PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES

FOR WHOLE OF LANDSCAPE RESTORATION

first you have to connect people before you can connect the country

the people
who live in a
landscape are
the ones who
are there for
the long haul

INTRODUCTION

The desire to put together a large-scale landscape restoration project is primarily driven by the need to halt biodiversity loss. The *way* a project is carried out varies greatly. It is our intention in this paper to show how community-driven projects have a good chance of success where they gain impartial resourcing and support that ensures all land managers and stakeholders sit at the table as equals.

For the purposes of this paper, the Norman Wettenhall Foundation defines a 'community-driven' landscape restoration project as one that aims to involve the full spectrum of people and groups who live, work or own land within the bounds of the particular landscape affected. Community-driven does not mean community groups acting alone - that would be as elitist and as ineffective as any vision or plan prepared by an individual, agency or organisation on their own.

In this context, a community-driven project requires from the outset the involvement of all stakeholders in, first, identifying the parameters of their project, then, secondly, engaging in a meaningful manner so they together create their vision.

The number one priority for a landscape restoration project need not be all about revegetation. The Norman Wettenhall Foundation seeks out projects that, as their first priority, concentrate on connecting people. Why? Because *community ownership* of a vision for landscape change is an essential ingredient or a project. Without it the survival of any vegetation planted is left to chance. No matter how brilliantly planned and executed, any revegetation or landscape project is reliant for its survival in the long term on *human management* to guarantee the works and on-ground support, and also security and continuity for the land being managed. This is particularly so among the fragmented land ownership patterns of southern Australia.

There can be no successful landscape restoration without the commitment of private landholders. Parks and reserves, while having a valuable role to play in conservation efforts, are still fundamentally fragments in the landscape.

In order to link up habitat and restore the land, public and private land managers need to work collaboratively across all sectors. Only at the point when the land managers – public and private – are working together, can a group begin to plan to restore degraded landscapes through a variety of connectivity projects.

We are primarily concerned in this paper with this vitally important first stage – the stage when everyone is invited to come and sit down at the table. If all potential partners are to be equally engaged in devising a vision for their landscape, the project must start at the very beginning without any preconceptions or fixed agendas.

When farmers and agency reps, field naturalists and treechangers, first sit together around a table, everyone should be presented with a blank page – not a cleverly designed biolink project that was the brainchild of a select few. This is the 'bottom up' approach.

We believe the best way to engage landholders is through an inspiring project in which they feel they have a stake. While agencies, large NGOs and individuals might provide leadership, if landowners are not brought on board from the outset and their viewpoints treated with respect, a landscape restoration project would seem to face a bleak future. The people who live in a landscape are the ones who are there for the long haul. If they are ignorant, apathetic or alienated from a project, what hope of success can be claimed for it in the long term?

So, we would argue, before even the best 'whizz bang' idea can succeed, a crucial first step must be taken. All those who live within and manage that particular landscape must be brought together, their views sought and their knowledge identified. Only then are they likely to gain ownership of the vision created, and it is that ownership which provides the commitment and power to drive long term change.

RATIONALE

Why adopt an inclusive approach in partnership building?

The Foundation acknowledges that there is no single or best way to undertake a landscape restoration project. What is important is a process that builds open and inclusive partnerships among a diverse range of stakeholders. This enables shared vision building and planning for sustainable and innovative solutions to a project. Solutions are invariably complex, so the more minds - the better.

Landscapes are managed by an interconnected web of people and interests. When stakeholders are ignored or excluded, links are broken: the chances of success are weakened.

Building partnerships is about inclusivity. The founding group will need to move outside its comfort zone if it is to be representative of all those who have a stake in a particular landscape.

Your first major challenge is to identify the legitimate stakeholders, listing each person, group or organisation. You could draw up a stakeholder map:
• who will be affected positively or detrimentally?
• who can offer resources or support?
• who are the movers and shakers who can give you access to larger networks, ensuring the project gains even greater leverage?

One of the most important ingredients for landscape change is finding committed people.

To find these people and invite them in, you need to spread the word – via local newspapers, newsletters, email lists and door knocking. Start with a public meeting or invite all major stakeholders to take part in a forum.

