

Introduction to planning and writing conservation project proposals

A guide for small wetland conservation project proposals



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Purpose and intended audience of this guide

This is an introductory guide and checklist for developing and writing project proposals for small to medium sized wetland conservation projects. It was commissioned by the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands as a concise support tool for the Contracting Parties when submitting project proposals for small grants.

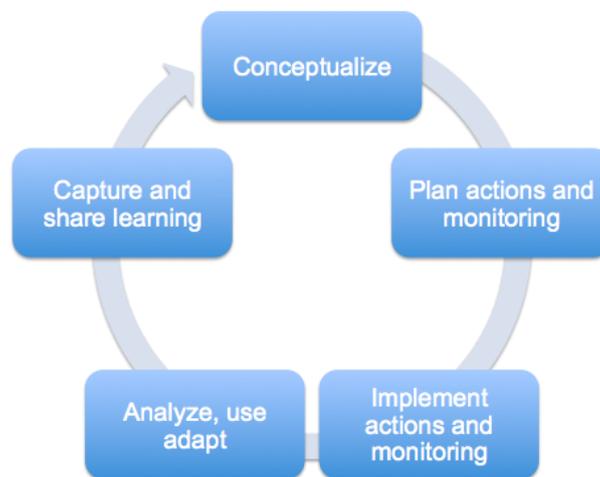
What is a project?

A 'project' is an initiative that has a clearly defined objective, a defined timescale and resources. By comparison, a 'programme' is larger in scope and scale, may comprise several projects, and has a longer time perspective that is not necessarily defined.

Every project should follow a cycle of steps, beginning with identifying a project idea, conceptualizing it and using what is learned to feed into the next project.

As illustrated in the project cycle diagram below, conceptualizing and planning are just the beginning of the full project cycle.

The project life cycle



This guide condenses the essentials of the first two stages of the project cycle and how to write a strong proposal for a donor. Part 1 describes the contents of a basic project proposal and can be used to improve the quality of a proposal if you have already spent some time planning. Part 2 explains the recommended steps to take a project idea and develop it into a full proposal ("planning a project").

The aim here is to help project planners write high quality project proposals that show a clear logical flow from activities to objectives. Examples will be taken from successful wetland project proposals.

Where to apply for funding for wetland conservation projects: Ramsar funding database

The Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands maintains an [online database of wetland funding opportunities on the Ramsar website](#). Contracting Parties to the Convention may also apply to one of the small grant facilities administered by the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands, which in January 2020 included:

The **Wetland for the Future (WFF)** initiative, funded by the United States State Department and Fish and Wildlife Services, supports small capacity building projects in Latin America up to \$20,000. The **Swiss Grant for Africa (SGF)** supports projects in Africa - up to 40,000 Swiss Francs. The **Nagao Wetlands Fund** welcomes one application per contracting party per year for projects up to \$18,000.

Parties are encouraged to identify a project that aligns to their country's national planning and the Ramsar Strategic Plan before consulting the available and relevant funding opportunities.

Part 1: How to write a project proposal document

Best practice for project proposal documents

The quality of the project document will demonstrate the clarity of the project ideas. Make it easy for the person reviewing the proposal to understand the problem the project is addressing, the overall objective, and how the objective will be achieved.

To keep your project document concise and easy-to-read, write short paragraphs and use sub-headings. Number the outcomes, outputs and activities. If the activities will be listed again, for example in the work plan, re-use the numbers.

The length and level of detail of the proposal should match the size and complexity of the project, so for a small project write just a few pages. If the donor has given word or page limits, be sure to follow them carefully.

While there are no firm rules, a small project (up to \$50,000) is likely to be structured with several levels of objectives and activities, as follows:

- **1 overall project objective** (also called a "general objective")
 - **2-3 outcomes** (also called "objectives" or "specific objectives")
 - **2-4 outputs per outcome**
 - **1-2 indicators per outcome**
 - **2-5 activities per output**

Try not to focus too much on whether to use the word outcome or result, but if needed, see Annex 1 for a glossary of project terminology. Focus instead on clearly describing the change you want to create and how each activity will contribute to that change.

Project document quality checklist

- Articulate your project request succinctly, but do not make assumptions.
- Avoid acronyms or jargon the reviewer may not understand.
- Do not duplicate information – if it has already been stated in another section, reference that.
- Use proper punctuation and spell check features.
- Have a colleague review the application before submitting it.
- Follow exactly the required formats for the proposal and budget.
- If filling in a template, use the headings but remove the instruction text.
- Present tables, such as the log frame or work plan, in landscape format.

About project terminology

Many project planners get confused and frustrated by the many different terms to describe projects, such as inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, objectives, overall objective, project objective project goal, development goal, and impact.

This guide mainly uses activities, outputs, outcome, overall objective and impact, illustrated below in a simple "results chain":



See **Annex 1** for a glossary of basic project terminology.

Project document format: outline

This is a simple outline to follow for a Project Document - the details for each section are explained below.

