Australian Citizen Science Association

Communication Strategy

Produced By Econnect Communication, 9 December 2016
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Contents

Introduction

Supporting ACSA's Strategic Plan

Effective communication is pivotal for the Australian Citizen Science Association (ASCA) being able to achieve its five overall goals. These five goals are summarised to emphasise the broad role communication plays in information sharing, dialogue and participatory engagement. ACSA:

1. Encourages **participation** in citizen science
2. Supports a community/hub of citizen science **practice**
3. Facilitates **partnerships** between like-minded organisations/groups
4. Promotes inclusive, credible and quality citizen science activities and **outcomes**
5. **Profiles** ASCA as a trusted recognised organisation

Priorities of a new association

As a relatively new association, ACSA's first priority must be to establish and support its members. Associations only exist because of their membership and, as such, this must be the focus of all initial communication.

There is an immediate need to build on the initial impetus of the 2014 workshop in Brisbane, subsequent 2015 conference, and foundation funding.

ACSA's Management Committee needs to determine the mechanisms, levels and benefits of membership, communicate these widely, as well as recruit and support active and engaged members.

Achieving this will rely on excellent communication between members of the Management Committee, its working groups and regional or topical chapters.

Four phases are recommended for implementing this Strategy:
1. Establishment: February – July 2017 – set up of website and recruitment of foundation members
2. Initial delivery of membership benefit: August-December 2017 – organise and run second conference
3. Consolidation of membership benefit – 2018 onwards
4. Outreach beyond membership – mid 2018 onwards

Situation analysis

Econnect Communication conducted interviews with seven individuals who were found to have direct interest and/or involvement in ACSA. During these interviews, several issues and opportunities were identified and these are outlined below.

The points below represent the perceptions of those being interviewed, and the reality may be somewhat different.

Management Committee – organisation, time and resources
- Roles and responsibilities (and expectations) of the management committee need to be clearly defined.
- Regional chapters need to be established as soon as possible.
- There is an urgent need to identify the benefits of membership, and make this clear in messaging.
- All involved need to acknowledge that resourcing is currently difficult and there is an ongoing reliance upon volunteers.
- Criteria are needed for: developing partnerships; taking on sponsors; accepting funding and endorsements; and evaluating benefits of projects for involvement/collaboration.
- There is a need to make use of existing networks to make tasks efficient and resource smart.
- There are risks of losing members/staff; and a potential need for training of more staff to allow others time off.
- There is danger of committing to too many tasks when a lack of resources and capacity could make them unachievable.
- There is a need to recognise the early stages of the organisation, and to build capacity over time.

ACSA's role / priorities:
- What are ACSA's fundamental roles in citizen science? These need to be defined and agreed upon. (While these are outlined in ACSA's strategic plan, these need to be clarified, especially in relation to communication, and regularly reviewed)
- Overall communication goals need to be determined.
- Citizen science projects should be broader than just biodiversity.
- Need to consider scenarios where citizen scientists request support, but do not have links with scientists.

Individual versus group agendas
- Determining and adhering to the fundamental goals of ACSA should help alleviate personal/hidden agendas. This can be achieved by regular review of ACSA's activities in light of these goals.
- Actions should be on behalf of the committee, not oneself.
- Transparency of committee members is crucial.
- Committee members need to operate within agreed guidelines and have clear processes/procedures to follow. (This will likely best be achieved through an external consultant conducting a workshop with the Management Committee and providing agreed guidelines and procedures.)

Internal versus external communication
- Communication within the committee has not been optimal—better and more frequent internal communication is vital. This requires a commitment by all Committee member to provide timely review and feedback to others' communication and to participate fully in meetings.
- Need internal workshopping, to agree on the fundamental principles of ACSA.
- Need to define the role of ACSA within the community.
- External communication is currently at a low level.
- External communication needs to be broad: Awareness; Involvement; Networking.
- While there has been deliberative communication initiatives such as the website and listserv, there is a perception that communication to date has been reactive rather than proactive.
- There are risks of preaching to the converted.
- Select citizen science champions within the community to especially promote ACSA and citizen science more generally.
- Regional Chapters will assist with communication over time, working within the framework of this Communication Strategy.