Incorporating a diversity of views, interests, skills and knowledge will lead to richer, more robust and innovative solutions.

Furthermore, to gain legitimacy and credibility, a partnership project will want as broad a range of representatives from stakeholder organisations as possible. And it is well known that where stakeholders are excluded from a partnership they can become a threat by undermining or acting as a barrier to the eventual implementation of a project's vision. Any partnership project should always leave the door open for a stakeholder to become part of the process. Differences can be helpful when exploring innovative solutions to complex problems.

If no one group or organisation directs the project or owns the vision, then the opportunity arises to build effective and equal partnerships with a whole range of stakeholders – industry, indigenous groups, government and non-government organisations, environment and landcare groups, 'friends of' and youth groups, schools and individual landholders.

landscapes are managed by an interconnected web of people and interests

people need to look at the big picture and imagine the future they want

What are the benefits of creating a shared vision?

To create a shared vision is to plan for the future. Before planning begins, however, people need to look at the big picture and imagine the future they want.

The process of creating a shared vision in the beginning of a project is a very important first step in defining future goals and will benefit the project in the long term, decreasing the chance of conflict. Once everyone agrees on this vision, the group has a common purpose.

Creating a shared vision gives a group direction, a purpose and a reason for making change. They become bonded together with a shared objective around which they can devise strategies and actions, moving towards positive change. You have to be able to imagine the future before you can build it.

A shared purpose makes a project team strong. Arriving at it will take much time and debate, especially if it is to be as inclusive as possible as already discussed.

Support and resources are essential in facilitating the process. Visions that appear out of thin air ought to be treated with suspicion. Weaving together the threads to create a common purpose will involve discussion, knowledge gathering, research, capacity building, negotiation and compromise. None of this comes for free. The Norman Wettenhall Foundation recognises the importance of funding the vision building process, and encourages other organisations to do the same.

The major keys to effectively working together to achieve a shared vision are:
- Adopting a 'bottom up' approach where everyone has the opportunity to speak
- Creating a platform where local knowledge and experience is validated
- Putting in place a governance structure that is accountable and open to everyone
- Empowering individual representatives so they can fully participate.

How can the vision be turned into reality?

Creating a shared vision is only the first part of the process. Many blueprints and plans are completed only to gather dust on a shelf. Often they are too grand in design or as ephemeral as fairy floss. They may be bold, but if they're kept vague and general, nothing's going to change. They're simply good ideas – and every pub bar is full of those.

At the end of the vision-building phase, project partners need to make hard decisions about priorities, then bring the detail of what they have selected to do into sharp focus. That's rightly their job. It's not up to outsiders to cherry pick from the raft of ideas thrown up in the vision-building phase. They don't have either the knowledge or the legitimate authority. It's up to those inside the tent to move from ideas to action via some form of democratic and accountable prioritisation process.

STEPS TOWARDS SUCCESSFUL LANDSCAPE RESTORATION

STEP 1 - The conditions for forming a participatory partnership

For landscape restoration to happen on the large scale, and to be truly sustainable, it is important that the people who live in the landscape have an opportunity to take the lead.

While there may be an interested core group that is keen to work on restoration, they cannot work in isolation on their own solutions. First, their solutions will not have widespread ownership and, second, they are unlikely to have the capacity to carry them out.

Everyone who has a stake or interest in the landscape must be given the opportunity to participate. Forming partnerships where people can work collaboratively will make sure that the outcomes are far greater than what individuals or groups could achieve on their own.

Casting the net widely to seek the involvement of others can take time and effort. It is often easier to just work with 'like-minded' people. But it is important that everyone who wants to be involved has the opportunity to participate from the outset. If not, the project runs the risk of appearing exclusive and people who are left out can quickly become critical or feel alienated.

It may be necessary to raise awareness and interest in landscape restoration to entice wide involvement. Even then not everyone may want to be involved. It is important to keep these people well informed of progress and to leave the door open to them participating in the future.

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Case study – Connecting Country

The Norman Wettenhall Foundation developed a work plan and funding stream focusing on supporting community-led landscape restoration in south-east Australia. In 2007 it was time to find the projects to support.

