

Agriculture-dependent Community Resilience Project: Community of Practice Evaluation

A report from the National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH), Hamilton summarising the evaluation of the Resilient Farming Communities project Community of Practice.



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1. BACKGROUND

A Community of Practice (CoP) is 'a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better' as they interact regularly (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The Agriculture-dependent Communities Resilience Building Initiative was made up of eleven specific projects and their respective teams who shared this community of practice facilitated by the National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH).

Commencing formally in October 2021 the CoP scheduled formal events and forged informal connections and communication over the life of the project finishing at the end of November 2023 as the eleven projects were completed.

The CoP drew upon evidence-based models crafted by Cambridge et al. (2005) and Wenger et al. (2002), and connected the eleven community resilience projects from across Victoria. Acting as a pivotal platform the CoP brought project teams together to share learnings, exchange insights, problem solve challenges and gain new knowledge to support their farming communities and enhance their capacity to foster and grow community resilience.

The eleven projects were place based, geographically spread, and differed in design. As these agriculturally based rural communities were still grappling with the COVID pandemic many similar challenges were present and the CoP provided a safe and supportive environment to share, discuss and reflect on ways to engage with each other and their respective communities. Additionally further skill and knowledge development occurred including presentation skills, articulation of project outcomes and improved interaction on digital platforms including Teams and Zoom. Opportunities to network, share ideas, improve competence, and openly discuss some of the bigger and more contemporary issues facing rural and regional communities were provided in a safe and respectful environment – the CoP.

2. METHOD OF DELIVERING THE COP

A successful CoP requires a predictable rhythm, therefore CoP meetings were scheduled once a month for the duration of the project with the exception of extended breaks during known key holiday periods. To accommodate the geographical spread of the projects, monthly meetings were conducted online. The Microsoft Teams platform was the preferred hosting platform by project funders to ensure data security when hosting meetings and allow documents to be securely shared and encourage interaction between meetings. Correspondence for all meetings was posted on the Microsoft Teams group communication channel and sent via group email, with reoccurring calendar invites set out in advance for the monthly online meetings.

Hosting monthly meetings via the Deakin University Microsoft Teams licence was challenging due to the project team members having to attend as 'guests' and unfortunately discovering they had restricted access and functionality. Following feedback, the decision was made from meeting 8 onwards to host the monthly meetings via the Zoom videoconferencing platform for ease of use and accessibility for all CoP members and guests. The Microsoft Teams channel was kept open for document and information sharing.

In the original proposal for the CoP three critical characteristics for a CoP and their members were listed:

- (i) To **voice their collective competence and learn** with and from each other.
- (ii) To create a community whilst pursuing their own interests/projects, engaging in **joint discussions, activities** and sharing information and ideas.
- (iii) To develop a **repertoire of resources to improve capacity** to deliver the resilience projects – through stories, tools and collective CoP experiences.

These three critical characteristics were foundational in the planning of meetings, demanding significant time, effort, and resources to cultivate. Additionally, the CoP prioritised the establishment of mechanisms for regular and constructive feedback, aiming to foster an environment where feedback was not only encouraged but also actively embraced and utilised to enhance the CoP's effectiveness. Support from the Department of Health (DoH) was provided through 6-weekly catch ups to the NCFH project team and representation and occasional presentation at the CoP meetings was welcomed in both the online and the three face-to-face meetings. These scheduled engagements served to nurture relationships and deepen mutual understanding between the NCFH and DoH and also within the CoP participants.

Whilst two face-to-face meetings were initially scheduled for the start and end of the project, an additional face-to-face meeting was added following an extension of the program due to delays with Covid-19 and the transition of ownership of four projects following the cessation of the Victorian Primary Care Partnerships, one transfer of ownership from a Shire to a not-for-profit organisation and one transfer of ownership between departments in the same organisation. The transfer of project ownership caused significant disruption to the projects including transfer of finances and staffing allocation and recruitment and attendance to the CoP. Significant Covid-19 restrictions were still in place at the start of the CoP which meant the initial introductory meeting was held online in October 2021 with the initial face-to-face meeting held sometime later in March 2022 in Ballarat. The key priority of the face-to-face meeting was to bring project teams together, but it too was also hindered somewhat by Covid-19 and a reluctance to mingle and also Covid-19 itself. The final face-to-face meeting and CoP wrap-up was held 24th October 2023 and project completion was 30th November 2023.

The CoP was coordinated by NCFH research assistant Kelly Barnes and overseen by CoP Lead Prof Susan Brumby for the duration of the project, with support from project lead A/Prof Alison Kennedy and project coordinator Dr Joanna Macdonald and Jessie Adams (maternity leave replacement for Dr Joanna Macdonald). All four members of the NCFH research team met weekly to discuss meeting content, review meeting feedback and discuss the overall project evaluation progress.

Following feedback from the CoP members on what they would like to see, the CoP topics were crafted through collaborative discussions with CoP members and the CoP project team, ensuring that they resonated with their interests and addressed their needs effectively. Additionally, following each monthly CoP, a comprehensive feedback survey was distributed to gather insights from CoP members using both scaled questions (Likert score) and open questions. These insights were then carefully analysed and used to shape and refine future content, thereby cultivating a more responsive and collaborative environment within the CoP. Such iterative feedback mechanisms played a pivotal role in ensuring that the CoP remained dynamic and relevant to the evolving needs of its members.

Meeting agendas were sent out 1 week in advance of the monthly meetings and any preparation for meetings clearly identified. Reminder emails including the agenda were sent out on the Friday and Monday prior to the meeting the following Tuesday, and a reminder email was also sent 30 minutes prior to the meeting on the Tuesday morning. Project team member participation in meetings was discussed at least 3 weeks prior to the meeting and was on a voluntary basis.

3. COP MEETINGS AND CONTENT

3.1. MEETING FORMAT

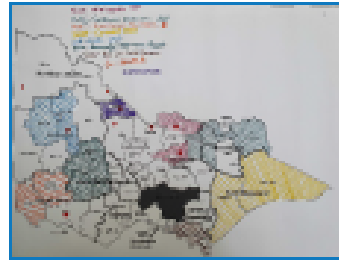
Over the duration of the program from October 2021 through to November 2023 (a total of 26 months) 21 meetings were conducted - 18 online meetings and 3 face-to-face workshops. Together the 11 project teams conducted activities across 22 local government areas (LGA's) in Victoria.

Meeting format included presentations from external guest speakers, project teams, NCFH staff, Agriculture Victoria and Department of Health staff. The Microsoft Teams channel provided a secure platform for participants to share relevant information between meetings, however there was limited interaction through this channel despite training sessions in using Microsoft Teams and regular posting by NCFH and DoH staff to encourage interaction. The Microsoft Teams channel continued to be used to share information and meeting agendas, but this information was also distributed through the group email to ensure project teams were receiving the information. Appendix (1 Summary of CoP meetings) gives an overview of the meeting format and content and an example agenda is provided below in Figure 1.

