



From Seed to Success

A Guide for Community Conservation Projects

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Te Papa Atawhai

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1. Introduction

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

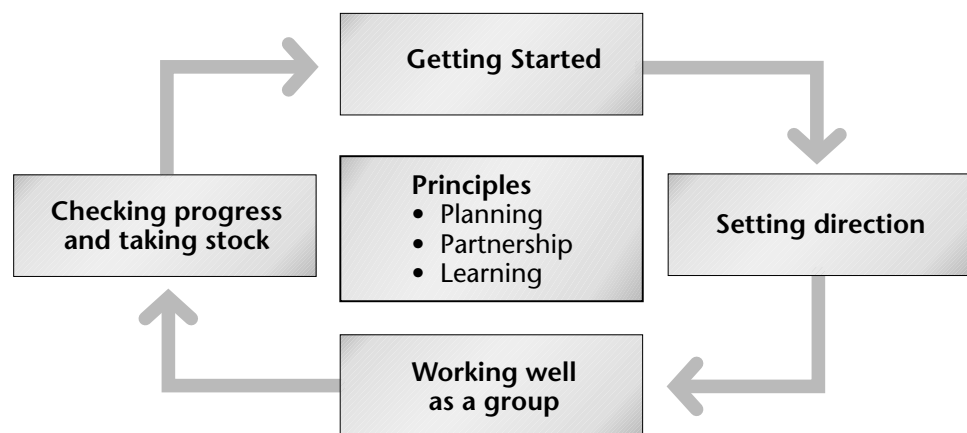
This Guide is designed for people involved in community conservation projects. It provides advice about establishing, maintaining, improving and evaluating community conservation projects, particularly those involving partnerships.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This Guide is divided into six sections. Section 2 looks at the three key principles behind successful community conservation projects.

Sections 3 to 6 consider each of the stages typically involved in a community conservation project:

- Getting Started;
- Planning Your Direction;
- Working Well as a Group;
- Checking Progress and Taking Stock.



Each section looks at the practical needs and typical steps involved for the different stages of a community conservation project.

WHY WORK TOGETHER FOR CONSERVATION?

Community conservation is about actively involving people in projects that sustain and improve the natural environment.

Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand.

A number of different agencies have conservation responsibilities. These include the Department of Conservation, the Ministry of Fisheries and regional and district councils. The challenges facing conservation of our native plants and animals in land, water and marine areas are huge. This reality is recognised in *Our Chance to Turn the Tide*¹, and *Restoring the Dawn Chorus*², which assert that only a combined effort between agencies and the community will arrest the decline of many species and habitats.

Fortunately, New Zealand has a well-established tradition of community involvement in conservation. Non-government agencies, community groups and individuals are active in a wide range of day-to-day conservation management activities. Examples include QEII National Trust, Native Forest Restoration Trust, local Lions and Rotary clubs, Junior Naturalists, tramping clubs, the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society and many more.

Partnerships are often the best way to achieve conservation results. Where communities become involved in conservation activities with agencies, experience shows a host of benefits³:

- Agency efforts benefit from local knowledge.
- Local groups, in turn, benefit from expert advice.
- A shared sense of responsibility and community pride is built.
- Things get done quicker and often more cheaply.
- Trust is developed between different groups and interests.
- Skills and capacity are increased.
- Enforcement costs reduce (involvement can encourage self-regulation).

¹ The New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy (DOC and Ministry for the Environment, 2000)

² The Department of Conservation's Statement of Intent 2002 - 2005

³ Adapted from Forgie et al 2001

THE CHALLENGES FOR COMMUNITY CONSERVATION

Within communities, there are often conflicting interests and goals. In addition, communities and agencies don't always have the same interests, needs or priorities. Other challenges that can affect both the effectiveness of groups or individuals and the agencies they are working with include:

- time and money constraints;
- lack of skills;
- sustaining enthusiasm over time;
- gaps in scientific and technical knowledge;
- difficulties in working together and sharing decision-making;
- keeping everyone informed through regular communication.

These challenges can (and need to) be addressed at the group level. This Guide looks at ways of dealing with these challenges, drawing on the experiences of successful groups, and the theories and models explained in the literature.

Case study: Agreeing on priorities prompts joint action

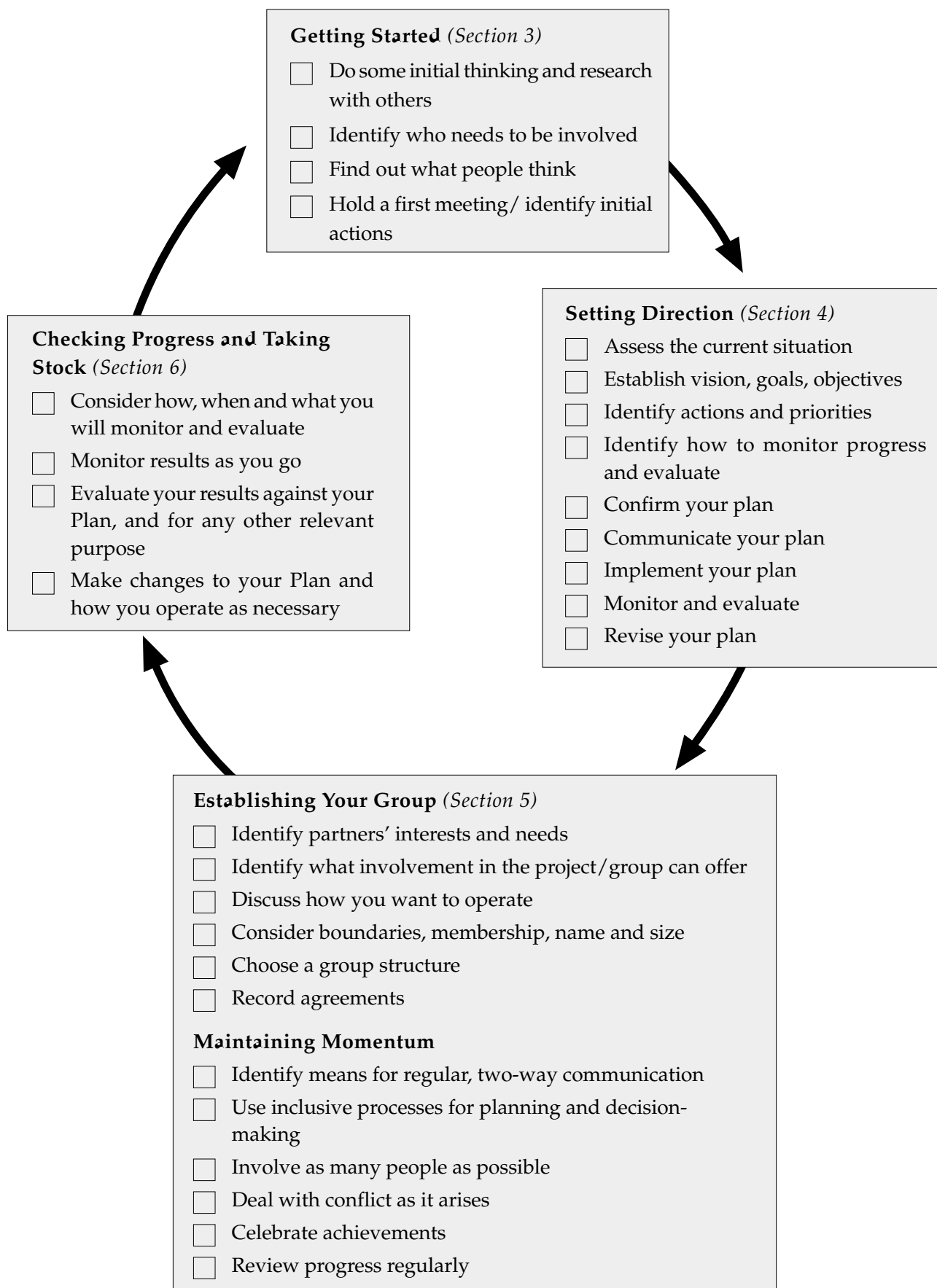
After approaching the Charleston community about conservation issues, DOC facilitated a forum process involving a community meeting and follow-up workshops. While DOC had initially gone to the community with two particular ideas, it was soon apparent through this process that the community had other priorities.

As a result of the forum, the Charleston Waitakere Community Group was formed. The group has taken on three initiatives working collaboratively with DOC:

- replanting Constant Bay with rātā, using funding from Project Crimson;
- a partnership between the Buller District Council, DOC and the Community Group to protect little blue penguins and their coastal habitat. This included new dog rules, signs and public information;
- a multi-sport event (held in August) under the auspices of the Community Group.

A number of people in the community are now keen to further the initial DOC idea of building a track along the old Argyle water race. This proposal will be followed up after the other initiatives are complete.

A GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PROJECTS – SUMMARY



2. Principles for community conservation

Certain conditions are needed for community conservation projects to work. According to Australian researchers⁴, the key ingredients for community action are:

- a pressure for change;
- a shared vision;
- capacity for change;
- actionable first steps.

People must feel a genuine need to improve or change the existing situation. They also need time to agree on priorities⁵ and must be willing to work with others to do so.

Successful community conservation projects tend to reflect three key principles:

- they are **well planned**, using inclusive planning and decision-making processes;
- they are **partnerships** that uphold Treaty of Waitangi principles and place high value on co-operation, trust and respect between all involved;
- they create opportunities for enjoyable **learning** and participation throughout the project, achieving lasting results.

These principles provide a touchstone for those involved in community conservation. They summarise the success factors apparent in effective projects. This section explains each principle in detail.

⁴ Chamala and Mortiss 1990

⁵ Fitzgerald 1999

1. THE 'PLANNING' PRINCIPLE

Successful community conservation projects:

- are well planned, using inclusive planning and decision-making processes.

