

Making Links 2004 Evaluation Report

Approximately 60 people attended the conference and of these, 34 people filled in an evaluation form.

Of the 34, one was a student, seven were volunteers and 23 were paid workers. (Some people checked more than one of these categories).

States represented:

ACT 3 (of 5 registrants from ACT).
 NSW 15 (of 43)
 NT 0 (of 1)
 QLD 3 (of 7)
 SA 1 (of 2)
 VIC 4 (of 9)
 WA No registrants
 Tas No registrants

Evaluations were generally favourable. Delegates were asked to rate the conference out of 10, and the average score was 7.8.

Aspect	Great	Good	OK	Poor	Terrible	No answer
Publicity material	2	12	15	2		2
Program overall	7	23	2			1
Venue	16	16	2			
Welcome	10	12	4	3		4
Speakers	8	23	2			
Catering	13	15	4		1	
Workshops	9	15	4			5
Cocktail party	2	11	2			7
Plenary session	4	14	2			13

Most people found out about conference via Email (21). Nine people reported that “Someone told them” and two reported they had found out via the website.

What did you want – did you get it?	Yes	No
Up to date info and ideas	28	1
Support from your peers	21	10
Networking and links	27	1
To be revitalised and re-energised	19	13
To develop skills and expertise	23	3
For the interesting workshops	20	1

This question was ambiguous as “No answers could mean either – they expected and didn’t get, or they didn’t expect. However in general responses were positive.

Other responses included:

“Insight into other organisations process and experience.”

“I wanted some plain English ways of dealing with the commonalities found in NGOs and their use of the web/developing websites.”

Delegates were also asked to comment on the following questions:

- Best and worst things about the conference
- What they learned and what they were taking back to their workplace (these overlapped a lot)
- Suggestions for improvement
- Any other comments.

In general the answers were favourable and constructive. Only one person was negative about the conference as a whole, stating they didn't learn anything, only refreshed their knowledge, and commenting adversely on specific sessions.

Best things

Networking and meeting new people was the most frequently mentioned. Typical comments were:

- "Talking about your work with large groups of people"
- "Plenty of time to meet lots of people and chat"
- "Meeting peers in other orgs and finding out what they're doing".
- "ambience of collaboration."

Others commented on:

- the diversity, and range of speakers ("I'm here with a co-worker who has very different interests ... we were both able to find sessions of interest")
- the workshops ("Practical")
- the size ("Small"),
- the computer lab
- Low registration fees
- New ideas

Presentations specifically mentioned were Brett Rolfe's (on Promotion), Andrew Arch and EvaluateIT.

NB: In future evaluations it is important to elicit more info about specific sessions.

Worst things

Three main issues emerged as the worst things:

- 5 out of 29 complained about catering. E.g.
 - "Not enough green vegie curry"
 - "Somewhere to eat sandwiches at – a table?"
 - "Beef bolognaise"
- Graphic design workshop by Imminent Design (5/29)
 - "Not really community based"
 - "Good idea but poor and unskilled presenters"
 - "I don't believe you let these people loose on community workers!"
- Having to choose between concurrent sessions (5/29)
 - "I missed a few interesting papers"
 - Too many interesting areas that overlapped"

Four people also made comments about the schedule, noting the gap after the opening plenary, the long lunch break, that there was not enough time, and the 9am start on Tuesday.

Other comments included:

- “Divided into ...IT geeks working with NGOs and people who worked with NGOs that had to work with IT. The difference was really big – speaking different languages..”
- “Learning how little I know”
- “Not enough practical”
- “Some sectors represented more than others”.

Several people used this space to make positive comments, e.g.

- “For what I had to pay, not a thing”

What new things did you learn at the conference?

Answers to this question were diverse. Several people identified that they had encountered new opportunities or ideas.

