Partnership Learning Project

Part 1 – Findings from the Capacity Building Partnerships

A Report for the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

In collaboration with Bonneville Environmental Foundation

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July 2017

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Acknowledgments

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About Reciprocity Consulting, LLC

Reciprocity Consulting, LLC is a women-owned small business based in Tacoma, Washington that provides customized support to build partnerships and engage diverse stakeholders.

Owner **Jennifer S. Arnold, Ph.D.** has 15 years of experience in research, facilitation, and training focused on collaborative approaches to conservation and community development. She specializes in launching new collaborative efforts, growing existing partnerships, managing conflicts productively, and effectively engaging diverse stakeholders to have a lasting positive impact in our communities and our environment.

Common Terms

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB)
The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board is a state agency that provides grants to help Oregonians take care of local streams, rivers, wetlands and natural areas. OWEB grants are funded from the Oregon Lottery, federal dollars, and salmon license plate revenue. The agency is led by a 17 member citizen board drawn from the public at large, tribes, and federal and state natural resource agency boards and commissions.

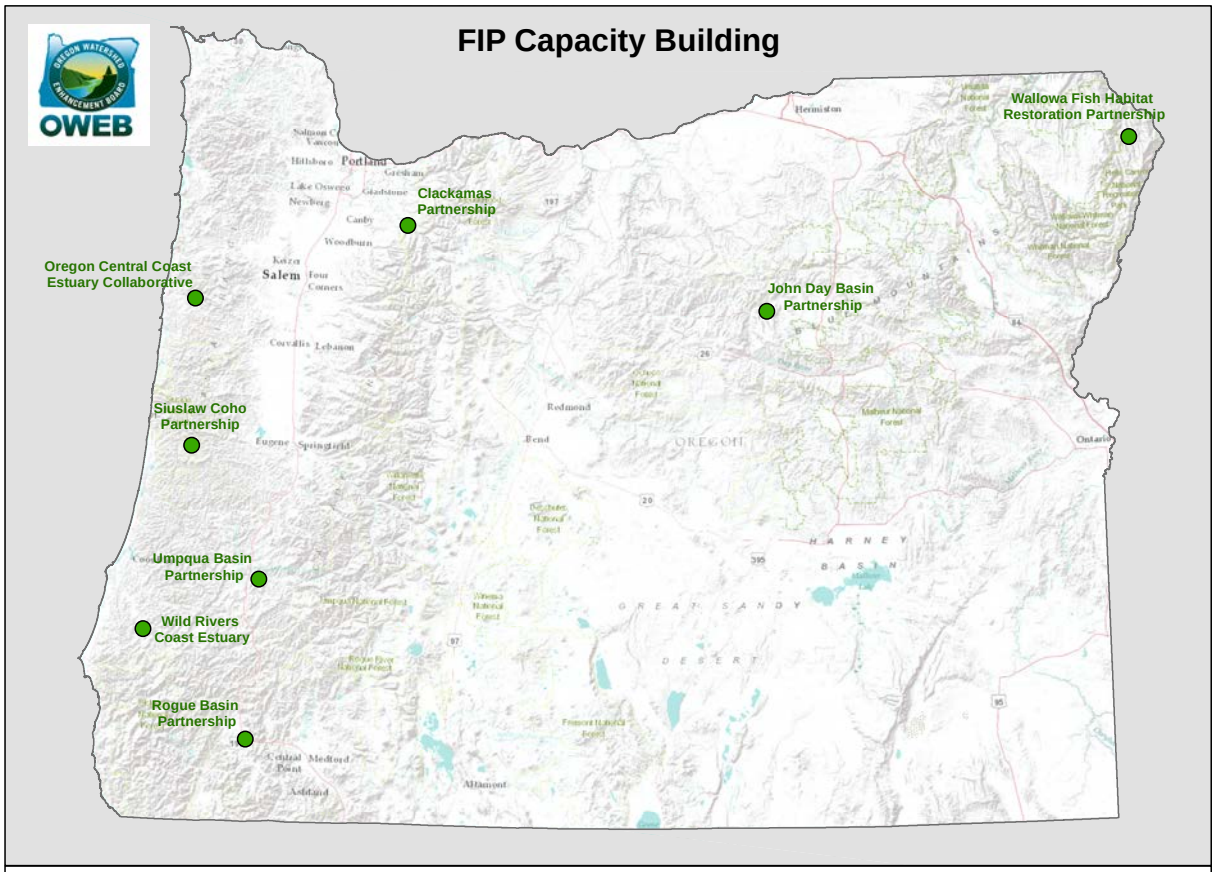
Focused Investment Partnership (FIP)
A Focused Investment Partnership is an OWEB investment that:

- addresses a Board-identified priority of significance to the state;
- achieves clear and measurable ecological outcomes;
- uses integrated, results-oriented approaches as identified through a strategic action plan; and
- is implemented by a high-performing partnership.

Capacity Building FIP Grant
Two-year grants, which are part of OWEB's Focus Investment Partnership Program, that are awarded to partnerships to develop a strategic action plan and build capacity to perform at a higher level.

Implementation FIP Grant
Six-year grants, which are part of OWEB's Focused Investment Partnership Program, that are awarded to high performing partnerships to implement on-the-ground restoration projects.

Map of Partnerships



Funded Capacity Building Applications 2016

Executive Summary

OWEB, South Coast Region, Sweet Ranch

Executive Summary

OWEB's Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) Program was initiated in the 2015-2016 biennium to make multi-year investments in partnerships, which demonstrated strong potential to accelerate the restoration of priority species and habitats. In January 2016, the OWEB Board awarded $13.7 million to fourteen partnerships – eight received two-year Capacity Building FIP grants to support the continued growth and development of their partnerships and six received six-year Implementation FIP grants to support large-scale on-the-ground restoration.

By encouraging reflection among grantees, this Partnership Learning Project aims to better understand:

> **1) What do partnerships need to be resilient and maintain a high level of performance?** and
>
> **2) How can OWEB improve and innovate the Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) program to support high performing, resilient partnerships that can make progress toward desired ecological outcomes?**

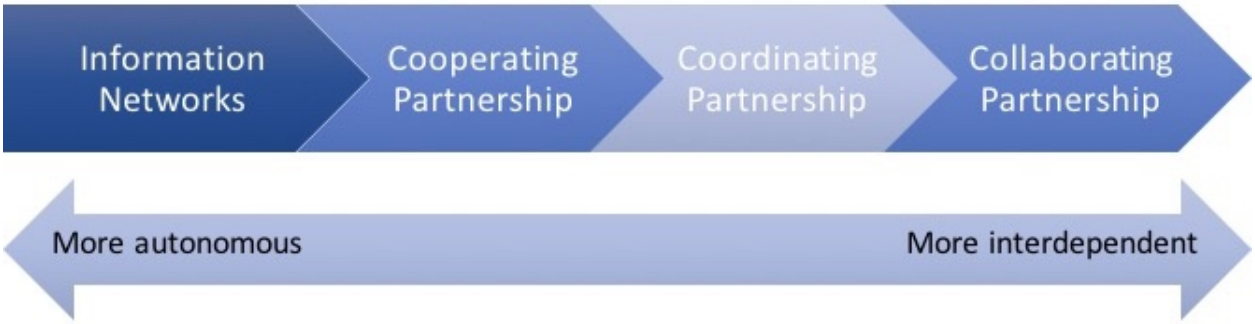
This report presents findings from the eight partnerships that received Capacity Building grants – **Clackamas Basin Partnership, John Day Basin Partnership, Oregon Central Coast Estuaries, Rogue Basin Partnership, Siuslaw Coho Partnership, Umpqua Basin Partnership, Wallowa Habitat Restoration Partnership**, and the **Wild Rivers Estuary Partnership**. These findings were produced from attending meetings of all eight Capacity Building partnerships from October 2016 to April 2017, in-depth interviews with 17 partners, and online survey responses from 80 partners across the partnerships.

Starting in Fall 2017, the same methods will be used to encourage reflection among the six partnerships that received Implementation FIP grants. Those findings will be presented in a separate report anticipated in Spring 2018.

Understanding the Value Proposition of a Partnership

Drawing from the public administration literature, it is helpful to think about partnerships on a continuum from **more autonomous partnerships**, where partners are loosely linked and periodically come together for information sharing or project-based collaboration, to **more collaborative partnerships**, where partners are committed to collective goals, complementary roles, and an integrated work plan.

Continuum of Partnerships



More collaborative partnerships require greater investments in planning, governance, conflict management, and communications, but the promise is that this increased investment will strategically leverage the strengths of diverse partners to tackle more complex restoration goals more effectively (Arnold and Bartels 2014, Warren, Reeve and Arnold 2016). When organizations align and focus their efforts, they also tend to be more attractive to funders, which has been prominent in partners' motivation for participating in the Capacity Building FIP grant.

> *"A big part of the motivation was working together in a more strategic way so that we could attract larger funding into the basin. The message was loud and clear that funders didn't want to fund single entities focused on single actions. If we wanted to get the work done that we wanted, then we had to work in a different way."*

What do partnerships need to be resilient, high performers?

Most partnerships in this study have been collaborating on specific projects for many years. Through OWEB's Capacity Building FIP grant, they have had the opportunity to build on that foundation through the development of 1) a strategic action plan that includes a prioritization framework for restoration activities, 2) governance documents that describe how partners will work together, and 3) an outreach plan that describes coordinated outreach to new partners and external stakeholders.

Reflecting on their history and how far they have come, many partners realized that one to three years of relationship building and internal organizational development were needed to solidify commitment to a collaborative effort before technical planning even began. Those groups that began strategic planning before talking about how partners would work together seemed to experience more internal skepticism and challenging group dynamics.

Throughout this early phase and even beyond, most partnerships experienced a cyclical process of addressing doubts and fears and reassuring partners of the value of working

together. Leaders who practiced good listening skills, diplomacy, and patience were able to effectively address doubts and keep the partnership unified. Partners felt stretched both within their own organization and by the partnership itself to understand how their internal goals aligned (or not) with the emerging focus, goals, geography, and funding opportunities of the larger partnership. Organizations that had recently gone through strategic planning found it easier to demonstrate overlapping interests and alignment with the broader partnership and justify their participation, for some a leadership role.

Tribal Engagement

Tribes played an important role in most partnerships – taking on various roles from leaders to core partners to promising new partners. Non-tribal partners described the learning curve of understanding the complexities of tribal interests, geography, internal organization, etc. Although non-tribal partners often assumed tribes had substantial capacity to participate, the geographic scale and breadth of tribal interests were significantly greater than most partners. With a little extra support, tribes with limited capacity could more fully participate, for example commenting on planning documents, participating in joint fundraising, or getting technical training to more fully participate in project implementation. Also, the complexities of intertribal relations were difficult for non-tribal partners to understand. Developing governance documents, such as an MOU, was seen as a valuable opportunity to respectfully learn about and address partner needs, including tribal perspectives.

Capacity to Partner

A common theme among small groups, such as watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts, land owner associations, and in some cases tribes, was limited capacity to participate. These groups expressed sincere appreciation for the capacity support provided by OWEB, while acknowledging that the collaborative work has taken more time than anticipated. If more capacity support were available, these small groups could more fully engage in the partnership's work.

Stakeholder Engagement

In general, it was difficult for partnerships to involve land owners, agricultural interests, and industrial forest interests at least during development of the strategic action plan. In a few cases, this was possible where well-organized land owner associations existed or where ranchers or farmers participated directly, for example as soil and water conservation district board members. In other cases, core partners worked diligently to reach out through personal networks to get some level of input from these interest groups. Most partnerships anticipated more success with engaging these interest groups once the plan was completed and the work shifted toward implementation.

Centralized Resources

GIS and IT are critical technical resources, most importantly for data analysis and planning, for example to integrate climate scenarios into prioritization frameworks, but also creating maps for outreach. GIS services are difficult for small organizations and even some partnerships to provide, and consultants are expensive. Some partnerships have had success with fee-for-service agreements, where the services of a GIS specialist could be shared among partners. Others relied on federal agency partners to provide GIS services. A few partners suggested that it would be extremely valuable if OWEB could provide GIS services at a regional level that could be broadly accessed.

Transitioning from Planning to Implementation

As partnerships anticipated the transition from planning to implementation, partners described feeling nervous, awkward, and excited. A common sentiment was expressed that if planning moves too slowly or if implementation funding lags too much after the plan is complete, partners may stop showing up, and the collective effort may lose momentum. Part of the awkwardness of transitioning to implementation is that partners are expected to "put their project ideas in the hopper" and accept that the list of prioritized projects may not include their own at the top of the list.

> *"Once we start having implementation money and ranking projects, it will take a different tone for the partnership. That will be challenging as the partnership changes."*

Many people felt this shift toward broad-scale collaboration wouldn't have been possible without funding for facilitators who can encourage a diversity of partners to feel comfortable participating, especially smaller organizations and younger professionals who at times have felt overpowered by well-funded organizations and senior professionals. Some partnerships selected internal facilitators, while others hired external facilitators – benefits and risks to both approaches were discussed.

Partners also found themselves caught in the transition between planning and implementation and faced with new decisions that represented uncharted territory, for example hiring a partnership coordinator or launching a partnership website before long-term funding was secured. A modest funding commitment could go far to bridge the gap between an intensive planning effort that creates the scaffolding for collaboration and the ability to attract long-term implementation funding to build out the partnership in earnest.

