

ResourceSmart AuSSI Vic Initiative

Regional Network Pilot 2010-11
Key findings & future recommendations



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> About the pilot

During 2010-2011 Sustainability Victoria (SV) initiated and funded two regional network pilots - in Gippsland and Grampians. The pilots were created to meet the growing interest from schools in **ResourceSmart AuSSI Vic** and Education for Sustainability (EfS).

Regional Coordinators were appointed to support and resource the two 'regional coordination' models. The coordinators (0.2 FTE) were funded by a grant of \$25,000. The grant also covered associated travel, communications and meeting costs. The Regional Coordinators were accommodated in offices at a local host organisation.

Pilot objectives

The major objectives of the two pilots were to:

- pilot a regional coordination model to support the uptake of ResourceSmart AuSSI Vic in rural and regional areas of Victoria
- test and trial alternative 'hosts' for the regional coordination role.
- discover opportunities and solve problems associated with regional coordination before a final model and ongoing funding is pursued.
- identify trends, similarities and differences between regions, helping to ensure resources and support are directed in the most effective way to the regions.

Different regional layout, types of support available and existing regional networks shaped the models chosen for the pilots. The findings of the two pilots certainly confirmed the notion that 'one size does not fit all'.

Grampians pilot

The Grampians Regional Coordinator was hosted by Sovereign Hill at Narmbool. The chosen model required the Grampians Regional Coordinator to work with and build on existing school networks including:

- Catholic School Principals Network,
- existing ResourceSmart AuSSI Vic group site (online support)
- Highlands Regional Waste Management Group teacher network
- a new special focus group which was established to connect sustainability representatives from schools and local action groups region wide.

The Grampians Region includes Ballarat City Council, Victoria's third largest city. Ballarat was the primary focus of the Grampians Regional Coordinator.

The Narmbool support was a key success factor for this pilot. During the pilot, three Narmbool staff completed the ResourceSmart AuSSI Vic facilitators training. Narmbool also ran a student leadership program that supported pilot activities which was made possible due to other funding sources.

Gippsland pilot

The Gippsland Regional Coordinator was hosted by the Gippsland Regional Waste Management Group (GRWMG). The chosen model required the coordinator to:

- establish new networks
- strengthen existing networks aligned to local council boundaries and the whole region via a new Groupsite (online hub and forum).

The Regional Coordinator recruited the support of the local council sustainability offices to help facilitate these networks. The GRWMG provided significant support for the coordinator, including training a staff member to become a ResourceSmart AuSSI Vic facilitator.

Tools and communication methods

Both pilots used similar tools and methods to achieve the desired outcomes. These included:

- regular group meetings with sustainable teacher representatives
- presenting and networking at existing teacher networks
- using Groupsite
- creating a database to identify local helpful resources
- marketing tools to promote the networks
- face to face support for schools.

Successes

Both pilots were successful in:

- increasing local dialogue about ResourceSmart AuSSI Vic between schools, education organisations, community groups and service providers
- increasing local knowledge of ResourceSmart AuSSI Vic
- increasing schools' commitment to ResourceSmart AuSSI Vic.

> Key findings

In planning for future regional networks the following findings should be considered.

1. The boundaries of clusters

Gippsland region – the Regional Coordinator established new network clusters within council boundaries. This helped in recruiting the support of councils, ensured consistent local communications, reduced the travel time for teachers' involved, encouraged schools to visit each other and made it easier to market and promote through avenues such as local newspapers.

Grampians region – the Regional Coordinator worked with existing network cluster' including the Catholic Principals Network. The boundaries of these groups were not the same as regional council boundaries. For example, one cluster of schools crossed three shires. This required more coordination in regards to communication to group, marketing and encouraging schools to share between themselves.

2. The size of the regions

In regional areas, schools are often spread out over a large area. This means that a substantial amount of time is spent travelling. This can be challenging when only one day per week is allocated for this task.

By focusing on more populated hubs such as Ballarat City, the Grampians Regional Coordinator was unable to provide as much assistance to outlying schools. It may be worth considering breaking the region a coordinator covers into smaller areas, for example the Grampians area could be broken into two or three areas.

3. Allocated time and budget

The role of a Regional Coordinator can be busy, with many schools needing support and advice. Effectively managing time and expectations is an important component of the role, especially in a regional area where there is a significant amount of travel time. Both Regional Coordinators in the pilots, out of dedication to the schools they worked with, exceeded time allocations and did more than 0.2FTE by contributing their own time voluntarily.

For the continuation of a Regional Coordinator role, a budget that adequately supports information and communication technology (ICT) tools and travel would need to be established.

