

Evaluation and Enhancement of the Hume Enviro Champions Program

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EVALUATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE HUME ENVIRO CHAMPIONS PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

The goal of the project was to perform an evaluation of the Hume City Council's Enviro Champions program to increase participation and awareness. Through interviews, surveys, literature reviews, and session observations, data was gathered about peoples' opinions on the program and what could be done to remedy the drop in participation seen from COVID-19. This was synthesized into a list of recommendations for the Hume Enviro Champions program to take into consideration.

AUTHORSHIP

This report was completely written and edited by Enrique Pohl, Rebekah Shields, Reya Truher, and Rachel Turman. All authors contributed equally to the work on the project as well as the final report.

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We would also like to acknowledge Professor Michael Miller and thank him for his guidance and knowledge throughout ID 2050.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank Michaela Lang and the 2024 Hume Enviro Champions participants for welcoming us into the weekly course sessions.

Hume City Council recognises the rich Aboriginal heritage within the municipality and acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung, which includes the existing family members of the Gunung-Willam-Balluk clan, as the Traditional Custodians of this land. Council embraces Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander living cultures as a vital part of Australia's identity and recognises, celebrates and pays respect to Elders past, present and future.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Hume Enviro Champions program is a yearly run community-focused program whose goal is to provide participants with leadership skills with the goal to create their own environmental projects. The program is a ten session long course that runs from 6:00pm-8:30pm on Wednesday evenings, and these sessions cover a variety of topics that help community members with project implementation skills. Since COVID-19, the Hume Enviro Champions program has seen a decrease in participation. Our goal is to perform a program review and provide recommendations to raise the participant recruitment and retention of the program.

COVID-19 greatly impacted people and programs all around the world, including the Hume Enviro Champions. COVID-19 caused many educational programs to adjust to a hybrid format with varying degrees of success. While some programs have since recovered, most are still struggling with participant recruitment and retention.

Figure 1 shows that while the Enviro Champions' registrations fluctuate year to year, course completions have been on a downward trend since 2020.

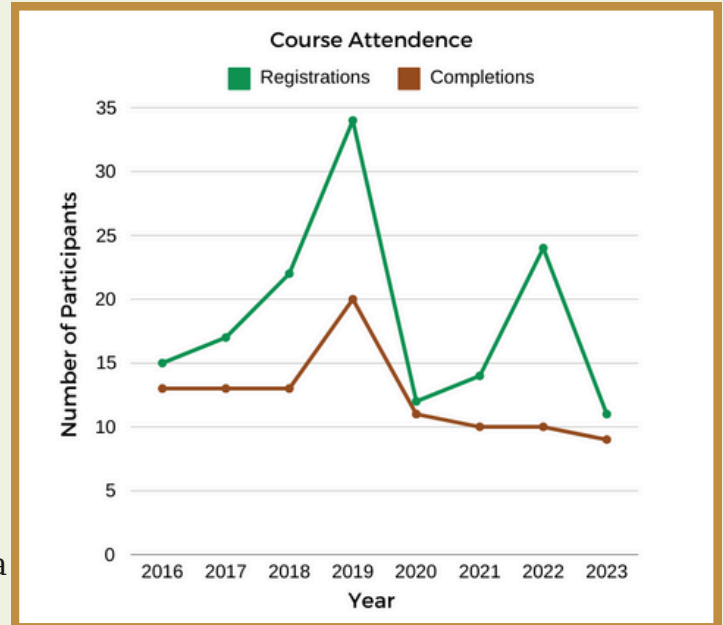


Figure 1
Participant Course Attendance

Our team performed a review of the Hume City Council's Enviro Champions program with the goal of increasing participation and awareness. This was done through a series of objectives: to identify the goals of the program leadership team, to understand participant perspectives on the program, to assess the course structure and efficacy, to review the recruitment strategies of external programs, and finally to provide recommendations to improve program recruitment and retention.

Our first objective was to identify the goals of the program leadership team through semi-structured interviews with various members of the leadership team. These members included the past and present Enviro Champions program directors and a member of the Hume Council evaluation department that has run evaluations of the Enviro Champions program. We asked questions relating to program goals, how the program changed over time, COVID-19 impact, and the methods they have tried for recruitment and retention in the past.

The leadership team's goals for the program are to aid people in implementing environmental projects and foster a sense of community among the participants. One logistical requirement for the program to continue is to have ten consistent participants with three to five projects to result from the program. This year, the program had an average of seven consistent participants. Additionally, all of the advertising materials are made by the Enviro Champions program director, which are sent out online through the communications department.

Our second objective was to understand participant perspectives on the program. We conducted a past participant survey, semi-structured past participant interviews, and

weekly session questionnaires for session four through seven. We asked past participants their experiences with the course and potential course improvements, including questions regarding how they heard about the program and why they joined. Through the weekly questionnaires we asked similar questions to current participants. This allowed us to compare the answers of past participants to current participants.

From the interviews, surveys, and questionnaires that we conducted, we discovered that many participants had an interest in environmental issues before joining the program and were looking for a way to express this. Nearly all of the interviewees saw the program in a positive way, praising many aspects of the course. We compared our interview data with data obtained from the Hume City Council over the years, as seen in **Figure 2**. Some past participants expressed that they felt they had lost project support from Council after the course ended. Our third objective was to assess the course structure and efficacy, done by conducting session observations and weekly session questionnaires. The weekly session questionnaires allowed us to ask highs and lows of each session, as well as how participants felt their projects were going. We observed four of the ten Enviro

Champions sessions and took notes on how the sessions were run, what materials were covered, and the participant reactions to the course as a whole. From these methods, we found that the course runs smoothly and the participants are engaged with the content. Participants were eager to ask questions, work in small groups on activities, and discuss project ideas, which often occurred during the dinner breaks and small group activities. However, participants seemed hesitant to connect with each other outside of the sessions. One third of the current participants spoke English as their second language, which led to some miscommunications. Overall, the

participants enjoyed the course. Our fourth objective was to review the recruitment strategies of external programs. We conducted interviews with external volunteer programs to learn how their programs ran and their successful program strategies. We spoke with the Strategic Coordinator for Environmental Volunteering, and they provided us with important facts, such as making programs social, timely, and attractive are some of the best ways to get people involved. They also mentioned that programs should be promoted to multiple demographics because the government has shifted to promoting to a younger demographic, but

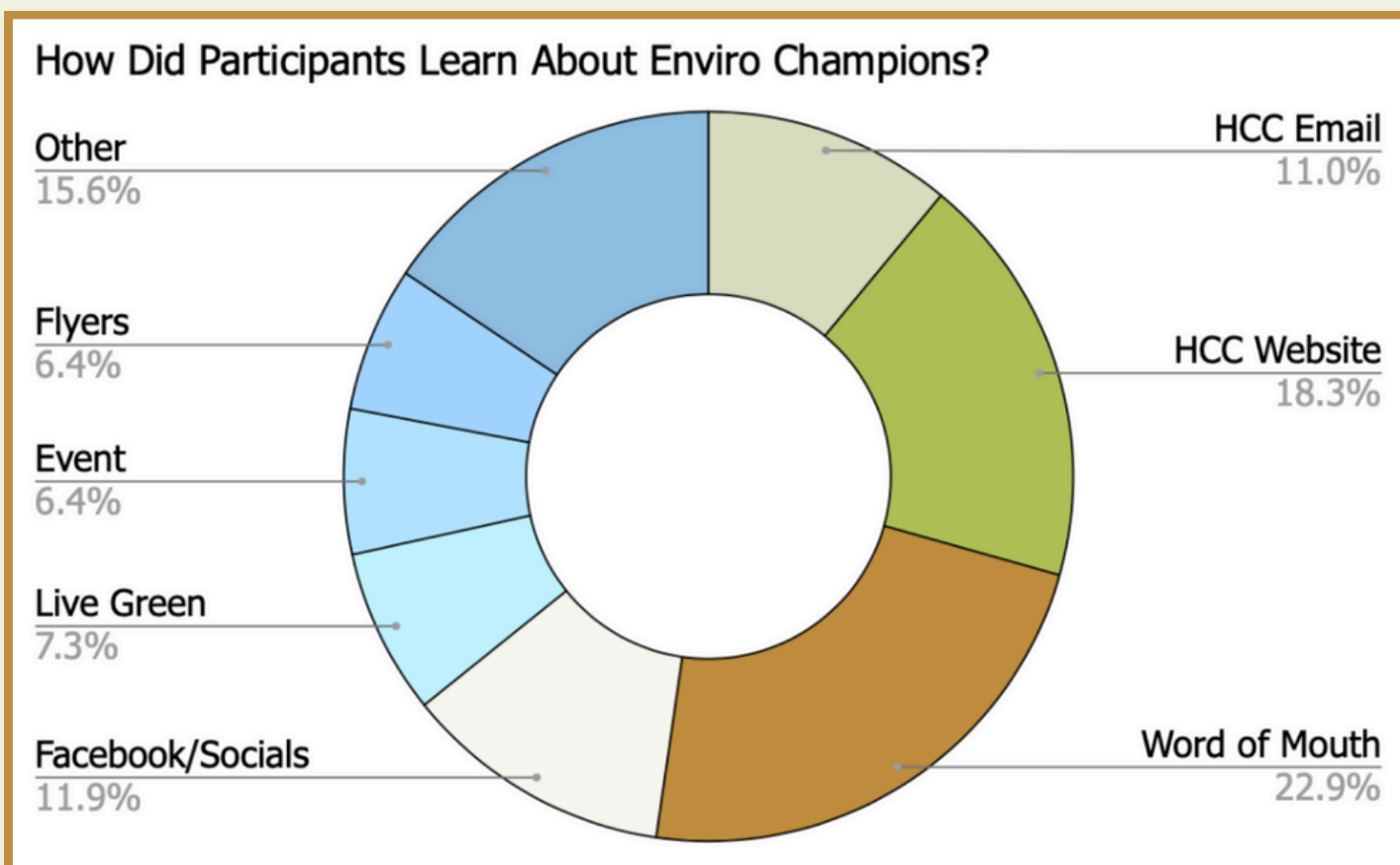


Figure 2
Past Participant Recruitment Data
n=108

the older generation is still the leading demographic in volunteer spaces. We also interviewed the Good People Act Now (GPAN) program. GPAN promotes to a younger demographic by using professional development sites, like LinkedIn. This markets the program as a resume building opportunity. Our last interview was with the Yarra Ranges Community Changemakers program. The Changemakers program had a high retention rate in recent years due to a phone interview requirement. This is where one of the program directors will call all of the applicants to address participant expectations and commitment.

Our fifth objective was to provide recommendations to improve program recruitment and retention. We had a conversation with our sponsor and provided a report with all of our recommendations. Our recommendations are divided into four areas; recruitment, no-call no-show, retention, and course alterations.

Recommendations for recruitment involve; expanding the target demographics of the program to promote to a younger demographic, increasing the amount of networking between the Enviro Champions program and other programs to give the participants more connections, advertising

the ability of past participants to retake the course, or adding a “bring a friend” session.

