

9. Implement workplans



Basic Practice Nine

This document is a chapter from the Conservation Action Planning Handbook. The complete Handbook is available online at <http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/cbdgateway/cap/practices>.

The CAP Handbook is intended as a guidance resource to support the implementation of The Nature Conservancy's Conservation Action Planning (CAP) Process - a powerful instrument for helping practitioners get to effective conservation results. The CAP process is a key analytical method that supports Conservation by Design, the Conservancy's strategic framework for mission success.

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This is a living document that will adapt and change as new information becomes available and as we hear from you about how to improve it. The most recent version will always be available at: <http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/cbdgateway/cap/practices>

For more information on Conservation Action Planning visit www.conservationgateway.org/cap.

CONSERVATION ACTION PLANNING

Step 9: Implement Your Actions and Measures

As summarized in TNC's [CAP Overview of Basic Practices](#):

Now you have your action and monitoring plans. They won't do any good sitting on the shelf - your challenge here is to trust the hard work you have done and implement your plans to the best of your ability. Implementation is the most important step in this entire process.

Expected Outputs

- Action
- Measures

The Importance of Implementing Actions and Measures

You have assembled a team of experts of all kinds. You have endeavored to have a shared vision of success, you have poured over all kinds of information and worked together long and hard, trying to understand where your efforts will make the most difference. All this has allowed you to define some strategies and action steps to take to make progress towards your objectives. Trust this hard work and now put your ideas into action. Implementation is the most important step in the project cycle. Without implementation of your actions, there is no conservation. Without implementation of your monitoring plan, you will have no information to let you know whether you are making progress or how to steer your course of action.

The other chapters in this handbook provide specific step-by-step instructions for going through the CAP process. In this chapter, however, there is not much step-by-step guidance that we can give you about implementing your project. Instead, we have asked some seasoned conservation project managers to share their “secrets” about getting started on a new project and maintaining momentum. Here's what they had to say.

Commonly Used Methods

1. Make sure the plan has at least one “owner.”

In the best of all worlds, the people who are key to implementing the plan should have been part of the planning process. If this is the case, you will have specific names next to individual action and monitoring steps in your plan. If this is not the case however, don't despair. If you have at least one person who is willing to push the plan forward, someone who is truly invested in the outcome and will champion the course of action, you can make progress on the plan. If this one person actively works to build trust by listening to and learning from others, always assumes that the people they hope to engage in the work are well-intentioned, and neither lays blame or cares who gets credit, they will not only move the plan forward, they will become the start of a caravan of action.

2. Take a few small steps right away.

Don't worry about having everything mapped out perfectly. Don't worry about knowing exactly what is the “perfect” or “right” place to start. There will be holes in the plan of action. Chances are, especially with a new project, many of the details will be vague. If this is the case, just take a few small steps. These can be as small as calling an expert to hear how they dealt with a similar threat or as simple as sharing your plan with your program's fundraising team. The single most important thing to do is to do something. Don't lose the momentum you have gained especially if your plan involved a lot of partners. Keep moving. Consider the act of developing the plan not an end point, but a launch.

3. Don't be stopped by fear of failure.

All too often, project teams are so worried about making a mistake that they become paralyzed and unable to take any actions at all. Accept the fact that you will make mistakes and trust that you will learn from them and correct them over time.

4. Look for early winners.

In general, whether your plan consists of strategies that are familiar to you or things that are completely new, look for action steps that are likely to provide your team and the project stakeholders at least a small taste of success fairly quickly. These kinds of things will build your team's confidence and inspire others to join you. In the Landscape Practitioners Handbook, Greg Low (2003) terms these actions “early winners.” He further recommends that you select those actions that “show early, tangible success that reinforces the interests and issues important to key constituencies.” This advice is particularly germane, when you are embarking on a complex strategy or one that is likely to be fraught with “perils or pitfalls” - for example, that could potentially engender bad feelings with an important stakeholder or opinion leader.

5. Look for “no regret” actions.

Related to but slightly different from the previous point is to also look for actions that are relatively simple and likely to be useful no matter what else you do. This is especially good advice if you are endeavoring to execute a strategy that is likely to be long-term and difficult. Get funding for additional law enforcement officers while you work on changing the regulations on snow mobiles in the National Forest. Install the mooring buoys on your way to developing a new zoning plan for the reef. Put in the channel markers as you are learning how to restore sea grass beds. Even though in the long run you know that these aren't the whole solution, they will be helpful in their own right.

6. Set up regular progress checks.

Assuming you have a work plan with the names of “lead” people associated with the actions, set up regular monthly calls with the leads to share progress. If that is too frequent, set up a time to meet in a few months for the express purpose of reviewing progress. Nothing breeds action like deadlines for some people. And if your project involves a number of partners, a regular time for sharing progress can set up a little “friendly” competition. Most of us don't want to be the one member of the team with no progress to report, especially twice in a row.

