OUR LEARNING APPROACH - Field GIS Australia

A FOCUS ON PARTICIPATION, PLACE BASED LEARNING AND LOCAL SOLUTIONS

We are first and foremost an organisation that understands the importance, and the challenges, of establishing community based environmental management initiatives. For this reason when we provide you with the latest in data capture and visualisation tools, we also provide a tailored, hands on training process. Put simply, we use these tools to record information about projects and places of direct interest to your group, as a way of your group learning how these tools can be applied to their work. This could be a place where you manage weeds and plantings, a cultural site, or a species of importance or interest to your group. After we spend time learning the range of possibilities that GIS tablets afford, we go out into the field and record information about your site or species, and use this data as the basis for our database design, and computer mapping workshops. At the end of the process, your learning group will be producing maps about the places they look after, using information they have collected.

Our approach may be simple, but it is also effective. Through our experiences working with Indigenous rangers and volunteer community groups over 10 years, we have found that investing time and effort in this learning process increases the levels of ongoing use and uptake over the longer term, adding significant value to the investment in technology you have just made.

A TYPICAL 3 WEEK COURSE

WEEK 1

Establish database and onsite integration with tools; Introduction to using GIS tablets; basic data input - points, polygons, lines, GPS photos; Initial fieldtrips to identify priority sites and trial of tablets; identification of priority site for Week 2 training; creation of training project and input of site boundaries.

WEEK 2

Field training based on data collection at priority site; input data into database; troubleshoot and refine tablet and database setup; install desktop mapping software.

WEEK 3

Introduction to desktop mapping; set up basic map templates for sites; working with data (data import, symbology, working with multiple layers); working with maps (legends, scale, titles); create maps based on training data collected in Week 2; work with individuals to learn more detailed mapping functions where relevant; refine and troubleshoot overall system; identify future learning needs and identify strategies for "next stage" learning.

OUR PHILOSOPHY

Our approach focuses strongly on place based and situated learning, and encourages participatory design of course content with your group. These concepts have been at the heart of our work over 10 years.

Situated learning is learning that happens in places, in social situations, and through practical teaching methods that are of direct relevance and interest to the learning group, rather than based on "off the shelf" course templates or text books. It focuses on learning by doing, sharing of knowledge as part of a community, and uptake in the field, rather than formal comprehension and testing. Situated learning is often a much more effective way of delivering course content where the learning group is made up largely of volunteers, where cultural and social aspects of community life create unique circumstances and needs, where oral, visual and landscape literacy is very high relative to written literacy, or where members of the group may have had a low level of exposure to formal education.

Participatory course design involves an explicit process of the learning group identifying it's priorities, interests and needs as a way of guiding what skills and knowledge will be included in the course, where the learning needs to take place, and who needs to be involved to make it work.

The outcome? Local learning solutions. During our courses, training will to a large degree happen on country and outside the office, trialling tools by collecting data that rangers and managers need to work with on a daily basis, and involving community members with a variety of forms of expertise and knowledge to help guide the process.