



Amongst it

2018 final report

Background

Amongst It started in July 2017 as an experimental project as part of the Nature of SA initiative.

We're focused on helping individuals form **positive connections** to nature and **celebrating** how uniquely important nature is to the identity of South Australia.

We are currently approaching the end of prototyping process structured as a grant round. We're sponsoring and supporting projects to test out a range of unexpected and meaningful ways to connect South Australians to nature. Moving forward, we are sketching possibilities for a state-wide festival to catalyse even more activities.

We are funded by the South Australian Department for Environment and Water (DEW) with in-kind donations from Hinterland Innovation. Grant funds were administered by Conservation SA.

Amongst It Working Group

Jill Woodlands—Nature Conservation Society of SA
Vicki-Jo Russell—Trees for Life/Nature of SA Co-Chair
Robin Parkin—Hinterland Innovation
Ryan Hubbard—Hinterland Innovation / TACSI
Jody Gates—Department for Environment and Water

We acknowledge the Adnyamathanha, Kaurna, Ngarrindjeri, Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara, and more than thirty other groups of traditional custodians of the land now known as South Australia.

We pay tribute to Elders past, present and emerging, who hold the stories, traditions, hopes and dreams of indigenous Australia.



We believe...

Connection to nature

is an important part of who we are as South Australians. We talk about it in different ways, but nearly all of us have places we hold as special, whether that's big, iconic nature like the Flinders Ranges and Kangaroo Island, our local leafy suburbs and backyards, or our unique capital city surrounded by parklands and nestled between hills and sea.



But for many of us

nature feels increasingly like a place 'over there' that we only visit on special occasions. We know how important it is to our wellbeing, but our screens, commutes and busy lives make it difficult to notice or connect to nature on a daily basis.

And as a state

we don't talk enough about how important connection to nature is in making South Australia vibrant, grounded, and a great place to live and work. We know that most people prioritise compassionate values like their connection to nature, and yet many of our most important values don't show up in our public discussions, media or priorities.

Amongst it

is an experiment in promoting creative ways to pay attention, slow down, and build an everyday connection to nature. We want to amplify the great work already happening, help kick off new projects, and celebrate all of it so that we remember to prioritise nature personally and publicly.



'Being Onkparingan' (Amongst It grant recipient) project participants



Our process

One year convening,
prototyping and learning

Timeline

Preparation

July–Sept 2017

The early stages of the project focused on refining our theory of change, brand, outreach collateral, key activities and overall goals.

We defined our aims as:

- To elevate and make more visible the myriad ways in which South Australians are already connecting with nature all around them.
- To catalyse new projects finding creative and unexpected ways to connect South Australians to nature.

The working name, **Amongst It**, was adopted after consulting with members of the Nature of SA working group; it was believed that this captured the dynamism that we wanted to be associated with the project and its brand.

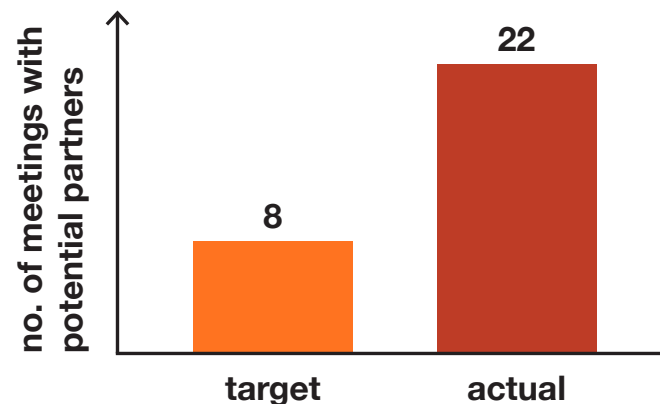
A [prospectus](#), [a short summary](#) and a project idea guide were developed in order to reach out to potential partner groups, alongside a [simple website](#) where they could be accessed.

Recruitment phase

Sept–Nov 2017

A target was initially set of meeting with at least 8 potential project partner groups. Ultimately, between October and November, 22 different potential project partners were met with to discuss their idea for involvement with Amongst It.