1. Executive summary
2. Project context (executive summary of the situation analysis)
3. Rationale for the project and the intended change
4. Expected outcomes, activities and outputs
5. Log frame (if required)
6. Assumptions and risks
7. Implementation arrangements: work plan, reporting schedule, monitoring and evaluation
8. Exit or sustainability plan
9. Budget
10. Annexes, as needed

Project document format: contents

1. Executive summary

- a. Write no more than a short paragraph. Check that you have mentioned what, why, where, who, when and how. Revise until it is extremely clear and convincing. You only have one chance to make a first impression.

2. Project context (executive summary of the situation analysis)

Summarize the results of Project planning Steps 1 and 2 (see Part 2)

- a. The ecological features (if place-based). Use both a map and text.
- b. The environmental, social and economic situation for the conservation and/or human wellbeing targets. Note or describe the threats to the environment.
- c. Current governance of natural resources - may include relevant environmental strategies, plans, or complementary technical assistance and Convention obligations.
- d. The role of wetlands as sources of environmental benefits and economic development in the region.
- e. Historical context from previous interventions by your organisation.
- f. Executive summary of the stakeholder analysis, including current conditions for men and women in the project location, number and type of potential beneficiaries and other stakeholders and names of potential partners.

3. Rationale for the project and the intended change

Refer to Project planning Steps 2, 3 and 4 (see Part 2)

Summarize the problem and its causes. Then state the change the project will create, noting the general approach that will be taken (e.g. restoration, awareness raising or policy influencing, etc). This provides background and justification for the project.

4. Expected outcomes, activities and outputs

Refer to Project planning Steps 4 and 5 (see Part 2)

As a rule of thumb, state one overall objective, two to four "intermediate changes" (outcomes or objectives - see the section "About project terminology" above), and as many inputs, activities and outputs as required.

- a. *State one overall project objective.*
Example 1: "To conduct a comprehensive wetland site assessment to determine the eco-hydrology, ecosystem service values and wider landscape connectivity of the AP Protected Landscape in Cambodia in order to inform its designation as a new Wetland of International Importance by the end of 2019."
Example 2: "To promote wise use of Lake Letas Community Conservation Area, a proposed Wetland of International Importance on Gaua Island, Vanuatu, through community-based ecotourism development."
- b. *List the 2-4 intermediate changes required to achieve the main objective (the expected outcomes or objectives).*

Clearly describe what will be different as a result of this project for the wetland, target species or target aspect of human well-being.

Example outcomes: "Water draining from the wetland is reduced."

"The number of local people with awareness of wetlands and wetland values in the Lake Kutubu Wetland of International Importance has increased (quantify if possible)."

- c. *List all of the activities that you will undertake.*

Example activities (see also Part 2 step 5): "Conduct data collection activities." "Hold a stakeholder workshop." Avoid being too specific, for example do not list each individual equipment purchase.

- d. *List all outputs that will be generated by the project.*

Examples outputs: "50 people trained" "2000 flyers produced and distributed"

- e. Include your illustration of a simplified "results chain diagram" (see Part 2, Steps 4 and 5). Larger projects should consider using a theory of change, introduced in the Annexes.

If the donor requires a log frame (logical framework), include it here, filled in with the items above and accompanied by a separate narrative explanation. See Annex 5 for more about log frames.

5. Assumptions and risks

Briefly describe the factors that are important for the success of the project, but lie outside its control. Discuss significant risks that could arise during the course of project implementation and cause delay or prevent the achievement of outputs/objectives, for example: exceptional rainy season which impedes field activities; serious change in the political situation; etc.

6. Implementation arrangements: work plan, reporting schedule, monitoring and evaluation

Refer to Project planning Steps 6 and 7 (see Part 2)

- a. Use a GANTT chart¹ to show when each activity will occur, for how long, and the sequence.
- b. Remember to include the data collection required for monitoring as an activity.
- c. Describe how you will manage the project, including:
 - i. Project team members and their responsibilities
 - ii. Management arrangements such as calls or meetings to review progress and monitoring data.
- d. Optional: use a diagram to show the structure of the project team.

7. Budget

Refer to Project planning Step 8. (see Part 2)

The budget must be complete and comprehensive, while being simple and concise.

- a. Clearly show the cost of all the :
 - i. Activities
 - ii. Staff time

¹ A GANTT chart is a table that lists activities on each row and time across the columns (e.g. months) to show which activities will be undertaken in which months. It is a useful way to visualize the amount of time to be spent on each activity and the sequence of activities.

- iii. Total project cost.
- b. Plan your budget in detail in an Excel sheet, where you can save your calculations and make notes, but present only the essential details in your proposal.
- c. Use a clear table or the donor's template.

8. Exit or sustainability plan

Write a few sentences describing how the positive changes created by the project will be sustained after the end of the project. For example, you can mention that your organisation will continue to work in the area, or that by empowering local people to self-organize into action groups there is an increased likelihood they will continue the pro-conservation actions into the future.

9. Annexes

Depends on the type and complexity of the project. Annexes *may* include:

- a. Additional details of the situation analysis, a more detailed work plan, or more detailed schedules of project reporting and monitoring, or a list of indicators that will be monitored.
- b. The Logical Framework or any other tables or diagrams that clarify the project.
- c. Job descriptions/Terms of References for senior project staff.
- d. Letter of support to the project by local authorities and/or from the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands.

