

# Field days for practitioners

Fire Ecology Engagement  
in Fire Adapted Landscapes



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This is a guide for practitioners when preparing on-site, experiential field days to engage people about fire ecology in fire-adapted landscapes. This type of engagement plays an important role to actively bridge connections - between fire ecology, risk management, local knowledge and social and behavioural science - that are practical and locally relevant. The experiential approach of these field day focuses on 'learning by doing'; using place-based scenarios for engagement.

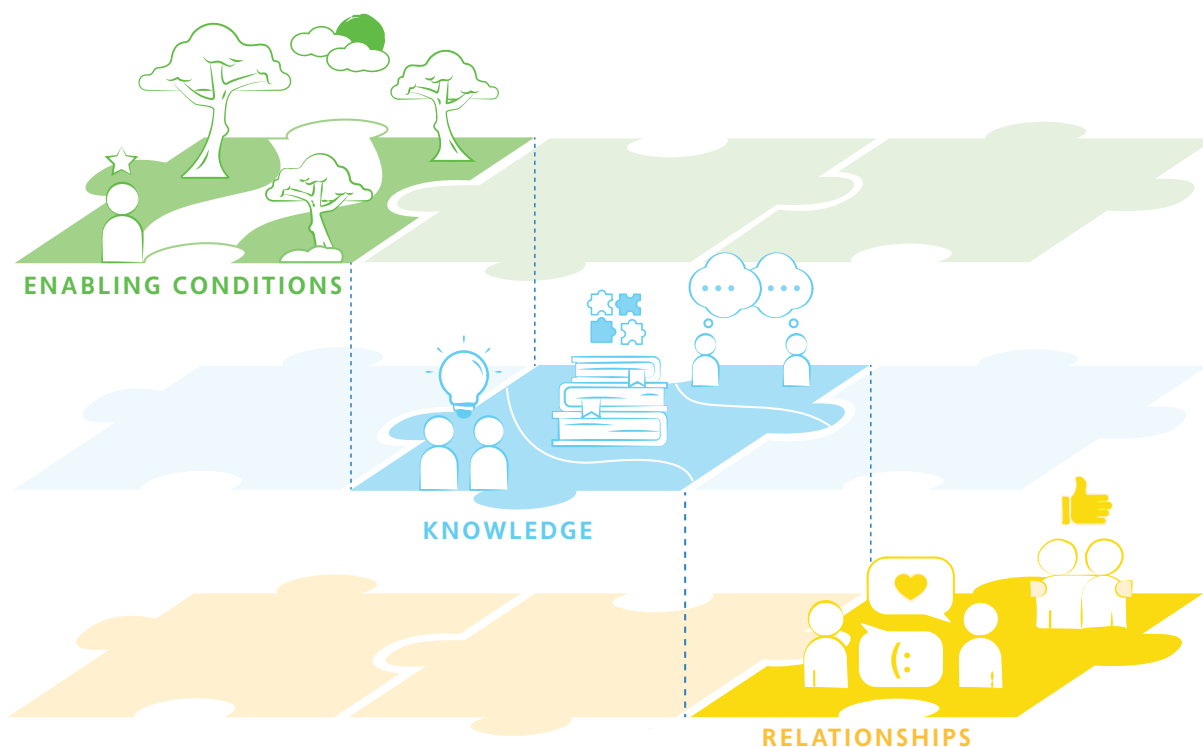
In 2021, Safer Together's Community First program conducted a review comparing the fire ecology engagement approaches in Australia and the United States.

Insights from that review informed development of capability-building field days for agency practitioners. These principles can also be applied when working with communities.

Two case study field days were conducted to raise awareness of collaborative land and fire management practices applied when organisations work with communities. The field days modelled fire ecology engagement principles and practices identified in the case studies, from which other practitioners can learn. This includes:

- Enabling conditions and resources that can influence engagement
- Exploring different kinds of knowledge systems and how they may be acknowledged, and
- The building of relationships among organisations and people.

Importantly, people can learn from being *in the landscape*; exploring different perspectives, issues and connections to place. This is especially relevant for fire ecology engagement.



The three elements – **enabling conditions, knowledge and relationships** – featured in this guide function as important interconnected thematic layers in fire ecology engagement. They provide a foundation for capability building opportunities that can be tailored to meet the needs of local places, people and land and fire management activities.





# Enabling conditions for the field day

**The field day experience is an enabling process,** which demonstrates how to incorporate the landscape as a space for exploring complex issues relating to people, place and fire ecology. Holding a field day in places where challenges have been broached, acknowledged, explored and discussed honestly can provide inspiration from which other disciplines and practitioners can learn.

**Choose an appropriate site** that reflects practitioners' and community's perspectives and experiences from which to learn. Scope the site for political, interpersonal, bushfire and cultural heritage sensitivities during the discussions with hosts. Spend time to involve the site hosts and facilitator during the planning. This creates a collaborative and safe setting. Good planning creates a relaxed atmosphere for participants.

**Time spent in the landscape** provides opportunity for both a collective and personal sense of discovery, and to 'stand in others' shoes'. Time spent learning from the land – to interpret it and share these insights – contributes to an experiential learning process that is dynamic and grounded in practice.

**Ensure there's organisational goodwill** and leadership support from people associated with the site to endorse the field day. This support will help advocate for the approach.

**Have a trusted, mindful and welcoming facilitator** to guide participants through the process. Their role is to help people feel safe, confident, capable and included. If independent facilitation is not possible, joint agency facilitation can also create an unbiased/unbranded atmosphere and sense of openness.

**Provide a welcoming, open and interactive space** to reflect upon and discuss the fire ecology objectives and engagement approach at the site, including challenges and opportunities such as regulations, organisational and community resources, and seasonal conditions.