There are many tasks and issues involved in the planning of any activity, including community conservation projects.

resources	budgets	objectives
contingencies	targets	timelines
monitoring	authorities	reporting
evaluation	responsibilities	reviews
goals	tasks	risks
people	deadlines	standards

Regardless of the particular approach you take to planning your project, it is always important to:

- Involve everyone. Community conservation projects are effective where all parties are involved in the planning and decision-making at all stages.
- Identify priorities. Rome wasn't built in a day, and your conservation project won't be any different! Spend time setting priorities to help guide your activities.
- Be flexible. Listen to what people are saying and if necessary, explore other options to get the job done. If a new opportunity comes up, you may want to take it. While it is difficult to plan for flexibility, it is possible.
- Build in ways to check your progress. It's important to plan how you'll 'take stock' of your progress – see Section 6 to find out more.

These things will all help in building a 'sustainable' project. Remember '*if you fail to plan, you plan to fail!*'



For more ideas about planning, see Section 4.

Case study: Short and long term goals bring dual benefits

Utakura Native Forest Restoration Project involved everyone in its planning, with the final plan combining the ideas of tangata whenua, Project Crimson, DOC and immediate neighbours. The group used workshop tools such as brainstorming to help with the planning process.

The group planned for things that could be done straight away, as well as longer-term actions. This enabled it to use the initial enthusiasm early on to achieve easier tasks and those that could be done with existing resources. By identifying longer-term actions (up to 5 years) the group established a clear sense of direction for the future.

2. THE 'PARTNERSHIP' PRINCIPLE

Successful community conservation projects:

- are partnerships that uphold Treaty of Waitangi principles and place high value on co-operation, trust and respect between all those involved.

A partner is a *'person associated with others in a business of which he/she shares risks and profits.'*⁶ Partnership for effective community conservation projects involves creating a situation where everyone involved, whether they are individuals, representatives of groups, agencies or iwi, jointly holds a 'stake' in the project. This includes a stake in deciding what the project does and how the project is undertaken, and ownership of its success or failure.

Partnership involves:

- a power sharing relationship (not necessarily equal but should be agreed);
- shared interest and investment (again this may vary, but should be agreed);
- shared decision-making and responsibility;
- trust, co-operation, support and respect for each other.

Case study: Coromandel communities find resources

The Kauaeranga Tramping Club raised \$34,000 for a priority DOC track upgrade that had been programmed over five years to spread cost. The extra money enabled the work to be completed in three years, using volunteers and employing local people.

At another Coromandel site, local bach owners suggested to DOC that a track be built to allow better access to a pā site. A staff assessment concluded that while there was an immediate safety issue to be addressed, this could be done with a \$200 sign, while access was not due for any immediate upgrading. However, staff also suggested that if local people raised the \$8,000 needed to get the materials on-site, DOC would consult with tangata whenua and Historic Places, and move the project up the priority list.

The residents reached the fundraising target two weeks before the deadline DOC had set, and the track went ahead. An opening ceremony was held with a blessing from Ngāti Hei. The DOC community newsletter noted that the project had been a real team effort, building relationships with both iwi and the community.

⁶ Concise Oxford Dictionary 1982

Building effective partnerships between contributors to a conservation project

To build effective partnerships, you need to:

- build and maintain relationships;
- discuss and agree how the group should operate;
- establish means for regular communication;
- deal with conflicts as they arise;
- use inclusive or 'participatory' decision-making when planning and implementing group activities.

Building and maintaining relationships

Partnerships only work if there are good relationships between the partners. Building and maintaining relationships is essential for effective community conservation.



See Section 5 for more ideas about building relationships.

Where the partnership includes parties to the Treaty of Waitangi (Crown and tangata whenua), effective partnerships will also acknowledge:

- the unique status of tangata whenua and associated obligations;
- kāwanatanga (governance) and statutory responsibilities of agencies.

If you are not a member of a Māori community, and unfamiliar with the local situation, you'll need to understand who the local people are, their kawa (protocols), and who has interests in the taonga (cultural treasures) your conservation project is concerned with.



Section 5 has more ideas about how to make contact with tangata whenua.

Case study: Partnerships with Te Parawhau in Whangarei Harbour

The Friends of Matakōhe-Limestone Island are working to restore this unique island in the Whangarei Harbour. In 1990, they undertook a Millennium project to erect a limestone carving as part of their activities.

Following media publicity about the carving initiative, they were contacted by Te Parawhau hapū, who was concerned, as the group holding mana whenua, that it wasn't being involved in restoration efforts. Until this point, the Friends group was unaware of Te Parawhau's connections to the island. Following discussions, Te Parawhau became a permanent member of the Friends' committee. This has enabled the establishment of a strong relationship, and has ensured that its mana whenua is recognised in the restoration of the island.

Agreeing how the partnership should operate

There are many ways of setting up your partnership. In successful partnerships, people discuss and agree how to work together, and take time to regularly review how things are going.



For more ideas about establishing partnerships, see Section 5.

Establishing regular communication

Successful partnerships emphasise the importance of regular two-way communication and information sharing.



Section 5 provides advice on group communication.

Case study: Regular meetings help keep local focus

The Coast Care BOP Programme Advisory Group meets six-weekly to discuss progress and agree on its next actions. The Group comprises representatives from five councils and DOC, who share administrative responsibilities for the coast. It provides a valuable two-way communication link between local projects and volunteers, and the overall programme coordinators.

The involvement of local council representatives has been particularly important in ensuring the project remains responsive to local needs. One community, for example, is planting to provide a sustainable source of pingao for weaving, while another is more concerned with planting for aesthetics and water quality.

Dealing with conflicts as they arise

Conflict is a normal part of groups. The important thing is how a group deals with it.



For ideas about managing conflict successfully, check out Section 5 of this Guide and Section 4 of the *Tool Kit for Community Conservation Projects*.

Using 'participatory' decision-making

Effective partnerships share common goals, which are best established through planning approaches that involve everyone. Similarly, the activities of the project itself should encourage regular involvement by all participants.



For ideas, see Section 4 of this Guide or Section 7 of the *Tool Kit for Community Conservation Projects*.

3. THE 'LEARNING' PRINCIPLE

Successful community conservation projects:

- create opportunities for enjoyable learning and participation throughout the project, achieving lasting results.

How group learning happens

The opportunity to learn is a strong motivator for many people taking part in conservation projects. Community projects offer enormous potential for learning by all participants. This includes learning about the conservation issue and its solutions, learning how to work as a group, and learning about each other as individuals and organisations. Learning may encompass developing practical skills, gaining historical, cultural or ecological knowledge, or deepening one's spiritual understanding.

However, learning doesn't always happen. People usually need to actively participate to gain skills or knowledge. This may come through skill sharing amongst the group, the experience of interaction, or through educational opportunities made available by agency staff or outside experts. Learning needs to have meaning and relevance to people.

Case study: Local involvement builds knowledge and ownership

Education resources that have local relevance are of particular importance for Māori. A DOC staff member in Northland involved in species protection was preparing a resource kete on a particular species. The staff member spent a month visiting local Māori and key community people to collect local and historical information. By involving people directly in the development of the resource, and by ensuring it captured local knowledge and views, a sense of ownership of the material was built. New relationships also grew between Māori, schools and government agencies.

Taking time to reflect is very important for learning. In some situations where a group is very focused on 'doing', they often don't make time to review their progress. Creating time for your group to reflect on progress, and then deliberately using this information to adjust what you're doing and how, will help group members get the most learning from the project (as well as checking the project is on track).

When community education is a major focus for your project

If your group is looking at an activity or event to foster learning about a conservation issue in the wider community, practical guidance is available to help design activities that provide effective environmental education.

A useful reference, *Environmental education: a guide for programme providers*, is published by the Ministry for the Environment. This guide covers how to develop, implement and evaluate strategies and programmes, and is free. See the reference for Blakely et al. (1999) in Section 10 of the *Tool Kit for Community Conservation Projects* to find out how to obtain a copy.

How can our group take a learning approach?

A group can take a 'learning approach' to a community conservation project by:

- taking stock of progress regularly;
- using reflection to guide its next actions;
- building learning opportunities into what it's doing.

Case study: Using a learning approach with Waikato conservation groups

The Rural Community Conservation Project in Waikato used an action research approach to learn about community conservation. This involved steps of research, action and reflection, using the lessons learnt to guide next steps. A steering group of community people and key DOC staff looked at how to enhance community conservation. It also looked at how interactions between DOC and community conservation groups could be improved. Community groups were consulted and many ideas were generated. Priority actions were chosen for a trial including offering workshops, establishing voluntary community advisors, improving communication channels and better access to information. The results were evaluated and checked with the steering group before next steps were planned.

Taking stock of progress

Make time as a group to reflect on what you've been up to. Discuss where things are at, what's worked well and what hasn't – and why. It's important to write down key points from your reflection, and make them accessible to all group members, for example, via a display board, group folder, or on a web page.



For ideas on taking stock of your progress, see Section 6 of this Guide and Section 8 of the *Tool Kit for Community Conservation Projects*.

Use reflection to guide your next actions

Use the results of your reflection to guide your next steps. Build on what's going well and change what's not working.

Case study: Continuous improvement benefits native robins

The re-introduction of native robins to the Barnett Reserve, Waotu, has required the Reserve Committee to continually adjust its pest management work.

Following a major rat eradication programme, robins were re-introduced in May 2001. Pest control was planned for the robins' breeding season (August to December). However routine monitoring carried out for the Reserve Committee by Auckland University found evidence of rat predation. Realising its pest control regime needed improvement, the group met with DOC pest management experts and researched alternative poisons.

The new regime is now being put in place, and involves a longer time period (July to January). The regime starts with Pindone Possum Bait pellets laid in bait stations every 5–6 weeks, followed by waxed pellets monthly from September to the end of January. Extra efforts are also being made with control of mustelids and feral cats.