The Foundation's Executive Officer contacted some key people in and around Castlemaine in central Victoria. There are a large number of people and groups participating in conservation efforts in the Mount Alexander Shire with over 30 Landcare groups, and yet no formal Landcare network or Landcare coordinators. A large cluster of conservation covenants was a tell tale sign that people were active in nature conservation, but no vision existed as to how people could work together to restore the landscape.

So various members of a range of environment and Landcare groups got together to discuss the funding offer to start a landscape restoration project – and they liked the idea. The timing was right and interest was high.

The next step was to form a Reference Group with representatives from a variety of environment and Landcare groups as well as representation from government agencies working in the area. The desire to work collaboratively across the whole of the landscape, to share information, to link up with other groups and to support each other was evident.

Local conservation group, Friends of the Box-Ironbark Forests, auspiced the project and employed a Project Worker with funds supplied by the Foundation. Work began on gathering information from the community about the condition of their land, what conservation efforts they had participated in, what flora and fauna were special to them, what specialist knowledge they had, and whether they would like to be part of a larger project.

From that point on, between 20 to 30 people regularly attended meetings. After about two years, the Reference Group became an incorporated body and the group became Connecting Country.
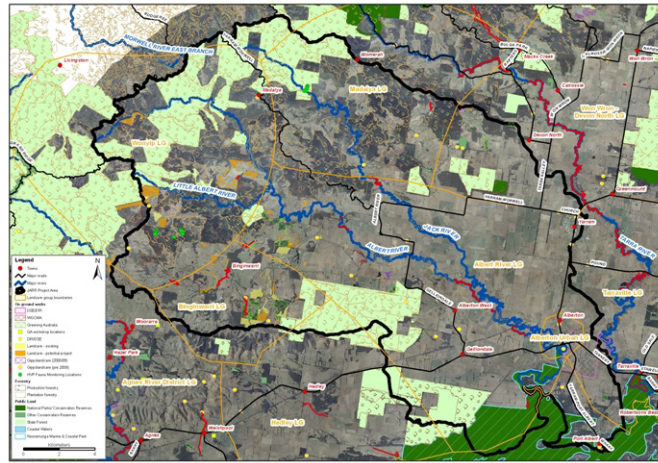
Today, Connecting Country has a website and blog, and has been successful in obtaining state and federal funding for on-ground work and community education. It is an exciting and solid project that offers funding to landholders, education courses, training and workshops, as well as advice and help with natural resource management issues.

STEP 2 - Creating a shared vision through mapping the landscape

Maps offer a useful tool for linking people as well as landscapes.

Landholders gain an eagle's eye view of the big picture, allowing the making of comparisons and appreciation of cross-boundary impacts.

Landholders often first become interested in a project through physically examining their property on a map in relation to their neighbours and peers.

Mapping the whole of the landscape area allows project partners to see how their actions in one part of the catchment may effect those in other parts. Those at the top of the catchment, for instance, become better placed to see what is happening to those at the bottom. This is very important in establishing the cause and effect relationship in a whole of landscape project.

For example, dairy farmers using chemicals on farm land at the top of the catchment may not realise that the run off is effecting the water quality downstream. This then impacts on recreational fishing.

Thanks to Melbourne software company, Spatial Vision, the Norman Wettenhall Foundation has an internet-based tool called the community web mapping portal (cwmp) available for use by groups to use as part of their projects.

The cwmp is a mapping device which is a combination of Google Earth and CFA maps. It is used for connecting with private landholders and for documenting actions and wildlife on private land. The cwmp allows on-ground groups to collect valuable data on particular species. This data can be used to build a picture of environmental assets, as well as plan for conservation actions.

The cwmp is being used by a number of projects around the state. However, what we've learnt from this exercise is that it is used mostly when there is a *need* – a need to collect specific information for a specific purpose.

STEP 3 - Mentoring and using local knowledge and skills

Peer group mentoring is another tool for promoting community linkages and provides a conduit for information between landholders, government agencies, catchment authorities and Landcare. The extension literature has long called for local content and control as an essential part of participative extension.

Mentoring

Mentoring is about having a non-judgmental attitude towards those you are dealing with, building trust amongst a group, sharing knowledge, active listening, providing feedback and advice, making resources available where possible, and providing support to those that need it.

