

We are just doing everything so much better. Our RSEN committee meets every month via webinar. We currently host 4 face-to-face events/year- one each school term.

b. Significant Findings - Participants

As a result of the Creating Change project, those who participated report substantially enhanced skills and capacity in leadership, networking and engagement, because of the project. All project measures identified at the outset of the project, have been achieved, as indicated in the table below.

Of particular importance, it is noted that program participants are better at motivating and engaging the community in education programs, delivering programs that impact on people's behaviour and evaluating the outcomes of their efforts.

Almost unanimously, participants reported that there practice had been improved, in that they had become better leaders and networkers. It is acknowledged that some had higher entry level skills in these areas than others; however improvement was reported by almost all participants within almost all measures. It is apparent from the results and it was expected that the most extensive rate of improvement for Participants occurred in Stage 1 of the project; given this was the specific objective (and intended outcome) of that Stage (see Report 1). It is heartening to note that for many participants there was continuing growth in skills and capacity through Stage 2 as well (see Report 2).

There is a plethora of quantitative and qualitative data available to support these findings see below and in Reports 1 and 2. The following quotes from participants amplify and complement the more quantitative data that is provided:

My objectives for participation in this course were totally achieved. The course did provide me with an opportunity to meet and learn from others in the environmental education field, provide a wonderful way to gain insight into what is currently happening in the NSW space and provide me with a support network for project implementation in 2017. Thank you.

I believe I have become a much more effective communicator and developed a strong network. These were two of my main objectives and I now feel much more comfortable in my professional roles.

Very content with my personal growth. My objectives were met and I was especially appreciative of the group that I was part of and the event that we organised.

Although it was difficult to know what exactly we were going to do at times, I was excited to work with a passionate team of other educators and had a sense from the beginning that it would have a big impact because of the calibre of the people involved and the range of organisations they came from. It felt like an incredible opportunity to learn from them.

It was a great journey that pushed me to learn new techniques for engaging participants and I especially liked the evaluation hierarchy work - an area that I definitely needed to grow in.

The table below provides specific findings with respect to each Program Measure (see also Appendix 1.2). It indicates that all thirteen measures were achieved by the project (green shading) and that there was substantial growth in participant's leadership, networking and engagement skills and capacities as a result of the project. A significant achievement!

Measure	Result/Commentary
Leadership measures	
Managing up so the executive in my organisation provide high level support for my work	**Survey data indicated discernible changes, particularly at the Stage 2 survey 29% said 'much improved at this' and 33% said they were 'good at this compared to 20% at the end of Stage 1.**
Gaining support from peers within and outside my organisation	**Substantial change at this measure - 42% said they were 'much improved at this' and no-one said they 'needed help at this' (16% at baseline).**
Gaining support from others who I need to involve in my projects	**Substantial change in this measure, no participant said they 'needed some help to do this better.' Forty-two percent felt they were 'good at this by the end of Stage 2; and 38% could do this better.**
Motivating/engaging members of the community/colleagues who are not interested in or committed to the environment/sustainability	**There was discernible change in this measure. Compared to a baseline of only 9% who rated themselves as 'good at this,' 54% said they were 'good at this' at completion.**
Networking measures	
Networking with peers	**Strong shift in this measure during Stage 1; 65% said they were 'good at this' compared to only 46% at baseline. Also at the end of Stage 2, no participants said they still needed some help to 'do this better' compared to 14% at Baseline. Also 50% said they had 'improved at this' during the course of the project.**
Networking with the community	**This program has helped participants to grow their skills in networking with the community. At the end of Stage 1,**

