

# Building Effective Working Relationships

Building effective working relationships comes naturally to some people and others can find it incredibly difficult. Relationships are central to Landcare's success across Australia. Committee and board members can create and sustain effective working relationships that boost morale, strengthen teamwork, and drive successful Landcare outcomes by paying attention to a few key areas. Use this worksheet as a trouble shooting guide when relationships feel like they require some improvement or as a guide to prevent issues before they occur.

## Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities

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### Define Individual Roles:

- Make sure each person understands their specific duties and how their work connects to broader Landcare goals.
- Provide or review job descriptions, work plans, and committees' terms of reference.

### Agreed Clear Expectations:

- Outline performance standards and timelines early in the staff tenure
- Consistent communication around progress, challenges, and successes
- Ensure coordinators are clear on what is expected of them and have open conversation around their expectations of their employer / volunteer line manager.

### Avoid Overlap and Confusion:

- Coordinate tasks so that committee/board members do not duplicate staff responsibilities or vice versa.
- Reinforce the distinction between governance (strategic oversight) and operations (day-to-day tasks).

## Effective Communication Techniques

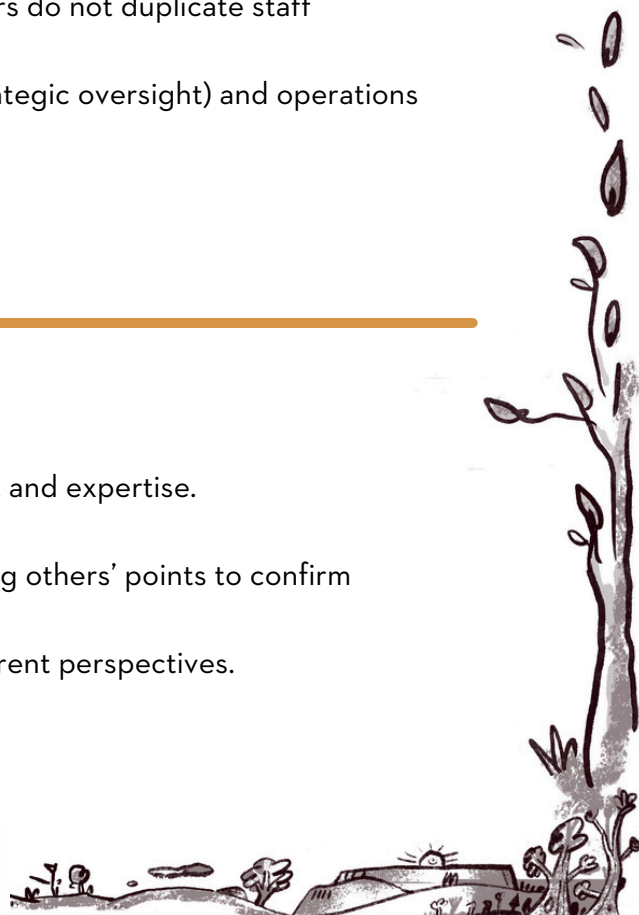
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### Open and Transparent Dialogue:

- Encourage regular updates and feedback.
- Use inclusive language that values everyone's input and expertise.

### Active Listening:

- Practice asking clarifying questions and summarising others' points to confirm understanding.
- Adopt a non-judgmental tone, acknowledging different perspectives.



### **Technology & Tools:**

- Use multiple communication channels (email, messaging apps, project management platforms) to accommodate different preferences and schedules.
- Establish agreed norms around response times and availability, especially if people work remotely and volunteers are involved.

## **Cultivating Trust and Mutual Respect**

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### **Demonstrate Reliability:**

- Follow through on commitments - if you promise support or resources, deliver them promptly.

### **Respect Boundaries:**

- Show consideration for staff workloads, personal life situations, and time constraints.
- Encourage a culture that respects mental health and work-life balance.

### **Celebrate Diversity of Thought:**

- Recognise that people bring different skills, backgrounds, and viewpoints to the organisation and that it is this diversity that makes teams and communities great.
- Foster an inclusive environment where individuals feel safe expressing ideas or concerns.