**Apply a relational approach to acknowledge what has come before on the site.** Sharing knowledge and building relationships are key objectives of the field day. Invite opportunities for feedback, ideas and discussion about the management of the place.

“ **The landscape does the work for you.** ”  
– Deb Martindale. Sentient Co





**Allow physical movement through the space** to interact with the landscape, one another, and the context of the work conducted there. Support the different skills, backgrounds, roles and ideas that participants will be bringing.

**Allow for the process to be adapted** in response to participant needs, learning opportunities, changes in weather and other conditions.

**Allow time** for practitioners to mix informally.

**Explore the context of time.** Provide prompts to reflect upon time, visualise where we are as part of a continuum. Respect the time it takes to learn about the site. Concepts of time may include that of the landscape, ecological systems, organisational change, land management and land carers.

**Examples of facilitated questions that might be useful to guide discussions:**

**What kind of skills or enablers (for example resources, information, people and authorisation) might you need to engage well, and to traverse the hurdles or concerns that might naturally arise?**

**Who should be included to enhance the learning experience for everyone?**

**If you worked here over time and from what you've heard and reflected on today, what signs of change or improvement would you hope to see? For example, improvements might relate to community, place, ecology and/or risk.**

“Time and the timing.

*Inclusion of community / landholders' perspectives*

*Bringing people together takes time – lots and lots of time*

*Engage on land – so valuable! Bring community and land managers to place. Use burns to train fires in ecological burns – share [the information] out.*

*Discussing alternative ways of doing things. Work with subject matter experts – public can trust the process.*

– field day participants







# Knowledge



**Multi-disciplinary, multi-agency participation draws together many perspectives and levels of understanding.** Consider local knowledge and different perspectives when the learning is undertaken on-site or in the landscape. Having diverse participants and locations helps shape rich discussions about specific issues. These may reflect one another's approaches and expertise, as well as institutional and cultural influences.

**Fire ecology engagement acknowledges the complexity and diversity of experiences and perspectives from which we can learn.** These might include ecologists, fire and vegetation managers, bushfire risk analysts, community engagement practitioners, landholders, Indigenous custodians and community members who care for the land.

**Remind participants to keep an open mind and create space to reflect and listen.** Inviting people to share experiences, feelings and interests opens up opportunities to consider different and nuanced layers of meaning and understanding about the place and fire.

**Experiencing the landscape** without pressure to provide technical answers enables tacit knowledge of a place and experiential learning to be incorporated into the process of developing a deeper understanding of fire, ecology and engaging people. These layers of knowledge can be reflected upon and discussed within small groups, or the whole group or between individual participants. Exploring multiple ways to view the same issue in a safe space allows people to acknowledge there may be no one 'right' way to resolve an issue.

**Discussions reflect the diversity of experience** from many years of collective learning and actions, which includes the historic context and scale of fire and land management objectives to which people work.



**Example of a reflective question that could be used:**

*When you consider the fire ecology of this space through different 'eyes' and perspectives, what do you think about? For example, consider through the lens of the neighbours, the Traditional Owners, local community members, local government, CFA, or perhaps even the birds and wildlife.*

“Experience and knowledge transfer between participants  
—  
PLACE used as an example for knowledge transfer to other communities and agencies”

– field day participants



# Relationships



**WOMINJEKA!**  
COME with PURPOSE.  
LISTEN with INTENT...  
**THEN DO IT!**

**Invite participants to come with the intention;** to connect with one another, and to explore the place (described as 'Wominjeka by The Kulin Nation, the language groups of the Wurundjeri people, the Boon Wurrung, the Wadawurrung, the Taungurong and the Dja Dja Wurrung). Acknowledge the effort participants make to travel to the location and how this shows commitment to contribute and learn. Emphasise that participatory relationships are an important part of the field day experience, which includes interacting with both people and the place. This involves coming with respectful consideration of different perspectives, landholders and hosts.

**Practitioners come to the field day as people first.**

To support the building of relationships between a range of disciplines from diverse organisations and roles, ask participants to not wear uniforms, as this de-identifies people's roles and status. This also helps equalise relationships and removes distinctions between those who may have certain kinds of knowledge and connections to, or issues with, the place. Collaborating in group discussions and explorations helps make sense of the landscape, the issues and how we work and live in these places together.


**Actively listen to other viewpoints** to help check our own assumptions. As a skill, active listening is a way to "tune in" to explore different fire ecology- based relationships that people have to the landscape across different roles. For example, from fuel

management to risk planning, weed management, cultural history, landholder engagement, vegetation management, burn planner, wildlife or pest animal control. The field day is an opportunity to be exposed to and learn about other communities' and organisations' ways of working.

**Walk around the site to observe and immerse oneself in the place.** Participants connect and reconnect with other people and with the land. As the cycle of conversations evolve, relationships with one another develop to foster new insights.







“Increased risk awareness due to communications”

– field day participants

Explore what it takes to make and maintain relationships for engagement relating to fire ecology practices. Maintaining respectful relationships over time can be challenging and requires us to actively consider how best to foster and support this process.

Shared and sharing experiences, knowledge and perspectives, which reflects respectful understanding, forms and shapes relationships.

An example of a facilitated question for group discussions

*How might you bring people together to see different perspectives, exchange knowledge and build a shared plan? Over what period of time might this need to occur?*

“Sharing understanding at place/ exchange knowledge-experiential opportunities for learning. Have discussions together with diverse groups. Pool and share agency and community resources. Agencies need to trust each other

—  
Listening  
—

—  
Show not tell - community balance”

– field day participants



## Acknowledgements

We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it. We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

We are committed to genuinely partner, and meaningfully engage, with Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and their broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.

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