Training needs assessment workshops: an evaluation of findings and recommendations

Content

Introduction

'Connecting Communities with Peatlands' is a Just Transition Funded project led by Irish Rural Link (IRL) and the Community Wetlands Forum (CWF) that aims to provide community transitioning supports to community groups across Ireland's Midlands. The project remit spans eight counties: Kildare, Westmeath, Laois, Offaly, Longford, Roscommon, North Tipperary, and East Galway.

One of the project priorities is to build the capacity of community groups to engage with their local peatland. To deliver identify training required for community groups in the coming year (2022), a needs assessment was carried out by the project coordinator in the form of nine workshops in each county area, as well as one online workshop.

Using the established Training Programme Framework Development[1] the workshops guided community groups and individuals to assess their training needs to design and coordinate projects in connection to peatlands and/or to manage and conserve peatland areas.

Although there were challenges delivering the workshops entirely in-person due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the workshops remained flexible to accommodate the needs of participants and followed all Covid-19 compliance guidelines issued by the government.

The findings have resulted in eight recommendations to deliver capacity-building training to community groups in the project remit area.

Methods

Community engagement workshops were convened to gather information on the training needs of community groups, individuals, and stakeholders.

Nine workshops were delivered across the project remit area in the course of four weeks between November to December 2021. In total 92 people registered for the workshop, and over 40 people attended (see Table 1). The last workshop took place online to facilitate those who could not attend in person. Workshops were arranged to take place on weekends to accommodate those working on weekdays. The half-day workshop (or two hours online) allowed participants to meet one another, network, share ideas and knowledge, but mainly to identify their individual training needs that would build their group's capacity to engage with peatlands.

The workshop was designed around the Training Programme Framework Development. Participants were asked to identify aspects of training that would be of most importance and urgency to them. The facilitator noted the training aspects identified and recorded the results in an analysis matrix, the findings of which are laid out below on page three.

Workshop registration was hosted via Eventbrite and shared with Community Wetlands Forum members, Heritage Officers, and Community Water Officers across the Midlands, as well as with Public Participation Networks. The workshops were advertised online via social media accounts belonging to Connecting Communities with Peatlands, CWF, and IRL with a

---

[1] Farrell, C. A. 2019. Community Wetlands Forum, Training Programme Framework development. Report prepared for CWF, Ireland.

press release was issued (See Appendix One). The workshops were featured on two news websites (Agriland[2], Kildare Now[3]), and the project coordinator was interviewed on Kildare FM.

There were many challenges to delivering workshops in person due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The project coordinator consulted with the members of the CWF and it was agreed that the workshops would take place in person as many highlighted 'Zoom fatigue' amongst their members. Other Covid-19 related challenges arose leading to the first weekend of workshops being postponed until December.

The numbers registered for workshops were higher than those who attended. Upon following up with registrants, they said Covid-19 was a factor in their non-attendance. Some workshops were cancelled due to non-attendance, and one was held online due to a potential Covid-19 case in the facilitator's house. An online workshop was arranged for those who could not attend an in-person workshop.

County	# of people registered	# of people who attended
Laois	5	4
Offaly	11	2
Longford	7	5
Roscommon	2	0
North Tipp	13	6
East Galway (online)	7	5
Kildare	15	0
Westmeath	12	5
Online	20	14
Total	**92**	**41**

Table 1 Registration and attendance of workshops

Workshops in Roscommon and Kildare did not go ahead due to non-attendance. Registrants were reminded of the event a day prior and asked to inform the coordinator if they could not attend. It may be possible that registrants did not read or receive the email.

Analysis Process

During the workshop, the facilitator took note of the training needs of participants using the Training Programme Development Framework. The identified training aspects were quantified by noting how many groups referenced the need for a specific type of training. The information was then put into an analysis matrix to display the results coherently and then translated into a graph. The training aspects referenced most are likely to take precedence over others.

