

Project area: *Communications and Uncertainty*
Intended readership: *Local authorities, practitioners, academics, interest groups*

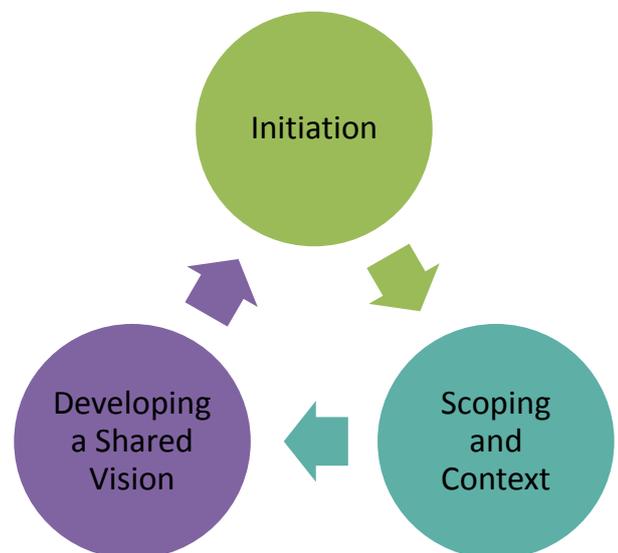
The Blue-Green Cities team have been working in partnership with stakeholders in the City of Newcastle to develop a Blue-Green vision focussed on improving flood risk and surface water management plus the delivering of multiple environmental, socio-cultural and economic benefits. A **Learning and Action Alliance** was established in February 2014 in order to break down barriers and fragmented thinking, and encourage cooperation and discussion between a diverse range of Newcastle stakeholders.

What is a Learning and Action Alliance (LAA)?

A LAA is a social learning framework and structure for collaborative working between a group of individuals or organisations with a shared interest in innovation and implementing change. LAAs are typically an open arrangement where participants create a joint understanding of a problem and its possible solutions based on rational criticism and coherence through discussion. LAAs create an atmosphere of trust and mutual ownership and facilitate the identification of innovative ideas for the solution of complex (*wicked*) problems. The aim is for stakeholders to bring their knowledge and expertise and talk freely outside the constraints of existing formal institutional settings and challenge restrictive regulations. There is no fixed structure in a LAA; it is important that they are locally and technically grounded and have their own specific vision that evolves over their lifetime.

How do you set up a LAA?

We followed the procedural steps outlined in Ashley *et al.*, 2011. The first **Initiation** stage involved forming a group of interested parties; individuals with expertise in sustainable improvements in Newcastle. This was achieved through existing contacts and online searches and an invitation to a start-up workshop inviting participants to be part of creating a Blue-Green vision for Newcastle. The second and third meetings focussed on **Scoping and Context**; the identification of the political and physical reach of the LAA and shortlisting additional stakeholders who should be engaged. Core LAA members were then tasked with promoting the LAA to their peers. A coordinator was identified and assigned with the practical organisation of the LAA. **Development of a Shared Vision** involved the negotiation of the LAA terms of reference ([available online](#)) to highlighted roles and responsibilities, protocol for data sharing and storage and communication pathways. Strategic objectives and frequency of meetings were decided, stakeholder drivers and motivations were identified and possible projects (planned and visionary) to demonstrate LAA learning and actions were selected.

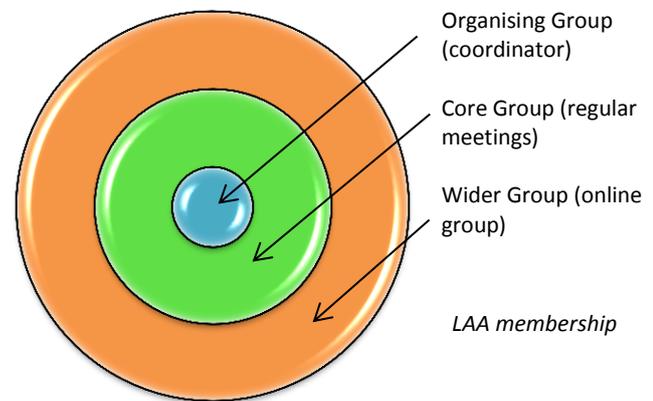


Establishing LAAs (adapted from Ashley et al., 2011 J. Flood Risk Mgmt. DOI: 10.1111/j.1753318X.2011.01108.x)



Levels of membership and roles; who could be involved?

One of the key goals of the LAA is to bring together people who may not typically meet on a regular basis. During the **Scoping and Context** phase, stakeholders should be identified and membership types determined. **Core Group members** are able to attend regular (e.g. every 6-8 weeks) face-to-face meetings, as organised by the coordinator (part of the **Organising Group**). **Wider Group members** are invited to attend meetings as appropriate, e.g. themed meetings in their area of expertise, and participate in an online group (e.g. LinkedIn) set up to continue discussions from the face-to-face meeting and permit wider information and data sharing.



The **coordinator** plays a vital role during the defining and establishing phase; they will contact stakeholders, explain the objectives of the LAA and identify stakeholder drivers, recruit new members, and aim to ensure that all stakeholders have an opportunity to contribute to discussions; stakeholders may not always agree but should respect differing opinions and ideas. The LAA is designed to be a long-term initiative and so this will evolve to be a more shared responsibility over time.

Stakeholders that could be engaged are those that are affected by, or affect, the success and functioning of the LAA and its vision. For Newcastle, this included;

- Institutional stakeholders (e.g. local authorities), major land owners and the local Water Company
- Local environment organisations and not for profit organisations
- Governmental bodies
- Infrastructure and utilities (energy, electricity, transport)
- Retail and business (local businesses and business development partnerships)
- Academics
- Industry

Stakeholder mapping and encouraging participation

- Detailed stakeholder mapping should focus on identifying the importance of involving each stakeholder group, their interests, motivations, and what outcomes/change could be produced by their engagement
- Regularly inform potential stakeholders of what the LAA could do for them individually and their organisation, and what they would gain from joining, e.g. networking opportunities, co-production of knowledge and learning from discussions (that may be outside their typical professional remit), data sharing, and access to academic research

Overcoming challenges to successfully establish and start running LAAs

- Recruiting stakeholders, who are often time-poor, may be difficult but can be overcome by clearly stating why it is important for them to be engaged, why their voice matters and what they can gain from attending meetings
- Cover a range of themes, as negotiated by the group, to help maintain the interest of different stakeholders who have specific drivers for joining
- Regularly refine the LAA vision to help keep meetings on track and avoid fragmentation
- Drive the LAA by a strong core group with ideas and enthusiasm to keep momentum and promote longevity
- Create a rapport between the LAA members. This is an essential part of the coordinators role and part of the process of creating trust and making the LAA an exciting and informative initiative to be involved in



Newcastle stakeholders identifying potential demonstration projects (June 2014)

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Blue-Green Cities in an interdisciplinary research consortium made up of partners from UK and international universities, government bodies and practitioners supported by:

EPSRC
Engineering and Physical Sciences
Research Council
EP/K013661/1

