**Voices from the Field: Partnership Experience within TNC**

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Q1. **How well prepared are TNC scientists as conservation partners?**

Overall, respondents were fairly positive in their assessment of TNC scientist’s partnership preparedness, with an average rating of 7/10. The chart indicates, however, some variability in that rating. Comments below suggest that may be a function of the (in)experience of science staff and the lack of a “typical TNC scientist”!

**Your Comments:**

* *I think most people learn as the go along or come with existing experience*
* *This has changed recently for the better*
* *Outside collaboration for TNC scientists is not encouraged by management.*
* *I feel we are better partners if teamed with experienced project directors/staff and/or scientists. Being good partners takes a lot of work and in my experience there is no real training for scientists to become good partners free of trial and error.*
* *I cannot assess that attribute in other TNC scientists.*
* *In general, higher level scientists are more well equipped as conservation partners to handle the more delicate situations than are newer or lower level scientists.*
* *Obviously this differs across individuals, so is not terribly meaningful. Is this focused toward WO scientists or all? Are only scientists answering, or also their "partners". Many of us are both scientist and practitioner.*
* *It is difficult to categorize a typical TNC scientist as we have people working at so many different levels and distances from the day to day project implementation.. There is likely to be a range from 3 to 10 with the more applied scientists who awaken to work with partners everyday scoring the highest.*
* *I think we have a broad range. There are some that transition from the science world with ease and others that never make the switch.*
* *Our science is our strongest part of our program, more so than the actual conservation.*

**2. How well do you think TNC scientists perform as partners?**

Interestingly, the average rating of TNC scientists performance was higher than their rating of preparedness (7.3 c.f. 7) although the comments below suggest that there is still perceived to be room for improvement. This question of course also begs a follow up assessment – i.e. what do TNC partners think of TNC scientists’ performance?

**Comments**

* *On average we are respectful and work well with partners, but could use more formal partnership training*
* *Compared with agency partners, I think we pull a lot of weight and are more disciplined about facilitation and preparation*
* *Some are very good, some not*
* *Much of our work requires that we establish and form partnerships with both traditional and non-traditional types of partners, so it's important to perform well with many types of partners to achieve conservation goals.*
* *by and large most perform well, but there are still those who may be driven more by scientific rigor (a good thing) when working with local partners in our international program than their absorptive capacity (an experience and confidence thing)*
* *I think for some there is an age old problem of people not being able to think outside their own experience or area of expertise so come up with projects which dont' 'hit the mark' to solve conservation problems. But generally we're pretty good as partners.*

**3. What are the top 3 characteristics of a collaborative scientist (in the context of a conservation-focused project)?**

This question elicited a clear emphasis on communications skills. Communications, Active Listening (which some might are indivisible) and an applied science focus dominated the overall responses.

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| Top Characteristics of a Collaborative Scientist | Frequency (% of respondents citing as a top 3 characteristic) |
| 1. Good Communication | 76.7 |
| 2. Active Listener | 43.3 |
| 3. Willingness to work in applied science (versus theoretical) | 40 |
| 4. Willingness to share data | 33.3 |
| 4. Willingness to attend and participate in “process” (planning, meetings, etc.) | 33.3 |
| 6. Social skills | 20 |
| 7. Willingness to get out of the drivers seat | 16.7 |
| 8. Multidisciplinary training/empathy | 13.3 |
| 9. Patience | 13.3 |
| 10. Networking skills | 10 |
| 11. Shared Values | 6.7 |
| 11. Academically productive | 6.7 |

Interestingly no one rated “shared values” as a top 3 characteristic. Additional characteristics suggested by respondents included:

* *willingness to get IN the driver's seat*
* *a good understanding of the cultural and socio-economic context/background (not necessarily be of the same background, but understand it)*
* *Collaborative problem solving skills: Ability to work with non-science counterpart(s) to determine what activity/product will meet their project’s needs.*
* *Ability to bridge gap between Applied work and Theoretical work, Previous experience working in applied science context, Intelligence, Ability to change course as needed (not wedded to previously laid out course of action if conditions have changed), Deliverables provides to TNC on-time, Treats TNC staff with respect*
* *While good communication, willingness to work in applied science, and patience were top ones I considered, social and networking skills along with the willingness to share data are also important.*
* *understanding of "applied" science: how much science is enough and how much is too much? I would like to tick the "Willingness to get out of the driver's seat" box, but feel this should be stated another way "Willingness to be catalytic and pass on leadership to others (we could still be driving the process through the catalytic role and follow-on supportive/advocacy role with donors)*

4. **Based on the characteristics you chose above, how would you rate yourself as a partner?**

With a mean score of 7.53, clearly respondents feel as if they “meet or exceed” the characteristics of a collaborative scientist.

