Developing High-Level Work Plans and Budgets Using the Open Standards

An FOS How-To Guide

November 2017

Foundations of Success

Improving the Practice of Conservation

This guide provides detailed guidance to help conservation teams develop work plans and budgets and move to implementing their strategic plans. It is based on the Adaptive Management principles and practices in the Conservation Measure Partnership's *Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation*. Materials in this guide have been adapted from previous works produced by Foundations of Success and members of the Conservation Measures Partnership.

FOS strongly recommends that project teams new to the *Open Standards* and the tools presented in this manual secure the guidance of a trained facilitator to apply the *Open Standards* to their projects.

To provide feedback or comments, you can contact Foundations of Success at info@FOSonline.org. Visit our website at www.FOSonline.org to download the most recent version of this guide. Please cite this work as:

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Contents

Purpose of FOS How-To Guides

This guide is one in a series of how-to guides designed to help conservation practitioners using the *Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation* operationalize their strategic plans. These guides are stand-alone documents, but practitioners will get the most value out of them when they use them together to support the broader process of moving from planning (Step 2) to implementation (Step 3).[1] The series of guides includes the following (relationship to Open Standards steps included in parentheses):

    A. Designing Monitoring and Evaluation Approaches (Step 2B)
    B. Data Collection Methods (Step 2B, under development)
    C. Operational Planning (Step 2C, under development)
    D. Work Planning, Budgeting, and Refining of Action Plan (Step 3A, this guide)
    E. Funding Sources and Proposals (Step 3B, under development)
    F. Implementation (Step 3C, under development)

FOS staff members are developing these guides over time. As of May 2017, FOS had released drafts guides for topics A and D listed above. As the guides are published, they will be available on the FOS website and the Open Standards website (along with a peer-reviewed rating). The Open Standards website also contains implementation and operationalization guidance from other organizations, with Bush Heritage Australia providing numerous documents and examples based on their own experiences.

High-Level Work Planning and Budgeting

Introduction to Developing a High-Level Work Plan

At this point, you should have fairly well-developed action and monitoring plans. In this section, we help you develop a high-level work plan and budget so that you have a better sense of the resources required to implement your project. We also provide you with some steps and tools that can help you make the difficult decisions about eliminating, postponing, or scaling back your strategies. Finally, we try to help you identify and understand the consequences of decisions to alter your action and monitoring plans.

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[1] For guidance on Steps 1 and 2 of the Open Standards, see FOS's manual, Conceptualizing and Planning Conservation Projects and Programs, as well as FOS How-To Guides on conceptual models and results chains (available from www.fosonline.org).

Before diving into the steps, however, it is useful to define some terminology. Box 2 describes the main terms we will use when talking about work plans. A **work plan** is a detailed, short-term schedule for implementing a project team's action and monitoring plans. It outlines how the team will turn the more general action and monitoring plans into on-the-ground implementation. At this point, you should keep your work plan broad and limit it to your strategies, staff responsible for implementing them, and a general estimate of time needed for and the timing of that strategy. Later, you will probably need to delve into more detail and include activities and tasks in your work plan.

> 🏷️**Tip!** Practicing adaptive management means incorporating monitoring (e.g., data collection, management, and analysis) into your regular activities. Keep this in mind as you develop your work plan and be sure to include monitoring in your time estimates.

How to Develop a High-Level Work Plan and Budget

Developing a work plan and budget can be done at different levels of detail. The steps are essentially the same, but you should consider your needs to help determine the best level of detail for your team. A high-level plan is useful at this point because it can be relatively quick and help you determine if your planned actions are feasible in light of your likely resources and, therefore, whether you need to make any changes to your project. We suggest you take this step before you develop your more detailed work plan and budget so that you do not spend a lot of time identifying activities, tasks, and resources for strategies that you might choose to eliminate or scale back.

> 🏷️**Tip!** In any project, you have two major resource groups – time and money. As you plan, consider whether you have sufficient funding and whether you have enough time of the right people – and, if not, whether you have the ability to get what you need.

Box 1. Work Plan Terminology

Here are some definitions to help you distinguish among the components of a work plan.

Work plan – A detailed, short-term schedule (3-12 months) for implementing action and monitoring plans. A high-level plan includes the strategies and perhaps some major activities, but it does not include all the tasks needed to implement each activity and strategy.

   Action plan – A description of a project's goals, objectives, and strategies that will be undertaken to abate threats and make use of opportunities.

   Monitoring plan – A plan for determining whether a project is on track and having the desired impact. It includes information needs, indicators, and methods, spatial scale and locations, timeframe, and roles and responsibilities for collecting data.

Strategy – A group of actions with a common focus that work together to reduce threats, capitalize on opportunities, or restore natural systems. Strategies include one or more activities and are designed to achieve specific objectives and goals.

Activity – An action carried out to accomplish one or more of a project's strategies. Also includes actions to collect monitoring data.

Task – A specific action required as part of an activity. Hierarchically, tasks fall below activities. A single activity might have several tasks associated with it.

Milestone – A marker that indicates how far along your project is toward achieving its goals or objectives. A milestone is a shorter term statement of your goals or your objectives

Sample Work Plan Hierarchy
Activity 1: Develop recommendations for low-impact construction methods
    Task 1.1: Collect peer-reviewed articles about low-impact construction methods
    Task 1.2: Interview key leaders in "green" construction
    Task 1.3: Etc...
Activity 2: Share recommendations with policy makers
    Task 2.1: Set up meetings
    Task 2.2: Carry out meetings
    Task 2.3: Incorporate feedback, as appropriate

Note: What is an activity for a smaller project might be considered a task for a larger project. What is most important is that you are consistent within the levels of your hierarchy.

After you do your high-level work plan and budget, you should determine if more detail is needed. Keep in mind that a more detailed work plan and budget will help you be more prepared for your project. At the same time, be careful not to over plan and fall into "planning paralysis."

The steps involved in developing a high-level work plan and budget include:
   1) Ensure your work plan includes all the strategies you wish to implement
   2) Specify the timeframe for your project and chart out which strategies will happen when
   3) For each strategy, identify who should be involved
   4) Broadly estimate the human, financial, and material resources needed to implement each strategy
   5) Add any other major expenses you think are likely

6) Add general operational costs and total your costs across all strategies

We will walk you through each of these steps in the following pages.

1. Ensure your work plan includes all the strategies you wish to implement

In Step 2 of the Open Standards (Plan Actions and Monitoring), your team brainstormed and prioritized a suite of strategies that you felt were necessary to help reduce threats and achieve your conservation goals. Now, you should revisit that suite and make sure you have all the strategies you think are important and necessary. As a starting point, go back to your conceptual model and look at the threats and contributing factors and try to answer the following questions:

- Do you have strategies to address all your high-ranked threats? If you do not, are there other groups in the area working effectively to address those threats?
- Does your suite of strategies address key indirect or direct threats and opportunities? Key factors include those that influence a lot of other factors at your site and/or are factors that you absolutely have to address in order to have a meaningful impact on your threats and conservation targets. Are you missing strategies for any key factors? If so, are there other groups working effectively to address those factors?