As part of Open State, Vicki-Jo Russell of Trees for Life and Robin Parkin of Hinterland Innovation delivered a 2-hour workshop. Ian Sellar of DEW coordinated a mobile stall gathering information about Amongst It branding and storytelling which collected survey data from over 100 people.





Grant round

Nov–Dec 2017

\$20,000 of grants was allocated to Conservation SA by DEW in order to support the development of Amongst It projects. The working group advertised these grants via direct outreach and promotion to a range of groups, including the Friends of Parks, the Office of Recreation and Sport, Conservation SA and DEW networks.

We were excited to see that demand for funding vastly outstripped our prototype budget, indicating strong interest amongst the community. We received 28 applications requesting a total of **\$96,603**. A panel consisting of members of the working group and Conservation SA CEO, Craig Wilkins, decided to allocate \$15,000 to 7 grant applicants and \$5000 to further develop two potential projects that we felt were missing from the line-up.

Prototyping

Jan 2018 onward

The grant recipients and related Amongst It projects are outlined on pages 8–18. These projects were scheduled to run between January and May 2018. However, 2 of the larger projects ultimately took place in November 2018 and April 2019,

Following each event, the grant recipients were asked to complete an evaluation form outlining where they felt they were successful, the responses they received from participants, and how they might run a similar event in the future.

Reflection

June 2018

A reflective gathering of the community that has grown up around Amongst It took place on 12 June 2018, gathering together the project partners and supporters of Amongst It to share the learning that emerged from running their project.

In particular we investigated:

- What worked and why?
- Who attended?
- What would a future iteration of Amongst It need to look like in order to have an impact?

The insights that emerged from this discussion are outlined on pages 19 to 27.



Our projects

10 experiments in
nature connection



Highlighting indigenous knowledge and leadership

Sacred Stories, Sacred Sands

Major 'Moogy' Sumner (AM) (\$4000)

Amongst It partnered with Ngarrindjeri Elder and local SA icon, Uncle Major 'Moogy' Sumner, to host twelve South Australian leaders at a corroboree at Sugars Beach on the Murray Mouth on the Coorong, including SA Minister for Environment and Water, The Hon. David Speirs; Vice-Chancellor of Torrens University, Justin Beilby; and Director of MOD., Kristin Alford.

Uncle Moogy and his family welcomed the group onto Ngarrindjeri land, shared stories of the Coorong and its history, provided a meal and concluded the evening with dancing around the campfire on the beach, in which the attendees also participated.

The event was met with strong interest, and received positive feedback from participants, with individuals appreciating the opportunity to move at a slower pace and be guided through the environment by someone who knew the land intimately.

Insights

- There is appetite amongst local leaders for positive opportunities to listen and celebrate the knowledge of indigenous Australians.
- There is an opportunity to connect leaders to place as part of understanding their role as stewards of the lands and waters of our state.



Celebrating urban nature

Movement, Mindfulness and Wellbeing

Botanic Gardens and State Herbarium (\$5000)

In early April 2019, the Adelaide Botanic Gardens hosted a series of workshops aimed at middle-primary students (years 3–5), in which they were provided with the opportunity to participate in mindful movement and explore the tastes and smells of the Kitchen Garden. This was followed up by a professional development day for teachers in facilitating similar experiments in their own classrooms.

The event was a resounding success, with all 150 spaces booked within a week of registrations opening. Both days received a 100% recommendation rate amongst participants afterwards.

The event also inspired action amongst participants. One student returned from the event and started cultivating her own seedlings to sell on her street!

Insights

- There is appetite for mindfulness activities targeted at children with a wellbeing focus.
- Even brief experiences of connection can be powerful enough to motivate action.
- We remain curious to see how these sessions could translate into changes in the classroom.