Mentoring others in a community or environment group is a way to ensure that future executive roles are filled, old members are retained and new members are recruited.

Trialed by the Otway Agroforestry Network (OAN) and by the Master TreeGrower (MTG) program in WA, peer group mentoring (PGM) grew out of long term treegrowers doing site visits and assisting other landholders in their area in selecting and locating productive as well as landcare plantings. Peer group mentors oversee projects, provide on-the-job training and facilitate visits to other landholders with similar aspirations – a service that has proven very popular.

It conforms with the long held tenet that landholders learn best by peering over the fence and checking out what their neighbours are doing – particularly where the mentors are considered as leaders in the community.

Local knowledge and skills

A strong community group is one that gives value to local knowledge and skills. In order to attract more active members, a project should focus on the different knowledge and skills that people can contribute, and how the project team can adequately carry out knowledge transfer. The project can compile this body of knowledge and skills into a database and use it to engage widely and to draw on local expertise when needed.

Likewise, a good project will seek out those in the community who can provide something towards the project – knowledge of local flora and fauna, or knowledge of local indigenous culture. This local knowledge is extremely valuable when added to the body of scientific research that the project has undertaken or intends to undertake.

Using mentoring and local knowledge and skills are ways to connect the people in the project, long before you can even begin to connect the landscape.

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The Otway Agroforestry Network (OAN) is an experienced group working on farm forestry and biodiversity conservation. They have teamed up with the Upper Barwon Landcare Network to work across the landscape on a connectivity project called LEAF - Linking Environment and Farms - which is proudly supported by The Norman Wettenhall Foundation.

One of the very apparent strengths of the OAN is their use of a peer group mentoring program, which uses local landholders to talk to their neighbours about whole farm planning and biodiversity conservation. OAN capitalises on its strengths within the group – diversity of skills and knowledge.

The PGMs seeks to enhance community capacity and assist the process of establishing multipurpose plantings in the Otway region. By involving farmers in the design and management of trees for conservation and profit, landscape change occurs in a way that reflects the interests and aspirations of the local community, as well as valuing and respecting local knowledge.

The PGMs give OAN members assistance and support from other experienced farmers and tree growers to design, establish, and manage multipurpose plantations based on landholder needs and desires.

In order to recognise leadership in landscape restoration, the Norman Wettenhall Foundation has awarded OAN member, Andrew Stewart, with a three year fellowship. The fellowship is intended to support Andrew's work, to keep him in the industry, and to reward peers and leaders in conservation.

STEP 4 - Undertaking appropriate research and investment

Decisions about how the partners in a project go about restoring their landscape must be grounded on sound science. While a hypothesis can start with anecdotal material, it needs, in the end, to be backed by evidence-based science. Constructing a landscape vision is fundamental to planning, implementing and restoring natural ecosystems, claim the research scientists behind a recent brochure Restoring Landscape Resilience.

The first step should be to gather together all the information and data available, ensuring that local knowledge is respected and considered. As a precaution to avoiding reinventing the wheel, a project ought to investigate prior research and studies conducted by other groups or government agencies via a literature search. Disseminating research findings widely ought to be built into the process. The aim is to empower as well as embrace community knowledge.

At the outset, project partners ought to consider carrying out a baseline inventory of biodiversity as it will provide a benchmark for measurement of progress. Without a benchmark, a project is flying blind. How can you know, for instance, whether indigenous flora or fauna is increasing or decreasing unless you have thoroughly surveyed what was there at the beginning?

Initial assessment ought to identify natural and human-induced disturbances of the landscape. As a result of what is discovered, project partners have the background context for developing a set of indicators for measuring changes in ecological and biophysical conditions. As a precaution to avoiding reinventing the wheel, a project could investigate prior research and studies conducted by other groups or government agencies via a literature search. Disseminating research findings widely ought to be built into the process.

Any large scale landscape restoration will require project partners to take a long term perspective. Research will have to be designed to consider the consequences of, for instance, differing fire regimes and ecological succession as vegetation ages, as well as factoring in the projected impacts of climate change.