For example, the team working at the marine site in Figure 1 added two new strategies when they looked at their conceptual model again, with fresh eyes. You should not feel obligated to add new strategies. You simply want to make sure that you have the right combination of strategies to be able to have the intended impact.

Now is also a good time for reflection and considering whether you have any strategies that are clearly less important or necessary. Some questions to think about when considering reducing or eliminating strategies include:

- Does your suite of strategies seem to work well collectively as a single project? Do you have any strategies that are obvious outliers that necessitate high levels of investment, in part because they cannot take advantage of efficiencies associated with implementing a set of similar strategies?
- Will any of your strategies require extraordinary investments? Do you have or can you get the skills to implement them all? Do you have a sense of whether that extraordinary investment will lead to extraordinary results?
- Looking at all of your strategies, do any seem to be addressing a part of the model that is less important or influential on the threats or targets?

Based on your responses to the above questions, you may want to add or eliminate strategies from your action plan before you complete your high-level workplan.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model with New Strategies Identified
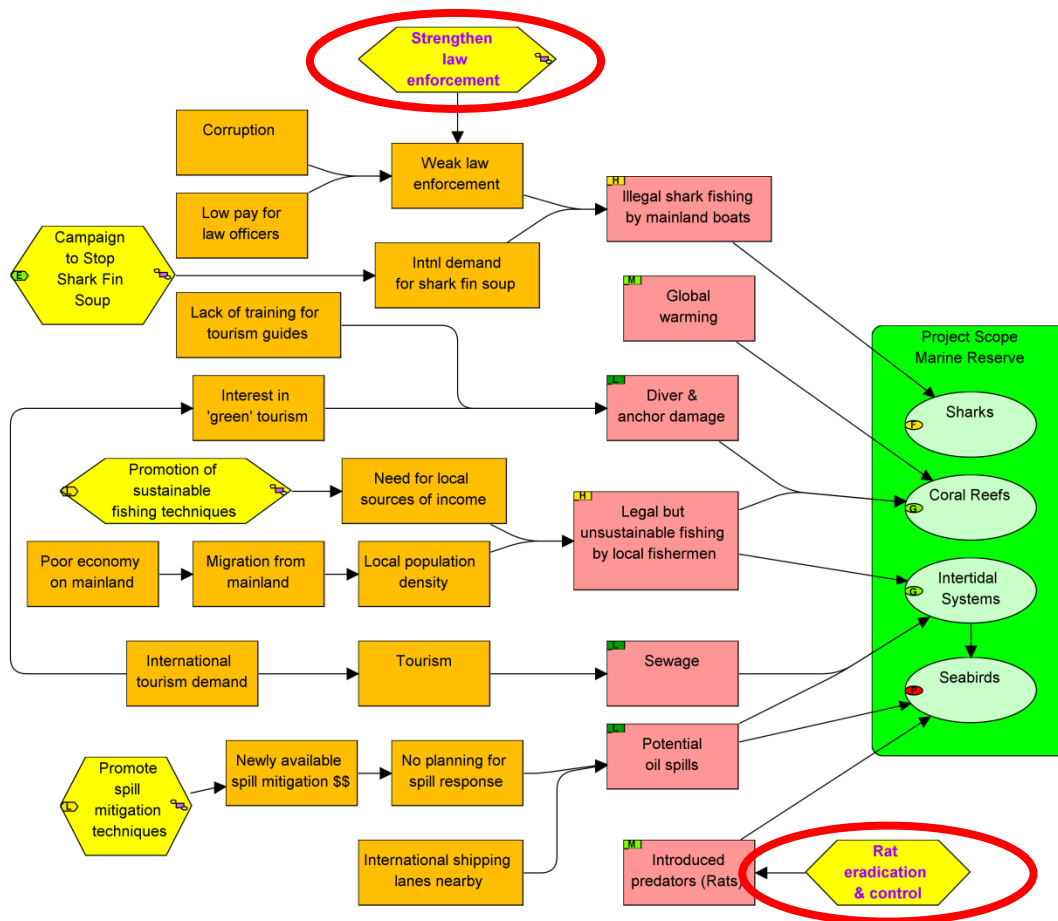
2. *Specify the timeframe for your project and chart out which strategies will happen when*

Now, you need to clarify over what timeframe your project will take place. Often, it is over a course of years, but some projects can be completed within months, and others may take decades. At a high level, it is fine to plan at the scale of years or, if needed, quarters. You should also lay out when different strategies within your project should occur. Some may be dependent upon others, and their timing should be sequenced accordingly. Some projects

📝 **Tip!** Keep in mind that some activities and tasks depend on others. Your sequencing should reflect this dependency

have an initial surge of activities, and then they slow down a bit. Others might start slowly and swing into full gear within a year or so. These considerations are important as you try to determine what staff and financial resources you will need when. Your conceptual model and results chains should be helpful for planning the sequence of strategies. You will also need to take into account your local context and any political, administrative, or logistical considerations that may influence timing.

3. *For each strategy, identify who should be involved*

This is one of the most important steps of developing your work plan. In a detailed work plan, you get very specific about who is going to do what and by when. In essence, your action and

monitoring plans move from the conceptual realm into reality with a concrete guide for implementation. In a high-level work plan however, you only need to identify who will be involved and the approximate timeframe for their involvement.

This step is simple in theory. Yet in reality, it requires your team to make sometimes difficult decisions about who will do what. When assigning responsibilities, you should consider:

- How many individuals are needed to successfully implement the strategy?
- Who is most qualified to implement the strategy?
- Who has the time available? and
- Are there individuals outside of your team that might be better positioned to implement the strategy?

> **Tip!** When planning time commitments within a project, keep in mind that team members may be involved in several projects

The mechanics of this step are fairly simple – you need to make sure that each strategy has at least one person assigned to it and that you indicate how much time you need from that person and when you need that time. Make sure you identify all the people needed, but be judicious – limit it to only those who are truly needed. In most work plans, this "Who" information is entered in one of the columns to the right of the strategy or activity (see Figure 2).

> **Tip!** For high-level work plans, you may not need to worry if staff members are overcommitted <u>IF</u> you know that you can get enough funding for the project <u>AND</u> you know that you can hire other people with the right skills.

When doing a high-level work plan, you do not need to invest a lot of time in making your work plan precise. This is because you may find that your work plan is way too ambitious for your funding and may require substantial changes. You don't want to invest too much time in work planning if you will have to significantly alter your action plan (i.e., what you propose to do) based on your funding.

4. Broadly estimate the human, financial, and material resources needed to implement each strategy

Now that you have your best guess at the right suite of strategies, do an initial estimate of what it will cost to implement them. At this point, you can just provide a very rough estimate at the strategy level. You may find it helpful to identify your major activities to develop this rough estimate. Box 3 provides some ideas of the types of expenses you should consider when developing your work plan and budget. At a high level, some of these will be less relevant, but they are still good to keep in mind.

