

What works regionally?

Canberra AES regional committee



Why are we doing this?

- For many members, their regional body offers their best opportunity for ongoing engagement and development.
- When we went looking for examples of best regional practice (to steal), we found a few (which we promptly stole) but we wondered if there were better ways of learning from each other and hoped this workshop could lead to an annual sharing of issues and good practice ideas.

The regions

- 10 regional AES bodies: Auckland, Canberra, New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, Wellington, and Western Australia.
- Each different: SA conference-focused, Queensland planning 2013 conference in tough local environment, NT annual theme and looking towards 2014 (?), Canberra in 2 year action research cycle, Tasmania is rebuilding...

The context

- Some issues shared by all groups – need to leverage limited human and funding resources to achieve multiple aims
- Each group gets up to \$1,000 per annum to meet all costs; knowing how to stretch resources one of the key requirements for success
- As issues and strategies so diverse, begin with Canberra and invite others to join in

Canberra overview

- Long-standing, relatively stable committee and local traditions, easy geography, 100+ members
- February 2012, began two year 'action research' to identify, address diversity of local members' needs
- First step contacting other regions, asking what worked for them

Canberra's 2 year plan

- Develop better planning, engagement tools
- Choose two areas in AES strategic plan where Canberra could play an important role
- Increase number and diversity of events and activities

Planning and engagement

- Increased committee numbers, recruiting members to build good mix of skills, interests and linkages
- Conducted strategic planning 'policy logic' workshop in June; facilitated by Carolyn Page and attended by Maria Eliadis
- Commenced quarterly newsletter; two issues sent out so far
- Conducted Canberra member survey, designed to complement anticipated Australasian survey

Survey findings

- Just over 20% response rate
- Members preferred different times of day, different topics, different types of events
- Bottom line A: There is little we could do that would not appeal to someone, and nothing we can do that will appeal to everyone
- Bottom line B: especially with a 20% response rate, we have a long way to go

Activities and events

In addition to supporting AES workshops, we:

- Have lunch-time 'brown bag' lunches, where a local member with an area of expertise is willing to discuss it with a relatively small group
- Hold 'Hot Issue' breakfast and after-work events, where members have a facilitated discussion on issues of general interest
- Initiated an 'Evaluation Book Club' – really more of a journal article club (but thank you Victoria)
- Hold series of special events, e.g. Saturday morning ethics discussion, planning session, Xmas networking events

Strategic work

Chose two areas:

- Engagement with government (esp Commonwealth, due to our location, but also ACT government)
- Engagement with other professional organisations – looking at two joint presentations per year with Canberra Evaluation Forum (CEF); have held joint event with Statistics Society of Australia, leading to proposed ongoing association and potential new SIG

Enablers, human resources

- Human resources required to achieve aims, also need to identify what care we require to sustain those enablers
- Committee members – mix of govt, private, academic, NGO backgrounds. Looking now at what drives and sustains us; what is our self-care, succession plan?
- Initiated new structure with three working groups taking on membership engagement, events planning, and meeting strategic aims – involve wider group

Enabling work, financial resources

Venue hire the biggest single expense. Strategies include:

- restaurant-based morning sessions (noise vs cold) and Xmas; participants pay most of own costs
- constant search for cheap (or free) venues – often achieved through engagement e.g. ACT government via Book Club
- members always on look-out for pleasant free (book shop), or cut-rate (arts, museum) venues; even so, used sparingly

Catering next biggest item – home-baked for meetings; 'brown bag' or buy own breakfast/drinks at restaurants

Summary

Summary: what works in Canberra

- Building on success (however defined)
- Theft
- Curiosity and hard graft
- Pinch of self-care

Over to you...

- What is working for you regionally?
- What challenges do you face?
- What would you like to share, and how can we better learn from and support each other?