Lessons learned

Covid-19 made it difficult to organise in-person events. Many said they felt uncomfortable attending in person, despite people's desire to engage with each other physically rather than virtually. Going forward, in-person events will be organised through email registration rather than through

---

[2] O'Sullivan, Kathleen. 2021. Workshops taking place in Midlands to engage communities with peatlands. https://www.agriland.ie/farming-news/workshops-taking-place-in-midlands-to-engage-communities-with-peatlands/ [Accessed 9 Nov 2021]

[3] Mather, Ciaran. 2021. Peatlands workshop tour to kick off in Kildare. https://www.kildarenow.com/news/local-news/684066/peatlands-workshop-tour-to-kick-off-in-kildare.html [Accessed 16 Dec 2021]

Eventbrite, and phone contact information will be required to follow up with registrants and their attendance.

Findings
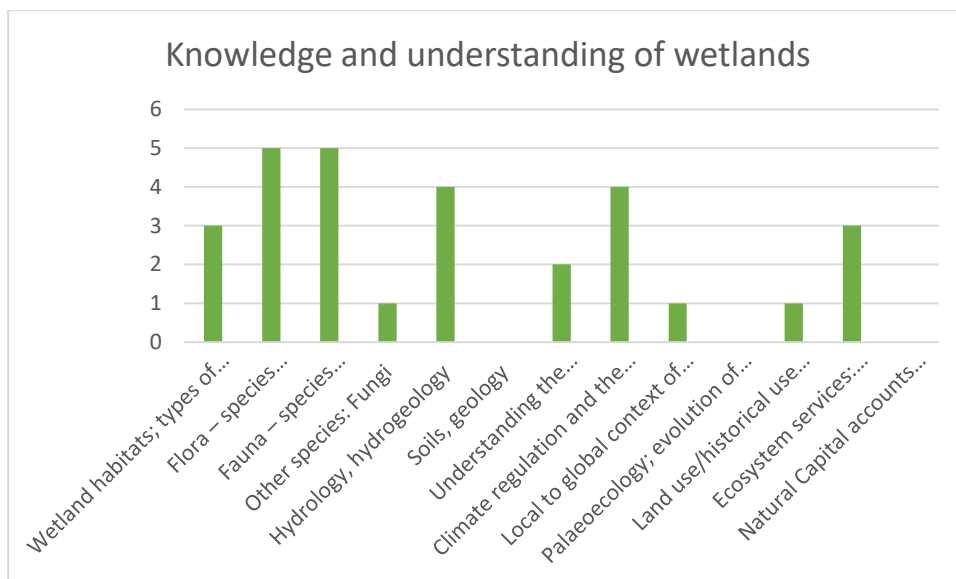
Stream one: Knowledge and understanding of wetlands

Figure 1. Stream One: Knowledge and understanding of wetlands

Key findings:

