Planning with purpose:

Landcare Project Planning and Development

Contents

An Action Plan or Strategy is a foundation for project development. Group Action Plans and Network Strategic Plans ensure projects reflect the goals and needs of the Group or Network. If a Group or Network does not have a Plan in place, support them to do one. If they are simply not interested, then start right here at Step 1, with a project planning workshop.

Step 1. The Project planning workshop

Ideally a Landcare Co-ordinator or Facilitator is available to assist the group to plan and develop projects. If not, then a sub-committee or nominated member needs to take on the task. Either way, in this Guide, we'll call them the *Project Co-ordinator.*

Use the Landcare Group Action Planning guide. Draw on Steps 2, 6 and 7 to get people involved, and identify priority issues and the objectives for these issues. Then generate ideas for projects.

Identify one or two top projects for immediate action. Availability of resources will help separate projects that can happen readily from those that require longer term efforts. Set some time frames on the remaining issues so expectations within the group are clear and long-term projects are not forgotten.

Identify the purpose for the chosen projects, to clarify in everyone's minds why the Group or Network want to develop this idea into a project and summarise what the project(s) will do and why.

List potential stakeholders and partners. Partners are those who will join you to run the project; stakeholders are those who value what the project will do and may be prepared to back you and help you make connections to community and resources.

Write up the conclusions into a project proposal to take back to the Group or Network so they can endorse further development of the project.

TIP - The Norman Wettenhall Foundation (NWF), a philanthropic trust, works with communities on landscape restoration projects. NWF use a checklist to assist groups to create project proposals that are well planned and integrated with community interest and scientific knowledge. Go to http://nwf.org.au/

'Being Investor Ready' is a useful tool for understanding what non-government sponsors want from Landcare, and prepare for that.
Go to the Landcare Gateway, http://www.landcarevic.net.au/resources/for-groups

Step 2. Draft a Project Proposal

The Project Proposal builds a picture of what the project will achieve, how it will achieve this, why the project is important, and who you hope will be involved as partners. The Proposal will include:

- Project description - purpose, activities, location and desired outcomes
- Objectives and justification/evidence for selected activities (Program Logic)
- Timeframe – one for developing the proposal, another for carrying out the project
- Identification of participants, stakeholders, audiences – how the project meets their needs, evidence of this (surveys, feedback from field days, group plans etc.)
- Identification of potential and actual partners and their desired outcomes
- Links to other plans and strategies
- Resources and if relevant an indicative budget
- Potential funding sources and their priorities.

Funding applications typically use their own headings for these matters, and restrict the number of words you can use. You must show that your project has been well thought out and fits the funding priorities.

Most funding programs have set timelines and will ask for your project start and end dates. If the project is more than one year, key milestones and associated dates may be asked for which may determine when you will receive the funds. ***Make sure your timelines are realistic and can be met within the funding timeframe*** – you may not be able to get an extension and may have to return unspent funds.

Step 3. Develop your Program Logic

Program Logic links inputs to activities to expected outputs and desired outcomes. It is most often represented as a diagram or a series of linked steps:

'if we do *this* then ………. *this* will happen'.

The Program Logic shows how change sought by the project will result from the chosen activities. Completing a Program Logic will assist the Group or Network, stakeholders and partners to reach a shared understanding of the project at an early stage. It can be a good basis for negotiating involvement and investment between partners and each time it is modified, it should be sent out to partners for confirmation of changes made. It may also be included as an attachment with a funding submission.

A guide to developing a Program Logic is provided by the Australian Governments Caring for Our Country Program in their Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI) Toolkit at http://www.nrm.gov.au/me/meri-toolkit.html#resources

TIP: Doing a Program Logic at the start of a Project is far easier and more useful than creating one retrospectively.

The first step is to break the project into different components, to set out what's involved in the project. A ***mind map*** can show the different areas of a project and the activities associated with desired outcomes, along with the flow of information and relationships.

With those ideas in front of you, the following questions can generate much of the information required for a basic Program Logic.

Foundational activities

What things have already been done, or will need to be done prior to the project commencing?

What resources / funding are needed?

Who needs to be on-board – participants, partners, project managers, other communities?

TIP - Many funded projects start more slowly than expected because the Group has not paid sufficient attention to these foundational activities, such as obtaining approvals to undertake works on public land, establishing networks with landholders, determining whether a cultural heritage survey will be required as part of the project, or even finding out in advance whether plants or seed are available.

Immediate activities and outcomes (1 -2 years)

What types of activities are appropriate to this project?