Table 1: Summary of the Meeting Content for the Community of Practice

Meeting	Content
1	Goals for Community of Practice , Presentations from project teams, introduction to reporting and evaluation
2	Presentations from project teams , further information on reporting and evaluation
3	Discussion of results from survey feedback , Personality Style quiz and discussion, Microsoft Teams training, Planning dates for Program Logic meetings
4	Guest speakers - Dr Lisa Cowan - Agriculture Victoria, Smarter Safer Farms initiative; A/Prof Jacki Schirmer - University of Canberra, Regional Wellbeing Survey; Lexi Marsh - Department of Health, Introduction to health and wellbeing promotion division. Overview of evaluation framework.
5	Face-to-face meeting Ballarat : Speed dating - getting to know other project team members, Project Evaluation, Feedback and testimonials, Presentations: Capturing stores/ social media, Social marketing campaigns, Media Guidelines, activity - Capturing stories - practice and viewing, DoH final comments.
6	Overview of NCFH resources and broader ways NCFH work can support projects. Panel discussion.
7	Introduction to network mapping , Project team member presentation - sausage making, Brainstorming breakout groups
8	Project team presentations - Engaging Youth, Digital Divide, Discussion how to reach the hard to reach groups
9	Introduction to Most Significant Change Workshop (External Workshop)
10	External speakers - DR.SAT, Drought Resilience Plans; Q&A - challenges from project teams
11	Introduction to the Steering Straight Plan , Introduction to Rural Financial Counselling Service Wellbeing Division, 6-month project updates.

12	Two project team updates. Discussion - thinking laterally about sustainability
13	New initiative demonstration and feedback from project team member. External speaker - Victoria Police - opportunities and experiences in rural communities. Discussion - Opportunities to expand your project impact
14	Face-to-face Meeting Waurn Ponds: New project team introductions, Quick Project updates, Diversity in Farming Communities - Expert Panel, Philanthropy and Funding, Refining your Pitch, Speed Dating 2
15	Two project team updates. NCFH Evaluation – recruiting qualitative interview participants, report updates and insights. Opportunities to connect with Deakin Philanthropy.
16	Three project team updates. DoH Updates
17	Diversity and Inclusion - First Nations - Djirri Djirri Dancers video, participants share history of first nations country, discussion and reflection - The Victorian Context and The Voice
18	Project team member workshop - Introduction to Group Model Building.
19	One project team wrap up and one project insights. evaluation update, Introduction to final reporting
20	One project update, An Unsettling Undercurrent Part 1 - Group Problem Solving An Unsettling Undercurrent Part 2 - Presenting Solutions
21	Face-to-face meeting Waurn Ponds: Sustainability Wetlands Tour, reflection and shared learning activities: 12 Recommendations, Project pitch speed dating, Project pitch recording. Continuing the Conversation brainstorming, Agriculture Victoria – Learnings from Smarter Safer Farms, thoughts and reflections from the Department of Health, continuing the learnings and staying connected wrap up.



Agriculture-dependent Community Resilience

Community of Practice – Meeting TEN

Tuesday 13th September 2022

9:30am – 11:00am

Online via Zoom

Link: <https://deakin.zoom.us/j/82841375898?pwd=dmx0NHZvWFJ0NjhKaWFrK0ZEcEYyZz09&from=addon>

AGENDA

Welcome and Introduction What is 'Resilience' anyway? - Thinking bigger picture when it comes to resilience	9:30am – 9.35am	SB
 Illyria Tucker – Analyst, Deloitte Climate Change and Sustainability DR.SAT - An innovative tool for assessing farm resilience – is this a handy tool for your community?	9.35am – 9.50am	IT
Ralph Cotter – Agricultural Career Ambassador and Regional Leader, Agriculture Victoria Regional Drought Resilience Plans 	9.50am –10.05am	RC
Grab a cuppa and have stretch 	10.05am 10.10am	BREAK
 A coming together of minds with Illyria Tucker and Ralph Cotter	10.10am 10.50am	All
General Questions/Comments/Feedback/Complete Survey	10.50am 11:00am	All
Meeting Close	11:00am	AK
Next Zoom meeting: Tuesday 11th October 2022		

Figure 1 Example of meeting agenda

3.2. ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION IN THE COP

The CoP was an important part of the Agricultural-dependent community resilience project. Project teams were encouraged to attend through written communication from the DoH (Appendix 2 Project Overview factsheet) –this information was sent all project leads and subsequent incoming project leads where a transition of the project had occurred and reiterated by NCFH via the project coordinator and the CoP coordinator. Contact details for any new project team members was requested and a welcome email sent on behalf of the CoP detailing the frequency and purpose of the CoP. New members were added to the group email list, calendar meeting invites and the shared Microsoft Teams channel. New project team members were also introduced to the CoP coordinator informally during the monthly evaluation meetings with the project coordinator.

Interaction via the Microsoft Teams channel was limited from project team members despite training sessions in monthly meetings, offers of one-on-one assistance and regular posting by NCFH project staff and DoH project staff. Project team members opted mostly to communicate and share resources via email or phone and during the monthly meeting. Figure 2 provides a breakdown of the attendees at each meeting and Appendix 3 illustrates the attendance in more detail showing changes in project team members.

