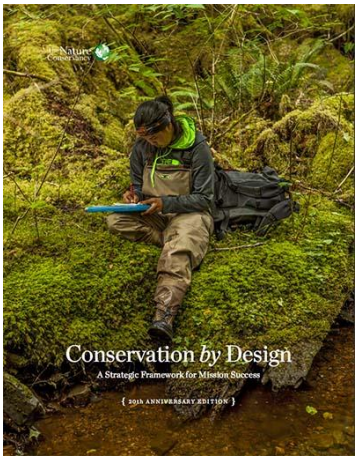
Conservation by Design 2.0 Guidance Document - Summary for Conservancy Staff



Introduction:

Conservation by Design 2.0 (CbD 2.0) and the supporting Guidance document represents a significant evolution in the Conservancy's conservation approach. Please read the 20th Anniversary Edition of Conservation by Design, for a full discussion of this evolution. The Board of Directors approved CbD 2.0 in February 2015, and the Guidance document represents an important step in its implementation.

The following high-level summary of the Guidance document is intended for all Conservancy staff. It begins with advice about how to use the Guidance, followed by a brief overview of the key advances of CbD 2.0, as they permeate the updated conservation approach. Please refer to the full Guidance document for much more detail about the information and concepts provided here.

Advice for Conservancy Staff about How to Use The Guidance Document

The Guidance document aims to help teams develop strategies to address the major conservation challenges of our day, challenges that require us to be bold and adapt our traditional ways of planning and implementing our work. To achieve our mission, we must move from strategies and projects that treat *symptoms* at a local scale to strategies and projects that address underlying *systemic causes* at much broader regional and global scales.

The Guidance document outlines the Conservancy's approach to develop, evaluate, and strengthen strategies in support of the advances described in the 20-year Anniversary edition of Conservation by Design. It replaces the Conservancy's Conservation Business Planning guidance. Other planning approaches and materials used by the Conservancy such as Major Habitat Assessments, Ecoregional (and other regional) Assessments, etc., may be useful for completing specific aspects of the updated approach.

CbD 2.0 Guidance is relevant to all major business functions and scales of Conservancy work, including place-based work, marketing, education and outreach, external affairs, and corporate engagements. That said, there is not an organization-wide mandate to use CbD 2.0 at this time. Instead, we encourage people to dig into the Guidance document and explore how it can be used to improve their work. We want to hear from staff about topics that would help guide learning opportunities around CbD 2.0, so please email your feedback, ideas and questions to cbd2.0@tnc.org.

Given the increasingly global scale of the challenges we seek to address, and our intent to drive our work in ways that contribute to systemic change, CbD 2.0 is most appropriately applied sequentially from global to regional to whole system scales. This approach better ensures that work at smaller scales adds up to more than the sum of the parts in contributing to larger system-scale impact. For this reason, we strongly encourage practitioners of CbD 2.0 to include in their framing and scoping a consideration of conservation efforts that may be happening elsewhere and at higher levels, so that their proposed engagement can align with, contribute to, leverage and advance those larger scale strategies and initiatives. Conservancy staff who have questions about organizational expectations around CbD 2.0 implementation should refer to information provided on the CbD 2.0 page on CONNECT.

Key Advances

The CbD 2.0 conservation process builds off the strong and widely adopted approach of adaptive management, a structured, iterative process of systematically testing assumptions to learn, adapt, and improve decision-making in the face of uncertainty. From previous applications of this approach in conservation, CbD 2.0 has evolved to incorporate four major advances: 1) explicitly consider linkages between people and nature, 2) design interventions focused on creating systemic change, 3) integrate spatial planning with the development of new conservation strategies, and 4) robustly draw upon and build the evidence base for conservation.

People in Conservation

Today, no natural systems exist without some form of human influence, nor social systems without nature. We increasingly recognize that social and ecological systems and the challenges they face are not just linked, but are truly interconnected, and are co-evolving across space and time. Scientists from many disciplines increasingly use the term "socio-ecological system" to describe coupled human-environment systems.