Final proposal checklist: key elements of a successful project document

The following checklist has intentionally been kept short and simple:

- A clear statement of the overall objective that explains how the environmental and human well-being targets will be improved.
- A logical flow of specific, realistic and achievable sub-objectives (activities, outputs and outcomes) that make a clear contribution to the overall project objective.
- A sound implementation plan.
- A clear and realistic budget.

Part 2: How to plan a project

This section gives an overview of the steps for planning a project. It covers the basic foundations to plan a small conservation project based on several publicly available manuals that are more detailed. It has been created for project planners writing small projects (in the range of \$10,000 to \$50,000) with a specific donor in mind. Each of the following steps is explained below, and more detail for each step is available in the annexes.

Consider the steps below to be "rules of thumb" for planning projects based on two popular approaches, "theory of change" and "logical framework analysis" (also known as the "log frame"). Some elements of the well-known "Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation" are also integrated. See the annexes for more information and references.

Before describing the steps, we would like to make some process recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Plan the project in a workshop with the project team

Developing effective conservation projects requires time with the relevant stakeholders, often in a workshop setting. The steps below could be used to develop a planning workshop agenda that may last from several hours to multiple days, depending on the complexity of your project and the stakeholders involved.

Recommendation 2: Use visual tools to facilitate project planning

Using visual tools is recommended throughout the planning process. For example, use "rich pictures" in Step 2 to describe and analyse the problem, or create flow-chart diagrams in to show how the activities are expected to lead to the overall project objective.

Visual tools also enable discussions that bring issues to the surface, and give participants a deeper understanding of the context. Visual tools can include rich pictures, problem trees, objective trees, conceptual models, system maps and more. See the Annexes for detail about Rich Pictures.

Overview of steps for project planning

- First check that you meet all the eligibility criteria from the donor
- Involve the project team and stakeholders*
- Step 1: Identify the project idea
- Step 2: Analyse / Describe the project context
- Step 3: Describe the problem
- Step 4: Identify the project objectives
- Step 5: Identify the activities and outputs
- Step 6: Identify indicators and a monitoring plan
- Step 7: Plan for implementation
- Step 8: Prepare a budget

*Involving key stakeholders is a fundamental principle for effective and fair conservation. The planning stage in particular requires the participation of the people directly affected by the project so make sure to involve them early in the process.

Step 1: Identify the project idea

Core questions: What is the main idea and location of the project?

Most likely you have a general idea of the issue or challenge you would like to tackle and how. Before diving into planning a project, make sure you have defined the basic elements of the project noted in the checklist below so you can bring together the appropriate people to help plan the project.

Checklist for project identification

- Name the location or the main theme if it is not location specific (e.g. national wetland strategy)

- Identify the broad approach (e.g. in-person trainings)
- Identify what the project will address. This is more than a target audience, it is either a "conservation target"² (e.g. the wetland, or the bird species found there) - or an aspect of human well-being (e.g. income levels, ability to fish, etc)

If you can answer these questions about what the project will and will not do you have defined the 'scope' of the project.

Step 2: Analyse and describe the project context

Core question: What is the current situation in relation to the conservation target(s) you wish to improve?

Once the project idea has been defined, describe the context in which the project will take place, remembering to identify the key people and groups.

Your organization may have undertaken a "situation analysis" to collect and analyse information about the ecological, governance, political and social factors that influence or are influenced by the project. The aim for a small project is not to undertake a detailed situation analysis, but to consider the context factors in which the project will operate.

A helpful visual tool to facilitate a common understanding of the project context within the project team is a "rich picture". See the Annexes for instructions.

When considering the context, you must also consider the stakeholders. Stakeholders are the individuals, groups, or institutions who may influence or be affected by your project's activities and results. A "stakeholder analysis" can also be very detailed, but for small projects the most important thing is to list the groups of people most likely to be the key actors and beneficiaries in the project.

Checklist of questions to consider in situation and stakeholder analysis

- Have you considered all the *social, political, economic, cultural, and ecological* factors affecting this situation?
- How do each of these directly influence the issue?
- Have all the critical actors and stakeholders been identified?
- What is their interest in the project? What is their influence on the project?
- For each of the above questions, how do men and women experience or influence these differently?

Final consideration for stakeholders: what is a gender responsive project?

A gender-responsive project goes beyond the "do no harm" approach of being gender sensitive, it proactively and intentionally contributes to the advancement of gender equality. At a minimum, the situation and stakeholder analysis should be gender-sensitive.

² For guidance on "conservation targets", see the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation - link is provided in the Annexes.

Step 3: Describe the problem

Core questions: What are the main problems facing the conservation target(s)? What are the causes of the problems?

The success of a project is closely related to a series of factors: good planning, adequate organisational capacity, competent and motivated project teams, Parties involved fulfilling their commitments, and more. But the most important starting point is to identify the real problem.

If the problem is sufficiently straightforward, it may be possible to present it in a simple written problem statement of just a few sentences. For more complex situations or problems a problem tree is a useful and recommended tool that - see the Annexe 2 for more detail.