You have a few options for arriving at an estimate of the strategy cost. Select one of the following options based on what information you have available:

a) **You can estimate the overall monetary cost, based on your past experience**. For instance, suppose you have worked in several regions to strengthen law enforcement and you know that you typically need $60,000 over two years to do the job well. If you know your proposed law enforcement will require a similar level of effort, you can simply estimate the

> **Box 2. Work Plan and Budget Checklist**
>
> Work plans and budgets can vary in detail by project and also within a project by phase of development. The most complete plans and budgets typically include the following:
>
> **Work plan:**
> - ✓ Strategies
> - ✓ Activities associated with:
>   - o implementing your strategies
>   - o monitoring your results
>   - o analysing your monitoring data
>   - o communicating and sharing your lessons
> - ✓ Tasks
>
> **Budget:**
> - ✓ Staff expenses required to implement your work plan
> - ✓ Any major capital investments or material resources
> - ✓ Travel and field expenses
> - ✓ Communications expenses
> - ✓ General operational costs (overhead)

> 🌟**Tip!** If you are new to this, bring in someone who has implemented these strategies before and has a sense of the investments needed. You may need to go outside your organization for this help.

cost at $60,000. In the example shown in Figure 2, the team spread this cost out over 2 years and allocated costs to reflect their experience of the first year requiring a heavier initial investment (green columns in Figure 2).

Figure 2. High-level estimate of strategy costs (option a):

b) **You can broadly estimate the staff and material resources required and derive your budget from that.** You can either identify specific people who would be involved or the general

types of people or skills you would need. You can then estimate how much of their time would be involved and then the overall cost based on the time level and salaries involved. This option might be more appropriate in estimating budgets for a new or innovative strategy.

> 👆**Tip!** If you are planning at the institutional level (not the project or program level), then be sure to allocate time for email, phone calls, and meetings

Figure 3 presents an example where the team estimated that they would need 750 days of staff time over 2 years for their strategy to promote sustainable fishing. They identified the people who would be involved (bottom half of Figure 3) and the approximate number of days they would each dedicate. This allowed them to calculate a high-level estimate of the strategy cost ($72,000), based on the daily rate of each staff members' salaries and the number of days they would be expected to work on the strategy. Note that the team did identify some major activities needed to implement this strategy. However, because they were still doing a high-level estimate of effort, they did not assign people to specific activities.

An alternative to determining the overall time needed to implement a strategy is to estimate the percent of time (% FTE) different individuals will spend on the project. One drawback of this approach is that teams have a tendency to underestimate time and potentially overlook a need to hire additional staff.

> 👆**Tip!** Keep in mind your first estimate is almost always an under-estimate. Consider increasing your initial estimate by at least 25%.

Regardless of how you estimate staff time, note that it is important to factor in time for monitoring into your overall estimate of staff time needed. At this point, because you are working on a broad level plan, you might just want to increase overall staff time by a certain percentage (a general rule of thumb is 10-15%) to include monitoring costs.

Figure 3. High-level of estimate of staff level of effort and strategy costs
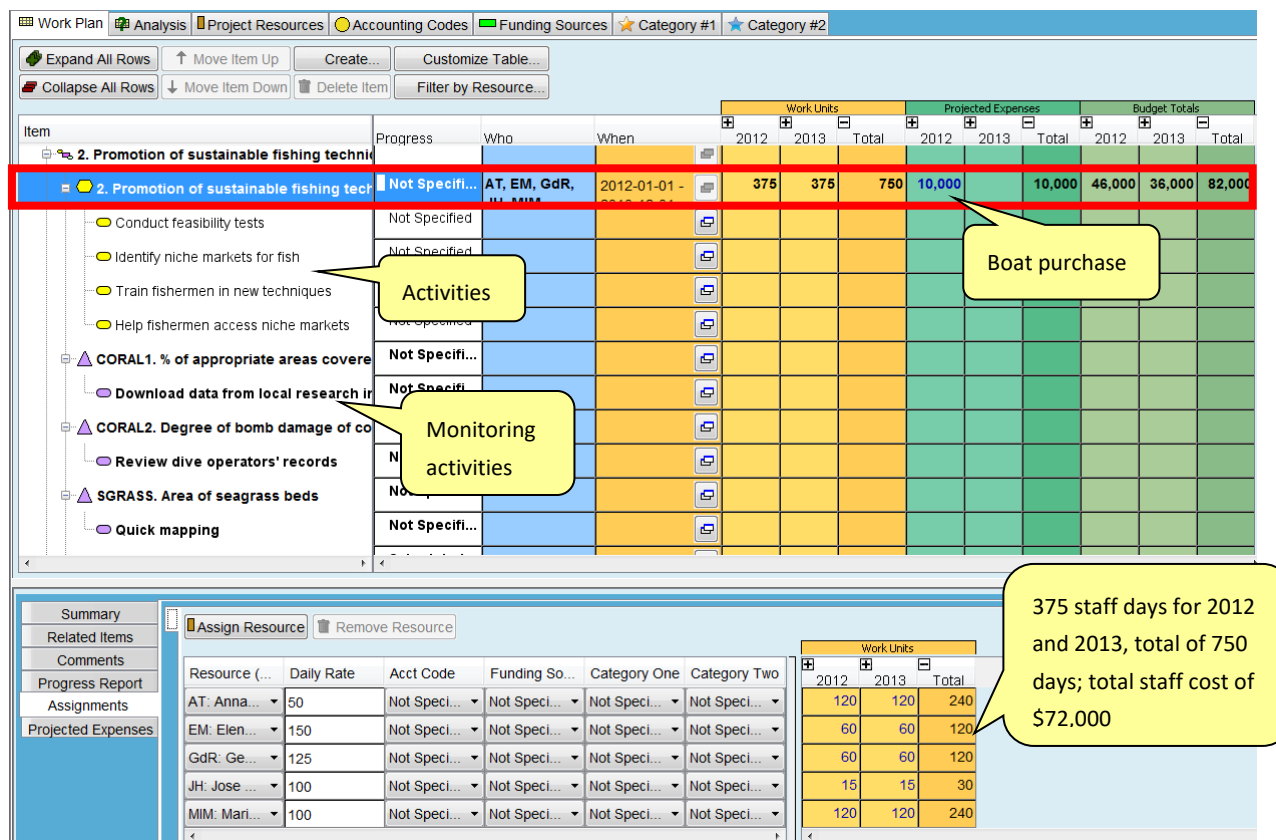
c) **You can do a combination of the above**, based on what you know about your different strategies.

It is important to consider whether your strategy will involve some capital investments or significant material resources (e.g., vehicles, GIS software, computers, etc.). If so, be sure to include those expenses in the estimate of the strategy cost. For example, in Figure 3, you can see that the team included $10,000 for a boat purchase in 2012. Also, as mentioned, make sure to consider your monitoring costs. It may seem unusual that a work plan should include monitoring activities, which are the monitoring methods you identified in Step 2 of the *Open Standards*. In an adaptive management approach, however, monitoring is considered an integrated part of the project cycle – not an add-on activity contemplated once a project is already underway. As such, project teams identify indicators and develop their monitoring plans in the early project planning phase (Step 2 of the *Open Standards*), and they then need to consider monitoring as something they do as part of their day-to-day project implementation.