Website, social media, email listserv
- Person-to-person interactions are very important.
- Emphasis on the value of workshops/meetings/conferences.
- Suggestions that relevant workshops and events be badged as ACSA in time; this would leverage ACSA's networks to promote such events.
- Email listserv not functioning (but we understand this is being moved to a more functional site).
- Online media plan needed for better structure, content management and analysis.
- Website updates/blogs etc. are not current.
- Add a 'meet the members' section.
- Quality control of content—proofreading, guidelines etc. are important to provide a professional impression.
- Consider sponsorships on Facebook as an option to raise money.
- Use of a calendar of events; news and newsletters etc.
- Ensure email contact is kept at a reasonable level to avoid excessive (unwanted) contact.

This communication strategy
The ACSA Communication Strategy outlined in this document is based on a seven-step approach to developing communication strategies:
1. Identify target groups
2. Set objectives for communicating with target groups
3. Understand target groups
4. Design messages
5. Choose strategies and tactics
6. Build in evaluation
7. Produce an agreed action plan

This approach is effective because it focuses on the target groups and their needs from communication, rather than what an organisation might think they should do.

Step 3 in the attached strategy is implicit in the messages, strategies and tactics chosen, based on the experience of the consultants, Econnect Communication.

Step 6 is built into both step 2 (evaluating objectives) and step 5 (monitoring and evaluating strategies and tactics).

The Management Committee should develop the action plan (Step 7) once they have determined the budget, roles and responsibilities for implementing the Strategy.

This Communication Strategy will always remain in draft form so that it can be continuously monitored and updated. This will mean that the Strategy, and in particular its action plan, is a working document that is constantly amended as issues or new information arise, and as priorities change.

Priority target groups

The following target groups are listed according to their current (late 2016) priority for ACSA. This recognises the importance of firstly establishing the organisation and its membership, the need to gain critical support and develop partnerships and then to create a profile and position ACSA on the national and international stage.

1. Membership, including regional and topical chapters
2. Internal organisation – Management Committee, support staff, volunteers Working Groups
3. Funders/supporters (current – Inspiring Australia; Australian Museum; and potential)
4. Partners – these are organisations who contribute to or collaborate in ACSA or joint activities; can include scientific organisations, non-government organisations (e.g. ATLAS of Living Australia,GBR Citizen Science Alliance), and government agencies (e.g. CSIRO, Local Government)
5. Policy makers / politicians – Federal, state and local government agencies (environment, education and agriculture portfolios)
6. School community – teachers, students, curricula developers
7. Wider community – media, retirees, interested citizens

Leadership

The Secretary of ACSA's Management Committee (as of February 2017), Ellie Downing, will drive the implementation, monitoring, evaluation and review of this Communication Strategy during its first year.

Overarching messages

- ACSA defines citizen science as public participation and collaboration in scientific research to increase scientific knowledge
- ACSA members believe that citizen science offers research organisations, governments and other organisations a credible and effective means of engaging citizens in science for mutual benefits
- ACSA is a national network of scientists, teachers, community leaders and members, and science communicators who are involved and/or interested in citizen science.
- ACSA exists so that members can share information, support each other and collectively advance the practice of citizen science in Australia
- ACSA:
  - Encourages **participation** in citizen science
  - Supports a community/hub of citizen science **practice**
  - Facilitates **partnerships** between like-minded organisations/groups
  - Promotes inclusive, credible and quality citizen science activities and **outcomes**
- ACSA facilitates its members to partner and collaborate in citizen science projects, but it does not run any of its own citizen science projects
- ACSA is the premier forum for people connecting and communicating with each other about citizen science
- ACSA's processes and activities are transparent to its members and funders and its Management Committee is democratically elected by members
- ACSA's Management Committee welcomes feedback and suggestions from members and other with an interest in supporting a growing citizen science community in Australia
- ACSA is a proactive, dynamic organisation with an active membership

1. Membership (Priority #1)

Who?

