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The ERA-NET promoting European research on biodiversity

Annex 1

Practical method note 2
Organising stakeholder workshops



PRACTICAL METHOD NOTE 2



ORGANISING STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOPS

It is increasingly common for researchers to engage with stakeholders in workshops at various points in the research lifecycle/lifetime. When done well, workshops can be satisfying for stakeholders and an efficient means of engaging in dialogue with a range of different stakeholders. If done badly, workshops can waste time

and cause long-term damage to relationships. There are two key ingredients to a successful event: good preparation (considered here) and effective facilitation (considered separately in [practical method note 12](#)).

WHEN TO USE WORKSHOPS?

There are several points in the research lifecycle when stakeholder workshops might be used:

- * **Exploratory phase:** scoping ideas for future research with likely users, understanding the sorts of challenges stakeholders are facing that the research might be able to address and getting feedback on initial ideas for a future project.
- * **Initial research:** engaging with stakeholders in a workshop at the start of a new research project can be an important way to shape objectives and methods before it is too late to amend the project implementation plan and to ensure the outcomes of the research are as relevant as possible to stakeholders.
- * **Data collection and analysis:** some projects need to

collect data from stakeholders, and workshops may be an efficient means of doing this. There are also methods that can enable stakeholders to analyse the data collected during a workshop (e.g. see [practical method note 11](#) on multi-criteria method).


- * **Interpretation of results:** whether data comes from stakeholders or other sources, it may be useful to engage stakeholders in the interpretation of the findings, making links and contributions to issues or policies which might otherwise have been overlooked.
- * **Dissemination of findings:** end-of-project workshops (or conferences) are a common way of disseminating findings in an efficient way that enables interaction between the research team and stakeholders.

PLANNING WORKSHOPS

When planning an event, there are a number of practical and conceptual issues to be considered. Before planning an event, it is important to:

- * **Understand the context** in which it is necessary to work with stakeholders and likely users of research - who are the key people that should be involved (see 'stakeholder identification' in Part 3 of the Handbook), what are their interests and constraints, what might they want to get out of the workshop?

- * **Develop a process plan:** decide how many events of a particular type are needed with which groups of stakeholders, and integrate this with the research management and planning. For example, should workshops be preceded by conducting scoping interviews with key people to understand the context better, or should separate workshops be held with groups who are in conflict with one another before bringing them together?



The next step is to **develop an event (facilitation) plan**. Although this may be based around an agenda, it will need to be significantly expanded to provide more details to help manage the process, it is advisable to:

- * Provide detailed timings for each agenda item (including a breakdown for each activity within an agenda item) and assign members of the facilitation team to each activity, with someone designated as overall timekeeper.
- * Set clear aims for the event, and then tailor techniques to the aims as well as the interests and needs of participants.
- * It can be useful to start the event with ‘opening out’ techniques, followed by ‘exploring’ and then ‘deciding’ techniques to structure the dialogue.
- * It is useful to include a buffer in the timings (e.g. a long lunch break) that can be cut short, or a session that could be cut out if time is running short. This will prevent people feeling rushed, and allow sufficient time for the most important aspects of the workshop.
- * Create an equipment list for every planned activity.

Consider taking stakeholders to the field:

- * Workshop settings can make some stakeholders feel uneasy and exacerbate unequal power dynamics. Putting everyone in the field often puts those who are traditionally more powerful in a less comfortable place, and puts those not used to workshop settings at ease, making it easier to manage the power dynamics.
- * A field visit could be arranged as part of an event, for example a field excursion. Alternatively the entire workshop might be held in the field.

- * Consider how to record notes during field trips, so all important points are recorded. Wind noise and acoustics can make field recordings difficult to make out. It is advisable to take notes by hand, but be prepared for all weather (e.g. with a rain protector for paper). In particularly challenging conditions, it can be useful to have a second note-taker, so nothing is missed.

Consider practicalities:

- * Work out how many people will attend the event, so a room can be organised that is large enough to accommodate everyone.
- * With larger groups, it can be useful to split into smaller groups for certain activities to ensure everyone has a chance to discuss issues in depth:
 - * Are ‘break-out’ rooms required or will the room be large enough for small groups to work without disturbing each other?
 - * Should small groups be facilitated by someone or be self-facilitating? Dominant group members may offer to facilitate and then abuse this position by not allowing others to talk or not fully capturing their points in the notes.
- * How suitable is the venue in other respects? For example:
 - * Where conflict exists between stakeholders, the venue should be considered ‘neutral’ territory.
 - * Is the venue fully accessible to everyone (e.g. transport links, physical impairments)
- * Will the event be held at an appropriate time of day and week for the target audience?

ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

There are a range of techniques available to facilitate two-way engagement between researchers and stakeholders; these are covered in greater depth in Part 5 of this Handbook. Broadly, these can be categorised as those suitable for:

Opening up dialogue and gathering information with stakeholders about issues linked to the research, for example:

- * Brainstorming (getting participants to think rapidly and express ideas in short phrases to come up with new and creative ideas).
- * Metaplan (participants are given note paper, asked to write down one idea and place it on the wall, ideas that are similar are grouped together to form idea clusters).
- * Listing techniques, such as carousel, where questions are arranged in different areas around the room and groups move round the different areas at timed intervals, this continues until they arrive back at their starting point. At the end of the exercise they can read what other groups have added to their initial ideas.

Exploring issues in greater depth with stakeholders, getting feedback on preliminary findings, for example:

- * Mind-mapping¹ techniques (also known as concept mapping, spray diagrams, and spider diagrams) can be a useful way to quickly capture and link ideas with stakeholders.
- * SWOT analysis encourages people to think systematically about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as they relate to the issues being researched.
- * For issues that have a strong link to events for which timings cannot change or are beyond the control of the research team, or for project planning with stakeholders, timelines can be used to help structure discussion in relation to historical, planned, or anticipated events.

Closing down options and deciding on actions based on research findings, for example:

- * Ranking can be used to place ideas in rank order. Getting consensus amongst participants for a particular ranking can be challenging, but the discussions it stimulates may be revealing.
- * Prioritisation differs from ranking by enabling participants to express the strength of their feeling towards a particular option rather than simply ranking an idea as better or worse than another idea (e.g. by assigning markers such as sticky paper 'dots' or stones [if working outside] to different ideas or options).
- * Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (see [practical method note 11](#)).

CASE STUDIES

EXPERIENCES FROM BIODIVERSITY RESEARCH

ENSURING WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES ARE STIMULATING

It is important to ensure that as well as meeting the needs of the researchers, workshop activities are designed in such a way as to keep stakeholders stimulated and engaged with the research. The FORCE project (see [Appendix 1](#) of the *Handbook*) held workshops with Caribbean communities to understand the relationships between coral reefs and livelihoods. Feeding back research results was an important component of the workshops, but researchers ensured that presentations were kept short (about 15 minutes) and were interspersed with a range of other activities which involved mixing up stakeholder groups to encourage interaction between individuals with different interests, and exercises which involved physically moving around the room to maintain focus and engagement.

VALUE OF FIELD EXCURSIONS AND DEMONSTRATIONS

The FIREMAN project held a successful series of field discussions and demonstrations alongside talks and indoor workshops. The project involved stakeholders to inform research on the effects of fire regimes on biodiversity under a changing climate in different European ecosystems. Stakeholders attended talks which were held in a lecture theatre format. Researchers felt that many of the stakeholders were inhibited about getting involved in the discussions as lecture theatres and classrooms are viewed as the territory of University scientists. As part of the stakeholder events, stakeholders were taken to demonstration plots in the field to observe recent prescribed burns and areas of past and planned future burns. Many of the stakeholders involved spend much of their time carrying out practical field management and in this environment were stimulated to become fully involved in discussions about the relationship between fire and biodiversity, presenting researchers with challenging questions. Researchers suggested that the inclusion of the field visits was an attractive element that motivated stakeholder attendance. Two stakeholders involved in the project echoed the value of discussing management issues away from 'sterile' workshop rooms. One who had been involved in several other research projects reported an experience where a significant conflict, that had arisen and threatened the future of a partnership between stakeholders on a moorland research project, had been largely diffused by a carefully organised field-based meeting between the parties concerned.



Stakeholder field demonstration in Sweden as part of the FIREMAN project.

Annex 1 of “*The BiodivERsA Stakeholder Engagement Handbook*. BiodivERsA, Paris (108 pp). © BiodivERsA, Paris, 2014”

The BiodivERsA Stakeholder Engagement Handbook is available online at <http://www.biodiversa.org/577>



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