5. Add any other major expenses you think are likely

In many projects, you may know ahead of time what major expenses you are likely to incur. These might include travel costs, printing or publication costs, or hiring outside services for a specific product. If you know your project is likely to have these general expenses, you should

include them as line items in your budget. Again, keep in mind that this is a high-level budget, so you should think about and do your best to estimate the major expenses (not all expenses).

6. Add general operational costs and total your costs across all strategies

Now that you have an estimate of the cost of each strategy, you can generate an overall budget for the project. To do this, you should total the costs across all your strategies (Figure 4). In addition, you should consider general operational costs. Determine whether you will have expenses that are not specific to any particular strategy but will be necessary to effectively implement your project (and others within your organization). These are often referred to as overhead or operational costs. Examples of these expenses include office equipment, communications costs, vehicles, rent, and administrative staff salaries. The simplest option, especially when doing a high-level budget, is to subtotal your budget and calculate a percentage of this – typically anywhere from 10-40%, depending upon the size and nature of your organization. Your accountant or office manager should be able to provide you with this figure.

> **Tip!** If you are using Miradi, you can enter operational costs by: a) increasing daily rates for each person by a percentage to cover general overhead; b) capturing general expenses as a "strategy" under the overall project; or c) adding a general expense "activity" to each strategy and estimating it as a percent of the overall cost for that strategy

Figure 4. Complete Project Work Plan and Budget

Examples of High-Level Work Plans and Budgets

Figure 5. Partial Work Plan and Budget for Fire Management Strategy

RC05 — Fire management

Type	Period	Details	Acct Code	Priority	CostCntr	Funding	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	TOTAL
Days							10	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Expenses							0	0	0	0	0	5,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	5,000
Cost							3,180	0	0	0	0	5,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	8,180

Strategy: Research appropriate fire regimes — Activity Code: 221

Type	Period	Details	Acct Code	Priority	CostCntr	Funding	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	TOTAL
Days							4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Expenses							0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cost							1,480	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,480

Activity — Develop prescribed burning recommendations

Type	Period	Details	Acct Code	Priority	CostCntr	Funding	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	TOTAL
Days	Year	Angela Sanders	5000-221-401-401	A	401-401		4												4
Cost							1,480	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,480

Indicator — Presence of well informed peer reviewed research

Type	Period	Details	Acct Code	Priority	CostCntr	Funding	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	TOTAL
Days	Month	Uni WA	5000-221-401-401	A	401-401		4												4
Cost							0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Strategy: Fire management — Activity Code: 221

Objective: By 2015, we have a science based strategy for a prescribed regime that will sustain a mosaic of age classes across the Fitzstirling.

Type	Period	Details	Acct Code	Priority	CostCntr	Funding	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	TOTAL
Days							4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Expenses							0	0	0	0	0	5,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	5,000
Cost							1,700	0	0	0	0	5,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	6,700

Indicator — % of area burnt

Type	Period	Details	Acct Code	Priority	CostCntr	Funding	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	TOTAL
Days	Month	Uni WA	5000-221-401-401	A	401-401		0	4											4
Expenses	Month	satellite imagery (in-kind)						0											
Cost							0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Activity — Firebreak and access maintenance

Type	Period	Details	Acct Code	Priority	CostCntr	Funding	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	TOTAL
Days	Year	Simon Smale	5000-221-401-401	A	401-401	ID11667.09	4												4
Expenses	Month	Contract access maintenance	5302-221-401-401	A	401-401							5,000							5,000
Cost							1,700	0	0	0	0	5,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	6,700

Source: Bush Heritage Australia 2015

Some Final Words

In this chapter, you learned how to develop a high-level work plan and budget. The main reason for thinking about your work plan and budget at a high level is to determine if there are any strategies that are clearly less important and could be eliminated, if needed. It would be a lot of work to go through a thorough work plan and budgeting process if it's clear that you have a $500,000 project, but you will likely only have $100,000 of funding to implement it.

In the next chapter, we will provide some guidance for how to analyze your work plan and budget and make adjustments to be able to implement your project within the constraints you have.

For some projects, a high-level work plan and budget is enough. But, in many cases, you will want to go into more depth. This is especially true for the work plan, as you try to determine how you will allocate staff time over this project, as well as other projects in which your staff is involved. The process is similar, but it is more detailed and results in a fairly thorough work plan and budget. Keep in mind, like all steps in the adaptive management cycle, this is an iterative process.

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Assignment 1: Develop a High-Level Work Plan and Budget

Develop a high-level work plan and budget for your project using the steps described in more detail above:

1) Ensure your work plan includes all the strategies you wish to implement
2) Specify the timeframe for your project and chart out which strategies will happen when
3) For each strategy, identify who should be involved
4) Broadly estimate the human, financial, and material resources needed to implement each strategy
5) Add any other major expenses you think are likely
6) Add general operational costs and total your costs across all strategies

Use the work plan and resources tabs in Miradi to enter the data for your work plan and budget. You will use the bottom pane to enter your data. If you have questions about how to use Miradi for work planning and budgeting, be sure to expand the dialog box on the top and read through the instructions.

Write a short paragraph about your impression of the process of developing a high-level work plan and budget. Include any challenges you had or anything you found to be useful. In particular, because this is a pilot test of this chapter, please provide any advice for how to improve the guidance and presentation.

Hand in your assignment (Word document + Miradi file) as Assignment 2

Analyze Your Work Plan and Budget and Refine Your Action Plan

Introduction to Analyzing Your Work Plan and Budget

Now that you have developed your work plan and budget, it is fairly likely that you have discovered that your team has been overly ambitious and you have more planned than you have the resources to cover. All along, as you have gone through the Open Standards steps, you have had to make decisions to prioritize your work – from selecting a limited suite of conservation targets to rating your direct threats to developing a conceptual model that lays out the most important factors affecting conservation at your site. You need to continue this strategic focus to help you prioritize your strategies based on your likely budget, determine which strategies to implement first, and if needed, determine which strategies to eliminate, postpone, or scale back. This is often a difficult step for teams, as typically they feel invested in their plans and believe that all strategies and activities are important.

In this section, we provide you with some tools and steps that can help you make those difficult decisions. We also try to help you identify and understand the consequences of any decisions to alter your work plan.

How to Analyze Your Work Plan and Budget and Refine Your Action Plan

You should now have a sense of what human and financial resources are needed to implement your suite of strategies. If you have only a high-level work plan and budget, don't worry if team members are overbooked. At this point, you only want to know if you have the funding to hire someone to do the job, even if it's not someone currently on your team. However, keep in mind whether you can find someone with the skills you need and the true cost of hiring someone new – it is not just their salary, but it also includes management, coordination, and other hidden costs.

Analyzing your work plan and budget and refining your action plan involve the following steps. These are listed sequentially, but you may find you are implementing several steps at the same time.

1) Compare your budget to your likely funding and, if appropriate, identify any obvious strategies that can be eliminated, postponed, or scaled back
2) Scan your material expenses and determine if any are clearly unnecessary. Eliminate these and adjust your budget accordingly
3) If you still have a budget shortfall, determine if there are alternative ways to implement your project
4) Identify other candidate strategies or activities to eliminate, scale back, or postpone using decision-making tools
5) For each candidate strategy, consider the consequences of eliminating it, scaling it back, or postponing it and then finalize your strategies
6) Determine whether you can still be effective with your suite of strategies and make a "go/no-go" decision
7) Examine your new work plan and ensure the work load is realistic for all staff members

The following pages explain each of these steps in more detail.