Research indicators can act as a powerful tool to inspire a community as well as a means of measuring change. A frequently used approach is to select an 'iconic' endangered species, such as the Regent Honeyeater. By identifying threatening processes and expanding habitat for the icon species, other interconnected species up and down the food chain benefit.

Before rushing to implementation, the scientific 'precautionary principle' requires the testing of any hypotheses arising as a result of research. Criteria for measuring success or failure have to be developed. Ideally, these measures should lack ambiguity and be relatively easy and cheap to sample. Well-planned 'experiments' could be designed to test theories that arise, with monitoring enabling adaptation.

STEP 5 – Community capacity and knowledge building

Capacity

The solutions to landscape restoration are complex and will require partners working effectively together, understanding and using accepted science, combining this with local knowledge and using their diverse range of skills and knowledge to think 'outside the box.'

In reality many communities are keen to act, but they lack the capacity. Often existing groups are run by volunteers who are overstretched as it is. They often don't have the time or people power to devote to their normal operation, let alone the requirements of participating in large scale landscape restoration.

If communities are going to get involved, they must be given the space to identify what they need. In some cases this may be giving groups the resources so they can operate effectively and undertake activities. This may involve employing existing members or bringing in a project worker to undertake activities. Whatever method is adopted, it's important that the capacity developed or brought in is shared amongst the group.

Knowledge building

Similarly, communities themselves are best placed to decide on their knowledge needs. Local knowledge is often the vital missing ingredient in many broad scale revegetation projects. By using it as the starting point for knowledge building, solutions for landscape restoration are likely to be sound and truly owned by local communities.

If it is recognised that skills and knowledge on a particular topic need to be brought in, it's important that 'visiting experts' cross-reference their information with local knowledge, ensuring a two way flow of information. Where investigations occur, it is critical to provide opportunities for local communities to participate and learn.

STEP 6 – Ensuring the community becomes resilient

Traditionally, the concept of resilience in natural resource management literature is discussed in terms of the ability of an ecosystem to absorb and adapt to change. How robust is that lake or landscape? What is its tipping point? But it is human beings who are the drivers of rapid, unsustainable change in almost every ecosystem. The resilience of a particular landscape is irrelevant in the face of unregulated resource exploitation, excessive waste production and continued reliance on invasive, exotic species.

Sustainability is not about preserving the way we in the first world live, with access to the same level of resources. This is seeing the future as some sort of rising trend line emerging from the past. In fact, futurists have demonstrated that major historical changes are based on paradigm shifts. Famously, the technological advances of the Industrial Revolution and the internet offer two examples; another, not so obvious example, is how mass education of women in the first world led to a significant decline in the birth rate.

We need a social revolution where people choose to live differently, learning to live within the limits of the natural system they inhabit and in balance with the rhythms of planet earth. Consequently, it would seem more fruitful to turn the concept of resilience on its head and create communities of people, who adopted an 'eco-centric', rather than human-centred, approach. In contrast to the traditional western values of dominance and exploitation, such resilient communities would see themselves as owing a duty of care to conserve and foster the health of natural systems on which we all ultimately depend.

Global philanthropic research in the biodiversity field has identified that groups of people already exist who have adopted a sense of stewardship and custodial responsibility for their land. Ken Wilson, ED of the Christensen Fund, says that recent research has found that 80 per cent of the world's most biodiverse areas are in the hands of Indigenous peoples. Community-driven land management based on deep connections to country is proving far more effective at environmental protection than putting land within formal reserve systems. Reserves – no matter how large – are merely islands, fragments dependent

for their long term value as habitat on the goodwill and practices of those remaining in charge of the surrounding sea of human-managed land. Where people are removed from landscapes, the tragedy of the commons awaits. Indigenous movements, for instance, have proven central to stopping environmental exploitation by corporations and governments, such as oil exploration in Alaska and rainforest destruction in the Amazon.

What the population control activists often miss is that it's not how many people live in a place, but how they behave. Australia, for instance, lost over half its forests to large scale land clearance for agriculture in the nineteenth century carried out by very few people. What the experience with Indigenous protected areas tells us is that what counts are the value systems in place and the rules of law supporting them – it's not simply a matter of numbers.