- Participants are keen to build their knowledge of their local peatland.
- They want to develop the skills to identify plant and animal species, as well as hydrology and the role of peatlands in climate regulation.
- Other areas of interest were: wetland habitats; types of wetlands, fungi identification, understanding water/soil/vegetation nexus, local to the global context of wetlands, land use/historical use, and ecosystem services.
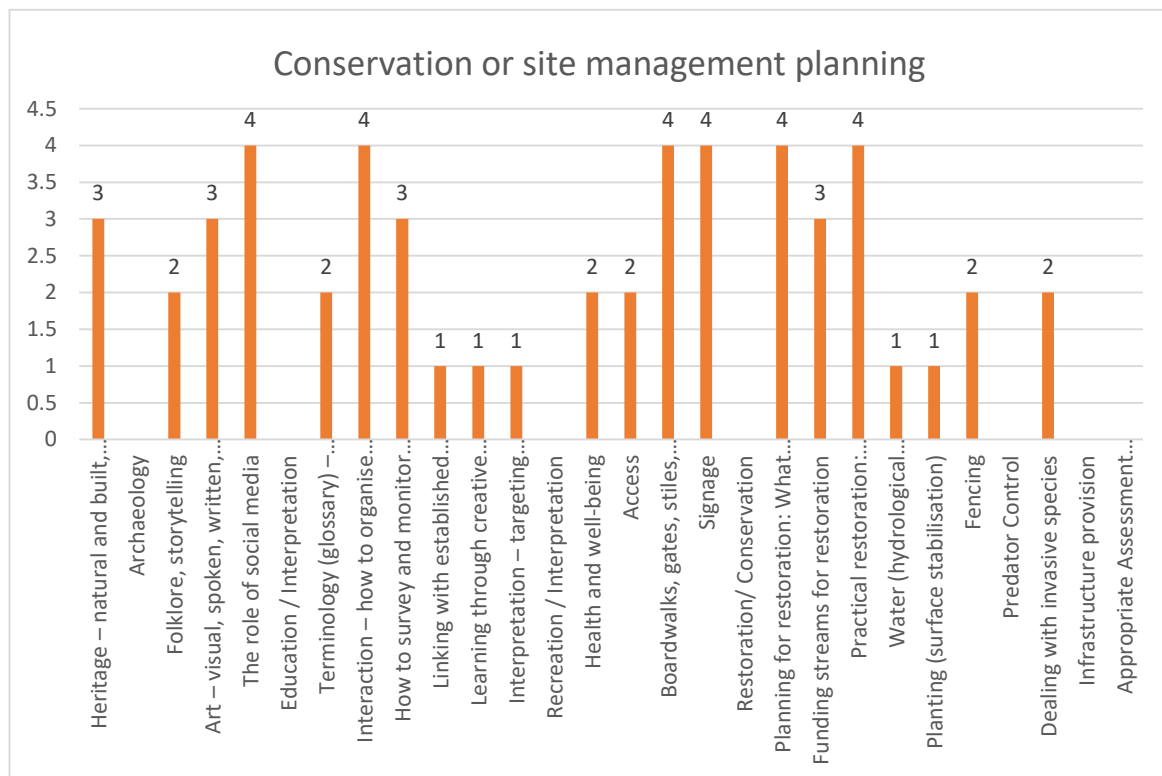
Figure 2. Stream Two: Conservation or site management planning

Key findings:

- Most participants expressed interest in all of the topics in this stream.
- The main training aspects of interest were: the role of social media, interaction (how to organise and deliver events), walks, talks, etc., boardwalks, gates, stiles and fencing, signage, planning for restoration, and practical restoration (designing, building and maintaining dams).
- Other areas of high interest within this stream were: heritage – natural and built, cultural, folklore and storytelling, Art (visual, spoken, written, drama, dance, photography, etc.), terminology (glossary) – jargon buster, how to survey and monitor wetland habitats and species, linking with established education providers, learning through creative interactions, interpretation – targeting users and audiences, health and well-being, access, funding streams for restoration, water (hydrological management) management – inputs and outputs, planting (surface stabilisation), fencing, and dealing with invasive species.
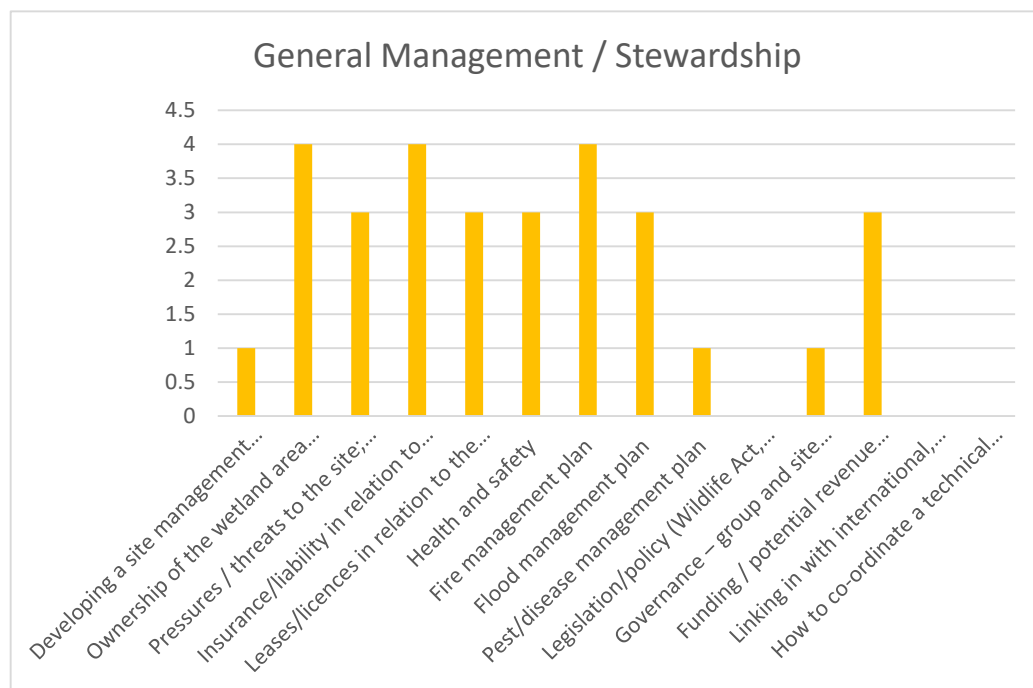
Stream three: General management/stewardship