Checklist of topics to cover when describing the problem statement (1 paragraph)

- The problem: qualitative (and if appropriate, quantitative) description of the situation to be changed.
- The beneficiaries: qualitative and quantitative (how many people in each group) analysis of the stakeholders most affected.
- The causes: explanation of the main causes (ie., direct threats), and the root causes or drivers of the problem (i.e. indirect threats).
- The consequences: description of the consequences of the problem on the environmental target or aspect of human well-being.

Step 4: Identify the project objectives

Core question: What is the overall project objective / goal? What needs to change before the overall project objective can be achieved?

Identify a few (two to four) outcomes that must happen in order to achieve the overall project objective. Objectives should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound (SMART).

Set realistic goals. The donor will require you to report on your progress, so consider whether you will be able to measure change within the project time frame.

How to write project objectives

Whether you are describing the overall project objective or goal, or more specific outcomes or objectives, write them in a way that describes how the world will look when this change has been achieved.

Example objectives (or 'outcomes'):

- Don't: "Training of community leaders".
- Do: "[number] community leaders finished the full training and have committed to follow-up plans".
- Do: Overall objective: "Revenue for local population from tourism increases".

- Do: Objective / outcome: "Signage and accessibility of key hiking and trekking sites are improved and maintained".

Including a simple diagram to illustrate the flow of activities and results is a strong complement to the text you will write to explain how the activities will create the required outputs and outcomes to address the problem(s) the project will address.

For your project, replace the words in the template below with your own specific statements. You may need several results chains or may need to expand the diagram to allow for multiple boxes.

Results chain template

A results chain lays out the sequence of inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, objectives visually. This is a simple linear template, but more creative lay-outs are encouraged.



Checklist for project objectives

- Objectives or outcomes are written as a statement.
- Objectives are "SMART".
- There is one (1) overall project objective/goal and two to four (2-4) outcomes

Step 5: Identify activities and outputs

Core question: What steps (activities) must be taken to achieve the overall objective? Are each of the activities necessary and sufficient to create the desired changes?

Once you have clarified the main objectives/outcomes, identify the activities. These should be achievable in the time frame of the project.

Remember that each objective is likely to require several activities and outputs to create the desired change (the desired outcome). Review the total set of activities proposed to make sure each one is necessary and that as a whole they will be sufficient to achieve the objectives.

When deciding upon activities, consider your institution's specific expertise, donor interest, likelihood of success, importance of assumptions, and budget available.

Write each activity as a short statement starting with a verb. For example:

Example activity statement:

- Do: "Organize a workshop among local communities to clarify the expectations and aspirations of the landowners".

- Don't: "Workshops among local communities"

Step 6: Identify indicators and a monitoring plan

Core question: What information will you need to determine whether your project is on track and has achieved its objectives?

Monitoring³ is a fundamental management activity that involves tracking progress on implementing activities, outputs and outcomes/objectives and using what is learned to inform the project team about how to continually improve the implementation of the project. This is called "adaptive management" and it is preferable to monitor, learn and adapt your project plan than to rigidly stick to a plan that is not working well.

Identify indicators that can be measured to show progress on activities, outputs, outcomes and the overall project objective.

Example indicators:

- Example indicators at the outcome (i.e. objective) level:
 - [number] Km of mangroves replanted within three years;
 - Decrease by 10% of collected bird eggs within one year.
- Example indicators at the output/activity level:
 - [number] of meetings with the local population to discuss wetland management within 4 years;
 - [number] of training sessions provided for public civil servants within two years.

A common shortcoming of small projects is an over-emphasis on output indicators - such as number of people trained, or number of flyers distributed. While these are important, ensure that there are also indicators for each of the 2-4 objectives.

Checklist for indicators and monitoring

- Have you identified at least one indicator for each activity, each outcome, and for the overall project objective?
- Are the indicators quantifiable?
- Are they measurable?
- Do you have a plan for who will collect and share the information and when?

Step 7: Plan for implementation

Prepare a work plan to describe how the project will be implemented. This should clearly define roles and responsibilities of all actors, including those of the National Committee.

³ Monitoring is often lumped together with evaluation, e.g. "monitoring and evaluation" or "M&E". In this guide we have not discussed evaluation for projects because it is rarely relevant for small projects. For medium and large projects it is important to include an independent evaluation at the middle and/or end of the project. See the IUCN Project Guidelines and Standards in the Annexes for an introduction to conservation project evaluation.

Checklist for the implementation plan / work plan

- Use a GANTT chart to show sequencing of activities and the amount of time allocated to each activity.
- Show the schedule of monitoring activities (data collection and review) and responsibilities.⁴
- Show the schedule of reporting - both technical and financial - and responsibilities.
- Make sure you have described WHAT, WHO, WHEN and HOW for each activity.

Remember that a work plan submitted to the donor is a preliminary plan that should be reviewed, adapted and updated as soon as possible after the project is started.

Step 8: Prepare a budget

A project budget is a prediction of the costs associated with the project. A clear and complete budget that presents a realistic assessment of its cost further demonstrates that the project is based on sound logic - and a sloppy budget conveys the opposite.