We believe that good management of the landscape requires retaining resilient communities within that landscape, capable of nurturing and sustaining not only themselves, but also other species with whom they share the natural living environment. Rather than focusing on depopulating landscapes and creating reserves, environmental activists and philanthropists need to move to the next level, taking up the challenge by asking: what can be done to ensure that communities become custodians of their land, leaving it in better shape for future generations?

Resilient communities will need to devise a diverse range of productive systems that enable them to live autonomously and sustainably in all senses of the word – from ecotourism through to utilising indigenous flora and fauna as part of the productive process. Involving as many different groups in the community in the vision-building process creates a fertile seed bed for seeking innovative solutions.

Ultimately, however, regional communities cannot be expected to do this on their own. Transforming enterprises and paying for custodianship will have to become a wider community responsibility. It's going to cost billions of dollars in government, corporate, philanthropic and public funds. It's a challenge we have only begun to face.

STEP 7 - Monitoring and adapting strategies based on experience

No matter how worthy, an objective that is not coupled with monitoring to measure progress towards its achievement is likely to prove wishful thinking. The City of London, for example, had for three hundred years the overarching objective of eradicating poverty. While a worthy stretch goal, it has clearly not been realised: over the centuries, planning strategies were neither targeted nor adapted to achieve that objective.

A vision is not fixed in stone, incapable of change. Some strategies will need discarding or adjusting. No matter how well intentioned, some will fail to perform as predicted, while others may be more successful than expected – something you cannot discover, except with hindsight.

To measure progress against a benchmark requires regular monitoring and review.

A study by the UK's Rowntree Foundation on successful partnership building found that interviewees "agreed on the need for a partnership to develop transparent measures of success (both qualitative and quantitative) that judge the activities of the initiative against its stated aims and objectives" – even where they could not agree as to whether to measure a partnership's success in terms of outputs or processes.

Strategic planning involves not only setting objectives and devising strategies to implement those objectives, but also undertaking evaluation and survey techniques to ensure that those strategies are, in fact, achieving what they are supposed to do.

Without monitoring of landscape restoration and community building processes, decision-making is based on intuition and the values of those in charge – both of which are all too fallible.

Sound science and social research both require continual monitoring, which ensures that adaptation is hard-wired into any change process. Adaptive management without monitoring and good science to underpin it is akin to alchemy and faith healing, argues ecologist David Lindenmayer.

Critical reflection ought to be embedded in the decision-making process so that it follows a cyclic pattern: plan > act > observe > review.

Establishing a regular review process will draw attention to those strategies that are falling short of achieving your vision. One habitual pattern worth considering is holding an annual, independently facilitated half day workshop at which project partners reflected on the effectiveness of their vision's implementation, both in terms of its outcomes and the process.

Case study – Regent Honeyeater Project

The Regent Honeyeater Project near Benalla is a 'flagship' project and The Norman Wettenhall Foundation has been providing funding for administrative support since 1997.

Gross loss of habitat coupled with fragmentation and degradation of the remaining vegetation have led to sharp declines in many Box-Ironbark species. This project aims to enhance both the quantity and quality of existing remnants in the Lurg Hills, connecting them with wide corridors of indigenous planting across farmland. The aim is to improve habitat for threatened species such as Regent Honeyeaters, Squirrel Gliders, Grey-crowned Babblers and Brush-tailed Phascogales.

Project Coordinator, Ray Thomas, has done a brilliant job over the years of engaging the community in monitoring activities, as well as nest box construction and planting weekends. The Foundation has noticed how the group's rigorous monitoring has been instrumental in keeping the project strong and ensuring measurable positive results can be celebrated. For example, results from their annual nest box monitoring and bird surveys provide evidence about the need for high density planting to ensure the safe return of many woodland birds. Regular monitoring of nest boxes, as well as plantings, has allowed the project team to adjust their program according to results.

They keep a cumulative track of achievements such as how many sites are fenced, length of fencing, how much habitat has been protected, how many sites are planted, number of seedlings planted and number of direct seeding sites, how many seedlings have been propagated, number of nest boxes placed, number of landholders involved, number of schools involved, number of students involved, and how many communities members are involved.