Scientists, teachers, community leaders, citizen science leaders

Why?

Objective	Relevant ACSA Goal	Performance indicator	Measurement tool
To promote the benefits of being part of ACSA	2. Practice 5. Profile	Number of members GOAL: increase number of members by 20% each year for three years Degree of satisfaction with membership GOAL: increase level of satisfaction by 10% in 12 months	Record of numbers joining organisation Annual survey of membership
To provide opportunities to network and share ideas among members	1. Participation 2. Practice 4. Outcomes	Level of participation in online and personal forum promoted by ACSA GOAL: increase number of interested citizens in ACSA's Email List from 150 to 500 in three years. GOAL: obtain three likes or follows per week on Facebook and Twitter respectively over 12 months Degree of satisfaction with networking opportunities GOAL: increase	Records / analysis Request feedback at events Annual survey of membership

		level of satisfaction by 10% in 12 months	
To exchange information about citizen science opportunities, issues and best practices	2. Practice 4. Outcomes	Level of requests for information GOAL: increase number of requests by 10% each year for three years Level of input by members into ACSA initiatives GOAL: increase level of input by 10% each year over three years Degree of satisfaction with information exchange GOAL: increase level of satisfaction by 10% in 12 months	Records / analysis Request feedback after specific information given Annual survey of membership

What they need from communication?

- Clear benefits from being a member
- Opportunities to network; inclusiveness
- Learning / professional development
- Opportunities to share information
- Best practice advice on citizen science project design, development and evaluation

What does ACSA wish to convey?

- These are ACSA's goals (describe)
- These are the benefits from being a member of ACSA (list clearly articulated benefits)
- You can be involved in these types of projects…(e.g. opportunities for involvement in areas of biodiversity, health, sport etc.)
- This is what other members are contributing to/participating in…(provide examples via profiles)
- This is how you can make a difference… (provide examples via case studies)
- This is what's happening globally in citizen science
- Get connected: benefit from our networks with other citizen scientists and researchers

Establishment: February – July, 2017

1. **Promote membership** (agree on fee structure/ online payment method)
   – Package of information re clearly articulated benefits (e.g. invitations to workshops, access to posting on listserv, discounts to conferences)
   – Use current networks, email lists to promote membership
   – Produce and distribute initial Foundation Member certificates for those who register as members in the first month.

   Monitoring and evaluation: Pre-test draft information about membership benefits with a sample of likely members

2. **Website development**
   – Content about goals, membership benefits
   – Membership payment section
   – Internal database of members
   – Social media links, including member blog site and Twitter feed

   Monitoring and evaluation: Pre-test draft content with sample group of members, funders, partners; install Google analytics and monitor use every 3 months

Initial delivery of membership benefit: August-December 2017

3. **Calendar of events and opportunities** (produced, maintained and ongoing)

   Monitoring and evaluation: Monitor use and contributions to the calendar

4. **E-news** – all members to receive automatic subscription to e-news every once a month (produced through content supplied by members, distributed to members on the same day each month)

   Should include 3-4 items with links to longer information about each item on the website.

   Monitoring and evaluation: Monitor openings and use of e-news through programs like MailChimp

Consolidation of membership benefit – 2018 onwards

5. **Chapters in regions and on topics**
   – Develop regional and potential topical ACSA chapters; need leaders/champions for each chapter
   – Support the chapters financially (provide an annual amount such as 20% of chapter members' annual membership fees for them to

organise venues, catering and promotion of chapter events) and through direct leadership support (participation in Chapter events by ACSA Management Committee members).