The budget should include the costs of labour, materials, and other related expenses. More specifically, it should include:

1. Financial resources for operational activities: e.g. printing, field visit expenses, travel, equipment etc.
2. Staff time (local and international): the staff time and/or management fees should meet the donor's guidelines for the percentage of the budget that may be for "overhead" or "management fee" (often a percentage of the total budget).

A project is normally broken down into specific activities, with costs assigned to each activity. For multi-year projects use one column per year. The Wetlands for the Future Fund Operational Guidelines provides a budget template but here we show only a very simple example.

Simple budget format example

	Costs (Amounts requested by the proposal for each activity)	Co-finance (optional) (List cash or in-kind contributions from your or other organizations towards the project)	Totals
Activity 1 (broken into sub steps if needed)	\$ 2000.00		\$ 2000.00
Activity 2	\$ 1000.00		\$ 1000.00

⁴ Monitoring and evaluation are often combined. Describe any internal or independent evaluation that may be undertaken at the halfway point or end of the project. Independent evaluation is different to technical progress reporting, and is unlikely to be part of small projects.

TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET:			\$3000.00
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Develop a detailed budget in Excel or Google Sheets and present a clean version of the high-level figures. Use the donor's template if one is provided.

Budget checklist

- Is the full cost of the project stated?
- Are all the proposed activities budgeted?
- Have you checked the numbers to make sure there are no calculation errors?
- If other sources of funding will contribute to the project ("co-funding" or "co-finance") - has this been shown?
- Have you included staff time?
- Have you used the donor's template (if applicable)?

Finally, ask yourself: How realistic is it to achieve the project objectives with this budget? Has your institution successfully managed a grant of this size before? Does it have the financial management systems in place to receive and administer the grant appropriately?

Conclusion

This concludes the main sections of the guide in which Part 1 explained how to write a proposal for a project that has already been planned, and Part 2 explained how to plan a project.

For further guidance and reading, six annexes are included on the next pages.

Annexes

Annex 1: Glossary of project terminology

Terminology may differ slightly from one development agency to another. Below is a short reminder of the meaning of some commonly used terms. For more complete glossaries please see:

- [The Conservation Project Manual has a glossary on page 185.](#)
- The Open Standards Glossary is on page 38 of the English version: <http://cmp-openstandards.org/download-os/>

Log frame: a common abbreviation for a logical framework. Log frames offer a structured and disciplined way of formulating and describing a project with hierarchical objectives and activities, indicators and means of their verification, and assumptions. Log frames are one of a class of similar methods.

Intervention logic: is the basic strategy underlying the project and covers all the steps to be taken within the project in order to contribute to the Development Objective.

Indicators / Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVI): are measures designed to classify the Development and the Project Objectives as well as the Outputs of a project. Where possible, they should be quantifiable and verifiable.

Examples of OVI at the outcome/objective level might be x Km of mangroves replanted within three years; decrease by 10% of collected bird eggs within one year.

Examples of OVI at the output/activity level might be: x number of meetings with the local population to discuss wetland management within 4 years; x number of training sessions provided for public civil servants within two years.

Sources of verification: are the elements (results of survey, reports, photos, etc.) which give the data needed to check the outputs against the indicators of success (OVI). If the expected output is to restore coastal wetlands in a Wetland of International Importance, the OVI could be 10 Km of mangroves replanted along a wetland shore. Aerial photos would be a good source of verification to demonstrate that the indicator has been reached.

Assumptions: are factors external to the project over which project managers have no control but which nevertheless have potentially great influence on the project output: civil war, travel restrictions, weather, etc.

Development Objective: is also sometimes called "Overall Objective" or "Development Goal". This is the broad purpose to which the project is meant to contribute. It should be consistent with existing National Conservation Strategies or any other officially declared Development Strategies.

Project Objectives: are also called "Project Purposes" or "Immediate Objectives". This is what the project itself is expected to achieve. Be careful not to confuse project purpose with results or activities. If you have too many project objectives, the project becomes confused and may be difficult to deliver.

Outputs: are the concrete results of the intervention (the project). Physical outputs are the ones you can actually touch or see: an infrastructure built, a management plan created, a successful consultation process implemented, a new legislation in place, a site delimitation put on map, an inventory finalised, etc.

Non-physical outputs/results are more difficult to evaluate and therefore often under-evaluated but are nevertheless very important: positive changes in policies, better trained staff, new mentality or new approach to problems, more positive behaviours, politicians and local communities more aware of the importance of wetlands. A very common mistake is to start defining an output by a verb, making it an activity.

Activities: is the work needed to be carried out to achieve the outputs. There can be numerous activities but it is important to be very realistic and link activities with resources. Each activity should be linked to an output. An activity always begins with a verb: buy, contract, implement, do, visit, distribute, train, etc.

Terms used in this guide: activities, outputs, outcome, overall objective and impact; these are illustrated in a typical sequence called a "results chain":



Annex 2: More detailed project development guidance

This annex provides project development guidance for more complex or larger projects, and a table referring readers to further sources of project planning guidance.

