

Sustainability Reporting 2020

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Enriching Canning

Kaya all! Thanks so much for tuning in, and staying on!

What does Sustainability REALLY mean?

It's not nearly as complicated as we make it sound!

It simply means the ability to maintain, or sustain, something indefinitely.

BUT...

...maintaining something indefinitely requires us to acknowledge the nature of a resource, and to manage the way we use that resource.

So I want to acknowledge something that I know we're all aware of, particularly those of us who have worked long in the sustainability space – but it doesn't hurt to give ourselves a collective reminder.

NOT all resources on the planet are naturally replenishing – many are finite, like fossil fuels, coal and minerals - and we're consuming them at a rate which means that future generations will not be able to access them and their quality of life might therefore be compromised.

And even those resources that we think **are** renewable – like wood, water, clean air, healthy soils etc. – are being consumed or polluted at rates wherein they simply can't replenish or repair themselves as fast as they are declining, and in many cases are being irreparably damaged.

And resources aren't just physical things either – our community capital, our local economy, our health and safety, our happiness – these too are resources that can be eroded if not valued, nurtured and protected and to my mind, in some respects at least, are being eroded.

This is a massive inequity and an issue of moral responsibility, which I believe is a responsibility of all levels of government, and one which currently is poorly serviced by all levels of government – including our own.

Local government, given what we collectively build, buy, consume and dispose of, has a massive environmental, social and economic impact – both locally, and more broadly.

But this also provides us a massive opportunity, if we work together, to find some consistency in targets and measurement and aggregate our positive impacts and our collective energy.

In sustainability – bigger really is better.

We're actually awesome.



I also want to acknowledge that local governments - Canning included - already do an incredible amount of work in the sustainability space – even if sometimes we don't acknowledge or communicate the impact our projects and programs have.

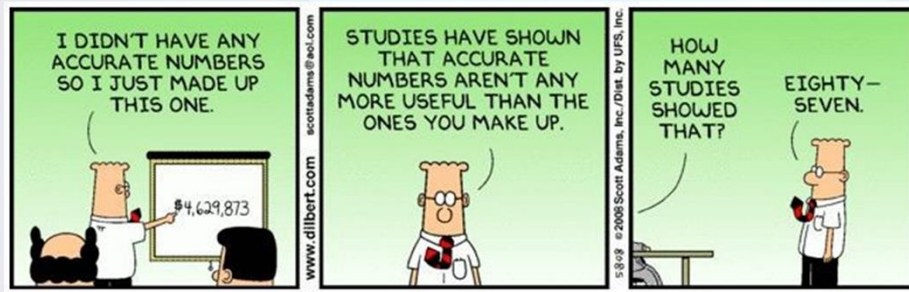
I'm going to be bold and say that, even if you don't necessarily think of the work that you do in local government as 'sustainability'... you are, on a daily basis, doing work that impacts both the sustainability of your Council and of your community.

Many local government have already set internal targets – and are tracking some of them as much as they are able. Some have set their bar really high!

Local government has strategies coming out of its ears, and action plans and policies to boot. We're signed up to all kinds of national and international alliances and programs.

We're active and intentional... but wouldn't it be amazing if we could also demonstrate, that we were effective and impactful, both locally and collectively?

You can't manage, what you don't measure...



...and even worse... you can't communicate it!

Unfortunately though, local governments are, if we're honest, not doing a great job across the board of capturing and communicating meaningful stories about our sustainability impacts – both positive and negative – to our community, our stakeholders and frankly, ourselves!

We've heard today about a number of the great strategies and reporting mechanisms put in place by individual local governments to track their own impacts – and it's great that some local governments are working in this space. But let's be brutally honest here, because there's not much time for us not to be, most activities and services delivered by local governments in Western Australia and beyond are currently not monitored or measured against shared sustainability benchmarks, against other local governments, or against national or international sustainability targets...

Basically – while we're all kinda doing it... we're all doing it differently, and I believe that as a result we're missing some significant opportunities.