Monitoring and evaluation: Monitor growth and development of chapters; request feedback from chapters

6. **ComPracComm (Community of Practice in Communication)**
   – A strategy that mimics citizen science with ACSA's communication where members proactively do most of the communication and are supported through ACSA mechanisms. This requires ACSA to set up a small communication moderation committee (maximum of 3 people) who would promote communication opportunities for all members through their contributing to things like the ACSA blog, website, calendar of events, webinars, e-news, social media and media activities. The moderation committee would develop and promote the activities and then monitor and approve contributions until they are satisfied with the quality of each contributor. Once satisfied, approved contributors could input with only minimal review before approval. This strategy harnesses the energy and enthusiasm of volunteer members. Active members should be recognised through a monthly 'Member of the month' award (certificate and website recognition), with the 5 most active members given free registration at ACSA's conferences.

   Monitoring and evaluation: Check regularly with members how easy it is for them to be involved; institute a simple quality assurance process through the communication moderation committee

7. **Templates to communicate as part of CPC**
   – Templates and tips that make it easy for members to communicate through CPC

   Monitoring and evaluation: Pre-test draft templates with a selection of members

8. **Professional development**
   – ACSA sessions that help members to effectively communicate as part of ComPracComm (CPC); E.g. using social media, writing blogs, speaking to the media, writing for The Conversation etc
   – Promote professional development at conferences and through regional/topical chapters
   – Negotiate partnership support/sponsorship of professional development sessions

   Monitoring and evaluation: Use the annual survey to find out professional development needs of members; request feedback forms from professional development sessions

2. ACSA Internal Organisation

Management Committee, Support Staff, Working Groups

Why?

Objective	Relevant ACSA Goal	Performance indicator	Measurement tool
To clarify and agree upon roles and responsibilities within ACSA	2. Practice 5. Profile	Level of agreement with articulated and documented roles and responsibilities	Feedback requested
To promote transparent communication within the Committee and group	2. Practice	Level of communication and information sharing Degree of satisfaction with communication	Records / analysis Request feedback from members
To ensure everyone knows what is happening and why	2. Practice 5 Profile	Level of awareness of ACSA activities and direction Degree of satisfaction with information exchange	Request feedback from members

What they need from communication?
- Understanding about individual roles and responsibilities
- Transparency of communication
- Opportunities to share ideas and discuss directions

What does ACSA wish to convey?
- These are ACSA's goals…(list)
- ACSA's role within the community is about being a hub for citizen science
- These are the roles and responsibilities of committee members…(document)
- These are ACSA's terms of reference, protocols and guidelines…(document)
- Transparency, unity and trust are key for ACSA's success
- Regular communication between committee members is essential

How?

<u>Establishment: February – July, 2017 (but then needs to happen on a regular basis)</u>

1. **Internal workshop**
   - Check consensus about ACSA's goals and positioning
   - Agree on this communication strategy
   - Clarify and document individual and group roles and responsibilities
   - Discuss and agree on membership structure and fees

Monitoring and evaluation: Request anonymous feedback at the end of the workshop (use a feedback sheet)

2. **Monthly online meetings** with structured agendas
   - Discuss any issues and opportunities

   Monitoring and evaluation: Monitor level and quality of participation

<u>Initial delivery of membership benefit: August-December 2017 (but then reviewed on a regular basis)</u>

3. Identify and agree on **ACSA spokesperson/s and guidelines** for:
   - Communicating with members
   - Liaising with funders / partners
   - Liaising and negotiating with any potential partners, organisations or funders
   - Speaking to the media
   - Briefing politicians/policy makers
   - Adding "subject/topic" experts to relevant media lists

   Monitoring and evaluation: Monitor level of use of agreed guidelines, and activity of the spokespeople

3. Funders / supporters

Who?
Currently: Inspiring Australia; Australian Museum, and potential (e.g. Trusts and grant schemes)

Why?

