

A person wearing a light green long-sleeved shirt, dark pants, a cap, and a backpack with colorful horizontal stripes is walking through a dense, sunlit forest. Sunbeams are visible filtering through the trees. The person is seen from the side, looking towards the left.

**Fauna  
& Flora**

**Supporting Organisational  
Resilience in Partners:**

**8 Lessons Learned**

**June 2024**



Senior leaders from Fauna & Flora partner organisations at a leadership retreat in 2023. Credit: Bobbi Hope/Fauna & Flora

## 8 lessons learned to date from our Conservation Resilience Fund

### Purpose

This briefing document shares learning from the first 3 years of Fauna & Flora's Conservation Resilience Fund. This Fund was established in 2021 to support our partners become stronger, more flexible and better able to survive and thrive into the future.

### Summary

Organisational resilience strengthens conservation impact, so support conservation leaders to prioritise it and plan for it. It might not be considered an immediate priority so take time to build trust and cover partner costs of engaging in this work wherever possible. Think carefully about which staff to involve for maximum impact- the proverb '*If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together*' may apply. Support peers to learn from each other. Intentionally engage across barriers. And finally, flexibility of both funding and approach allows for greatest impact.

### 8 Lessons Learned to date

The fund was deliberately designed to be flexible enough to allow Fauna & Flora and our partners to think and act more strategically, respond to emerging challenges and needs, and to pilot approaches new to this context. Much was learned. In this briefing document we present 8 key recommendations for similar endeavours.

#### 1. Make the link between investment in organisational development and conservation impact

Stressed, overwhelmed and under-resourced local NGOs are not going to do their best work. They are also going to be particularly vulnerable to crisis events, failing to predict or even survive them. By emphasising the conservation value of investing in ongoing organisational development, it may be possible to leverage more resource and attention for these crucial activities.

These links are not always obvious, either to funders or to the leaders of any organisation stuck in a short-term loop of project fundraising and day to day firefighting. But the tangible adoption of relevant skills, systems and practices can result in increasing organisational independence and resilience, confidence & credibility. This, in turn, can have significant positive influence on an organisations ability to deliver impactful biodiversity conservation more efficiently and/or at greater scale.



Staff from Oceans Alive during a workshop in Kenya. Credit: Oceans Alive

*“The project has allowed [us] to develop Administration and Financial toolkits which have not only strengthened [us] institutionally but also raised our credibility as a donor-worthy investment”.*

**Oceans Alive Trust, Kenya. Extract from final sub-grant report.**

Take the time to gather and present empirical evidence that investing in organisational development in the short term – whether that be strengthening a financial management system, developing a communications strategy or updating governing documents– can have a direct impact on the quality and amount of conservation work the organisation and its staff are able to achieve into the future. We found that real-world examples were invaluable to bring these links to life.

Respect other ongoing conservation-focussed activities and try and co-ordinate with them, while still continuing to highlight the benefits of organisational development. We found it was important to try to plait organisational development and more direct conservation work together for stronger impact, rather than treating them as different strands led by different people.

## **2. Don't be discouraged if organisations struggle to prioritise the time for their own development in the face of more immediate issues relating to conservation action.**

Under this Fund, some partners took over a year to prioritise the time to explore their organisational resilience needs and develop a plan to address them. However, every single one of the organisations supported in this way stated that they were glad they had done it, valued the opportunity and space to discuss real and possible issues and

expectations, as well as challenges and solutions.

Bringing people to the metaphorical table can be supported by:

- Taking the time to establish strong and trusting relationships with clear and open communication channels.
- Covering staff costs for participating in and taking forward organisational development
- Agreeing and keeping deadlines, although listen and respond flexibly and empathetically when needed
- Recognising and respecting that initially it may not be the priority for overworked staff. Meeting them where they are and within the limits of what they can do is essential

## **3. When working with an organisation, think carefully about which staff members you engage in which initiatives.**

It may not always be the 'obvious' people. We make this recommendation for two key reasons. The first is that we found inviting a range of staff from same organisation to certain events helped ensure that different perspectives were heard, that there was wider organisational buy-in to any outputs and that there was more of a shared sense of responsibility for acting following the event.



Staff from Islas de Bahía Foundation (IB) during their strategic planning retreat. Credit: Chiaperio/Fauna & Flora. Credit: Sarai Mon Nye Nye Lin / Fauna & Flora

*“We have received and obtained support, not only financially but also technically. We have become a strong organization .... We have belief in ourselves... It is useful when we expand our activities.”*

**Nay Htut Tin, Marine Science Association, Myanmar**

For example, we facilitated a series of mentoring sessions with a Financial Management expert but ensured that a range of people were invited from each partner organisation, not just the 1 ‘obvious’ financial manager or similar. This enabled wider scale organisational understanding of and buy in to key changes that were then adopted into the wider financial management systems.