Conservation success is most sustainable when it is the result of systemic change within a socio-ecological system, whereby people recognize the benefits they receive from nature and how their decisions impact nature's ability to provide these benefits. Once this complex connection is understood, people are compelled to act to conserve nature, thus creating or reinforcing an enduring virtuous cycle. Accordingly, the entry point for CbD 2.0 is a socio-ecological system that provides the bounds for identifying significant problems facing people and nature. Importantly, the scale of a socio-ecological system can be the globe, a major region, a country, or a landscape, seascape, or watershed (e.g., whole system). In addition, these systems may be defined in combination with ecological (e.g., a river basin) and/or human (e.g., a city, agricultural system, geography covered by a policy) attributes.

In the interest of transforming the relationship between people and nature to a more positive one, and to strengthen existing positive relationships, we aim to prioritize conservation solutions that both benefit nature and improve people's lives. However, in some cases the needs of people and nature will be in conflict. As such, there will be times and places where we design conservation activities that protect nature for its intrinsic value, even when there is no obvious, immediate material or economic benefit to people. Further, human preferences and needs vary from person to person and group to group, increasing the likelihood that some individuals and groups may oppose particular projects. Such opposition does not necessarily mean that a project should not be undertaken; however, we must ensure that vulnerable, disadvantaged, and marginalized people and communities are not harmed and that social safeguards are incorporated into project planning and implementation.

We tangibly account for people in conservation in several ways in the Guidance document. First, we emphasize how environmental changes affect all types of people, and in turn how conservation actions can positively or negatively influence people's relationship to nature. Second, we offer a human well-being framework to systematically identify how our conservation strategies directly and indirectly affect these groups of people to ensure that we consistently consider all aspects of human well-being and how they may or may not intersect with conservation. Finally, we provide formal social safeguards considerations. Taken together, our framing and tools allow us to articulate and develop plans to maximize opportunities to benefit human well-being and minimize or avoid risks to people caused by our conservation strategies, which helps to increase the impact and sustainability of our work.

Because we focus on transforming the relationship between people and nature *through conservation* rather than solely on human development, we limit our work to the aspects of people's lives that are connected to nature. These aspects are not fixed globally, but vary from place to place based on people's livelihoods and preferences how the project's socio-ecological system currently functions. These aspects are also subject to change as political, technological, economic, cultural, and other factors shift in the future. The Guidance document will help practitioners identify which aspects of people's lives are connected to conservation in each case.

Imperative for Systemic Change

Explicit in CbD 2.0 is the expectation that conservationists increasingly seek to effect systemic change within the socio-ecological systems in which they work. Systemic change refers to creating, strengthening, or shifting the social, economic, political, and cultural systems that comprise and sustain a socio-ecological system. CbD 2.0 clarifies that the future of nature and the future of human civilization are interdependent. However, the major systems commonly used to describe the forces affecting that common future - economic, political, and social - do not adequately reflect this interdependence. In short, unless we act to address systemic causes, we are likely to fail in our mission.

We note that achieving systemic change may take longer, often significantly longer, than the duration considered by a typical conservation project. Further, conservation outcomes will likely increasingly be framed as policy, practice, or behavior outcomes (e.g., in terms of changed human behavior and changing the sets of "rules" – formal and informal – that guide people's behavior). When this is the case, teams should clearly describe the relationship between achieving behavior change, policy, or practice outcomes and meeting the longer-term outcomes for nature and people. Finally, being skilled at systems thinking is critical in order to be able to develop strategies aimed at achieving systemic change. We acknowledge here that this field is a growth area for the Conservancy. Over the next several years we intend to focus our organizational learning around these topics of systems thinking and strategies for achieving systemic change.

