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1. Project Selection Stage Overview

What is Project Selection?

A detailed investigation of a project's technical, social and economic feasibility is conducted in the Feasibility Study Stage. The Project Selection Stage is a first process to assess each project idea and select the highest priority project(s) for further investigation.

At this Stage, possible projects may only be ideas or suggestions (e.g. individual observation, most serious invasive plant in an inventory, most important site, species with greatest conservation needs), so you may need to write a brief description of each project before continuing with the selection process.

Selection of projects is based on:

- **Benefits:** A measure of the positive outcomes of the project. These are often described as “the reasons why you are undertaking the project”. The benefits of invasive species management projects include:
 - Biodiversity,
 - Economic,
 - Social and cultural,
 - Fulfilling commitments made as part of national, regional or international plans and agreements.
- **Achievability:** An “educated guess” measure of the likelihood of the project being a success, i.e. achieving its objectives. Projects vary greatly in complexity, risk and cost. By evaluating likelihood of success when selecting projects it means the most-likely-to-succeed projects with the greatest benefits are given priority.

Why Do Project Selection?

Often you will have a number of project ideas but not enough resources, money or time to undertake all of the projects. The ideas for invasive species management projects may have come from many sources including: the community, funders, local and national governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). You will therefore need a way of deciding on the priority order of projects.

If your organisation has limited experience in conducting invasive species management projects then it is recommended to concentrate on a small number of projects, ideally one project at a time, until the people in your organisation have developed the skills and experience. Start small, grow capacity and build up to undertaking multiple projects at any one time. Do the straightforward projects first. Work towards the most difficult and rewarding projects. Use the easiest projects to help answer questions/solve issues for the more difficult projects. These are the best opportunities to learn.

You may have a mix of straightforward and difficult projects and do not know where to start. The Project Selection Stage will assist you by providing a process to compare the importance of the projects and select the most suitable project to undertake.

By following the Project Selection Stage you will use a step-by-step objective method for prioritising projects – this can be used to explain to stakeholders the reasoning behind why you selected a particular project.

The advantages of completing the Project Selection Stage are:

- a transparent and documented record of why a particular project was selected is produced
- a priority order for projects, that takes into account their importance and the benefits and achievability of the project, is established.

When to Do?

Undertake a Project Selection exercise when you:

- have more ideas than the number of projects you can undertake and need to select the project(s) that should be given priority.

Note: If you only have one project, it may still be useful to score it against a set of criteria to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the project. The results may be useful later in the Feasibility Study Stage.

Who Should Be Involved?

Agency Management:

- Set selection criteria to ensure the selection process aligns with agency strategies.
- Selection processes are often run as a management initiative before the implementing Project Manager is appointed.

Stakeholders:

- Stakeholder participation from the start of a project creates strong community ownership and support, and increases the chances of a successful outcome.
- Stakeholder input should be included at the ideas stage; consult widely as you are developing the ideas for projects as the community will be the source of many of the best project ideas.
- Stakeholders must be informed of the outcome of the Project Selection Stage.

Project Manager:

- Involving the Project Manager in the Project Selection process will help build ownership in the project and support a successful project in the long run.

2. Feasibility Study Stage Overview

What is a Feasibility Study?

The Feasibility Study outlines the work to be accomplished, sizes the project, identifies any key issues that need to be addressed before a project is undertaken and determines whether the target species can be successfully managed at the project site. It gives an indication of whether the project will be successful, or not.

1. The Feasibility Study asks three questions:
 - Why do the project?** Typically an invasive species management project is started within the long-term goals of a restoration project. The benefits of taking action need to be clear from the outset. Specific measurable benefits help evaluate a project against environmental and financial costs. This is critical for building support for the project.
2. **Can the project be done?** To be successful, an invasive species management project must fulfil seven criteria:
 1. **Technically feasible:** Will the technique(s) to be used at the project site achieve the desired management option (eradication, long-term control) of the target population(s)?
 2. **Sustainable:** Can you prevent re-invasion of the target species and invasions of new species, or keep target populations to the desired level, e.g. zero density, 50% density?
 3. **Socially acceptable:** Does the project have full support from the community and other key stakeholders?
 4. **Politically and legally acceptable:** Will you be able to secure all required permits and consents?
 5. **Environmentally acceptable:** Can you ensure a manageable impact on the environment?
 6. **Capacity:** Do you have, or can you acquire, the skilled people, resources and equipment that will be required?
 7. **Affordability:** Will you be able to secure the required funding for the life of the project?
3. **What will the project take?** As the seven criteria are assessed, you may identify issues that will need to be addressed before the project can proceed (e.g. What will take the place of any invasive plants removed from a site?). The Feasibility Study will determine the key issues to be resolved.