Diversified Fundraising

Diversifying fundraising strategies was highlighted as a critical path to get more capacity for continued partnership coordination and also larger grants to more effectively advance restoration at a large scale. Strategies to diversify funding were discussed by some

partnerships, but many smaller organizations haven't had the capacity to explore other options or invest in fundraising beyond what they already do. The promise of a collaborative model of watershed restoration is that there would be centralized leadership and resources to do fundraising on behalf of the whole to distribute to partners. However, partners expressed uncertainties, concerns, and fears about how this would affect individual fundraising and how funds might be distributed. Concerns were also expressed that there are only so many potential funding opportunities for this type of work, and over time, more funding may be concentrated in partnerships and high capacity organizations.

How can OWEB improve and innovate the Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) program to support high performing, resilient partnerships?

Funders have played a prominent role in how these partnerships have come together, including the focus and scope of the partnership. In many cases, partners cited the Capacity Building FIP grants, which supported facilitators, staff capacity, and consultants, as the tipping point that made the shift toward collaboration possible. In other cases, partners leveraged funding from other "anchor funders" and were able to deliver a "higher quality, seamless product" because of the Capacity Building FIP grants. Partners expressed universal appreciation for OWEB's flexibility allowing modifications to the timeline, scope, and strategic action plan template relative to partner needs.

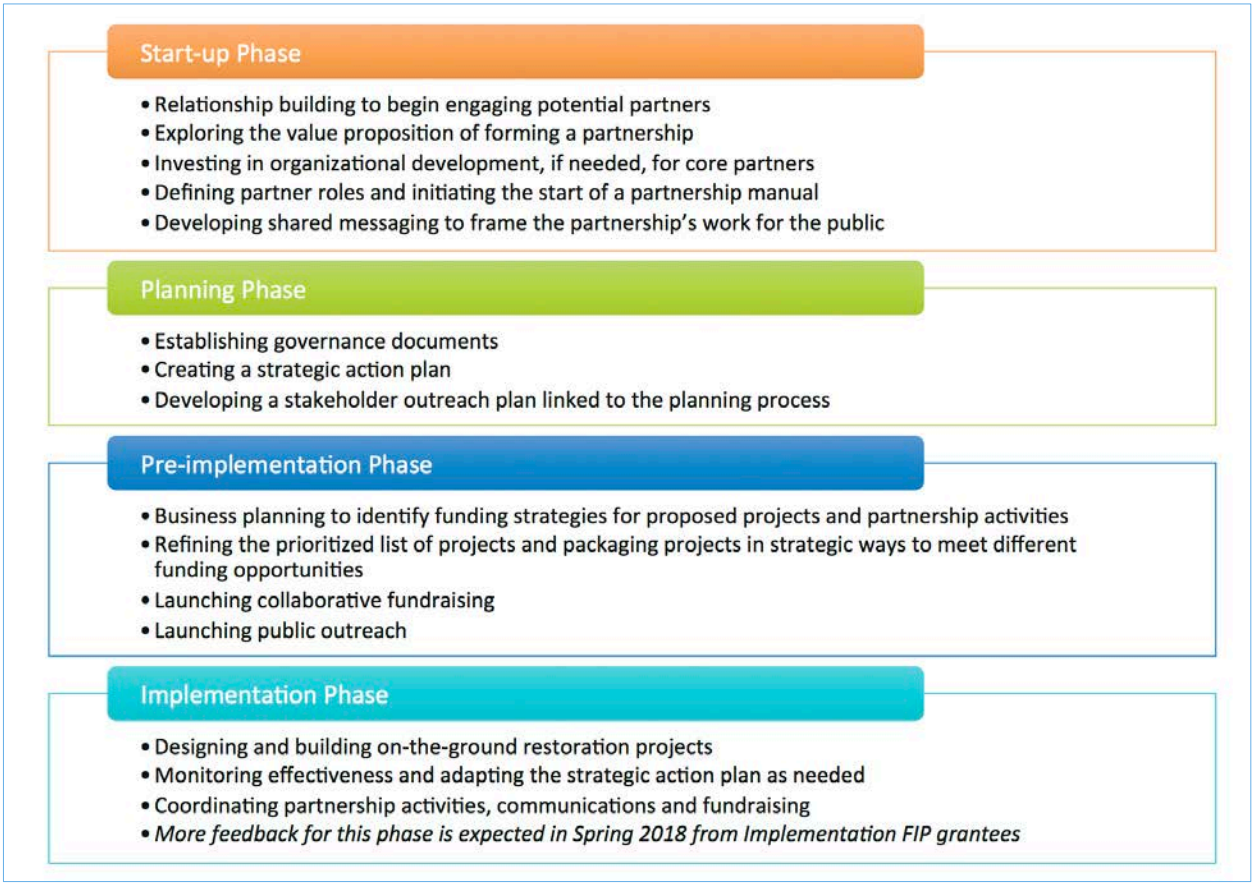
> *"So far this grant has worked very well. I think the secret to this success is flexibility at OWEB. Had OWEB led these grants with hard and fast prescriptions, I think success would be much lower."*

Suggested Four Phases of Partnership Support

As partners reflected on their progress with planning and looked ahead to their goals for implementation, several interesting suggestions surfaced across the partnerships that together paint the picture of how the FIP program could better support resilient partnerships through four phases of partnership support. Specifically, suggestions emphasized the need for more relationship building and organizational development upfront before technical planning began and more capacity to refine the prioritized project list and diversify fundraising strategies to more fully prepare for implementation.

> *"FIP or no FIP we're going to use our plan to leverage more money. The leverage is the plan. The better the plan the better the leverage. We don't have our plan fleshed out to the level that I would like. I would like to say, 'We have these anchor habitats. Here's what your money will buy you, and this is what we can do. Here is why it matters, and here are the projects you can be involved in.'"*

Suggested Four Phases of Partnership Support



The pre-implementation phase in particular seems to be a missing link in the current structure of the Focused Investment Partnership Program. Once the partnerships complete the Capacity Building FIP grants, they are eager to find substantial enough implementation funding to justify continued investment of time and effort in the partnership. Most partnerships are strategically focused on developing a competitive Implementation FIP proposal, despite the reality that the Implementation FIP grant is highly competitive and open to all partnerships in the state.

> *"We would definitely continue on and look for other funding if we didn't get an Implementation FIP grant. But it would definitely help! Since we are investing a lot of our time and effort in defining what our FIP proposal would look like, it would be a shame if we didn't get that funding source."*

Most partnerships will not be able to get an Implementation FIP grant because of the small number of grants open to all partnerships in the state, and so a key step in supporting the resiliency of these partnerships is to provide support for them to develop a business plan that would identify a mix of potential private and public funding sources. This would allow

a partnership to layout their work plans along different timelines and pace themselves according to the potential sources of available funds.

A question that requires more discussion is whether these newly strengthened collaborative partnerships will attract new investment for restoration in the state – potentially yes especially if restoration goals are linked more broadly with economic development – or whether this approach will simply concentrate existing investments in more focused geographies and activities. If there is a chance that funding in the state will stay the same or decrease, a measure of caution is wise to avoid encouraging the growth of too many collaborative partnerships if implementation funds are not likely.

Communications and Outreach Investments Linked to Strategic Action Planning

Several partners acknowledged the limitations of a highly technical strategic action plan relative to their goals for stakeholder outreach and the community support needed for project implementation. Suggestions for future investments in communications and outreach linked to the strategic action plan included: **studies on the economic value of restoration and why it should matter to people**, **clear messaging from these studies to launch a state-wide campaign** that could be tailored at the local level, and **general capacity for relationship building**, particularly local leaders and influencers with a history of skepticism toward government.

More Than One Way to Be Strategic in "Moving the Needle" for Restoration

OWEB's two restoration funding programs – the Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) program and the open solicitation program – can be used strategically to respond to different types of opportunities. They have the potential to be complementary if they are appropriately linked and the details are clearly explained to potential grantees.

Similarly, within partnerships, there are different views about what's most strategic to "move the needle" for watershed restoration. Partners that push for the biggest environmental win tend to rely on a purely scientific approach to prioritization that makes a clear case for specific geographies and restoration activities, which is a good match for the FIP program. Partners that operate with a "restoration through relationships" approach, which some refer to as opportunistic, tend to fit well with the open solicitation program. The latter approach may have more modest environmental wins initially, but this can build trust among potentially skeptical land owners. Through a "neighbor-to-neighbor approach," one private land owner may turn from a restoration skeptic to a champion, and as a result, an initially modest environmental win can create positive waves of opportunity throughout a basin that can lead to increasingly strategic environmental wins over the long-term.

More discussion is needed to understand how best to link the Implementation FIP and open solicitation programs – or not – to support different paths to long-term restoration. Also, more support within the partnerships to navigate these differences could facilitate the development of prioritization frameworks that better reflect the diverse partners and constituencies represented by the strategic action plans. The value of respecting these differences and working to find common ground for long-term restoration cannot be underestimated.

Appreciation for Learning

From across the partnerships, people expressed appreciation for OWEB's investment in this Partnership Learning Project to invite early feedback from grantees with a willingness to apply learning to the next evolution of the Focused Investment Partnership Program. Most partnerships also expressed an interest in repeating the survey, interviews, and observations at some point in the future to highlight their progress and any additional feedback that might emerge after more experience as a partnership. They also expressed an interest in future opportunities for peer-to-peer sharing across partnerships.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments i

Common Terms ii

Map of Partnerships iii

Executive Summary v

Introduction 1

Methods 3

Partnerships (Capacity Building FIP Grantees) 3

Diversity of Partnerships 3

How Partnerships Work 7

Findings 11

Making the Shift toward Coordination and Collaboration 11

Value Proposition – Weighing the Benefits and Costs of Participation 13

Trade-offs Between Efficiency and Complexity 16

Engaging and Sustaining Core Partners 17

Tribal Engagement 19

Stakeholder Outreach 22

Transition from Planning to Implementation 25

Centralized Resources and Coordination 29

Governance 31

Strategies for Success 33

Influence of the Funder 35

Topics for Discussion 39

More Than One Way to Be Strategic in "Moving The Needle" for Restoration 39

Communications and Outreach Investments Linked to Strategic Action Planning 42

What is Needed to Support Highly Performing, Resilient Watershed Partnerships? 43

Appreciation for Learning 48

Conclusion 50

References 54

Appendix – Partnership Survey 55

Introduction

Robert Warren, Harney Wetlands

Introduction

OWEB's Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) Program was initiated in the 2015-2016 biennium to make multi-year investments in partnerships, which demonstrated strong potential to accelerate the restoration of priority species and habitats. In January 2016, the OWEB Board awarded $13.7 million to fourteen partnerships – eight received two-year Capacity Building FIP grants to support the continued growth and development of their partnerships and six received six-year Implementation FIP grants to support large-scale on-the-ground restoration.

By encouraging reflection among funded partners, this Partnership Learning Project aims to better understand:

1) What do partnerships need to be resilient and maintain a high level of performance?

2) How can OWEB improve and innovate the Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) program to support high performing, resilient partnerships that can make progress toward desired ecological outcomes?

This report presents findings from the eight partnerships that received Capacity Building FIP grants in January 2016, including insights expected to benefit the partnerships and suggestions to adapt and evolve the FIP Program. In Fall 2017, the six partnerships that received Implementation FIP grants will be invited to share their reflections. Those findings will be presented a separate report anticipated in Spring 2018.

Partnerships are dynamic and experience normal ups and downs in performance depending on both group dynamics and external events. This project aims to consolidate insights across partnerships with the idea that learning at any point in a partnership's evolution will help paint the picture of what is needed for partnerships to be successful and resilient over the long-term.

Methods

Robert Warren, Monitoring Juvenile Salmon Use of Estuarine Wetlands in the Columbia River Estuary

Methods

From October 2016 to April 2017, each of the eight partnerships that received Capacity Building FIP grants were visited to observe their process and informally talk with partners. A confidential online survey was developed and sent out to the partnerships using a mix of ranking and open-ended questions asking about people's experience with their partnership and the support needed to build their performance and resiliency (See Appendix). Phone interviews were conducted to understand the history, vision, and current activities of each partnership, including expected benefits and costs and how they managed challenges and risks. Altogether, this effort included:

- 8 partnership meetings, which lasted 3-8 hours,
- 17 confidential phone interviews, which lasted 30-90 minutes, and
- 80 confidential survey responses, including quantitative and qualitative responses.

Interview transcripts, survey responses, and meeting notes were analyzed using a qualitative approach called grounded theory, which builds theory from emergent themes (Charmaz 2006).

Partnerships (Capacity Building FIP Grantees)

- Clackamas Basin Partnership
- John Day Basin Partnership
- Oregon Central Coast Estuaries
- Rogue Basin Partnership
- Siuslaw Coho Partnership
- Umpqua Basin Partnership
- Wallowa Habitat Restoration Partnership
- Wild Rivers Estuary Partnership

Diversity of Partnerships

The eight partnerships have different histories and context, which influence the culture of the group, how they work together, their ability to attract key partners, their potential for fundraising, and their outlook for large-scale implementation. Aspects of diversity include:

- **Time that partners have worked together and known each other.** When partnerships overlap with personal friendships, past mentor relationships, and community ties, they tend to operate very well on an informal basis even with moderate levels of complexity.
- **Number and size of watershed councils and soil and water conservation districts**. Complexities and competitive tensions tend to emerge when there are multiple watershed councils and soil and watershed conservation districts, especially when one organization operates at a much higher capacity in terms of staffing and success in fundraising.