Engaging families in a regional location

Tumby Bay Cubby Competition

Eastern Lower Eyre Peninsula Landcare Management Committee (\$1500)

On 12 March 2018, the annual 'Tumby Market @ the Bay' took place on Eyre Peninsula. However, this year, instead of the usual bouncy castle, long line-ups for face painting, and sugary drinks, the organisers held a cubby building competition for family groups to build a structure on the beach, sponsored by Amongst It. A Play Space Kit containing logs and sticks, vines, pinecones, gumnuts, rocks and fabric was allocated to each family group. Awards for Best Structure, Most Creative, Quirky & Quaint were announced later in the day.

We were attracted to the regional focus of this event, the potential to engage whole families, and the prospect of adding a nature activity into an existing event.

This activity was enthusiastically taken up by kids and their parents, and was followed by a [strong write-up](#) in the Port Lincoln Times, with the heading, "Back to nature at market".

Insights

- Although targeting kids, this activity also was a great spectator sport involving their parents.
- Bringing in natural materials is important for minimising damage to local biodiversity, but also limits interaction with the environment itself.
- Local media has an appetite for covering positive stories celebrating local places.



Highlighting health and wellbeing in nature

Forest Bathing Walk

Cancer Care Centre (\$1500)

Forest Bathing is based on the Japanese practice of “Shinrin-Yoku”, and is the practice of ‘bathing’ ourselves in a forest or natural environment, for the widespread health benefits it brings. The Cancer Care Centre provided 5 nature bathing experiences of 3 hours each for a total of 29 participants.

Participants were provided with invitations to connect with their senses to the nature around them, and experience a sense of mindful presence.

This project received a compelling write-up in Boomer Magazine from the Advertiser, focusing on the health benefits of time in nature. While it was hoped that these sessions would be for the benefit of cancer patients, ultimately they were primarily taken up by volunteers and recovered former patients.



Insights

- More active reassurance may be required in order for unwell people to feel comfortable about this kind of activity.
- There is interest amongst local media in the health benefits of time in nature.

Supporting deep reflection and connection

Being Onkaparingan

Community Health Onkaparinga (\$1500)

Through a series of workshops and experiences in nature, Being Onkaparingan took a selection of local Onkaparingan residents on a journey to explore the Onkaparinga bioregion ecologically, geologically, historically and experientially, relating this back to what this means for “Who am I?” and “What am I meant to do?”

Registration for this activity was much stronger than expected with 20 expressions of interest, although the final group consisted of 10–12 regular attendees, as previously anticipated.

A series of rich discussions and experiences took place over the course of 5 workshops over 2 months. The group ultimately took the decision to continue meeting up after the conclusion of the program to continue to discuss how they could take the insights of this program into the wider community in Onkaparinga.

Insights

- Individual story-sharing was a particularly powerful exercise.
- Not all activities will appeal to everyone; events therefore need to be tailored to different groups.





Experimenting with lightness and play

Playful signage

Freerange Future (\$5000)

Freerange Future developed a creative signage campaign—a series of public invitations and reminders to notice, touch, smell and enjoy nature throughout the city and suburbs (see designs opposite).

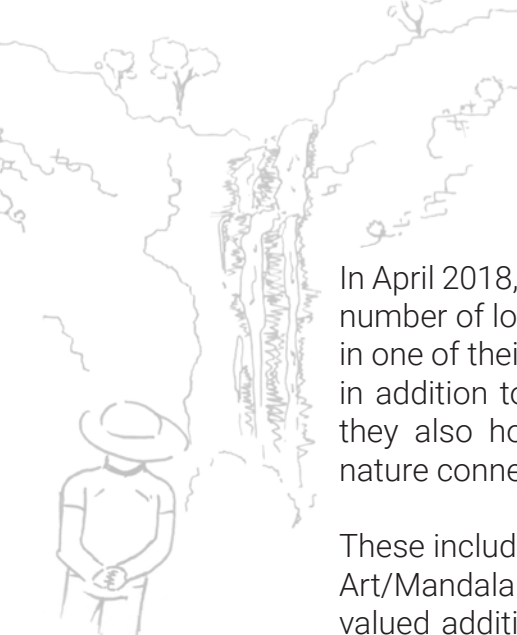
Initially 3 local government partners were approached to participate in this project; however, despite strong interest from biodiversity teams, we have not so far succeeded in finding a host to trial this signage project on the ground.