Objective	Relevant ACSA Goal	Performance indicator	Measurement tool
To maintain or increase funding and support for ACSA and its activities	1. Participation 2. Profile	Level of funding Level of in-kind support	Review of ACSA's financial records
To demonstrate that ACSA is delivering on the citizen science priorities of those funding and supporting it	5. Profile	Degree of satisfaction with activities from funding agencies	Request feedback to reports

What they need from communication?
- Demonstration of value gained for money or in-kind resources invested in ACSA
- Regular updates of ACSA's activities, especially those benefiting from funding/support

What does ACSA wish to convey?
- ACSA is a proactive, dynamic organisation with an active membership
- This is how ACSA is fulfilling its mission…(provide summary information on members and projects)
- This is what ACSA is achieving…(provide examples via case studies and profiles)
- Citizen science makes important contributions to science and policy (give examples)
- Citizen science can help deliver against your strategic agendas, and this is how…
- This is how you can support ACSA and citizen science…

How?

Happens throughout all phases with ACSA becoming more proactive during its 4th phase: Outreach beyond membership – mid 2018 onwards

1. Regular (every 2 months) updates of activities and achievements
2. Personal briefings/discussions about issues and opportunities (at least twice a year)

Monitoring and evaluation: Request feedback to reports, personal briefings/discussions

4. Partners

Who?

Scientific organisations, museums, relevant non-government organisations (e.g. ATLAS of Living Australia, GBR Citizen Science Alliance, etc), government agencies, Australian Science Communicators, Scientific societies (e.g. Ecological Society of Australia), National Geographic, private companies (e.g. iNaturalist, QuestaGame).
International citizen science associations (i.e. European and American)

Why?

Objective	Relevant ACSA Goal	Performance indicator	Measurement tool
To link together and collaborate on events and activities of mutual benefit	1. Participation 2. Practice 3. Partnerships	Level of partnership agreements / joint activities	Review of each event /activity to determine partnership involvement
To discover ideas and opportunities for improving what ACSA does	3. Partnerships 4. Outcomes 5. Profile	Level of new initiatives Degree of satisfaction in collaborations	Review of records Request feedback from partners

What they need from communication?

- Benefits from collaborating or partnering with ACSA (versus any risks)
- Understanding of what ACSA does

What does ACSA wish to convey?

- ACSA is the hub for citizen science
- There are opportunities and benefits from partnering and collaborating with ACSA such as…
- ACSA's partners include…(list), and this is how we work together…
- We want to learn from your experiences
- We want to work with you for mutual benefits, such as… (describe)
- This is what ACSA is achieving…(provide examples via case studies and profiles)

How?

Outreach beyond membership – mid 2018 onwards

1. Identify suitable organisations and people and make contact
2. Consider any opportunities for cross-memberships
3. Develop a shared list of events of mutual interest
4. Link to relevant sites on website and promote (ask for reciprocal linking)

Monitoring and evaluation: Monitor opportunities and the progress of these; request feedback from partners

5. Policy makers / politicians

Who?
Those in federal, state and local governments interested in citizen science – likely to be in environment, education, agriculture, fisheries, tourism, health, energy and water departments

Why?

Objective	Relevant ACSA goals	Performance indicator	Measurement tool
To promote the benefits of citizen science initiatives	1. Participation 2. Profile	Level of awareness of citizen science and benefits	Request feedback
To demonstrate how citizen science initiatives can meet the priorities of governments	3. Partnerships 4. Outcomes	Level of interest in / use of citizen science activities	Review of records
To partner with governments in citizen science initiatives	1. Participation 3. Partnerships 5. Profile	Level of partnerships with governments Degree of satisfaction with partnerships	Review of records Online questionnaire

What they need from communication?
- Understanding of what citizen science is – opportunities, risks, how managed
- Role of ACSA and how the organisation can help them
- What ACSA wants from them and why

What does ACSA wish to convey?
- ACSA is the hub for citizen science
- Citizen science makes important contributions to society, science and policy
- Citizen science can help identify and solve issues, and deliver against strategic agendas
- This is how ACSA is fulfilling its mission…(provide summary information on members and projects)
- This is what ACSA is achieving…(provide examples via case studies and profiles)
- ACSA's partners and sponsors include…
- This is how you can partner with ACSA…(describe)

How?