How do we know these are the best – is there any information to guide the choice of activities?

What will be the immediate results from these activities?

How will we know if they have been successful?

Who will measure this success and how?

Intermediate outcomes (within 5 years)

What other benefits will result from this project?

What broader issues will this project contribute to?

Long term outcomes

What change in resource condition and landscapes will this project contribute to?

Look at the evidence that the selected activities will produce intermediate outcomes, so that you are confident you are doing what will make a difference. Test your assumptions – don't rely on anecdotal evidence alone. Dig out research that can back up your claims as to the nature of the issue and your chosen methods to address it.

Evidence of why and how landholders adopt sustainable practices could come from past projects, landholder surveys, research projects – put the call out through your networks asking people to send any useful results or reports. A review of why landholders adopt conservation practices can be found in the research papers written by Nicholson et al [1] and Pannell et al [2].

Monitoring data may provide evidence of change in resource condition from the Project activities you are considering—water quality monitoring, native vegetation quality and extent or records of animals and their habitat. The Victorian Resources Online website is a great place to find mapping data for each Catchment Management Authority (CMA) region in Victoria. CMA's, WaterWatch and the Environment Protection Authority all contribute water quality monitoring data to a central data warehouse. Ask a local Officer how to get access to this information if it could support your project.

A free mapping program called the 'Community Web Mapping Portal' (CWMP) can be used to generate maps of plant and animal occurrences. Some groups

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[1] Nicholson, C., Barr, N. F., Kentish, A., Dowling, P. M., McCormick, L. H., Palmer, M., Simpson, I., Simpson, K. and Walsh, J. (2003) A research-extension model for encouraging the adoption of productive and sustainable practice in high rainfall grazing areas, Australian Journal of Experimental Agriculture, **43,** 685-694.

[2] Pannell, D., Marshall, G. R., Barr, N., Curtis, A., Vanclay, F. and Wilkinson, R. (2006) Understanding and promoting adoption of conservation technologies by rural landholders, Australian Journal of Experimental Agriculture, **46,** 1407–1424. or at http://www.ruralfutures.une.edu.au/downloads/conservationlandholders_316.pd.

are also using this program to record and monitor results of projects, such as revegetation sites, pest plant and animal infestations and their control. This mapping program was developed in partnership by private company Spatial Vision and the Norman Wettenhall Foundation. See http://nwf.org.au/landscape-restoration/community-web-mapping-portal/

Protected area management plans or other resource documents can also provide important sources of evidence to support project assumptions.

Step 4. Get your stakeholders and partners on board

Stakeholders are members of the Group or Network, or other Landcare or community groups, who will undertake on-ground works or participate in training programs.

Partners are organisations that have interests that align with the proposed project, possibly as part of a larger plan or strategy or through an investment stream they manage. Partners can commit contributions to the project (cash or in-kind), or link their activities with yours.

Talk with key stakeholders and partners of the proposed project and ask if they want to be involved. If they are interested, include them in the proposal and send a draft for their input. **Write a letter**, re-capping on previous discussion with them and saying why they are being sought as stakeholders and partners to the project. **Ask them clearly for feedback** on the proposal and to let you know if and how they would like to be involved.

The Project Proposal should be sent to key stakeholders and partners with plenty of time to engage them in the project and seek their input on the proposal. Highlight the timeframe for development and the stages you will ask them for input.

If you progress to a funding bid, **partner contributions are best finalised before submission, with an agreed and signed off budget.** Changes to budgets can be negotiated later, but an agreed budget is the best starting point. Any potential partners originally listed but not interested need to be removed from the proposal.

TIP - Most large organisations develop and finalise their budgets between February and May, so if you are looking for co-contributions of cash – keep this timeframe in mind.

You can develop project proposals any time and have them ready for when funding announcements are made. If you are proactive and have a proposal ready the process will be far less stressful than waiting then having to meet the usually tight timeframes of funding programs.

Step 5. Find resources for your project

Start close to home. In most cases funding is required to undertake projects, but resources may already lie within the Group or local community. Some activities can be done at low or virtually no cost, which will help keep costs down, for example:

- Seed collecting, direct seeding and weed control working bees.
- Necessary equipment can often be mustered from group members or hired at low cost.
- Farmer discussion groups can be set up by members who may contribute an annual fee each to cover costs of a facilitator or guest speaker.
- If education and training are a part of your project, talk with Community Centres, Department of Primary Industries or TAFE to see if they can shape something to meet your project ideas, possibly at low or no cost or funded by sources you may not have thought of.