We welcome expressions of interest from councils, organisations or businesses interested in hosting this trial in a natural environment which they manage.



Insights

- For public/marketing campaigns, beginning the outreach process with both biodiversity and marketing teams may be important for securing champions within local government.
- Developing the campaign itself in collaboration with local government marketing teams, rather than presenting complete designs may mean it is more likely to succeed.
- For councils with many priorities and pressures, innovation projects need to be as easy to roll out as possible.



Adding to an existing event

Morialta MiniBlitz

Friends of Black Hill and Morialta (\$500)

In April 2018, Friends of Morialta and Black Hill hosted a number of local scientists and naturalists for half a day in one of their regular 'mini bio-blitz' activities. However, in addition to the biological surveys, for the first time, they also hosted a number of activities focused on nature connection.

These included sessions for Forest Bathing and Nature Art/Mandala Making. These activities proved to be a valued addition to the event, with the Friends of Black Hill and Morialta keen to undertake similar activities in the future.

Registration for the event was high, although hot weather and booking complications ultimately affected turnout on the day.

Insights

- Activities focused on 'play' and those oriented towards mindfulness can be difficult to integrate into the same event.
- People will readily try things out that they haven't tried before when they are already at an event which has guaranteed value for them.
- Both scientific surveying and nature connection can provide experiences of delight and play in nature; it may be viable to integrate nature connection into other existing survey events.





Transforming interactions through tech

Text a Tree

Amongst It Project (\$1000)

The Hinterland Innovation team volunteered to create a technology platform to enable Adelaide Fringe festival-goers to text a large, lighted lemon-scented gum that forms a memorable part of the Garden of Unearthly Delights each year. The funds were used to cover some of the costs of the texts.

Hinterland Innovation created the personality of the tree along with responses to common kinds of questions. The Garden responded enthusiastically to the proposal, and the installation was launched on 15 February with the opening of the Garden.

Over the course of the Fringe, with no more promotion than a small sign, more than **30,000** messages flitted back and forth between festival-goers and the stunning *Corymbia citriodora* ("Dora").

Insights

- In festive environments like the Fringe, passers-by have an appetite for the unexpected and will try out activities they otherwise might not.
- The community of organisers connected with the Fringe is drawn to adventurous ideas; however, it is challenging to attract media attention at this time.



City Unearthed

Conservation SA (Splash Adelaide Grant)

The launch of Amongst It prompted Conservation SA and Trees for Life to initiate City Unearthed, a three-part experience inviting people to attend to natural beauty in the city through attentive nature photography. This project was supported by the City of Adelaide.

A photography competition, NatureClick, first encouraged people to take photographs that celebrated nature thriving in Adelaide city, and received over 100 submissions. This was followed by a public screening and awards ceremony at the Joinery on Franklin St.

Finally, the prizewinning photos were screened for a number of nights on the walls and windows of the Joinery to bring the winning submissions to the public.

Insights

- The organisers of this event had a clear message that the goal of this project was about mindfulness and celebrating urban nature, and this was carefully integrated through all marketing and communications. This appeared to help the photographers participate in a spirit of attentiveness and joy, as organisers intended.
- The prizewinners' stories of taking the photos were a highlight of the awards ceremony; sharing these personal narratives was a powerful way of inviting others into an experience of mindful connection with nature.



Rainbow Lorikeet, Sandy Horne
1st Prize, Open Section & People's Choice



Complementary project

Growing Communities

Trees for Life (Myer Foundation Grant)

Trees for Life (TFL) wanted to understand how to best engage new volunteers with nature in urban environments. They brought on the services of Hinterland Innovation to launch a seven-month capacity-building project in human-centred design. Over the course of the project, TFL staff were trained in qualitative interviewing, qualitative analysis and prototyping, with the intention of both building the nimbleness of TFL to innovate, and to develop ideas for new ways TFL could connect people with nature in urban environments.