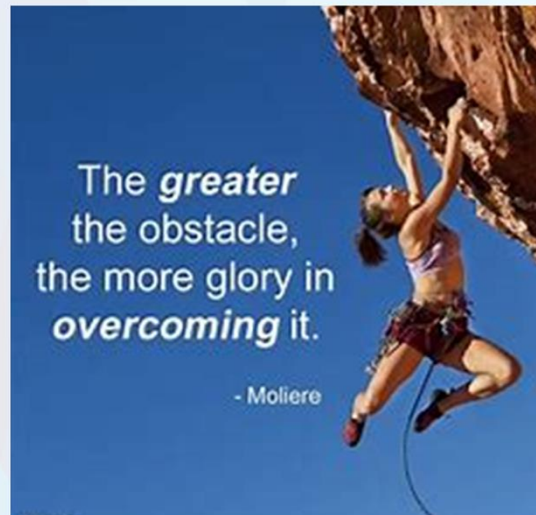
Our inconsistency leads to an inability to strive for common targets or benchmark against each other, it leads to an inability to demonstrate collective progress, and it increases the risk of local governments not realising major operational resource and cost reductions. Beyond that, it limits our ability to capitalise on the reputational recognition and public trust of responsible 21st century governance – which we so sorely need in this era of government.

Across local government, the cumulative impact of the work we do is massive and

impressive. Imagine if we were able to properly capture those impacts, and communicate those both at an individual local government, and at a sector level, how powerful and inspiring that message of progress would be.

Imagine the advocacy position it would put us in to actually know how the investment we collectively make into sustainability was translating into real, on-ground impact – reducing emissions, conserving water, improving resource recovery, changing lives.

So why are we not doing it?



Well... here's the short list, which was identified at a workshop I'll tell you all about a bit later...

- Lack of (or undervaluing of) appropriate resourcing including finances, people and time.
- Lack of leadership support and/or political will.
- The definition of sustainability is still unclear and inconsistent across Councils.
- The value of investment in sustainability is not clear.
- There is inconsistency and uncertainty in the measurement of qualitative data such as community capital, social impact and wellbeing.
- Sustainability is complex and systems need to be adaptable to a changing environment.
- Local government is complex and multifaceted and sustainability requires cross-organisational buy-in.
- Sustainability is not considered core business and is therefore not seen as a priority.
- Difficulty of accessing corporate data across multiple data types and sources.
- Difficulty accessing appropriate data from utilities.
- Difficulty of generating appropriate baselines to measure against.

And believe it or not... that really was the short list – our consultation for this project identified over 60 barriers to local government sustainability reporting. So if that's our starting point, it's no wonder we're collectively finding it difficult to manage.

But the recently published research by WALGA, developed in collaboration with the City of Perth through the Murdoch University internship program kind of sums it up... while many tools have elements of applicability, there is no real fit for purpose solution – because none of the solutions on offer have been designed **by local government for local government**.

Looking across a number of sustainability reporting tools used by local government it is evident that most are being 'adapted to fit' from tools developed for other kinds of organisations.

While most of the tools can support the collection of data to measure corporate sustainability, for local government, given the breadth of services and projects undertaken by any given Council, there is an inordinate amount of manual handling and onerous cross-organisational information gathering, and in many instances, that huge burden tends to fall to a single officer. You know who you are... and I salute you.

Additionally many present a barrier simply in their ongoing and often escalating costs. Not to mention that pesky inconsistency between tools and between organisations.

Canning goes rogue (or mad).



For those of you who know me well, you'll know two things about me... that I've never been able to sit idly by and wait for someone else to fix / break things, and that I have a perverse affection for seemingly insurmountable challenges.

You'll also possibly know that I've been bouncing around local government sustainability, climate change and environmental policy for many years – in NFPs, at WALGA and at 4 different LGs... so I've pretty much seen every reporting tool there is (and worked with many of them), so I've become intimately familiar with both their good sides, and their bad.

So when the City of Canning challenged me to ensure that the City could track and communicate its own sustainability progress and demonstrate financial, social and environmental benefits of the City's investment in sustainability, I was quick to point out that, while I could do it for us, it would be so much more impactful if we jumped out of our rusty silo and did it for local government. You know, go big or go home.

So with an incredibly supportive Executive Manager, a Sustainability Board and a CEO who believes in innovation and creativity I was afforded a budget to build a minimum viable product that we can continue to develop, in the hopes that in time, we can co-

create with supportive local governments, a system that actually can, fit all.

So we've jumped, head first, into the sustainability performance tracking space.

Our challenge was to bring the diverse local government sector together around common sustainability goals and find a way to **measure, monitor, manage and market** the progress of both individual local governments, and the collective local government sector, towards those goals.