Scan for funding. Locate funding programs on various web sites (see below for some examples). Reading funding guidelines carefully to see if the purpose or objectives of your project align with the objectives of the funding program and that your proposed activities are eligible. You may need to adapt your project approach in order to meet the funder's targets or priorities.

Assessment panels will always have limited time to review a large number of project proposals, and they will more favourably score the ones that can most clearly demonstrate a link between project activities and the program priorities. You may also need to adapt the 'language' of your proposal to match that of the funding program or private organisation.

Funding Opportunities	**Contact**
Victorian Investment Framework	Through the CMA
Catchment Management Authorities	CMA Regional Landcare Co-ordinator or Partnerships Officer
Department of Primary Industries (DPI)	Local offices
Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE)	www.dse.vic.gov.au
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) – Australian Government	www.daff.gov.au
Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities – Australian Government	www.environment.gov.au
Vic Health – Victorian Government	www.vichealth.vic.gov.au
The Norman Wettenhall Foundation	http://nwf.org.au/
Philanthropic trusts – You can subscribe to The Australian Directory of Philanthropy	www.philanthropy.org.au
Landcare Australia Limited	www.landcareonline.com.au

Our Community keeps a list of current grants	www.ourcommunity.com.au
Local Council Community Grants	Community Grants Co-ordinator

Step 6. Write the submission

Start with a draft. Once a suitable funding program has been identified, write a draft application that can be shown to Landcare Committee people, other members involved and shared with partners for their input. **Ensure you are confident that the project purpose and objectives match the aim and objectives of the funding program.** Summarise something to this effect at the beginning of a draft application.

To make sharing of documents easy and because many applications are now completed on-line, it is best to set up a new document in MS Word, using the headings and questions from the funding application.

Work out your timeline to submission. Advise stakeholders and partners of the funding opportunity, the input you require of them and the timelines for development and submission of the application – work back from the due date, allow plenty of time and stick to it. Thoughtful planning and liaising with stakeholders and partners during the development stage will ensure a well-informed application is written and a strong base for the future success of the project is established.

For specific input from stakeholders and partners, consider using tables (see overleaf), so it is very clear what you are asking for, from whom and by when.

Information required

Information required	From whom	Responsible person	When

Commitments required

Partner	Commitment	Responsible person	When

Ask for letters of support. Letters of support can be sought from all those involved as well as other organisations who can vouch for the importance of the work and/or the Group or Network's ability to undertake the project. In order to write an accurate letter of support it is best for the person concerned to have a copy of the final submission.

It is best to finalise the application at least 14 days before the due date so everyone involved can review the final submission and letters of support can be collected. Set a target of a few days before this just in case anything unexpected arises. This timeframe ensures partners and stakeholders have an opportunity to review the application and provide feedback and to iron out any last minute issues.

TIP: You may need to follow up with people to ensure they provide the information you need. Start early, rather than waiting till the last moment, keep your reminders friendly—by email, phone, or even mobile texting—and be persistent.

Get feedback on the draft. Ensure relevant group(s), staff and partner representatives review final draft application prior to its submission. Landcare Group members involved in the project and/or Network Board representatives and partners need to be given the opportunity to review the final draft application also.

After receiving feedback from stakeholders and partners the Project Co-ordinator can make any final changes to the application. If someone has suggested changes that impact on others represented in the application then these suggested changes should be communicated to all stakeholders and partners. Good communication throughout the process should prevent this from happening in most cases.

Submit the application. After any required changes have been made, you can submit the application. ***It is a good idea to submit applications at least three days in advance.*** This allows for any unforeseen time delays, such as electronic application databases' collapsing under the pressure (which happen regularly), mail strikes etc.

Confirm the application has been sent and received. Confirm the application has been sent by circulating a final version of the application to all partners. Confirmation of receipt from the funding body can also be circulated with a reminder of expected dates of approval and roll-out.

Let people know the outcome. Announcements of funding decisions are made on relevant web sites, Minister or Member of Parliament articles in the media and most often directly by post. Advise partners and stakeholders of successful or unsuccessful applications as soon as you know the result.

If you are unsuccessful, find out why from the funding body, so you can improve applications for that or other project ideas. Circulate a brief note explaining the reasons for the failed bid. At this point, ask partners and stakeholders whether they are interested in looking for further opportunities to fund or otherwise implement the project. If the decision is to hold off, keep details of the application, which will be useful for future project applications.

If you are successful, advise all relevant parties and organise a meeting to start the ball rolling. Remember to celebrate your success – before the next round of the hard work starts!