- **Tribal involvement and potential for competing tribal interests**. Tribes can be a powerful ally in long-term restoration and can often help access specific funding sources. Complexities emerge with multiple participating tribes who have competing interests or a history of past conflicts, which may not be apparent to non-tribal partners, especially when intertribal relations are too sensitive to for discussion.
- **Agency involvement (state and federal) and the longevity of staff in key positions working in the focus geography**. When government staff were in key positions for many years, they acquired extensive knowledge of local geography and the institutional knowledge to mobilize resources and support for collaborative efforts. In some partnerships, they were long-standing members and key partners. Yet when agency staff were newer in their positions, they tended to lean toward a more peripheral role in the partnership, hesitant to over-commit scarce resources.
- **Regional and national environmental non-profit involvement**. Regional and national environmental non-profits tended to be able to pull in significant resources when the partnership goals overlapped with their internal priorities, specifically technical, fundraising and general capacity support.
- **Mix of urban and rural communities and proximity to large urban areas.** Partners based in urban and rural areas discussed the challenges of engaging local residents and leaders. Urban residents tended to be too busy for one more activity or commitment, while rural residents may limit their full engagement due to geographic distance or concerns about privacy. Attracting potential funders and local champions with the capacity to rally others seemed to be associated with being somewhat close to urban areas and more diverse economies. Although within large metro areas, watershed groups found higher competition for funding.
- **"Anchor" funders with an interest in the focus area**. Partnerships that had one or more large anchor funders seemed to have more capacity and flexibility to build relationships and fully engage in strategic action planning since they had some level of certainty in significant funding for implementation. These anchor funders tended to invest in specific geographies or habitats aligned with their mission and goals.
- **Mix of younger and experienced professionals.** Some partnerships notably had a broader age range, which was seen as an advantage when the full range of partners actively participated. Younger professionals offered fresh perspectives and an ability to connect with younger constituencies, while senior professionals provided valuable institutional and content knowledge.

- **Prior experience with strategic planning and/or collaborative groups**. Partnerships benefited when one or more partners with a leadership role had past experience with strategic planning and/or leading collaborative groups.
- **Prior experience contributing to the development of OWEB's Focused Investment Partnership Program**. Many partnerships had one or more people who actively participated in the development of the FIP program or submitted comments during the public process. These partners described how their early involvement inspired them to see how they could operate in a different way and have impact at a different scale. This inspiration created a sense of vision and persistence to counter the tedious pace of planning and the sometimes challenging work of partner engagement.
- **Geographic scope and breadth of activities covered in the strategic action plan**. Partnerships with a more focused geography and scope tended to have a smaller set of partners that were used to working together and comfortable with the scope. However, most partnerships expanded their geography and/or scope to some degree from previous planning efforts.
- **Rules defining "membership."** Some partnerships intentionally started with a small, well-defined group of partners, while others sought the full range of potential partners from the beginning, which created more work but also more energy and new ideas. Some partnerships struggled with the slower pace of working with a bigger group in scheduling meetings and working through complex topics, and these worked to define representatives and tiers of participation. Tiers of participation, including working groups defined by geography or interest area, were also adopted by many groups to provide opportunities for engagement that matched partners' interests and ability to participate.
- **Degree of formalization of the partnership structure.** Smaller partnerships where most people had a long history of working together tended to operate more informally relying on contract terms and letters of agreement to define roles and expectations among partners. Groups that were larger or tackling more complex issues or scope tended to invest time early in their process to formally define roles and expectations for decision-making and communication, for example in MOUs or partnership manuals.

How Partnerships Work

Robert Warren, Snow Geese Near Burns, Oregon

How Partnerships Work

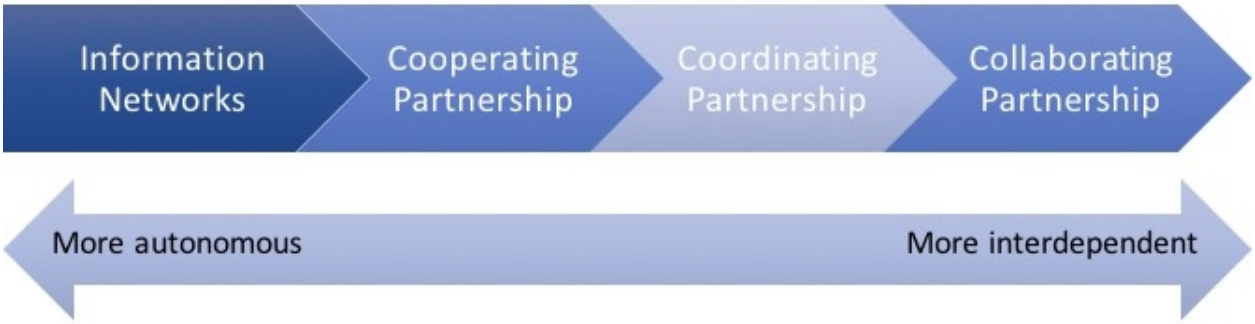
Partnerships are networks of people and organizations working together to advance shared interests. They operate on the fundamental belief that partners can achieve more collectively than individually. Partnerships require a great deal of upfront investment in relationship building, and once a partnership is established, there are inherent costs and challenges related to communication, decision-making, and coordinated action (Brouwer and others 2015).

Partners and funders commit time and resources based on their perception that the expected value of the partnership outweighs the costs, challenges, and risks. Various internal or external events, such as changes in leadership, funding, or policies, may influence people's perceptions of the value and costs of the partnership, and thus partners' commitment and the overall performance of the partnership. A resilient partnership emphasizes learning and feedback to continually build confidence in the value of the partnership and actively manage the inherent costs, challenges, and risks to maintain a strong value proposition that can maintain engagement despite crisis and change (Arnold and Bartels 2014, Warren, Reeve and Arnold 2016).

For partnership champions and funders, understanding the range of partnership types can help guide the group strategically toward the structure that best fits the history, context, and value proposition for partners. From the Public Administration literature, partnerships are described along a continuum where partners are more autonomous at one end and more interdependent at the other (Cigler 1999; Mandell 2001).

The key distinction is the degree to which individual partners remain separate and autonomous or form new combined organizational structures for long-term change and interaction (Mandell 2001). They also represent different purposes and structural characteristics that require different levels of trust, depth of communication, investment in partnership operations, and length of time to develop.

A Continuum of Partnership Types



- **Information networks** – Partners come together to share information but may have little formal connection or shared work together.
- **Cooperative partnerships** – Partners remain autonomous, while sharing responsibilities for specific projects, such as a contractual relationship or task force.
- **Coordinated partnerships** – Partners retain most of their autonomy, but actively work with each other to align their missions and activities to strategically advance mutual goals.
- **Collaborative partnerships –** Partners commit to a long-term shared vision and take on complementary roles and responsibilities to achieve that vision, sometimes referred to as the collective impact model (Kania and Kramer 2011, Christen and Inzeo 2015).

As you move from left to right on the continuum, you find increasing:

- Complexity of purpose,
- Intensity of linkages,
- Formality of agreements,
- Commitment to each other and greater whole,
- Interdependence of purpose and operations,
- Risk to individual organizations,
- Capacity to achieve systems change, and
- Investment in governance and communications.

Notably it may seem counterintuitive that as partnerships become more collaborative, individual organizations may experience greater risk since the ideal of a collaborative model is that "all boats rise on a rising tide." However, as individual organizations commit to each other and the greater whole, the success of the partnership's vision may require that individual organizations change their internal operations and priorities to benefit the

greater whole. In some cases, organizations may be ready and willing to make these changes, while in other cases, such changes may represent a risk that the organization is asked to fundamentally shift or in some cases even dissolve or merge with others to realize the larger vision of the partnership. In these cases, individual organizations risk losing their self-determination, possibly even their identity as an organization.

Partnerships are dynamic and may shift along this continuum over time, for example in response to changes in leadership, a crisis, or opportunity. Common challenges frequently encountered by even the most successful partnerships include:

- High staff turnover,
- Personality clashes, including institutional and cultural differences,
- Coping with high expectations,
- Reducing transaction costs, for example to maintain a high level of communication and coordination given costs for travel, meeting time, etc., and
- Maintaining the interest of the private business sector considering that businesses often prefer to maintain independence and restrict sharing proprietary information to protect their economic bottom-line and competitive advantage in the market place (Sanginga and others 2007).

Often new partnerships establish first as a coordinated network and may evolve to a collaborative network with pooled resources and a combined organizational structure as trust and commitment build over time (Raine and Watt 2013). Conversely, some partnerships operate quite effectively as an information network or cooperative partnership, and the expected value of a more complex, collaborative structure does not offset the greater costs. Some partnerships are established for a specific purpose and time period, which again may not warrant a more resource-intensive collaborative structure. Partnerships are highly dynamic and do not necessarily follow linear trajectories of development (Mandell and Keast 2008).

Findings

Robert Warren, Crooked River

Findings

Making the Shift toward Coordination and Collaboration

Most of the partnerships included in this study have had a long history of successfully operating project-based cooperative partnerships that have now evolved into a broader interest in working together more formally, collaboratively, and over a longer timeframe.

> *"Our partnership has evolved over time, not quite sure why it's been successful. For some reason, we're just better together than we are apart. The FIP process is very timely to help us work at a higher level – almost like we've graduated from high school, and now we get to be an adult."*

> *"It's easy to end up in silos of excellence. We've had great partnerships between organizations, agencies, and the tribe, but it's individuals working in silos. This is new that we're all getting together and talking about the basin as a whole."*

> *"I said, 'Hey, would everyone like to get together to form a partnership? A basin partnership would be helpful for the resource.' They said, 'We don't know what it means yet, but yes, we're interested.'"*

Looking at the events leading up to a group's decision to shift toward collaborative work at a broader scale, several themes emerged relative to the timing and conditions or "readiness" of partners to move in this direction. This "readiness" was complemented by a good dose of serendipity such as the opportunity to leverage multiple funding sources just at the right time.

"Readiness" to shift toward collaborative restoration:

- **A history of strong relationships among partners and local leaders**, most commonly project-based cooperation, where partners contractually agree to different tasks to complete a project, and sometimes coordination between organizations, where they align their missions and jointly agree to take on complementary roles,
- **Leadership**, most commonly one or more people who see a strong value proposition in collaboration, who can persuasively share that vision, and who have the organizational capacity and personal interest to try this new way of working,
- **Internal strategic planning** completed by partner organizations that points to broader goals than what their organization can accomplish alone and recognition of how those goals overlap strategically with other potential partners,

- Past positive **experiences with collaboration**, especially among the leadership of partner organizations who can share wisdom and provide support,
- A **personal affinity** expressed by leaders for relationship building, listening, serving as a liaison among partners, managing tough conversations, and strategic planning,
- **Foundational planning documents, watershed data, and analysis tools** that provide a launching point for more comprehensive, integrated restoration planning,
- **Unique funding opportunities** that provide flexible support for facilitation, partner capacity, and consultants as needed to work in this way, for example from OWEB, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Oregon Water Resources Department, Bonneville Power Administration, The Nature Conservancy, etc., and
- **Inspiration** from personal contact with potential funders or successful collaborative groups that planted the seed for how this approach could lead to greater funding, effectiveness, and impact.

Value Proposition – Weighing the Benefits and Costs of Participation

As conveners brought potential partners together to envision what this new way of working together would look like and to explore the potential benefits and costs, they often used the "carrot" of attracting more, stable, long-term funding.

> *"A big part of the motivation was working together in a more strategic way so that we could attract larger funding into the basin. The message was loud and clear that funders didn't want to fund single entities focused on single actions. If we wanted to get the work done that we wanted, then we had to work in a different way."*

Yet this potential for funding speaks to different partners in different ways – not all partners feel they will be able to access funds leveraged by the partnership and they feel the strength and strategic focus of the partnership may outcompete or eclipse their priorities.

> *"The challenge is to create opportunity without trumping somebody's ability to compete for funds."*

For some, the partnership approach creates uncertainty and risk that if their organization's mission, goals and activities do not align with the larger partnership then they may be less competitive for funding or even cut out of some opportunities like OWEB's open solicitation grant program.

> *"This partnership approach stretches people. It really does."*

As partners considered the potential benefits and costs, people felt stretched both within their own organization and within the partnership itself. Each partner organization was stretched to understand how their internal goals aligned (or not) with the emerging focus, goals, geography and funding opportunities of the larger partnership. Organizations that had recently gone through strategic planning found it easier to demonstrate overlapping interests and alignment with the broader partnership and justify participation or even a leadership role. As the scope and focus of the partnerships evolve through the planning process, many partners struggled with where their organization fit in and how much time they should invest, especially when a partner might be involved in multiple collaborative planning efforts.

> *"It is a risk how the partnership defines projects and how they are prioritized. I have to ask – Is this worth my very limited time and funding? I am not going to be able to justify being a part of this collaborative if [our geographic area] isn't prioritized until many years later, which is hard. I totally see the value in it and the value of all of our ideas and expertise contributing to it. The reality is I don't think that will work for [small organizations]."*

Many core partners whose organizations closely align with the partnership have found themselves investing considerable energy to engage their leadership and boards, especially over the first few years of a broader collaborative partnership. They have had to continually reassure and remind board members of the expected value and how it aligns with their internal mission and goals. They have also regularly addressed fears, such as "mission creep" and the potential for reduced funding opportunities if their organization does not align well with the partnership's priorities or if the partnership does not attract additional funds.

To help the partners stretch into the partnership, leaders and conveners have invested considerable time to reach out to potential new partners and keep skeptics on-board. Many people described this as a cyclical process that comes in waves of doubt or fear and that requires continual patience to remind and reassure people of the added value of working together and steps taken to manage risks. People taking on this leadership role in the partnership or their organization must have the capacity to feed and nurture those relationships and align expectations.