No-call no-show refers to participants who signed up for the course and failed to show up to any of the sessions. Recommendations for no-call no-show involve; adding a “15-minute phone interview” to ensure the expectation of the applicant and the program leadership team align, or adding a course deposit which would incentivize participants to come to the sessions.

Recommendations for retention involve; hosting the sessions at one location near public transit, moving the meetings to Saturday mornings to reduce day to day conflicts that might occur, and promoting existing projects to reduce project related hesitation and make people more comfortable in the course.

Recommendations for course alterations involve; using more language barrier techniques, such as writing all spoken points down as well as handing out activity instructions in multiple languages, and making the sessions fortnightly, adding more take-home assignments, or adding more sessions in order to reduce the tight time constraints of the course.

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INTRODUCTION

Hume (**Figure 3**) is a local government area (LGA) in the northern growth corridor of Melbourne, Australia, rich in both cultural diversity and concerned about sustainable environment practices. The area encompasses a dynamic rural-urban interface, which brings unique environmental concerns in the region. The Hume City Council strives to improve climate change awareness. Council provides programs to give Hume locals opportunities to engage in their home ecology and help the local community.



Figure 3
City of Hume Map
Note: Threatened flora Hume City. (n.d.).

The Hume Enviro Champions program assists participants with project planning so that they may independently create their own environmental project in Hume. The program provides a 10 week training course that teaches environmental behavior change, resourcing, communication strategies, and more to help citizen volunteers feel confident to initiate their own project. Participants in the program have successfully implemented 50 projects, which includes HumeCAN (Climate Action Now), the Children's Hume Community Garden, the Hume Seed Library, and even various social media campaigns. The opportunities the course provides are meant to provide encouragement and confidence to members of the Hume community who want to pursue a project that initiates positive environmental change, but don't necessarily have the tools to start or maintain a project.

Since COVID-19, the program has been facing challenges of enrollment and retention. There was a drastic drop in participation and significant amounts of negative feedback about the online variation of the course Council had provided during the pandemic for social distancing purposes. While the program has returned to fully in person, program participation has not returned to pre-pandemic level.

Our goal was to perform an evaluation of the Hume City Council Enviro Champions program to identify ways to increase awareness of and participation in the program. By exploring the program structure, interviewing program participants, and meeting with other volunteer programs, we have identified areas of improvement within program recruitment, retention, and implementation of the course. Our first objective was to identify the goals of the program leadership team to see if the course is meeting these goals or if the goals should be altered to meet the wants of the participants, and discover the current recruitment methods. Objective two was to understand the past and current participant perspectives on the program to determine what the participants want from the program and what they are getting from the program. Our third objective was to assess the course structure and efficacy, detailing the program strengths and weaknesses. Next, the fourth objective was to review recruitment strategies and program logistics of external programs, allowing connections with volunteer programs aside from the Enviro Champions to explore successful recruitment strategies.

Lastly, the fifth objective was to provide recommendations to improve program recruitment and retention. This objective focused on providing our findings and our suggestions for constructive changes to the program leaders.

BACKGROUND

2.1**HUME ENVIRO
CHAMPIONS
PROGRAM****2.2****ENVIRONMENTAL
VOLUNTEER
ORGANIZATIONS IN
VICTORIA****2.3****VOLUNTEER
MOTIVATIONS AND
DEMOGRAPHICS****2.4****HUME COMMUNITY,
DEMOGRAPHICS, AND
VALUES****2.5****COVID-19'S EFFECT
ON SMALL PROJECTS
/ BUSINESSES**

The Hume Enviro Champions program is a community-centered program focused on environmental projects within the municipality of Hume. The program leads participants through a series of community based activities and project planning sessions. The end goal of the program is to encourage participants to create an environment-centered project. The Hume Enviro Champions program has experienced varying degrees of success throughout the years, with attendance fluctuating between 10 and 30 participants. Since the program is volunteer-based, we have explored many aspects of volunteerism and what might affect the motivation levels of volunteers. We also considered aspects such as demographics of Hume, materials covered in Hume Enviro Champions, and advertising strategies. These factors are interrelated with each other, and are useful to explore when looking into the Hume Enviro Champions program.

2.1: HUME ENVIRO CHAMPIONS PROGRAM

1	Introduction
2	Behavior Change
3	Create Community
4	Project Template
5	Community Organizing

6	Gov. Support
7	Comms Branding
8	Project Planning
9	Resourcing
10	Graduation

Figure 4
Enviro Champions Course Sessions

The Hume Enviro Champions Program encourages people to take action by starting an environmental project in Hume. The Hume City Council provides the participants with a series of tools to empower them to create a successful project. The program consists of ten two-and-a-half hour sessions (**Figure 4**) that meet once a week (with exceptions for holidays) from February to May every year. They are led by a contracted facilitator and sometimes supported by guest speakers. Each session has a different focus, to help people learn about the environment, project management, and community building.

To help the participants get a better understanding of what their project is and how they would execute it, the sessions focus on a multitude of aspects of creating a successful project. The sessions include exploring interconnections between participant projects and the Greater Hume Area, breaking down projects into more achievable goals, and time for participants to consider different elements of their own projects. The Hume Enviro Champions program emphasizes the importance of making projects realistic in scope so the projects have a higher likelihood of success. Most sessions have group discussions that allow for participants to get feedback from both the instructor and other participants.

Topics for most of the sessions are aimed towards community building and public outreach to help projects function. These are distributed throughout the course as

a whole, starting with community behavior change and ending with communication. The initial sessions help educate and encourage the participants with outreach and the logistics of making a project. Specifically, these skills give the participants a wider array of tools and methods to get others involved with their project or spread community awareness. The course itself is primarily focused on helping the participants with their projects, it also seeks to educate and inform in its own right.

The next type of session is directed towards accessing Council's available resources and helping volunteers find free resources near them that they can use for their projects. This includes networking with others for help, grants that they can apply for to access financial aid, and other public resources that the participants can use.

The Hume Enviro Champions program has seen a decrease in participation in recent years, presumably due to COVID-19. Hume City Council needs the program to retain ten participants per year in order to consider it an effective program. This year, the program has seen 16 sign-ups, ten participants, and seven of those ten generally attend the weekly sessions. Previous surveys sent out by Hume City .

Council have gotten little response, so the team will have the chance to explore perspectives on the program in a more in depth way to determine the best remedies for the lack of participation and retention

2.2: ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS IN VICTORIA

The passion for the environment and volunteerism in Australia has led to many community led organizations which promote sustainability. Programs such as Landcare Australia, Climate Action Now, and Friends of the Earth all have active community involvement and interest in

volunteerism. Many of the environmental organizations within Victoria are smaller and numerous, focusing on specific goals. The 2023 Volunteering Naturally report highlights that most volunteer work focuses around caring for landscapes and sustainable living, while other volunteer work handles citizen science, advocacy and

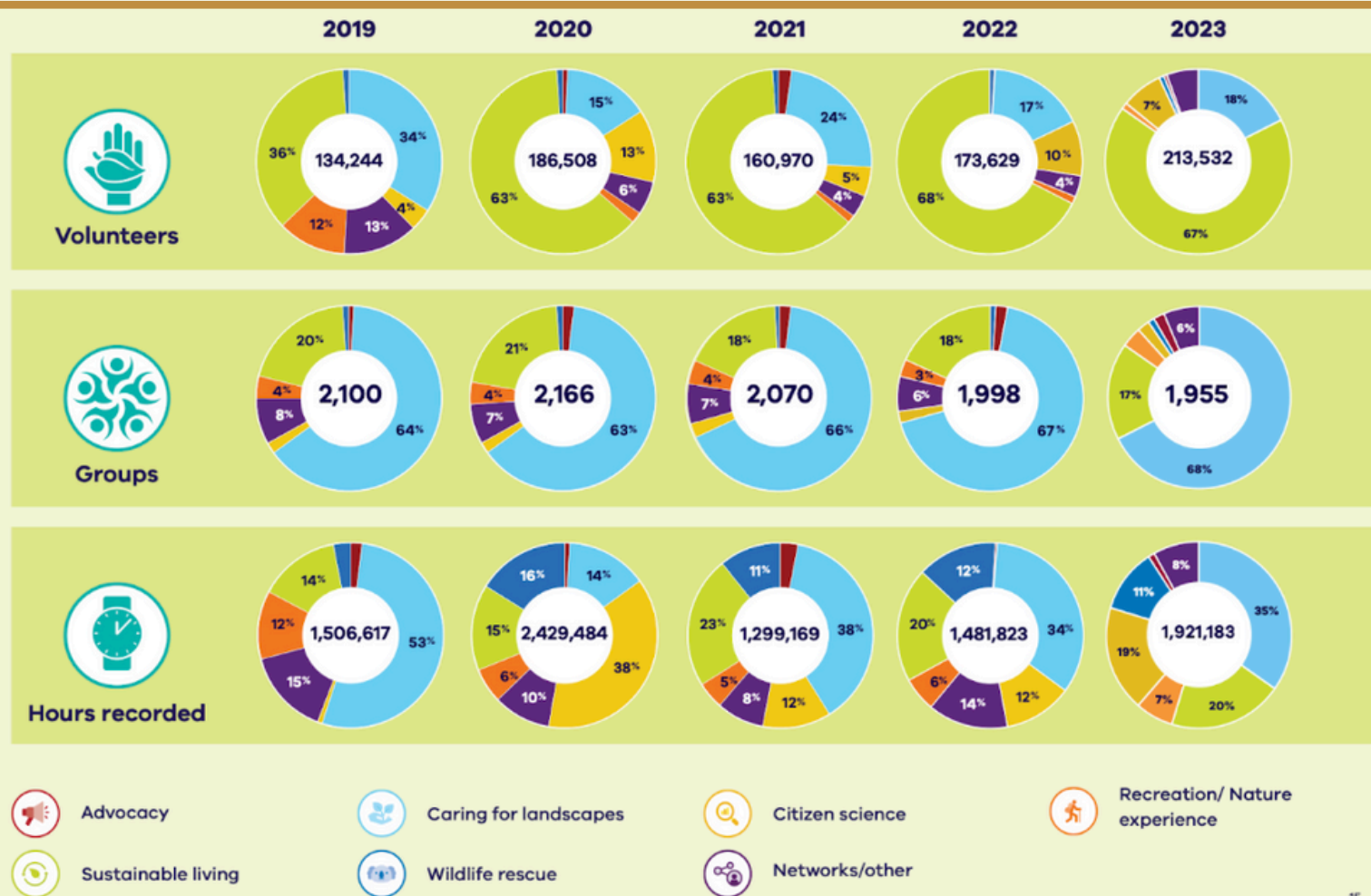


Figure 5

Volunteer Group Objectives

Note: Volunteering Naturally 2023 (2023) Comparison of Volunteering Naturally Data. Victoria State Government.

networking. **Figure 5** shows how these categories have changed on a year-to-year basis. This chart indicates a wave of volunteers who seek to make visible changes to their environment while others deal with educating and informing. These programs are supported by individuals who give their time to fit one of those specific initiatives, whereas government run programs such as the Hume Enviro Champions allow for greater opportunity in the form of ongoing projects and initiatives. These programs, from a management point of view, are focused on capacity building within the community which means that participants can control what their form of environmental change will be. In all cases, these organizations provide the necessary social support and networking to foster local community participation in environmental work. In Australia, volunteerism “plays a vital role in our political, social and economic systems,” (Measham & Barnett, “Introduction” para. 1).