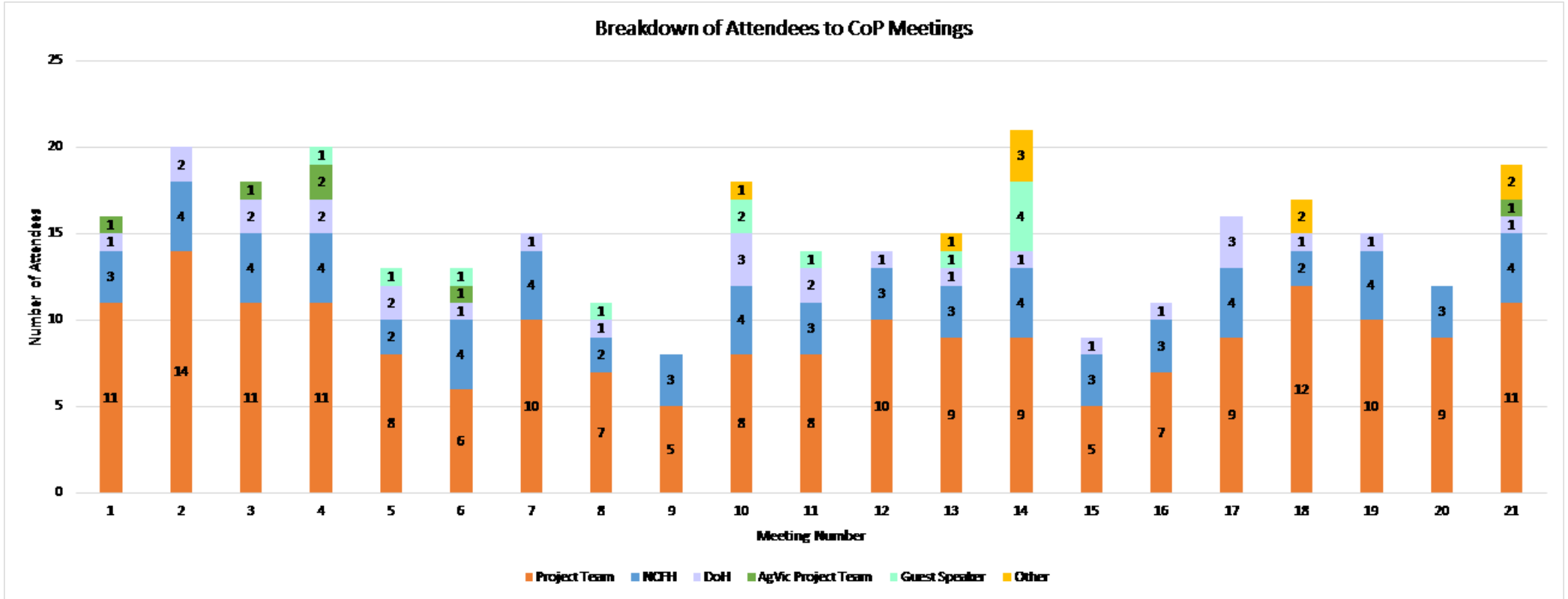


Figure 2 Breakdown of roles of attendees at each CoP meeting

Post meeting survey highlighted that CoP members frequently transitioned directly from one meeting to another or anticipated doing so afterwards. Consequently, during meeting 7, the introduction of a brief intermission was incorporated to recognise and respect and accommodate this need. Additionally, inspired by a discussion within the NCFH project team— about leading by example and prioritising the wellbeing of CoP project team members—care packages (refer to Figure 3) were dispatched to all resilience project teams. These packages were intended to be enjoyed during the break, emphasising the importance of fostering connection and supporting personal wellbeing throughout the project duration. ‘Volunteer fatigue’ was observed in many of the communities and Covid-19 was still prevalent at this stage, making this a timely reminder of the increased burden on projects and project team members.

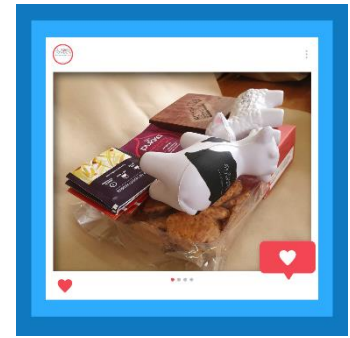


Figure 3 Example of care package sent to project teams

There were mixed opinions in feedback on meeting length but to try to encourage greater attendance the length of the online meetings was reduced from 2 hours to 1.5 hours recognising that project teams often had limited resources (time and staff) to attend the meetings and participation was voluntary. The appearance of the meeting agendas was revisited and graphics and a copy of the LGA map were added to add an element of fun and make the meetings more appealing.

4. OUTCOMES

4.1. CORE COMPONENTS OF THE COP AND EVALUATION

A series of consistent questions were included in every post-meeting survey to measure the impact of the individual sessions and to identify any long-term trends or changes throughout the delivery of the CoP. These included the core aspects of a CoP such as:

- new ideas to share and discuss,
- new information that could work in the projects,
- providing new ways of measuring impacts in communities and learning new ways or consolidating methods of evaluation.

As shown in Figure 4 below the CoP was a place where new ideas were shared and discussed, with numerous meetings having 100% of members agreeing or strongly agreeing as shown below.

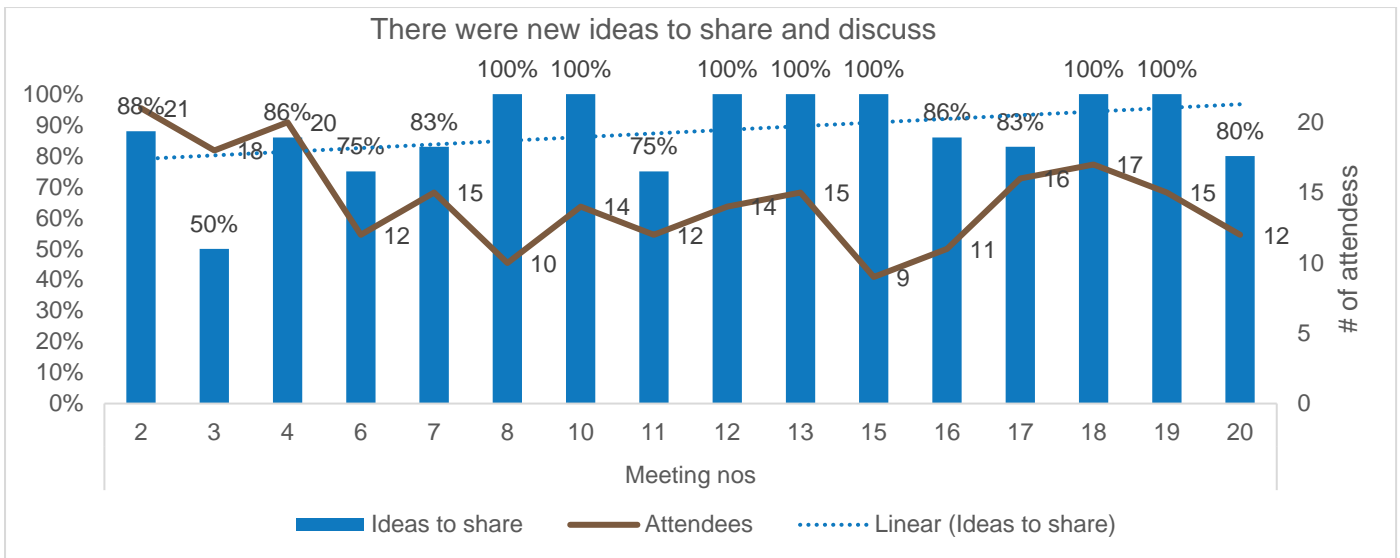


Figure 4 CoP meetings provided new ideas to share and discuss (agree or strongly agree).

Whilst being able to share new ideas and discuss is important, a core part of the CoP was to build community capacity by thinking about new and better ways to deliver the projects in their respective agriculturally dependent communities. In some ways this was a delicate dance, as many of these project teams were a mixture of well-seasoned leaders very familiar with their communities and new team members joining. As depicted in figure 5, agreement regarding the applicability of new information to their projects fluctuated, with unanimity achieved in seven meetings and dropping to as low as 20% in meeting 3 where Personality Style quiz and discussion, Microsoft Teams training, and planning of dates for Program Logic meetings were discussed.

