

Sustainability Learning Guide: Effective Change Agents

About this guide

This guide has been developed to help council sustainability practitioners to become more effective change agents and influence others. The information collected in this guide has come from research conducted by André Taylor (andretaylor.com.au) as presented at an Australian Water Association supported workshop in June 2010, and council practitioners who have shared their experiences with Local Government NSW (LGNSW). For more information, visit lgnsw.org.au under "Ecologically Sustainable Development".

Why produce a guide?

Sustainability practitioners often don't have the support they need to influence change within their councils. When passion and dedication aren't enough, it's personal leadership skills that can make the difference. Not everyone is a "born leader" but many of these skills can be learnt and developed over time.

What do we mean by leadership?

"... environmental leadership consists largely of learned skills and styles and... learning needs to begin early and last a lifetime." (Gordon and Berry, 2006, *Environmental leadership equals essential leadership*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, p148 – referenced in Taylor, A. (2010) Using the level of leadership to drive environmental change: ten tips for practitioners. *Proceeding of the Enviro 2010 Conference*, 21-23 July 2010, Melbourne Victoria.

The guide will help those working to progress sustainability within councils to create positive and lasting change.

10 key strategies to become a more effective change agent:

1. Take responsibility for your development as an emergent leader
2. Get feedback on your leadership skills
3. Get mentors
4. Become an excellent networker
5. Gather diverse experience
6. Learn to reflect on leadership experiences
7. Foster relationships between champions
8. Foster cross organisational teams
9. Lead yourself
10. Join a leadership development program

Key Area:	How to?	Examples:
1. Take responsibility for your development as an emergent leader	<p>Build an Individual Leadership Development Plan to direct activities to strengthen leadership skills. Revise it annually.</p> <p>These plans typically include once-off, project type actions (e.g.set up a new mentoring arrangement) and on-going, frequent actions/behaviours (e.g. trying to use specific behaviours more frequently).</p>	<p>Use a Leadership Development Plan Template. There are a range of these available on the internet including the from Australian Public Service Comission site. Ideally these plans aren't developed in isolation but as part of a Leadership Development Program (see 10 below). These plans could also be developed through mentoring and coaching relationships (see 3 below).</p> <p>The Centre for Creative Leadership (ccl.org) has developed many leadership guides. LGNSW Learning Solutions has a training stream dedicated to leadership development.</p>
2. Get feedback on your leadership skills from colleagues	<p>You can use existing assessment tools (eg: a 360-degree feedback process). These should be facilitated by someone with skills in this area (eg: HR staff or consultant). "After action reviews" are another good way of getting feedback on a more regular basis.</p>	<p>The Water For Life's Advancing Leaders program included a 360-degree process: (waterforlife.com.au).</p>
3. Get mentors	<p>Choose a mentor that can help with <i>specific</i> development needs (ideally not your supervisor/manager as this could be perceived as favouritism)</p> <p>Set up a formal mentoring arrangement (Agree on roles, objectives, meeting frequency, review period etc)</p>	<p>Many councils run mentoring programs, eg: Manly Council.</p> <p>CENTROC run a mentoring program between regional council officers and experts in the field (centroc.com.au).</p> <p>The Young Water Professionals run a 9 -month mentoring program (iwahq.org).</p>
4. Become an excellent networker to plan ahead	<p>Build relationships for the future by joining existing professional networks.</p> <p>Develop and use a networking plan.</p> <p>Do a training course or read about networking techniques.</p>	<p>Join sustainable.net.org.au and attend council network meetings eg: LGMA Leadership for Sustainability Network (lgmansw.com.au). AAE's list of networks (aaeensw.org.au)</p>
5. Gather diverse experience	<p>Take on challenging projects inside or outside of work (eg: job rotations, secondments, acting positions).</p> <p>Take on leadership roles in cross-boundary projects and in professional associations.</p>	<p>Most councils consider secondment requests from staff to work on short term contracts with other councils and agencies. Your learning and experience whilst on secondment can be highly beneficial to your organisation.</p>

Key Area:	How to?	Examples:
6. Learn to reflect on leadership experiences	Make time to reflect individually and as a team on leadership-related experiences (eg. after major projects).	Keep a leadership journal. Make time in team meetings to reflect on leadership skills.
7. Foster relationships between champions and executives	Use executives as 'sponsors' to advise project teams. Get executives involved in pilot projects that relate to their areas of interest. Set up mentoring relationships between project-level champions and executives. Seek executive input when planning sustainability projects. Ask executives to help get sustainability projects endorsed.	Yass Valley Shire Council has a councillor sponsoring their TBL Sustainability Team. Waverley Council has a director leading their staff Sustainability Action Team. Ashfield City Council has mentoring arrangements between champions and executives.
8. Foster teams of sustainability leaders	Build high-performing interdisciplinary teams that cross council departments and managerial levels. Build relationships and trust. Build networks with academics and community sustainability leaders. Use team based leadership development strategies for major and on-going teams.	A lot of projects funded under the NSW Environmental Trust's Urban Sustainability Program established cross council interdisciplinary teams. Eg: the Cooks River Alliance (cooksriver.org.au), Northern Rivers Food Links (northernriversfoodlinks.com.au) and Sustaining our Towns (sustainingourtowns.org.au).
9. Lead yourself – practice what you preach	Build self awareness through self reflection and feedback from colleagues. Learn to manage stress and 'burn-out'. Ask for help. Build an Individual Leadership Development Plan.	Develop these skills through training: LGNSW Learning Solutions runs many courses including time management and information overload (lgnsw.org.au/member-services/learning-solutions).
10. Join a leadership development program	Shop around for a good program (generic and/or sustainability focused). Good programs typically include 360-degree reviews, training, coaching, mentoring and Leadership Development Plans that are based on theoretical frameworks and empirical research.	Amongst others, the Peter Cullen Trust (petercullentrust.com.au) and the Centre for Sustainability Leadership (csl.org.au) run development programs.