Build learning opportunities into what you are doing

Take time to share stories and perspectives – and try and include as many group members as possible in activities. Use opportunities for learning as they arise.

Case study: Learning benefits both DOC and local Māori

A group of DOC staff and women from local hapū in the Whangarei area is running education sessions for local Māori and DOC using the opportunity presented when DOC obtains dead native birds. The sessions are typically run in the area where the birds were found and tend to arise several times a year.

A demonstrator shows how to remove feathers from the birds, which are then available for making cloaks. Discussions draw on traditional principles and scientific information, for example, the nutritional requirements of the birds and the place of the bird in the wider ecosystem. The sessions also discuss practical steps that can be taken to restore and enhance the bird species.

As well as providing valuable learning both for Māori (skills in handling the birds and practical steps to help sustain them) and DOC (staff gain a better understanding of Māori protocols and customs), the sessions have been an important relationship-building tool.

Be aware that people learn differently. When you are undertaking learning activities, such as the demonstration of a conservation or restoration technique, be aware of different learning styles (or ensure that the presenter or facilitator is aware). To allow for different styles, it helps to mix and match approaches – for example, use a combination of written material, visuals, discussion, practice, and demonstration.

Traditional Māori learning was through kōrero (speaking) and waiata (singing), as well as seeing and doing things. In many cases it is appropriate to use these interactive learning styles with Māori groups. A waiata may be an appropriate learning tool in some contexts (see the case study below).

Most people find learning easier when they are able to link the material to a personal or local context – for example, they're learning how to monitor the water in the creek they drink from. In many areas there will be a story (or many stories) about the local area that can be used to enhance interest and ownership in an issue.

Case study: Using waiata to learn about harakeke

To improve knowledge about Te Harakeke – the flax family – a waiata was developed. The waiata is part of an activity about caring for the flax plant from a Māori perspective. While singing the waiata, you're learning about how to identify the flax plant and how it grows. Memorising the song and practising the methods together in this way is called whakapapa ki kaitiakitanga – genealogy and guardianship of the resource. This particular waiata comes from resource Ngā Pihi 2 tape waiata Āku Kuia. This activity is part of a DOC education resource titled the Karikari Peninsula Kete.



Check out the references for Blakeley et al. (1999) and Fleming (2001) in Section 10 of the *Tool Kit for Community Conservation Projects* for more information about learning styles.

Learning about working effectively as a group

You can learn a lot by looking at how you work as a group. For example, if you use a workshop technique to progress something as a group, allow time afterwards for people to reflect on the steps you took, as well as what you achieved. This will help people understand the technique better, give them confidence to help run it next time or even use it themselves in another situation.

Gaining conservation knowledge and skills

Find out what people in your group want to learn, as well as what skills they have that can be shared with others. Incorporate talks and demonstrations from people with expertise (group members or outside experts) into regular meetings and events – for example, a scientist studying the area, a local landowner with historical knowledge, a member of the local iwi who can describe the stories and significance of the site to Māori.

The agencies involved in the group can be a good source of knowledge and expertise. Encourage them to share information, best practice, or skills with the wider group. You might also want to invite people doing similar projects elsewhere to share what they've done.

Case study: Learning opportunities at Karori Wildlife Sanctuary

Karori Wildlife Sanctuary Trust holds regular seminars for volunteers and members on a variety of natural history and conservation topics relevant to the aims of the Sanctuary.

The email group established for volunteer guides and hosts also provides a forum for people to pose questions about what's happening at the Sanctuary, and to get these answered by the Sanctuary's technical experts or other knowledgeable volunteers.

Refresher courses are held on a regular basis to keep people up to date with progress and new information.

3. Getting your project started

You're at the point where you want to kick off a local conservation project and involve the wider community. How can you get your project off to a great start?

Typically, starting off involves the following steps:

- do some initial thinking and research with others;
- identify who needs to be involved;
- find out what people think;
- hold a first meeting/ identify initial actions.

You will need to be flexible – some steps might need to happen at the same time, while others might need to be repeated.

INITIAL RESEARCH AND THINKING

Consider the following questions⁷:

- Why do we need the project? What is the problem we're trying to solve or the conservation outcome we're seeking?
- Why am I/we passionate about it?
- What information exists about this issue?
- Has this or a similar project been attempted before?
- What evidence of community interest is there?
- Who could I/we work with?
- What resources might be needed?

Some of these questions could be discussed at an initial meeting about the project and considered again when you're ready to develop a plan of action.

IDENTIFYING WHO TO INVOLVE

Talk to others and think about:

- Who's likely to have an **interest** in the conservation issue and efforts to deal with it? Examples might include local councils, existing conservation or landcare groups, iwi/hapū. Why is it important to them? If you're part of an agency, remember to think of internal people that need to be involved.
- Who might be **affected** by anything you do to deal with the issue? For example, landowners, neighbours, recreational users, tangata whenua.
- What agencies might have a **legal responsibility or interest** in the issue or place? What role might they take?

⁷ Based on Eckman 1996.

Go beyond your usual networks:

- Use street displays /public places to approach people you haven't identified.
- Ask interested people who else they think might have an interest or want to be involved.
- Agencies can be a good source of contacts. Councils, the local DOC or MFish office, and others agencies are likely to have lists of local organisations and key contacts relevant to your issue.

Involve the right people

Support from the right people can make or break a project:

- If you work for an agency, have you got support from your manager for initiating and/or being part of this project?
- Have you talked to those with influence or standing in the community, such as local councillors, community board members, iwi representatives?
- Are the people you'd like to involve influential in the community and able to provide access to other community groups or potential sponsors?
- Who is enthusiastic and likely to have passion, time and energy for the project?

Case study: DOC works with Chinese communities in Auckland

DOC research in 1999 highlighted a need to improve the conservation awareness of Asian peoples, particularly recent arrivals to New Zealand. In response, DOC undertook a project in Auckland targeting Chinese-speaking communities.

With only one possible contact from a few years previous, DOC was starting from scratch with the task. However, the single contact proved invaluable, providing a perfect combination of enthusiasm, understanding of both conservation and Chinese culture, communication skills and excellent networks. With her help, DOC was able to gain an understanding of the Chinese community in Auckland, including media networks, festivals, cultural events, and organisations.

Early on in the process, World Wetlands Day provided an opportunity for a field trip to Miranda, a wildlife refuge on the Firth of Thames. The refuge has a strong connection to Asia through the journeys of migratory birds between Asia and the Pacific. The trip was attended by a full busload of people, who were provided with a Chinese translation of the commentary about godwits and other birds that make the long journey between China, Alaska and New Zealand each year. This event inspired a chain of other events and activities involving Chinese-speaking communities in conservation. A Chinese Conservation Education Trust has recently been established.

8 Adapted from Hei Hei, 2002a

Table 1 below is designed as a prompt to help you identify the people you need or want to involve in your project.

Table 1: Prompt list for identifying who to involve⁸

People or Organisation	Examples (Note – this is NOT a definitive list)
Tangata Whenua	Iwi, hapū, Trust boards
Historic Places Trust	Local committee
Local government	District council, regional council, community boards
Crown agencies	Animal Health Board, Museum of NZ, Department of Work and Income
Local businesses	
Landowner, leaseholder	Farmers, DOC, council, Māori incorporation, concession holders, lifestylers
Neighbours	
Conservation and environment organisations	Forest & Bird, Fish & Game Council, NZ Landcare Trust, Landcare groups, Native Forest Restoration Trust, Conservation Boards
Education organisations	Schools, polytechnics, universities, outdoor education, environmental education centres
Community service organisations	Rotary, Lions clubs
Resident organisations	Ratepayers associations, progressive associations
Industry organisations	Federated Farmers, Contractors' Federation, Manufacturers' Federation, Tourism Association, Fishing Industry, IPENZ
Recreation organisations	Hunting, fishing, boating, tramping, kayaking, 4WD
Public information centres	
Consultants	
Key individuals	
Science and technical organisations	Ornithological society, NZ Geological Society, naturalists' clubs, local research stations, Crown Research Institutes, Botanical Society



Check out the reference for Taylor et al (1995) in Section 10 of the *Tool Kit for Community Conservation Projects* if you need to research your community of interest further.

⁸ DOC 2001b; CRESA 1998.

FINDING OUT WHAT PEOPLE THINK

You need to find out what people feel about your project idea and assess if there's support for a group effort. Some key things to explore with people are:

- how and why they might be interested in the project;
- whether people are already working on the project, or a similar or related project;
- any community issues or relationships that may need to be recognised or addressed;
- what they'd like to see achieved by the project;
- any information needs or gaps.

The easiest way to find out what people think is to ask! Or get someone else to ask if you can't. Here are some options:

- call people or organise a phone tree between a group of you;
- talk to people when you see them, for example, set up outside the local supermarket;
- hold an open day or a site visit and use this to find out what people think;
- visit people in their own environment, for example, ask residents to host 'kitchen meetings' comprising their immediate neighbours; talk to the volunteer fire brigade at the station; attend a meeting of the fishing club or the local marae committee;
- put something in the local paper for people to fill in and send back;
- ask for input over the local radio station;
- get people to respond to a discussion paper or survey.

Allowing plenty of time for this stage builds a good foundation of support for later in your project.

Case study: Different approaches to getting started in Whaingaroa catchment

In Raglan, the Whaingaroa Harbour Care group started with a few locals asking each other informally *'how can we clean up our harbour?'* This question prompted the establishment of a nursery to support the idea of a harbour margin restoration project. It didn't take long for the group to hold its first open meeting, at which members managed to sign people up for an Incorporated Society!

The Whaingaroa Environment catchment project, on the other hand, took more than a year of small group discussions throughout the entire catchment before the first open community meeting was held. It wasn't until that meeting that the Whaingaroa Environment group was formed to enhance communication and coordination among catchment residents working on environmental issues.