Measure	Result/Commentary
	63% reported being 'good at this' and a further 28% said they were 'reasonable' at it. At Baseline 43% said they were 'reasonable' and 36% said they were 'good at this.' At the end of Stage 2, 38% said they had improved at this.
Gaining personal and project benefits from my networking skills	With respect to this measure, the percentage of participants who said they 'needed help to do this better' had dropped considerably; from 41% at baseline to 12% at the end of Stage 1 to 0% at the end of Stage 2. Also 46% indicated they had improved at this' through the project.
Engaging participants in my projects through networking	Substantial improvement in this measure; At baseline 41% 'needed help to do this better' and at the end of Stage 1 this had dropped to 18%; no respondent indicated they needed help by the end of the project - Stage 2. In addition, 38% reported being 'good at this' at the end of Stage 1 compared to 11% at baseline; 54% said they were good at this by the end of the project.
EVALUATOR NOTE re Southern Cross University Research	It is noted that further research into the networking functions of the MNCSEN will occur prior to December 2018, through an internal grant from Southern Cross University, secured by a program participant and application supported by AAEENSW.
Engagement Measures	
Delivering projects that impact on people's behaviour	At the end of Stage 2 no participants reported that they 'need some help to do this better' compared to 20% at baseline. In all 54% reported that they were 'good at this', 22% higher than at baseline and 25% indicated they were 'much improved' at this.
Identifying, planning and delivering innovative attractive programs	Only one person reported at the end of Stage 1 that they 'need some more help with this,' and none at the end of Stage 2 compared to five a baseline. In all 63% said that they were 'good at this' at the end of Stage 2 compared to 34% at baseline.
Writing clear project outcomes and how they might be measured	There were substantial gains with respect to the capability to write outcomes and measure them. At baseline, 34% said that they 'need some more help with this.' This figure had dropped to 10% at the end of Stage 1 and 0% at the end of Stage 2. Thirty-four percent said they were 'good at this at baseline and this had risen to 42% at the end of Stage 1 and 50% at the end of the project.
Evaluating the outcomes of my projects	While at the end of Stage 1, 23% said that they 'still need some more help with evaluating the outcomes of a program,' that number is substantially less than the 46% who said this at baseline. At the end of Stage 2 no-one

Measure	Result/Commentary
	said they needed more help. Also at the end of Stage 2, 50% said they were 'good at this,' an increase from 25% at baseline.
Reporting my successes and learning to others	**Participants have also got better at reporting the outcomes of their projects; 20% said that they were 'good/reasonably good' at this at baseline. This figure had risen to 42% at the end of Stage 2 of the project.**

Appendix 1. Relevant Data

A. Relevant Data for RSENS

Three specific data sets are cited that inform the findings concerning the substantial improvements across RSENs in achieving:

Outcome 4. *Improved capacity and effectiveness of RSENS to provide strategic support to member organisations and members.*

Outcome 6. *Identified improvements in strategic planning and networking within each RSEN.*

Data Set 1: See Report 2 RSENS have produced significant products.

    i. Eight of the RSENs have now written strategic plans and are working towards implementation.

    ii. Nine RSENs All groups have developed joint projects and by end July, eight will be written up some have been written up as best practice case studies. It is noted that this process will still be occurring for one additional case study - expected completion mid-August.

Data set 2. The first of these data sets analyses benchmark and end of program data summarised in the table below. It is clear that on a number of measures related to the effectiveness of RSENs, substantial improvements can be identified. This table shows that on four measures these improvements are significant (green shading) and on the remaining three measures, there has been improvement but at a lesser magnitude (yellow shading).

Table 1. *Measures of Improvement data*

AT BASELINE	AT END OF PROGRAM	HAS THERE BEEN IMPROVEMENT
Only two RSENs rated themselves as 'active and effective.'	Seven RSENs rated themselves as 'active and effective.'	
Eight RSENs rated themselves as 'active but could be more effective.' Note four of these strongly agreed with this statement	Four RSENs rated themselves as 'active but could be more effective.' As indicated in Report 2, more than one person from some RSENs did the survey and as such their responses were not always consistent. Note re this item, two RSENs selected both this box and the one above.	
Five RSENs rated themselves as 'very limited in what it is doing and could do much more.'	No RSEN rated themself as 'very limited in what it is doing and could do much more.'	
Six RSENS saw the need for strong 'coordination and leadership.'	While the need for strong 'coordination and leadership' was flagged by a number of RSENs, there were reduced numbers who saw this as essential – because it had	