STEP 8 - Developing a range of fully costed action plans, then ranking

A project's vision will contain a whole range of possible strategies for restoring their landscape. But not all can be begun at once. Even in the unlikely event of a full suite of resources being on hand, some, on closer inspection, should logically take precedence sequentially. Focusing, for instance, on riparian zones as lifelines through the landscape or preserving and enhancing remnants: these are acknowledged as usually the richest sources of biodiversity.

As a second stage, the Foundation requires project partners to draft a shortlist of opportunities from those already identified in their vision. These are to include a range of short term (<1yr), medium term (1-5yrs) and long term (5-10yrs) action plans, or what we call 'ecoships' (i.e. ecosystem partnership action plans that enhance the natural living environment). Different time frames are necessary to match the varying growth rates and life spans of flora and fauna.

To help identify and flesh out opportunities, the Foundation provides funding to employ a project officer. We recommend limiting this development process to, say, a maximum of 10 action plans, with at least one from each category of short, medium and long term. You could, of course, select a suite of more or less action plans. But you need to consider how best to marshall your resources and knowledge, ensuring that you don't spread yourselves too thin.

The criteria for evaluating action plans could include their potential for:

• Boosting biodiversity;
• Collaboration and leveraging;
• Achievability within the timescale chosen;
• Innovation and community inspiration;
• Capacity building and increasing community resilience;
• Replicability within other ecosystems.

A mix of action plans ought to be considered – not all need be about on-ground works.

A diversity across a range of indicators would offer more funding opportunities.

Different community hubs could have different aspirations and needs. As highlighted in *Biodiversity: Integrating Conservation and Production* (Ted Lefroy *et al* 2008): "Innovative solutions arise when people share knowledge and aspirations, and action occurs when people have developed common goals and participated in planning."

At the end of the development period, the project partners are likely to face further refining and prioritising of their action plans as to what is achievable and manageable. Resources for implementing environmental projects are particularly finite. Halving what needs to be done makes it more likely that it can be done. As well as ensuring that the implementation process is manageable, a few clearly delineated, fully costed action plans demonstrate what the project stands for and what the partners are attempting to achieve.

Many people have difficulty with ranking. They cannot decide what they believe is most important or do not want to expose their priorities to public scrutiny. If not managed well, ranking can lead to confusion and conflict. It is, therefore, recommended to hold an independently facilitated workshop to make these decisions.

The project officer would present a range of fully costed options to the workshop, at which the project steering committee and land managers would prioritise approximately 3-5 ecoships, including one from each category (short, medium and long term).

This is a suggested process. The Foundation recognises that communities have different characteristics and constraints and operate in different ways. Modifications to this process may be necessary to suit local situations.

Where an agreed action planning process is followed, the Foundation undertakes, for its part, to work with a project steering committee in seeking funding for each of the prioritised ecoship options. Such a prioritisation process confers legitimacy and credibility on the action plans developed. It is inclusive, equitable and rigorous, offering a firm foundation for the next step in the process.

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STEP 9 - Seeking sponsorship funding and leveraging resources

Engaging business and industry to invest in a community project can be a daunting task for some community groups. A small community group is not often versed in marketing strategies and generally doesn't have a dedicated person to head up their funding department or to focus specifically on raising funds.

But an organisation needs to dedicate time and resources to the area of funding and sponsorship – developing a plan, researching opportunities, producing a proposal, carrying out visits, making applications and following up with sponsors. The key to receiving funding from government and philanthropy is to have a solid project with specific goals, timelines, achievable targets, strategies on how to achieve goals, and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating outcomes.

One tool that landscape restoration projects can use to stringently asses their project and seek funding is INFFER – Investment Framework for Environmental Resources. INFFER is a framework designed to assist with decision making about investment in the environment and natural resources. INFFER gives priority to highly valued natural assets, which are highly threatened or degraded, with high technical feasibility of avoiding or repairing that damage, and high adoptability of the required works by relevant land managers. It can operate at a range of scales, and can be used to develop and assess projects for assets such as natural habitat, rivers, wetlands, threatened species, agricultural land, lakes, parks and reserves. An important feature of INFFER is that it assists users to develop projects that are internally consistent, ensuring their delivery mechanisms would actually deliver the required on-ground action in order to achieve a specific, measurable, time-bound goal. (ref: www.inffer.org)

Sponsorship

Sponsorship involves adopting a slightly different approach. Sponsors can support projects financially, in-kind, or by offering equipment, administration or human resources support.