Are we mad? **Clearly.**



We know that local governments are vastly different across Western Australia (in size, in socio-economics, in demographics, in resourcing and finances etc.), the challenge we face as a team is to find an equitable solution that is adaptable enough to be of value to the smallest rural local government, while being robust enough to accommodate the complexity of the largest city local government; and to enable meaningful benchmarking for the sector across a wide range of sustainability goals, targets and indicators.

Our intention over the next 6 months or so, is to agree a set of SMART sustainability targets, and co-design with key stakeholders and partners from across the local government sector, an online platform to demonstrate progress towards them against environmental, economic and social indicators.

These targets will provide a set of easy-to-assess sustainability criteria for local government operational and strategic decision-making documents (like our strategies, business cases, procurement processes, project plans, Council items, policies etc.), and will simplify the process of measuring, tracking, evaluating and reporting against sustainability targets over time.

It will also make it simple for to demonstrate and communicate the positive sustainability outcomes of individual projects, and how they contribute to the overall sustainability of local government, helping sustainability professionals like me communicate the very real business case for sustainability investment to our Executives and Elected Members.

What have you done so far?



Late last year we held an initial design thinking workshop, with an inter-organisational crew of over 40 local government and industry sustainability specialists who kicked off the co-design process. At this workshop we tested our initial assumptions and gathered data on sector-wide needs and expectations, and opened the invitation to participants to continue to input into the process.

Specifically, we sought to answer the following questions:

- Starting from where we are – what are the **highest order sustainability goals** that we need to measure, monitor, manage and market across local government?
- Starting from where we are – what are the **best indicators for achievement** of those goals? This will help us to set SMART targets, and outline the progress measurement processes that will best demonstrate outcomes.
- How might we **co-design a shared-use online tool** that meets the needs of local government across Western Australia (and potentially beyond) that allows us to achieve the above?

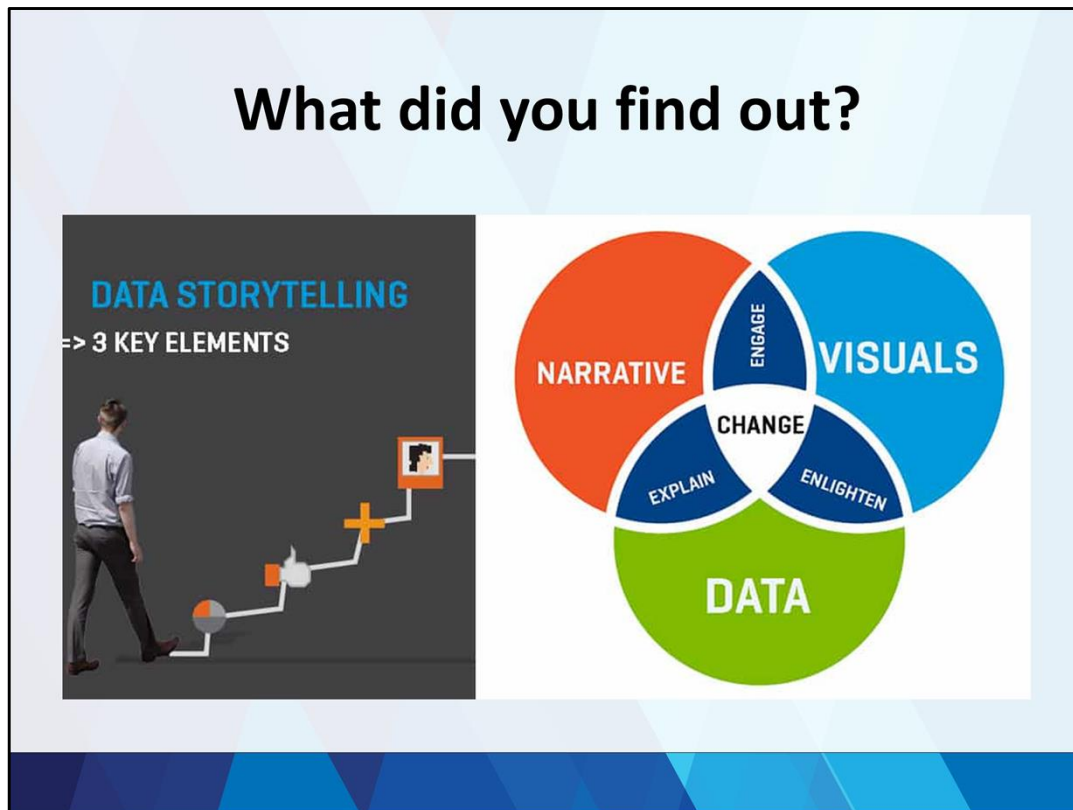
The group identified the highest order sustainability goals that local government seeks to measure and determined some indicators to demonstrate progress towards them; we developed a prioritised list of the user requirements of a tool that would provide a shared solution to the challenges outlined previously and we identified our key communication strategies, through which we would engage our key stakeholder groups. And as alluded to previously, we also identified the major barriers for local government to sustainability reporting – so that we can be sure to address them in design, rather

than running into them post roll-out.