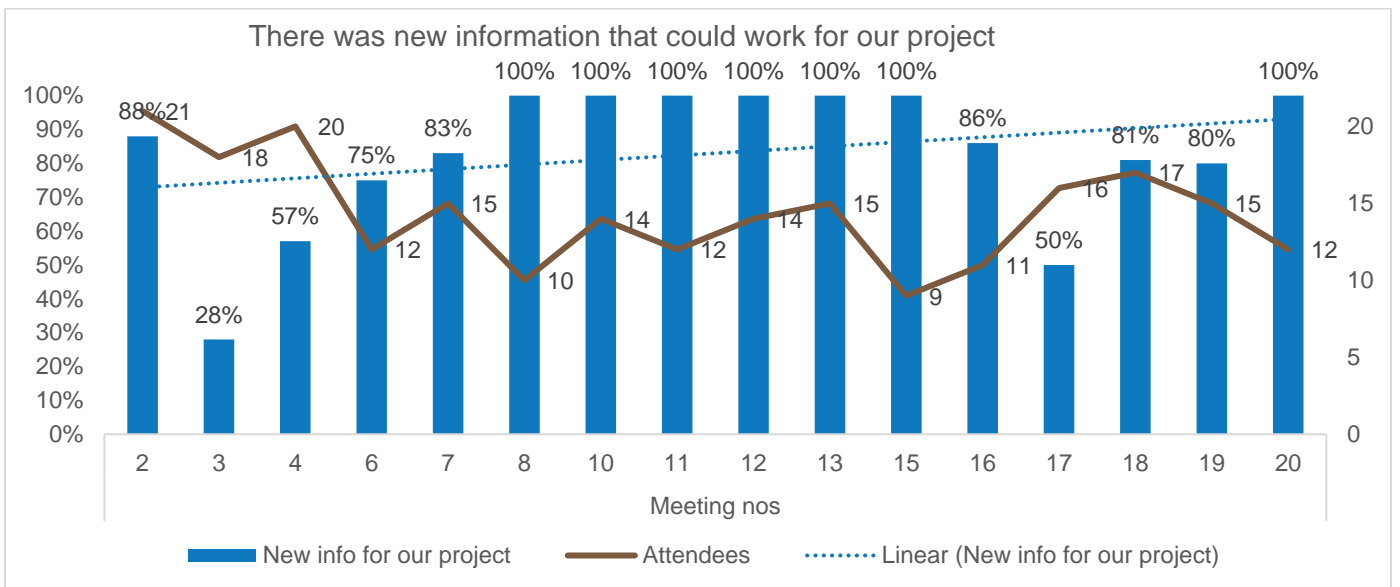


Figure 5 CoP meetings provided new information that could work for my project (agree or strongly agree).

Another pivotal aspect of the CoP was to aid project teams in contemplating methods and approaches to measure the impacts of their projects within the community. The aspiration was that by initiating discussions around this topic, there would be a shift towards measuring impacts rather than merely counting the number of attendees, thus fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the projects' effectiveness. In Figure 6 we can see that across meetings there were large variances in the feedback for looking at new ways of measuring impact in agricultural communities. This is not surprising again as seen in Meeting 3 there were some meetings where new ways were not discussed and this is accurately reflected in the survey results.

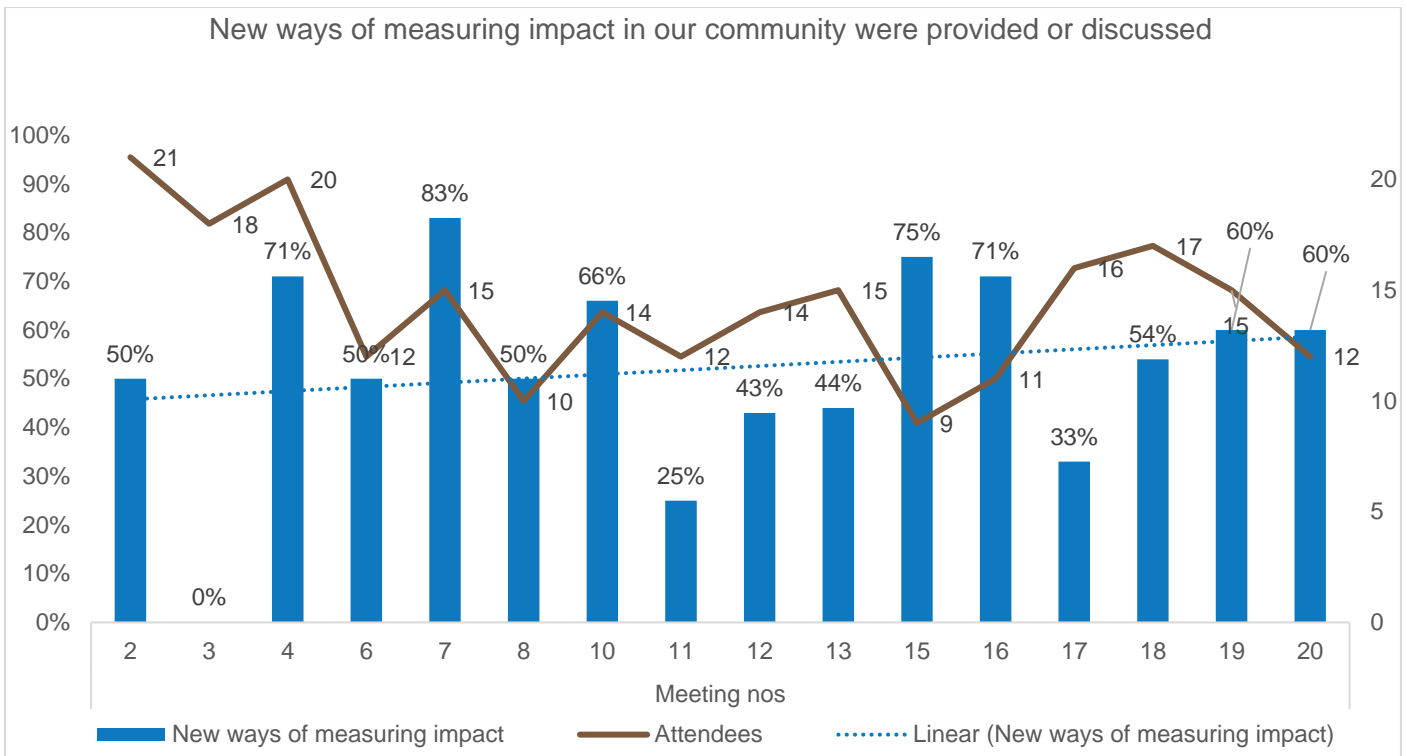


Figure 6 CoP meetings provided of new ways of measuring impact (agree or strongly agree).