> *"We have had a lot of bumps in the road where member organizations aren't happy about a particular decision. We have to navigate those little flare ups from time to time."*

Participation has required an investment of time and capacity to attend meetings, follow up on action items, and review and comment on collaborative documents, which has often taken far more time and capacity than people initially realized. For organizations with limited capacity or with interests in multiple partnerships, this has meant that they may only attend meetings or track progress through email. The value they get from the partnership is limited if they do not have the capacity or technical background to review and comment on partnership documents and assert their own internal priorities. Yet without participating, they risk being left out of potential opportunities.

"I come from a watershed council, and with a staff of one, I do everything. Taking the time to be there is really hard for me. The only reason I continue to do so is that the decisions will continue to affect me whether I am there or not, and also it's so well run that it's worth my time."

"It would be helpful to have more funds for the councils to support their time and expenses. There may be other partners, groups that may be better able to participate if there was greater funding – in recognition of what it takes. And soon, we'll be able to report out what it did take."

Some of the partnerships have actually considered whether they may eventually function as an information network at a large scale including the full range of partners, while a smaller sub-group of partners, who have more tightly aligned missions, goals, and geographical focus, may operate as a coordinated or collaborative partnership seeking out funds for focused work in a particular portion of their focus area. This speaks to the value proposition associated with a lower level of investment as an information network that can still yield significant value in terms of sharing expertise, influencing restoration approaches, and reporting on activities and effectiveness.

"From my perspective, [the partnership] brings a lot of interest from agencies and outside that we might not have if we were just at the sub-watershed level, a lot more expertise and support. I feel like I have more people I can go to for advice. I know they are there, but being part of the group, I feel like they are more accessible to me."

"Just the expertise in the room is incredibly valuable, to hear and learn about what worked and didn't is hugely valuable. Surprisingly, we don't have a lot of forums where we sit down and talk about those things."

Trade-offs Between Efficiency and Complexity

Some partners viewed this shift toward broad-scale strategic planning as a step toward efficiency, especially those partners who had experience doing this type of planning in other geographies. However, in most cases, partnerships took on more complexity, which was beyond what they had done previously and ended up extending their timelines and budgets. This extra effort was considered reasonable as it was expected to yield results.

Dimensions of increased complexity beyond past planning efforts:

- Expanding to include **new partners** such as additional watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts, tribes, or government agencies who may see the issues and strategic focus differently,
- Broadening the focus to include **multiple fish species**,
- Broadening the focus to include **uplands in addition to in-stream habitat**,
- Focusing on **complex habitats**, such as estuaries, that require specialized technical expertise,
- **Expanding the geography** to include areas that have not been the focus of restoration activities in the recent past,
- **Combining multiple basins**, in some cases with different geology and hydrology, and
- **Expanding prioritization frameworks** to include social and economic considerations in addition to ecological factors.

Engaging and Sustaining Core Partners

The diversity of core partners has contributed greatly to the strength and resilience of the partnerships.

> *"Each partner has different strengths, different ways of doing things, and different abilities…. The partnership tries to play to everyone's strengths."*

Core partners have included:

- Watershed groups,
- Soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs),
- State and federal agencies, including land managers, regulatory entities, researchers, and funders),
- Environmental advocacy groups,
- Tribes,
- Power utilities,
- Funders,
- Local government entities, and to a lesser degree
- Land owner associations,
- Agricultural interests, and
- Industrial forest interests.

Some patterns emerged across partnerships related to how these different types of partners participated and engaged. In general, it was difficult for partnerships to involve land owners, agricultural interests, and industrial forest interests at least during development of the strategic action plan. In a few cases, this was possible where well-organized land owner associations existed or where ranchers or farmers on Soil and Water Conservation District boards participated directly. In other cases, core partners worked diligently to reach out through personal networks to get at least high-level input from colleagues. Most partnerships anticipated more success with engaging these interest groups once planning efforts were complete and the work shifted toward implementation.

A common theme among small groups, such as watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts, land owner associations, and in some cases tribes, was limited capacity to participate. Modest capacity funds from the Capacity Building FIP grant were greatly appreciated and allowed these smaller groups to participate.

> *"We need capacity for sure, and that's hard to come by. It's really been helpful that we've had some reimbursement for our participation, especially for a small organization like ours. More of that would be helpful."*

In a few cases, it seemed that processing travel reimbursements and stipends might be more time-consuming than expected, which kept people from submitting invoices for various reasons. Perhaps this could be an area that partnerships could share best practices to streamline internal processes.

Agency staff took on a breadth of different roles depending on agency priorities, the longevity of specific staff in an area, and the flexibility staff had in their work schedule to dedicate to partnership activities. In some partnerships, agency staff took a lead technical role or had the longest personal experience working in a partnership. In other partnerships, agency staff only felt comfortable playing a supporting role and explicitly did not want to be a decision-maker or "member."

Another common theme was tension between organizations with a tightly focused environmental mission and funding sources dedicated to that mission, such as environmental advocacy groups and some government agencies, and soft-money organizations with broader missions reflecting diverse constituencies, such as watershed councils and soil and water conservation districts.

> *"[The SWCD] faces constant pressure to do more from others, and we are really limited on funding. We have managed to avoid being pulled into a lot of the politics, while still getting funding to do our work. It is important to not take a super hard stand on any one issue as nothing is black and white."*

These two types of organizations often had different ideas of what they considered "strategic restoration" based on their missions, their constituencies, and their funders. Tensions, discomfort, and competitiveness came to the surface when developing a shared vision for restoration and a shared framework for prioritizing projects. To maintain a broad partnership that has the core partners needed for implementation, some partners recognized the importance of respectfully working through these differences to maintain engagement.

Most partnerships recognized stronger relationships with core partners as one of the early accomplishments of their collaborative planning efforts, in some cases yielding new joint fundraising opportunities or other near-term benefits. In other cases, core partners have felt unsure or skeptical about their future involvement, which is expected especially during this early planning phase as each partner considers their value proposition relative to the evolving scope and focus of the plan and related funding opportunities.

Tribal Engagement

Most partnerships value tribes as strategic partners and seek their full engagement, yet most non-tribal partners experience a learning curve to working with tribes, which is why this section of the findings is expanded.

> *"Historically, the tribes have not been key partners. In fact, the tribes have been so opaque to so many of us in terms of an organization and an entity to work with. Now, in the last year, there has been an incredible growth in their engagement. We have really tried to bring them in. Now all of a sudden, they are pushing from their end as well."*

In these eight partnerships, tribes take on the full range of roles:

- A **convening or leadership role** because of the tribe's deep interest in natural and cultural resources,
- An **intermediary role** bridging perspectives and building relationships because of their triple bottom line approach to social, environmental, and economic sustainability that resonates in different ways with conservationists, resource users, and forest industry,
- A **core partner** actively engaged, making comments, and taking on responsibilities,
- A **new or peripheral partner**, learning about the partnership, tracking progress, and waiting for opportunities where partnership activities intersect with tribal priorities and merit more involvement.

Many non-tribal partners unintentionally underestimate the sensitivities and complexities of working with tribes. However, they are open to learning and changing as they gain more appreciation, which can have a huge impact on promoting fuller engagement. Yet it can also be draining for tribal partners who are regularly placed in the role of explaining the full breadth of tribal perspectives, often in a short amount of time.

> *"What I learned, in the future, we need to sit down with the tribe when we get a draft and make sure the wording and the content is going to be satisfactory so they're not going to be surprised."*

"The general understanding of the partners – understanding the tribe's role – is an interesting concept. Not many people understand how the tribe manages their resources. And all tribes are different. Out of everyone in the room, the tribe has been there the longest and probably will be there the longest. The impacts will be seen and heard the longest. Having people understand our role is a challenge sometimes. And people don't understand the tremendous landscape that we cover – multiple counties and millions of acres – as opposed to a single watershed or jurisdiction."

Tribal partners discussed a range of complexities that are often not well-understood by non-tribal partners, but that heavily influence their interest and ability to engage in broader partnerships.

Complexities of tribal participation not often understood by non-tribal partners:

- The **vast geography of aboriginal territories** relative to their capacity and staffing and how that may overlap or touch on aboriginal territories or reservations of other tribes,
- **A broad range of tribal interests in natural resources** from protection of culturally important sites and restoration of fish populations to specific issues of accessing natural resources for cultural uses or managing tribal industrial forest operations,
- **Legal standing in resource management**, including concepts of treaty rights, co-management, sovereignty, and government-to-government relationships with federal entities,
- **The structure of tribal government** and the process needed to gain approval or feedback from tribal leadership, and
- **Conflicting interests between tribes**, which may complicate communications and the ability to participate together in a collaborative partnership.

The opportunity with these partnerships is to reach out genuinely to tribal partners and take the time to ask and learn about their interests.

> *"We do a lot of outreach to talk about our history, who we are, our culture, and what my department does so that people really understand where we're coming from. I think there needs to be more of an introduction like that for the partnership. Maybe it would be helpful to have set-aside time for each partner to discuss what their priorities are in general and talk about their organization. I know we say, 'Oh we already know all of that.' But there's always new staff. For the tribe, it is a regular recurring problem. People don't know what we do, where our land base is, what we care about. They just don't get it. I just did a presentation again for the National Forest. They are a federal agency so you would think they would understand what we do, but they were so happy to have this presentation. I don't know exactly what this would look like. It would definitely be valuable for the tribes to have that opportunity in this partnership."*

Partners highlighted the value of getting to know other partners' interests as a key step in the early formation of the partnership. The process of developing partnership governance documents, such as a charter or MOU, and inviting tribes to comment and sign on can be an extremely valuable opportunity to listen and reframe partner roles in ways that respect tribal culture, history, and legal standing. Defining the scope and setting goals can also be an important time to draw out those interests, for example several partnerships included lamprey when defining their scope, which is a non-listed native fish of particular cultural significance to tribes. These opportunities for learning may come up at any point in planning or implementation when key decisions are made or when new partners come to the table. By taking tribal interests seriously and incorporating them into the partnership's activities, non-tribal partners can make great progress with tribes building trust, learning how to work together effectively, and building momentum for long-term engagement.

> *"One tribe had some reps participating in our meetings, but maybe not the right ones. When they took the MOU and [partnership documents] in front of their tribal council, the council said, "What is going on?" They sent a letter with detailed questions and asked for representation from all the tribes on the steering committee. The steering committee got together in what I thought was a very thoughtful process and agreed to make those changes. Then the tribe was fine with it, and they signed the MOU. It was a very successful route to deal with those concerns."*

On a final note, tribal and non-tribal partners reflected on the tribe's capacity to do this work. Although tribes often have multiple staff in their natural resources department, the geography and breadth of issues they cover is often far greater than that of other partner organizations and the partnership itself.

> *"If I'm participating in this I can't participate in something else or do something that is maybe more culturally relevant. The mission of our department is really diverse. It includes artifact protection, cultural events, and camps. I always have to ask myself what am I gaining through this participation."*

This point is often not fully explored relative to the mismatch between the desire to have tribes fully engaged in partnerships and the capacity for them to do so. One tribal partner suggested that if OWEB was willing to extend capacity funding to tribes similar to what they do for watershed councils, they could greatly increase their ability to participate more fully in partnership activities – from commenting on planning documents to joint fundraising to getting technical training for staff to more fully participate in implementation of projects.

Stakeholder Outreach

Most partners felt public awareness and support are important or very important to achieving restoration goals, especially on private lands and arguably less so on federal lands. Many partners commented on the risk of "surprising people down the road" referring to the fear that people will push back against the plan if the first time they hear about it is when they are faced with a project proposal that they don't like. Yet people also recognized that the planning process is too slow and detailed for most land owners and community members to participate.

> *"It's really tough to engage land owners in this strategic action planning process (laughing). That's where you lose them. It's so detailed. They don't have time to come to meetings like that. Once you get past planning, that's when you get the land owners engaged. When you have some specific tangible things you can offer them, whether educational workshops or funding for projects, or getting them involved in community meetings that actually get them toward them something. In the planning process, you lose them."*

Some partnerships developed an outreach plan early in their planning process identifying the objectives, timing and approaches to engage and communicate with key audiences, while others have put more time into technical planning before getting into the details of an outreach and communications plan. In some cases, partners have conducted their own

stakeholder analysis and outreach planning, and in others, communications consultants have developed outreach plans and even facilitated some stakeholder engagement.

Some partnerships have focused first on broad education and relationship building, while others sought high-level input on the action plan from key stakeholder groups. At the time of this report, partnerships are at varying points in implementing their outreach activities.

Planned Outreach Activities

- **Personal outreach** to individuals to let them know about the plan and get feedback,
- **Public gatherings** to get high level input on the partnership's vision,
- An open invitation for the **public to attend partnership meetings**,
- Development of **shared talking points** so that partner organizations can speak to different audiences with a coordinated message, for example in their board meetings, newsletters, county commission meetings, etc.,
- **Listening sessions** with community leaders and influencers to understand interests, potential misperceptions, and opportunities for messaging,
- **A land owner survey** to get input and inform people of the planning effort,
- **A public website** for the partnership,
- **A public campaign** including short compelling videos and information displays,
- **Science summits** open to the public,
- **Townhall meetings** to get feedback from land owners on the draft action plan, and
- **Presentations on the final plan** for the public, county commissioners, funders, etc.

