LIVING WATER

Place-based Engagement and Impact Tool

The Place-based Engagement and Impact tool aids organisation staff and stakeholders in place-based initiatives. It provides flexible guidelines for implementing complex environmental and community programmes. Structured around eight criteria, it guides the setup and assessment of effective programmes. It emphasises thorough preparation, inclusive engagement, strategic alignment, collaborations, collective action, capacity building, scalability, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation practices. The goal is to enhance outcomes and sustainability. Each criterion includes examples of effective practices, promoting adaptability and innovation for better outcomes.
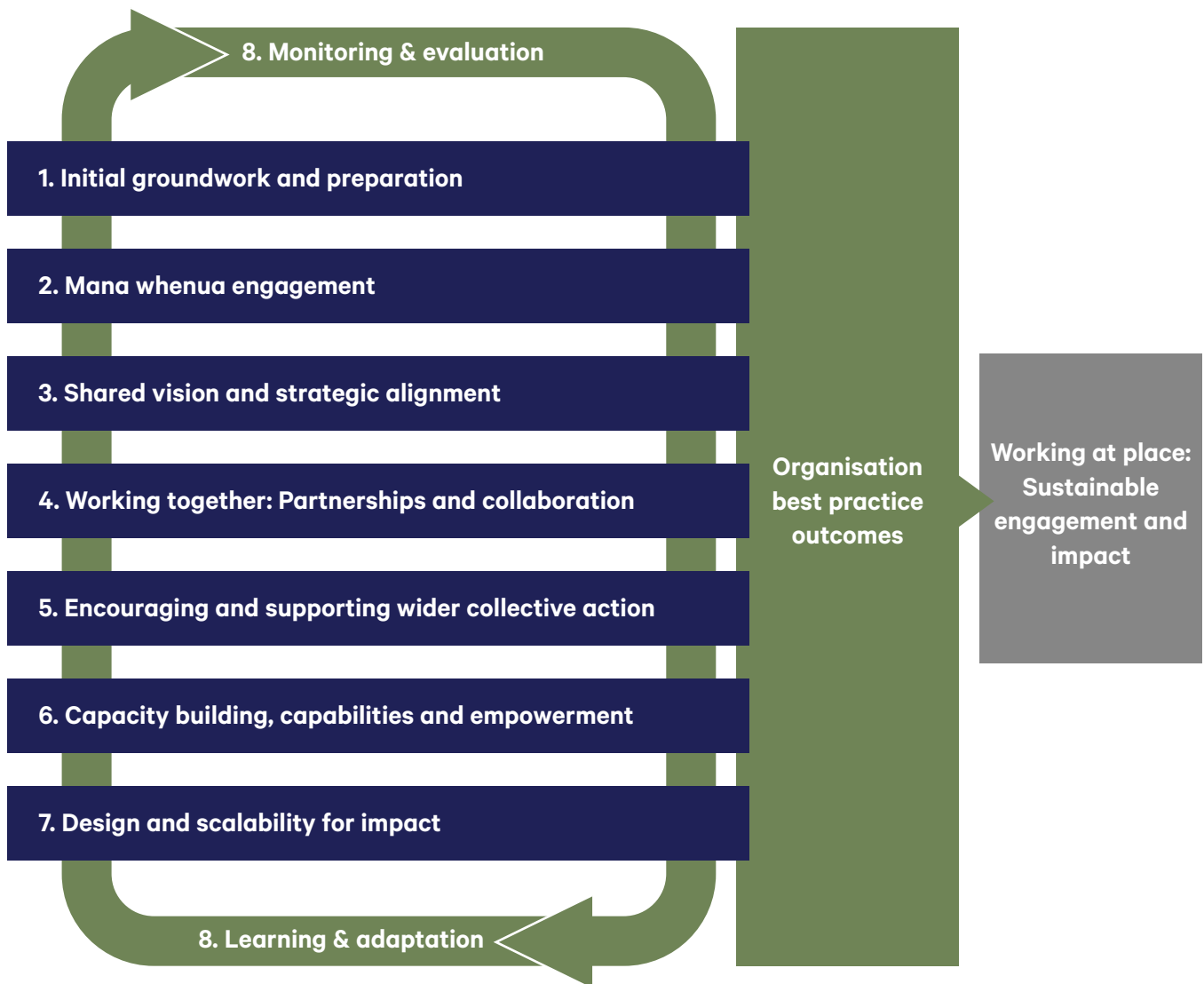
8. Monitoring & evaluation