Spatial and Strategic Planning

The Conservancy and many other conservation organizations have a strong history in creating maps that identify critical ecological information such as where important biodiversity remains and which locations are likely to be more resilient to climate change. This information remains highly relevant as it provides foundational information for developing strategies. Achieving systemic change that benefits socio-ecological systems requires us to harness this spatially explicit information about biodiversity, along with additional types of spatially explicit data, including social, economic, and political data, to develop effective strategies that consider the many dimensions impacting conservation efforts.

In the CbD 2.0 Guidance document we focus on how spatial planning can be integrated with strategy development to tell us *what* actions are needed *where* in order to achieve systemic change. The resultant strategy and opportunity maps can show where investments in specific strategies will be most effective. This ensures that investments are targeted to affect the places where they have the most benefit to the larger socio-ecological system, and allow robust estimates of the magnitude of change possible with a given strategy. Such mapping also lends itself to comparisons among alternative strategies, including cost-benefit analyses.

Evidence Base

An evidence base refers to a body of knowledge about how socio-ecological systems behave. The evidence base includes knowledge ranging from scientific assessments to traditional knowledge and may exist in many forms including white papers, reports, peer reviewed literature, primary data, interviews, traditional oral accounts, government records, and social media content. Note that the evidence base on its own will not sufficiently disseminate new knowledge about how to accomplish these strategies; we must also commit to proactively sharing what we learn. Conversely, sharing knowledge without a commitment to increasing the evidence is a lost opportunity, and is also insufficient on its own. We advocate for evidence coupled with knowledge sharing, as it is this combination of skills and commitments that is needed to truly advance conservation.

Accountability to evidence is a hallmark of science-based decisions and organizations. Conservation strategies aimed at achieving systemic change depend on influencing others to act, and evidence that is relevant and effectively communicated to key audiences can be a critical asset for generating that influence. If available evidence is insufficient to generate that influence or manage important risks, then research and monitoring can be directed to address priority evidence gaps. Thus, CbD 2.0 emphasizes the generation, collection, synthesis, sharing, and leveraging of evidence. We've increased this emphasis so much so that this aspect of our work is called out explicitly in three of the five phases of CbD 2.0 described below.

High Level Overview of Conservation by Design 2.0 Approach

CbD 2.0 contains 14 steps grouped into five phases. Here we list and describe the steps for each phase followed by some key points for consideration. Please keep in mind the key advances described above because they are relevant for every phase of the updated conservation approach.

Phase 1: Identify Challenges & Goals

1. *Specify Planning Context*. Define the scope to ensure a focus on significant conservation problems and the relevant geographies where those challenges will be addressed.

2. *Conduct Situation Analysis*. In close collaboration with key stakeholders, analyze evidence to describe current and predicted future situations to identify conservation targets, directly related human interests, threats, drivers, risks, and opportunities for creating change.

3. *Draft Goal Statement*. Specify the minimum change needed to contribute to desired systemic change, both for nature and directly connected outcomes for human well-being.

4. *Share Advances in Knowledge Through Relevant Pathways*. Identify the key lessons you have learned in the process of identifying challenges and goals, determine who needs or will use that knowledge, then document and disseminate appropriately.

Key Points

- CbD 2.0 uses a socio-ecological system as the entry point, and these types of systems are often defined differently than an ecoregion, which is defined exclusively by ecological attributes. The globe, a food production system for a country or region, and a river basin are all examples of socio-ecological systems.
- The situation analysis is a critical step in our updated conservation approach, and answers three questions: 1) What are the key challenges

to nature? 2) What are the key challenges to people and society? 3) Which are connected, and how?

- A robust situation analysis should illuminate those key challenges that incorporate multiple conservation primary interests, their connected social or economic primary interests, and their most powerful drivers of change in the current system, thus promoting identification of novel conservation strategies aimed at systemic change.
- Answering the above three questions during the situation analysis is not enough; we need to understand and document where the evidence is strongest for nature-people connections. By doing so we ensure that science informs our management decisions about priorities and strategies.
- Generating a minimum goal during Phase 1 is important as it will be used to assess whether we can impact the challenges we have identified.
- We advocate for evidence coupled with knowledge sharing, as this combination of skills and commitments is needed to truly advance conservation.