2.3: VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The most common reasons that people volunteer are that they want to make a meaningful change, help others in the community, religious concerns, and motivation from previous positive experiences with volunteering (Brudney, 2016). This means that most motivations for volunteering are intrinsic, and that simply getting people to know about volunteering opportunities is the best way to recruit volunteers. There are factors that contribute to who is likely to volunteer, specifically people who belong to groups that prioritize giving back to the community or people who have experienced volunteering before, either giving or receiving services.

Raj (2023) argues that the most successful strategy of getting people to volunteer is to give a thorough description of what they will be doing.

Not only will that filter out the people who are unable to do what is asked of them, but will make those who are capable more motivated to join. There is a strategy called Warm Body Recruitment, which targets

already existing groups like college campuses, businesses, community groups, church groups and Scouts of America, for recruitment. The most effective methods used in this strategy include talking to groups in person, placing fliers in public places, and posting online. Talking in person is the best way to recruit people because it allows for people to connect on a personal level and creates a sense of belonging.

Since volunteers are a diverse group of people, they may have different motivations. In a 2022 study on New Zealand conservation volunteers, researchers found that one of the primary motivations for environmental volunteering was “Stewardship/kaitiakitanga: Responsibility to volunteer in conservation because they saw the environment as theirs’ to look after; they reflected a protective relationship to a place” (Heimann, Medvecky, 2022). This study indicates that volunteers are intrinsically motivated, working out of their own obligation to help preserve the environment. Since “conservation volunteers predominantly live in ‘a

rural area/settlement/village’ (42% [of survey respondents indicated])” (Heimann, Medvecky, 2022), we can infer that this “protective relationship to a place” likely refers to a place that volunteers reside in that they wish to protect. Allowing volunteers to work on projects that are personally relevant to them leads to increased volunteer perceived impact.

While it is vital to properly describe to the volunteers what they will be doing, it is also important to make sure that the jobs are enjoyable and to make the volunteers feel valued. It is important to thank volunteers individually for their hard work and time, no matter how big or small their task. By making volunteering enjoyable and fostering a positive community, those that participated are more likely to return and encourage others to join.

To ensure volunteers feel fulfilled in their work, organizations must tailor materials to the demographics of the specific community. In particular, most volunteers tend to fall into a relatively narrow age range, and are most motivated to work on projects that are local to them. This is highlighted in surveys on

environmental volunteerism in New Zealand where “regular” volunteers are aged between 40 and 65 years; “casual” volunteers are family groups and corporate groups’(Peters, Hamilton, and Eames 2015).

Metric	Category	% of groups
Years established	>1	1.4
	1–2	5.4
	3–5	13.9
	6–10	27.7
	11+	51.7
Participation	1–5	16.2
	6–12	31.8
	13–20	24.3
	21–50	16.2
	51–100	5.4
	101+	6.1
Age (years)	≤18	3.4
	19–30	4.7
	31–50	25.7
	51–65	53.7
	66+	12.5

Table 1
Demographic Distribution of Volunteering
Note: (Peters, Hamilton, and Eames 2015)

Table 1 above is describing the average demographics of volunteers and their organizations. The “years established” is the percentage of the volunteer groups separated by how long they have been a functioning volunteer group. A vast majority of the groups are over ten years old, and there are very few less than two years old groups. The most relevant demographic for environmental volunteering, which is reflected in the Enviro Champions demographics as well, is the 51-65 age group.

2.4: HUME COMMUNITY, DEMOGRAPHICS, AND VALUES

The Hume area is home to many people from many backgrounds. Out of the 240,000 people who live there, only 55.1% were born in Australia, with India following at 6.7% and Iraq at 6.3% (**Figure 6**). About 60% of Hume residents born in Australia had both parents born overseas. This cultural diversity is very important to Hume as a whole. There are many programs sponsored by the local government that integrate different

communities together, such as the Hume Interfaith Network, Refugee and Asylum Seekers, LGBTIQ+, and Hume Community Change Makers (Hume City Council). Hume values its diverse perspectives and backgrounds and helps its citizens to feel welcome in Hume.

There are also programs to help people in minority groups, such as the city-funded LGBTQIA+ Community Group. The Hume

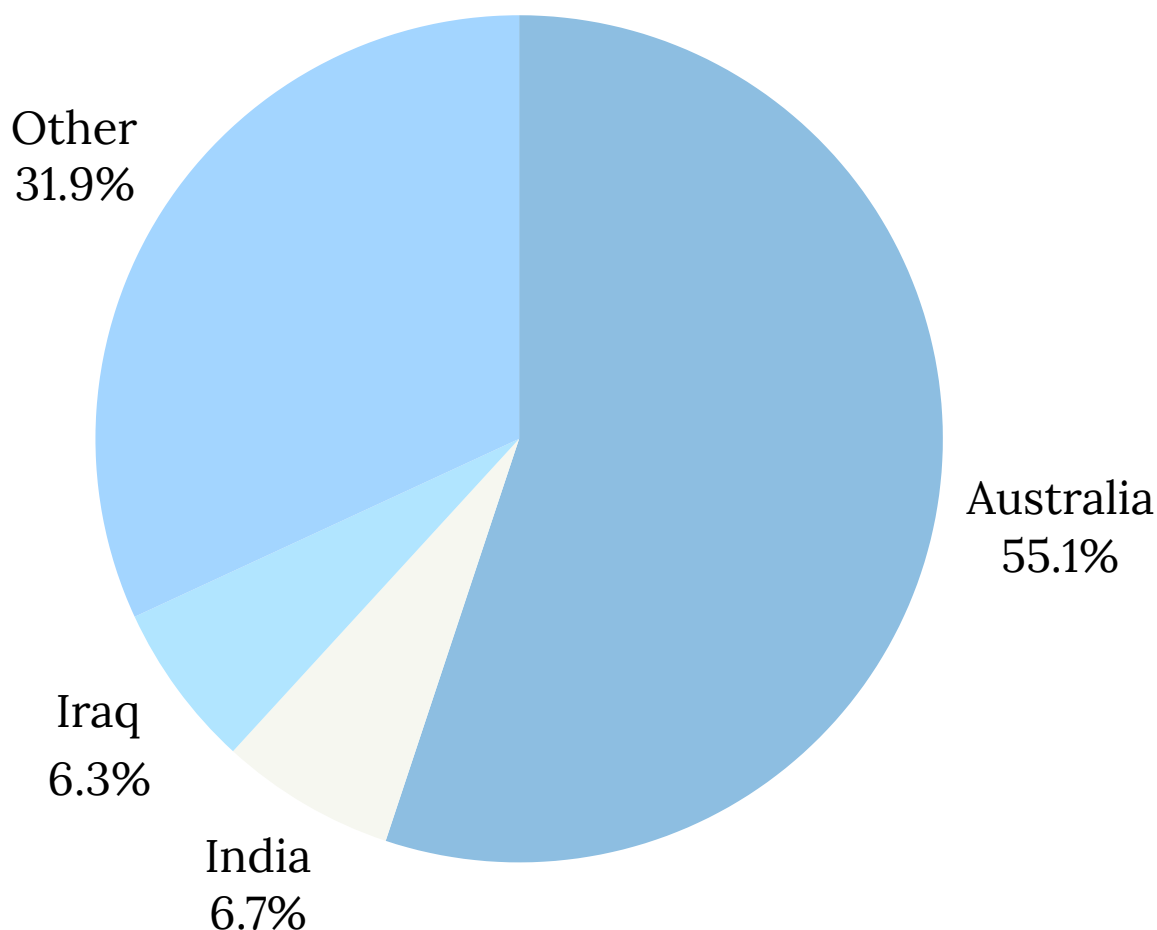


Figure 6
Where Hume Residents Were Born

City Council acknowledges and appreciates all their community members and has many outreach programs to many different demographic groups. They also have housing facilities for unhoused people, and have created laws that allow people to camp in public places for a limited amount of time to aid the homeless population.

In terms of land area and environmental conservation, there are more than 700 parks in Hume. The city has a number of programs in place to help raise awareness of environmental concerns, and provides ways for the community to live a more sustainable life; for example they have many community gardens (**Figure 7 & Figure 8**) where residents can plant and harvest food.



Figure 7
Craigieburn Community Garden. (n.d.).



Figure 8
Sunbury Community Garden

2.5: COVID-19'S EFFECT ON SMALL PROJECTS / BUSINESSES

COVID-19 was debilitating to many businesses and programs due to its socioeconomic impact, and Hume was no exception. Relevant case studies highlight some key factors caused by COVID-19 that overlap with Hume City Council programs. Evidence indicates that some of the most prevalent difficulties with these programs were lower funding and participation, especially in the voluntary sector. This caused programs to adapt to utilize a hybrid format to preserve the social aspect of volunteerism, which is a driving factor for participation.

Due to mandatory shutdowns, volunteerism significantly declined both in terms of participation and financial support. Some of the most important motivations for volunteerism such as socialization and self-fulfillment were obstructed due to COVID-19. For example, a case study on four organizations (France Volontaires) showed how

“(a) [COVID-19] closed, reduced and/or refocused program operations; (b) It impacted organizational practices; and (c) in some cases, it changed self perceptions of what it means to be a volunteer.”
(Perold et al, p.26)

Similarly, the Hume Enviro Champions program saw reduced participation when COVID-19 was most widespread. The demotivation shown by the volunteers in the studies mentioned may be similarly attributed to participants of the Hume Enviro Champions program during COVID-19. It was found that there was

“A sense of loss of the social element associated with the event volunteering experience was captured across both the survey and interview data.”
(Power and Nedvetskaya, 2022, p. 8)

showing that this is a universal occurrence, not unique to Hume. Even those who adapted their programs to involve risk-free environments for volunteers to volunteer still saw lack of participation.

While there were still cases of hesitation to reenter the volunteer workforce, many projects maintained strength in their programs by switching to an online format. This created another barrier as potential volunteers had to adapt to new technology and forms of communication. The Hume Enviro Champions program similarly implemented a hybridization of the course, which allowed them to conduct alternative activities safely during the pandemic. Although the in person sessions were highly preferred for participant satisfaction, online platforms still allowed alternate tools for program success. While these sessions were offered throughout the peak of COVID-19, they are no longer an option, as all of the sessions are solely in person again. This was done due to the negative responses from the participants to the online sessions. Considering participants felt much more confident in person, Council tailored the course to accommodate this.