From this workshop we walked away with a series of great recommendations to help us formulate the design specifications for our procurement process to find the perfect software developers – with the right blend of passion, creativity and practicality.

And we've partnered up with an amazing crew of entrepreneurial software developers at Ninja Software to help us break down the barriers to tracking sustainability performance for local government.

What did you find out?



Possibly our most important learning was that few people in the room were actually interested in data per se, but in the sustainability stories that data can help to tell our Council and community to engage them in changing behaviours – if we use it well.

While we know we need accurate data to demonstrate impact – we identified that perhaps, given the myriad ways that local government collect and store data, and the multiple tools and software they use to do so, this tool shouldn't seek to be another 'data repository', but a project impact aggregator, giving project owners responsibility for the data they use to verify the sustainability impacts of their projects.

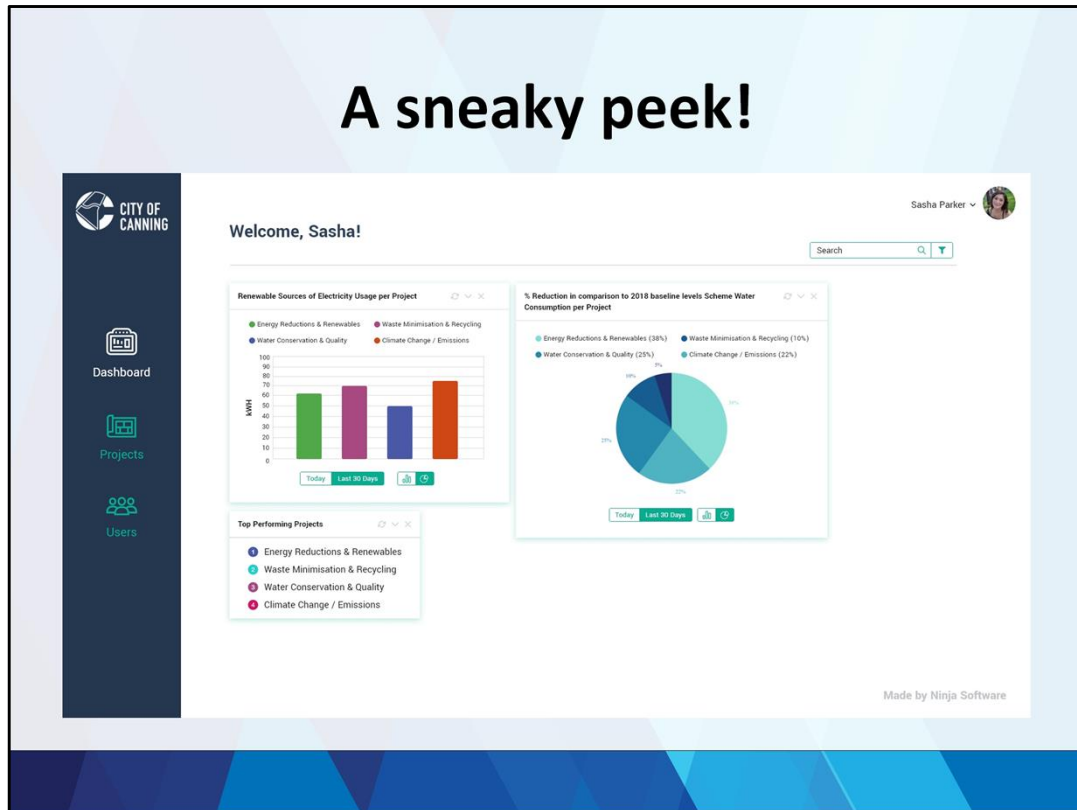
We found out that local government actually do seek to measure very similar things... not surprisingly... and while we won't be able to incorporate them all into our MVP, we will seek to embed them as the platform grows.