However, those respondents who did comment further clearly believe there is always room for improvement:

* I've worked with partners a lot and am always learning
* I do a lot of this, so I hope I'm good at it!
* No one should rate themselves as a perfect partner. If this were true then we would work ourselves out of a job.
* Asking the wrong person
* Partnership is context specific and a two-way street, so I think this answer depends on the situation.
* Who's perfect? We all have room to improve! I feel good about my ability to relate and translate science into meaningful outcomes for conservation but am always looking for ways to do it better.
* I do all these and try and build capacity in local scientists in Indonesia, plus work on writing up the conservancy's science.

**5. What is the best partnership you’ve been involved in and why? (we asked folks to add their name if they were happy to share their answer – other examples are quoted with general details only)**

* *Collaborating with a land grant institute on agronomic research. We defined the research need, they defined the how, we had clear roles and responsibilities, and most importantly - mutual respect.*
* *I'm working with a collaborative group where many individual partners have joined together creating a common vision, goals and shared implementation. It was a shared effort in creating the group, the priorities and direction, so people are highly invested and committed to outcomes.*
* *San Vicente Salmon Recovery Group (unofficial name)-played to members strengths, good communication, being unstoppable, fun in the face of adversity. Kit Crump*
* *Coral Reef Conservation Partnership*
* *Santa Cruz Island Restoration (pig eradication portion). Powerful because of clearly defined focus/outcome, tremendous dedication of all parties and TNC institutional commitment. Lynn Lozier*
* *I'm currently helping the USFWS develop a grazing program for their grassland restoration at the Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge. this has been a good partnership because TNC management has allocated my time so I can actually focus on it.*
* *Two collaborations where for-profit consulting firm contractors/licensees and I designed an experiment/program from the ground up. Lots of give and take and refining of design. Contracting partner shared data willingly, good communication, pleasant to work with, intelligent folks with good sense of humor and able to adapt to changing circumstances, deliverables always provided on-time, mutual respect, contractor writes well, presentations at professional conferences already given, professional papers likely in future.*
* *My best partnerships have been with science-based conservation entities, such as WWF, NOAA and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, with which we share concern for new, practical, science to inform and make relevant our conservation applications in a rapidly changing world. these are organizations who also need to make decisions quickly or pass on advice with short notice and are comfortable doing so with the best available information. The key is taking what science you can get, making sense of it, and limiting the damage in the way it is presented AND not obsessing or delaying because the science is deficient. By all means quote me if deemed useful.*
* *The best partnership I have been involved with is recovery planning for endangered Coho salmon with National Marine Fisheries Service recovery team. With this partnership we brought our Conservation Action Planning tools to the partnership. With creativity and a great team we were able to develop a well-written, and scientifically robust recovery plan focusing on life stages as the targets.*
* *We have many partnerships that have worked particularly well for us in Australia e.g. with the Australian Research Council Center of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies and the University of Queensland. In both cases, we have a great two way flow of information, and many collaborative projects. What works well for us is that we spend a lot of time discussing our interests, and looking for good opportunities to collaborate that suit both our needs and interests. Alison Green*
* *Surprisingly, one of the best partnerships I've formed was with a non-traditional partner who at many times has voiced his opinion and sometimes dislike of TNCs approach to our work. Although we don't always see eye to eye on things we have contracted with this partner to help us out with some of our project work, and we do respect each other despite some of our differences. I kept this discreet as to the partner and my name, but if you'd like to use the quote you're more than welcome.*
* *As a scientist, I have been involved in restoration research on preserves that both resulted in restoration in that spot and then was implemented and improved upon across the larger landscape and exported to other sites. That's pretty satisfying - learning relevant information that is then implemented and exported.*
* *Partners, a local conservation trust and international NGO were able to take my academic bird inventory data and quickly create conservation areas on a small oceanic island... much faster and more productive then having to publish in an academic journal and then hope conservation practitioners found and used the recommendations. Jensen Montambault*
* *I am involved in many collaborative partnerships since what I do is facilitate them. I learn so much at each and honestly could not pick a favorite. - Lynn Decker*
* *Partnership with local NGOs and Global Marine Team and Asia Pacific scientists and a consultant to undertake a rapid response to coral bleaching and assess reef resilience. All partners did high quality work and TNC contributed funds to allow us to value add to the work and we came up with a fairly innovative new way to look at this issue which we are currently publishing.*
* *My relationship with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority - we have shared goals, don't have turf issues, and the same people have been involved over time so we've built a common understanding - there is a lot of trust involved. (prefer not to be quoted)*
* *The VU University in Amsterdam partnership because they were able to provide skilled field researchers and data analysts in a timely way and because they put up with our slow and sometimes ridiculous contracting process. Craig Leisher*
* *Working with Conservation International and WWF-Indonesia in a real spirit of collaboration to do biological and socio-economic science, that directly contributes to real management on the ground. In addition, the 3-NGO collaboration tries to build capacity in local universities and institutions in Eastern Indonesia.*