Step 7. Set up Project Management

You and your partners will need to agree on such things as appointing a Project Manager, establishing a Project Management Team and/or Reference Group if required, putting together an implementation plan and advertising/awarding any contracts or consultancies.

Appoint the Project Manager. If a new person needs to be appointed to manage the project and the Group or Network has not employed a person before, make use of the **Employment Toolkit** for Landcare on the Landcare Gateway web site. [3]

Once appointed, all information relevant to the project application needs be handed over to the Project Manager including contact details for partners and stakeholders. Completing a Funding Deed will possibly be one of the first responsibilities for the Project Manager and if they are new, they may need some help from people involved in putting together the application.

Set up the Project Management Team and Reference Group. A Project Management Team will most likely be required for larger projects involving several groups and partners. Members of the team could include Landcare staff, group or Board members and representatives of partner organisations. Regular Project Management Team meetings will present the best opportunity for the project to be effectively communicated and implemented. More frequent meetings may be required in the early phases of the project and less frequently further along in the life of the project.

Large and innovative projects often benefit from having a Reference Group whose members can contribute relevant expertise and guidance with project planning and implementation. If you do not already have possible reference group members in mind, ask through your networks for suggestions. Invite potential members to be involved by calling first and then following up with a letter and copy of any relevant papers – either original proposal or word version of final application. Be sure to confirm what commitment of time you are asking them to make.

[3] **Employment Toolkit** for Landcare http://www.landcarevic.net.au/resources/for-groups

Step 8. Develop an implementation plan

The Project Manager is the best person to lead the development of the implementation plan for the project. The implementation plan is a detailed breakdown of how the project will be delivered from beginning to end. Like a Landcare Group Action Plan or a Network Operational Plan, it will include:

- Activities listed under each objective
- Time frames
- Persons responsible (ensure this is very clear)
- Budgets

The Project Manager can create the implementation plan in several different ways …..

a) Project Manager develops a draft implementation plan and obtains input from the Group or Network representatives, project team and/or reference group by circulating electronic or hard copies (be sure to ask people to use 'track changes' on electronic copies) or;

b) The Project Manager asks different people who will deliver components of the project to draft that section in the plan, using the same base template and then compiles the sections or;

c) The Project Manager and project team develop the implementation plan together as a group. This can be time consuming at a meeting but agreement on the plan can usually be made on the spot.

Use the Program Logic developed earlier or create one now to double check all activities required to achieve outputs/outcomes are covered in the implementation plan. In addition, it is a good idea to have (and many funding bodies require) the following:

- A communication plan—effective communication is timely, simple, accurate and relevant to its intended user. Communication activities can be listed in the implementation plan but further detail may need to be provided in a separate Communications Plan;
- Reporting requirements against key deliverables and outcomes;
- Monitoring, evaluation and improvement processes.[4]

For large projects you might consider contracting out the monitoring and evaluation component of the project. You may decide to advertise or approach a selection of suitably qualified people. Either way a Request for Quote (RFQ) process is good to follow and may cut down the need to interview the number of people to just a few suitable candidates.

[4] The Australian Government Caring for Our Country Program - Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI) Toolkit can be found on their web site at http://www.nrm.gov.au/me/meri-toolkit.html#resources

Launch the Project. It is important to formally recognise the beginning of the project to everyone and anyone who may become involved. Write a media release to launch the project.

You may wish to advise some people personally by letter (other than those already advised because of their involvement in the project), such as people in local government, Catchment Management Authorities, CFA, related, non-partner industry groups etc. It is possible a number of slightly different letters may be required to meet the individual needs of the recipients. At a minimum each media release or letter should contain the following messages:

- Name of project
- Purpose of project
- How the project will be rolled out
- Key dates
- Who is involved
- Recognition of funders (get the name right!)
- Contact details

In some cases, it is appropriate to have some sort of gathering to launch the project, particularly large, multi-stakeholder/partner projects. ***A public launch can be a great way of gaining community awareness of the project from the outset.*** Inviting a public figure, perhaps the local Mayor or Member of Parliament can also help raise the project's profile and attract the media.

After the launch, the project officially begins, and people will be expecting and ready for action to happen.

The implementation plan should be continually used and revised as needed to deliver the project effectively.

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This Guide is current as of May 2013, and downloadable from www.**basscoastlandcare**.org.au/*resources* .

References, useful web sites and templates for use in planning processes are provided in a separate, alphabetically listed document . These will also be revised from time-to-time.

We value your thoughts about the Guides, and your experiences as you use them. Send a note to moragh@vic.chariot.net.au .