Our top five areas of interest for reporting are Waste; Water; Energy / Climate Change; Transport; Biodiversity / Natural Environment.

We're also interested in tracking Health & Happiness; Community Capital / Social Impact; Local Economy / Social Enterprise; Innovation & Leadership and Development / Planning & Infrastructure.

And lastly, we found out that people were concerned with being able to map progress against other important goals and commitments of local government, specifically their Strategic Community Plans and the Sustainable Development Goals.

A sneaky peek!



We thought we'd give you a very quick tour of what we're working on so far – and while this is very preliminary, it might give you an idea of the simplicity of the user journey we've developed for users of the system.

As a project owner you'll be able to access your space with your unique user logins, where you'll see your dashboard, like this one, demonstrating the progress of your projects, and their impact.

And another one...

The screenshot shows a web application interface for the City of Canning. On the left is a dark blue sidebar with the 'CITY OF CANNING' logo and three menu items: 'Dashboard' (with a dashboard icon), 'Projects' (with a building icon), and 'Users' (with a group of people icon). The main content area is titled 'Profile Details' and contains a form for user information. The form fields are: 'First Name' (filled with 'Sasha'), 'Last Name' (filled with 'Parker'), 'Email Address' (filled with 'sasha.parker@canning.wa.gov.au'), 'Password' (masked with dots and a toggle icon), and 'Contact Number' (filled with '(08) 9682 4093'). Below these fields is a 'Profile Avatar' section showing a circular profile picture of a woman, with a 'Remove' link below it. At the bottom of the form are two buttons: 'Save Changes' (green) and 'Cancel' (grey). In the top right corner, there is a user profile dropdown menu showing 'Sasha Parker' with a dropdown arrow, and links for 'Profile', 'Notifications', and 'Logout'. The footer of the page says 'Made by Ninja Software'.