METHODOLOGY

3.1

TO IDENTIFY THE GOALS
OF THE PROGRAM
LEADERSHIP TEAM

3.4

TO REVIEW THE
RECRUITMENT
STRATEGIES OF
EXTERNAL PROGRAMS

3.2

TO UNDERSTAND
PARTICIPANT
PERSPECTIVES ON THE
PROGRAM

3.5

TO PROVIDE
RECOMMENDATIONS TO
IMPROVE PROGRAM
RECRUITMENT AND
RETENTION

3.3

TO ASSESS THE COURSE
STRUCTURE AND GOALS

3.6

CONSIDERATIONS

The team has performed a review of the Hume City Council's Enviro Champions program with the goal of increasing participation and awareness. The objectives for this project were to understand participant perspectives on the program, to assess the course structure and efficacy, to identify the goals of the program leadership team, to review the recruitment strategies of external programs, and to provide recommendations to improve program recruitment and retention. We have completed these objectives through a variety of methods as seen in Figure 9. The flowchart in **Figure 9** associates the methods to each objective which in turn are used to meet our main goal.

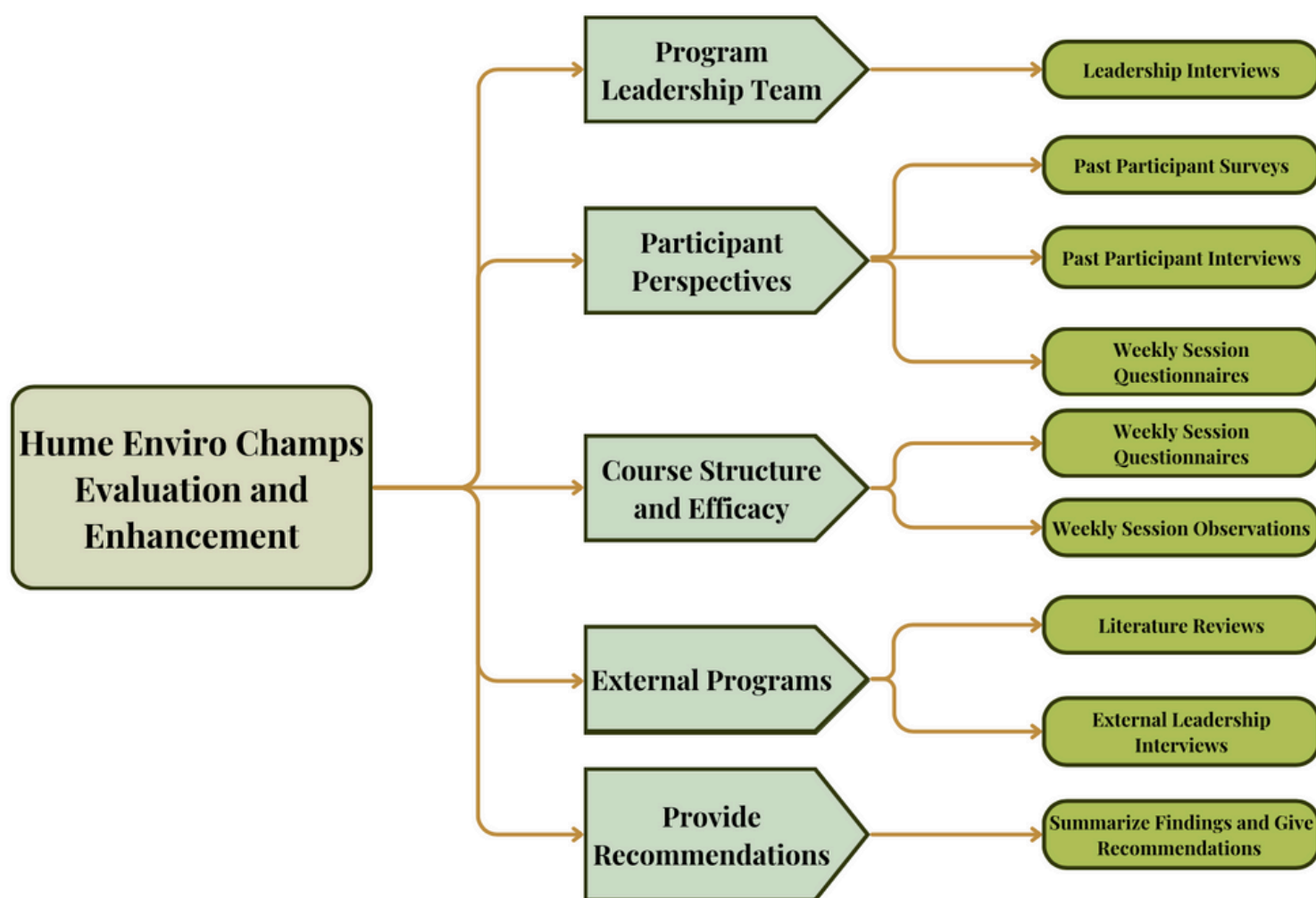


Figure 9
Flow Chart of Project Objectives and Methodology

3.1: TO IDENTIFY THE GOALS OF THE PROGRAM LEADERSHIP TEAM

The first objective was to identify the goals of the program from the perspective of the leadership team. For this we hosted semi-structured interviews with multiple members of the leadership team within the Enviro Champions program. The people who we interviewed were the current and past Enviro Champions program directors and a member of the Hume City Council evaluation department. This was to see what their goals are for the program, how it changed overtime, and to see if there are any discrepancies between the program goals and the participant goals. These interviews were also to learn the scope of Enviro Champions program, what resources they have used, and methods they have tried in the past. During the interviews, we initially obtained general expectations of the course and program from a management perspective and then delved into the specific research questions we had, shown in Appendix A. With the evaluation department specifically, we asked about how they currently promote the course, what factors have changed internally since COVID-19, what are their needs compared to wants for the program,

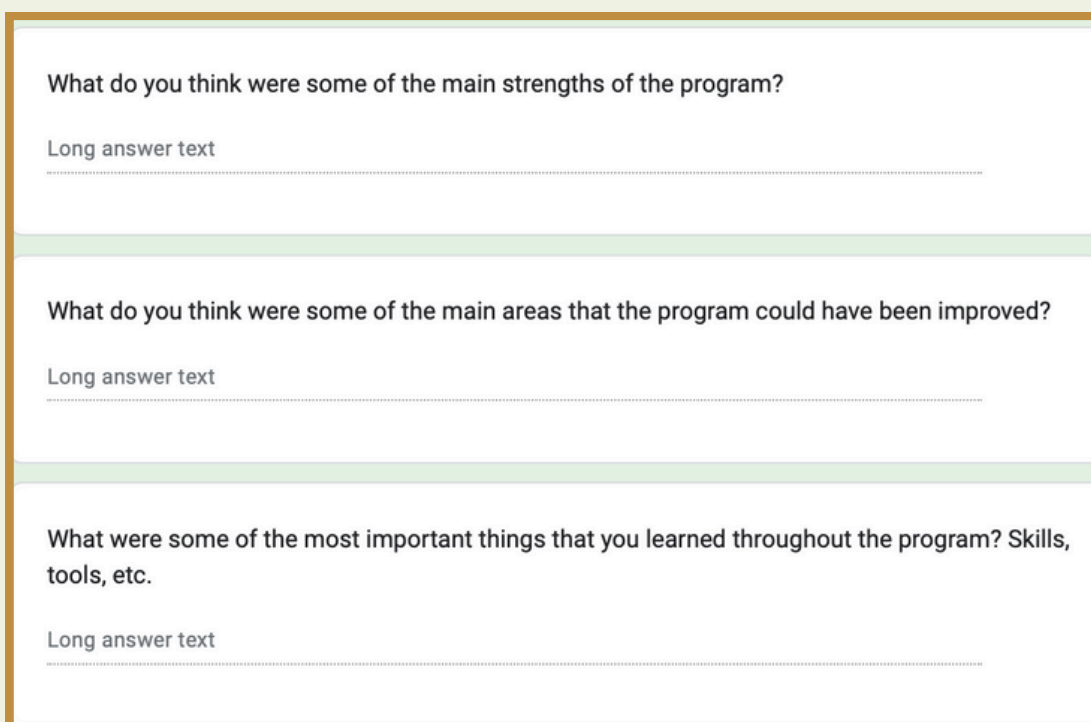
and what things they have tried in the past. By conducting these interviews, we avoided suggesting strategies that program leadership had attempted in the past. We had three people transcribing each of the interviews, with one transcript document being typed by hand and one by a speech to text program to make sure we did not miss any important information from the interviews.

3.2: TO UNDERSTAND PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES ON THE PROGRAM

The second objective was connecting with past and current participants to understand their experience with the program as a whole. We conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with past participants who were willing to connect with us. In those interviews, we asked questions about their specific experience as well as what aspects of the course aided or hindered their progress. Through this, we gained a more complete understanding of the logistical components and received in-depth and detailed participant feedback as well as the yearly Hume City Council surveys about the Enviro Champions have sometimes suffered from low response

rate. We were flexible in our questions and tailored the interview to the individual in order to maximize the effectiveness of the interviews, as everyone had different perspectives and experiences with the program.

We reached out to potential interviewees through the Hume City Council Enviro Champions past participant email alias. To keep the emails confidential, we had the program director forward our email stating the purpose and request for interviews, so the people who were interested in an interview reached out to us. In the interview process we aimed to discover



The image shows a screenshot of a survey form with three questions, each followed by a text input field. The questions are:

- What do you think were some of the main strengths of the program?
- What do you think were some of the main areas that the program could have been improved?
- What were some of the most important things that you learned throughout the program? Skills, tools, etc.

Each question is followed by a text input field labeled "Long answer text".

Figure 10
Past Participant Surveys

themes from the questions in **Appendix B** (some pictured in **Figure 10**), covering topics including what got the participants interested in the program, the most important things were that the participants learned from the program, and what they thought could have been improved. We collected new data from participants with a variety of experiences of the program, not only to understand what went well and what didn't, but also what the process looked like as a whole. The participants' perspectives were vital to understand what struggles they underwent when initiating their projects and what aspects of the program helped them continue to their goal.

Along with the interview process we administered a survey to the past participants. This allowed us to access information from a greater variety of people, even if they were unable to meet for an interview. The full list of questions can be found in **Appendix C**, sample questions are "How did you hear about the program?", "What were some of the main strengths of the program?", and "What were some of the most important things you learned throughout the program?". With the data we collected from these surveys, we were able to broaden our scope of responses beyond just those who

could meet in person. We sent out these surveys via the Hume City Council to past participants who were able to answer at any point up to April 26, 2024. The survey had multiple choice and open ended questions, so we can get a variety of types of information about the program.

Since the program was ongoing while we were working on site, we were able to send weekly questionnaires to current participants to get more relevant information about individual sessions and discover the patterns that occurred over each session. This was essential because all the other past participant surveys were months after the program had ended and participants could have forgotten key details. Our primary goal with these questionnaires was to get information on the individual high and low points of each session, to better assess participant outlook on a week-by-week basis. Added to the interviews and surveys from past and current participants, we were able to analyze information about the different experiences that people had with the Enviro Champions program.