HOLDING THE FIRST MEETING AND IDENTIFYING INITIAL ACTIONS

Once you've established initial support to talk about the project idea, you're likely to need a meeting. Your first meeting might be to test ideas more widely, to endorse and confirm informal discussions, or to launch your project. Depending on your purpose, the meeting might only include key people or be open to the wider community.

You might decide to meet with key people where:

- you need to negotiate with or seek the support of one group first, for example, commercial interests who might be affected by what you want to do, or negotiating a partnership with tangata whenua;
- your project is small and/or unlikely to be controversial.

A public meeting might be necessary where:

- your proposal could have a big impact on lots of people, for example, setting up a marine park;
- you want people to get involved in the project, or it's important to have a wide base of community support for success, for example, a restoration project on the edge of an urban area;
- consultation is legally required for your project or an aspect of it.

You may need more than one meeting before it becomes clear if your project will proceed and how.

Meetings can be valuable because face-to-face communication is essential when:⁹

- you're requesting a commitment and support from people;
- you need a team decision;
- you want group synergy;
- you need different perspectives on the same issue;
- people need to express their point of view and be heard.

Typically the purpose of the first meeting is to:

- bring together people who are interested in the project;
- allow for discussion of the project;
- confirm whether the project is a 'goer' for a community effort;
- identify the next steps. This may include getting commitment to form a group.



For more ideas about organising meetings, see Section 5 of the *Tool Kit for Community Conservation Projects*.

⁹ Fitzgerald 1999; Moss 1996

Case study: Holding a meeting to suit your community

A workshop was organised for locals in the Clarence area to identify land management issues of concern. The organisers aimed to involve as many people as possible, and timed the workshop to follow a series of interviews with local residents. Each property owner was contacted by mail, followed up with personal contact where possible. The workshop was set for a Saturday morning with a community barbeque afterwards. Childcare was provided on the day.

It's important at a first meeting that people are able to generate a shared understanding about the proposed project or the issue. This will help them to assess the likely level of commitment and to decide, at least in principle, whether to be involved.

By the end of the first meeting there should be some sort of clear decision. This might be to proceed and form a group, or not to proceed. It might be to hold another meeting and/or to gather more information before a decision is reached. In this case, a time, date, purpose and organisers for the next meeting should be identified.

Remember, 'good things take time!' Don't be surprised if people want to take things more slowly than you do. Finally, recognise when to pull out! If there's a distinct lack of enthusiasm, get ideas from those present on how to reframe the concept so that it better meets people's needs. If you still get nowhere, then the meeting may agree to put the idea on hold until a later time.

Suggestions for a first meeting agenda

Here's a suggested agenda and some pointers for running a first meeting:

Welcome and presenter/organiser/facilitator introductions

- Introduce the meeting organisers and state the aims - why you've called the meeting, what you think the issue is, and how you think a community approach might help.
- A ritual may be appropriate, for example, a mihi (greeting) or a pōwhiri (formal welcome).

Outline of agenda, meeting purpose

- Check people are happy with the meeting aims and agenda.

Participant introductions

- Invite people to introduce themselves – state briefly why they came, their (or their organisation's) interest in the issue, what skills and knowledge they have to offer.
- Ask for the names of those who couldn't come but want to be kept informed.

Presentation on issue or proposed project

- Provide a quality presentation and/or discussion on the issue, focusing on the need for the project.

Workshop or small group discussion

- Allow plenty of time for discussion about the issue, covering everyone's points.
- Use techniques that involve everyone, for example, a workshop process or small groups.
- Record all discussion notes up the front where everyone can see them.
- For more ideas, check out the Section 5 of the *Tool Kit* (Agenda and Process).

Identify initial actions

- Confirm whether there is support for the project – ask for a show of hands.
- Be clear what the next steps are.

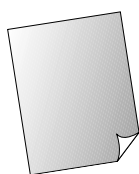
If your project is going ahead at this stage, it's a good idea to agree on the next few steps needed. For example:

- set a time, date and place and purpose for the next meeting. Don't make the date too far ahead;
- identify who will provide/gather extra information or do research;
- identify who can help.

You can also invite people to leave their name, address, and phone number by sending around an attendance list.

Time to socialise

Finally, it's nice to allow time at the end to provide refreshments and allow people to socialise and get to know each other.

**PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER**

Use the worksheet below to help with getting your group started - work through the questions as a group, filling in the worksheet as you go and referring back to this section for ideas.

4. Planning to set your direction

Now you've decided to form a group to deal with your conservation issue, it's helpful to decide what the group will do – that is, to plan your activities, and how the group will run – your structure and how members will work together. This section, *Planning to Set your Direction*, and section 5, *Working Well as a Group*, consider these aspects in turn.

Once your group or project is established, there will be a point at which you will need to do some planning.

WHY IS PLANNING IMPORTANT?

While a simple task list may be sufficient for the planning of many groups, there comes a point in the life of most groups when a more detailed strategy or plan is required. The need to obtain funding is a common reason. Most funders and sponsors who make money available for conservation projects will require a written plan with clear goals, tasks and cost estimates.

Good planning will avoid haphazard implementation and will mean that your activities have a much greater chance of being effective. It means that everyone is clear on what's happening and ensures that activities continue even if key people leave the group.

Organisation is the key to success

A good plan will show:

- the community and environmental results wanted (your vision, goals, objectives);
- actions that will be taken;
- what needs to be done first (priorities);
- what resources are required;
- how resources will be provided;
- who will take which roles and responsibilities;
- how coordination, communication and decision-making will take place
- time lines;
- how progress will be monitored.

WHAT DOES PLANNING INVOLVE?

The typical steps involved in planning are shown in the box below. They provide a guide but depending on the scale of your project, it may not be necessary to follow all of the steps or to stick to the order below.

Planning Steps

1. Assess the current situation (see Section 3 for ideas)
2. Establish vision, goals, objectives
3. Identify actions and priorities
4. Identify how to monitor progress and evaluate
5. Confirm your plan
6. Communicate your plan
7. Implement your plan
8. Monitor and evaluate
9. Revise your plan

You'll usually end up with a written plan at the end of the process, which might be simple or in-depth, depending on your group or scale of your project. Some groups start off with a very simple action plan for the immediate issues – for example, a flipchart list of tasks and who is responsible – returning later to work out a long term vision or goals.

Case study: Kōkako Trust broadens focus using long term planning

The Kaharoa Kōkako Trust started in mid-1997 with immediate actions towards its goal of protecting kōkako and their surrounding forest habitat. Within a few months, bait stations were established and poison laid in 350 ha of forest. The first few years of activities focused primarily on spring poisoning operations. Much of the Trust's day-to-day planning has been responsive, dealing with opportunities and issues as they arise.

Following its success with the initial forest block in Kaharoa, the Trust has progressively moved its management into adjoining forest blocks. However, Trust members have now realised that to fulfil their goal, they need to see their task from a wider perspective – how best to manage the forest area as a whole in the long-term.

This has raised the need to do some longer term planning. To help with this, trustees are seeking advice from DOC scientists and regional council pest experts on the best approach for managing forest areas over the next 5–10 years. They're also exploring the possibility of avoiding or reducing the use of toxins in ongoing management, and of attracting students to undertake studies that benefit both students' academic work and the ongoing work of the Trust.

Other groups might decide to spend considerable time developing a clear, shared vision and goals before taking any action.

Case study: Taieri Trust uses strategic planning

The TAIERI Trust developed its strategic plan following the strategic plan format used by the NZ Landcare Trust. This involves identifying a 10-year vision for what is wanted, and identifying indicators that can signal whether or not progress towards the vision is satisfactory. The Trust developed its plan at a workshop involving Trustees and its Management Group. It has since presented it to communities in different parts of the Taieri catchment to check its aims against local needs.

STEP 1 – ASSESS THE CURRENT SITUATION

You will have gathered information during the initial work to get your project started – see Section 3. This is the time to bring it together and fill any gaps. Additional information needs might include:

- existing information about the issue, such as scientific studies, reports, media items;
- plans, strategies or procedures related to the site or species your project is concerned with – for example, a management plan for the area;
- historical information;
- information from others engaged in similar projects, which can help with deciding where to start.

Check that the information you have so far has given you:

- a good understanding of the problem or issue, including opportunities;
- an understanding of any related actions planned or under way by an agency or another group;
- an understanding of the resources available within your group, or outside resources that could be made available. This also includes identifying any constraints on partner members, in terms of what they can and can't contribute;
- an understanding of who should be involved in the planning.

Take the time to fill in any gaps you find. Double check whether there is anyone else likely to be interested in and/or affected by your project – and take steps to involve them now at the planning stage.

STEP 2 – IDENTIFY YOUR VISION, GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

This is the ‘gutsy’ part of your planning work. A strategic plan sets out your group’s direction.

Ko te Taumata¹⁰

A Mission (or vision) statement is important.

“Know where you are going and where you have been... You will be clear on what you want and how to get there.”

Do your planning as a group

The task of actually doing this part of your planning can be daunting for many groups. Holding a meeting dedicated to these tasks alone is a good idea - for example, a planning day, two half-day sessions over two weekends, or a series of evenings. Using a workshop for your planning is often the most effective because it:

- gives everyone the chance to be involved;
- ensures everyone gets to contribute something;
- enables consensus on key decisions such as vision and goals;
- ensures planning doesn’t get lost in the wider business of the group;
- builds relationships and helps people get to know each other better.

Remember that ownership builds commitment. People support what they create¹¹.

As part of your planning, think about how you’ll record your progress. Confirm how your plan will be written up and where it will be kept – for example, on a notice board or web page. It can help to timetable in regular review sessions where you can celebrate your achievements, revisit your plan, and decide on future actions.



Check out Section 7 of the *Tool Kit for Community Conservation Projects* for more ideas on how to plan as a group.

