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An action learning approach to evaluating community engagement

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A project within the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) has initiated a 'learn from doing' approach to evaluate social processes, where we are engaging people in decision making around complex issues that relate to both natural and to man-made (built) environments. This includes two projects engaging citizens in planning for fire prevention, and a project concerned with the revitalisation of a metropolitan centre. The aim of the project is to learn about how to evaluate community engagement processes, and about the efficacy of a 'learn from doing' approach to developing capacity for evaluation within an organisation such as DSE, and with partner organisations such as local governments.

The approach taken looks at the relationship between action learning, evaluation capacity building and process use.

A round table session will involve a brief, 10-15 minute presentation providing the background to the project and the organisational environment in which it exists. This will be followed by a focussed discussion that will enable participants to share their experiences of evaluating social processes and address questions around issues such as impact and attribution. It will also allow for discussion around the topic of learning from real life processes in an evaluation context.