To answer these three questions you will need to gather all the relevant information, some of which will already be available via documents and authoritative internet sites. However, visiting the project site is an essential part of any Feasibility Study. Being at the site will provide first-hand knowledge of the unique characteristics of the site. Such direct experience is vital in an accurate feasibility assessment and the site visit plays a central role in the Feasibility Study Stage.

The Feasibility Study will allow you to assess whether each of the seven criteria can be met. Based on these answers and the work identified to resolve the issues, you will then weigh up the project benefits and costs to make the decision whether the project is feasible or not.

Findings from the Feasibility Study are documented in a Feasibility Study Report that will be part of the project record and used to keep stakeholders informed and as a source of information in later stages.

Why Complete a Feasibility Study?

A Feasibility Study will help determine if the proposed project is practical, especially where:

- there are new project teams
- the implementing agency has limited experience
- several separate invasive species management projects are being planned
- complex projects involving multiple invasive species are planned

A good Feasibility Study will also highlight the issues with any current plan and what needs to be done before the project can be successful.

The benefits of completing a Feasibility Study:

- **Increased chances of the project being a success:**

To identify the hard parts of the project, such as dependencies in the planning, e.g. trials that need to be done or questions that need to be answered before key decisions on operational design can be made. This will allow time for you to plan for and deal with all of the issues before the project starts and will reduce project risk and the likelihood of surprises later in the project. The Feasibility Study Stage tells you what you need to prepare and plan in the Operational Planning Stage.

- **Informed decision making:**

- To manage stakeholder expectations about how much the project will cost and how long it will take.
- To ensure that the decision to commit time, money and other resources to the project is based on accurate information.
- To enable adequate resources and timeframes to solve issues.

- **Better use of money:**

Projects that are too difficult will be stopped early rather than later; before expectations are raised too far, or when more money has been spent. Concluding that a project is not feasible is **not** a bad outcome, as it:

- avoids wasting time and money on a project that would later fail.
- enables you to identify what extra work needs to be undertaken to make it feasible.

- **Record of what you know about the project:**

When writing the Feasibility Study Report you will have gathered significant amounts of valuable information on the project – the objectives, the site, the impacts and what you plan to do. All this information will be used again in the upcoming Stages. **All is not lost if a project is not feasible at this point in time**, as it may become feasible in the future as new techniques are developed, or technology or funding become available. The work completed in the Feasibility Study can then be used but it would need to be updated.

- **The Feasibility Study Report can be used to support your funding application:**

Many funding organisations will fund the Feasibility Study and maybe the Project Design stage separately from the Operational Planning and Implementation Stages. While many funders will require you to complete their own funding application document, your Feasibility Study Report can be used as part of the application.

When to Do?

The Feasibility Study is conducted after you have selected a project in the Project Selection Stage.

Who Should Be Involved?

Project Manager:

- The Project Manager will take the lead in conducting the Feasibility Study, organising the site visit and completing the Feasibility Study Report.

Feasibility Study Team:

The Project Manager will form a Feasibility Study team to:

- provide the required skills and knowledge (i.e. knowledge of the technical details of the project, familiarity with the local environment, an understanding of the local community and culture),
- take part in the site visit.

Stakeholders:

- Stakeholder consultation will continue to play a major part in the project, particularly during the site visit. Engage closely with the local communities as they will be an invaluable source of information for the Feasibility Study.

Independent Technical Advisor:

- An independent technical advisor will be used to provide technical advice and to review the Feasibility Study Report.

3. Project Design Stage Overview

What is Project Design?

In the Project Design Stage the Project Manager details how the project will be managed and governed. The Project Plan is targeted at funders, management and Project Managers. It is used in all later Stages to manage the project.