¹⁰ Hei Hei 2002b

¹¹ WDFW 1995

Developing a Vision

A clear, shared vision that signifies general agreement on the key issue and priorities is essential. Without it, community action will lack focus, and the initial motivation of the participants will be lost¹².

A vision statement contains a description of what your group wants in an ideal future (for a beach, wetland, bush area, bird or marine species etc)¹³. Some groups may not want to spend time on a broad, overarching future vision and could instead start by identifying a clear medium-term goal (see below).



Section 7 of the *Tool Kit for Community Conservation Projects* provides more ideas about generating a vision.

Example Vision¹⁴

The Motua stream reserve is a popular community recreation area. The stream's clean sparkling waters attract swimmers and fishers, and picnickers enjoy the established trees along the stream banks.



Generating Goals

A goal is a major result or outcome the group wants to achieve. Goals should be related to a group's vision if you have one. Goals should be brief and focused – expressed in one sentence. Goals may need to be re-examined on a regular basis as the project develops.

Example Goals

- The Motua Stream environment is re-vegetated, landscaped and maintained.
- Rabbits are effectively controlled in the White River valley.



Developing Objectives

Once you have your goal(s), it's helpful to break them down into 'do-able' chunks of work. Objectives are carefully thought-out targets, which move the group closer to its goals and ultimately its vision. Objectives are much more specific than goals. To be achievable, objectives should be realistic, measurable and have a set timeframe.



Section 7 of the *Tool Kit for Community Conservation Projects* provides further pointers.

¹² Fitzgerald 1999

¹³ Donaldson 1994

¹⁴ Adapted from WDFW 1995

Example Objectives

- To complete riparian planting along 50 metres of the stream edge over the next year
- To reduce the rabbit population by 20 percent in the next 6 months

STEP 3 – IDENTIFY ACTIONS AND PRIORITIES

Once you've developed objectives, you need to decide how these will be achieved. An action plan sets out what steps are to be taken by when, and by whom.



Check out Section 7 of the *Tool Kit for Community Conservation Projects* for ideas about how to prepare an action plan.

Example Action Plan¹⁶

Long term goal – To re-vegetate, landscape and maintain the Motua stream environment.

Short term objective – Complete riparian planting along 50m of the stream edge over the next year

Steps needed to reach the objective	Who	When
Recommendations for local plants, report to May meeting	Betty	by end April
Organise pest control and advice with regional council	James	by end May
Order plants	Betty, Bill	30 June
Advertising/awareness – publicity for nursery and DOC	Jenny and helpers	by end July
Prepare area and planting site, organise helpers	Sally, Jane, Marty and Bill	end July
Planting day – logistics/barbeque	Tim, Jane, Eve	end July

Costing your activities

Allow for the costs of your activities as accurately as you can. Consider the materials, machinery or expert advice you might need to pay for associated with each task. Where an event or meeting is involved, consider venue, equipment, refreshment, advertising and signage costs. If you're unsure:

- ring around for prices;
- ask others who've undertaken similar projects;
- get estimates from professionals;
- seek guidance from funding organisations (they will often provide advice on how to cost things out).



See Section 5 (The meeting or event checklist), Section 7 (Action plan template) and Section 11 (Funding sources) of the *Tool Kit for Community Projects* for more help on costing and funding your activities.

¹⁶ WDFP 1995

STEP 4 – IDENTIFY HOW TO MONITOR PROGRESS AND EVALUATE

How are you going to know that your work is being effective? It's useful to consider how you'll monitor progress as you're setting goals and identifying actions. Think also about when and how you'll do 'checks' on your progress.



Section 6 of this Guide discusses what is involved in **monitoring** and **evaluation**.

Example of monitoring progress

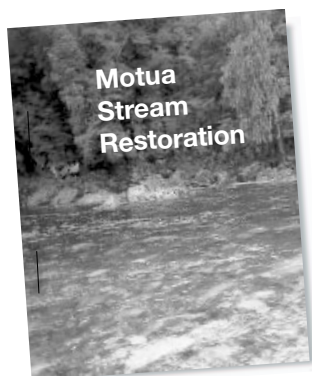
Examples of what could be monitored over time to show the success of the Motua Stream project:

- survival rates of trees planted – checked at 6 months and 1 year;
- pest presence in the area – baitline checked every 2 weeks;
- the Plan's goals, objectives or actions met by the time originally set.

Example of evaluation

Example of when and how to evaluate the Motua stream project:

- regular report on monitoring results at bimonthly meeting;
- check of progress against action plan at bimonthly meeting;
- every six months, dedicate an hour of a regular meeting to 'take stock' and reflect, adjusting what is being done as necessary.



STEP 5 – CONFIRM YOUR PLAN

When you've finished your plan, it's a good idea to mark the occasion in some way – this might be a social occasion at the end of your planning workshop. Where the plan has been finished off by a smaller team, it might be a report to the wider group followed by a discussion to 'tick it off'.

STEP 6 – COMMUNICATE YOUR PLAN

Completing your plan is an opportunity to get some publicity about your group and its intentions. It's also useful to let other relevant organisations know about your plan, to build understanding of your project's goals. Consider:

- how you'll ensure all members have access to the plan – for example, a summary item in the newsletter, with details of where the whole plan is;
- other organisations that would benefit from a copy;
- local media, particularly if you want the benefit of wider publicity for your efforts.

STEP 7 – IMPLEMENT YOUR PLAN

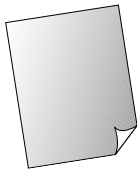
Having a great plan is all very well. Now it's time for the work to start! Section 5 considers some of the things that will help your group work effectively, and maintain momentum as you put your plan into action.

STEP 8 – MONITOR AND EVALUATE

Ideas about how to monitor and evaluate progress with implementing your plan are provided in Section 6 of this Guide.

STEP 9 – REVISE YOUR PLAN

Don't forget to revise your plan based on what you've learnt!



PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

Use the worksheet below to record your planning decisions and progress. It's designed to guide you through the planning process.



Good planning will give
your activities a much better
chance of being effective

Photo: DOC/Dave Hansford

5. Working well as a group

This section looks at what's involved in establishing your group and explores how to keep things running smoothly and maintain group momentum.

Establishing Your Group	Maintaining Momentum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify partners' interests and needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular, two-way communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify what involvement in the project/group can offer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use inclusive processes for planning and decision-making
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss how you want to operate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve as many people as possible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider boundaries, membership, name and size 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deal with conflict as it arises
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose a group structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate achievements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review progress regularly

ESTABLISHING YOUR GROUP

It's important for most groups to discuss early on how they want to work together, particularly when they include representatives from other groups, agencies and organisations. Getting these things clear can help build trust and an understanding of each other's roles, strengths and constraints from the beginning - and reduce tensions later on. If things do go wrong, these early discussions and agreements also provide something to refer back to and help clear up conflicts.

The key steps involved in establishing your group are outlined below.

1. Identify partners' interests and needs

A good place for groups to start is by identifying each other's interests and potential roles in the project or issue – *'What do we each want or need to get out of this project?'*

This process will often identify a variety of different needs and interests. It can help everyone understand what agency representatives need to achieve to justify the agency's involvement.

2. Identify what involvement can offer

The next step is to identify what different people or agencies can offer. *'What are we each bringing to this group or project?'* This can help identify the skills and resources jointly held by the group, and may clarify what people and agencies can and can't contribute.

It can also be useful to consider what your group can offer to contributing agencies. This might involve recognising how the group's activities can help further an agency's policies. Where the group is involved in work that is the core business of an agency, and/or there are legal requirements for seeking input from community members, agencies may need to consider reimbursement of meeting and travel expenses to ensure these don't become barriers to community involvement.

3. Discuss how you want to operate

Using the information you've gathered from the first two steps, together with your understanding of what the group wants to do, it's time to consider how you want to operate as a group. This discussion could include things like:

- how you will reach decisions;
- how you will communicate between yourselves (and with people outside);
- rules or protocols to be observed by all group members. For example, when things should be confidential to the group; how information generated from the group's project is held or distributed;
- when to review these agreements.

Case study: Working arrangements help Pouto June group

The Pouto Peninsula Steering Group has been grappling with the issue of off-road vehicle use on sand dunes. The group comprises representatives from Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, Department of Conservation, Te Uri O Hau, local landowners, 4WD commercial tourist operators, Historic Places Trust and Kaipara District Council.

To help things run smoothly, the group has agreed to a number of working arrangements to help with the task of making recommendations on how best to deal with this contentious issue. There is a designated secretary responsible for writing up meeting notes and ensuring matters agreed are acted upon. A single person is designated as the public spokesperson for the group – the group Convenor, who is also the local Mayor.

Group representatives operate on the understanding that they are there to bring the views of who they represent to the Steering Group. This also requires reporting back to their parent organisations and seeking further feedback on the Steering Group's direction. Representatives then bring this feedback to the next meeting.

Protocols for agency/group relationships

Protocols for liaison between the group and partner agencies may be very important and should be agreed on early in the relationship. Ideally they should be written down and communicated by the agency's representative back to the wider organisation. If your group is conducting activities on land that an agency is responsible for, this may require an agreement with the agency. You'll need to clarify things such as health and safety considerations and responsibilities, for example, if you are running a field trip.

4. Boundaries, membership, name and size

It can be helpful to consider and clarify the geographical boundaries of your group – for example, how you fit into relevant agency administration boundaries or tribal boundaries.

You may also want to consider membership. The benefits of having an inclusive community conservation project, with no limits on who can contribute, are significant. In most cases, these benefits will outweigh the additional work and communication effort required for a diverse or large group to operate well. In some cases a group may want to look at the question of membership, either with a view to establishing a subscription, keeping things a manageable size, or ensuring access to the right skills and resources.