Out of this process, TFL has embarked upon a number of new projects aimed at urban gardeners, and produced a personalised innovation guide for the benefit of TFL into the future.

Insights

- People's gardens were an important site of connection to nature for many of the interviewees. Trees for Life recognised an opportunity to expand the possibilities for how people chose to populate those spaces, integrating more local natives.
- People have difficulty participating in TFL activities when they have full-time work; TFL recognised an opportunity to work with corporates to bring nature into their work environments, or to bring those work environments into nature.
- Recent arrivals into the SA community are often looking to connect with their local place and community—TFL could assist by connecting people with their local natural environments.





Our insights

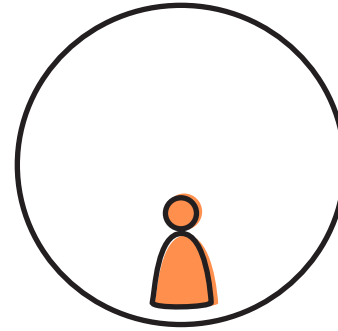
9 things we learned
across all of the projects **19**



#1 There is energy for this work

As evidenced by the demand for meetings in the lead-up to the close of applications for the Amongst It grant round, and by the number of applications for funding, it is clear that there is an active community of providers 'doing' nature connection.

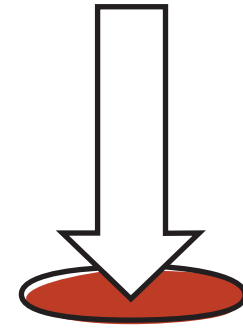
This gives us confidence that there is appetite for Amongst It-style nature connection, and strong potential to build upon and elevate this work.



#2 Wonder works

Some of the most joyous nature connection experiences were those that enabled individuals to glimpse the size and complexity of nature and the extent to which it thrives independently of humanity, inviting a sense of wonder at the complexity of the natural world and helping people feel part of something bigger than themselves.

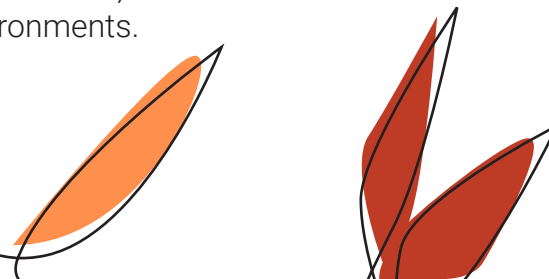
This came into relief particularly through the NatureClick activity, which drew people's attention to nature "getting on with its work," even in urban environments.

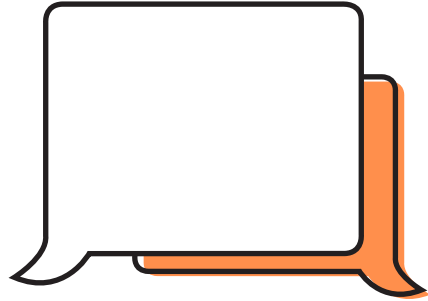


#3 Particular places matter

Rather than simply being an activity in a natural environment, events were most powerful and effective when they invited individuals to observe or interact with a particular place in a way that they had not before, enabling them to see it with new eyes.

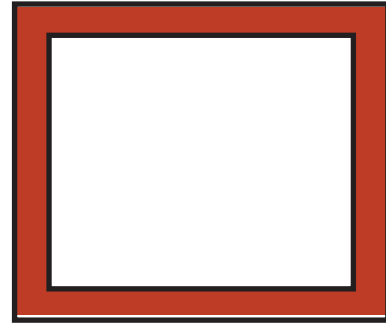
While for some activities, such as cubby building and nature art, bringing materials in was necessary, it was also felt that this distanced the individuals from really interacting with the environment of that place.





#4 Reflecting on our own stories helps

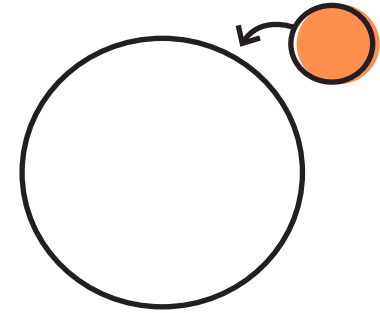
We learned from Forest Bathing and Being Onkaparingan that it was a powerful experience for individuals to share personal stories in a natural environment, or about their connection with nature. This process enabled individuals to touch base with and make sense of their own history with nature, and cement it by sharing with others.



#5 Framing is always critical

The language and framing of the purpose of events was critical. We learned we have to be persistent, focused and clear in how we contextualise the activities as part of Amongst It, from the initial marketing to the instructions given at individual events.

The careful framing of the NatureClick photography competition as a mindful and celebratory exercise, in particular, invited participants to inhabit this mindset throughout the activity, with a strong positive response from participants.



#6 Bolt-ons can be effective

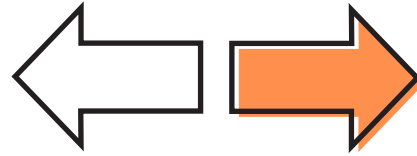
Participation was highest when the activity was 'bolted on' to an existing community event with which people were familiar—such as the Adelaide Fringe or Tumbly Bay Market.

The disadvantage of this approach, however, was that the engagement tended to be more shallow. Nonetheless, it was observed that initial engagement can be deepened by progressively deeper invitations.



#7 Participatory art cuts through

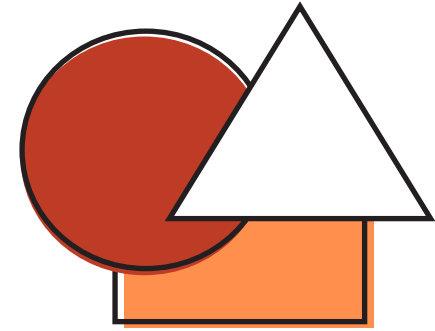
Inviting people to create or co-create art as an expression of their love for the natural world, as with the nature art activity in Morialta or the NatureClick photo competition, appeared to produce particularly strong experiences of connection. Participatory art pieces inviting individuals to externalise their love for nature may be strong candidates for future projects.



#8 Some activities are best separated

It was found through the Morialta MiniBlitz experience that it was sometimes difficult to strike a balance between events that both invited playful and active interactions with nature alongside those which were more mindful or attentive.

While we think further investigation of this phenomenon would be valuable, this was an unexpected and important insight for planning future activities.



#9 Nothing works for everyone

Different people respond to different activities, and it was difficult to find an event that suited everyone—an insight that became particularly clear in the Being Onkaparingan project.

It is therefore important that event organisers understand who they are targeting with a particular activity, rather than try and cater for all.

Tested customer segments:



Existing nature-lovers

The primary participants through all the Amongst It projects were those who already sought out and were interested in nature connection. While it was encouraging to learn that there was already existing demand for Amongst It activities, our mission continues to be to learn how to make these activities more broadly accessible.

Passers-by at festive events

Dora the texting tree and the Tumby Bay market demonstrated that, at festive events, people are open to stopping by and participating in unexpected and playful activities. While these types of engagement are likely to be more brief and superficial, they represent a more accessible entry point for individuals who may not otherwise participate.



Kids

We felt confident that children were a known and familiar segment who, in general, are provided with more opportunities to get active in natural environments, particularly with the recent success of Nature Play. This was validated by the enthusiasm amongst kids to participate in activities such as cubby-building, nature art and nature surveys.



Health/wellbeing enthusiasts

Our experience running these events suggests that nature connection activities can be successfully marketed as health/wellbeing activities. However, while this approach may appeal to those who are already well and interested in maintaining their general health, we may need specific framing and messaging to appeal to those who are unwell, or those who are not already interested in holistic healthy living.

Parents & families

Many parents care about getting their kids outdoors, active and off their devices. Amongst It events so far have had strong appeal to whole families looking for activities to do together. We are interested in the potential for children to act as change agents for their parents.