CITY OF CANNING

Dashboard

Projects

Users

Profile Details

Account

Email Notifications

First Name

Sasha

Last Name

Parker

Email Address

sasha.parker@canning.wa.gov.au

Password

••••••••

Contact Number

(08) 9682 4093

Profile Avatar

Remove

Save Changes Cancel

Made by Ninja Software

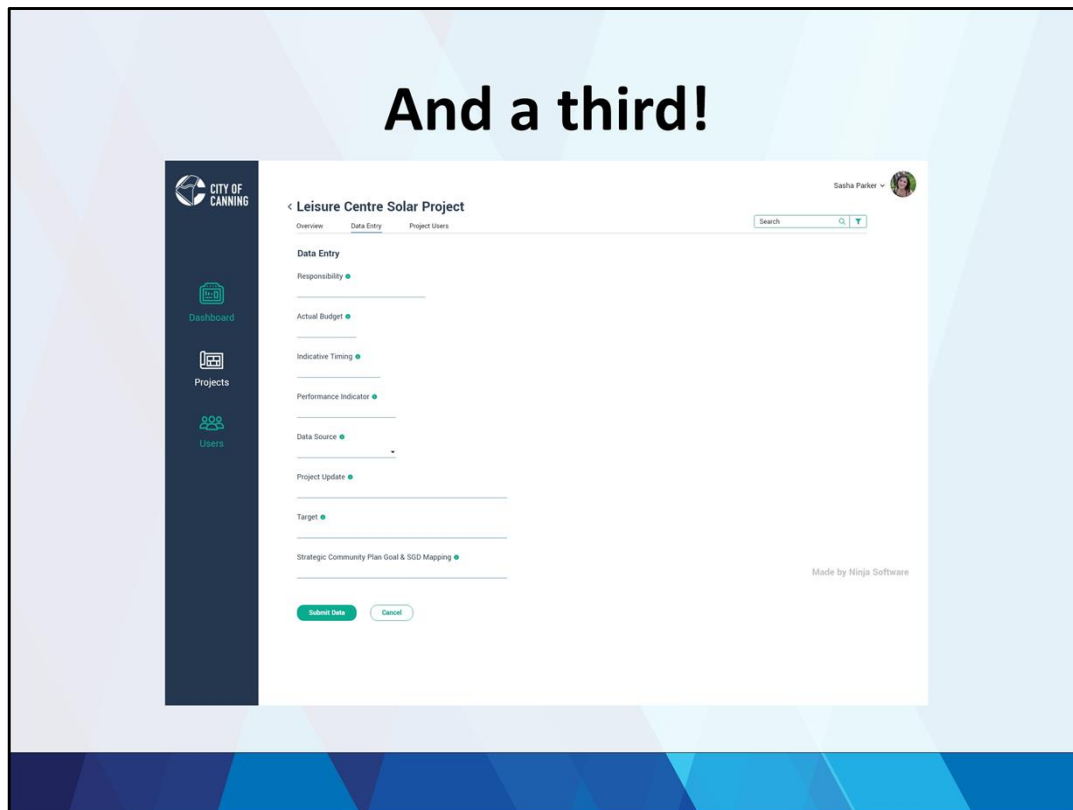
Sasha Parker

Profile

Notifications

Logout

You'll be able to add your unique user profile.



You can add a project and details pertaining to that project's impact, linking it to a specific SMART target and indicators.

This disperses responsibility across the organisation – meaning that there is no one gatekeeper for information, and no onerous burden for sustainability reporting. It can be linked to internal rewards and recognition programs for sustainability too!

This can also be linked to your Council specific project management frameworks if you have them, so projects are flagged for inclusion as soon as they are approved via Council.

And one of the key features here is that we intend to make the project criteria captured here consistent with corporate documents like Council reports, business cases and procurement processes, to make sure outcomes are linked to budgets and decision making. Of course – this will require something of a policy review post launch of this system... but we think it will be very much worth the effort.

And a fourth!

CITY OF CANNING

Edit Project

All Projects Create a Project

Project Name
Climate Change / Emissions

Description
Reducing carbon footprint in all sites

Private
Yes

Project Owner
Search for a project owner

Project Members
Search for a project member

Image
Drop your image or click here to upload

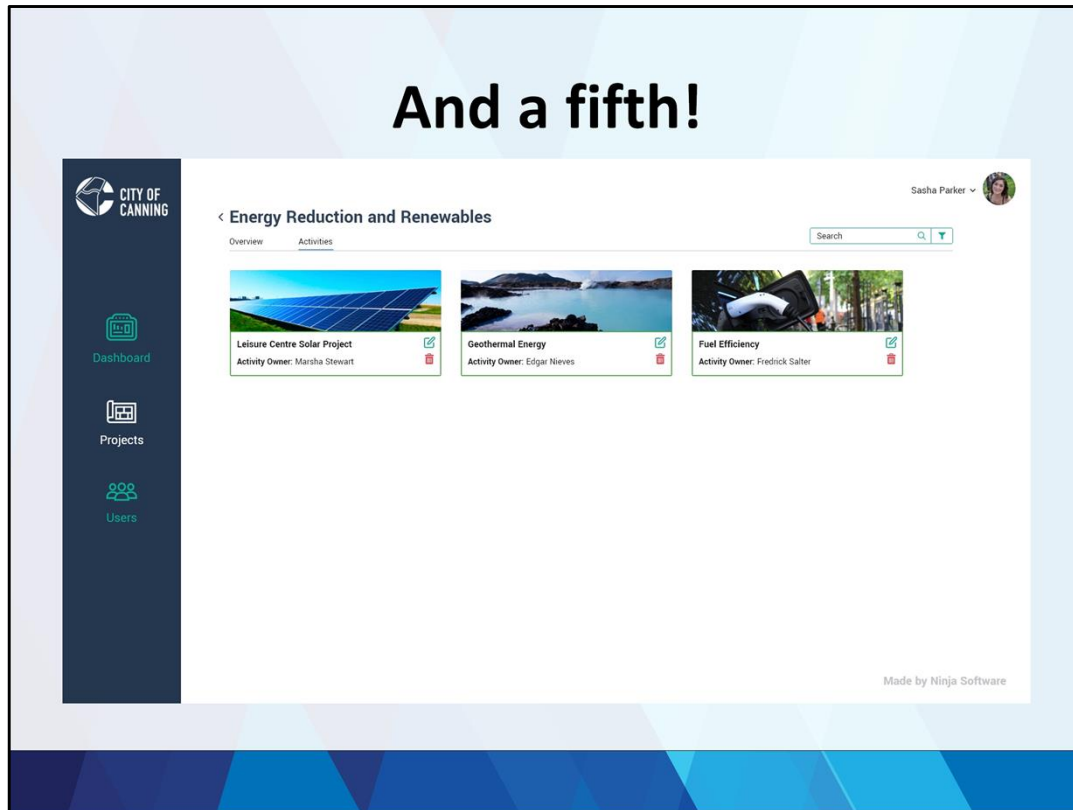
T3shuti.jpg

Save Changes Cancel

Made by Ninja Software

You'll also be able to add your project team to the project at various permission levels and they'll be able to support you to ensure all details and data are correct and up-to-date. So while each project owner will have responsibility for periodic update on their specific projects, they can enlist the help of their project team to make sure the burden of reporting is quick, easy and hassle-free.