*Group name*¹⁶

The group or project name could reflect the area and main activities, or something of significance to the group. Keep in mind that if you decide to form a charitable trust or incorporated society you need to check through the Companies Office that no one else has already registered the name.

5. Group structure

Choosing a structure for your group is related to your discussions about how you want to work together and your scope or boundaries.

Case study: A working structure for TAIERI Trust

The TAIERI (Taieri Alliance for Information Exchange and River Improvement) Trust has two main goals. First, to ensure that information exchange is happening between all parties, and second, to improve the health of the Taieri River.

A full time coordinator with expertise in stream ecology carries out the day-to-day project work, supported by five Trustees and a Management Group. Four of the Trustees are landowners in the Taieri, each representing a different geographical area. The fifth Trustee is from Otago University, which has been involved in the project since its inception. The Management Group has been given equal voting rights by the Trustees, and is made up of representatives from the three major divisions of Otago University, Fish and Game Council, and individuals from the local community.

¹⁶ Collins et al 1995

Groups can be informal, with members sharing the coordination role and teams established for discrete tasks, or groups can choose to be formal, with assigned roles, such as treasurer, secretary, chairperson and a committee. Both structures can work successfully.

Duties in a more formal group structure will generally include:

- chair – represents the group (spokesperson), chairs meetings and ensures everyone has their say;
- secretary – takes minutes and deals with all correspondence. The secretary may circulate minutes or send out an agenda before the meeting;
- treasurer – handles the financial side of the group's operation. In some groups, the treasurer's role is undertaken by the secretary.

Other members may be given designated roles, for example, publicity officer, fundraising coordinator, volunteer coordinator. Where your group is establishing a committee, it should ideally be a good representation of the wider group including interests, skills, gender and culture.

Case study: Different purposes, different structures

The Okoroire Stream Care Group operated for ten years, planting thousands of trees, without ever forming a legal entity or even opening a bank account. Some of the trees planted came from Environment Waikato, and others the group grew themselves using bags and potting mix donated from suppliers. Later group members received grants from the South Waikato Environmental Initiatives Fund that saw its bills for potting mix paid through the South Waikato District Council accounts department. Members valued the informal nature of their small group and saw no need for a legal structure.

By comparison, Whaingaroa Harbour Care had large-scale tree planting plans and chose to form an incorporated society very early on. It has accessed considerable grant funding over its seven-year history and will soon plant its 500,000th tree. The Karori Sanctuary group chose a charitable trust for its ambitious project, favouring the measure of independence it gave the group compared with some of the other structures available. While Trustees make the major decisions, their structure includes a membership option to enhance the community sense of ownership of the project.

Forming a legally recognised group

In some cases a group may need to become a legal entity – for example, to access funds or where a group wants to take on significant responsibilities for a conservation area or species currently managed by someone else (usually an agency). The most common options available to groups are to become a Trust or Incorporated Society. There are both advantages and disadvantages to becoming a legal entity¹⁷:

Legally Recognised Groups	
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligibility for accessing large funds and grants. Many funding organisations require groups to be a legal entity to show financial accountability. • Individual members are not personally liable if the group gets into financial difficulty. • The group continues until formally disbanded, even if members change. • A group can hold assets, enter into contracts or take out loans in its own name. • It may be possible to obtain charitable status for tax purposes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More administration work – keeping minutes of meetings and financial records, filing correspondence. • Cost of auditing accounts. • More structured approach required in terms of group activities. • Minimum number of members required.

For those groups reluctant to become a legal entity but still needing access to significant funds, a further option is to negotiate with an existing legal group or agency to handle the funding aspects¹⁸.

Case study: TAIERI Trust links with Landcare Trust

As part of the arrangements to satisfy its funders (the Sustainable Management Fund administered by Ministry for the Environment), the TAIERI Trust operates under the umbrella of the New Zealand Landcare Trust. The Landcare Trust handles project administration and financial aspects, and employs the TAIERI Trust coordinator, ensuring ongoing support and professional development opportunities.



Section 12 of the *Tool Kit for Community Conservation Projects* provides more information about becoming a legal entity.

¹⁷ Collins et al 1995

¹⁸ DOC 2001a

6. Record agreements

Many groups may be happy to 'minute' the agreements reached during discussions about how the group should work. For other groups, a formal 'memorandum of understanding' (MOU) may be necessary. This is a signed document that captures the agreements made about how the group will operate.

Case study: Opito Bay Group opts for an MOU

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) proved the most straightforward means to enable Opito Bay Residents and Ratepayers Association to undertake a track extension project in Akeake Historic Reserve. The MOU was necessary to assure the Department of Conservation that the group was able to take on both the extension work and the ongoing maintenance of the track, as DOC had no resources available to pick this up.

The final MOU took the form of a five-page document, and looks a bit like a contract. It sets out: the two parties to the agreement (DOC and the Residents Association); the various land owners; relevant provisions from the area's Conservation Management Strategy (the legal document guiding DOC's work and policies in an area); and the sixteen-point agreement reached by the parties.

The agreement includes who is accountable for what on a day-to-day basis, when meetings are to be held, and how changes can be made if needed. The final part of the MOU comprises two Schedules, one describing the land and the other describing the track work to be done (both construction and maintenance aspects).

The process of putting the MOU together also helped in gaining approval for the track to proceed from the district council and other landowners along its course.

An MOU document may be relevant where a group wants to enter into a co-management arrangement with an agency for an area or species, for a large project involving a number of agencies, or where there is a history of mistrust between one or more group partners. An MOU can include a mechanism for what happens in the case of a disagreement or dispute.

MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

Once your group is established with clear direction and an action plan to work on, it's important to pay attention to how you will maintain momentum. What's needed to get things happening and to keep up the motivation and enthusiasm of your group?

The success of your project, and the enjoyment you gain from it, will come down to how well you work together as a group. No groups act or interact in exactly the same way. However most groups display common signs when working well, or not working well. Understanding these signs helps, especially when the group is going through a rough patch.

Signs of an Effective Group	Signs of an Ineffective Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular, two-way communication • Inclusive processes for planning and decision-making • Workload is shared • Conflict is dealt with as it arises – and with a view to learning from it • Achievements are celebrated and people are recognised • Progress is checked regularly and time made for taking stock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor or inconsistent communication between partners/members • Alienation of some partners/members and poor levels of trust • Key people burned out • Conflict being avoided, or not dealt with properly - continues to escalate • Membership declining • Progress stalled or not followed up

The sections below provide some ideas about how to make sure your group continues to work together effectively.

1. Regular, two-way communication

Good communication is vital in keeping the group cohesive, motivated and involved. Working out how you'll communicate and what protocols you might have is an important early step. The more partners involved in your project, the more critical it is that you maintain regular and transparent communication.

Case study: Regular communication invaluable for Pouto dune group

Regular communication in between meetings among the key office holders (e.g. Secretary, Convenor) of the Pouto Peninsula Steering Group has been invaluable for the smooth running of the group. It has enabled upcoming issues to be flagged early and sensitivities to be recognised, enabling the group to keep on track with its task of identifying how best to deal with the conservation issue of off-road vehicles in sand dunes.

Early on, there was conflict within the group when minutes from some meetings were not accepted as a true record of decisions. To deal with this, it was agreed that all agreements and actions would be written up on a white board and checked with people at the meeting. These notes now provide the basis of the minutes and adhering to this practice has avoided subsequent misunderstandings.

Case study: Good records essential for Waitomo Catchment Trust Board success

Having a good record of all work done has been an important factor in the success of the Waitomo Catchment Trust Board. These records of the group's achievements are regularly summarised in newsletters. Along with regular monitoring of stream sediment levels, they provided proof of the Trust's capability and effectiveness when recently applying for major sponsorship. In 2002 the Trust obtained \$55,000 from Lotteries Grants Board for the second phase of their catchment project.

Methods for communicating your group's progress could include:

- a telephone tree (each group member has a list of people to call) and regular meetings;
- reports at regular meetings and recording who's doing what by when;
- circulating minutes to all members, using email, post or web site;
- protocol requiring copying of all memos or emails routinely between all partners – so everyone knows where things are at – and only one version of a message gets around!
- newsletters – for sharing information within the group and with the community. Consider circulating your newsletter to partner agency staff, sponsors, local businesses, and the local paper;
- a brief, regular article in the local paper or school newsletter;
- signs beside current and completed work explaining who completed the project and when – could be paid for by a sponsor and feature their logo;
- displays at local shows, libraries, etc.
- open days and celebrations, inviting as many people as possible.

Remember, it's important to communicate even if there is nothing to report – this can be a great motivator to get things back on track.

Communication with and between partner agencies is very important. Agency representatives may change. This means it's important to have established relationships with the wider organisation, otherwise their contribution could end with the departure of the representative. Agency representatives have responsibilities here too. They need to:

- keep other staff informed of group progress and issues;
- involve other relevant staff in group activities to build understanding;
- ensure decisions about agency support (including financial support) are taken at the appropriate level and properly documented.

2. Use inclusive processes for planning and decision-making

Techniques that involve all partners in planning and decision-making are more likely to build a clear sense of purpose, enthusiasm, and ownership.



Section 7 of the *Tool Kit for Community Conservation Projects* provides more information and some techniques for this.

3. Involve as many people as possible

A very real risk encountered by many groups is that too few people end up doing too much of the work. This can lead to burn out, and sometimes even the collapse of a group or project. While it seems almost too much of an effort to get lots of people involved, it can become your group's 'insurance policy' for the future. Remember, involvement builds ownership!