1. Initial groundwork and preparation

2. Mana whenua engagement

3. Shared vision and strategic alignment

4. Working together: Partnerships and collaboration

5. Encouraging and supporting wider collective action

6. Capacity building, capabilities and empowerment

7. Design and scalability for impact

8. Learning & adaptation

Organisation best practice outcomes

Working at place: Sustainable engagement and impact

Figure 1: Place-based Engagement and Impact Tool Underlying Framework

The Place-based Engagement and Impact Tool

The tool can be used for programme assessment and planning, helping design and implement engagement approaches that consider and address all eight criteria. It is designed to support open-ended discussions on the criteria. The examples of good practice provided are indicative, not exhaustive. They are meant to inspire discussions and encourage consideration of other practices that could help achieve good practice. Depending on where you are in your project cycle, you may want to engage in a discussion on all eight criteria as a team, exploring how you have or will approach these components or focus on a single criterion and examine it as a separate exercise.

Assessment and planning approach

- **Good practice:** Indicates the standard for success.
- **Evidence & feedback:** Allows participants to consider their position and identify possible areas for improvement and strengths.
- **Areas for improvement:** Notes where performance can be enhanced.
- **Strengths:** Highlights where performance exceeds expectations.

Teams can also use a traffic light system to visually assess and prioritise areas for action:

- 🟢 **Green:** This aspect is well covered.
- 🟠 **Amber:** Need to think about this as it may be a limiting factor.
- 🔴 **Red:** Need to address this aspect as it is a limiting factor.

Instructions for facilitators

- Encourage participants to think broadly about each criterion and to consider practices beyond those listed.
- Use the good practice examples as starting points for discussion, not as definitive answers.
- Foster an environment where diverse ideas and innovative approaches are welcomed.
- Collect feedback and evidence throughout the discussion to inform ongoing improvement and adaptation of practices.

By emphasising the open-ended nature of the discussions, you can encourage a more reflective, dynamic and inclusive approach to place-based engagement and impact.

Use and disclaimer

This document has been prepared for the benefit of those who were part of the Living Water team, their partner organisations, and others as a resource for future thinking about implementing collaborative place-based initiatives. The material contained here is provided solely for use within one's own participatory process and should be further considered and refined to suit specific needs and circumstances.

Criteria 1. Initial groundwork and preparation

Good Practice: Emphasises the value of internal organisational conversations to identify the "current state" of involvement in a catchment/place/community. This includes being aware of potential barriers/enablers (such as history, funding, relationships, skills, and competencies) for innovation and collaboration "at place" and building wider organisational understanding and buy-in. Includes initial discussions with people and communities at place and developing responses to those discussions.

Indicative example areas of good practice	Traffic light assessment 🟢 🟠 🔴	Evidence: Note areas where we have strengths, work proficiently, or need to improve
• **Identify existing internal connections:** Engage across functions and teams to identify all internal connections in/on the place, such as policy, strategies, and operational delivery programmes.		
• **Initial community discussions:** Conduct initial discussions with people and communities at place to understand their perspectives and develop responses that inform the planning and initiation of the project.		
• **Organisational understanding and buy-in:** Multiple teams and roles understand project concepts and current/potential linkages to their functions. Linkages across teams are actively maintained through updates and discussions.		
• **Operational funding and resources:** Understand available funding and resources (e.g., staff capability, capacity, equipment) to support place-based initiatives.		
• **Cross-functional understanding:** Ensure business processes support the project's intended approach (e.g., procurement, financial reporting).		
• **Identify and discuss:** Any other key areas of practice for this criterion.		

Criteria 2. Mana whenua engagement

Good Practice: Recognises there is no one-size-fits-all approach for engaging with mana whenua. Emphasises the need to understand cultural contexts, aspirations, and cultural processes. Ensures basic cultural competency of those engaging, and engage early in a project's conceptualisation.

Indicative example areas of good practice	Traffic light assessment 🟢🟠🔴	Evidence: Note areas where we have strengths, work proficiently, or need to improve
• **Build on existing relationships and local processes:** Actively seek to engage mana whenua through existing relationships, connections, and local processes, identifying relevant staff for early discussions. • **Preparation and awareness:** Invest time in understanding mana whenua based on available information and in-house knowledge, including current priorities, historical grievances, Treaty settlement status, and organisational structures. • **Cultural competencies:** Ensure staff engaging with mana whenua have basic cultural competencies, including understanding of tikanga, basic pronunciation, and key concepts. • **Early engagement and responsiveness:** Engage with mana whenua from project conception and remain responsive to their interests, processes, timelines, and iterations. • **Clear and flexible engagement:** Ensure mana whenua interests, aspirations, and contributions are clear and self-defined, with flexibility to adjust engagement as the project develops. • **Identify and discuss:** Any other key areas of practice for this criterion.		