Figure 3. Stream 3: General management / stewardship

Key findings:

- This stream of training was most relevant to community groups who manage peatland sites.
- The most agreed-upon training in this stream included: ownership of the wetland area (land register, title, rights, etc.), insurance/liability concerning group activities and the wetland site, and fire management plan.
- These were closely followed by training aspects in relation to pressures/threats to the site; surrounding land-use, leases/licenses concerning the wetland site (understanding land title), health and safety, flood management plan, and funding / potential revenue streams/managing finance.
- Some mentioned the need for developing a site management plan, pest/disease management plan, governance – group, and site governance.
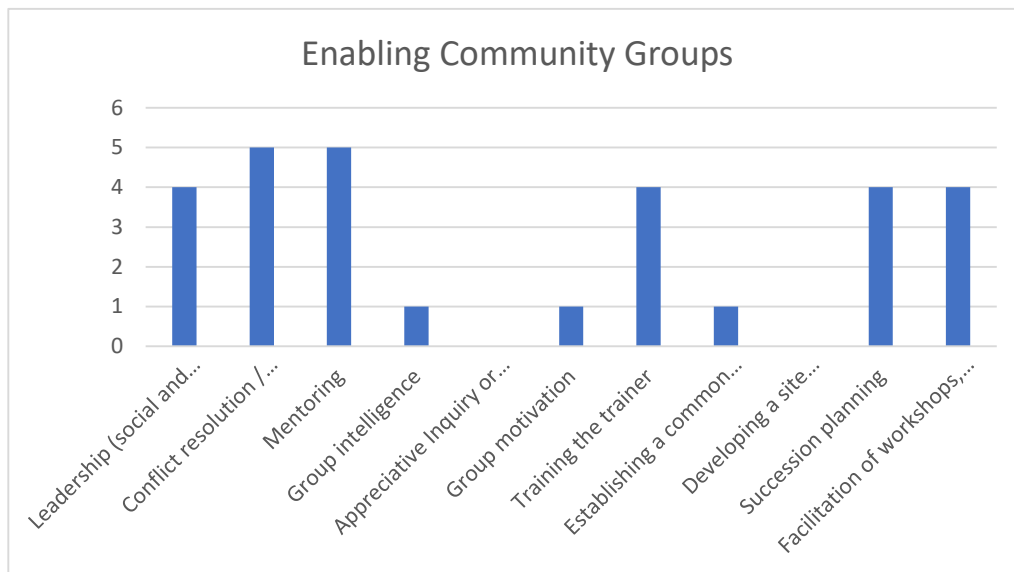
Stream four: Enabling community group

Figure 4. Stream four: Enabling community groups

Key findings:

- This stream was applicable to all groups/individuals who attended the workshops.
- The training aspects highlighted within this stream are leadership (social and collective), conflict resolution/negotiation, mentoring, training the trainer, succession planning, and facilitation of workshops, events, meetings, etc.
- Other training mentioned included group intelligence, group motivation, and establishing a common vision, purpose (vision, mission, values, goals, etc.).

Suggested training

Participants also recommended other pieces of training that are not listed on the Training Programme Framework. These were: risk assessment, guided tours kit for school students, stakeholder management. Risk assessment and guided tours kit for school students were only mentioned once, however stakeholder management was brought up three times. Therefore, consideration should be given to stakeholder management when devising a training plan.