Clear and realistic expectations of the role need to be defined, including appropriate time and budget allocation. The nature of the role, with strong demand and positive feedback from schools and other organisations means that this role will always feel obliged to do more than the essential.

4. Online networking and communication

Both Regional Coordinators managed online network groups through Groupsite. Groupsite provides users with:

- online resources
- a forum for questions and discussions
- group emails can be generated
- events can be posted via a Groupsite calendar
- a portal to other links
- a site to house case studies
- photographic records of events.

Groupsite was particularly valuable to schools in outlying areas as they could still be involved despite the lack of face-to-face support. In particular this was very beneficial in catering for smaller schools and encouraged interaction across the larger region and network clusters.

However, there were a few issues with school internet security restricting the communications between schools, limited uploads permitted, and restricted number of members capped at 100 before it converts to a fee paying structure. There was also significant training required to establish a Groupsite and time required to keeping it up to date. Alternatives should be researched and considered before planning future online networks.

Both Regional Coordinators identified problems with not having access to emails or online resources while on the road or at home. To maximise the effectiveness of the Regional Coordinator's time, a smart phone or a laptop with internet access would be of benefit.

5. Regional Coordinator support

The host organisation for each of the Regional Coordinators was valuable in providing extra support, access to a vehicle, contacts, office facilities and district specific knowledge.

In particular, in the Gippsland region, establishing local council support via the sustainability officers encouraged a succession plan for each of the networks. This will hopefully encourage the continuation of the facilitated networks. Local council support varies, so flexibility in establishing relationships, expectations and communication is required.

6. Sustainability providers

The involvement of local sustainability providers, such as Ballarat Renewable Energy, Zero Emissions (BREAZE) and Gippsland Climate Change Network, was valuable in increasing knowledge and expertise of teachers. Their involvement also supported the Regional Coordinators through professional discussions and sharing expertise.

Some providers used their relationship with the network to leverage their own projects, while others used it to develop new projects. For example, Narmbool provided additional student camps, to support ResourceSmart AuSSI Vic for local schools.

7. Teachers' time

Teachers in these regions (as with all) were rarely given additional time release for EfS projects. This issue can be seen as one of the arguments to have regional co-ordination.

Both Regional Coordinators voiced their concerns about the lack of support for EfS in schools – issues including: teachers not appointed to head EfS, timeframes too tight for schools to complete modules, lack of resources, lack of confidence in ability to achieve the requirements of modules, lack of regional awareness of what other schools are achieving, and burn-out.

Teachers are busy and completing modules in the timeframe without additional resources – such as regional assistance – was found to be a major obstacle for schools not taking up the ResourceSmart AuSSI Vic framework.

Simple ideas such as networking and the Groupsite assisted in breaking down the barriers to several of these issues – especially in increasing the confidence of teachers to enable them to take on the ResourceSmart AuSSI Vic framework.

> Recommendations for future implementation

- Ensure that the Regional Coordinator role is **clearly defined and has adequate budget and time allocation.**
- Source a **supportive and committed host organisation** that can provide in-kind support through office and other facilities as well as other staff to support the Regional Coordinator.
- **Be aware of ICT issues.** Consider school internet security and access; regional Victoria still struggles with fast internet access. Budget for portable ICT resources for Regional Coordinators. (mobile phone/smart phone and training for their usage if required)
- **Reduce travel and time as barriers for schools** participating in networks. Coordinator needs to make it easy for schools to attend meetings and access information. Regional coordination provides a single point of contact as a trusted source of communication either in person or via the Groupsite.
- Regional Coordinators need to **build strong relationships and networks with a variety of stakeholders** including EfS service providers, local councils, local education authorities (eg DEECD and Catholic Education Diocese offices) and schools. Many hours will be spent on stakeholder communications. Regional Coordinators must have **strong interpersonal skills.**
- Regional Coordinators need to have the **interest and support of principals** and to encourage EfS to be on the agenda at principal meetings.
- Regional Coordinators need to **listen and frame the local contexts for service providers, local councils and schools in their regions.** For example, having local schools host network meetings, raise relevant issues and suggest guest speakers.

Conclusion

Overall both pilots were successful in encouraging schools in pursuing ResourceSmart AuSSI Vic modules, to have more conversations about EfS, and to talk to other schools and local organisations for support.

Each of the coordinators adapted a model that was suitable for their region and their needs. The support from the host organisation and local sustainable education professionals was incredibly valuable to the success of role. Face to face support and network meetings are time consuming but valuable and appreciated by schools.

Regional Coordinators could benefit from access to more sophisticated ICT tools and professional development.

For the continuation and future development of regional networks time and budget allocation need to be realistic, desired outcomes clear and expectations of the scope of a Regional Coordinator role need to be managed.