Phase 2: Map Strategies & Places

5. *Identify Candidate Strategies*. Articulate potential strategies to meet your goals, using insights gained in the situation analysis to consider both known and novel strategies and to seek strategies that lead to systemic change.

6. *Construct Results Chains*. Articulate the logic for why proposed actions will change an undesired state to a desired state. Articulate the assumptions necessary for this to happen, and synthesize evidence regarding these assumptions.

7. *Strategy and Opportunity Mapping*. Characterize the potential magnitude of the effect of different candidate strategies, enabling the evaluation of the contribution of each strategy toward stated goals. This allows an estimate of the conservation return on investment (ROI) for each strategy, which can inform the selection of which strategies to implement. Strategy and opportunity mapping also aids the implementation of selected strategies by identifying where each strategy can most effectively touch down in space.

8. *Select Strategy or Strategies*. Identify strategies that, if successfully pursued, at least meet the minimum goal, have relatively good conservation ROI, avoid negative impacts to vulnerable people, and have acceptable levels of financial and reputational risk.

9. *Share Advances in Knowledge Through Relevant Pathways*. Identify the key lessons you have learned in the process of mapping strategies and opportunities, determine who needs or will use that knowledge, then document and disseminate appropriately.

Key Points

- We aim to identify and select strategies that create systemic change, which requires us to identify whose behavior we are trying to change, and identifying opportunities to motivate this change.
- Strong results chains have resolved "leaps of faith" or "then a miracle happens" gaps in logic.
- As with the situation analysis work, it is critical to evaluate strength of evidence for a strategy's assumptions when completing the results chain. When evidence is determined to be insufficient it can point to priorities for research or monitoring.
- The minimum goal from Phase 1 of the work is used to help select strategies in the ROI process of Phase 2.
- Selected strategies should incorporate social safeguards to avoid, minimize, or mitigate, risks and harm to people resulting from our conservation work.
- In Phase 2 we continue our commitment to both build the evidence base and proactively share what we learn.

Phase 3: Finalize Outcomes & Develop Measures

10. *Articulate Theory of Change*. Convert draft minimum goal statements into specific outcomes based on insights gained in developing results chain and strategy maps. Articulate the problem, the solution, and why your organization or team is positioned to implement the solution, in a succinct way that colleagues, partners, stakeholders and funders can understand and support.

11. *Define Measures and Create a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan*. Explain how essential evidence gaps and monitoring needs will be filled to determine project success or failure, mitigate legal and reputational risk, avoid and mitigate negative impacts, influence others to replicate and leverage work, satisfy donor expectations, and adaptively use monitoring and evaluation information to manage the project.

Key Points

- A strong theory of change brings all of the work of Phase 1 and Phase 2 together: minimum goals associated with key challenges are converted to outcomes, paired with solutions, and the rationale for "why now and why this team" is provided.
- The monitoring plan developed during Phase 3 should help build the evidence base and be designed to help mitigate risks.

Phase 4: Take Action

12. *Implement Strategy(ies) using Sound Project Management*. Provide clarity around roles and develop work plans and budgets. Implement monitoring and evaluation plan.

Key Points

- The curriculum and training of the Conservancy's, Highly Effective Teams is tailor-made for this step; staff should take advantage of their materials and training.

Phase 5: Evaluate and Adapt

13. *Evaluation*. Conduct analysis and evaluation to fill essential evidence gaps and satisfy monitoring needs.

14. *Adapt*. Use monitoring and evaluation to assess progress towards goals and outcomes and assess the need to adapt to changing conditions, unintended consequences, and new opportunities. Share lessons learned via relevant pathways.

Key Points

- Evaluation of project monitoring information is critical to building the evidence base, but doing this alone is not sufficient; this activity needs to be paired with communicating results.
- Annual review of strategies, and any improvements to evidence via monitoring, helps ensure the theory of change remains credible and grounded in science.