As the NCFH were also being asked to undertake evaluation, there was the opportunity to introduce, discuss and consolidate ways of evaluating projects. Figure 7 illustrates the survey responses correlating to evaluation tools. A great example of this was the use of the program logic models which the NCFH undertake as a key part of the evaluation. The CoP allowed for further updates, and discussion about program logic as an evaluation tool as well as network mapping, and group model building.

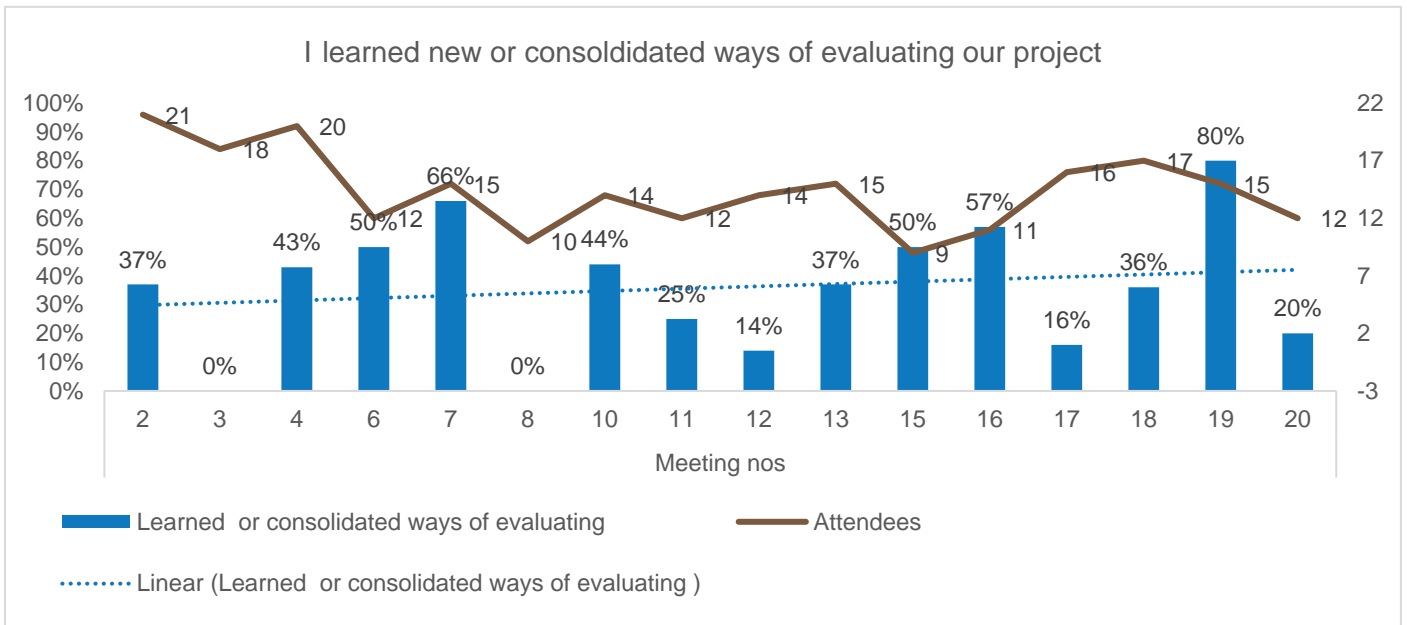


Figure 7 CoP meetings consolidated or provided new ways of evaluating our project (agree or strongly agree).

Finally, at each CoP all participants were asked if they agreed or disagreed if they had made contributions to the topics discussed. As always, some topics lent themselves to more contributions as shown in figure 8. Unfortunately,

in meeting 8 only 2 surveys were received. As noted here, Meeting 3 saw 100% of respondents making contributions to the topics discussed.

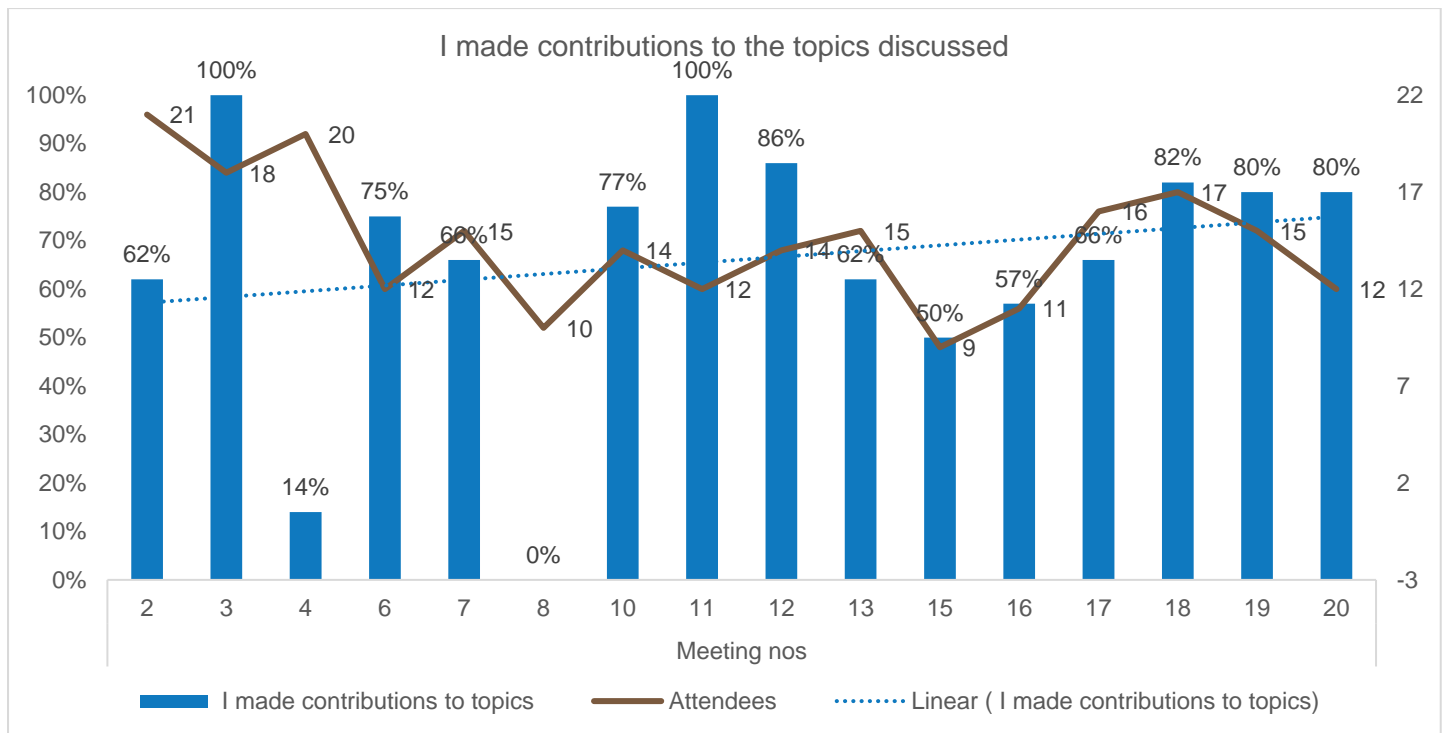


Figure 8 During the CoP I made contributions to the topics discussed (agree or strongly agree).