AT BASELINE	AT END OF PROGRAM	HAS THERE BEEN IMPROVEMENT
	been improved markedly during the course of the project. Given this it is achieved at a significant level.	
Five RSENs disagreed with the statement 'we have tried to make our RSEN work but there is a lack of interest'. Only 3 RSENs agreed with this statement	Five RSENs disagreed STRONGLY with the statement 'we have tried to make our RSEN work but there is a lack of interest'. Only 3 RSENs agreed with this statement	
Nine of the ten RSENs disagreed that there is 'no interest in their region in supporting RSENs', a similar result was obtained about the level of interest in three respondents' organisations.	There was evidence that supporting RSENs across all regions and employing authorities was important. All responding RSENs said this.	
Six respondents saw the problem as 'people are just too busy and there is little time for managing a RSEN.'	The problem remains 'people are just too busy and there is little time for managing a RSEN.' Seven respondents said this and noted the voluntary nature of the work.	

Data set 3. The third of these data sets relates to the level of activity and membership of the RSEN from benchmark 2016 to end of project June 2018. The following table extracts and analyses information provided in each of the two surveys. Data from 2016 benchmark is shaded in green and data from the final survey of RSENs is shaded in blue.

Note: this set of data does include names of respondents/coordinators.

Table 2. Membership and Coordination Data

RSEN BENCHMARK 2016	Data Completed by...	Active members	RSEN END OF PROJECT 2018	Data completed by/'active' members	Number in Network group
Southern NSW	Doug Reckord	Less than 5	Now Sapphire Coast SEN and Science Hub	Doug Reckord

2 Very active members | Over 100 Schools, National Parks, LLS, Council, NGOs, Businesses, Private individuals |
| **Central Coast Environmental Education Network** | Jane Smith, Coordinator | Over 10 | Central Coast EEN | Jane Smith Now Mayor of Central Coast Council; Still involved in EEN but | A core group. 40 on the list. They are mostly community environment organisations, most of the formal educators are regulars at events/activities |

RSEN BENCHMARK 2016	Data Completed by...	Active members	RSEN END OF PROJECT 2018	Data completed by/'active' members	Number in Network group
(CCEEN)				not as coordinator. Nick Carson one of 3 organisers since this Sustainability Leadership program	
MRGEE (Mid Rivers Group of Environmental Educators)	Ali Bigg , member	5 to 10	Now Mid-North Coast Sustainability Education Network (MNCSEN) Amalgamation of MRGEE and non-functioning Manning Group	Lisa Siegel 4 key members who are organisers for in the north and one in the south	Eighty in the network About 20 active members in the southern group- remainder in the north
Western Sydney Environmental Educators Network	Judith Bruinsma, Network convener	Over 10	Judith Bruinsma	A single coordinator and 2 active members	Almost 20 local government sustainability and environmental educators only one state government educator. Network drawn from 9-10 organisations
Northern Rivers Group of Environmental Educators (NRGEE)	Kirsty Howton, (unofficial Coordinator on an off and on basis for past 6 years or so)	Over 10	Northern Rivers Group EEN	Cindy Picton Coordination function improved and new convenor in place	Approximately 10-15 people involved Most have been involved in all or some projects. Local government, education and universities
Central West Environmental Educators Network	Andy McQuie, Convenor	5 to 10	Now Western Rivers EEN	Andy McQuie and Sally Neaves Coordination role shared	About 140-Dept Ed EECs, EPA-Netwaste, LLS, OEH, Universities, Landcare, Taronga Western Plains Zoo, Community bushcare/environmental groups, local service clubs, DPI-Fisheries, MDBA, Aboriginal groups, teachers (Primary-Tertiary)
Southern Sydney	Edward Fernandez,	Over 10	Southern Sydney EEN	Current convenor:	Unknown because no response to Stage 2 request