7. Invest in capacity.

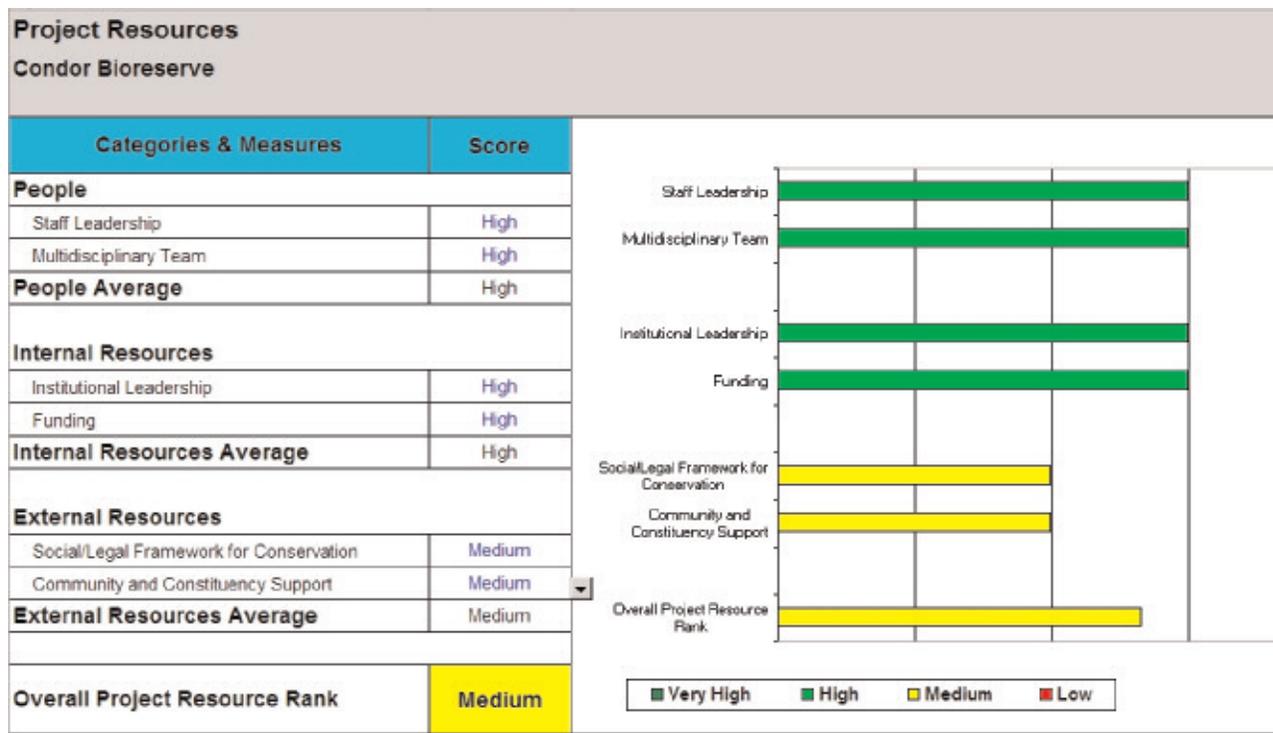
Often your action plan will have an early step outlined for one or more objectives to increase capacity by hiring new staff or developing new funding sources. While these things aren't going to have a direct effect on your target's health like executing a prescribed burn in a savannah or

removing a source of pollution in a stream, sometimes the best early actions to take involve increasing capacity to execute the work. One way to see if your project might benefit from early capacity investments is to do a quick capacity assessment.

In the “Resources” section of the CAP Workbook there is a short worksheet exercise to prompt you to think about your project capacity. This exercise asks you to “rank” the availability and skills of project leadership and the team necessary to execute the plan. It also asks you to consider the institutional and legal framework in which you must operate, whether these will be supportive or difficult environments. Similarly, the Resources worksheet asks you to consider whether or how possible it will be to have the support and positive involvement of key community and constituency and whether there is or likely to be sufficient operating funds to execute the plan. Box 1 shows the 6 Project Resources categories from the CAP Workbook. Resource ranks of Very High, High, Medium, or Low can be assigned to each category and help guidance clearly defines the specific criteria associated with each Resource rank.

When you take a little time to think about these questions or similar ones, you will determine where your capacity may not be equal to the tasks laid out in your plan of action. If it appears you have some serious deficiencies, consider investing your time in building some capacity as an early step in the process. The work of conservation of biodiversity in any one place is usually a long voyage, sometimes getting the ship provisioned properly first can be a wise investment.

Box 1. Project Resources Scorecard from the CAP workbook



8. Find allies.

Building capacity doesn't always have to involve hiring new staff in your own organization or raising new money. Think about other organizations or members of your community who would value the intended outcome of this strategy. In particular, think about organizations or individuals whose work to date may be more similar to the work envisioned by this strategy. Go visit them as a first step. Share the logic of your CAP with them. Emphasize how the planning team decided this strategic action was critical to achieve the objective. If you have an idea of a specific thing you would like them to help with, ask. If not, ask them to help you lay out a game plan for moving forward. Chances are by asking their advice on “your” game plan, you will find that they will see themselves as implementing some of the steps in that game plan. Recognize that for this approach to implementation to work effectively, you have to be prepared to give up some control of how things are done at the very least. This is easier to do if you.

9. Keep your eye on the big picture.

Don't get attached to any action or way of doing things or one fixed sequence. When you developed the CAP, the ideas for how to achieve your objectives were based on the knowledge you had at that time. It is an absolute fact that players change, circumstances change and one step you take may lead to a place you never knew existed. Your strategic actions and/or action steps may in fact have to change as conditions change and as you learn more when your monitoring results start to come in. It is your objective that is likely to be largely fixed over time. Keeping some clarity on your objective and investing in monitoring the effectiveness of your actions will help you to understand whether to maintain, change or completely abandon a course of action.

10. With patience and perseverance, you will make progress.

Conservation is a long distance race. It is best to think about your work in this way and be ready to make a long term commitment. But as you travel, keep in mind Margaret Mead's insightful observation: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

Opportunities for Innovation

The tips outlined above represent only a fraction of the collective wisdom that exists about implementing projects. If you have other thoughts or ideas that work for you, please be sure to share them with your peers!

Resources and Tools

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