Evaluation

This section includes an evaluation of the findings, as well as participant and facilitator evaluations of the workshops.

Evaluation of findings

Participants were most engaged with streams two and four, with some interest in topics within streams one and three. This reflects the developmental stages of the participating community groups, as different training streams appeal to groups for different reasons. Very few are in a position to manage a peatland themselves (as they may not be the owners, or lease the land from the owner), hence there was less engagement with stream three than the other streams. The different stages of training needs should be reflected in the training recommendations.

Based on the informal discussions prior to identifying training needs, it became clear that many new groups, as well as more established groups, are seeking direction and ideas for new projects associated with peatlands. This should be addressed in the recommendations. However, some groups did have ideas, but were unsure about the next steps required to deliver them. They need support to make the projects a reality.

For example, project ideas arose during the Laois and Westmeath workshops. 'A Day on the Bog' festival, as well as a cultural celebration of the peatlands were mentioned. Another idea was to design a booklet of bogs with walkways to visit to be delivered to each household in the region to promote local tourism. These ideas are promising, and showed that groups require idea development support, training, stakeholder engagement skills, as well as funding to make these projects a success.

The findings lack representation from two counties (Roscommon and Kildare) due to low participation levels. Despite hosting an online workshop for those who could not attend in-person, not all of those who missed the in-person workshop did not attend the online version.

Participant evaluation of workshops

Participants were asked to complete an online evaluation of the workshops. Five participants completed the form.

The overall feedback was that the workshop met their expectations. They liked that their input was included in the workshops, they were listened to, and that it was casual allowing them to ask questions and chat:

> "very casual and we had great opportunities for a chat and ask questions."

> "I really like the space for discussions and identifying training needs for each participant."

Overall, feedback for the facilitator was positive for both in-person and online workshops:

> "great facilitation solicited input and discourse from all participants and framed the workshop in terms of just transition."

> "It was a well-run webinar, very informative and engaging."

Participants also expressed that they left the workshop feeling that they had learned something that would benefit them:

> "greater clarity in my head about next steps for the area."

> "The detailed training list gave me a good overview of what we need to know and understand to move forward with our bog conservation project."

Based on this limited feedback, it can be assumed that the workshops were not only helpful to assess the training needs of community groups but provided them with information and support to progress their own groups and ideas.

Facilitator evaluation of workshops

Overall, the workshops were a success as they provided vital information on community training needs which will inform the project's capacity-building training programme over the coming year.

To increase workshop attendance, the organiser should consider the locations, venues, and times of the workshops in the context of Covid-19. Outdoor venues could also be considered and reduce the length of the workshops. Online workshops are more accessible and less time-consuming to participate in, therefore they could also be considered as an alternative to in-person workshops.

There was little uptake on completion of online evaluation forms, therefore it would be beneficial for future feedback on workshops if participants complete an evaluation form at the end of the workshop.

Recommendations

The approach to delivering training needs to be carefully considered. The majority of training topics within each stream can be combined, with others would requiring their own separate module. Below are eight recommendations for capacity-building training based on the findings and evaluation of findings.

Recommendation 1

Based on the responses to Stream One, the topics within this heading should be combined to form one training to build community group knowledge of peatlands. The modules are related to natural science and would form a holistic training piece that could take place over the course of two-three days, and potentially include site visits. The module "*How to survey and monitor wetland habitat species*" from Stream Two could also be integrated into this training as it is practical and would help communities put their learning into practice.

We note that the Irish Peatlands Conservation Council would be best placed to provide this training as they have the resources, knowledge, and staff, and insurance to facilitate group visits to Lodge Bog, Co. Kildare.

Recommendation 2

Stream Two is the largest section in the Training Programme Framework. The sections within this stream can be easily broken down and delivered as training in areas of appreciation, education, recreation, and restoration. Given the high level of interest in this Stream, each section could be delivered as a module in a four-part course, where groups could register for all modules or a selection. Table 2 outlines each course and the modules contained with it that could be provided.