The most challenging stakeholder groups for partners to engage and the ones that are most important for implementing restoration projects on private land are private business interests, such as farmers, ranchers and industrial forest operations. Several partnerships described diligent efforts to thoughtfully reach out, but still with limited success. The most promising touch points to some of these important groups include:

- Reaching the **farming and ranching community** through Soil and Water Conservation District board members,
- Reaching **private land owners** through land owner associations where they exist to address issues, such as fuels reduction, riparian restoration, and weed management,
- Reaching **rural residents** through Forest Protection Associations and the potential for generating support through local jobs created by restoration projects, and
- Reaching **industrial forestry companies** through tribal forest enterprises.

Where these personal connections exist, there is a far greater potential for engagement. However, in most cases, the value proposition for private land owners and businesses may still not be great enough to warrant their involvement in planning. Those partners emphasized that valuable input can still be gained by speaking individually with key stakeholders and bringing their interests back to the partnership.

As a final note, in many watersheds, a contentious history has created especially challenging circumstances to engage people in a collective discussion about priorities for restoration and build trust in a shared strategy. In some cases, partners at the table are currently involved in litigation, for example between tribes and agencies. People in these situations remarked that they tend to work well together at the staff level even when things are tense among upper management. In other cases, private land owners have long-standing "problems with the G word," specifically the role of government, misperceptions about watershed councils as governmental entities, and concern about losing private property rights in the name of restoration. Some partners talked about strategies to address this "negativity" and prevent it from spilling over into the partnership's work, including field trips to unpack assumptions about land management, personal outreach to explain and accept responsibility for projects that weren't successful, and neighbor-to-neighbor approaches that highlight the multiple benefits possible with restoration projects developed in collaboration with private land owners. Several partners also suggested that OWEB and the state could play a larger role communicating the economic contribution of restoration, for example job creation, improvements to farms and ranches and clean water.

> *"At the end of the day, we can only be successful with WILLING landowners, and there are pockets of resistance due to anti-state, anti-federal lands, and anti-conservation sentiments. If OWEB and the State could help craft better economic studies regarding the economic value of conservation and communicate those for us, that would be helpful. We need CLEAR messaging on the economic value…that's the most effective way to turn peoples' minds toward conservation."*

Transition from Planning to Implementation

As partnerships anticipated the transition from planning to implementation, "where the rubber meets the road," partners described feeling nervous, awkward, and excited about implementation. A common sentiment was expressed that if planning moves too slowly or if implementation funding lags too much after the plan is complete, partners may stop showing up, and the collective effort may lose momentum. Thus, decisions about the desired complexity, scope, and level of detail in the plan are all critical considerations to increasing the chances for effective implementation.

> *"Once we start having implementation money and ranking projects, it will take a different tone for the partnership. That will be challenging as the partnership changes."*

> *"I'm excited about it. I look forward to the implementation money. Planning is tough for folks. We've been meeting for almost two years now. We keep going without funding. I'm looking forward to moving through to implementing projects."*

Part of the awkwardness of transitioning to implementation is that partners are expected to "put their project ideas in the hopper" and accept that the list of prioritized projects may not include their own at the top of the list. The success of this process requires that partners buy-in to the prioritization framework, which establishes alignment and emphasizes transparency as a means to build trust. In practice, it brings competition for funding and power dynamics to the surface. Some partnerships slowed down when they got to the step of requesting project proposals for the list.

> *"We're still working on the list of projects. Yeah, that's awkward. We work in such a crazy, weird competitive environment and in really small communities. Talking about projects and people you work with is not something we normally do a lot of for various reasons. There might be potential push-back from other organizations who think we shouldn't receive funding because our projects don't have enough of an environmental win – even though those are the projects that work in our area. Some of those people sit on review teams. You don't want to have all your cards on the table in this competitive environment."*

Many people acknowledged that it is critical to have a facilitator at this step – either an internal partner or an external consultant – someone that has the trust of all the partners and can help navigate challenging conversations and power dynamics. Some partners proudly commented on the effectiveness of their internal facilitator, while others were greatly appreciative of an outside consultant.

> *"It is helpful to have a consultant work with all of us as partners because no one of us has the time or what would appear to be the objectivity. It's good to have an outside source be able to balance the interests and feed it back to us so we can agree."*

> *"[Our internal facilitator] communicates expectations really well and follows up with people – makes us realize that our time is worth it, and we follow through. We are all incredibly busy and so contributing to this is a big deal. The way we walk through this planning exercise is really regimented and so well organized. That makes it strategic and focused. I've also been a part of collaboratives that have a contractor as a facilitator. It is really helpful that [our facilitator] is in the know. It's to our advantage."*

Many people felt this shift toward broad-scale collaboration wouldn't have been possible without funding for facilitators who can encourage a diversity of partners to feel comfortable participating, especially smaller organizations and younger professionals who at times have felt overpowered by well-funded organizations and senior professionals.

> *"[Our facilitator] pulls people back when we need to stay focused. It's frustrating, in collaborative groups like this, to have someone not acknowledge your statements and restate them in their own words. As a young female in this field, it is hard to be taken seriously. I've worked really hard, and I have the experience and education to get where I am. [Our facilitator] sees that and has class in how to deal with it."*

Other people emphasized the value of a facilitator to advance the work in between meetings by following up on action items and incorporating people's comments into collaborative documents.

> *"When you're doing strategic planning, it's just hard to find the time to do it in between all of the other work that has to get done."*

It is challenging to find time to dedicate to a strategic planning effort or management change within an organization. Within a partnership, it is all the more difficult for organizations to prioritize their staff time and limited capacity to a strategic planning effort that may or may not have significant overlap with their organizational mission and goals. It is even more critical to dedicate resources to facilitation for a collaborative planning effort. This goes back to the value proposition that each partner considers as they decide the extent of their participation. Having the funds for a facilitator can provide that valuable glue to hold people together long enough to solidify the partnership's focus and commitment from partners who can then contribute more fully to effective implementation.

> *"Having that person, your facilitator, hand-holding your partnership before they can walk on their own is extremely important."*

Internal facilitators can be extremely effective, especially when they are self-aware of their role and their influence on the group. Several internal facilitators noted that a culture of professional dialog and open channels for feedback can go far in minimizing the risks associated with internal facilitation.

Risks Associated with Internal Facilitation:

- An internal facilitator could be seen as **favoring one partner or sub-set of partners** over another that could create division and strife, potentially limiting the partnership's ability to work at a broader scale,
- An internal facilitator could assert their professional expertise or knowledge of the planning tools to **steer the prioritization framework** in a certain way that aligned with their priorities but not necessarily those of other core partners, and
- An internal facilitator could facilitate a process with such a strong leadership style and vision that the process becomes **unwelcome to different points of view or new partners**, called "founder's disease" when the internal facilitator is also the group's founder, which limits the resilience of the effort after the founder can no longer play a leadership role.

In contrast, external facilitators may be more easily seen as an advocate for all partners, but they may not understand the local context or technical content as well as an internal facilitator. There are also different types of consultants that could serve different facilitation roles depending on the partnership's needs, for example, technical planners, organizational development consultants, and communications specialists. Partners described the importance of managing risks associated with an external facilitator by providing opportunities for group feedback and providing oversight and guidance through a sub-committee or leadership team that includes multiple partners with different perspectives.

Risks Associated with External Facilitation:

- A partnership could **"fast track" the selection of an external facilitator** due to lack of time to research options or set up a selection process, which may lead to contracting with someone who is not a good match for the partnership's needs,
- An external facilitator could **impose their own planning tools or approaches** that may take the plan in a specific direction that does not reflect the interests or buy-in of all core partners, and
- Partners could **rely too much on an external facilitator to write the plan**, which may result in a technically sound plan that has very limited input or buy-in from partners.

Overall, partners acknowledged there is still much to learn as they proceed toward implementation. For those skeptics of the collaborative planning process, many felt the list of prioritized projects may not look that different from the projects people would have proposed without a plan. Each partnership has been navigating the challenges unique to their planning process to build that clarity, confidence and commitment among core partners and funders. Partners appreciated the opportunity to learn from each other and the partnerships awarded Implementation FIP grants so that they may better prepare to attract funding and shift toward implementing their strategic action plan.

Centralized Resources and Coordination

Referring back to the continuum of partnership types, partnerships structured as information networks typically come together informally with limited centralized support. For cooperating partnerships, partners come together according to specific roles and responsibilities for a specific time period, for example defined contractually in terms of projects, deliverables, and timelines. In these cases, it can be fairly straightforward for one organization to take the lead convening and coordinating the effort, or even to switch off from one organization to another depending on the terms of each project. However, as partners move toward aligning their priorities and coordinating their activities over the long-term, they gradually require more centralized support, for example to manage internal and external communications, partnership governance, joint fundraising, fiscal management, and shared accountability. As partner organizations become more interdependent, centralized resources can help build transparency, coordination and trust that everyone is moving forward together and following through on what was agreed.

> *"Getting projects on the ground to benefit fish is what's most important, but everyone is going after the same small pot of money. Better oversight and coordination would be beneficial to ensure consistency and fairness."*

For those partnerships gearing up to operate in this more coordinated or collaborative way, they found themselves faced with new decisions that represented uncharted territory. In two cases, partnerships felt caught in the transition between planning and implementation. In one case, the desire to hire a partnership coordinator was put on hold until long-term funding was secured to support that position. Despite the role that a coordinator could play to move the group closer to implementation, some partners didn't feel comfortable hiring without first securing implementation funding. In another case, the desire to launch a partnership website to increase public awareness stalled out after initial web design. None of the partners felt comfortable, at least initially, stepping forward to invest in a multi-year domain name without long-term funding in place to support this expense. Both of these examples demonstrate the growing pains associated with this shift toward a collaborative partnership and the required investment in centralized coordination. A modest funding commitment could go far to bridge the gap between an intensive planning effort that creates the scaffolding for collaboration and the ability to attract long-term implementation funding to build out the partnership in earnest. Without capacity dedicated to coordination and external communications, fundraising at the partnership level for a collaborative effort is a heavy lift for individual partners.

Another aspect of centralized support discussed across several partnerships is the need for technical services like GIS to provide basic mapping capabilities and more sophisticated modeling, for example climate change predictions and scenarios. GIS services are difficult for small organizations and even some partnerships to provide, and consultants are expensive. Some partnerships had success with fee-for-service agreements where the services of a GIS specialist could be used by multiple partners. Some relied on federal agency partners to provide GIS services. A few partners suggested perhaps OWEB could invest in GIS services at a regional level that would be available to help small organizations and partnerships increase the analytic power of their strategic action plans.

Governance

As partnerships transition from more autonomous to more interdependent, another common gap is a mismatch between the vision of how partners work together collaboratively and how collaboration is practiced, referring to the governance structure and culture of decision-making. The governance structure refers to how "membership" in a partnership is defined, how decisions are made, and how work gets done, for example in committees or work groups. Whatever the decision-making model that is adopted from consensus to modified consensus to majority vote, the importance lies in discussing how decisions will be made and which decisions will be made by the full partnership versus a leadership team or work group.

For groups that have a long history operating as informal networks or according to the terms in a contract, these aspects of governance may seem unnecessary, even annoying. Yet these are the democratic tools that can help diverse partners work through differences, make decisions that have broad support, and build momentum and influence for effective implementation. Without intentional conversations about decision-making and governance, a collaborative effort is far more vulnerable to destabilizing power dynamics or subtle undercurrents of resistance that lead to either missed opportunities for greater impact or problems with implementation.

> *"We all come together and talk about working together, but there is no direction. I feel a lot of the shortcomings of the strategic action plan can be attributed to the fact that the 'goals' of the plan were not adequately resolved, especially in the context of the actual capacity of the 'Partnership' members to implement it. Perhaps an effort to define a vision for how the partners could actually work together as a group, a vision that would reflect the contributions and organizational needs of each, should have taken precedence over developing a plan. That way the final plan, and its goals, would be a reflection of the capacity of the partnership."*

> *"I'm not aware of any governance documents. Right now, implementation is a big black box. I don't know what's intended in terms of implementation. I don't know who is going to be involved, the technical people reviewing the projects. I think we need to have those discussions about what's coming next."*

Despite the heaviness of skepticism in the above quotes, both indicated a desire to talk about governance and make the partnership work. These are examples of the subtle undercurrents of resistance that are common in groups when roles, responsibilities, and decision-making are not openly discussed. Yet in many cases, these concerns can be alleviated relatively quickly with productive conversations about roles, responsibilities, and expectations.

There is a learning curve to having these discussions as well as understanding the pros and cons of different approaches to structuring the group and defining decision-making. In the best cases, some partners have had experience with different collaborative decision-making models and can share experiences to help the group make an informed choice. When that is not an option, it can be useful to invite someone with experience to the group, for example peer-to-peer learning with someone from a well-established collaborative partnership or a consultant who can provide training or guidance in collaborative decision-making. Once decision-making rules are adopted, it usually takes some practice to get comfortable with them and make them a part of the partnership's culture.

> *"We identified that we would use modified consensus. We didn't discuss it in much detail. It was introduced by a partner, everyone just nodded, and it got recorded as the prevailing interest of the group. No other suggested decision tool was given. It was identified with those present, but it may evolve, especially as we get into it."*

Equally important, decision-making rules should be regularly revisited and refined. If they aren't working for a partnership, it is important to adapt them so that they do – or else the risk is sinking confidence, lack of participation, frustration, or division within the group (Hanson 2005). As an example of this, one partnership reflected on previous challenges with modified consensus and made a carefully considered decision to operate by majority vote. In general, some type of consensus is typically recommended in a diverse collaborative group that desires broad-scale impact. However, if the group decides consensus doesn't work, it is extremely valuable for partners to collectively decide what *does* work, invite feedback, and adapt as needed.