3.3: TO ASSESS THE COURSE STRUCTURE AND EFFICACY

The third objective focused on the program structure and efficacy. We collected information on the course structure by connecting with current participants through a series of weekly questionnaires. In the questionnaires, we asked important questions found in **Appendix D**, such as “How did you hear about the program?,” “What got you interested in the program?,” and “What do you expect to get out of the program?”. We measured several variables in questionnaires throughout the course, including volunteer satisfaction and perceived project readiness. By giving the participants multiple questionnaires throughout the course, we obtained a more complete picture of what the participants value and what they’re getting out of the course. These short questionnaires were given to current program participants on a weekly basis, with more in-depth questionnaires offered at the beginning and end of our 7-week project to address our demographics and to measure a change in outlook over the 4 sessions that have transpired. These will cover both quantified measurements, like program investment on a scale of 1-10, and qualitative measurements, like project readiness.

In addition to analyzing participant feedback, we also attended four of the weekly sessions. This allowed us to further familiarize ourselves with the program content and perceived how participants interacted with the program. Then we used observational analysis to note interactions between the participants and the instructors. We took notes on what type of questions were asked frequently and compared results from our questionnaires and interviews to see which sessions participants preferred. All four of us attended after having been granted permission by the Hume City Council to observe, and gained consent of seven participants to send them weekly surveys about the program.

We have our questionnaire after each of the four sessions we attended in order to get data which we could compare over time. The full list of questions can be seen in Appendix D, but some of the main questions that will be focused on for this objective are “How did you hear about the program?,” “What got you interested in the program?,” and “What was the most impactful moment during the program?”. The first and last sessions have different

questions as can be seen in **Appendix D1** and **D3**: to gather introductory demographic data as well as final conclusions on the course without overwhelming the participants with a lengthy survey. This was done to identify what drives their motivation for joining the program and whether program expectations have been met. Appendix D2 shows what our weekly questionnaires looked like, with some questions having a scale so that we can tabulate and analyze data more easily. The questionnaires were electronically sent out to all of the willing participants. The main purpose of the questionnaires was to gain insight from the participants' perspective and to understand how they feel about the efficacy of the program, helping them to initiate and pursue projects of their own.

In addition to the weekly questionnaires, we also observed four of the ten Enviro Champions sessions. We were able to attend four of the sessions, where we took notes on how sessions were run, the materials covered, and how responsive the participants were to each lesson.

In order to supplement our data, we utilized the Hume City Council annual post-program data. There are Hume Enviro Champions reviews that date back from 2016 which provide data on past participant

data, including program enjoyment, effectiveness of project preparedness, and participant suggestions on improvement of the course. We extracted relevant data from these and recorded trends through the years.

3.4: TO REVIEW THE RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES OF EXTERNAL PROGRAMS

The focus of our fourth objective was to collect information on other environmental or community based programs and compare their outreach and recruitment strategies with those used by the Hume Enviro Champions. We found these programs by thoroughly researching local programs with similar structures to Hume Enviro Champs. These similarities include size of program, environmental content, and long-term follow-ups. We explored these programs through their online resources as well as contacting them directly to conduct interviews.

The main aspects we explored were outside perspectives pertaining to program advertising, recruitment, and participant retention. We reached out to other local

government management and publicly run organizations that were able to give insight on these types of issues. The programs that we interviewed include Volunteering Environmentally Victoria, the Yarra Ranges Changemakers (**Figure 11**), and Good People Act Now (**Figure 12**). The programs with successful results in recruitment and retention methods were compared to those being used by the Hume Enviro Champions program.

We collected this information through interviews with outside organizations by connecting with them through email asking for an interview, and asking questions found in **Appendix E** pertaining to their recruitment strategies. Even though not all of these programs were environmentally focused, we were still able to learn from their recruitment strategies.



Figure 11
Community Changemakers Logo
Community Changemakers Program. (n.d.)



Figure 12
Good People Act Now Logo
GPAN – Good People Act Now. (n.d.)

3.5: TO PROVIDE RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE PROGRAM RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

The primary focus of our fifth objective was to highlight the program strengths and weaknesses and suggest alternative program structure. We have suggested alternate data-based target demographics, recruitment strategies, and other logistical recommendations in the form of a report containing our data and analysis to support our findings. In order to suggest improvements to the program to our sponsor, we had a conversation with our sponsor, in addition to writing a report to give to them our findings and recommendations for improving the program.



3.6: CONSIDERATIONS

It is important that we have considered our time constraint of seven weeks. This means that we have not seen the current participants finish the course and discovered how successful they are with their projects. The data that we have collected from them in the surveys is limited to the sessions that we have attended and it has been helpful, but we were not be around to see if it ultimately helps them make successful projects.

Another limitation is the amount of people who we interviewed and took the surveys. Since our population is relatively small with about 7 people currently taking the course and about between 10-30 participants per year in past years, our results were based off of a small sample size and may not be representative of the larger population Enviro Champion participants.

FINDINGS

4.1

**PARTICIPANT
ENGAGEMENT AND
MOTIVATIONS**

4.3

**GOALS OF PROGRAM
LEADERSHIP**

4.2

**CURRENT CURRICULUM
STRATEGIES AND
EFFECTIVENESS**

4.4

**EXTERNAL PROGRAM
METHODS**

4.1: GOALS OF PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

In a broad overview, the leadership team wants to provide an informative and insightful program that helps the residents of Hume have faith in their ability to implement environmentally focused projects and foster community-driven change. The course should effectively provide the participants with the tools and confidence to tackle the environmental problems in the local Hume area that they care about.

The Environmental Community Development Officer (ECDO) was our main point of contact throughout the project as well as our first interview within the program leadership team. Their main goal is to increase the participant retention of the program to have consistently between 15-20 participants. There were an average of seven consistent participants (**Figure 13**)

in 2024, and in order to maintain funding, the program must have at least ten strong participants as well as producing at least three projects at the conclusion of the program. Since it is government funded, it is important to be able to hit the benchmarks so that the program can justify its use of funds.

One of the important takeaways from the interview with the ECDO is that Hume City Council has looked positively on the project outcomes from Hume Enviro Champions and are included in the Live Green Plan. Council has had many environmentally-focused initiatives, and participants have often put their projects into one of these initiatives. There are also fairly loose requirements for participant projects as they can range from a one time tree planting to educating the youth about



Figure 13
2024 Participation Graphic

green cleaning supplies, and all of these are viewed as successful projects.

The ECDO does a lot of the advertising on their own, with help from the communications department. The communications department provides them with an advertising template that they are able to fill in with relevant information, which is then electronically disseminated to the local community centers, libraries, and other public places. The ECDO is responsible for all other forms of advertising such as physical posters, social media, and running stands at local events that are run by the Hume City Council and external organizations.

Our second interview within the program leadership team was with the previous ECDO and main administrator of the Enviro Champions program. They are now in charge of the Hume Changemakers program, which is a similar program with less focus on environmental issues and more focus on learning how to implement any community project, not specifically environmentally related. They were in charge of the Enviro Champions program for three years, and one of their main goals with regards to the program was increasing the scope of the content. The change in ECDO was during 2019, and the course

expanded to have less time for participants to talk with one another, but included higher level project information such as community organizing.

We asked the former ECDO questions relating to the limitations people might face when it comes to attending the sessions and they pointed out that “people have jobs, families, lives, and other limitations in the day.” Because of this, people are less likely to be eager to get involved when asked to come back to more events. Another large barrier that they pointed out was “fear of the unknown.” People are quite often uncomfortable when they are told to share their ideas in a room full of others. They used a lot of the same recruitment strategies as the current ECDO in terms of advertising. One of their main points was that “the social part is the real hook.” If the course is “attractive and social” people are more likely to get engaged with the promoted event.

Our third and final interview from the leadership team was a member of the research and engagement team. They work all across Hume to assess different aspects of community engagement. One of the main themes they have learned throughout their time surveying Hume is that people like to stay in their “15-minute cities.” The idea of 15-minute cities is that everything you need is within 15 minutes of your home, and people are uncomfortable going farther than that.

Another important trend that they mentioned was the decrease in government trust among the people of Hume since the lockdowns. Many people do not have an understanding of what is under Hume City Council legislation. When something goes wrong, the community is quick to blame the Council, even when it is run by the state government, not the local council. She also pointed out that “the vast majority of people don’t care terribly much as long as what they need from council is being ticked off.” This emphasizes the point that most people will not get involved in giving feedback as long as their needs are being met.



4.2: PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT AND MOTIVATIONS

Initial project motivations are closely linked with project implementation and engagement in the course. During the interviews, we noticed that the participants who joined with a concrete project idea tended to have the most successful project outcomes after the course. Those participants joined Enviro Champions because they wanted the skills to be able to implement their ideas, while most interviewees that came in without a project idea joined because of a “general concern for the environment”. Within the group of people who joined without a project, they tended to either join other projects in the group, or struggled coming up with an idea until they reach a point in the program where they have to start making a presentation for their projects. Those projects tended to remain unimplemented solely because those participants lacked the enthusiasm for their chosen project.

Participants highly enjoyed the social aspect of the course and finding people with similar interests. **Figure 14** shows how participants found out about the program in a variety of ways, which explains the social connections that the participants were striving for in the community. **Figure 15** then shows that during our interviews, participants were keen to highlight the connections that they formed during the course. In particular, the participants felt less alone in caring for the environment. Many joined to find like minded individuals with which they could socialize, some noting how their demographic may have a harder time connecting with others, and joined to be more in touch with the greater community. Some past participants had continued relationships with other participants after the course, but not all, leading to the feeling of loss of the Enviro Champions community after graduation.

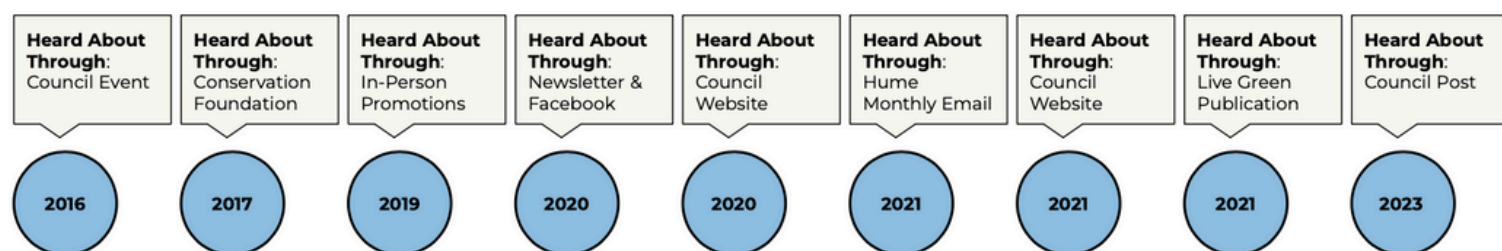


Figure 14
Past Participant Interview Data

Apart from project implementation, the Enviro Champions program increases capacity in environmental action. After the



course, participants “had all those connections and experience which helped greatly”, creating community members with greater initiative and motivation. Even if the participants weren’t successful in their own projects, the course gave some of the participants the confidence to join other organizations after the course ended, leading to more activism and engagement in the environmental space. A good portion of the interviewees were previously involved in other volunteer organizations before taking the course.