Project Design differs from the Operational Planning Stage in that you are thinking at a higher level about managing the project. For example:

- How will decisions be made and who has the authority to do what?
- If the Implementation Phase must begin in a particular month, then when does the money have to be secured to start the project?
- What staff training is required and when?

Why Prepare a Project Plan?

The Project Plan gives the big picture of all the components of the project that need to be managed to make it successful. Identifies tasks that must be completed before other tasks can be undertaken. It helps to identify the full costs and realistic timeframes for doing the project. The project is more fully costed in the Project Plan than in the Feasibility Study and it can be used to support funding applications.

The benefit of a Project Plan: A management framework is put in place to support the successful planning and implementation of the operation.

Who Should Be Involved?

Project Manager:

- Prepares the Project Plan, using Subject Matter Expert input where required.

Subject Matter Expert(s):

- Provides input across all specialist areas (e.g. technical, cultural and political).

Independent Technical Advisor:

- Provides technical advice and reviews the Project Plan.

Stakeholders:

- Consulted during the planning process and notified of final plan.

4. Operational Planning Stage Overview

What Planning is Needed?

There are three related planning exercises in the Operational Planning Stage:

1. **Operational Plan:** This contains the details of the operation. It covers two important aspects:
 - o Design details – the methods, timing and sequences of the eradication or control operation.
 - o Logistical details – matching your design with getting the right people and equipment in the right place at the right time.
2. **Biosecurity Plan:** Planning the prevention, surveillance and incursion response activities to protect the investment you are making in doing the project and prevent new invasive species arriving and becoming established on the site(s).
3. **Monitoring Plan:** Planning how and when to measure the success of the project in relation to your goals and objectives.

Why Prepare an Operational Plan?

Invasive species management operations can be complex and difficult. Things that are planned well tend to go well.

There will be many activities that need to be completed before you are ready to undertake the operation, for example: trials, ordering materials/supplies, training, planning Biosecurity and Monitoring and much more. Many of these activities will need to be completed before others can start. By completing the Operational Planning Stage you will ensure that all required tasks are completed at the correct time.

The benefits of Operational Planning:

- Minimises the risk of failure
- Ensures nothing is forgotten
- Allows for a meaningful, external review of the operation
- The Project Manager and team will be fully prepared when Implementation and Sustaining the Project Stages are started.

Who Should Be Involved?

Project Manager:

- Prepares the Operational Plan, Biosecurity Plan and Monitoring Plan.

Project Team:

- Provide input as required by the Project Manager (includes Subject Matter Experts providing input on key aspects of the project, e.g. technical, cultural and political).

Stakeholders:

- Consulted during the planning process and notified of the final plan.

Independent Technical Advisor:

- Reviews the Operational Plan, Biosecurity Plan and Monitoring Plan.
- Provides expertise as required by Project Manager

5. Implementation Stage Overview

What is the Implementation Stage?

This is where the operation is done. The Implementation Stage is based on the Operational Plan and is divided into three phases:

1. **Pre-Implementation Phase:** Final preparations are undertaken.

In this phase preparation activities identified in the Operational Plan are carried out. These may include:

- Training the team
- Completing any trials
- Field testing new or unproven equipment
- Sourcing all equipment and consents
- Completing readiness checks
- Pre-Operation monitoring to measure the baseline for the indicators before the operation takes place
- Implementing the prevention component of the Biosecurity Plan.

Note: Biosecurity measures must be in place before the Implementation Phase to prevent new invasive species being introduced by the operation.

2. **Implementation Phase:** The actual treatment of the target species (eradication or control) at the project site. For invasive plants, this may take several years.

This phase may be different for each invasive species project and for each target species being dealt with. However there are similarities and by the start of this phase each project should have:

- An Operational Plan to work to,
- A team of motivated, capable people with good support,
- The necessary financial resources
- The necessary equipment/material/tools,
- All permissions/consents.

The Operational Plan describes the details of the treatments and should be followed closely. Remember when doing the field work to “stick to the plan”:

- Unplanned changes increase the risk of failure
- Take time to think and discuss any changes

Part of the planning is being clear about who has the authority to make decisions (see Project Plan). Where possible, have experienced people on-site, or on-call, for discussions that support the Project Manager’s decision-making – those present at the site are best able to judge local conditions.