## **Team Building and Collaboration**

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### **Regular Check-Ins and Meetings:**

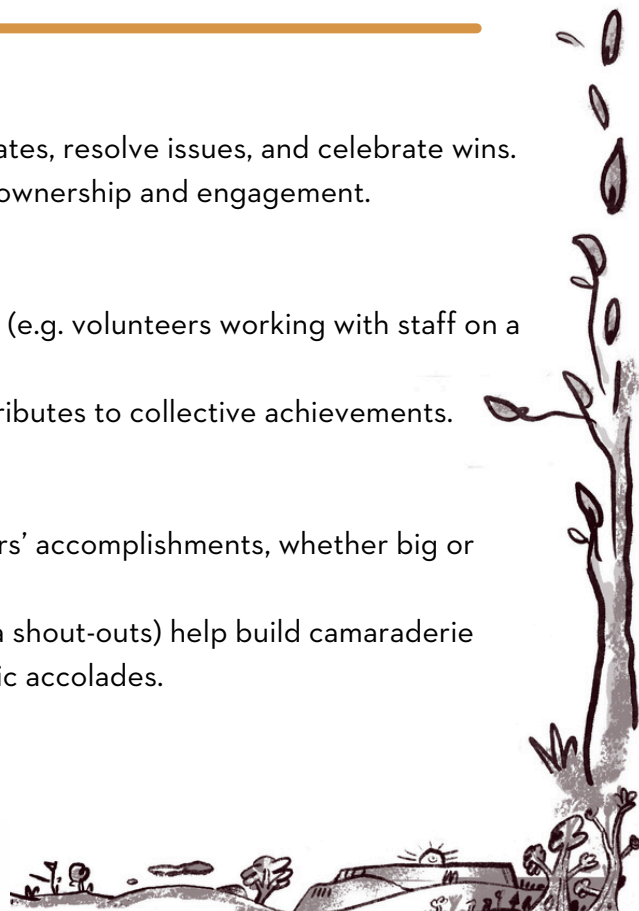
- Schedule structured team gatherings to share updates, resolve issues, and celebrate wins.
- Rotate who leads portions of the agenda to foster ownership and engagement.

### **Shared Projects and Goals:**

- Assign tasks that require collaboration across roles (e.g. volunteers working with staff on a community planting day).
- Ensure everyone understands how their work contributes to collective achievements.

### **Recognise Achievements:**

- Publicly acknowledge volunteers' and staff members' accomplishments, whether big or small.
- Simple gestures (e.g., thank-you notes, social media shout-outs) help build camaraderie and appeal to a broader range of people than public accolades.



## Addressing Issues Early and Constructively

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### Early Intervention:

- Encourage staff or volunteers to bring up concerns as soon as they arise—before they escalate.
- Show openness to feedback and willingness to adjust or clarify expectations.

### Constructive Conversations:

- Frame discussions around behaviour and impact, rather than personal attributes e.g., “How might we improve report turnaround time...” rather than “You are always late!”
- Use “I” statements to share observations and feelings without blaming e.g. “I’ve noticed...” or “I feel...”

### Conflict Resolution Pathways:

- Have a clear process for managing disputes e.g., initial one-on-one conversation, then escalation to the committee chair or a mediator (accessible through the Shared Services Hub) if unresolved.
- Emphasise finding common ground and cooperative solutions. Understand that the source of many conflicts is that people feel unheard. Help people to hear each other. We do not have to agree but we do have to hear the viewpoint of others.

## Providing Ongoing Support and Guidance

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### Mentoring and Skill Development:

- Offer opportunities for staff and volunteers to learn from experienced committee/board members or external experts. See Shared Service Hub for some supported options.
- Encourage training, professional development and an environment of continuous improvement.

### Resources and Tools:

- Provide adequate supplies, equipment, and information to help staff and volunteers succeed in their roles e.g. staff should have access to a work computer and phone.
- Maintain an up-to-date suite of policies, procedures, and project guidelines and ensure staff know where to freely access this.

### Two-Way Feedback:

- Ask for regular feedback on how the committee/board can better support staff and volunteers.
- Demonstrate active listening by implementing changes or explaining why certain requests can’t be met.



## Our next move:

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Consider some of the following actions to help expand your effectiveness in these areas and come up with your own actions list below to ensure you start taking steps towards more effective working relationships today.

- Ask your team: ‘What is our biggest challenge in building effective working relationships?’
- Discuss these ideas with a fellow committee member and compare strategies.
- Set up a group WhatsApp or chat channel to streamline communication. It takes 10 minutes and can save hours of back-and-forth emailing.
- Set up a 15-minute virtual check-in with a colleague to discuss communication improvements.

## Our next steps:

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**Priority 1:**

**Priority 2:**

**Priority 3:**

**Priority 4:**