COVID-19 had a huge effect on the program for participants who took the course in 2020-2023, with either fully online or hybrid classes. Most of the data pertaining to the impact of COVID-19 was drawn from the past participant interviews. Of the nine we had interviewed, two had taken the course in 2020 and three during 2021. One interviewee was unable to fully implement their project so they decided to retake the course in 2021. Similarly, the other 2020 participants had difficulty with project implementation. It was harder to work on and implement a project that may have geographic ties, such as a community garden, during lockdown because of government restrictions as well as the mental toll of the pandemic. One participant commented that it was “very

difficult [to gain traction] because people were hesitant to go out.” During the course, this made it more difficult for participants to socialize with each other, especially online. Feedback reports from the Hume City Council show that the participants did not like the online and hybrid versions of the course. This was also voiced during our interviews. Participants who were inexperienced with technology such as Zoom, experienced a learning curve when first transitioning online, but the older demographic was more likely to participate online than the younger demographic.

Project implementation is entirely up to the participant after the course is over. Most of the feedback collected showed very successful short term projects contrasted with tentative success of longer term projects. The interviews highlighted that maintaining project objectives over a long period of time without direct support from Council was difficult due to the time required and managerial tasks overburdening the participant. In contrast, one time projects, such as the Park Fruit Tree Planting, did not need ongoing project management after the event and had a clear success marker.

Participants had varying suggestions for

the course when asked, but they all centered around common themes. A key component which hindered participants was the amount of time the course allowed for project development. From both the weekly questionnaires and past participant interviews, participants stated that they would prefer more time to dedicate to their project. Some suggestions given included extending the session time, increasing the number of sessions, and time in between each session to allow for more digestion of the material before moving on to other content. Other ideas focused on wanting more guidance and support for project implementation after the course was over. Some had felt “dropped off” after the course ended and felt additional meetings would be helpful to check in with others and get more feedback from other participants. Another type of suggestion had to do with networking and socialization. An idea that was supported by many of the past participants was to initiate outside-of-session socialization with their peers directly from the start of the training course via group chats. Our data also consisted of individuals who felt that no change in the program is necessary.

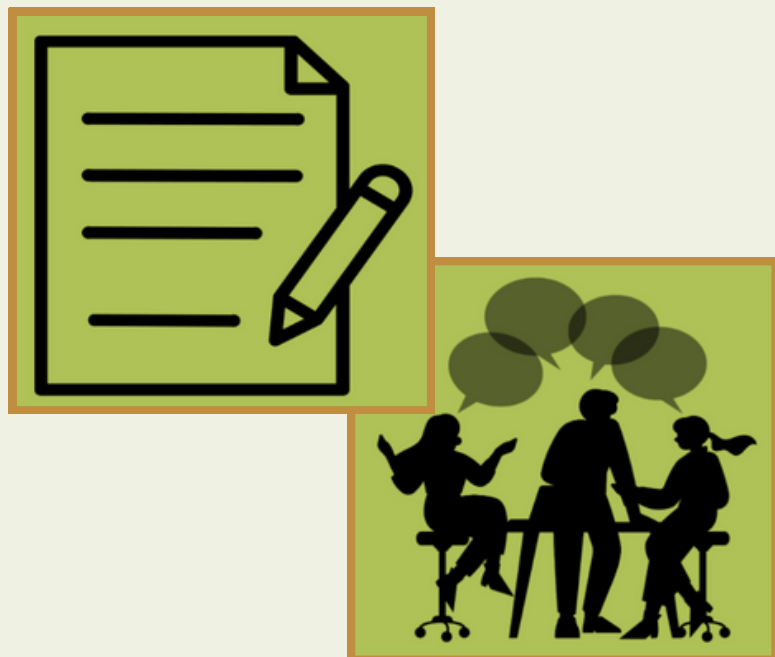
4.3: COURSE STRUCTURE AND EFFICACY

Our results for this section are concluded from our own in person observations of the course, as well as weekly questionnaires to current participants about how they felt about the course. We got an average of three responses, and noticed the course had about seven consistent participants as of session seven.

Overall, we observed that the course ran very smoothly and the participants absorbed and enjoyed the information that was being presented. The course was structured much like a classroom, with a facilitator who led most of the sessions and occasionally a guest speaker who was an expert in the area leading the session. Participants were encouraged to ask questions and share their project ideas with the entire group, and they were engaged when they separated into small group activities. These activities allowed the participants to further develop their environmental projects and expand upon essential skills required to make a project. In the smaller groups, the participants received direct feedback for their projects from their peers, creating a sense of community and trust in the sessions. After

the small group discussions and activities, the discussion opened back up to the full group where everyone shared their ideas for their project and showcased the activity they did. The activities we observed ranged from mapping out the connections between the participants' projects and the wider community, to advertisements for their project and helping direct the objectives of their chosen projects.

Throughout the sessions, participants were engaged in the materials. Most of the participants took notes, were enthusiastic about their projects, and were engaged in the course activities.



Participants were encouraged to get to know each other through the facilitated activities and during the dinner break. During breaks, the participants talked with the people sitting near them, and chatted among themselves about their projects and lives. As previously mentioned, the social aspect contributed significantly to the participant enjoyment of the program. In the weekly questionnaires, there were a considerable number of responses that designated the high point of the session as getting to talk to the other participants and share ideas. One response even noted that the high point of the session for them was not even related to the course materials, but in getting to know the personal life of another participant. In the weekly questionnaires, the participants voiced that they wished they had more time to talk with other participants during the sessions, further supporting the idea that social interaction is an important factor for participant enjoyment in the course.

Although the in-class socialization is a high point of the course, the participants seemed to be hesitant to continue to connect with each other outside of the sessions. Since this is a government program, the facilitators were not allowed to share personal information of the participants with the others. At the end of

a few sessions, the ECDO encouraged the participants to get each others' contact information so they could keep in touch and continue to network, but the participants seemed hesitant to be in charge of creating a group chat. It wasn't until session six that one participant took up the responsibility to collect people's contact information to create a group chat. When the participants started to collect contact information, all of those who were interested in joining had a group discussion on what platform to use for communication, and they seemed hesitant to compromise on which messaging platform to select. We are unsure whether the group chat was ultimately created or how often it was utilized.

We observed that a majority of the participants taking the course were English first language speakers, but about a third of the participants were non-native English speakers. Due to this language barrier, it created some misunderstandings among the group, especially in regards to the smaller group activities. During the course, the native English speakers and non-native English speakers tended to sit separately, so when the smaller group activities occurred, the ESL participants sometimes misinterpreted what the activity was. In one case, a participant misinterpreted what

the course was even about, and intended on making a community meditation program. That participant later changed their idea to an environmental project idea, but had joined the course not fully understanding the goal of the Enviro Champions program.

Through our observations we found that the program had very tight time constraints. The sessions often ran to time and the facilitator had to encourage the participants to move on from activities and discussions frequently. We observed that the participants were always very engaged with the course concepts and therefore were always eager to continue talking about them after allotted time was filled. While the facilitator always encouraged participants to share their project ideas and suggestions with each other, sometimes discussions would have to be ended in order to move onto the next topic.

Based on the observations and weekly questionnaires, the course is well-executed, runs smoothly, and most of the participants excel at learning about project implementation in the program environment. There tended to be a core group of about seven participants that would constantly show up to the course. They were consistently engaged and

enthusiastic about the materials that they were learning because the new materials were all directly connected back to their own project plans. At many points, the participants voiced that they had never thought about certain aspects of their project, and would not have considered them before making their project if the Enviro Champions program hadn't brought those aspects of planning to their attention.

4.4 EXTERNAL PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

The team also ran a series of interviews with people in leadership positions of external volunteer programs. From these, we were able to determine some of the effective strategies within other programs which the Hume City Council could adopt for the Hume Enviro Champions program. We were able to interview the strategic coordinator for environmental volunteering in the Greater Melbourne area, the Gender Equity Officer in Banksia Gardens, and the Community Development Officer for the Yarra Ranges Changemakers program.

The first interview that the team conducted with the Strategic Coordinator for Environmental Volunteering (SCEV) at the state government level. Their job involves reaching out to volunteer groups and “trying to find what’s working and what’s not in the sector, and run programs to expand volunteering into different sectors”. They work in the Greater Melbourne Area, with Hume generally being the boundary for their data collection. During the interview, they showed us that Hume has more volunteer

groups and better networking than most of the surrounding area. They gave us many different strategies that volunteer groups in the Greater Melbourne Area use to get people interested and keep them coming back. One of the main points that they talked about was promoting the program as a social, timely, and attractive event for your target audience. In terms of target audience, they mentioned the government is focusing on getting younger people involved in volunteer programs, but still promoting towards the older generation in order to expand the volunteering base in Victoria.

Some of the specific recruitment strategies that their research has found to be successful include recruitment videos posted by Landcare Victoria, going to community events to meet people face-to-face, running more events to peak peoples’ interest, promoting the career benefits of the program, having more timing flexibility, making applications easy, and forming a personal connection with people and the community. If recruiters are able to form a more personal connection with someone,

that person is more likely to join their cause.

Another main point that the SCEV mentioned about the Hume Enviro Champions program specifically, was that people might avoid joining the program simply because they do not have an environmental idea that they want to implement. To fix this, they recommended stressing the point that you are able to join another group in advertisements to take away some apprehension about joining the program.

The SCEV also mentioned ways to tailor advertisements in a way that will catch more attention. Some of the main strategies include using less words and more images, as well as showing pictures of your target audience in the program. Along with making the advertising more eye-catching, you also have to promote them in a way that the most people will read it. Finding the correct places to post physical ads is crucial in this step of promotion. One of the suggested methods was the “back of the toilet recruitment strategy.” The idea behind this strategy is to place posters on the back of toilet stall doors because people will often read something simply because it's there if they have the time to. It would be possible to take advantage of

this strategy in a variety of locations such as libraries, schools, malls, etc. During this interview, she stressed the point to us that people generally don't know what opportunities are available, which is one of the main reasons they don't join these types of programs.

Our second interview was with the Gender Equity Officer (GEO) at Banksia Gardens. The GEO works with the Good People Act Now (GPAN) program, which brings people through a series of youth-centered free training sessions about creating gender equality in the community.

GPAN has many successful advertising strategies including placing fliers in local universities, workshops on university campuses, and putting program information on LinkedIn. LinkedIn has been successful for the group because it is a more reputable source than a link on other social media platforms such as Instagram or Facebook. It is also useful because university-age people will quite often be browsing LinkedIn for job opportunities, so they have a greater likelihood of discovering GPAN in the process. GPAN is marketed as a resume building opportunity, which often resonates with the younger generation that is often looking for ways to boost their resume. Another advertising

strategy that they use is promoting stalls and workshops that they run at their sessions to give potential members a better understanding of the program. Along with their fortnightly meetings, GPAN runs events including an annual trivia night, which gets very positive responses each year. Another way the GEO gets people interested in their program is through a program newsletter that gets shared through the Banksia networks. Volunteers are able to write an article for the newsletter to share their experience with the course, which helps get other people interested in the program.

of a concern for the participants who want to stay involved with the program.

The GEO admits that there are some major roadblocks with any program such as GPAN. The main roadblock that they run into is the timing of the program and commute for participants. With most of their participants being university-age, GPAN understands that commuting to and from the sessions can be difficult. The six training sessions are solely in person, but they do provide uber vouchers for post-session travel for anyone who might need it considering the sessions end at 8:30pm on Wednesdays. Once the training sessions are over, GPAN offers a hybrid format for the post-training sessions, where participants are able to join in person or online. This allows transportation to be less

Good People Act Now, also known as GPAN, also has an effective promotional flier (**Figure 16**) which uses different color sections to draw attention to the main points of the program. At the top of the page, GPAN uses their first color to put a hook for the poster. “Join the Team” is placed at the top of the page in large font so it is the first thing that people will see. This color section also includes the program name and logo. Moving on, there is a picture with their team and the next color section with application requirements and a QR code to sign up for the program. This section allows people to see if they fit the requirements for signing up and gives them easy access to then apply for the course. The last color section is then to tell people the course logistics such as when the first session is, where the sessions are held, and that the cost of the course is free.



Figure 16
GPAN Promotional Flier
Banksia Gardens Community Services. (2024, January 30).

Our third interview was with the Community Development Officer (CDO) for the Yarra Ranges Changemakers program. The CDO shared with us that the program is a ten session course that runs over a period of six months. The sessions are generally fortnightly and they skip some sessions for holidays. They touch on a variety of topics and have different external facilitators talk during the meetings who are experts in the session's topic. The sessions change between in person and online depending on the week. The in person sessions are generally group dynamics focused with one being culturally-focused, where the participants get to communicate with one of the local Elders.

The Yarra Ranges Changemakers course emphasizes connections to the community, encouraging people to join the program even if they don't have a project idea for the community in mind. In the previous two years the program has had a hundred percent retention rate from how many people were accepted into the course to how many graduated, with most participants identifying as women, with an average participant age of between 40 to 65.

One reason the CDO contributed to the

high retention rates use of a 15 minute phone interview upon applying for the program. Since the program is limited to 30 people, the program administrators call all of the applicants to further explain the goals and logistics of the course to ensure participants understand what is expected of them and give them an option to retract their application if the goals don't resonate with them. It allows them to select the most committed and enthusiastic applicants for a successful program. The CDO mentioned that the calls also create a sense of social obligation because it puts a personality to the program. In the past two years, there have been three people who dropped out at the beginning of the program. In addition, the program leadership team sent out a poll at the beginning of the course to survey when and where it would be best for participants to meet for the sessions.

The changemakers program uses a variety of communication strategies to promote the course. These include sending out advertisements through the communications department who posts them directly to the community website. They also promote the program by networking through the other government led programs in the area, such as the cultural development team and the

community development team. One more communication strategy they emphasize is word-of-mouth recruitment. The program leaders often encourage participants to share the course with others who might find it valuable. They send out surveys to the participants before, during, and after the course in order to gauge the participant opinions in order to make .

improvements to the sessions. Along with this, bi-annual check-ins are conducted by the administrators for the alumni to see how everyone is doing with their projects from the course and give additional help and guidance for projects when needed.

The Yarra Ranges Community Changemakers program flier (**Figure 17**)

highlights the important aspects of their program and application. Both the flier title and the “apply now” graphic has many colors in order to catch peoples’ attention. It then directs attention to the goal of the program being to “make a positive difference in your local community.” The flier then gives some more detailed information about the program and clearly points out the application deadline by using a different color of text.



Figure 17

Yarra Ranges Community Changemakers Promotional Flier
Community Changemakers program. (2024)

CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM METHODS

5.1**COMMUNICATIONS
DEPARTMENT****5.3****ADVERTISING
STRATEGIES****5.2****TARGET DEMOGRAPHICS****5.4****CLASSROOM
ALTERATIONS**

5.1: RECRUITMENT

Our first recommendation for recruitment is to expand the target demographic of the program to target the younger population in Hume. The best way we have found to target younger demographics is to emphasize the Hume Enviro Champions as a resume building and professional development opportunity. Platforms such as LinkedIn provide opportunities to advertise the course as a resume building program in a more professional and reputable setting than Facebook or Instagram. During our interview with GPAN, they indicated that a large number of participants discovered their course through LinkedIn. While advertising on other platforms like Instagram and Facebook may return clicks, the primary focus of these platforms is entertainment rather than providing career based opportunities. People are less likely to trust a link on one of these entertainment focused sites as opposed to one more focused on networking and resume building.

Our second recruitment recommendation is to increase the amount of networking with other volunteer programs. Activities such as presentations at similar organizations or workshops with other groups are a good way to form face-to-face

connections and get people involved with the Enviro Champions program. Similar organizations such as GPAN have seen great returns from workshops that they run with volunteer groups and local colleges. While the Enviro Champions program already does some advertising through various events, we feel as though it will be helpful to increase advertising through other programs. This would give participants of the other groups the opportunity to learn about the Enviro Champions program and potentially sign up for the program.

Another way that the Enviro Champions program could increase program recruitment is by advertising more heavily to past graduates. This suggestion would apply to past participants who have not successfully started their project and want another chance to get it off the ground or to graduates who want to implement a new project. These people could retake the course to try to get more resources and project feedback while sharing their knowledge from their project with other program participants.

Our next suggestion for recruitment is to have a “bring a friend” session or similar activity. The plurality of Enviro Champions

participants find out about the program through word of mouth, as seen above in **Figure 5**, and increasing the number of people that are exposed directly to the program can bring more opportunities for this kind of connection. The program graduation has traditionally served this purpose with participants bringing their friends and family to observe, but this

concept could be more integrated into the structure of the course to showcase the process of the course rather than the results, and make the program seem more attainable.

One advertising strategy the Enviro Champions program could use to improve its recruitment is by utilizing the simple yet effective “back of the toilet door” recruitment. This method doesn’t necessitate large investments by Council, but leverages Council’s access to public facilities. This works because people tend to read items that are in front of them, and there are less distractions in the stalls.

Our final suggestion to increase participant recruitment of the program is to alter the Enviro Champions promotional flier. Through our interviews with the Yarra Ranges Community Changemakers program and the Good People Act Now program, we gained access to their fliers (**Figure 18 & Figure 19**). We were able to examine these posters and compare them with the Hume Enviro Champions poster to see some of the main selling points for the other programs.



Figure 18
Hume Enviro Champions 2024 Flier
Hume City Council website. (n.d.).

By using some of the strategies that Yarra Ranges Community Changemakers and GPAN used in their posters, we can suggest changes for the Enviro Champions promotional flier. The Hume Enviro Champions flier from 2024 can be seen in **Figure 18**. The flier successfully provides the program title, the course logistics, who to contact for more information, and a QR code to register for the course. One alteration to the poster that the Enviro Champions program could make is adding more colors. With the use of more colors, the poster will be able to catch the attention of more people that are walking by. Council would then be able to highlight key words and phrases in the poster such as “community led” and the date that registrations close. Another alteration to the posters could be to the text size. There is a large amount of white space on the poster, so it leaves room for text size to be increased. If the text size of major points is increased, it will make it easier for people to get all of the important information quickly. Then they can spend time reading the smaller text for more details if they wish. One last suggestion is poster, but are interested in the program, they will be able to scan the QR code and

look into the course when they have time. We have included a proposed poster for the Enviro Champions program which takes some of these suggestions into consideration, which can be seen in **Figure 19**.



Figure 19
Hume Enviro Champions Proposed Poster

5.2: NO-CALL NO-SHOW

The Enviro Champions program experiences multiple no-call no-shows every year, and this is one aspect that we explored for improvement. Two suggestions that we have to potentially remedy this issue are “15-minute phone interviews” and the addition of an opt-out fee.

Our first suggestion is to implement a “15-minute phone interview” for all program applicants. This would include the ECDO having a 15 minute conversation with applicants to make sure that participants and program leadership are on the same page before they commit to joining the program. The ECDO would talk about the Enviro Champions goals and structure in order to inform the participants of how the course is run. This would provide more detail than any posters or webpage that might be explored. In return, the participant would share their goals for the course and their potential project. This way if expectations of the participant do not match that of the program, the participant has the option to adjust their expectations before officially enrolling in the course. In addition, this would allow the program to pair down the group in the event that there were more than 30 people who submitted

an expression of interest. The interviews will also create a social connection between the applicant and the course director, making it so the applicant would be more likely to continue the program because a sense of social obligation will be established.

Our second suggestion is the addition of a small course deposit and corresponding waiver. This would be a small amount of money that is put down by all participants before the course begins. If a participant wishes to waive this payment, they are able to come within the first three sessions and inform the ECDO that they would like to waive their deposit and they will not be charged. If a participant signs up for the course and then does not make contact or show up to any sessions they will be charged this small fee. This would encourage people to show up to at least the first sessions and increase the perceived investment that the participants have in the course, or contacting the administrator that they would like to drop the program which would help the administrator with logistics. While this method may sound counterintuitive, a barrier for recruitment may be the lack of value assigned to something that is free, and the monetary

commitment will hold people accountable to show up to the course. The reason for the first three sessions is so that even the semi-active participants can waive the fee and not have to pay. Ideally nobody would pay the deposit as people would either show up and opt out of the payment, or communicate with the administrator to leave the course.

5.3: RETENTION

Our main suggestion for increasing retention is to centralize the location for the program. Other programs that we have researched have their meetings in one location for every meeting. With one centralized location, people may consider if they are able and willing to make the travel to the location for the meetings before they sign up for the course. Switching to a single centralized location near public transportation will give more opportunity for those without access to a car to attend sessions. It would allow for people who live closer to the session location to sign up, as the rotating session locations could be a deterrent for people who are hesitant to drive outside of their “15 minute city”. This suggestion could reduce the number of people who sign up with the ability to only show up to the close sessions near them. Alternatively, the suggestion could increase the number of sign ups of people who were deterred due to the fact that they would have to drive farther than was comfortable with a seemingly unpredictable location schedule.

Our next suggestion is to run the sessions on Saturdays as opposed to Wednesdays. The Yarra Ranges Community Changemakers program is very similar to Hume Enviro Champions, but they have a

much higher retention rate. The Yarra Ranges Community Changemakers run all of their meetings on Saturdays, which allows people who have jobs more flexibility to attend. Saturday sessions would also alleviate stress for people who are uncomfortable driving at night. Many participants identified that having a meal was an important draw to them, so we suggest having it around lunch instead of dinner. One potential drawback of this suggestion is that people are more likely to travel on weekends, causing them to miss meetings, but it is unlikely that people will travel every weekend. Another potential drawback is that parents who have obligations with their children, such as youth sports, may not be able to attend these sessions, but similar concerns exist for week nights as well.