4.2. ILLUSTRATING REACH BETWEEN RESILIENCE PROJECTS.

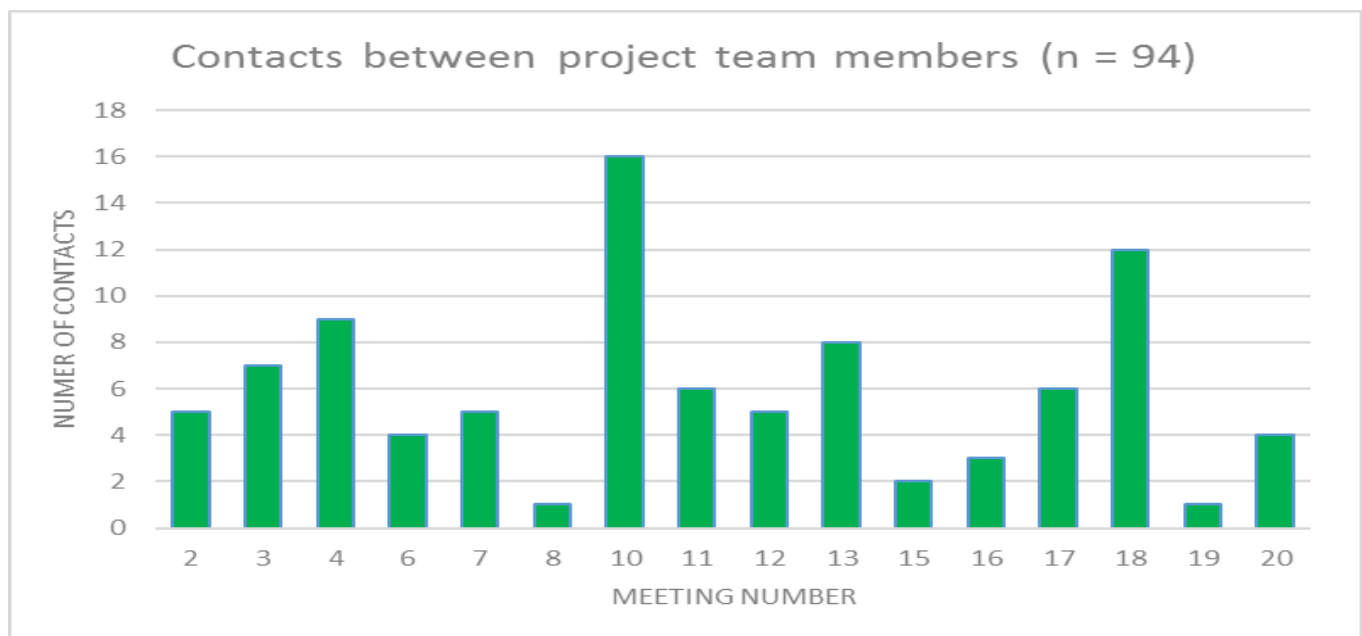


Figure 9 Project team member networking between meetings

All comments from the question “What did you like most about today’s meeting?” were combined and themes developed as show in table 2. Learning from peers in the CoP. Hearing about the peers projects was the most widespread comment appearing 46 times throughout 117 comments and addresses the first of three critical characteristics of a CoP as detailed in the original project proposal. The inclusion of external speakers was frequently mentioned. The popular inclusion of external speakers assisted participants to increase their tools and resources, whilst the brainstorming, networking and social connection created a sense of community to support each other and share ideas.

Table 2 Key Themes from “What did you like most about today’s meeting?”

Theme	Occurrences
1. Learning from peers	46
4. External speakers/ learning new information	23
5. Brainstorming/discussion	16
2. Connections and networks	15
3. Support social connection	11
7. Support for evaluation	3
8. Sharing own thoughts	2
6. Feedback from others	1

4.3. ILLUSTRATING PROJECT REACH

At the first face-to-face session a mapping activity was introduced with each project team marking the Local Government Areas (LGA’s) their resilience project covered. An image of this map (figure 10) was added to the monthly meeting agenda and was often discussed at meetings. A second map (figure 11) was completed at the second face-to-face meeting the following year with the addition of new project activities. The Resilience Builders project covered schools and organisations across the state, which were overlaid onto the maps.

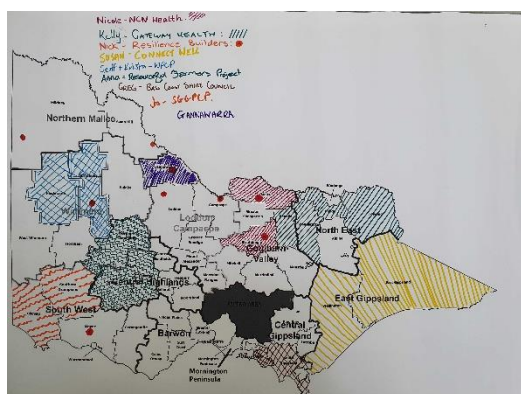


Figure 10 LGA map created at first face to face meeting

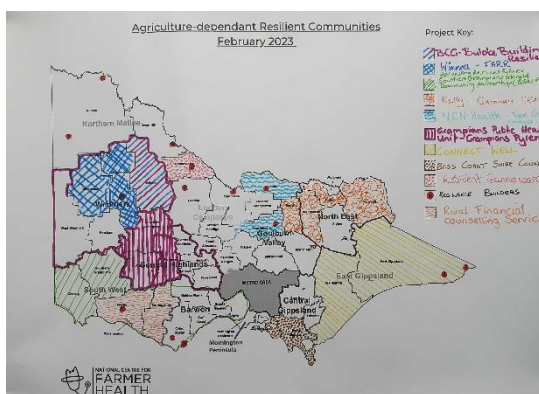


Figure 11 LGA map created at second face to face meeting

The maps facilitated project teams to recognise their project as piece of the bigger picture Resilient Farming Communities project spanning the whole state of Victoria and identify opportunities for collaboration with nearby project teams or as in the case of the Resilience Builders – identifying a gap in delivery (Gippsland) and collaborating to ensure diverse spread of project reach. At the final meeting the maps were again used to illustrate all the activities that had occurred and to understand the ripple that the Resilience Farming Communities project had accomplished.

4.4. POST MEETING SURVEYS AND FEEDBACK

Collecting feedback was often identified as a challenge by the project teams when reporting on their own project events and activities so it was an interesting reflection to see that the project teams themselves found it challenging to complete the post-meeting surveys too despite being able to resonate with the frustration! Notwithstanding, at the end of every CoP meeting a feedback survey was undertaken. As outlined previously, the feedback was reviewed, and analysed by the NCFH Project team and where necessary adjustments and changes made.