***6. What has been the worst partnership you’ve been involved in and why?*** *(certain details have been deleted at authors request - we asked for permission to quote named examples)*

* *Working with academic oriented partner on measuring impact of a conservation action. The partner had their own agenda, and no shared objectives.*
* *The worst partnership I've been involved with was with a group that is very important but also dysfunctional. The relationship was unbalanced and I ended up doing most of their work to pull of the intended outcome. The project was successful but required a lot of effort, time, patience, and flexibility. Kara Nelson*
* *local stakeholders, state parks and noaa in CA-never able to get to a common ground, never able to build enough trust to get anything done*
* *As a practitioner I have assisted other scientists in finding funding to address a particular question that they then neither really address nor publish what they do learn.*
* *-Fairly new to TNC - still working out which are the "best" and "worst" partnerships. All have ups and downs at the moment. Sorry.*
* *Hard to say. May be that I can't think of a good example because I didn't think of those experiences AS partnerships.*
* *I was asked to engage a group of partners to do a CAP for a proposed project . TNC has now decided to back off the project. I feel we misled our partners.*
* *Two come to mind. Both involved non-profit conservation contractors/licensees. One had an inflated sense of his own importance (arrogant), the other was always trying to bend the rules for personal gain while affecting self righteousness. Neither were willing to share information or data willingly, neither worked in a collaborative manner, neither has co-authored anything with TNC staff.*
* *THE worst partnership I have been involved with was an internal team where people were not listened to or valued, information was not shared, and favoritism was the name of the game.*
* *The worst partnership I was involved with was an industry partner who wanted to use TNC's brand for green credentials. We supported a study together by a consultant, and they would not agree to release the study (even after many iterations of the report) because it did not reflect well on them. However, that did not stop them saying they were working with us and misrepresenting the results in the media (showing them in a much more positive light than the report showed).*
* *Large project involving multiple TNC global teams that was ineffectively managed by someone who wanted top-down control of all communications and activities between partners. It was challenging to be a partner in the project, as input wasn't recognized and contributions were*
* *One of the worst partnerships I've had was with some folks in federal agencies that we've had to deal with. No matter how much our team tried to coordinate monthly conference calls and inform them of our activities, they generally were pretty poor in reciprocating any feedback from their end to us despite continued courteous and polite attempts to do outreach with them.*
* *After 2 years of planning and promising our partners (2 other NGOs and an academic institution) finally admitted they just weren't comfortable sharing raw data, even to make better conservation decisions. - Jensen Montambault*
* *When it has been all TNC scientists in the room and that the others would be contacted later. I was stunned it was even thought of as a partnership.*
* *Absolutely and unequivocally the worst partnership I precipitated was with an organization that has since gone belly-up. While I managed a good enough personal relationship with the executive Director, the organization cultivated a culture of combative competition and lack of trust of other organizations. The organization was clearly the best placed in terms of mission and experience to address a serious marine resource issue in the Indo-Pacific seas, but simply treated any attempt at partnership with suspicion. Developing trust was made impossible, even after directing a considerable amount of funding to a partnership activity: the concept of a "competitor" directing funding their way seemed incomprehensible. Fortunately the issue was solved when major foundations withdrew funding and the organization dissolved. I have encountered similarly difficult situations with two other organizations over data sharing and ownership: our more open approach to discuss the nature and direction of our work led to demands for our data before our applications were complete.*
* *A general comment - its very frustrating to work with partners from universities who can't write and as a 3rd author spending a lot of time rewriting reports or manuscripts so they are publishable. And going through all the angst of the arguments about who's got final say on the content/writing style.*
* *CARE-WWF partnership on an ICDP in Vietnam. CARE emphasized the project's development and WWF the conservation objectives, and consequently, neither succeeded. Craig Leisher*
* *Worked with an ex-TNC scientist and he asked me to be on a science paper, used my ideas and then decided to omit me as an author from the paper, without even telling me. Completely unethical behavior!*