Table showing recommended sources of guidance on specific needs

Requirement	Tool or guide
How to do stakeholder analysis	IUCN Guidelines, Hivos Theory of Change guide
How to do conservation specific conceptual maps / results chains	Open Standards
How to do problem trees and objective trees	Conservation Project Manual, Open Standards (called conceptual models)
How to follow a logical framework analysis	Conservation Project Manual
How to integrate gender	IUCN guide - see the annex on gender within Module 1

Glossary of project terminology	The Conservation Project Manual has a glossary on page 185. The Open Standards Glossary is on page 38.
How to use spheres of influence	Hivos Theory of Change guide or Outcome Mapping methodology: https://www.outcomemapping.ca/ .

Theory of change or logical framework analysis?

The theory of change approach uses a diagram to illustrate how the project team expects change to occur through the project. The linkages between activities and outcomes are shown visually. Logical framework analysis follows similar steps to developing the project ideas, but the final product is described in a matrix called a “log frame”. This guide recommends both approaches because they are complementary and the visual representation of the change the project expects to create is very important. Log frames are frequently requested by donors, so an example of a completed log frame matrix is provided in Annex 5.

More for Step 1: Identify the project idea

Use available conservation data and science

Make use of publicly available conservation prioritization and planning tools and data sets to identify priority locations and targets for action - doing so helps demonstrate to the donor that investment in your project meets a proven need and is likely to have an impact. Customary and traditional knowledge gathered from men, women and other socio-cultural groups involved or impacted by the project should also be gathered and used.

More for Step 2: Analyse / Describe the project context

Recommended visualization tool for situation analysis: Rich Picture

A rich picture is a visualization of a project development process to illustrate the individual and shared understanding of the current context and desired situation. Drawing helps to grasp the complexity of a system and facilitates discussion.⁵

To draw a rich picture, ensure each participant has access to markers and use one large, shared piece of paper. All participants contribute to drawing the current situation that the project will influence, including the stakeholders and linkages between elements on the drawing. First allow time to draw without discussing, and then use the drawing to hold a discussion about what each person included and why.

Questions the rich picture and ensuing discussion should respond to:

⁵ For more guidance, see *Visualizing sustainable landscapes : understanding and negotiating conservation and development trade-offs using visual techniques:*
<https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/10074>

- What is the current situation in relation to the issue(s) we wish to change?
- Does the picture reflect the social, political, economic, cultural, ecological factors?
 - How do each of these directly influence the issue?
- Are all the critical actors and stakeholders identified? Who are the key stakeholders?
 - What is their interest in the project? What is their influence on the project?
 - For each of the above questions, how do men and women experience or influence these differently?

More for Step 3: Describe the problem

Recommended approach for more complex problem analysis: Problem Tree

If the problem or situation is more complex, a problem analysis using a problem tree is recommended to identify the problems and the causal relationships between them. A problem tree helps establish cause-effect relationships between the negative aspects of an existing situation. This exercise is considered extremely important, as it forms the basis for choosing project activities.

Before beginning the visual process of mapping the cause and effect analysis of the problem the project will address, review the Rich Picture or the organisation's existing strategy as a group to identify the higher level 'result area' or objective on which to focus the problem analysis for this project.

The instructions for problem trees in the Conservation Project Manual beginning on page 44 are recommended.

More for Step 4: Identify the project objectives

Recommended approach: Objective Tree

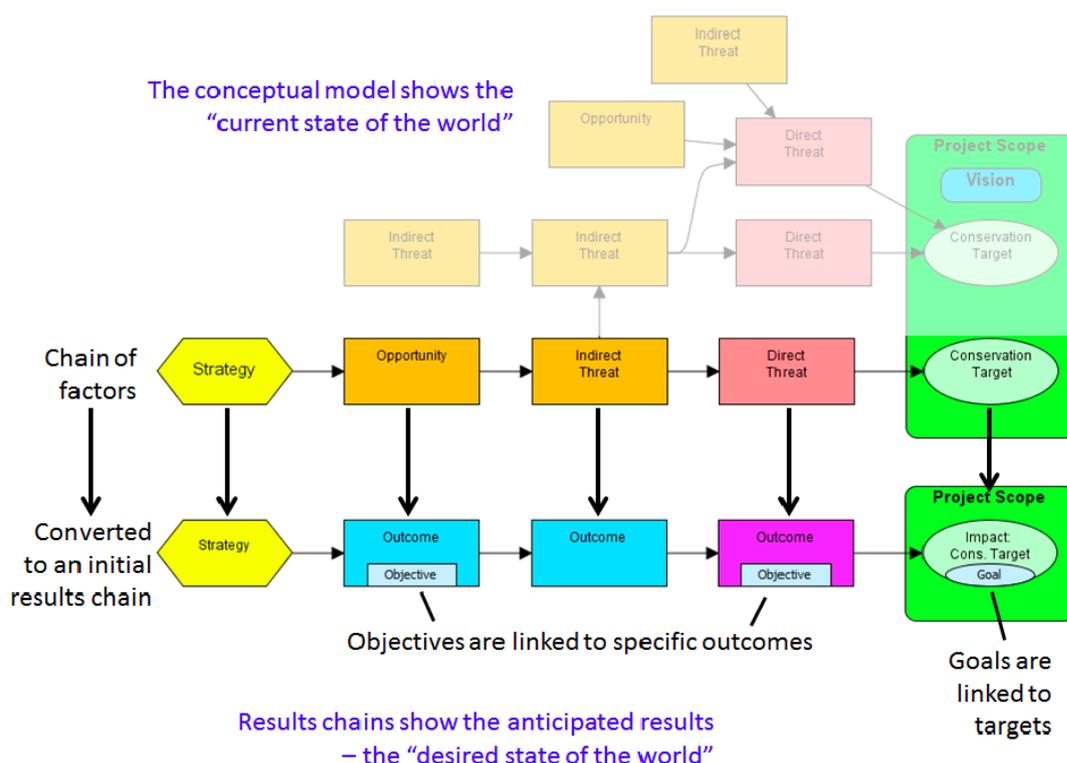
If you developed a problem tree, develop the logic of your intervention(s) by working backwards from the long-term desired change, converting each problem to an intervention, forming an objective tree. Elucidating the anticipated set of changes in this way uncovers the team members' assumptions about *how* changes are expected to happen. The visual representation of the series of intermediate changes required will be an objective tree – or if it is simple, may be represented as a results chain or flow chart.