Strategies for Success

In summary, the following are strategies highlighted by multiple partnerships as keys to success:

- **Facilitators are critical to having productive conversations.** Whether internal partners or external consultants, it is important to have resources to support good facilitation, especially in the context of goal setting, clarifying partner roles, project prioritization, and funding for implementation.
- **It is critical that leadership is seen as inclusive and fair** leading to greater trust and commitment in the partnership. Collaborative leaders communicate evenly with partners so everyone is working from the same information. They bring partners in early on collaborative funding opportunities to review applications and provide comments. Good organization, focus and follow-through build a sense of accountability, teamwork, and momentum. Effective leadership allows flexibility to discuss important topics as they come up, while managing the process to meet budget and timeline goals.
- **GIS and IT are critical technical resources**. They are the "lynchpin" that hold it all together, most importantly data analysis for planning but also creating maps for outreach. Some watersheds or organizations may not have access to GIS and IT, while others have had success sharing staff or creating a fee-for-service agreement.
- **Strengthen partner organizations**. Stronger organizations with engaged boards and empowered staff can create forward momentum, activate local organizers, and identify opportunities where the value proposition for collaboration is high. It is challenging for grant-based organizations to carve out internal time to review and comment on collaborative documents, but also critically important to represent an organization's interests in the broader partnership. In remote, rural areas it may be challenging to develop a strong board due to lack of potential board members. In urban areas, potential board members may be too busy to commit time.
- **Create organizational commitments**, for example through governance documents, so that as individuals transition out, the partnership maintains its culture, purpose, and stability.
- **Seek anchor funding**. It is easier to attract more funding if you have a large anchor funder. Some geographic areas or habitat types may be more attractive to large funders, while other areas may have fewer options.
- **Diversify fundraising strategies** to get more capacity funding for coordination and planning. With 100% grant funded positions, common among small organizations, there is very little flexibility to invest staff time in organizational development or

partnership activities outside of implementation. Coordinated or collaborative partnerships hope to get more creative about fundraising, but there is also concern that there are only so many potential funding opportunities.

- **Receive feedback and comments with grace.** Understanding, trust, and relationships grow when challenges are handled well within the partnership and with external stakeholders. Feed and nurture relationships at all levels.
- **Partners meet in person periodically and communicate regularly through many channels.** Face-to-face meetings are still important in building trust, understanding, and relationships, but drive times make it difficult to find meeting locations that are central for everyone. Technology such as Go-To meeting and conference calling can help partners use their time more efficiently, for example meeting in person less frequently or for shorter meetings and following up with smaller work teams that are geographically closer together. However, partners from across the partnerships felt that some amount of in-person meeting time was needed, especially for important discussion topics.
- **Streamline internal processes** for managing tasks, timelines, and documents, for example using Basecamp for assigning tasks or DropBox for sharing documents. Peer-to-peer sharing creates opportunities for improvement, for example with processing stipends and travel reimbursement. A few partners expressed some potential bureaucratic hurdles to invoice capacity funds and cited the lack of time as a reason why they hadn't followed up to resolve these issues.
- **Offer tiers of participation.** Create options for organizations to participate in the partnership with less time commitment such as work groups, which give people an opportunity to focus their time on the topics or geographies where they are most interested.
- **Communicate openly and proactively with stakeholders** to avoid surprises. Interviews, listening sessions and surveys were appreciated by different partnerships as methods to better understand stakeholder interests and create opportunities to better connect with key audiences, such as land owners and community residents.
- **Track land owner contacts, projects, and outputs** to share knowledge, coordinate, and avoid redundant or duplicative work. A project tracker can be used to raise public awareness, get feedback early, and prevent surprises as one piece of a broader communications strategy.

Influence of the Funder

As discussed relative to the shift toward collaboration, funders have played a prominent role in how partnerships come together, including the focus and scope of their work. The Capacity Building FIP grants, which supported facilitators, staff capacity, and consultants, were cited as the tipping point that made the shift toward collaboration possible in many cases. In other cases, partners leveraged funding from other "anchor funders" and were able to deliver a "higher quality, seamless product" because of the Capacity Building FIP grants. The Implementation FIP grants also had significant influence on the formation of these partnerships not because partners received funding from this program but because partners wanted to do what they could to increase their competitive edge for a future Implementation FIP grant.

Partners talked about the risk of funders setting overly prescriptive requirements that would have undue influence on the quality of the plan, potentially on the prioritization framework itself. In the context of the Capacity Building FIP grant, partners expressed universal appreciation for OWEB's flexibility allowing modifications to the timeline, scope, and strategic action plan template relative to partner needs.

> *"So far this grant has worked very well. I think the secret to this success is flexibility at OWEB. Had OWEB led these grants with hard and fast prescriptions, I think success would be much lower."*

Yet referring back to the value proposition for partners, the primary motivating factor for partners coming together and formalizing their work with a strategic action plan and governance documents is the expectation that they will attract greater funding. Without long-term funding for implementation, the partnership will be stuck in limbo having invested significant time in planning, yet without the resources to launch implementation or a more cohesive fundraising effort, for example hiring a coordinator, creating a partnership webpage, writing grants, and building relationships with potential funders.

> *"We would definitely continue on and look for other funding if we didn't get an Implementation FIP grant. But it would definitely help! Since we are investing a lot of our time and effort in defining what our FIP proposal would look like, it would be a shame if we didn't get that funding source."*

OWEB guidance encouraged partners to focus first on developing a high-quality strategic action plan, which could be used to seek grants from different funders, and then later to separately develop their Implementation FIP proposal. However, the reality for partners is that developing a high quality strategic action plan and developing a competitive Implementation FIP proposal are closely intertwined, arguably inseparable, in the value proposition of the partnership.

"We have gotten some mixed messages about the intended scope of our plan. We have historically worked in a very large area and through this process are realizing that more focus is needed. Yet we have been highly encouraged by some OWEB staff to 'go ahead and do it all,' while at the same time hearing it's up to us to decide where to take it."

Without a good chance for attracting significant funding, partners may have to reduce their time commitment to a partnership. For example, in some cases organizations have had the opportunity to participate in more than one partnership. When they have had limited capacity to participate in both equally, they have had to select which one to prioritize, and the likelihood of getting significant funding for implementation has weighed heavily in their decision. With this in mind, despite the flexibility of the Capacity Building FIP program, partnerships were still greatly influenced by OWEB relative to the structure, expectations, and constraints of the Implementation FIP program due to their desire to be as competitive as possible for an Implementation FIP grant.

"I'm trying to fit what they're asking for in the strategic action plan template. Maybe I need to let go of that and say this is what's working for our group. I think it's worthwhile considering what OWEB is asking for. The group is cognizant that we want to present OWEB with what they expect so that we have a better chance at Implementation FIP funding – but we also want to keep in mind there is flexibility."

With this in mind, many partners across the partnerships expressed frustration with the lack of clarity or guidance regarding expectations for a successful Implementation FIP application. The top concerns across partnerships related to how they would define the geography and activities in their Implementation FIP proposal to maximize the potential for impact over the six-year timeframe and minimize limitations on other funding opportunities.

"There is some difficulty in tailoring your effort to an uncertain target."

The potential limitation most often discussed was OWEB's guidance that projects included in the scope of an Implementation FIP grant would not be eligible for their open solicitation grant program. The meaning of this guidance and its implications were discussed at many partnership meetings at different points in their planning process.

The timing of the Implementation FIP application process was another common question relative to the goal of keeping up the partnership's momentum until implementation funds would be available. For many partnerships, an Implementation FIP grant provides the best chances for the partnership to fully launch into implementation and operate as a coordinated or collaborative partnership.

Although partners recognized that OWEB was still learning and developing the program and so they might not be able to provide that level of desired clarity, there was consistent feedback across the partnerships that more clarity would be better. Specific suggestions included a presentation and Q&A session from OWEB along with clearly written guidance. Without direct guidance, partners spent considerable time speculating in meetings and side conversations.

> *"I think we oddly circulate lots of questions about what is a FIP and spend a lot of time rehashing, people saying 'my experience is this' and 'mine is this.' It's possible this happened, and I just didn't hear about it, but having some kind of really clear orientation from OWEB would be helpful. This is what a planning FIP is, and this what an implementation FIP is. I know part of the challenge is OWEB is still figuring it out. I wasn't involved from day one. Everyone has different backgrounds and conversations with different people. It ends up being confusing and a big waste of time."*

Some speculation and confusion is natural with any competitive funding opportunity. However, partnership comments suggest there is an opportunity for OWEB to provide more guidance to help ease those anxieties and get groups through the difficult decision points related to scope, prioritization, and positioning for future funding opportunities – whether Implementation FIP, open solicitation grants, or opportunities with other funders.

Although it will be tough news for partnerships who are not able to attract significant funding for implementation, partners have received considerable value from the Capacity Building FIP opportunity in large part due to OWEB's flexibility.

> *"The Capacity Building FIP grant was the catalyst, why we took this deeper look and came up with this operational manual. It's pretty historical for us. Hopefully, positioning us to function as a partnership will make us more efficient and effective."*

Topics for Discussion

OWEB, Imnaha River

Topics for Discussion

More Than One Way to Be Strategic in "Moving The Needle" for Restoration

OWEB's two restoration funding programs – the Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) program and the open solicitation program – can be used strategically to respond to different types of opportunities. The FIP program aims to focus investments in specific geographies and restoration activities to have a greater ecological impact in a relatively short timeframe, which follows a broader trend in grantmaking, for example the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Save Our Great Lakes Program (See also the literature on collective impact, Kania and Kramer 2011, Pearson 2014). In addition to direct ecological benefits, the advantages to this approach when successful are that impacts can be demonstrated more clearly to the public, funders, and decision-makers to build further support for restoration. In contrast, flexible funding programs, such as OWEB's open solicitation grant program, can respond to a range of opportunities as they come up and can distribute funding more evenly across the state, which is often important for public grant programs.

These two types of funding programs can be complementary, yet depending on how they are linked, or not, they can also undermine each other's effectiveness. For example, if there are no restrictions on applying for both Implementation FIP and open solicitation programs and the Implementation FIP grantees can put together very competitive proposals for the open solicitation program, then it is possible that the open solicitation program could begin to function much like the FIP program without providing opportunities for a broader range of project types. On the other hand, if partners associated with a successful Implementation FIP are not allowed to apply for open solicitation funding, then project proposals that are not ranked high by the partnership may not be eligible for either Implementation FIP funding or open solicitation funding, again restricting the effectiveness of the open solicitation program to fund a broader range of project types.

Similarly, within partnerships there are different views about what's most strategic to "move the needle" for watershed restoration. Partners broadly acknowledged the power of a scientifically based prioritization process to achieve ecological restoration. However, there were differences of opinion about how to integrate social and political factors into prioritization frameworks or whether it is most strategic to focus solely on ecological criteria.

Partners broadly agreed that willing land owners are necessary in the context of private land restoration. However, according to some views of strategic restoration, activities should only take place when particular areas and project proposals indicate the potential for a strong environmental win. These views were more often held by partners from national or regional environmental organizations or government programs with a strong focus on environmental protection. These approaches are typically easier to implement on public lands although when private land owners are willing, these approaches can be extremely impactful in the private lands context. Approaches that emphasize strong environmental wins are most attractive to environmental funders.

Other partners representing broader constituencies, such as watershed councils and soil and water conservation districts, tended to emphasize the strategic value of doing restoration projects that have additional social and economic benefits, for example farm improvements that also benefit aquatic habitat. These approaches may have more modest environmental wins initially, but they can build trust among potentially skeptical land owners. Through a "neighbor-to-neighbor approach," one private land owner may turn from a restoration skeptic to a champion, and as a result, an initially modest environmental win can create positive waves of opportunity throughout a basin that can lead to increasingly strategic environmental wins over the long-term, for example as multiple land owners along a stream become receptive to restoration projects. This "restoration through relationships" approach is the approach that tends to get the most traction in landscapes managed by private land owners and potentially industrial forestry operations. Funding opportunities that blend environmental, social, and economic benefits like the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service programs are a good fit for these opportunities.

While these two strategic approaches to prioritizing restoration can be complimentary, they can also be viewed as opposites. As partnerships have put together their prioritization frameworks and proposed project lists, some have struggled with tensions between large, well-funded groups pushing for the biggest environmental win and smaller organizations with broad-based constituencies who can only operate using the "restoration through relationships" approach. Conflicting missions among partners are an inherent challenge of broad-based partnerships (Hanson 2005). Common strategies to manage these challenges are to respect differences broadly and navigate the issues as they come up to try to make decisions that everyone can support even if they do not fully agree.

The crux of the problem is that these two approaches to strategically prioritize restoration tend to align with the two different types of grant programs. Partners that push for the biggest environmental win tend to rely on a purely scientific approach to prioritization that makes a clear case for specific geographies and restoration activities, which is a good match for the FIP program. Partners that operate with a "restoration through relationships" approach, which some refer to as opportunistic, tend to fit well with the open solicitation

program. The risk that many partnerships have discussed openly is that the partnership may prioritize projects with the highest environmental win, especially if their prioritization frameworks focus strictly on ecological factors, while projects with more modest environmental wins may not rank very high on the list, potentially limiting future funding opportunities.