RSEN BENCHMARK 2016	Data Completed by...	Active members	RSEN END OF PROJECT 2018	Data completed by/'active' members	Number in Network group
Sustainability Educators Network (South of Sydney Harbour to the area just north of Wollongong)	Environment Officer Sustainability Reporting, Marrickville branch IWC			Sierra Classen

Group still active. No response to RSEN survey however. See Report 2 | for data. |
| **Northern Sydney Environmental Educator Network (NSEEN)** | Adriana Genova, currently the group coordinator | Over 10 | Northern Sydney EEN | Coordinator changes Adrianna Genova on maternity leave. Now Lena Hammond and Wendy Goldstein | 68 people on the list, most from Councils, some of whom have not been so active. But recent increases in activity. |
| **Manning Environmental Education Group** | Kirsty Hughes, standing chair | none | No longer functioning, Now amalgamated MRGEE and Manning Group | See above Mid North Coast SEN | See above re MNCSEN amalgamation of areas. |
| **Hunter** | Tricia Donnelly, nominal convenor | Less than 5 | Hunter Region Sustainability Education Network | Data completed by Melinda Hale

4 active members share coordination | 60 people from local and state government agencies, University, teachers, EEC's principal and teachers, business and private education operators. |
| **Illawarra** | No data- did not exist | RSEN not formed | Illawarra Region Sustainabiity Education Network formed as result of Stage 1 of this program. | Julia Barnes 10 active members on committee | 120 on mailing list. Highly active new group. Participants include primary/ secondary school teachers and preschool teachers, university lecturers and students, local and state government representatives, private consultants and local NGO and businesses representatives. There is also an audience of 600 via social media |

From this data the following highly important improvements can be identified:

iii.   With respect to the evaluation, data from 10 RSENs is included. In the life of the project two non-functional RSENs identified at benchmark (Manning and MRGEE) has been amalgamated to form the reinvigorated the Mid North Coast EEN; and one new group - Illawarra Regional Sustainability Education Network, has commenced.[2]

iv.   Other low level functioning groups have been reinvigorated and sustained effectively.

v.   All groups have an active core group and a substantial member base although the makeup and number of members varies from group to group.

vi.   Apart from joint projects developed as a part of this project – See Data Set 1 above, Report 2 and case studies – all groups undertake some form of capacity building and networking.

vii.   All groups have a coordinating functionality.

Data Set 4. This data set relates to issues around governance of the RSEN; in particular it indicates how and how often the RESN meets.

Statement	At Benchmark	At completion	Improvement Measure
Our RSEN meets more than three times per year in person	10.0%	44%	
Our RSEN meets more than three times a year by a mix of on line and face-to-face meetings	0.0%	25%	
Our RSEN meets between one and three times a year on line or face-to-face	30.0%	19%	Note this appears to be a decrease but in fact more networks are meeting more than three times a year.
Our RSEN does not hold meetings but we communicate by email/phone etc	0.0%	13%	
Our RSEN does not function at the moment.	10.0%	0%	

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[2] Note: input from the project coordinator indicates that a Macarthur group is also functioning. The evaluator has note included reference to this group as they have not provided any evaluation input, at baseline, end of Stage 1 or end of Stage 2.

In summary this data indicates that RSENs meet more often. Each of the measures identified with a smiley face shows improvement. See also note in the box above which does not include a smiley face.

