



'Knowing what is happening in the ACT and Region'

Executive Summary

A 2019 survey of the
Community Development Network of the ACT & Region's
email list subscribers

November 2019

- *It's a fantastic resource for keeping abreast of what's going on in the region.*
- *It's a great way to keep across everything that is going on. It's the most helpful distribution list I'm on.*

The Community Development Network acknowledges the sponsorship provided by the
ACT Government

Supported by



A selection of quotes

- *I regard CDNet as a vital tool for keeping across a variety of events, seminars, talks, job offers - and assorted information some of which I often share with others...It helps keep our community connected.*
 - *It is an invaluable platform that connects community development and related practitioners in the ACT and region.*
 - *When I first subscribed, I found my next job through CDNet. I then utilised the email list for training and development opportunities. Now in my current role it is more useful to be informed.*
 - *Being informed through the one format of Canberra based community and other activities is super helpful. As well as being able to share about what services, activities we can provide, especially free activities. Always up to date information. It helps me see what is available and what is changing across the region.*
- *[...] Personally I use it for being informed about all manner of events and things, I also do a lot of signing people up if they are looking for work or are after regular specific info about certain areas of our community sector work.*
 - *It is a convenient and current resource of community service opportunities that I may otherwise not be aware of.*
 - *It's free; it appears regularly and frequently; it's full of useful information.*
 - *I have attended courses, lectures and exercise classes that I saw advertised on CDNet. I have informed clients about activities that are relevant to them and I've also passed on information to my supervisor about potential training and activities for our workplace and clients.*
- *Easy to use, text only format means only required information is given, and it gives me and my organisation information about what is happening in other areas of the community.*
 - *Everyone has an opportunity to promote what they're doing free of charge.*
 - *The amount of information available quickly and easily managed.*
 - *It's a quick and easy way to reach a lot of relevant people.*
- *Opportunities for our staff and service users are delivered to our inbox daily.*
 - *One email to send out information to many organisations and I don't need to continually update email addresses - CD Net does that for me.*
 - *Cheap way to post jobs! Also good for circulating info.*
 - *Free promotion service. If it wasn't free it would be costly/laborious to reach the same audience.*
- *Would create a HUGE hole without such a service.*

Executive Summary

CDNet Email Subscriber Survey 2019

November 2019

The Community Development Network of the ACT and Region (known as CDNet) has been supporting the community development sector since 2004 through the following roles and functions:

1. Facilitating the sharing of information on current trends, good practice and activities relevant to community development through an email distribution list
2. Providing information on the role of community development to ensure a sound foundation for healthy and sustainable communities, and
3. Providing opportunities for discussion and learning through seminars, workshops and conferences.

(For information about CDNet, including its history and previous reports, see: cdnet.org.au.)

CDNet has received core annual funding from the ACT Government since 2003 and acknowledges with gratitude the Community Services Directorate (CSD) for continued funding. One of CDNet's current funding requirements is to '*Undertake a stakeholder survey of CDNet to redo the last review in 2014 to inform ongoing funding*'.

There were 2044 email subscribers at 30 June 2019. This report summarises the 106 responses (5%) to a 15-question online survey of email subscribers conducted in July 2019 – a response rate that provides a reasonable sample for analysing qualitative feedback.

The full report – *CDNet Email Subscriber Survey 2019* – is available on the CDNet website [CDNet Email Subscriber Survey 2019.pdf](#)

The link to the survey questions online is

https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/CDNet_survey_2019

Survey results can also be viewed at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-MNZJFJZJ7/>

Key survey findings

Please note that percentages are used when figures are out of all or most of the cohort of 106 respondents. When figures are from smaller subsets, numbers are used to provide a clearer representation than percentages.

- Where relevant, comparisons are made with the findings of a similar survey conducted in 2014 sent to over 2300 subscribers to the CDNet email list to which 154 people (7%) responded.

How long have respondents been using the CDNet email list?

70% of respondents had used CDNet for more than three years and 21% for more than one year. 10% had joined in the last 12 months. Therefore, the respondents are most representative of long-term users of the email list.