Formulate each step in the pathway or map as a realised situation, not as an activity or objective. Resist the urge to list activities you are familiar with and instead start with the problem and identify the building blocks of a transformed situation. This increases the chances of having a clear logical link between the activities and the desired outcomes. Examples are available in all of the project planning guides that have been recommended. See also Annex 4 for questions that help test assumptions.

When describing the diagram you have drawn, explain why and how each link joins each 'building block' to the overall desired change in the conservation or human well-being target. Uncover assumptions by prompting the project team to ask: 'If we take x action, then y change will result, because...'.

Recommended tool: Conceptual models

The following diagram is a template for a "conceptual model" taken from the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation. The Open Standards is a useful guide that explains how to map the factors that affect a conservation target. For example, a lack of alternative food sources (indirect threat) leads to overfishing (direct threat) leads to reduction in fish stocks (environmental target). In the diagram below, the last two rows show how one can take a threat and turn it into an objective.



Source: Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation

More for Step 6 on Monitoring: Why monitoring is important

Another reason to monitor the progress of a project is because it tests the assumptions you made about how the activities and outputs would lead to the outcomes. For example, if your monitoring showed that 40 people attended a training workshop to raise awareness about wetlands (attendance at the training would be an output indicator to measure number of people trained) but then you surveyed the participants and learned that only 5 changed their attitudes towards wetland conservation (this change in behaviour would be an outcome indicator to measure change in attitudes), you would have learned that the training activity did not lead to the expected outcome.

This information is important for "adaptive management" - adapting the project plan based on what is learned while it is implemented.

Additional considerations for larger projects: Environmental and social safeguards

Could your project have unintended negative environmental or social consequences?

Organizations are increasingly planning upfront to safeguard against possible unintended negative social and environmental consequences, and are developing guidance on how to screen projects for risk and put in place mitigating actions. IUCN is one such organisation and has developed an Environmental and Social Management System that is made publicly available.

Screening for and implementing environmental and social safeguards:
<https://www.iucn.org/resources/project-management-tools/environmental-and-social-management-system>

Annex 3: Simplified project document format for workshops and seminars

Project documentation for workshops and seminars generally does not require as much preparatory analysis and planning as does a large field project. Workshops and seminar proposals should provide a short explanation of the situation the workshop or seminar is going to address and the justification, such as, preparation for the next COP; implementation of resolution X; exchange of experience; learning from other regional experience.

The project objective: should state the change or improvement that will result from holding the workshop. (Example: to provide Governments or members with assessed information on..., thereby facilitating their decision on the future development of ...).

Project Outputs should be clearly described. (Example: a report based on the inputs and deliberations of the workshop containing assessed information on...).

Project activities necessary for preparing and holding the workshop as well as post-workshop activities should be outlined.

Project inputs needed and the role of speakers should be explained, as well as the role of consultants required to prepare papers.

Reporting, evaluation and follow-up are required, even for workshops, as is a budget. Budgets for workshop projects usually consist mainly of travel expenses (subsistence allowances and travel fares), organisation expenses (rent of meeting facilities, communication expenses, staff time, printing and publishing, postage, etc.). In some cases, there might be fees for invited speakers.

Annex 4: Considerations for specific types of conservation strategies

Project approach	Key questions to test assumptions
Knowledge products (training materials,	<input type="checkbox"/> Can you describe how the use of the product will lead to change? <input type="checkbox"/> Have you identified a set of intended uses and users?

reports, analyses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have you identified an intended result? <input type="checkbox"/> Have you considered how to involve the end users of the product in creating it to increase their sense of ownership of it? <input type="checkbox"/> Have you planned for uptake and use of the product? (distribution, training, capacity development, and more)
Capacity development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have you clearly stated which skills should be acquired, the target audience and the intended use of the new skills? <input type="checkbox"/> Do the beneficiaries have an environment that will enable them to use their new skills? <input type="checkbox"/> Are all of these linked to the project or programme goal?
Policy influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have you identified which segment of the policy cycle you want to influence: agenda setting, policy development, policy implementation or policy review? <input type="checkbox"/> Who needs to be influenced? Who will you work with? What science is required? What formal and informal activities are required?
Species or site management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have you identified the specific conservation targets - species, species assemblages, or ecosystems?
Sustainable livelihoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have you identified the human well-being targets - elements of human well-being affected by the conservation targets? <input type="checkbox"/> Do the stated beneficiaries have the resources, capacity, alliances, and attitudes required to take up the new practices?