Most common answers were:

- Technical and open source (9/32)
 - “Technical issues were clarified”
 - “Tools available”
 - “Greater understanding of software, open source”
- 6 /32 people said they had learned a lot. E.g:
 - “Too many to list individually”
 - “All new & mind boggling”
 - “Learnt something at every session”
- Recognition that other community orgs share similar issues.
 - “Working in isolation is common, even when the IT person is “in-house”
 - “Issues that are facing community orgs”

Others included:

- Web policy / strategy / standards / accessibility (4)
- Web statistics (2)
- Different ways of presenting material (2)
- Community development (2)
- Evaluation (2)
- Action research
- User testing

Only two people said they had not learned anything, and one of these framed it positively as: “Not so much new things as fabulous networking opportunities with like-minded others.”

What can you take back to your organisation from the conference?

Answers to this question overlapped a bit with the previous question.

- Different / new ideas & perspectives (7/32)
- Networking contacts (5)
- “Better understanding” or information & knowledge about:
 - Evaluation (5)
 - Policy & procedures / web publishing standards (3)
 - Community development (3)
 - User testing (2)

- Promotion (2)
- Multilingual site challenges (2)
- Site statistics (2),

Also mentioned:

Photoshop; W3C guidelines, “need for bringing along whole organisation”, open source & content management, “Possible workshop for sex workers in regional area to increase access to net”, “A knowledge that we are not alone in the challenges of setting up and maintaining websites.” “Heaps. Too many to write down”; “Place of website within communications strategy”.

The next conference

Delegates were asked for suggestions about how the conference could be improved next time. There were a variety of specific suggestions that are very useful.

- Fewer streams (7/28)
 - “shorter sessions, shorter breaks, less concurrent sessions”
 - Two streams over three days.”
- More practical / interactive (5)
 - “More interactivity / participation”
- Comments about workshop / session “level” (4)
 - A skills assessment form when registering and having a skill stream targeted at building new skills”
 - “separation of workshops into beginners & experts”
- More time (3)
- More info available prior to conference (e.g. Draft program) (2)

Other suggestions included:

- “Try to combine tech & social sides”
- “More parts of community sector represented”
- “More ice-breakers to get people talking and knowing where they come from, early in the conference”

As well as some specific workshop suggestions. Organisers of the next conference would benefit from reading this info.

Other comments

There was a space for general comments.

Thanks, congratulations & positive comments (12/22)

- e.g. “Great forum to link with other like organisations, practical. Thanks you to the co-ordinators.”
- “Great convention – useful & no unnecessary frills.”
- “thank you for facilitating an innovative, accessible conference on a timely, relevant topic. It ran smoothly and was a pleasure to attend.”

- “Thank you – first conference in years that I would gladly stay for another day (or two ..)”

There were a number of more specific comments, and suggestions for a future conference, most of them constructive. E.g.

- “It would be great to expand the focus of the presenters” (i.e. from sectors other than HIV)
- “Programming: grouping of speakers was good”
- “Would be good to have a grant writing session”
- I enjoyed it and understood what was said but it’s hard to then bring really technical info back to an org that has no-one who understands what’s going on Fun and useful for me, but not for the org I represented. Something more user friendly and easier to understand would have been more appropriate ...”

Organisers of the next conference would benefit from reading the full list.

There were only two negative comments. One was in relation to the food (unhealthy & inappropriate for people with HIV or Hep C) and the other was about the presentations by Phillip Keen (objection to graphic sexual content) and Imminent Design (perceived as incompetent).

Conclusion

Overall, evaluations of the conference were positive and constructive. It is clear that generally the conference achieved its goals of bringing web workers together, building a network and skills within the community sector. Some of the faults identified (e.g. too much HIV-related material), were problems that the organising committee was already aware of, and in general did not seem to interfere too much with people’s enjoyment of the conference.

Evaluation forms confirmed the positive impressions people had been giving the steering committee during the conference, and a 50%+ return rate is excellent.

A number of useful suggestions could be carried on into the programming and organisation of the next conference. A future evaluation should have more scope for people to rate specific presentations. (perhaps list each one & ask for a 1 – 5 rating?).