1. Compare your budget to your likely funding and, if appropriate, identify any obvious strategies that can be eliminated, postponed, or scaled back

Compare your final budget figures to the funding you believe you are highly likely to acquire for the project. More likely than not, your budget is higher than your likely funding. Look again at your suite of strategies and see if there are any that can be easily eliminated or scaled back, as a first step. Potential candidates could be strategies that:

- Are lower rated in your strategy rating process;
- Are very different from the rest of your strategies (and therefore may not benefit from any implementation efficiencies);
- Address lower-rated threats;
- Are designed to influence less-critical contributing factors in your conceptual model; and/or
- A partner or other organization could easily implement and is likely to do so.

> **Tip!** Pulling together a complete project is as much an art as a science. While you want to have the greatest impact for your conservation investment, you may find it makes sense to keep some lower-rated strategies because they are low-cost, easy to implement, of interest to your stakeholders, and/or easy to fund.

If you can easily eliminate or scale-back any strategies, you should do so.

2. Scan your material and other expenses and determine if any are clearly unnecessary. Eliminate these and adjust your budget accordingly

Now that you have a sense of your overall budget, the resource available to you, and possibly some ideas on whether to eliminate or scale back certain strategies, you may find that some of the material expenses that seemed so important in earlier iterations of your plan seem less important now. This is a good time to consider whether all your expenses are necessary. For example, are your travel expenses essential, or could you be as effective or nearly so by holding virtual meetings? However, be careful not to eliminate truly necessary expenses that would seriously affect your ability to be successful with your strategies.

3. If you still have a funding shortfall, determine if there are alternative ways to implement your project

After doing a first round of "easy" trimming, if there is still a funding shortfall, you will need to look more deeply at your suite of strategies and determine how to proceed. You have already done some trimming, so presumably all the strategies and activities you have are important to implement. Assuming this is the case, you should first look for other mechanisms to help you implement all of your strategies. Some options include:

- **Can you secure more funding via other avenues, including in-kind contributions?** Think again about your funding options and whether there are creative ways of increasing the resources available to you. Consider if there are political opportunities or special interests in an aspect of your project. If so, you could tap into these, even if they offer the potential to fund lower-priority strategies. Also, in-kind contributions are a great way to leverage more resources for a project. As an example, you might be able to borrow a

partner's vehicle or coordinate trips with them rather than investing in a new, expensive truck. Likewise, you might be able to access data and information from partners rather than collecting your own data, which can be time-consuming.

- **Can you scale up within your institution by hiring more people to help you implement your project?** In addition to securing more funding, this could involve hiring less-skilled (and therefore, less-expensive) staff for certain activities and tasks that do not require specialization.
- **Does it make sense to hire consultants for certain activities?** Sometimes, it may be more cost-effective to hire out some services rather than to try to use your staff. This is especially true for specialized services where your staff may not have a lot of experience.
- **Does it make sense to take on some activities that you would normally hire out?** The other side to the point above is that sometimes it may make sense to internalize some activities that you might normally contract out. This is particularly true if you have staff with the skills and time and if the activity is an expensive service to hire out.
- **Do you have partners in the region that would be willing and able to take on different strategies?** A great way to increase the potential of your project is to get partners to take on certain strategies.

The following table summarizes some common benefits and drawbacks of these options for implementing your strategies.

Table 1. Consequences Associated with Alternative Options for Implementing Your Project

Alternatives for implementing project	Advantages	Disadvantages
Secure more funding via other avenues	• Increases overall funding available • Can strengthen partnerships	• Can be more opportunistic and less strategic (funding may not be targeted at the most important strategies) • Time consuming to identify other funding avenues • In-kind donations could require a lot of additional coordination
Scale up within institution by hiring more people	• Increases staff time available • Allocates skills in a more cost-efficient way • As such, frees up funding	• More people means more management burden • May be hard to find the right people
Hire consultants	• Can get special expertise not available within your team • Special skills allow them to get the job done quickly • Can be cheaper, depending on the situation	• Can seem costly (though when considering the time saved, it may be cost effective) • Lose the opportunity to create potentially relevant skills in project team
Internalize activities rather than hiring them out	• Take advantage of under-utilized staff time (where relevant)	• Could overburden staff • Relevant skills may not exist in project team

Alternatives for implementing project	Advantages	Disadvantages
	• Can be cheaper, depending on the situation	• Could be time consuming esp. if staff are not as efficient at tasks as consultants
Get partners to take on different strategies	• Staffing and associated financial burden are shifted from your project	• Potential loss of quality control or control in general • Partners may also lack needed skills

4. Identify other candidate strategies or activities to eliminate, scale back, or postpone using decision-making tools

At this point, you have done all you can do to make your project manageable and feasible. If your budget is still too high, then you will need to make some tough decisions now. You have at least four options available to you:

- **Eliminate strategies or activities:** This involves completely eliminating a strategy or some of the activities under a strategy.
- **Scale back strategies or activities:** This involves implementing the strategy or activity, but at a reduced level of effort. For example, if you are working with ranchers to reduce grazing impacts, you might focus on a smaller group of ranchers, or you might make fewer outreach efforts, or you might limit what you try to address with them.
- **Scale back your geographic or thematic scope:** Likewise, you could think at the project level and decide to limit the implementation of your full suite of strategies and activities to a smaller geographic area or thematic scope.
- **Postpone strategies or activities:** When you look at your project as a whole, some strategies might be very important to implement right away (e.g., an invasive species prevention program), while others could wait a few years with relatively minimal adverse effects (e.g., trash pick-up program with school children). In particular, you should consider postponing strategies in cases where they are less urgent and/or you think you might be able to get additional funding at a later point.

In some cases, you might need to make decisions at the strategy or project-wide level. In other cases, you might be able to modify some activities without seriously affecting your strategy.

Relative Ranking

There are numerous decision-making tools available. The References section lists several sources for more information. One of the simplest and most adaptable tools, however, is the relative ranking. A great advantage of this tool is that it forces a spread across whatever is being rated. All strategies you have are important, but this tool requires you to compare each strategy with all the other strategies to determine which is likely to be the most feasible and have the greatest impact, for example. In Steps 1 and 2 of the Open Standards, you may have used this tool for ranking your direct threats and/or prioritizing your strategies. Here, we will repeat some guidance on using relative rankings for prioritizing strategies and actions.

a. Determine your criteria for ranking

As a first step, you need to determine the criteria against which you will rank your strategies. Common criteria for ranking strategies include:

Potential Impact: Degree to which the strategy (if implemented) will lead to desired changes in the situation at your project site. In particular, how likely is it that the strategy will mitigate a threat or restore a target?
Note that there are at least two dimensions rolled into this rating: probability of positive impact and magnitude of change. Users must mentally integrate these into their rating.