Annex 5: Example logical framework template ("log frame")

A logical framework or “log frame” (also called a results framework) aims to capture the main intended results/outcomes/objectives, key outputs and activities, and indicators of success. This matrix is another way to give a view of the project’s intentions and can facilitate monitoring and evaluation of the project. The log frame also documents assumptions underpinning the project’s logic, and may mention the external risks facing the project.

It does not replace the visual illustration of a theory of change, but the main elements of a theory of change can be transferred into the log frame tool.

An example log frame format is shown here, but if the donor has a specific template, use theirs. Note that the example content here is limited and a completed log frame would require more precision.

Log frame example

Intervention logic	Objectively Verifiable Indicators	Sources of verification	Assumptions
Overall Objective Improved wetland management provides useful services to the community	Existence of a management plan, implementation of participatory approaches	Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands, independent experts	
Outcomes (objectives) 1. Sustainable fish stock	Number, size and variety of fishes	Independent reports, fish counts	Political support from government authorities
Outputs 1.1. New incentives for sustainable fishing	Number and type of legal measures taken	Population survey	Authorities and Government want to implement these measures

1.2. Effluent pollution under control	Number of m3 of untreated sewage going into the river	Report by Ministry for the environment and municipality	The company complies with its pollution reduction strategy
Activities 1.1.1. Set up a fund to finance incentive payments. 1.1.2 Train civil servants on Market Based Instruments (incentives).	Fund in place Records of the workshop Civil servants complete a post-training questionnaire	Website, other documentation Workshop agenda and report	Good relations with the local authorities; good participation by local population and feeling of project ownership
1.2.1. Survey sources of pollution 1.2.2. Discuss with polluting company 1.2.3. Plan pollution reduction strategies	Report of pollution survey Discussions held One action plan written up by polluting company	Reports, documentation	Polluting company is open to discussion

Annex 6: Sources and further reading

- **Database of wetland funding opportunities**
<https://www.ramsar.org/activity/funding-organization-database> (Compiled by the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands)
- **The Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation (2017)**
Specifically designed for conservation by conservation organisations, offers detailed guidance on conceptual maps, uses the concept of conservation targets and human well-being targets. The *Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation* were developed by a global partnership of experienced conservation organizations to define a general approach and specific tools required to implement quality conservation interventions.
 - Open Standards website: <http://cmp-openstandards.org/>
 - Open Standards PDFs in various languages: <http://cmp-openstandards.org/download-os/>
 - [English](#) (4.1 mb)
 - [Indonesian](#) (3.7 mb)
 - [Portuguese](#) (3.7 mb)
 - [French](#) (6.8 mb)
 - [Albanian](#) (6.7 mb)
 - [Spanish](#) (5 mb)
 - [Russian](#) (7.8 mb)
 - [Persian](#) (4.5 mb)
 - [Korean](#) (4.1 mb)
- **The IUCN Project Guidelines and Standards Version 2.3 (2016)**
Mostly based on a theory of change approach but also includes log frames, elements of Open Standards and an adapted version of logical framework analysis. Useful for larger projects. <https://www.iucn.org/resources/project-management-tools/project-guidelines>
- **The Conservation Project Manual (2003)**
Approachable, thorough, and aimed at beginners developing projects up to \$150,000. Based on logical framework analysis. Available also in Spanish, Russian, Chinese and Tibetan.
 - Website: <http://www.conservationleadershipprogramme.org/grants/project-manuals/>
 - PDF manual in English: <http://www.conservationleadershipprogramme.org/media/2014/09/ConservationProjectManual.pdf>
- **Theory of Change Thinking in Practice (Hivos, 2015)**
Not specific to conservation, but adds valuable dimensions of social analysis and considerations that are limited in the other guides above. More advanced.
 - Webpage: <https://knowledge.hivos.org/theory-change-guidelines>
 - PDF: https://knowledge.hivos.org/sites/default/files/publications/hivos_toc_guidelines_final_nov_2015.pdf

- **Journal article on results chains in conservation:**
<https://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol18/iss3/art22/> (Published in Ecology and Society)
- **Short guide to Stakeholder Analysis by ODI (2 pages):**
<https://www.odi.org/publications/5257-planning-tools-stakeholder-analysis>.
- **Visual techniques (including Rich Picture):**
Visualizing sustainable landscapes : understanding and negotiating conservation and development trade-offs using visual techniques
<https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/10074>
- **IUCN Environmental and Social Management System manuals:**
<https://www.iucn.org/resources/project-management-tools/environmental-and-social-management-system>