For example: In the early stages of the CoP participants were sent the survey link following the closing of the meeting, however feedback and a sometime disappointing number of responses led us to try and address the challenge of participants not filling out the post-meeting survey. Five minutes was introduced at the end of the meeting to allow participants to fill out the survey during the allocated meeting time. We acknowledge that all participants of the CoP have other commitments outside of the CoP and can have the best of intentions, but the survey ends up further down the to-do-list so the decision was taken to include 5 minutes towards the end of the allocated meeting time. A survey link was also sent out with the link to the meeting recording to encourage feedback from participants that were unable to attend the live meeting. It was pleasing to see that we did receive survey responses following participants watching the recording if they missed the meeting in person.

The survey was also assessed following meeting 6 and repetitive or unhelpful questions identified and removed to streamline the survey and make it quicker and easier to fill out. A simple section was introduced from meeting 7 onwards asking '*What you want us to Start Doing, Stop Doing and Keep Doing*' – this simple structure allowed participants to provide concise suggestions as well as letting us know if there was anything they did not want to see continue.

Feedback from surveys was positive and contributed to the iterative development of future CoP meetings. Suggestions for future topics were very helpful and every effort was made to incorporate these where feasible e.g.:

Feedback – *“A short break in the middle of a 2 hrs online session would be great (came from a meeting and went into another online meeting)”*

NCFH Response and Implementation – Reduced meeting time to 1.5 hours and implemented 5-minute break during the meeting

Feedback – *“would like to hear from local government on what they are looking to achieve in remote communities and what is the local government long term vision and objectives”*

NCFH Response and Implementation - The presentation on the community consultations that Gannawarra Shire Council conducted in March and April 2023 was a valuable contribution to addressing this topic.

The CoP ran in alignment with goals set out in the original proposal but was also very responsive and adaptive to the changing needs of the project teams:

We received requests to promote project team events through the CoP and thought was given to how this might occur without increasing reporting burdens from individual project teams. Project teams were connected to the NCFH Marketing Communications Coordinator and community events were shared through NCFH social media channels to increase reach. The addition of regular project updates at CoP meetings allowed for individual project teams to share events during with other project teams.

The CoP Post-meeting surveys included questions to assess the value of each presentation or session. Given the wide variety of topics and speakers this information has not been reported on directly in this report but was used to guide and inform topics and meeting structure throughout the duration of the CoP.

4.5. FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS



Figure 12 Compilation of photographs from the face-to-face meetings

The inclusion of face-to-face meetings greatly assisted to build connections and encouraged valuable networking opportunities. Whilst previous project work at NCFH has shown that co-design, community consultations and working groups can be effectively conducted fully online when needed (during the Covid-19 pandemic) (Kennedy et al., 2021, Binder et al., 2022), face-to-face meetings were still important to build strong meaningful relationships.

As part of the evaluation framework, members of the NCFH project team travelled to each resilience project location to facilitate individual face-to-face meetings to develop program logics. Meeting project team members in person in the early stages of the resilience project helped build trust and rapport. Positive feedback from these meetings reinforced the importance of bringing all of the project teams together at least twice over the duration of the project; with the extension of project timelines and funding a third face-to-face meeting was added at completion.

“Always love NCFH events and efforts to our CoPs. So pleased to have another F2F with all” (F2F session 2)

“Great venue, lovely food, good content and very informative. I am very appreciative of the opportunity to attend.” F2F session 2)

4.6. BUILDING TRUST TO TACKLE THE DIFFICULT TOPICS

Consistency is a vital component for a successful CoP and the changes in project team members and delivering organisations meant that it took a little longer to get into a cycle of trust but by meeting 10 a rhythm was starting to be established. Key project team members that had attended regularly from the beginning of the project were key to supporting consistency and building trust with new members. Building trust is essential to a shared learning space and the CoP was able to begin tackling some of the more challenging topics in the second half of the project once these key elements were embedded. Prioritising the establishment of inclusive, trusting and safe spaces for discussing contemporary issues within rural communities, became more possible, whilst acknowledging their sometimes conservative in nature. Some specific examples follow:

- **Meeting 14 themed around diversity and inclusion** included a panel discussion with experts in sexual identity, disability, and use of language to reduce stigma and the face-to-face format helped to create a safe environment for people to be curious and continue discussions with peers during refreshment breaks.
- **Meeting 17** online was designed to be informative and non-judgemental providing a safe space to open up the dialogue of the inclusion of the needs of first nation peoples in community projects and to reflect on local history. The concept of allyship formed an important part of the discussion and provided a framework for project team members to build confidence to support diverse community members.

Incorporating mechanisms for ongoing reflection and dialogue into the CoP initiatives and programs ensures that the voices of rural communities were heard and valued. It promoted a culture of openness and receptivity to change, empowering project teams to navigate complex societal issues with increased understanding and resilience. The CoP embraced the potential for positive transformation through open dialogue and reflection.

5. REFLECTIONS AND LEARNINGS

The final face-to-face CoP event had a strong reflective focus to celebrate the fantastic achievements of the projects and provided space for project team members to articulate how their project had contributed to increasing resilience in the agricultural communities they work and live in. (see Appendix 1 for further details). Project team members were asked a series of short questions to reflect on their participation in the CoP for the duration of their involvement of the project. The key findings are detailed below in figure 13. Ninety-three percent of surveyed participants agreed or strongly agreed that their time spent participating in the CoP had helped to make their project better and contributed to the success of their project. Ninety-three percent of people also agreed or strongly agreed that they had taken away new learnings for their work.

It was pleasing to see that 100% of the participants surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that participation in this CoP had helped them to feel engaged and connected with other project team members and generally inspired about the work they are doing. The experiences of the participants aligns with the 3 critical characteristics of a CoP listed in section 1 of this report.

