

Locally led program design and delivery

Best Practice Engagement: Recommendation 7



The Best Practice Principles for Community Science Engagement Programs review identified seven recommendations for effective and impactful community science programs.

A community science engagement program can be improved and enhanced through the inclusion of locally relevant contexts and resources, and by ensuring local people are central to program design and delivery.

Recommendation 7 emphasises working with communities as genuine partners and drawing on the strengths that already exist locally. These strengths may include local knowledge, cultural traditions, annual events, community organisations, industries, infrastructure and community leaders who can help shape and champion science engagement activities.



Image: Beeyali Tallo Billa (Listening to the calls of Humpback Whales), 2025
Credit: Dr Tricia King



Image: Indigenous Land and Sea Rangers leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Marine Science (ATSIMS) participants on a Goolboddi (Orpheus Island) mangrove walk, discussing Traditional ecological knowledge and monitoring
Credit: Laura Boderke

When programs are informed by local expertise and priorities, they are more likely to be relevant, inclusive and engaging for participants. Leveraging local assets also strengthens community connections, builds capacity, amplifies impact and supports long-term sustainability, creating benefits that extend beyond the life of the program.



Case study: Citizen Science in Action: Reef Life Survey

The Reef Life Survey (RLS) demonstrates the **power of citizen science** to generate valuable research while actively engaging communities in scientific discovery. Established in 2007, RLS brings together marine scientists, management agencies and recreational divers to monitor marine biodiversity and improve understanding of changes occurring in marine ecosystems around the world.

At the heart of the program is a simple but powerful idea: equip skilled local recreational divers with the tools and training to contribute to long-term marine monitoring programs. This approach expands the reach of research efforts and enables data collection in locations that may otherwise be difficult or costly for scientific teams to access.



Partnerships with management agencies ensure activities focus on priority areas and that information collected supports marine conservation and management decisions. Through these collaborations, RLS has built one of the world's most extensive marine biodiversity datasets, with surveys undertaken at hundreds of locations nationally and internationally.



Beyond the scientific outcomes, RSL creates lasting connections between participants and the regional marine environments they help monitor. Volunteers gain a deeper understanding of environmental change and a strong sense of purpose through their contribution to conservation and research. It is a compelling example of how **local knowledge, skills and enthusiasm** can be harnessed to strengthen science engagement, build community capacity and deliver benefits for both science and society.

*Images: Reef Life Survey divers conducting underwater visual census of the reef using standardised methods.
Credit: Antonia Cooper, [Reef Life Survey](#)*

For further detail about *Best Practice Principles for Community Science Engagement Programs*, read the full report, which includes case studies and other resources, at www.chiefscientist.qld.gov.au.



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