Spreading the load also helps to build up the skills of a wider group of people. Consider these ideas to help involve more people:

- Try to make all experiences and tasks rewarding so people want to stay involved – for example, share a cake after stuffing envelopes or incorporate a pot luck meal into committee meetings.
- Have flexible timeframes – don't be too rigid about things happening on time.
- Understand and manage expectations – what can realistically be achieved.
- Keep tasks manageable, so people aren't daunted. Provide a range of different sized tasks – small 'one-off' contributions and bigger more challenging tasks.
- Focus on having successors for group roles – for example, use a mentoring system so the next secretary is being trained on the job by the existing one.
- Build capacity for the long-term sustainability of the group. If people simply lack skills, look at training opportunities as this can be a real motivation. Consider employment possibilities – for example, making group activities part of a local employment scheme.
- Reward people's efforts – for example, organise a special field trip or social event for volunteers, making it attractive for people to contribute.

Being culturally inclusive can be important when you're trying to involve a cross section of your community. For example, observing tikanga by starting meetings or events with a karakia, mihi, or pōwhiri can help Māori to feel welcome and respected.

If you don't have the necessary contacts within your group, ask around locally to find out the best person to talk to. Sometimes local councils or agencies such as DOC can help. Some marae committees, Trust boards and rūnanga are also listed under 'Māori organisations' in the Yellow Pages, or you can check out www.maori.org.nz. For other cultural organisations, seek out local contacts first or try 'Associations and Clubs' in the Yellow Pages.

Encouraging individuals to participate

Team spirit is a powerful force in keeping the group active and committed. You can enhance motivation by considering individual needs as well as the group's:

- Actively involve each person – emphasise teamwork.
- Welcome everyone.
- Use people's names and ask everyone for responses to ideas.
- Take time to find out everyone's skills and interests (don't make assumptions about who knows what).
- Get feedback on how people are finding the meetings.
- Allow time for individuals to have their say in meetings and other activities.
- Organise activities at times and places where everyone can participate.
- Take into account people's interests when allocating jobs.
- Agree on a code of conduct (no interruptions, no criticism of others, etc).
- Spend time with people – be actively involved in the project yourself.
- Encourage those with particular skills to train others.
- Ensure valuable work is recognised and appreciated by the group – thank those who have put the effort in.



Friends of Matiu/Somes Island hard at work clearing the Railway

Photo: DOC/Annabel Riley

4. Deal with conflict as it arises

Conflict is normal in a group. It inevitably arises where people are working together and trying to make things happen. Deal with it as it arises and try to learn from it, both individually, and as a group. Strategies for dealing with conflict include:

- Separate people and personalities from the situation – consider issues only.
- Try to look at things from different points of view – explore people's feelings.
- Look for options where there are mutual gains.
- Focus on mutual interest – agree on solutions.
- Emphasise common concerns and points of agreement.
- Agree to disagree and come back to the sticking point at a later time.
- Be honest if you don't have an answer.



Section 4 of the *Tool Kit for Community Conservation Projects* provides more ideas.

Case study: DOC works to address criticism on contentious dune issue

Despite a real effort to identify interested parties, DOC was criticised for missing out key people and organisations after sending out for comment an initial paper scoping the issues of off-road vehicles in sand dunes on the Pouto Peninsula.

By taking prompt and decisive action, these concerns were successfully addressed. DOC called a public meeting, which provided an open opportunity for anyone with an interest to come forward. A steering group was appointed at this meeting, and since that time this group has been responsible for progressing work on the issue.

5. Celebrate achievements

While seeing results is reward enough for some people, most of us like to hear that we have done a job well and that our work is appreciated. A letter of thanks, a certificate or award, or publicity that recognises people's efforts can both motivate and strengthen a group¹⁹.

Ideas for celebrating group achievements

Publicity about a group's activities including:

- publishing data or monitoring results;
- local newspaper coverage of events and field day;
- items in the group's regular newsletter acknowledging people's efforts and achievements.

Contributions of information and expertise including:

- briefings to volunteers by agency experts;
- provision of practical information to help with group projects.

Agency presence at group events including:

- having an agency manager or Councillor give a speech of appreciation or issue prizes or awards.

Social functions, special outings including:

- an end of year get-together;
- an outing – for example, to another conservation project or an island sanctuary.

Individual acknowledgement including:

- saying 'thanks' for all efforts, no matter how small;
- yearly awards;
- training opportunities for active members;
- coaching and mentoring systems for those taking on new responsibilities.

¹⁹ Based on Ritchie and Simmons 2001

6. Review progress regularly

Successful groups tend to be better at asking 'how are we going?' on a regular basis – taking time to reflect on progress, and to learn from what they are doing.

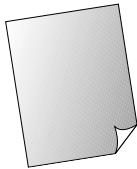
Case study: Lessons learnt by ECCO²⁰

The East Coast Community Organisation (ECCO) identified the following lessons when it reflected on its work together:

- The community is the expert on its own circumstances and needs.
- Take a participatory/inclusive approach to meetings.
- Full communication is essential and must be ongoing.
- Child-minding should be provided regularly.
- Keep the focus of the group broad to begin with - don't predetermine issues
- Get to the starting point early.
- Individuals and groups can't dictate what is best for everyone.



Section 6 provides more information about monitoring and evaluation for groups.



PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

Use the worksheet below to record your ideas and decisions about how you want to work as a group.

²⁰ Fitzgerald 1999

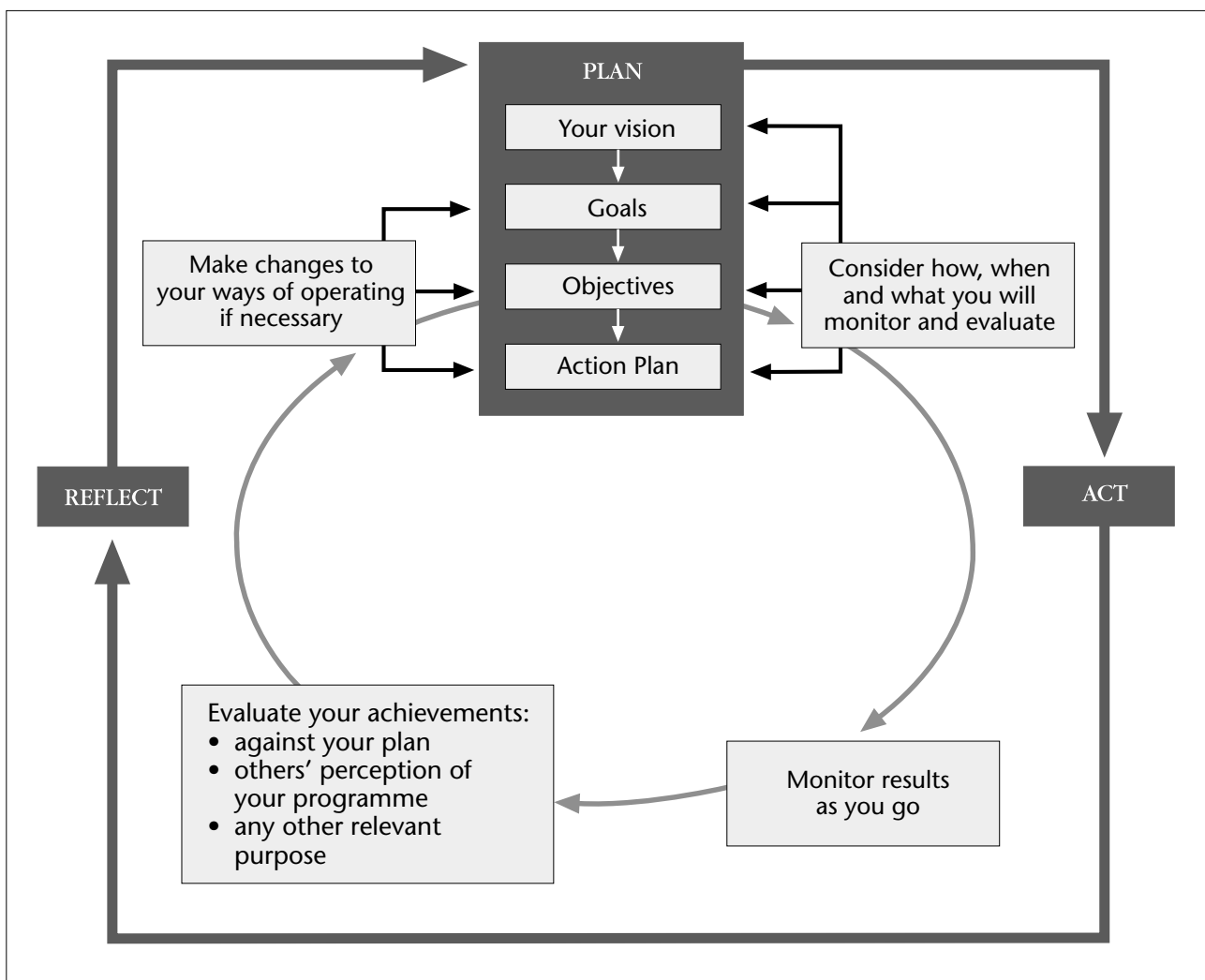
6. Checking progress and taking stock

Having ways to check on your progress (monitoring) and take stock of where things are at on a regular basis (evaluation) are important for your group to function effectively. Monitoring and evaluating can help you identify issues, measure your successes and learn from your mistakes. The outcomes can also provide great benefit to others – little is known about much of what we are trying to achieve in conservation, so monitoring and evaluation are critical to helping us ‘learn as we go’. The insights and data your group gathers can help fill gaps in our ecological knowledge. Monitoring and evaluation represent the learning principle at work.



See Section 2 ‘The Learning Principle’.

How evaluation and monitoring fits with a group’s activities



EVALUATION

Evaluation is appraising the worth of something. When you evaluate, you measure something against a benchmark or values and you gather information from others to give their evaluation of what happened²¹. This enables you to judge how effective your project is (or has been) in contributing positively towards the conservation and community outcomes the group wants.