> *"What does research tell us is most limiting? What is the data telling us what we need to do? That is the strategy to move away from opportunistic to strategic restoration. It is important to have willing landowners, but if that [stream] reach doesn't matter, then why are we there?"*

> *"There are partners around the table who all work in different ways. Coming from a watershed council, my organization is enacted by The Oregon Plan, and I report to the county commissioners and state. Our goal is to meet people in the middle and get environmental work done, while some other organizations have the luxury of choosing just environmental win projects. It has started to get to me as we start to identify project areas. I can't be against farm practices and push full dike removals. I can convince people to breach their dike, but if that is not one of the practices that is chosen by the partnership then that is limiting – we cannot participate like that in our county with our working landscape. It will potentially push me out of getting funding for the type of work that I could get done. The understanding that we all come from different ways of working – we need to find a way to make that work, and I worry we might not find a way to make that happen."*

The risk lies in the connection between the two funding programs. If the partnership is awarded an Implementation FIP grant and it has prioritized projects with the biggest environmental win, more modest projects in working landscapes may be excluded from both Implementation FIP and open solicitation funding because of the current limitation that projects within the scope of a funded Implementation FIP are not eligible for the open solicitation program. More discussion is needed to understand if there are other options for how the Implementation FIP and open solicitation programs are linked or not. Also, more discussion and support within the partnerships could potentially help ease these tensions and facilitate prioritization frameworks that more broadly reflect the diverse partners and constituencies represented by the strategic action plans. Some partnerships sought to bridge these different perspectives by including social and ecological factors into their articulation of goals and values, their prioritization framework, and their situational diagram or results chains. The value of respecting these differences and working to find common ground for long-term restoration cannot be underestimated.

Communications and Outreach Investments Linked to Strategic Action Planning

Similarly, as we think about the next frontier for strategic action planning, several partners acknowledged the limitations of a highly technical plan relative to their goals for stakeholder outreach and the community support needed for project implementation.

> *"The plan was basically built by scientists, but it wasn't really built at a second level with the thought of community engagement – not to dumb it down, but to put it in a different light. Although it was created with a gee whiz of limiting factors and basin geography, it also has to be put into a different light. What's the benefit of doing these things? What's the need to do this? Fisheries are crashing. Forget the scientific explanation, tell us in different terms why this is important."*

> *"In general, the FIP is a tremendous opportunity for us to take funding and focus on areas with a broad partnership – we need to continue to increase our messaging and find ways to better frame the strategic process that makes sense at different scales."*

As OWEB provided direction for this study, they were interested to understand what types of support might be helpful for partnerships to more proactively and meaningfully engage stakeholders through outreach.

Suggestions for future investments in outreach:

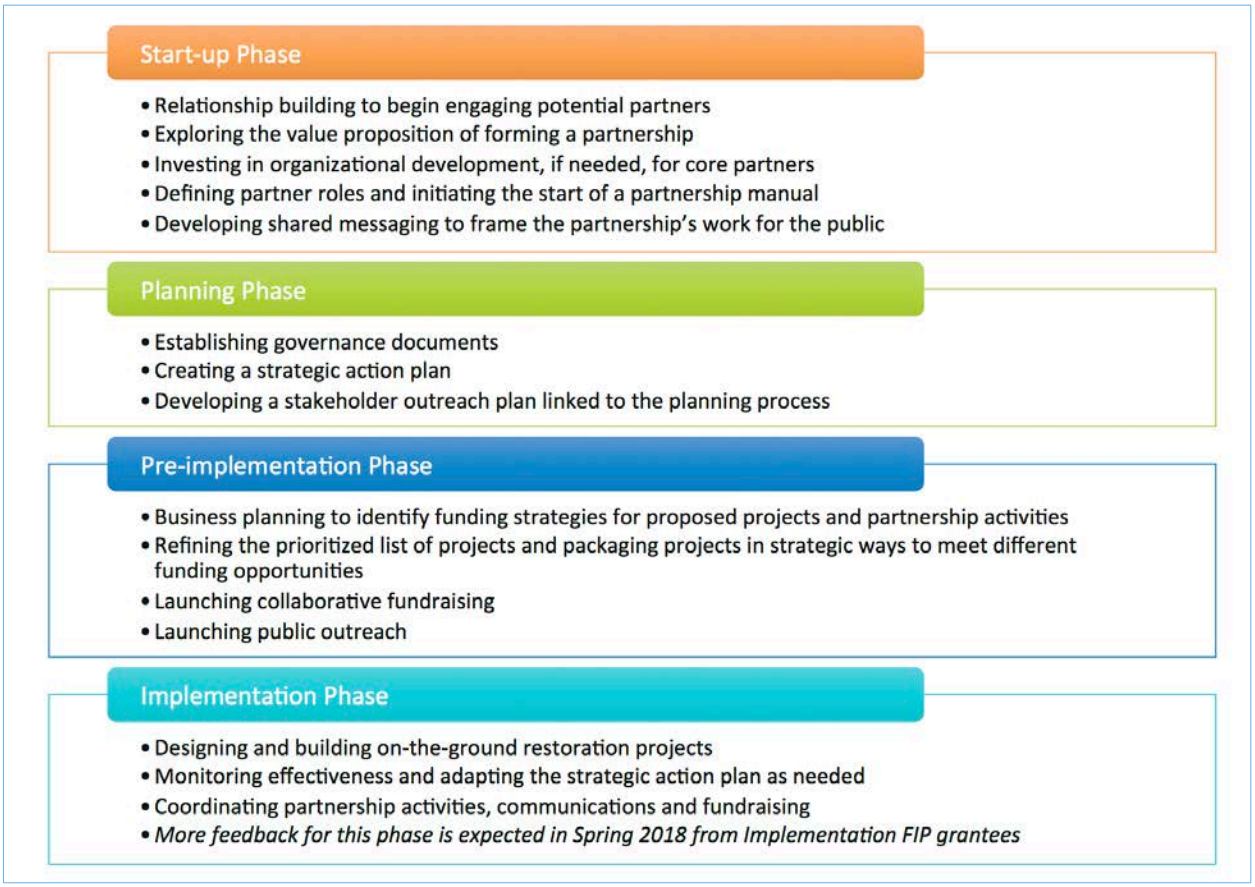
- Studies on the **economic value of restoration and why it should matter** to people paired with **clear messaging in a state-level campaign** that could be tailored for local outreach efforts,
- Funds to support **more extensive land owner surveys** that could be used to gauge awareness, potential misperceptions, and opportunities for engagement, and
- **General capacity for relationship building** with local businesses, community leaders, land owners, and residents, particularly those with a history of skepticism toward government and restoration.

The insights, messaging tools, and relationships developed through these types of investments could help re-orient the planning framework to include social and political factors and more effectively connect the goals, prioritization framework, and monitoring methods with the interests and needs of constituents.

What is Needed to Support Highly Performing, Resilient Watershed Partnerships?

As partners reflected on their progress with planning and looked ahead to their goals for implementation, several interesting suggestions surfaced across the partnerships that together paint the picture of how the FIP program could better support resilient partnerships through four phases of support.

Suggested Four Phases of Partnership Support



Partner suggestions related to the need for a pre-planning phase centered around the reality that one to three years of internal organizational development work and relationship building often helps to catalyze these types of collaborative efforts before technical planning even begins. In other cases, 10 or more years of relationship building created an opportunity to put together a Capacity Building FIP application when the call for proposals went out. In some cases, this long-term relationship building was possible due to significant anchor funders. One partner raised the question, what if there is a strategically significant part of the state or a resource issue that warrants investment, but there is not a history of collaboration or partnership? Perhaps having a start-up phase of support would help groups come together and explore the potential for collaboration.

> *"I'm thinking back on the process of applying – I was just so pleased, our partnership too, that we already had experience with one another and recognized our complementary roles. It would be interesting if an area needed groups to come together and they didn't have that history. They wouldn't have been able to pull something together. As OWEB identified the 7 focal areas, there may be an area they would like addressed, it may require some support to get a group started."*

Relative to the planning phase, there was consistent feedback that capacity support was greatly appreciated and more support would help bring additional partners more fully to the conversation, especially watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts, smaller organizations, and in some cases tribes. Support for facilitation, GIS analysis and consultants to write the plan and develop a communications and outreach plan was strongly emphasized.

The suggestion for a pre-implementation phase came from several different partnerships. People explained that from their years of experience with project management, they recognized the significant work required to take a list of projects on paper that were only roughly sketched out and develop fleshed out descriptions that could be more persuasively taken to funders.

> *"FIP or no FIP we're going to use our plan to leverage more money. The leverage is the plan. The better the plan the better the leverage. We don't have our plan fleshed out to the level that I would like. I would like to say, 'We have these anchor habitats. Here's what your money will buy you, and this is what we can do. Here is why it matters, and here are the projects you can be involved in.'"*

Along these lines, one partnership had already completed their strategic action plan prior to being awarded the Capacity Building FIP grant. Reflecting on their experience, partners explained that they used Capacity Building FIP funds to convene work groups, build out their work plans in more detail, and position themselves for stronger funding proposals. The grant funds also allowed the partnership to focus more capacity on fundraising and external communications, which has already led to near-term funding with the potential for longer term opportunities. As a result, they are gradually transitioning from planning into implementation.

> *"Obviously, the FIP capacity grant was huge. It got us over the hump in terms of capacity and was instrumental to our development. We leveraged it to bring in more foundation support. We always wanted to stay lean and mean in staff, but now we're up to 2 FTE. Now we are working on transitioning my role to champion fundraiser."*

Most partners in this study couldn't speak directly to suggestions about the implementation phase since they have not gotten to that point yet. This section will be further explored with Implementation FIP grantees for Part 2 of this report.

A central theme that ran throughout people's comments was the limited capacity and limited flexibility in staff time to commit to building a resilient partnership.

> *"Funding for capacity is the thing that could make or break watershed-wide efforts. We can't 'move the dial' and get the right people on-board without the flexibility of staff not being attached to a certain project. If you really want that long-term success, there has to be attention to the work that isn't clearly associated with just one project. That's what this grant allows. It is wonderful thinking ahead to provide that. The next step is how can we support the success and continuation of this effort in a way that is not project specific, but still feeding that goal of on the ground restoration?"*

Strategies to diversify funding were discussed by some partnerships, but many smaller organizations haven't had the capacity to invest in fundraising beyond what they already do. The promise of a collaborative model of watershed restoration is that there would be centralized leadership and resources to do fundraising on behalf of the whole to distribute to partners. Again, this points to uncertainties, concerns, and fears about how this would affect individual fundraising by partners and how funds might be distributed.

> *"What we're really trying to get people to do is to jump boundaries and look for money."*

In the most successful scenario, realizing this vision would take time and investment to establish a centralized structure to be effective at long-term fundraising at that scale, and depending on the value proposition for potential partners, funders, and stakeholders, that level of greater investment may not be warranted in many places. Because of the phenomenon of "anchor funders" attracting other big funders, there is the potential that funders will end up further concentrating their funds in these partnerships where centralized infrastructure exists. This topic deserves more discussion and careful consideration. Perhaps over time, if large funders continue to place emphasis on collaborative partnerships, they may create a larger gap between "haves" and "have nots" among watersheds and restoration organizations. Going back to the continuum of participation from the introduction of this document, a lower level of partnership may be more cost-effective and produce significant value. It is too easy to fall into the popular ideal that more collaboration is better. It is worth more discussion.

For capacity building grantees, perhaps there are different "on-ramps," such that they aim for the point in the partnership continuum that they feel has the greatest value proposition for their partners and funders. What would that look like? Perhaps the start-up phase would be the broadest opportunity for many potential partnerships to explore partner roles and their value proposition for different partnership types. From there, some partnerships could operate as an information network or cooperative partnership with relatively little additional investment, while others could decide to further invest in building a strategic action plan and governance documents to move toward a collaborative partnership. As more partnerships take this step toward implementation, there is a possibility that the number of partnerships and the scale of the investment required to keep their partnership going is not feasible at the statewide scale given the general trends in environmental grantmaking.

It may be useful to map out the known funding sources, recognizing that these will change over time, to estimate roughly how many collaborative partnerships could potentially be supported in the state through various funders. This number could be used to inform how many collaborative partnerships OWEB would like to catalyze through the Capacity Building FIP program. This number could also potentially inform a more accurate value proposition for newly forming collaborative partnerships. Reflecting on the awkward transition between planning and implementation, partnerships risk falling apart if they are not able to secure relatively stable implementation funding relatively soon after completing their plan. Although partners appreciated the near-term value of relationship building and information sharing, they likely would not have chosen to invest so much time and energy in strategic planning, governance, and outreach if they did not feel they have a good chance at long-term funding.

Appreciation for Learning

Robert Warren, Sagebrush

Appreciation for Learning

From across the partnerships, people expressed appreciation for OWEB's investment in this project to obtain feedback early in the process to inform and adapt the Focused Investment Partnership program. Partners also appreciated the opportunity to learn across partnerships through the conference calls and informally sharing of planning tools and resources. Yet there was a touch of frustration that it was too early in their collaborative effort to have more in-depth feedback. Most partnerships expressed an interest in repeating the survey, interviews, and observations at some point in the future to see how they have progressed and what feedback they may have after more experience as a partnership. They also expressed an interest in future opportunities for peer-to-peer sharing across partnerships.