Feasibility: Degree to which your project team could implement the strategy within likely time, financial, staffing, ethical, and other constraints
Note that your project should always meet the "ethical" aspect of this criterion. If it does not, you should not implement it.

Niche/gap the strategy would fill: Extent to which your strategy will fill a gap not addressed by another project or organization. You may find that you have the perfect strategy to address a particular threat, but another team is already implementing that strategy and doing it effectively. If this is the case, you need to consider whether your resources would be better spent implementing a different strategy or addressing a key intervention point where nothing is currently being done, or whether you could support existing work. You ideally want to choose strategies that will add the most value for conservation in general. This may mean filling a gap by implementing an entirely new strategy or filling a gap by providing additional resources to an existing strategy implemented by another group or project.

You may have other criteria you think are important. For example, you might want to look at criteria such as risk (which is closely tied to feasibility), political buy-in, funding opportunities (also tied to feasibility), or urgency for taking action. Another important criterion might be "synergies with other strategies." Some strategies when implemented together could bring results greater than the sum of the strategies implemented separately or at different times. This might be a bit difficult to consider in a relative ranking, but it may be something you want to evaluate in your final decision of which strategies to implement.

b. Create a matrix and rank each of your strategies by your criteria. If you use the three criteria suggested above, begin ranking your strategies in terms of potential impact by giving the strategy you think is likely to have the greatest impact the highest ranking (e.g., a 6 if you have 6 strategies) and the one likely to have the lowest impact a 1. Continue ranking the remaining strategies until you have completed the potential impact column. Note that you should not rank two strategies with the same number. Repeat the same process for ranking the strategies according to feasibility and gap/niche. Sum the numbers up by column and rows. The total for each column (criteria) should be equal, but the totals across rows (strategies) should yield a range of numbers. You may wish to weight some criteria higher than others – this is a decision your team should discus. The strategy with the highest number is your best strategy and one you should probably undertake. Likewise, the strategy with the lowest number is one that, with limited resources, you should probably not undertake.

(Note: this ranking process is not currently supported in Miradi – you will need to do it using some other software program).

Table 2. Relative Ranking of Strategies for Marine Reserve

Strategy	Potential Impact	Feasibility	Niche/ Gap	Total
A. Strengthen capacity of park guards to enforce laws for boat captains and boat owners	5	3	1	**10**
B. Awareness raising campaign to educate companies and restaurants about the ecological impacts of shark fin fishing	3	7	2	**16**
C. International media campaign to reduce consumer consumption of shark fin soup in key markets in Asia	4	6	3	**16**
D. Promotion of sustainable open-ocean fishing techniques to artisanal fishermen	7	5	6	**24**
E. Influence policy to limit migration to Marine Reserve site	2	2	5	**14**
F. Lobby shipping industry and government ministries to redirect international shipping routes	1	1	4	**8**
G. Promote spill mitigation techniques	6	4	7	**24**
Total*	**28**	**28**	**28**	

*As a cross check for doing a relative ranking, your totals for your columns should all add up to the same number.

For the Marine example shown in Table 2, the team can easily see that the promotion of sustainable open-ocean fishing techniques and the promotion of spill mitigation techniques (Strategies D and G, respectively) offer the greatest potential for their site. Other potentially useful strategies might be awareness raising and media campaigns directed at consumers of shark fin soup, as well as restaurants and companies that buy shark fins (Strategies B and C). The team can also easily see that lobbying the shipping industry and government ministries to redirect international shipping routes (Strategy F) is not likely to be a good strategy, *relative* to the

others that the project can consider (remember that all strategies here did make a first cut for feasibility and effectiveness, and the team is now comparing its available options). It is important to keep in mind that strategy ranking is just a tool to narrow down your strategies and that you should use your knowledge of your site to inform your analysis and final decision-making. For example, in the case above, the team might decide that, in addition to promoting sustainable open-ocean fishing techniques and promoting spill mitigation techniques, it can take

on one more strategy. Based on the relative ranking, the team would likely choose from three strategies – international media campaign, national awareness raising campaign, and influencing migration policy. Of these three, the team may choose to take on the international media campaign to reduce shark fin soup consumption because it has strong ties to a Chinese conservation organization that has been very successful in its awareness campaigns. It is important to bring this type of knowledge of the site and circumstances to help you decide which strategy to implement. In some cases, you may pick a lower-ranked strategy because of other variables that you did not consider in your strategy ranking that make the strategy more desirable for your project.

Other Decision Making Tools

There are many other tools that different people may find helpful. We have highlighted the relative ranking tool because we feel it is one of the best, it is easy to apply, and it forces a spread that allows you to see, amongst a set of "good" strategies, which are the most likely to be effective.

You may want to explore some other tools as well. Here are some that may be of interest:
- **Grid analysis** – Grid analysis is similar to relative ranking. It involves listing your strategies as rows in a table and the criteria you need consider as columns. You then score each strategy/criteria combination, weight this score by the relative importance of the criteria, and add these scores up to give an overall score for each strategy. For an example, see: http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_03.htm
- **Decision trees –** A decision tree uses a tree-like graph or model of decisions and their possible consequences, including chance event outcomes, resource costs, and utility. A decision tree consists of three types of nodes: decision nodes – commonly represented by squares; chance nodes – represented by circles; and end nodes – represented by triangles Decision trees are commonly used in operations research to help identify a strategy most likely to reach a goal. Figure 6 and Figure 7 are good illustrations of the use of decision trees in invasive species management (though they do not use the generic node symbols). You can see how the tree in Figure 7 is a nested option within the tree in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Strategy Selection Decision Tree for Invasive Species Management
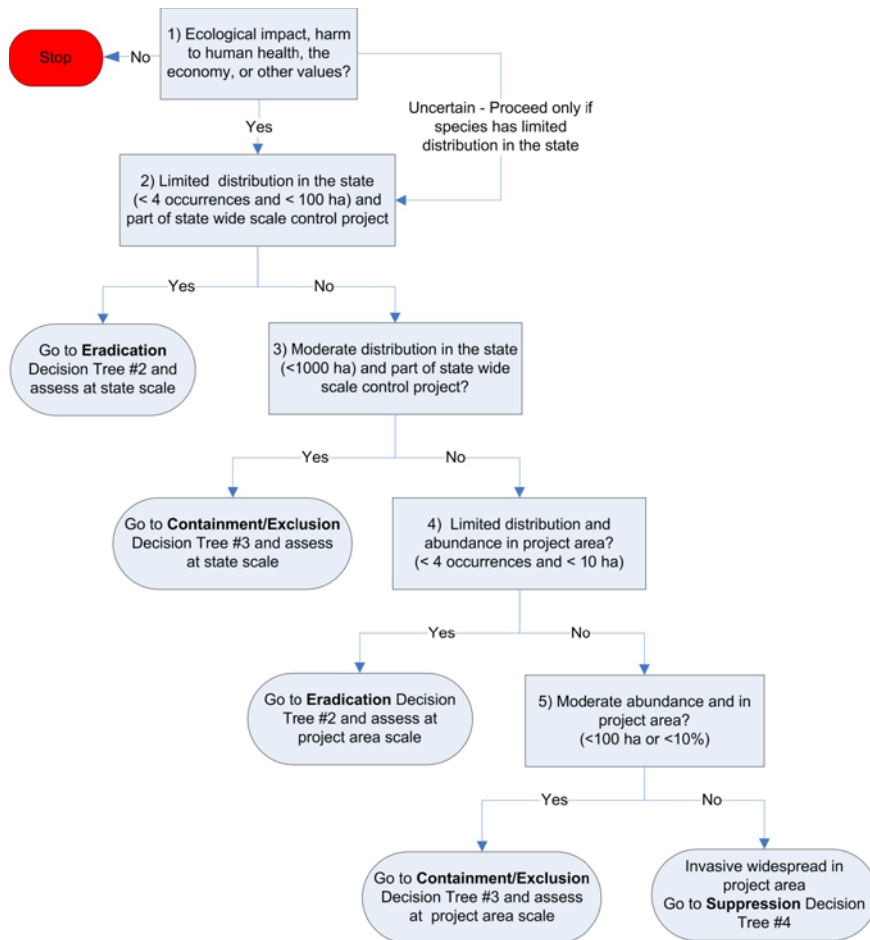
Source: Zimmerman, C., M. Jordan, G. Sargis, H. Smith, K. Schwager. 2011. An Invasive Plant Management Decision Tool. Version 1.1. The Nature Conservancy, Arlington, Virginia.