Criteria 3. Shared vision and strategic alignment

Good Practice: Focuses on engaging with stakeholders to develop a shared vision that is strategically aligned with local values and broader sustainability goals. This includes utilising co-design and human-centred approaches to ensure that strategies are adaptable, inclusive, and scalable, addressing both local needs and broader environmental impacts.

Indicative example areas of good practice	Traffic light assessment 🟢🟠🔴	Evidence: Note areas where we have strengths, work proficiently, or need to improve
• **Early stakeholder dialogues:** Initiate dialogues with a broad range of stakeholders early in the project to develop a shared vision, ensuring alignment with local and broader sustainability goals.		
• **Inclusive direction setting:** Manage processes that engage diverse stakeholders, including government bodies and indigenous groups, to understand key value sets and refine project visions and objectives.		
• **Understanding local context:** Consider the social, cultural, and biophysical history of the place to align goals with the local context.		
• **Consider** the social, cultural, and biophysical history of the place to align goals with the local context.		
• **Continuous engagement:** Maintains ongoing communication and regular strategic alignment check-ins to ensure the vision and objectives remain relevant. Maintains ongoing communication and regular strategic alignment check-ins to ensure the vision and objectives remain relevant.		
• **Formal documentation:** Document agreements clearly to guide implementation and ensure accountability. Document agreements clearly to guide implementation and ensure accountability.		
• **Identify and discuss:** Any other key areas of practice for this criterion.		

Criteria 4. Working together: Partnerships and collaborations

Emphasises the establishment of respectful, balanced partnerships and collaborations. These efforts are typically smaller in scale and number, focusing on strategic, representative stakeholders to build on the shared vision and strategic alignment developed in the planning stage.

Indicative example areas of good practice	Traffic light assessment 🟢 🟠 🔴	Evidence: Note areas where we have strengths, work proficiently, or need to improve
• **Building trust and equity:** Establishes partnerships based on trust and equity, ensuring all contributions are valued. • **Strategic partnerships:** Forms collaborations across agencies, sectors, Māori, and other groups to address complex ecological challenges by integrating diverse inputs. • **Clear collaboration frameworks:** Utilises frameworks and co-design approaches that outline roles, expectations, and contributions to align all parties. • **Shared ways of working:** Develop a shared culture of working together, including managing shared tasks, conflicts and differences. Implements effective mechanisms to manage disagreements and maintain cooperation among partners. • **Shared decision-making:** Ensure all partners have meaningful input in collaborative decision-making while acknowledging the varying capacities of different groups. • **Identify and discuss:** Any other key areas of practice for this criterion.		

Criteria 5. Encouraging and supporting wider collective action

Good Practice: Focuses on fostering wider buy-in, collective action, and adaptive engagement at community and regional levels through approaches such as extension agents, behaviour change, and community development strategies. These scalable practices can effectively manage, grow, and sustain project impacts.

Indicative example areas of good practice	Traffic light assessment 🟢🟠🔴	Evidence: Note areas where we have strengths, work proficiently, or need to improve
• **Behaviour and goal alignment:** Clearly defines activities and goals necessary for achieving agreed outcomes with different groups of stakeholders, ensuring efforts are aligned towards measurable success.		
• **Practice change initiatives:** Implement approaches informed by the latest engagement and implementation science, while being culturally informed and responsive to community needs.		
• **Adaptive management:** Utilises adaptive management techniques to refine and adjust strategies based on ongoing feedback and changing conditions.		
• **Regular reviews and updates:** Conducts regular reviews and updates to strategies, supported by an integrated monitoring and evaluation system, to sustain engagement and ensure long-term success.		
• **Identify and discuss:** Any other key areas of practice for this criterion.		

Criteria 6. Capacity building, capabilities, and empowerment

Good Practice: Focuses on enhancing capacities and capabilities to support meaningful engagement and contribution across all key activity areas. This includes investing in both technical (hard) and interpersonal (soft) skills development and providing necessary resources such as funding, specialist input, and technical infrastructure.