Outreach beyond membership – mid 2018 onwards

1. Identify suitable organisations and people and create a list of the top 50 people to keep in contact
2. Produce a short briefing document about citizen science and activities of relevance to the top 50 list
3. Document relevant government programs, initiatives and policies regarding citizen science and identify opportunities for ACSA
4. Organise personal briefings with key people that discuss opportunities for mutual benefits (aim for at least 4/year, increasing over time)
5. Meet with representatives to find out their perceptions, concerns and needs

Monitoring and evaluation: *Monitor opportunities and the progress of these; request feedback after meetings, briefings*

6. School community

Who?
Teachers, students, curricula developers (especially in environmental areas),
Department of Education in each state and territory

Why?

Objective	Relevant ACSA goal	Performance indicator	Measurement tool
To promote citizen science and involvement in relevant citizen science activities	1. Participation	Level of awareness of and involvement in citizen science	Review of degree citizen science is integrated into curricula Number of schools who participate in citizen science through ACSA leverage

What they need from communication?
- Benefits from getting involved in citizen science (versus any risks)
- Opportunities to get involved easily for school groups
- Best practice ideas for school involvement in citizen science

What does ACSA wish to convey?
1. Citizen science is… (define citizen science)
2. ACSA is the hub for citizen science
3. Citizen science is fun—get involved, learn and make a difference!
4. Citizen science helps students to learn about and engage with science
5. Here are opportunities for schools to get involved in citizen science…(describe)
6. We want to learn from your experiences

How?
Outreach beyond membership – mid 2018 onwards
1. Identify existing school citizen science programs and develop case studies that highlight what works or not
   Monitoring and evaluation: Pre-test draft case studies before loading on web or promoting
2. Promote networking activities between schools
   Monitoring and evaluation: Monitor networking activities
3. Identify curriculum opportunities for including citizen science
   Monitoring and evaluation: Check interest of teachers for including citizen science activities
4. Showcase school citizen science activities (on website, though media, in e-news)
   Monitoring and evaluation: Check Google analytics for website; review media coverage (quantity/quality)

7. Wider community (interested community)

Who?
Media, retirees, those already involved in environmental volunteer activities, interested citizens

Why?

5. Objective	Relevant ACSA goal	Performance indicator	Measurement tool
To promote citizen science and involvement in citizen science activities	2. Participation	Level of awareness of and involvement in citizen science	Review any relevant public surveys

What they need from communication?
- Understanding of citizen science
- Benefits from getting involved in citizen science
- Opportunities to get involved easily
- Best practice ideas for involvement in citizen science

What does ACSA wish to convey?
1. Citizen science is public participation and collaboration in scientific research to increase scientific knowledge
2. ACSA is the hub for citizen science
3. You can be involved in these types of projects…(E.g. opportunities for involvement in areas of biodiversity, health, sport etc.)
4. How are you contributing to science? Let us know!

How?
Outreach beyond membership – mid 2018 onwards
1. Identify existing citizen science programs and develop case studies that highlight what works or not
   Monitoring and evaluation: Pre-test draft case studies before loading on web or promoting
2. Promote networking activities between citizen science programs
   Monitoring and evaluation: Monitor networking activities
3. Identify current environmental programs where there are opportunities for including citizen science
   Monitoring and evaluation: Check interest of environmental programs for including citizen science activities
4. Showcase citizen science activities (on website, though media, in e-news)
   Monitoring and evaluation: Check Google analytics for website; review media coverage (quantity/quality)

Priority actions February-July 2017

1. Set up the ACSA website, including ability for people to register and pay as members (includes a profile template)
2. Develop and add to the website details of membership benefits
3. Promote ACSA foundation membership
4. Develop program for ACSA November 2017 conference in Adelaide
5. Produce monthly e-newsletters
6. Promote membership/involvement in e-discussion groups and ACSA social media mechanisms
7. Report to current funder/supports (Inspiring Australia / Queensland Museum)
8. Set up and pre-test an initial online survey of members (to be conducted August 2017) – to act as baseline data and also drive future ACSA activities
9. Review progress of communication strategy
10. Discuss funding of social media posts for promotion (e.g. for priority membership, conferences etc)