Another technique that has been successful is the addition of a polling system. This was a technique that Yarra Ranges Community Changemakers program uses and it has seen great success. This suggestion includes sending a poll to survey the people who register for the course asking for their preferred meeting time and meeting place. Once the results are in, the ECDO can tailor the Enviro Champions sessions to the most favorable time and location. With the

use of a polling system, participants would be able to provide their input to when the sessions would be run, adapting to the different needs of the groups every year. This system would make it so more participants can consistently show up to the sessions because they would be held at a time where a majority of people are available. If participants are able to provide their input, they will feel as if the program values their opinion more and will therefore look on it very favorably.

5.4: COURSE SUGGESTIONS

Overall, the Enviro Champions program is run very well, but there were some areas that we felt could be altered within the course structure. The areas that we have given suggestions on include the language barrier seen within the course as well as the course timeframe.

The biggest obstacle in the sessions we observed was the language barrier. In the sessions, we noticed that some of the participants did not fully grasp the goals of the course due to a language barrier. In order for the course to be more appealing to a larger demographic we explored some strategies that would aid with this aspect. The first strategy that we suggest to help the language barrier is to use more visuals. If more visuals are used in the course content, even if someone misses a key point stated by the facilitator, they would still be able to look at the graphic or other visual. This would make it so people with a language barrier are able to follow along for themselves rather than relying mostly on oral instructions. Another strategy to help people with a language barrier is to write more of the spoken information down. If there is an interactive activity with the whole group, ideas are often brainstormed rapidly. This makes it so it can be hard to keep track of what is going on, especially

with language barriers. If the facilitator makes it a point to write down ideas that they or the group says, people can read what was said even if a point was missed. The next strategy to point out is the use of written instructions for all of the activities.

Sometimes instructions for activities can be unclear to people with language barriers, so the use of physical instruction papers could help facilitate these activities, especially if provided in multiple languages. This would allow participants to read the instructions after the activity is explained and ask for more clarification if it is needed. These aspects can all be used in conjunction with each other to create a more welcoming environment for individuals who experience a language barrier in their day to day lives.

Another obstacle that was mentioned by many past participants was that the content of the course was given too quickly for them to fully understand. To remedy this we suggest spreading out the sessions to be every other week, add more take-home assignments, or adding more sessions to spend more time on each topic. In the first suggestion, the course would run fortnightly as opposed to weekly. One of the comments from a past participant was that there was often too much

information to digest in a single week. If the sessions are run fortnightly (with an extra week break for holidays), participants would have more time to further apply the learned material to their own projects. This would lead to more well rounded ideas that they could bring back to each session, especially if take-home assignments were given. These assignments could include something as simple as “go to a local park and see how your project could fit here” or something more complicated such as “look into this list of technical requirements for your project,” in order to keep participants thinking about their project.

Finally, we suggest the addition of more sessions, so course content can be spread out more with less content in each session. This would allow more time in each session for socializing, networking, project planning, and better understanding of the course materials. Considering participants emphasized the social aspect of the course, we believe that this should be a larger aspect of each session. This could also open the opportunity to give participants more time to share their projects with others. The participants were all very eager to share their ideas, and more time to do this during the sessions could greatly improve their view of the course.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Director and Leader Interview Protocol

Interview Format:

Data Collection Method: Sound recorded, transcriptions

Who: Program director, session leaders and program staff

When: Weeks 2-6

Where: Hume City Council Center

Why: To get an overview of managerial perspectives, the methodology behind their program and what they feel are the most successful methods for project success.

How: Through our sponsor; and other program staff/session leaders. All four of us will be present; two for transcribing, two for asking questions.

Questions:

- Consent brief
- Briefly explain how the program is run.
- What is your role in the program?
- How has the course evolved over time?
- What particular aspects do participants respond to the most?
- From your perspective, what portions of the course had the most participant interaction?
- What are some strengths of the program?
- What are some weaknesses of the program?
- What do you think were the highs and lows of this week's session?
- What do you hope for participants to get out of this program/your session?
- What are the ultimate goals of the program/of your session?
- Do you plan on expanding the scope of the course? Or keep it as is?

Appendix B: Past Participant Interview Protocol

Interview Format:

Data Collection Method: Sound Recorded, transcriptions

Who: Past participants of the Hume Enviro Champions program.

When: Weeks 2-6

Where: Hume City Council Center

Why: In order to understand past project experiences and report back what in particular benefited and restricted project success through the eyes of the participant.

How: Connections through our sponsor, reaching out to past participants online and chain referral sampling. All four of us will be present; two for transcribing, two for asking questions.

Questions:

- Consent brief
- Demographic Q's
- How did you hear about the program?
- Did the program meet your initial expectations?
- What got you interested in the program?
- What do you think were some of the strengths of the program?
- What do you think were some of the weaknesses of the program?
- What were the most important things that you learned in the program?
- What specific time works best for session meetings?
- Were you part of a project team or did you work alone?
- Was the Hume Enviro Champions your only commitment at the time?
- Would you have liked to set up a form of communication with fellow participants?
- How much time did you commit to the program outside of the sessions?
- How likely would you be to recommend the program to others?
- If you had a project:
 - When did you initiate your project? Before or during the course?
 - What are some motivations behind your project?
 - How did you implement your project to obtain your goals?
 - How did you maintain your project post-training?
 - What are your current plans for maintaining your project goals?
- If you did not have a project:
 - What kept you from initiating a project?
 - What could the council have done better to make you more confident in starting one?

Appendix C: Past Participant Survey

Interview Format

Data Collection Method: Online surveys

Who: Current Program Participants (2024)

When: Weeks 1-6

Where: Online

Why: To ask similar questions but also understand their feelings of the course at the later stages of the training.

How: Directly through the program

Questions:

- Consent brief
- Demographic questions:
 - Age, gender identity, ethnicity
- How did you hear about the Enviro Champions program?
- If you had a project, when did you initiate it?
- What were some of the motivations behind your project?
- What do you think were some of the main strengths of the program?
- What do you think were some areas of the program that could be improved?
- What were some of the most important things you learned throughout the program?
- How successful was the implementation of your project if you had one? (scale of 1-10)
- How did you maintain your project after the course ended?
- What are your plans at the moment, if any, for maintaining your project?

What was the nature of your employment for the duration of the program?

Appendix D: Current Participants

Appendix D1: Questionnaire 1

Interview Format

Data Collection Method: Online questionnaires

Who: Current Program Participants (2024)

When: Weeks 1-6

Where: Online

Why: To get a consistent, quantitative data set in order to know which sessions the participants enjoy the most/find most useful, specifically to know their initial interest in the program.

How: Directly through the program

Questions:

- Consent brief
- Demographic Questions
 - Age, Gender identity, Ethnicity
- How did you hear about the program?
- What got you interested in taking the program?
- What do you hope to get out of the program?
- Do you have a current project idea?
 - If so, briefly explain the idea
- Are you in any other volunteer programs?
- How invested do you want to be in the program on a scale of 1-10 and why?

Appendix D2: Questionnaire 2

Interview Format

Data Collection Method: Online questionnaires

Who: Current Program Participants (2024)

When: Weeks 1-6

Where: Online

Why: To get a consistent, quantitative data set in order to know which sessions the participants enjoy the most/find most useful within the middle of the course.

How: Directly through the program

Questions:

- Current participants: short weekly questionnaires
 - Consent brief
 - Highs and lows of the class that week
 - Do you currently have a project idea?
 - If so, briefly explain the idea
 - How likely are you to share the program with others at the moment on a scale of 1-10?
 - How invested do you feel in the program on a scale of 1-10?
 - How would you rate this week's class on a scale of 1-10?
 - What was the most important skill, tool, or fact you learned about this week?
 - Is there anything that would make the program more appealing at the moment?
 - What would you have changed about this week's session if anything?

Appendix D3: Questionnaire 3

Interview Format

Data Collection Method: Online questionnaires

Who: Current Program Participants (2024)

When: Weeks 1-6

Where: Online

Why: To ask similar questions but also understand their feelings of the course at the later stages of the training.

How: Directly through the program

Questions:

- Current participants: last week questionnaire
 - Consent brief
 - Highs and lows of the class so far overall
 - If you have a project idea, how confident do you feel in working on it on a scale of 1-10?
 - Briefly explain why.
 - What is one of the biggest strengths of the program so far?
 - What is one of the biggest weaknesses of the program so far?
 - What has been the most impactful moment of the program so far?
 - If you could change anything about the program, what would you change?

Appendix E: Outside Program Leadership

Interview Format

Data Collection Method: Interview

Who: Other program management

When: Weeks 4-6

Where: Online

Why: To understand outside program recruitment and retention strategies so that we may suggest methods not seen by Hume City Council before.

How: Reaching out online and connections with advisors/sponsor

Questions:

- Consent brief
- Demographic questions:
 - Age, gender identity, ethnicity
- What program do you work for at the moment?
- What is your position in this program?
- What are some of the recruitment strategies that your program uses?
 - Which ones have you found to be the most effective?
- How is your comms dept. run?
 - Is it a separate department for comms?
 - Are advertisements handled by program leadership?
 - How do you effectively communicate the goals/content of your program?
- Is there any sort of fee to join the course/program?
- How many people generally sign up for/show interest in the program?
 - Out of this group, how many consistently show up to events?
- What do the demographics of people that sign up/show up generally look like?
- How has COVID affected your program?
 - What were the major impacts of COVID?
 - Did you attempt a hybrid approach?
 - How have you recovered since?
 - What noticeable changes about participants have occurred since COVID?
 - Demographics, motivations, etc.

Appendix F: Consent Brief for Surveys and Interviews

Hello and thank you for participating in our survey. There will be a series of questions that will be administered throughout the survey in order to help us collect data about the Hume Enviro Champions program.

This is a completely anonymous and optional survey. You are allowed to choose how many questions, how detailed you answer them, and if you would like to stop. If at any point you get to a question that you do not want to answer, you are allowed to skip that question and continue the survey. If at any point you get to a point where you do not want to complete the survey, you are allowed to stop answering questions. You are then able to submit the unfinished survey if you wish, but you are also allowed to simply discard your answers if you would rather. You are allowed to give any amount of detail that you would like about your experience with the program at this point.

We are conducting this survey in order to gather data about the Hume Enviro Champions program, this work will be published. All information regarding names, addresses or other identifiable information will not be shared. This process is completely voluntary.

We appreciate any answers you are willing and ready to give us, but your comfort is our number one priority with this survey. Feel free to contact us at the email(s) provided below with any questions or concerns. Thank you again for your participation and we look forward to seeing your feedback on the program!

Your Friends,

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