Figure 7. Invasive Species Eradication Decision Tree
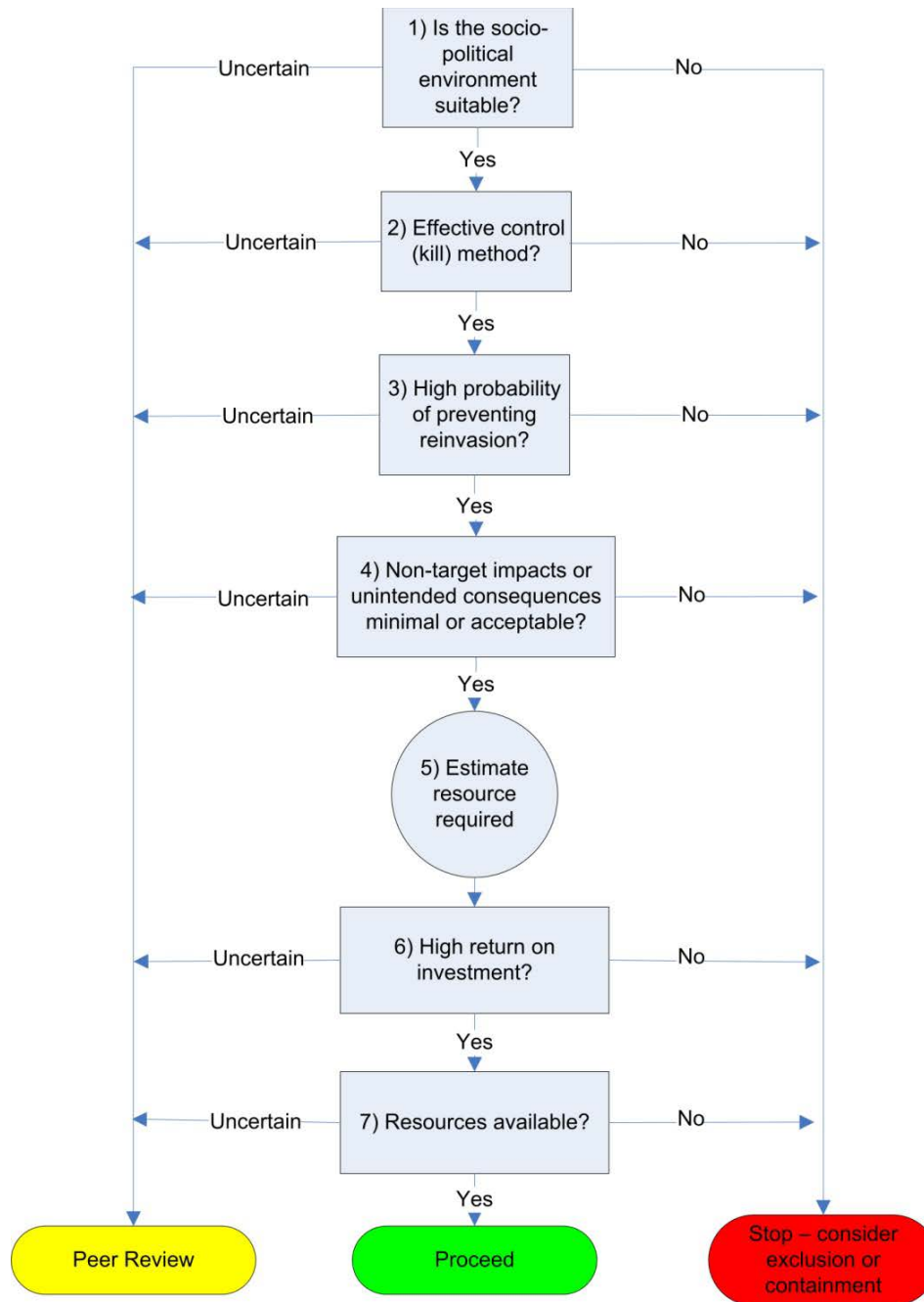
Source: Zimmerman, C., M. Jordan, G. Sargis, H. Smith, K. Schwager. 2011. An Invasive Plant Management Decision Tool. Version 1.1. The Nature Conservancy, Arlington, VA. (Adapted from Panetta and Timmins, 2004)

5. For each candidate strategy, consider the consequences of eliminating it, scaling it back, or postponing it and then finalize your strategies

The decision making tools you used in the previous step helped you identify strategies that might be lower priority. You have done what you can to apply an objective process and set of tools. Now, you should evaluate these strategies and determine whether you can eliminate them, scale them back, or postpone them. Box 3 provides some questions your team should consider that will help you understand the consequences of changes to your suite of strategies. Table 3 can also help you draw on your answers to these questions and summarize your analysis in a matrix form. At this point, your team will have to make some subjective decisions, based on your best knowledge and a thorough discussion. Uncertainty is an inherent trait of working in conservation. In adaptive management, it is important to analyze your options, document your decisions, and then monitor and evaluate to determine what is working or not and why. Based on this, you may ultimately decide to change course, or you may find that you made the right decision with your strategy choices.

> **Tip!** Do not be afraid to make some tough decisions. As part of the adaptive management process, you will continually assess whether you are on the right track and if you need to change course.

Box 3. Questions to Consider When Altering Proposed Strategies

As you try to determine whether and to what degree you need to eliminate, scale back, or postpone your proposed strategies, it is helpful to consider the following questions. Doing so will help you identify likely consequences.

- Can you be successful with your overall project if you eliminate, scale back, or postpone this strategy?
- Can the strategy be successful if you scale it back or postpone it?
- Are any other strategies dependent upon this strategy? If so, how will they be affected if the strategy is eliminated, scaled back, or postponed?
- How will stakeholders react or be affected if this strategy is eliminated, scaled back, or postponed? Are you likely to alienate an important constituency?
- What is the worst thing that would happen if you eliminated, scaled back, or postponed this strategy? How likely is it to happen?
- What is the most likely consequence of eliminating, scaling back, or postponing this strategy? How likely is it?
- Is there any urgency to act now with this strategy? (e.g., a strategy to prevent the introduction of exotic invasive species)

Table 3. Matrix for Assessing Consequences of Proposed Strategies

| Strategy | Option (choose one) | | | Questions to Consider | | | Notes |
	Eliminate	Scale back	Postpone	Worst potential outcome	Likelihood of worst?	Most likely outcome?	
D. Promotion of sustainable open-ocean fishing techniques to artisanal fishermen		X		Overfishing escalates; key fish spp unable to recover	Somewhat unlikely	Overfishing continues but at a rate that would allow recovery over longer timespan	Possible to scale back in a limited # of sites
			X	Overfishing escalates; key fish spp unable to recover	Very Likely	Overfishing escalates; key fish spp unable to recover	Not an option to postpone
G. Promote spill mitigation techniques		X		No tankers adopt spill mitigation techniques; Major spill happens	Somewhat likely	Only tankers posing greatest risk adopt techniques; Minor spills happen	Scaling back is too risky
			X	Major spill happens prior to implementing strategy	Somewhat unlikely	No spills or minor spills only	Postponing is an option, but we should not postpone beyond 1 year
C. International media campaign to reduce consumer consumption of shark fin soup in key markets in Asia	X			Consumption levels of shark fin soup increase	Very Likely	Consumption levels of shark fin soup remain the same or increase	Eliminating is not a good option, unless we can find a partner to implement
		X		Consumption levels of shark fin soup remain the same or increase	Somewhat likely	Consumption levels of shark fin soup remain the same or decrease slightly	Scaling back would make this strategy too ineffective. It would be better to eliminate than scale back.
			X	Consumption levels of shark fin soup increase; we lose opportunity to reverse trend	Very unlikely	Consumption levels of shark fin soup remain the same or increase over short term; Levels decrease over long term	Postponing could give us the option to identify other partners internationally and to potentially scale up our impact

Put together the project that makes sense for your situation. While the tools described here are designed to help you make difficult choices, you may also need to take a step back and make some decisions based on your context and what you can do within your budget. For example, it may make sense to choose high priority strategies but also fill in "holes" with lower priority strategies. You need to think about your overall budget and what you can feasibly do. For example, say you have a project with a budget of $150,000, but you only have $100,000 of funding. You have a final list of strategies (in order of priority) as follows:

> Strategy A: $80,000
> Strategy B: $50,000
> Strategy C: $10,000
> Strategy D: $10,000

Given your budget, you may choose to implement all of Strategies A, C, and D (totaling $100,000), even though C and D are lower priority than Strategy B. Obviously, there are some costs to not implementing Strategy B, but you should consider whether it would be better to scale back Strategy B and try to implement a little of all strategies or whether it might make sense to eliminate or postpone work on Strategy B.

> 📝**Tip!** It is OK to be opportunistic when settling on your strategies. This might include chasing donor funding or working on high-profile, popular strategies. The key is to make sure you are working on strategies that are likely to be effective and to ensure you do not lose sight of your overall goals.

Likewise, you may have another strategy – Strategy E – that did not make your final list of strategies but that is still important. If donor funding is readily available for that strategy, you may want to consider including it. You, however, should be careful not to include ineffective strategies just because there is funding for them.

6. Determine whether you can still be effective with your suite of strategies and make a "go/no-go" decision

You should now have a "final-for-now" suite of strategies. You may want to develop a more detailed work plan and action plan and then repeat the process described in this chapter to analyze your work plan and budget and refine your action plan, as needed.

Before doing so, however, be sure to ask yourself if you can still be effective with your new suite of strategies. If the answer is "no," then you should consider whether you can increase your potential funding and/or bring on more partners. If neither of these is likely, you may need to abandon your project. No matter how great and important some of your strategies are, if they are collectively unlikely to have a significant impact, you may be wasting conservation dollars by continuing to pursue them.

> 📝**Tip!** Be sure to ask yourself if you can still be effective with your new suite of strategies. If the answer is "no," consider alternatives to make sure key "abandoned" strategies can be implemented – whether by your team or someone else.

7. *Examine your new work plan and ensure the work load is realistic for all staff members*

Now that you have a trimmed-down work plan, it is important to revisit who will be involved

> ☝ **Tip!** Don't forget to factor in time needed for meetings, email, and other administrative tasks. This can typically take up to 20% of an individual's time

with each strategy. You should make sure that any one individual is not over-committed. If you are doing a project planning, keep in mind that each person is likely working on multiple projects and will not be able to dedicate 100% of their time to your project. If you are doing an institutional-level plan, it should include all time commitments for each individual.

Figure 8 illustrates the power of analyzing time commitments by individuals. In this figure, you can readily see that Maria Ines is well over the standard of 240 working days for 2012. What's more, this figure does not yet include work units for monitoring activities or non-programmatic activities like staff meetings, emails, or participation in conferences. Likewise, this figure shows that Elena and George are under-committed. Viewing staff commitments in a format like this can help your team determine whether it needs to reallocate responsibility for some activities and whether it has the right people within the team to take on those activities. You may find you need to do a combination of reallocation, contracting external help, and/or hiring additional staff.

Figure 8. Time Commitments by Staff Members

		Work Units		
Item	Resource Type	⊞ 2012	⊞ 2013	⊟ Total
⊟ ◯		797	589	1386
AT: Anna Thomas	Person	183	163	346
EM: Elena Martin	Person	87	77	164
GdR: George DeRosa	Person	89	69	158
JH: Jose Hernandez	Person	146	92	238
MIM: Maria Ines Moreno	Person	292	188	480

Note: In this example, there are 240 working days in a year

Assignment 2: Analyze Your Work Plan and Budget and Refine Your Action Plan

Conduct an analysis of your work plan and budget and refine your action plan as needed. Use the following steps described in more detail above:

1) Compare your budget to your likely funding and, if appropriate, identify any obvious strategies that can be eliminated, postponed, or scaled back
2) Scan your material expenses and determine if any are clearly unnecessary. Eliminate these and adjust your budget accordingly
3) If you still have a budget shortfall, determine if there are alternative ways to implement your project

4) Identify other candidate strategies or activities to eliminate, scale back, or postpone using decision-making tools.
5) For each candidate strategy, consider the consequences of eliminating it, scaling it back, or postponing it and then finalize your strategies
6) Determine whether you can still be effective with your suite of strategies and make a "go/no-go" decision
7) Examine your new work plan and ensure the work load is realistic for all staff members

You will want to use Miradi to make any alterations to your strategies, resources, and/or budget. However, much of this work will need to be done outside of Miradi. You can use tables like those shown in Table 2 and Table 3.

Write a short paragraph about your impression of the process of analyzing your work plan and budget. Include any challenges you had or anything you found to be useful. In particular, because this is a pilot test of this chapter, please provide any advice for how to improve the guidance and presentation.

Hand in your assignment (Word document + Miradi file) as Assignment 3