And a fifth!

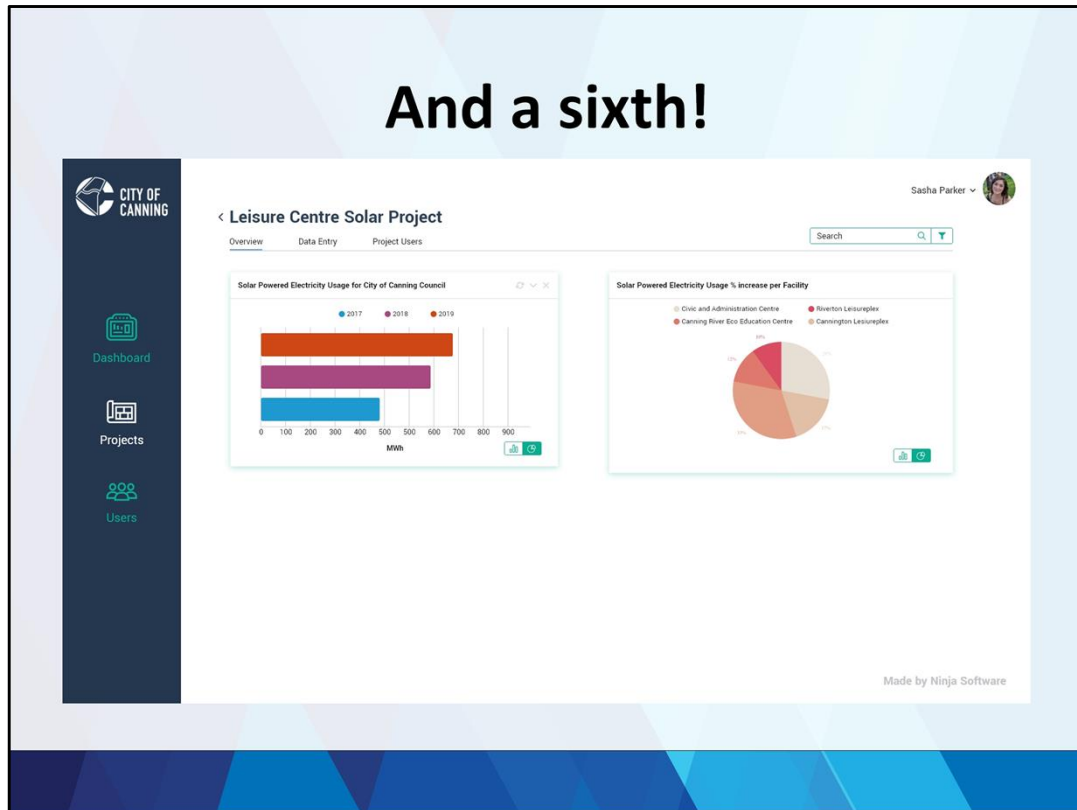


As an example – if you were the project owner of the leisure centre solar project, you would create a brief project profile, adding details of the energy generation expected from the project, and link it to the overall target of 100% renewable for council operations by 2030. You could also map it against SDGs and SCP goals and link it to other targets as appropriate (i.e. emissions reduction targets etc).

You will be sent update notifications on a periodic basis to denote percentage completeness of the project, or verified impact at that point in time.


This project will add to the aggregated totals of all projects linked to these targets, demonstrating how close your Council is getting to that all important strategic commitment.

And a sixth!



You'll be able to see that graphically represented and be able to download graphs and stats for reports, or drop short reports directly out of the platform.

We're keeping it simple and clean – and we're keen to hear your feedback!



Thank you for your time and
patience!

Drop me a line if you'd like to chat, be involved,
support or just have a good whinge about
sustainability reporting for local government...
After all, necessity is the mother of invention.

Melanie Bainbridge

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This project doesn't end here and there's much more to talk about - so we want to extend an invitation to stay in touch with the project, and be part of the co-design process going forward.

Please feel free to get in touch.