> *"I was so excited to see that this [Partnership Learning Project] was part of this effort. It shows that OWEB wants to make this something that works. That is nice. And then there is less griping when something doesn't work. I am very appreciative."*

> *"Thank you for taking time to get feedback from the tribes."*

> *"Thank you for the opportunity to read and offer comments on this report prior to it being finalized. It was fascinating to learn of the similarities between these 8 partnerships."*

Conclusion

Robert Warren, Juvenile Coastal Cutthroat Trout

Conclusion

The strategic vision of this style of focused investments is that a cohesive, strategically-oriented body of work with the buy-in of diverse partners and stakeholders will have greater impact and attract more funding. The purpose of this report was to learn from the experiences of 8 partnerships that received Capacity Building FIP grants to understand what is needed to support resilient, highly performing partnerships. Drawing from the public administration literature, it is helpful to think about partnerships on a continuum from information networks, where partners remain mostly autonomous to collaborative partnerships where partners become interdependent and oriented toward collective goals. Moving toward more collaborative partnerships requires greater investment in planning, governance, conflict management, and communication, but the promise is that this increased investment will strategically use the strengths of different partners to tackle more complex restoration goals more effectively.

Considering how partners made the shift toward working more collaboratively, several themes emerged as common to several partnerships, such as a history of positive working relationships, a personal affinity to working with groups on the part of partnership leaders and conveners, and the serendipity of multiple funding sources coming together at the right time. Although many partners approached strategic action planning with a desire to be more efficient, especially those who had past experience with planning, most groups added new layers of complexity that extended timelines and budgets, for example new partners with different views, multiple watersheds, or multiple habitat types. Several common themes emerged relative to tensions between some partners and challenges to engage others. Tribes are engaged in most partnerships, in some they take a prominent leadership role. Throughout there was recognition of the learning curve to working with tribes and the value of taking adequate time to talk about partner roles and interests, including tribes along with all other partners, for example during the development of governance documents. Although some partnerships waited to develop governance documents until after the strategic planning process, some of these partnerships experienced more difficulty getting buy-in from some skeptical partners. Stakeholder outreach was challenging for everyone, especially engaging private land owners, farmers and ranchers, and industrial forest interests. In general, partners felt outreach would be more effective once the strategic action plan was complete. However, there was still an overall interest in having more communication tools and messaging ready to communicate broadly about the partnership and the goals of the plan early in the process.

As partnerships transitioned from planning to implementation, there was a nervousness, anxiousness, and excitement. Most partnerships were focused on being as competitive as possible for Implementation FIP funding and struggled somewhat to keep up momentum

through the planning process, eager to move into implementation and more tangible results. Some partnerships also had promising leads to other funding sources. As groups anticipated implementation, they began to feel the tensions of competition rise to the surface and the influence of the funder, in this case OWEB, became stronger. Partnerships broadly praised OWEB's Capacity Building FIP program for its flexibility and its lack of restrictions. Ironically although partnerships weren't funded through the Implementation FIP program, they were greatly influenced by it because it represented for most if not all partnerships the clearest path toward somewhat stable implementation funding. The Implementation FIP structure and link to other funding opportunities, such as OWEB's open solicitation program, has created lots of concern, speculation, and to some degree perhaps unintended influence on the scope and focus of the strategic action plans. Some of this perhaps is unavoidable because of the nature of competitive grantmaking, but there appears to be an opportunity for OWEB to provide more clarity in messaging and perhaps more careful consideration of how the different grant programs are related.

Returning to the purpose of this report, it appears that four phases of support may be more appropriate – start-up, planning, pre-implementation, and implementation. The early start-up phase would allow partners the space to build relationships, explore the value proposition for working together, and begin defining partner roles early on in the process. A partnership may decide to operate at a lower level of investment, for example as an information network if that feels right for their value proposition. If partnerships felt there was value in moving toward a more collaborative partnership type, they would begin the planning phase similar to the current Capacity Building FIP program. The pre-implementation phase would provide extra support to ground-truth initial project ideas and package them more persuasively for funders. Suggestions for the implementation phase will be further developed in Part 2 of this report drawing from the experiences of Implementation FIP grantees. Overall, there was recognition that working collaboratively takes more capacity and the FIP grants provide some flexibility to support that capacity. Realistically partners reflected that it probably takes more capacity than was funded, and they can provide that retrospective information about how much it did take once their plan is complete.

Potentially refining the Capacity Building FIP program to emphasize development of a business plan could uncouple the formation of new partnerships through the Capacity Building FIP program with the expectation of implementation funds through the Implementation FIP program by providing alternative pathways to fund newly formed collaborative partnerships through a mix of private and public sources. With a roadmap of potential funding sources, a partnership could adjust their pace, shift their timeline, and set realistic expectations based on available funds.

A question that requires more discussion is whether these new collaborative partnerships will attract new investment for restoration in the state – potentially yes especially if restoration goals are linked more broadly with economic development – or whether this approach will simply concentrate existing investments in more focused geographies and activities. If there is a chance that funding in the state will stay the same or decrease, a measure of caution is wise to avoid encouraging the formation of new collaborative partnerships if implementation funds are not likely.

Overall, partners greatly appreciated being a part of this exciting program and looked forward to learning from each other, current Implementation FIP grantees, and the next cycle of Capacity Building FIP grantees. They greatly appreciated OWEB's genuine interest in getting feedback from partners in this way, and many hoped there would be an opportunity to continue learning together and providing feedback over the next few years as their work takes off.

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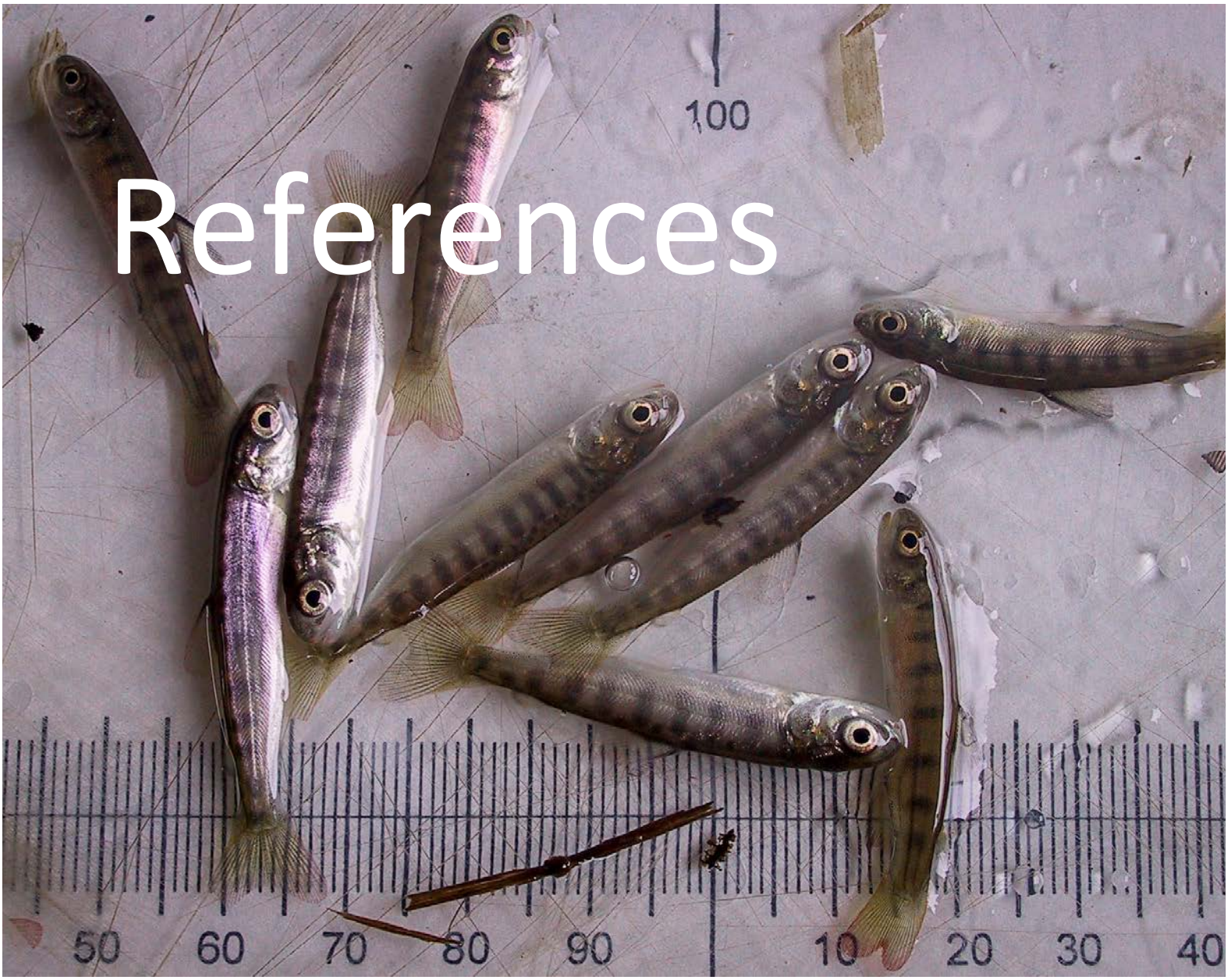

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Appendix – Partnership Survey

OWEB's Partnership Learning Project

Thank you for taking the time to share your reflections and feedback!

Even the most successful partnerships face common challenges, such as recruiting key partners and staff turnover. Performance is dynamic, with normal ups and downs expected. This study does not attempt to categorize partnership performance, but collect insights from your experience to understand what partnerships need to be resilient and how OWEB's Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) Program can support your success.

If you are short on time, you can complete the required questions in 8-10 minutes. If you have more time, please add your comments, suggestions and examples to promote learning and sharing.

This survey is confidential. At the end, we ask for your name to keep track of who completed the survey. However, your name will not be connected in any way with your answers in the presentation of results. The summarized survey results for your partnership will be shared with you; however, they will not be shared with OWEB. OWEB will only see results that are generalized across all FIP partnerships, and FIP partnerships will have the chance to review preliminary findings.

Contact Jennifer Arnold at jennifer@reciprocityconsulting.com with any questions.

Partnership

1. To what extent do you feel your partnership is actively changing and evolving or stable and established?

Actively changing and evolving	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Stable and established

2. To what extent are you satisfied with your partnership's process to develop your strategic action plan?

Not at all satisfied	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Extremely satisfied

   Any comments or reflections on the structure, scope or content of your strategic action plan? Any advice for groups just starting their plan?

Core Partners

3. To what extent do you think the right people, organizations, and stakeholders are actively involved in the partnership, referring to the core partners that will help achieve your goals?

Lacking core partners or not active	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	All core partners involved, active

Are there specific people or organizations you would like to see more involved? If yes, please explain what you hope they would bring to the partnership and your thoughts about why they are not as involved as you would like.

Any comments or suggestions for recruiting core partners? Any advice to share with other groups?

Communication

4. To what extent are you satisfied with the frequency and quality of communication among core partners for planning and coordination?

Not at all satisfied	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Extremely satisfied

5. To what extent are you satisfied with how the partnership communicates with external stakeholders?

Not at all satisfied	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Extremely satisfied

Any comments or suggestions to improve communications with core partners or external stakeholders? Any advice for other groups?

6. To what extent do you think core partners hold themselves and each other accountable to follow through on their commitments?

Significant gaps in follow-through and accountability	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Exceptional follow-through and accountability

Any comments or suggestions to improve follow-through and accountability? Advice that could benefit other groups?

Governance

7. To what extent are you satisfied with the way that core partners work together to make decisions, for example deciding on the scope for the capacity building grant, prioritizing grant funds, or assigning project leads?

Not at all satisfied	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Extremely satisfied

8. To what extent do you think your governance documents, such as MOU, accurately reflect how partners work together and are useful in supporting your success? If you feel your governance documents are a good start, but would benefit from further development, please note that in the comments below. Skip if you do not have governance documents.

Not accurate, not useful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Highly accurate, very useful

Any comments or suggestions about the usefulness of governance documents or how they can be improved to support your success?

Value of the Partnership

9. To what extent do you feel the benefits of participating in the partnership are greater than the costs?

Costs far greater than benefits	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Benefits far greater than costs

Please tell us about the costs and benefits that matter most to you and your organization.

Challenges and Adaptation

10. To what extent has the partnership faced external challenges that limited what you could achieve, such as changes in laws, policies, land ownership, elected officials, funding, etc.

Few, minimal challenges	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Continual, extreme Challenges

11. To what extent has the partnership responded well given these limitations?

Struggled to respond	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Responded extremely well

Please share an example of an external challenge faced and how the partnership responded.

Success

12. To what extent do you feel the partnership has made good progress developing a strategic action plan and the capacity to implement it?

Limited progress with action plan and capacity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Exceptional progress with action plan and capacity

Please share your reflections on what have been the key drivers of your success or lack thereof?

13. To what extent do you feel public awareness and support are important to achieving your restoration goals?

Not at all important	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Extremely important

14. To what extent do you feel the public is aware and supportive of the value of the partnership's work? If the partnership has not yet conducted the public outreach desired, please note in the comments below.

Public not aware or supportive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Public very much aware and supportive

Any comments about your success with public outreach or the outreach your partnership plans to do in the future? Suggestions for how OWEB resources could help you achieve your public outreach goals? Advice for other groups?

Feedback for OWEB

15. To what extent were you satisfied with the FIP application and selection process?

Not at all satisfied	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Extremely satisfied

Any comments or suggestions to improve the FIP application and selection process in the future?

16. To what extent have you been satisfied with the frequency and quality of communication with OWEB staff?

    Not at all satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely satisfied

    Any comments or suggestions for OWEB to improve communication?

17. To what extent are you satisfied with the FIP program as an approach to support resilient partnerships and implement ecological restoration?

    Not at all satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely satisfied

    Please share any specific feedback for how OWEB can better structure the FIP program and associated funding to support your partnership's success.