Table 2 Recommendation for Stream Two training course

Appreciation / Interpretation	Heritage – natural and built, cultural
	Archaeology
	Folklore, storytelling
	Art – visual, spoken, written, drama, dance, photography, etc.
Education / Interpretation	Terminology
	Interaction – how to organise and deliver events
	How to survey and monitor wetland habitat species
	Linking with established education providers
	Learning through creative interaction
Recreation / interpretation	Health and well-being
	Access
	Boardwalks, gates, stiles, fencing, etc.
	Signage
Restoration / Conservation	Planning for restoration
	Funding streams for restoration
	Practical restoration
	Water management
	Planting
	Fencing
	Predator Control
	Dealing with Invasive species

	Infrastructure provision
	Appropriate assessment screening/ or Natura Impact Statements

Recommendation 3

Some participants expressed difficulty reaching their wider community to convey the importance of the bog. A one-day training course on communications strategy planning, to include modules on 'targeting users and audiences' and 'the role of social media' from Stream Two, would be beneficial for groups. This should be delivered by experts with experience communicating with communities.

Recommendation 4

Stream Three is a niche training area as the majority of groups do not own or manage the peatland they are engaging with. The modules are practical and specific to groups managing their own peatland site, or those who have that ambition. Stream Three should be delivered as an entire training containing all modules, delivered by experts in management and stewardship of peatlands, and including site visits to CWF members who manage their peatland sites.

Recommendation 5

Stream Four could be delivered in individualised modules. Each module would need to be delivered by professionals with expertise in the area to ensure learning is taking place and theory can be put into practice. The coordinator should identify companies and professionals in these areas to deliver such training, particularly for modules on conflict resolution, leadership, training and trainer, and succession planning.

Recommendation 6

Communities need support to further develop their project ideas to carry out feasibility studies which are an integral outcome of this project. Design thinking workshops for community groups facilitated by professionals would support community groups -

- to consider projects and address how to go about them,
- assess their training needs further, and
- in the future, produce successful projects.

Design thinking workshops will also help the project meet its indicated outcomes by supporting communities to carry out feasibility studies.

Recommendation 7

Some participants expressed difficulty in finding resources, information, schemes, grant funding, etc. A one-stop-shop event where community groups have access to this information, stakeholders, agencies, etc. would create a more direct experience and put faces and names to supports they could access. An online, or in-person, event where stakeholders, agencies, funders, and others present what they have to offer community groups could support this.

Recommendation 8

Building connections with other projects, initiatives, and stakeholders as much as possible to optimise opportunities for training, collaborative projects, funding, and to reduce instances of re-inventing the wheel would facilitate reciprocal, mutual learning. The coordinator should prioritise

CWF members for training delivery and site visits. It will also be important to connect with Just Transition Fund projects in the Midlands establishing a connection with tourism initiatives as well as heritage, climate, and biodiversity officers in the county councils, and including community water officers.

Conclusion

The success of *Connecting Communities with Peatlands* hinges on the delivery of capacity-building training to community groups across the Midlands. Thus far, community groups have engaged with the project and are informing the training programme in development for 2022.

There is room for improvement in the process of engagement with communities which should influence future needs assessment workshops. The recommendations outline a roadmap for the coordinator to follow when implementing training programmes over the coming months.

Appendices

Appendix One – Press release

Irish Rural Link

8th November 2021

Workshop tour in Midlands supporting community engagement with peatlands

Connecting Communities with Peatlands, which launched 18th October in Co. Offaly, is beginning a workshop tour of the Midlands. The Just Transition Fund project, led by Irish Rural Link (IRL)– the national network representing the interest of rural communities and the Community Wetlands Forum (CWF) – a representative platform for community-led conservation groups will host workshops in Laois, Offaly, Longford, Roscommon, East Galway, North Tipperary, Kildare and Westmeath over the coming weeks.

The workshops aim to assess community need for training to engage with their local peatland, whether it be through citizen science, building a boardwalk, or learning more about the ecology of peatlands.

The workshops take place in each county throughout the month of November into early December.

The priority of Connecting Communities with Peatlands is to provide community transitioning supports to community-led groups in the Wider Midlands region by supporting community engagement with peatlands.