- By comparison, 55% had subscribed for over three years in the 2014 survey.

Focus areas of interest/volunteering/work

Unfortunately, this question also did not allow for multiple responses as intended and will be sent again at a later date. Nevertheless, answered by all 106 and having to choose only one area created an interesting ranking of interests in which the most frequently mentioned area of interest were: *mental health* (19 respondents), *disability* (17), *community development* (15), *housing and homelessness* (13) and *children and families* (10).

In answer to the sub-question, '**What is your primary area of interest?**', 68 people answered. Most of these – 46 (76%) – reported either *many* (35) or *all* (11) areas interested them. Again, *mental health* was most frequently mentioned by 18, followed by 11 who named *community development*. A wide range of other areas of interest were mentioned by between 3-9 respondents.

- In the 2014 survey, when the list of focus areas of interest allowed multiple choices, *all* areas were ticked by at least 25% of respondents, with over 60% interested in community development and mental health, and 50% interested in training opportunities and events.

Where people work or volunteer

Three quarters of respondents (75%) work or volunteer in community organisations, 11% in business and 9% in government.

How regularly do subscribers post on CDNet?

60% had ever posted and 40% had never posted; 20% posted about once a month and 16% about once a year. 12% posted about once every three months and 6% once every six months.

- A similar percentage of respondents had ever posted on the email list in 2014 (56%), had never or rarely posted (44%), and posted once a month or more (21%).

In answer to the sub-question, '**What have your posts been about?**', 52 commented. Of these, over half (29) post about *events*, such as workshops and forums. Others posted about *training/courses* (8) or *job vacancies* (8), and some about *groups* (4) or *programs* (4).

- The same four main categories or themes emerged in both survey periods: *events* were most frequently posted about (50% in 2014), followed by *training or courses*, *job vacancies* and *programs*.

Participation in forums, workshops, activities or events seen posted on CDNet

83% said yes, they had participated in events posted on CDNet, and 17% said no. 84 people commented further:

- A third (27) said they had attended '*many*' events, such as a variety of workshops, events and sector forums, or training and jobs, as well as a mix of professional and personal development opportunities. Three said '*too many*' to list
- *Training and development* events were specifically mentioned by a further third (29), while others named workshops, courses, professional development or work-related forums
- 13 described various collegial *networking events*, and
- 8 had not attended any events, giving different reasons, such as lack of time.

Does CDNet save time?

70% felt that CDNet save them time (21 % said 'a lot of time', 41% said 'some time' and 9% 'a little time'). The remaining 30% did not know or ticked 'not applicable'.

- Overall the same percentages (70%) of respondents in 2014 reported that the email list saved them time, with similar percentages for the various amounts of times ticked.

In answer to the sub-question, '**Feel free to elaborate on how CDNet does/could save time or why it does not**', 26 people responded, of whom 21 noted a number of ways – and often more than one – in which the email list saved them or their organisation time. Primarily, receiving information in the one place and daily was useful. Secondly, the platform greatly facilitated sharing, sending and networking information to a wide audience reach in one simple email. Time was also saved searching or researching organisations, training or opportunities. Another notable time-saver was not needing to continually update email addresses as CDNet does that for all subscribers. Four of the five people who said CDNet did not save them time added a 'but' – it was worth the time invested.

Does CDNet save money?

39% felt CDNet saved them money (23% 'some money', 9% 'a little money' and 7% said 'a lot of money'). Of the remaining 61%, 23% ticked 'not applicable', 19% did not know, and 18% said 'not really'.

In answer to the sub-question, '**Feel free to elaborate on how CDNet does/could save money or why it does not**', 15 people responded. Five people mentioned the most obvious saving on *free advertising or promotion of programs, jobs and information*. Two also noted that saving time saves money. A less obvious saving for four respondents was in accessing free or low-cost places in workshops, training courses or professional development opportunities.

- Overall, fewer respondents in 2019 felt that CDNet saved them money than in 2014 when 60% thought CDNet saved them money on advertising and publicity, with estimates of \$50-\$600 saved per month. A possible reason for the higher estimates of money saved in 2014 could be that the question that year specified: *Do you think the CDNet email list saves you/your organisation*

MONEY on advertising/publicity? – whereas in 2019, the question was simpler and possibly ambiguous: *CDNet saves me/my organisation time*. Another difference was the ‘not applicable’ choice ticked by nearly one quarter in 2019, an option not offered in 2014.

What people found most useful about CDNet’s email list

Unfortunately, this question also did not allow for multiple responses as intended – and will be sent again at a later date. One advantage of having to choose one option is seeing what people find the most useful about the email list.

70% clicked ‘*being informed*’ – in equal measure about *specific* events and *more generally* about what is going on in the ACT and region. *Opportunities for clients* were mentioned by 16%. *Training and development* accounted for only 7%. Only four people clicked posting information for *promotion* (4%) and two people mentioned *job-seeking*.

25 people took the opportunity to make extra comments to elaborate their responses: 15 said variations of ‘*All of the above*’ or *many reasons*. and four mentioned *being informed for clients* as well as themselves. Three people noted being able to post their own information and two highlighted training and development opportunities.

- In the 2014 survey, where multiple choices were available, 45% liked the information/being informed. Specifically, people in both surveys mentioned very similar themes: *events*, jobs and training as well as generally keeping up to date and knowing what is going on.

What people valued about the email list

52 people valued the *information* (24), *being informed* (16) or *keeping up to date* (12) – ‘knowing what is happening’ in the ACT region and community sector. Five people mentioned the *broad range* or scope of information.

Subscribers also valued the *opportunities* (16) provided by the email list – for training (17), jobs (9), activities relevant for clients (9) and workshops (6). Some valued the *accessibility* of the list (8) – three noting its ease of use. Others valued the *connection* (9) it provides for the community sector.

- Very similar themes as to what subscribers value about CDNet are mentioned in the 2014 survey.

What works well about the email list?

This question (not asked in 2014) evoked similar themes to those above. Of the 98 people who responded to this question, 25 commented on the *usefulness of the information*– such as the *broad range of subject matter* received in a *timely, convenient* forum; a further 13 noted that it kept them *informed* or *in touch* with what is happening in the community sector.

The *accessibility* of the email list works well for 21 respondents, particularly its *ease of use*, *availability* and *access to the community*. 10 more described the *wide reach and range of audience or readership*, across the region as well as *targeting like-minded organisations and people*.

Other aspects of the email list that worked well were that it enabled respondents to *feel connected* – with other community service providers, practitioners or carers. Others noted *being able to advertise, promote or share jobs, programs and community events*. Three further aspects that worked well were the *regularity* and ‘*real time*’ arrival of the *daily* or daily digest of posts, that it ‘*comes to me*’ – and that it is *free*.

How did people hear about the email list?

62 (58%) found out about CDNet through their *workplace* or *colleagues*. A further 31 (29%) knew through *working in the sector*. A few (7) were told about the email list as *students*.

What does not work well about the email list?

Over a third (31) of the 86 who responded to this question thought there was nothing that did not work well about the mail list, saying variations of ‘nothing’ (16), ‘nil’ (6), n/a (5), ‘can’t think of anything’ (2) or ‘all good’/‘works well’ (2).

The two main themes as to what does not work well were the sheer *volume of emails daily* (19 comments) and various ways in which *email subscribers* did not use the list appropriately. A lesser issue, though it relates to ‘too many emails’ above, is posts that are *repeated* too often.

What could be improved with the CDNet email list?

39 (45%) of the 87 who answered this question had *no suggestions* for improvement, responding with ‘nothing’ (11), variations of ‘it’s fine as it is’(9), N/A (8), ‘not sure’ (6) or ‘nil’(4).

- In 2014, slightly fewer (one third) of the comments under suggestions for improvements either had no suggestions or thought the email list worked well.

There were three major themes among the suggestions: *subscriber education* (15), *email list functionality* (14) and *improvements to formatting* (11).

Subscriber education suggestions aimed to address:

- Unnecessary posts to the whole list (8) such as unsubscribe requests (4) instead of emailing directly to CD Admin; or replying to the CDNet-list rather than the relevant contact person
- Repetition or multiple postings (6) – for example, by posting weekly not daily, or rolling multiple postings into one email
- Vague subject headings, by improving descriptions of the email content (3).

Email functionality suggestions included:

- Hyperlinks (4) in the table of contents of the daily digest summary
- Keeping to one email digest a day (3)
- Attachments being easier to attach or access (2)
- Allowing subscribers to choose their areas of interest (filters) (2)

Email formatting suggestions were:

- Better formatting and layout to make emails easier to read, and for condensed emails
 - More functionality than text alone, which does not allow images, branding or creative design
 - Reducing long tag lines after each post, and long text regarding scrubbed attachment and unnecessary hyperlinks.
- In 2014 suggestions for improvement fell into similar broad themes: *Improving the system from CDNet's side* and *User issues and education*. In 2014 there were many more comments about *the number of unsubscribe messages* that go to the wider email list.

Suggestions regarding plans to update the CDNet website

Of the 73 who answered, 40 had no suggestions, six did not use the website and two rarely did. 23 people made 29 suggestions regarding the website. The two main themes were:

1. To have *links to or lists of services, courses or opportunities* such as jobs or volunteering (7 suggestions). However, two others stressed the importance of such lists *needing to be up to date to be of use*.
 2. To make the website *more user-friendly* (6 suggestions), for example by better use of colour, attachments, table and links.
- In 2014, there were 22 suggestions for improvement varying from satisfaction to ideas for improving the look to a complete overhaul. Given the lack of funds, people were satisfied with a functional and free website.

Actions by CDNet in response to the survey

The CDNet Steering Committee reviewed the survey findings, noting that the survey was complimentary, CDNet is appreciated, and suggestions were about 'small niggly things'. While some similar issues were raised in 2014, a reduction in complaints about/the number of 'unsubscribe' messages going to the whole list rather than to the moderator may reflect the benefits of 'subscriber education emails' sent to the list after the 2014 survey.

Actions by CDNet to address issues raised in the survey are included in the report and include:

- Adding further tips to the website's 'How to post' section for increasing effectiveness of emails, such as shorter emails, stripping out excess information and flattening pdf attachments
- Sending the survey report to the CDNet email list
- Creating a series of emails that address some of the key suggestions for improvement and explaining where some suggestions cannot be addressed, for example, an email list capable of carrying branding and other visuals would cost a great deal more as well as result in bigger individual emails and thus digest lists.

In August 2019 (after the survey), CDNet gained an ACT Government 2018-19 Participation (Digital Community) Grant Program grant of \$1400 (excluding GST) to update the website. CDNet added

\$1000 from its savings to cover the costs of the upgrade which was completed in October 2019. Further ideas for improving the website's content can be added to the new website.

Conclusions

Bearing in mind that respondents were probably 'fans' of CDNet, most having been on the email list for three years or more, a third finished the survey with compliments or thanks in various ways. These provide a useful summary of the feedback overall, which is that they value CDNet as a *worthwhile, valuable or useful resource and service*.

Comparing the 2019 and 2014 surveys found overwhelming similarities in the findings, in particular:

- What subscribers post about themes are identical: *events* were most frequently posted about, followed by *training or courses, job vacancies and programs*
- What subscribers like, value or find useful also had the same themes: being informed being the most useful, followed by events, jobs and training as well as generally keeping up to date and knowing what is going on
- Overall the same percentage (70%) of respondents in both survey periods reported that the email list saved them time
- While overall fewer respondents in 2019 (39%) felt that CDNet saved them money than in 2014 (60%), the difference probably reflects the differences in the question and answer options.

In conclusion, two quotes capture the value of the CDNet list to subscribers and its simplicity:

- *It is so important to have one central system for accessing this information.*
- *Don't get too fancy. It's easy to be seduced with tech improvements but the reality is the CDNet works and has done so for a very long time, let's not muck round with it.*

Further information

Contact: secretariat@cdnet.org.au

Visit cdnet.org.au

Full report [CDNet Email Subscriber Survey 2019.pdf](#)