3. **Post-Implementation Phase:**

- After the operation there are a number of post-treatment activities to complete, e.g. clean up rubbish, remove public warning signs.
- The Project Manager will prepare an Operational Review with the team to record how the operation went and what could be done differently next time.

NOTE: this is especially important with invasive plant projects which may have annual treatments for several years.

- For some projects, post-treatment monitoring will occur soon after the operation, for other projects it may be several months before undertaking the post-operation monitoring.

Why Do It?

The benefits of the Implementation Stage:

- Dedicating enough time and resources to preparation for the Implementation Stage significantly increases the chances of success of the Operational Phase and the Sustaining the Project Stage.
- Benefits of the operation will have been developed during the Feasibility and Project Design Stages and will be documented in the Project Plan.

Who Should Be Involved?

Project Manager:

- Has overall responsibility for the project. Is responsible for ensuring the team has all the skilled people necessary. Uses the Operational Review to help prepare for the next implementation phase or the next project.

Project Team:

- Complete activities required for successful Implementation. Where possible, the team should include experienced persons who can support the Project Manager on site.

Local community:

- May be part of the operation. To provide the necessary manpower, local communities often take part in the actual operation.

Stakeholders:

- Notified of progress.

Independent Technical Advisor:

- Reviews any major changes to the Operational Plan to help assess impact to successful Implementation of the operation.

6. Sustaining the Project Stage Overview

What is the Sustaining the Project Stage?

The Sustaining the Project Stage is the on-going work required after the operation has been completed. With invasive plant eradication projects, the operational work (Implementation) may continue for many years. With invasive plant control projects the operational work (Implementation) may continue forever however biosecurity still needs to be implemented.

Sustaining the Project involves continuing to implement the:

- Biosecurity Plan

To minimise the chances of re-invasion, the Biosecurity work that started in the Implementation Stage will continue. The Biosecurity plan will need to be kept in place permanently if re-invasion is to be avoided.

A surveillance plan will need to be put in place that checks for the presence of invasive species on the site. For eradication projects, if target invasive species are discovered at the site this can mean either; the original eradication operation was not successful, or there has been a post-operational invasion. Either way, the incursion response actions (detailed in the Biosecurity Plan) will need to be implemented.

- Monitoring and Evaluation Plan.

Post-operation monitoring of the project outcomes as described in the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan will continue throughout the Sustaining the Project Stage.

Why Do It?

Eradicating the target species, or controlling it to the required density, is only the start of an invasive species-free site. If the project is to be a long-term success you must ensure that:

- the target invasive species does not re-invade and re-establish,
- new invasive species do not become established on the site.

In many cases, you will only be able to have one attempt at eradication; funders may not be so enthusiastic to fund a second eradication project if the first fails – so it is vital to continue the effort after the eradication and prevent re-invasion or invasion by new invasive species.

Control projects may go on forever and decision-makers and funders will want to see positive progress with targeted species on the site and no invasions of new species.

The benefits of the Sustaining the Project Stage:

- Implementing the Biosecurity Plan is essential in ensuring that the target species or new invasive species do not invade the site.
- Surveillance and incursion response readiness will enable you to stop any invasive species that evade your prevention measures from establishing a population on the site.
- Monitoring will provide the data to assess and demonstrate the success of the project.

When to Do?

The Sustaining the Project Stage work will start as soon as the Implementation Stage is completed. Implementing widespread prevention measures will have started in the Implementation Stage but will continue throughout the Sustaining the Project Stage and will need to be permanent.

Preparation for the surveillance and response parts of the Biosecurity Plan will have started during the Implementation Stage, so that the team is trained, prepared and ready and any necessary tools/equipment/materials are immediately available for response actions at the start of the Sustaining the Project Stage.

Post-operation monitoring may have started as part of the Implementation Stage, if not it will start early in the Sustaining the Project Stage. The frequency and type of monitoring will vary from project to project and will have been planned in the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan.

Who Should Be Involved?

Project Manager:

- Overall responsibility for the project.

Project Team:

- Surveillance, incursion response and monitoring.

Stakeholders:

- Notified of progress

Local community:

- Adopt Biosecurity prevention measures, surveillance, report incursions, value the invasive free status of the site, and put pressure on other site users to keep the site invasive free.

Visitors

- Adopt Biosecurity prevention measures.