Indicative example areas of good practice	Traffic light assessment 🟢 🟠 🔴	Evidence: Note areas where we have strengths, work proficiently, or need to improve
• **Resource allocation:** Manage resources to ensure access to necessary tools, specialist knowledge, and infrastructure, supporting the practical application of skills.		
• **Identify capability gaps:** Where needed, work with specialists to enhance programme capabilities, ensuring projects adapt to emerging challenges		
• **User-centric approaches:** Develop new tools and approaches with those expected (hoped) to adopt them. Build buy-in and capability of future users through engagement, and receive feedback and input on practicality and use of tools and approaches.		
• **Strategic and dynamic training programmes:** Implement training programmes to enhance both technical and interpersonal skills and knowledge, equipping stakeholders to navigate dynamic and complex challenges.		
• **Identify and discuss:** Any other key areas of practice for this criterion.		

Criteria 7. Design and scalability for impact

Good Practice: Addresses the assessment and integration of innovations, focusing on co-design to develop scalable tools and practices. Emphasises the importance of creating tools and approaches that can be expanded and adapted to different contexts while maintaining effectiveness and relevance.

Indicative example areas of good practice	Traffic light assessment 🟢 🟠 🔴	Evidence: Note areas where we have strengths, work proficiently, or need to improve
• **Scalable design**: Initiatives are designed from the outset to be scalable and impactful. Tools and approaches meet local needs and gain broad acceptance through comprehensive stakeholder engagement. • **Pilot testing and iterative development:** Implements pilot projects to test strategies in real-world settings, followed by iterative development to refine and confirm scalability. • **Clear scalability metrics:** Establishes specific metrics for scalability, covering people, activities, and social, ecological, economic, and cultural impacts. Incorporates cross-sector integration to leverage diverse insights and innovative technologies. • **Flexibility in tools and practices**: Designs tools and practices with flexibility to allow necessary adjustments based on ongoing feedback, ensuring sustainable impact across various contexts. • **Identify and discuss:** Any other key areas of practice for this criterion.		

Criteria 8. Monitoring, evaluation, learning and adaptation

Good Practice: Highlights the need for comprehensive monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that support ongoing learning and adaptation, ensuring continuous improvement in both technical and social aspects of projects.

Indicative example areas of good practice	Traffic light assessment 🟢 🟠 🔴	Evidence: Note areas where we have strengths, work proficiently, or need to improve
• **Comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework:** Implements a thorough framework for monitoring, evaluation, learning, and adaptation that supports programme planning and management, encompassing both technical and social metrics.		
• **Holistic assessments:** Extends beyond monitoring technical or biophysical states to include thorough assessments of processes and stakeholder relationships, ensuring a well-rounded understanding of project impacts.		
• **Performance reviews and reflection sessions:** Conducts regular reviews covering both quantitative outcomes and qualitative impacts. Integrates reflection sessions into decision-making processes to critically assess strategies, integrate lessons learned, and provide a foundation for continuous improvement.		
• **Diverse performance indicators:** Utilises a comprehensive set of quantitative and qualitative performance indicators, including complexity-aware monitoring, to provide evidence of outcomes - including impacts on community and stakeholder relationships.		
• **Innovative monitoring techniques:** Incorporates new monitoring techniques to evaluate the effectiveness of tools and user engagement, ensuring a comprehensive approach to adaptive management.		
• **Identify and discuss:** Any other key areas of practice for this criterion.		

Points to note when using this tool

This checklist-based assessment approach is useful to help develop the capacity of teams and organisations to reflect on their performance in specific areas, and to coordinate across areas. While the checklist is designed to be used by an external evaluator or facilitator, an agency or lead organisation that has facilitation skills within its own membership can usefully undertake its own evaluation.

Where participants feel they were doing well, it is useful to prompt them to think about the reasons why this is so. Where participants identify an area where they feel is a weakness, they could be offered an opportunity to work through why they think that (remembering that some people/teams are 'harsh markers') and develop steps that could be taken to improve performance.

Tips for use

The checklist encourages self-reflection, helping participants identify obstacles in their projects. It can also support more rigorous peer reviews with external project partners, ideally conducted collaboratively in person or via online platforms like Zoom.

- Start by checking in with key players about the broad vision they are aiming for. This review should include both formal goals (the initial objectives) and informal goals (those personally important to individuals or developed by groups).

- Effective facilitation is crucial to the success of the self-assessment approach. Evaluations can seem negative, as they often highlight weaknesses and gaps. It is important that participants see the assessment as supportive and owned by them, yet they should also be encouraged to think critically beyond the notion that 'everything is alright'.

- An organisation or group's openness to learning and development enhances readiness for improvement. Additionally, the more experience participants have with the activities involved in multi-stakeholder interventions, the more they will reflect on progress.

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