Data Set 5. There is significant evidence that RSENs members communicate more often and more effectively by electronic media. A number of quotes drawn from Report 2 illustrate this:

- (We have) c*ontact via zoom and phone*
- *We have had one face to face in the last 12 months but a number via phone and/or zoom hook up.*
- (We have a) *community facebook page was started and combined with another community facebook page called 'Sustainable Illawarra'.*
- (We have a)*HRSEN Facebook - sharing of projects, meetings etc is active. The network still has a website but it has not been updated for some time. Email and collaboration remains active.*

B. Relevant Data for Participants

Three times during the course of the project participants were surveyed regarding 13 project measures related to Leadership (4 measures) Networking (4 measures) and Engagement (5 measures). The following tables provide a summary of the raw data from each survey for each measure. This, and related qualitative data has enabled analysis statements to be drawn

Given the long term nature of the project, the number of respondents at each stage varies. This makes the data somewhat problematic because although the same respondents completed the surveys the number of respondents changed. At benchmark, n=44 although one participant did not go on to undertake the project at all, At the end of Phase 1, n= 41; there were two more drop outs in Stage 1. At the end of the project n =24. This final response rate (59% of the number of Stage 1 (41) respondents) was somewhat disappointing. It was still sufficient to draw indicative end of project conclusions.

Leadership Measures

Participants were asked to rate their capacity on each the following leadership statements three times during the project; at benchmark prior to the commencement of the project September 2016; at the end of Stage 1 in March 2017 and at the completion of the project June 2018. Note that 'much improved at this' was not an option at benchmark or at Stage 1. It was only an answer choice at the time of the final survey. No information is available about why a small number of participants chose not to respond to an item in any of the surveys.

On the table below percentage data at Benchmark (baseline) is in black; data from the Stage 1 report is in blue; data at Completion is in red.

Leadership Skills and Attributes	Need some help doing this better	Reasonable at this	Good at this	Much improved at this	No Comment/ response
Managing up so the executive in my organisation provide	34% 32% 0%	41% 41% 21%	23% 20% 33%	29%	2% 7% 17%

Leadership Skills and Attributes	Need some help doing this better	Reasonable at this	Good at this	Much improved at this	No Comment/ response
high level support for my work					
Gaining support from peers within and outside my organisation	16% 12% 0%	46% 46% 4%	34% 42% 46%	42%	2% 0% 8%
Gaining support from others who I need to involve in my projects	32% 12% 0%	43% 34% 13%	25% 54% 42%	38%	0% 0% 8%
Motivating/ engaging members of the community /colleagues who are not interested in or committed	61% 24% 0%	30% 37% 21%	9% 39% 54%	17%	0% 0% 8%

Networking Measures

Participants were asked to rate their capacity in each the following networking statements on the scale provided. As per the Leadership table above three lots of data are recorded.

Networking Skills and Attributes	Need some help doing this bet	Reasonable at this	Good at this	Much improved at this	No comment/ response
Networking with peers	14% 12% 0%	39% 22% 0%	46% 63% 42%	50%	2% 2% 8%
Networking with the community	16% 10% 0%	43% 27% 0%	36% 61% 54%	38%	4% 2% 8%
Gaining personal and project benefits from my networking skills	41% 12% 0%	27% 39% 21%	30% 44% 25%	46%	2% 4% 8%

Engaging participants in my projects through networking	41% 17% 0%	46% 44% 8%	11% 37% 54%	29%	2% 2% 8%

Engagement Measures

Participants rated their capacity on each the following engagement statements three times during the project (as above) on the scale provided.

Engagement Engaging Skills and attributes	Need some help doing this better	Reasonable at this	Good at this	Much improved at this	No comment
Delivering projects that impact on people's behaviour	20% 10% 0%	48% 54% 8%	32% 37% 54%	25%	0% 13%
Identifying, planning and delivering innovative attractive programs	11% 2% 0%	55% 42% 4%	34% 56% 63%	25%	8%
Writing clear project outcomes and how they might be measured	34% 10% 0%	32% 49% 13%	34% 42% 50%	29%	8%
Evaluating the outcomes of my projects	46% 23% 0%	30% 44% 25%	25% 34% 50%	17%	8%
Reporting my successes and learning to others	36% 10% 0%	43% 59 % 25%	20% 31% 42%	25%	8%