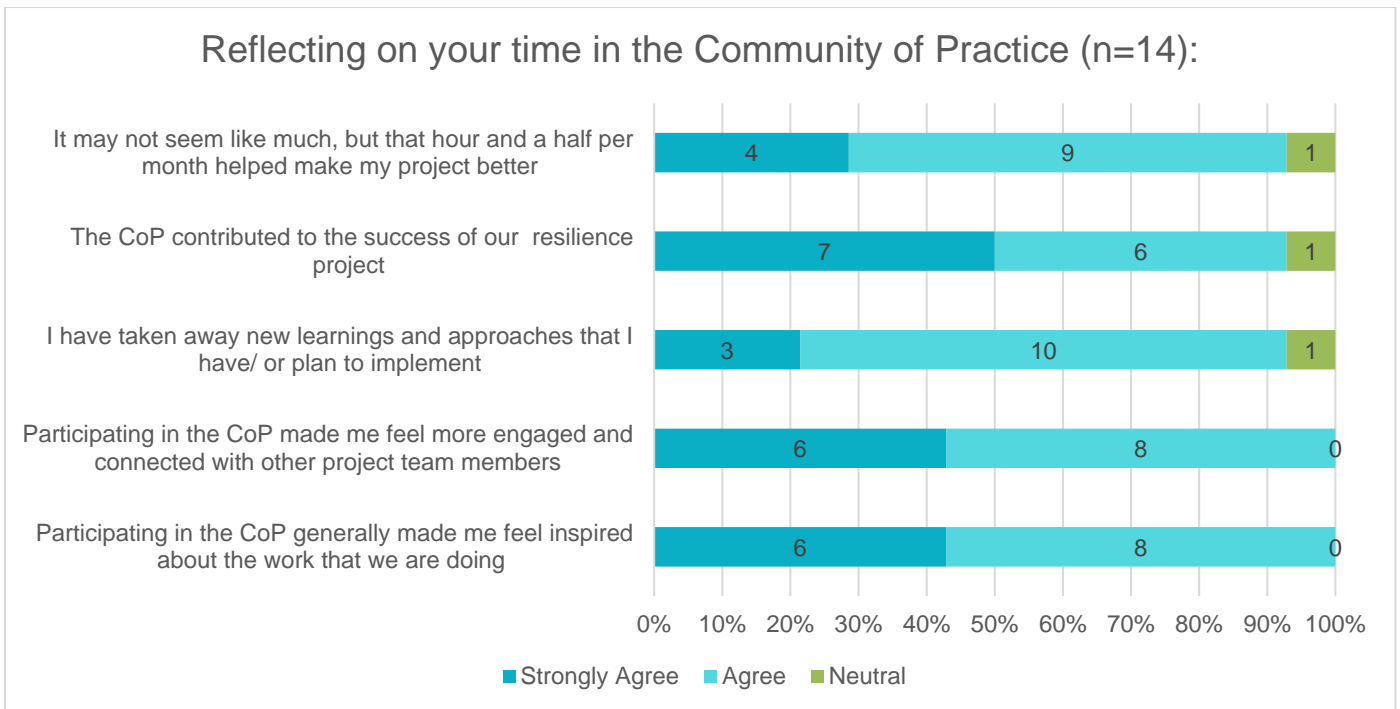


Figure 13 Project team members reflections on their time in CoP

The true value of attending a CoP cannot always be articulated to participants at the start, and they often do not understand and appreciate the experience fully until they reach the end of their project or participation. With this in mind, it is important to gain the trust of the participants early on through consistency and minimal time requirements and ensure a broad range of relevant topics and meeting styles are utilised. The transition of projects between organisations and project staff make it difficult to reiterate the value of the CoP and greatly depend on effective external and internal handover briefings to ensure participation in the CoP is prioritised.

Commitment to regular attendance from the majority of the group is vital to its success. This can be facilitated by stipulating attendance as a requirement of successful project delivery and a deliverable for project funding acquittals wherever possible.

Attendance and reiteration of importance from funders and project delivering bodies is also key to the success of a CoP. The NCFH are grateful for the support and guidance from the DoH in the execution of the CoP, with consistent attendance at meetings despite changes in project staff and delivering departments early on in the project. It was also noted that DoH staff appreciated the opportunity to connect and build a stronger relationship with the project funders Agriculture Victoria and build stronger connections with the individual project organisations delivering the resilience initiatives and with the NCFH team.

The voices of the CoP members were highly valued throughout, and we acknowledge their insights and perspectives as integral to the CoP. Below are some of their final reflections

What key insights/learnings have you gained from your participation in the Community of Practice?

- *“All our locations are unique. One model of delivery does not fit all so it is great to learn about the work other CoP members are doing.”*

What is a piece of knowledge you wish you had before undertaking this project?

- *“How difficult it would be to prioritise evaluation with community members and stakeholders.”*
- *“How to talk/think beyond the project in a practical way that brought stakeholders along”*

What is the one piece of advice you would give a colleague starting a resilience project?

- *“Work towards a coordinated approach, identify your enablers for support and begin with well thought out and supportive governance”*
- *“Don’t try to solve all the problems - find your niche, where you can best create impact”*
- *“Get a face-to-face CoP started asap”*
- *“Join a CoP”*

6. APPLYING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE RAPID REVIEW

The CoP was designed to address a number of the recommendations identified in the rapid review (Kennedy et al., 2021). The Community of Practice (CoP) systematically applied the recommendations outlined in the rapid review to enhance its functionality and impact.

The purposefully funded, planned and coordinated approach brought resilience project teams together in a regular and facilitated way through the CoP. This enabled the development of rapport, trust and meaningful engagement between project members to grow over time. The CoP also allowed for learnings to be shared, leading to better outcomes. The CoP also contributed to the sustainability of resilience outcomes by facilitating and strengthening networks within and across project teams and communities.

The CoP actively encouraged project teams to consider the needs of their identified target farming population, while also encouraging them to look at the needs of diverse groups within farming communities - considering issues such as gender diversity and inclusion, disability and challenges faced by our First Nations people.

The CoP initiated and strengthened engagement within project teams as well as between project teams and other external stakeholders (e.g. Deakin staff with expertise in funding, disability, gender diversity and inclusion). This was supported by shared learning and addressing shared interests and gaps in knowledge.

Within the CoP model, there was also examples of peer-to-peer support, including brainstorming across project teams to inform the eResilience model developed and delivered by the Resilience Builders.

Effective resource development was also considered within the design and delivery of the Community of Practice, including the provision of materials to support effective program development and delivery, as well as resources to support project team members own wellbeing and resilience—enabling them to live the message they were delivering.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Department of Agriculture and Department of Health should look to ways to sustain their support for a Community of Practice (CoP) to nurture and expand the existing partnerships and trust that have developed.
2. The CoP be integrated in the various plans and agendas of both the Department of Health and Agriculture Vic to continue to improve the health, wellbeing, resilience and safety of farming communities. Given their

known disproportionate vulnerability to mental illness, injury, chronic disease, workplace fatalities, and suicide, this inclusion is paramount.

3. Future iterations of the CoP should prioritise enhancing partnership dynamics with institutions and organisations spanning the health, agriculture, industry, education, climate change, local government and community sectors.
4. Continue to embrace an evidence-based resilience methodology in collaborating with the CoP and ensure the maintenance of its grassroots membership, preserving its authenticity and relevance.
5. Collaborate with the National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH) to secure funding for a five-year program aimed at sustaining the CoP, its networks, and actively working towards minimizing the urban-rural divide. This joint effort between the Victorian government and NCFH will contribute significantly to bridging the gap between urban and rural communities.

These recommendations aim to provide clearer direction and emphasise the importance of evidence-based approaches, partnership cultivation, and sustained support for the wellbeing and resilience of farming communities.

8. REFERENCES

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