A Just Transition refers to the 'transition' or change that a community experiences when climate action policies impact the community's economic and social activities. Communities in the Midlands have been impacted by the closure of peat harvesting plants and the move away from extracting and burning peat for energy to establish renewable energy sources and rehabilitate peatlands for the storage of carbon, in line with National and EU climate action policies. This kind of transition can be very difficult for communities if the process does not include them.

Irish Rural Link and the Community Wetlands Forum realise the importance of community involvement in conservation of peatlands. The intended outcome of the project is to have community groups across the Midlands engaging in their own projects in relation to their local peatland, which in turn can support the local economy.

You can register for the workshops on Eventbrite by following this link: https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/empowering-communities-to-connect-with-peatlands-tickets-195737324607

Community groups interested in engaging with their local peatland and individuals who may own peatland are encouraged to participate in 'Connecting Communities with Peatlands' and can contact aoife@irishrurallink.ie for further information on the project and on upcoming workshops.

Empowering Communities to Connect with Peatlands

Equipment: flipchart paper, markers, pens, projector and screen, labels, sign-in sheet, participant form, evaluation form, training framework printed.

9.30am – Sign-in, contact tracing form and Covid-19 certificate check, tea/coffee

10.00am – Welcome, introduction, agenda

10.10am – Participant introductions.

Questions:

What is your name?

Where are you from/where are you living?

What got you interested in peatlands/wetlands?

Tell me something about yourself that no one really expects, e.g. a hobby, interest, something you did/do.

10.30am – Presentations

Presentation on Just Transition and Sustainable Development Goals

Presentation on Connecting Communities with Peatlands project

Questions

11.10am - Comfort break/tea/coffee etc.

11.25am – Group Discussion: peatland projects ideas

12.00pm – Lunch break

12.45pm - Training Framework introduction

Read through the training framework and identify training that is of most interest to you.

What training would your group benefit from?

2.00pm - End

IRISH RURAL LINK - COVID-19 Safety Plan

Indoor events

Event details

Name:	Connecting Communities with Peatlands project workshop
Event location:	
Event type:	Controlled indoor event
Completed by	Aoife Kirk
Email address	aoife@irishrurallink.ie
Date of Event	
Date completed	

Wellbeing of staff and Attendees

- Advise registrants to stay away if they have symptoms or feel unwell.
- Exclude staff and attendees who are unwell from the event.
- Provide staff with information and training on COVID-19, including on when to get tested, physical distancing, wearing masks, and cleaning.
- Advise registrants to wear masks/face coverings when moving around the room, and encourage mask wearing in general.
- Advise registrants on conditions of entry including requirements to stay away if unwell and record keeping.
- If contact details are captured electronically upon registration for the event, registration form will be required, if not additional collection of contact details will be required.
- In the event that a registrant or staff member becomes ill or shows symptoms of Covid-19, the workshop will end and registrants will be advised to follow HSE guidelines.

Physical distancing

- Capacity for a controlled indoor event (seated, ticketed and enclosed) is 100% if registrants can prove immunity to Covid-19 with a Covid-19 Vaccination Certificate or proof of immunity certificate.
- Support 2m physical distancing where possible. Seating will be 2m distanced.
- Avoid congestion of people in specific areas where possible.
- Where registrants will be discussing in groups there will be pods of up to six people.

Record keeping

- Keep a record of the name, contact number and entry time for all staff and attendees for a period of at least 28 days.
- Records must be provided as soon as possible, but within 4 hours, upon request from an authorised officer.

_____

Hygiene and cleaning

- Have hand sanitiser at key points around the venue and provide masks at entry point.
- Ensure bathrooms are well stocked with hand soap and paper towels or hand dryers.
- Clean frequently used indoor hard surface areas at least daily with detergent/disinfectant.
- Clean frequently touched areas and surfaces several times per day.
- In indoor areas, increase natural ventilation by opening windows and doors where possible, and increase mechanical ventilation where possible by optimising air conditioning or other system settings (such as by maximising the intake of outside air and reducing or avoiding recirculation of air

I agree to keep a copy of this COVID-19 Safety Plan at the Event

Signature:

Date: