"Collaborative conservation is a promising approach for resolving conflict and achieving benefits for conservation, society, and economies." *Wilkens et al. 2021.*

"Collaboration is a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences, and search for solutions that go beyond what any one of them might have thought possible." *Gray, 1989.*

"Collaborative conservation uses practices that center human well-being, promote equitable participation, and acknowledge power dynamics." CCC

"Collaborative learning offers a synthesis of ideas from dispute management theory and systems thinking that allows it to address controversy and complexity." *Daniels and Walker, 2001.*

"What are the essential foundational elements of people who have decided to work together? They can be summed up in four building blocks: PURPOSES, PEOPLE, PROCESS, and PRODUCTS—the 4-Ps." *Forest Service National Collaboration Cadre, 2019.*

"Collaboration involves stakeholders and the public in a process of consensus building to address some of the most difficult environmental management problems facing society today." *Margerum, 2008.*

CENTER FOR COLLABORATIVE CONSERVATION

How-To: Collaborative Conservation

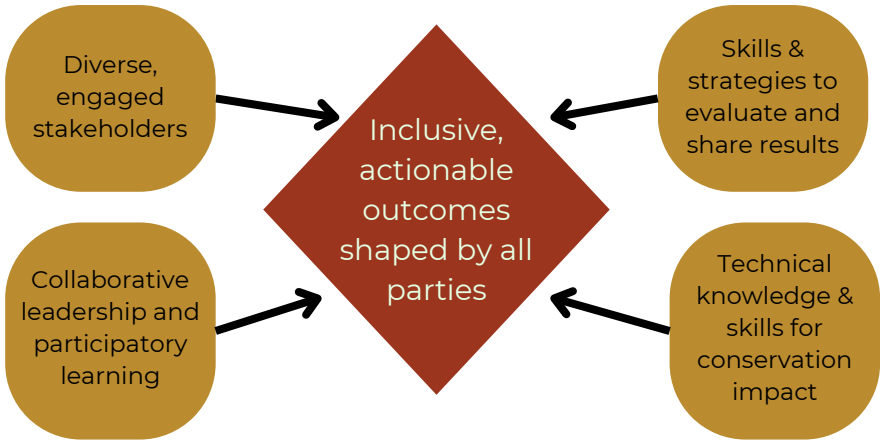
Why Collaborative Conservation?

Given that many natural resource issues are embedded in complex systems, the most effective solutions often arise from engaging a diverse array of stakeholders from different sectors. As stated by the Future of Conservation Forum (2022), "People across the landscape should be engaged in shaping the future of the places where they live, work, own land, and recreate." Each stakeholder can offer valuable contributions toward a mutually acceptable solution. By working together, stakeholders can combine diverse knowledge systems and develop innovative solutions.

What does Collaborative Conservation Look Like?

At its foundation, collaborative conservation involves people contributing knowledge, ideas, and/or resources in order to achieve common goals. It might take place through a network that is convened for the purpose of tackling an environmental issue, in which case processes and structures need to be in place to create shared visions and support joint work. But stakeholders do not have to be convened as part of a single coalition to be involved with collaborative conservation. Capacity building, sharing or gathering information that contributes to decision-making, or introducing conservation tools that can inform solutions can all be part of a collaborative conservation effort.

All collaborative conservation projects feature the following characteristics (Margerum, 2008): a (1) range of stakeholders (2) engaged in – or at least contributing to - participatory processes that lead to creative solutions. This diverse engagement means a (3) sustained commitment to problem-solving and (4) an increased likelihood of acceptance of solutions, goals, and proposed actions.



How-To: Collaborative Conservation

Stakeholder Engagement

Collaborative conservation engages stakeholders – individuals, organizations, agencies, and/or communities. The level and depth of this engagement can be described on a spectrum, as shown in the table below (adapted from the International Association for Public Participation). The amount of participatory power, agency, and shared decision-authority increases for the stakeholders as you move from the top of the table to the bottom.