For more information about evaluation, check out the following references in Section 8 of the *Tool Kit*: Blakeley et al (1999) and Wadsworth (1991). Blakeley et al has particular relevance as it is designed for NZ and looks in detail at evaluation of community environmental education programmes.

Evaluation provides an opportunity for us to reflect and learn from what we've done, and think about new ways of doing things. In other words, it informs our future actions.

Evaluation should ideally be factored into your initial project planning. When you are setting your vision, goals and actions, you need to be considering how and when you'll check your progress against them. You may decide that you will:

- refine your project as you go, so that evaluation is part of your regular project activities (this is recommended);
- evaluate the project at agreed milestones, for example, on a yearly basis or after major activities;
- carry out an initial baseline exercise against which you compare progress at the end of the project.

Case study: Annual review takes different forms

Utakura Native Forest Restoration Project schedules time for reviewing the project on a yearly basis. This takes place in several ways: a review by the project committee of goals and actions; a peer review of the revised plan by someone outside the project; and an annual open day for the wider community to update people on progress that's been made. The open day provides an opportunity for community feedback and ideas, and operates a bit like an AGM.

²¹ Blakeley et al 1999

METHODS OF EVALUATION

There are many different ways to evaluate your project, depending on what your purpose is in evaluating²²:

Main Purpose of Evaluation	Suggested Evaluation Approach
To learn from what you are doing	Approaches that are flexible and are based on reflection among group members, e.g, a quarterly discussion and critique of monitoring results
To find out whether your project is meeting community needs	Approaches that involve asking the community, for example, a community survey, workshop, or written invitation to provide feedback
To measure progress against specific goals	Approaches that involve checking against goals/ objectives
To evaluate an event or field day	Approaches that enable you to access participants from the day. For example, handing out a feedback sheet at the event, conducting a phone survey of participants a few days afterwards



Section 8 of the *Tool Kit for Community Conservation Projects* provides some specific evaluation techniques.

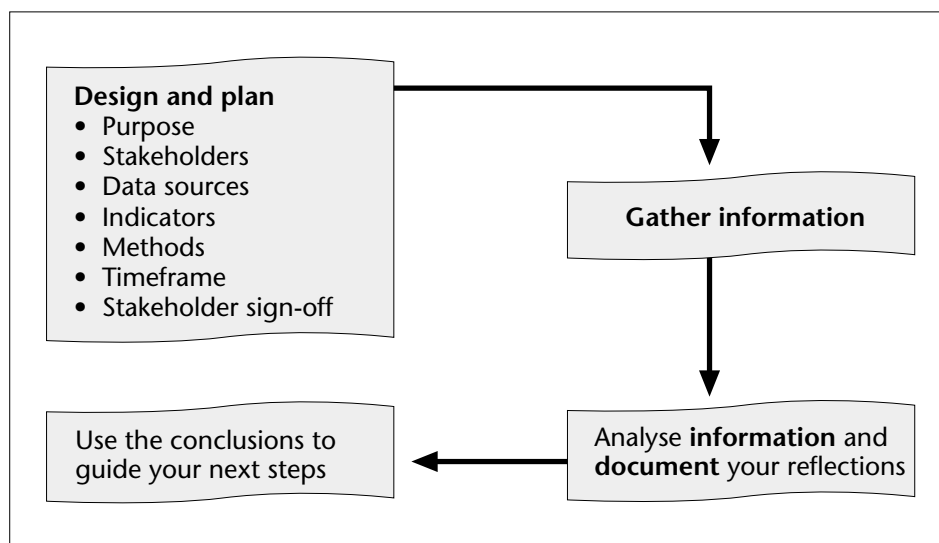
Case study: Quarterly field trip is a useful check-in

The Kerikeri Shade House project schedules a quarterly field trip for all volunteers involved with the native plant nursery. This field trip, which usually has an educational theme, provides an opportunity for volunteers to talk with each other and DOC staff about issues and ideas. It also serves to re-ignite people's motivation, and is a way of saying 'thank you' for the valuable input they are making in providing native seedlings for restoration projects all over the Northland area.

²² Based on Blakeley et al 1999

WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR EVALUATION?

Regardless of the method or methods chosen, the steps involved in an evaluation follow the same process (see diagram).



The steps are:

1. Design and plan the evaluation

- Clarify the specific **purpose** or outcomes of the evaluation. Establish why you are doing it, and for what purpose. This stage may be helped by identifying exactly how you wish to use the evaluation results.
- Determine the **questions** you want answers for.
- identify **stakeholders** and what they require of the evaluation exercise (this may affect your purpose and questions).
- Identify possible sources of **data** and what you will gather.
- Identify **methods**, approaches and techniques which could be used.
- **Agree** on the **evaluation purpose** and **procedures** including
 - **timeframes**
 - **indicators** or benchmarks that will be used (these are what you are evaluating against)
 - how you will ensure you respect the rights of all those involved.
- Prepare any **materials** required, such as questionnaires.
- **Check** with stakeholders to make sure the evaluation planned will meet their requirements.

2. Gather information

- Gather all the data using the methods or techniques you identified, eg. questionnaires, interviews, discussions, measurement of effects on the environment, and tests.

3. Analyse the information. This may include preparing recommendations. Check that your conclusions especially respond to the purpose of the evaluation.
4. Put your results into practice. Use your conclusions to adjust what you are doing and to guide your next steps.

ENSURING EVALUATION IS EFFECTIVE

When designing your evaluation, make sure you're clear about your **purpose**. It's helpful to determine what questions you want answered – make sure everything you ask or investigate during evaluation relates back to these questions. Don't forget to check with stakeholders to make sure the evaluation will meet their needs and expectations.

Ideally your evaluation will measure the extent to which your project is achieving the outcomes set for it (in most cases, these will be conservation outcomes.)

It's important to make sure the evaluation process involves **valid** and sound methods for information gathering and analysis. This doesn't mean you need to go to great expense but requires that you be clear about the methods involved. A small project could be evaluated using a well-structured workshop at an evening meeting attended by all project partners. In comparison, a large, expensive multi-year project might warrant employing a specialist or at least getting their help with evaluation design.

Evaluation, by its very nature, is about judgement and for this reason it is important that you respect the **rights** and **values** of all those affected by the evaluation. This may require confidentiality agreements, for instance.

Once evaluation data has been gathered and analysed, remember to check your conclusions against your goals and objectives. Make sure you **put your results into practice** – take them on board and use them to influence how you work! It's also helpful to tell others what you've learned so they can benefit from your experience.

Agencies and evaluation

Evaluation may be required to meet legal or administrative requirements of an agency. This might require agency staff to develop their own (job related) benchmarks against which the agency can evaluate its involvement in the project. These are usually called performance measures. If an agency already has appropriate performance measures, agency staff need to make sure other project partners are comfortable with them.

In summary, evaluation is effective when:

- there is a clear purpose and the questions to be explored answer this purpose;
- has defined boundaries;
- is focused on achievement of defined outcomes;
- uses a simple process;
- includes and analyses all relevant data;
- respects values, rights and perspectives of those involved;
- is developed in partnership with stakeholders and meets their needs;
- the results are demonstrably valid and reliable;
- is cost effective.

MONITORING

Monitoring is the systematic gathering and analysing of information that will help measure progress on an aspect of your project. Ongoing checks against progress over time may include monitoring water quality in a catchment or monetary expenditure against the project budget. Monitoring is not evaluation as such but is usually a critical part of your evaluation process and should therefore be included at your project planning stage.

Why monitor?

Keeping records and monitoring activities helps people see progress and builds a sense of achievement. Records can be useful and even essential when promoting the group or applying for funding.

Monitoring also has significance for the wider field of conservation. Ecosystem monitoring is not a fully developed science, so any work undertaken by your group has the potential to contribute to the refinement of measures of ecosystem health.

Deciding what to monitor

Deciding what to monitor is important because monitoring requires time and commitment. What you are monitoring should be directly relevant to your project's activities.

The following list of questions will help you decide on your monitoring objectives:

- What information will help us make informed decisions? What will help us know that our project/group is on track?
- What's the appropriate scale for monitoring? For example, catchment, district, reserve boundary, whole forest, whole ecosystem.
- What are our timeframes for monitoring (days, months, years)?
- Do we need input from other groups or agencies?

To be meaningful and useful, monitoring objectives should state fully what you want to achieve and specify a recognisable end point. Good monitoring objectives provide a yardstick against which progress can be evaluated. At least some of your measures and indicators should relate directly to your vision, goals and objectives.

Any decisions about what to monitor should be agreed to by all project partners. Problems can sometimes arise where agency staff involved in a project collect and use information without approval from the other project partners. Discussing as a group how monitoring information will be used can help avoid these issues.

Case study: Photo records important to monitor Coast Care progress

Photo records of sites before, during and after work has been undertaken are an important monitoring tool for the Coast Care BOP Programme. They have helped build ongoing enthusiasm and interest in the coastal planting programme, inspiring communities to undertake projects in the most remote parts of the district.

Each six monthly newsletter profiles a particular area, using the photo information in a 'Back from the Brink' type poster. The newsletters provide an ongoing record of Coast Care progress and recognise volunteers' effort. They are circulated widely to volunteers and project partners, including councillors, and to outside people such as coastal scientists and other environmental agencies.

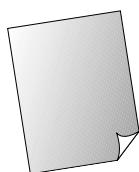
How to monitor

There are a number of guides available that can help your group pinpoint what should be monitored and how. Check out the references provided in Section 10 of the *Tool Kit for Community Conservation Projects* – in particular, Biggs et al (water quality monitoring) and DOC 2001a (bush monitoring).

Ensuring monitoring is effective

Monitoring is effective when:

- scientifically valid techniques are used;
- aspects relevant to your project are measured;
- it's carried out regularly and consistently;
- accurate records are kept;
- it's used as part of your evaluation to support or adjust project goals and actions.



PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

Use the worksheet below to help plan your evaluation.