Sponsors may seek more than just a good feeling for their involvement.

Groups need to consider creating opportunities within a project for sponsors to be involved and play a part. Sponsors often want some recognition and a return for their support. Some might request, for instance, their name and logo on promotional material, or even naming rights for large grants.

Much depends on the formation of long lasting, reciprocal relationships with local government, agencies, industry and business in your region. One measure sponsors will use to judge your credibility will be the strength of your links within your community. Part of a paid employee's role needs to be given over to organising local support, constantly doing funding applications, and being 'seen' as widely as possible in the community doing on-the-ground work.

Like any other other funder, sponsors expect to see fully costed, detailed submissions, rather than vague generalities. It's not the length of a submission that counts, but its auspices, goals, achievability, innovation and budget breakdown.

STEP 10 - Ongoing Implementation

Landscape restoration is likely to take generations. For this reason, it's vital to pay attention as to how partnerships can be sustained for the long term.

Any organisation is bound to have its 'ups' and 'downs'. In the area of biodiversity conservation, long term core funding is sometimes hard to come by, and certainly not assured forever. Establishing a team, having successes, being able to show positive results, and planning for the long term are all factors that help a group stay alive. Having paid employees to support volunteer efforts will make a huge difference to the capacity of the group to lead projects and avoid burn-out.

One of the biggest pitfalls that cause groups to flounder is burn-out of a few dedicated individuals. Ensuring the load is shared and that positions are regularly rotated are ways of guarding against burn-out. Remember, if there is a wide range of partners on board, there is likely to be a wide range of skills and know-how as well. Building a culture of sharing knowledge and skills and encouraging others to learn will help new people take on challenges. This is the backbone to successful succession planning, something that is vital for continuity and future survival.

Having a structure that allows partners to follow their interests will help maintain enthusiasm and relevance.

While getting the work done, partners should be having fun. This may be as simple as meeting in convivial surroundings, rotating hosts or meeting 'in the field' now and again.

Just as regular evaluation of the success of on-ground works is important, you will need to regularly check on how the operating processes are tracking and whether they are still satisfying the needs of partners. Part of the review process should include taking time to identify and then celebrate achievements. Stopping to recognise work well-done and progress made will help renew and regenerate.

A group should continually be looking outwards, assessing whether there are potential new partners that could be co-opted; and seeing whether there is anything that can be learned from other successfully operating groups.

CONCLUSION

This paper was produced as part of our journey into the field of landscape restoration granting.

The Norman Wettenhall Foundation is an environment group and philanthropic trust that began in 1997 and has a number of granting schemes Australia-wide.

Our program of landscape restoration funding began in 2007 (although funding for the Regent Honeyeater Project has been on-going since 1997).

As we began supporting our first project, Connecting Country, we worked closely with them, and developed a checklist document.

This checklist document is used by our Foundation and by other projects, as a rough guide to successful, community-driven landscape restoration. It contains the criteria we need to assess a project's success and whether to give further funding.

It is our belief that a good whole of landscape project should be owned and run by a community group, and therefore given the necessary funds to make it work.

We think a project should develop a plan, and map environmental assets. We also think that after the community identifies on-ground projects, the project team should 'ground proof' them and come up with a rational list of potential areas of work. This list can then be used to seek funding from other sources.

But this is just what we think!

Our journey is still continuing. We currently have five projects under our 'umbrella' that we are hoping to support into the future. We are learning from these projects about how different landscapes need different approaches to conservation.

We are also learning about the complex mix of biodiversity and productivity in our landscapes in the south. Part of our program involves the projects sharing knowledge and learnings from each other.

The successes from Foundation projects are starting to be seen - engaging the community with educational materials, establishing links in the landscape, fencing off eroded creeklines, collecting data, and collaborating with other bodies.

We will continue to work in this area, and welcome feedback on our policy paper.

For further details about The Norman Wettenhall Foundation, please see our website www.nwf.org.au.