Participatory power, agency, and shared deciion-authority

	Nature of Engagement	Role of Stakeholder
INFORM	Convener provides objective information to help stakeholders understand the problem and possible solutions. Convener proposes which approaches to pursue, how to do the project, and which results are significant.	INFORMATION RECIPIENTS: "here's what is happening."
CONSULT	Convener receives feedback from stakeholders on alternatives, decisions, and/or analysis. Convener uses this information to set priorities and for decision-making. Most of the key decisions are made by the Convener.	INFORMATION SOURCES: "here are some options, what do you think?"
INVOLVE	Stakeholders involved throughout the process, creating a joint enterprise and integrating different knowledge sources into collaborative decision-making. The concerns, values, and aspirations of stakeholders are taken into account. Still, the overall effort is organized and led by the Convener.	ADVISORS: "here's a problem; what ideas do you have?"
COLLABORATE	Stakeholders help identify the issue and how to address it. While there is a Convener role, each stakeholder shares in the leadership and is involved with every aspect of the project, from setting the agenda to creating and implementing solutions.	ADVOCATES: "let's work together to solve the problem."
COMMUNITY-LED	The project originates with a community concern, which motivates the community to invite the Convener's help. Community stakeholders help determine the project and priorities based on their needs. There is shared leadership, with tangible community improvements as priority outcomes. The community owns data and shares credit and authorship in any academic publication.	IN CONTROL: "you care about this issue are are leading the initiative, how can we support you?"

Considerations for the Convener

Questions to consider:

- Who is at the table?
- Who is missing?
- Why would somebody come (or not)?
- What are the opportunities for reciprocity?

Engagement at the Inform and Consult levels requires relatively less time, commitment, and resources. Conveners drive the project agenda and solutions, and scientific knowledge is prioritized over local knowledge systems.

Because engagement at the Involve, Collaborate, and Community-led levels require progressively stronger relationships, best results happen through a *Listen, Let Go, and Reciprocate* engagement strategy.

- Begin by asking questions and listening (rather than bringing your own ideas).
- Let go of any preconceived notions, biases, or emotional reactions you might have. Release any need for control or to push your own agenda.
- What are the ways in which people will act in each other's interests, and how will you know?

At the Collaborate and Community-led levels, there is a greater integration of scientific knowledge and local knowledge, and community needs are a driver of the project agenda and possible solutions.

Considerations for building trust and relationships with stakeholders

- Host face-to-face introductory meetings that help establish a relationship outside of the context of a project.
- Listen to and learn about each stakeholder- their concerns, values, and aspirations. Limit your speaking time.
- The engagement model of *Listen, Let Go, and Reciprocate* is rooted in shared learning, shared power, reciprocity, accountability, and a commitment to relationships.
- Identify and reduce barriers to meaningful engagement. This might include understanding what happened during past collaborations, understanding your intentions, and being able to let go of predetermined agendas.

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The **Inform** and **Consult** levels engage stakeholders through one-way communication. Those in the middle levels (Involve and Collaborate) have greater involvement and influence on the process, and an increasing impact on the decision-making. Working in these levels requires deeper relationships, trust, and a willingness to share power. **Community-led** reframes the engagement process entirely, with the community setting the agenda and wielding ultimate decision-making authority.

While there are advantages of engaging partners at each of these levels, collaborative conservation happens at the Involve, Collaborate, or Community-led levels.

When collaboration is appropriate

- There is sufficient time and resources available to support the collaborative process, including building trust and relationships.
- A situation is complex or controversial, thus impacting a wide variety of interests and stakeholders.
- Processes can be designed and implemented to ensure meaningful stakeholder engagement that engenders trust and respectful, meaningful participation.
- A mutual gain is possible, meaning that stakeholders have something to gain from participating in collaboration.
- There is sustained funding and resources to support at least the convener role.

When collaboration is not the best approach

- Stakeholders can pursue an alternative that will result in a better agreement or decision than that which might be reached through the collaborative process. See Fisher et al. (2011) for more details about “Best Alternatives to a Negotiated Agreement” (BATNA). BATNA’s allow stakeholders to have their interests addressed through other venues that might undermine the collaborative process.
- Decisions must be made very quickly.
- Affected parties do not see the issue of high enough priority to engage in the collaborative process.
- A decision-making agency is not committed to implementing solutions reached through a collaborative process.
- The situation is so polarized that key parties refuse to engage.
- Resources are lacking to sustain the processes and relationships required for effective collaboration.