Untested customer segments:



Wired but disconnected

While we successfully engaged people through their devices in the 'Text a Tree' project, we are yet to learn how to provide a deeper and more transformative experience for those who have little contact with the natural world in their everyday lives. This group continues to be a key target group—we are interested in the potential to reach this group through technology, through play, music or by integrating our activities into existing events.

“I’m no greenie, but...”

There is a substantial cohort of people who do not identify as 'nature-lovers' or 'greenies', but who nonetheless value the contact they have with natural spaces in their everyday lives. Perhaps they cycle through the parklands, enjoy rock climbing or love the beach. We would like to learn better how we can invite these people to recognise and deepen their existing connection to the natural world by incorporating Amongst It experiences into the activities that people are already doing.



Patients/those with limited mobility

Our initial attempts to invite those who were unwell to participate in nature connection met with limited success, as the 'Forest Bathing' activity did not successfully mobilise current cancer patients. However, we are keen to make these experiences accessible to many, and are interested in learning about how to make them more friendly to those who may have physical limitations.

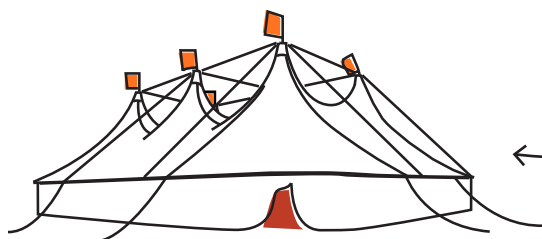




“Dora”, the texting *Corymbia citriodora*

Possible directions

Where could Amongst It head next?



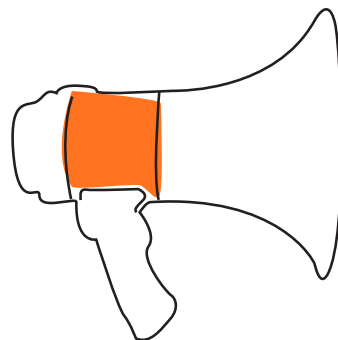
SA Festival of Nature

Intense public engagement

Working with festival curators and arts administrators, Amongst It could morph into a fortnight- or month-long Festival, featuring a range of curated and non-curated events distributed all across the state.

Across this time, we might see forest bathing activities in Belair National Park; nature camps in the Botanic Gardens; scavenger hunts throughout the Barossa.

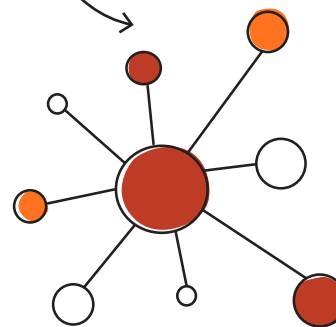
A festival has the advantage of unlocking new sources of funding, and creating density and visibility for this work.



Marketing/Media Campaign

Light public engagement

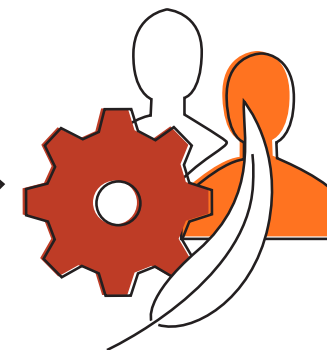
Rather than focusing on creating new nature connection experiences, we might turn our attention to making more visible the great work already happening, with a clear, coherent narrative and dynamic and unexpected visual storytelling.



Learning & Action Community

Sector/provider engagement

Amongst It could focus on supporting new nature connection activities by convening a learning community dedicated to sharing insights, sourcing funding and supporting new transformative experiences.



Nature Connection Program

Targeted engagement

Drawing on the insights from our work so far, and collaborating with innovators in the area of play and gamification, Amongst It could develop a prototype nature connection activity engaging a particular segment of the community—namely those who fall into our ‘untested’ customer segments outlined above.

We develop this into a program that can be scaled and rolled out around the state.



Created by Hinterland Innovation
and The Australian Centre for
Social Innovation (TACSI) for the
South Australian Department for
Environment and Water (DEW).

Contact

Robin Parkin
robin@amongstSA.org.au