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The Five Foundations for Practicing Collaborative Conservation

There is no "one size fits all" formula for how to do collaborative conservation. However, the following Five Foundations are helpful to consider. The CCC How-To Page is organized around these Five Foundations, offering helpful resources for each.

Collaborative Cornerstones

- Collaborative design
- The collaborative mindset
- System and context; conditions and capacity
- Levels of engagement

Engaging Stakeholders

- Situation assessment
- Stakeholder analysis
- Trust-building and engagement strategies
- Engaging across cultures

Managing the Process

- Collaborative leadership
- Facilitation considerations and strategies
- Integrating different knowledge systems
- Participatory learning
- Managing conflict
- Decision-making frameworks

Achieving Conservation Impact

- Conservation planning
- Theory of change and project-planning
- Systems thinking
- Finance and fundraising

Telling the Story

- Communication strategies
- Outreach and influencing behaviors
- Evaluation planning
- Participatory methods

Collaborative Conservationists should be able to:

- Evaluate potential stakeholders (considering social capital, power, influence, and other factors) and conduct a situation analysis.
- Create a stakeholder engagement plan, understanding the role of influence, participatory power, and agency.
- Maximize opportunities for participatory power and shared decision-authority.
- Build collaborative leadership skills, including interpersonal behaviors and maintaining and leveraging relationships.
- Use strategies to build and maintain trust, minimize power differentials, manage conflict, increase participation, and achieve action.
- Use different decision-making frameworks in ways that address controversy and complexity.

Collaborative Conservationists should be able to (con't):

- Manage differences, evaluate alternatives, and reach agreement.
- Use a variety of facilitation strategies and processes, becoming skilled at questioning, listening, and reframing
- Foster participatory learning.
- Use guiding values and principles for meaningful cross-cultural engagement, practicing a "listen, let go, and reciprocate" engagement model.

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Foundation 1: Collaborative Cornerstones

Not all processes that use public engagement strategies fall under collaborative conservation, requiring a core understanding of the design and successful implementation of collaborative efforts, including the system, context, conditions, and capacity for the effort. A collaborative mindset is built by understanding the principles of effective collaboration and characteristics associated with successful efforts. Explicitly recognizing the role the stakeholder will play in the project – their level of engagement -- reflects the core belief that those affected by a decision have a right to be involved in some way in the decision-making process.

Foundation 2: Engaging Stakeholders

A structured approach to engaging stakeholders allows collaborative conservation leaders to identify the type of engagement that is needed, who should be included, what the engagement looks like, and the governance structures that might be needed. Cross-cultural considerations guide meaningful engagement strategies, especially for Indigenous and other marginalized communities.

Foundation 3: Managing the Process

Collaborative conservation leaders create and implement successful processes that build trust and advance a shared vision wherein multiple priorities, knowledge systems, and values are given equal or equitable weight. This is a learning endeavor, and collaborative learning tools and strategies underlie efforts to constructively manage differences and tackle complex issues.

Foundation 4: Achieving Conservation Impact

Strategic planning and project planning frameworks are helpful in setting agendas, creating goals, analyzing the systems at play, and moving a project forward. Planning and implementing conservation projects also requires technical knowledge and analytical skills. Because collaborative conservation projects often require a sustained commitment, conservation finance becomes important, including accessing capital in creative, innovative ways.

Foundation 5: Telling the Story

It is important to share the results and story of the collaborative conservation effort. Outreach and engagement strategies utilize communication that is relevant, engaging, and audience specific. Telling the story also requires participatory research and evaluation methods to understand the outcomes of the collaborative conservation effort.

How-To: Collaborative Conservation

Conclusion: The Tools for Practice

The practice of collaborative conservation is situationally responsive, and there is no one way to do it. Therefore, we designed a framework designed to help each collaborative conservation leader develop their philosophy and approach based on key sets of principles, processes, and techniques. We seek to embed research in practice and leverage our collective knowledge and skills in ways that help us successfully practice collaborative conservation.

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