Secondly, while a strong organisation is one in which all staff have the necessary skills and experience to effectively deliver their responsibilities, a resilient organisation is one where staff have enough overlap in skills and knowledge to support each other’s roles, including during staff transitions and absences. It also contributes to strong succession planning at all levels of staffing. Over the first few years of this fund, staff turnover in some partners meant that individuals who were engaged in earlier initiatives left before changes could be embedded. Making opportunities available to a range of staff helped to future-proof to ensure any knowledge and skills gains aren’t quickly lost.

**4. There is value in having a plan, especially one that everyone buys into**

An Organisational Resilience Check tool developed under this Fund allowed organisations to

subsequently create an Organisational Development Plan. We received regular feedback as to how much these plans were appreciated. Firstly, because they were designed to be developed in a participatory way with staff at all levels of the organisation, organisations reported a much stronger shared understanding of priorities and shared goals at every level of their organisation. Secondly, the existence of a plan allowed a more guided and co-ordinated approach to addressing priority areas in a way that could also be monitored. This helped ensure that the people responsible for leading could be held to task, and it prevented organisational focus slipping back to just on project/grant-funded activities alone.

**5. Think very carefully about inclusivity and barriers to participation and how to remove these, but also accept there may be limits**

This grant operated globally across many countries, time zones, languages and cultures. We worked hard to try and reduce resulting barriers between partners and their access to opportunities. E.g. We ran online webinars at least twice in different time zones, as well as posted recordings on a publicly accessible website so people could listen at a time that suited them. We were aided by the rapid advances in online conferencing technology since the Covid-19 pandemic.

For example, we were able to offer multiple audio channels with live translation in up to 5 different languages during our online webinars and resilience festival events. We also appreciated the opportunities that moving webinars and other events online afforded, in terms of making access global for both presenters and participants. Finally, some 1 to 1 coaching sessions also took place with a translator present to ensure progress wasn't limited by lack of a shared language.

Nevertheless, there were limitations. Unsurprisingly we found that in-person interactions created higher quality and longer-lasting connections between participants. There were limits to translation opportunities too, with in-person translation notably more expensive and technically challenging. As a result, we ran some events, such as a 5-day leadership retreat, in English only, meaning it was ultimately only accessible for people with a good grasp of that language. This was done for a number of reasons, but included consideration of costs, session flow and maximising interactive opportunities between participants.

## 6. Harness the power of peer-to-peer learning

Within this grant we were determined to not replicate the traditional training delivery narrative of the international NGO 'transferring' knowledge, skills and funding unilaterally to a smaller recipient

organisation, with little contact between the different partner organisations. This desire to break from the norm was driven partly by a recognition that we were often not the most experienced people in the room, but also because sharing stories and experiences can help build trust. Trust builds strong relationships and networks. Strong external networks mean more support to help both identify and mitigate future crises but also better weather crises events. This can be as simple as a connection lending a generator during a power cut or as powerful as specific advice being shared on protecting against cyberattacks or shared evacuation procedures in a crisis. Strong external networks mean more resilient organisations.

To this end, we ensured the Fund had peer-to-peer learning initiatives, including funding exchange visits between partners around specific organisational resilience topics. We helped facilitate initial online Action Learning Sets between leaders of partner organisations in the anticipation they would continue independently into the future. We ensured that online events such as the resilience festival sessions included partner-led sessions, including case studies and Q&As. Finally, during events like the leadership retreat we endeavoured to build a strong trusting participant community that was totally independent of Fauna & Flora.



Surveying the sponge community in Gökova Bay. Credit Akdeniz Koruma Derneği

*"Now we have a better understanding of the data, we are working on data management... That helps us to evaluate and understand.... It is hard to directly relate this organisational development to biodiversity increase but now we have better understanding and more time. I have more time to spend in the field and to understand what is happening in the water. This is all connected, like the ecosystem itself, this is all connected with organisational resilience."*

**Funda Kok, Akdeniz Koruma Derneği AKD (Mediterranean Conservation Society)**



*“It is important to recognise that in our organisations, our day-to-day work is so absorbing that the institutional part, or the issue of institutional strengthening, almost inevitably lags behind... This is important because in our case we work with several partners. If one partner is weak this can affect everyone.. Resilience and projects should go hand in hand. Resilience is more than just taking care of our day-to-day business, it is about investing time and resources in strategic actions that can have an impact over time.”*

**Ana Paz, Fundación Cuero y Salado (FUCSA), Honduras**

### 7. It is possible to ‘over-facilitate’

It is important to note that sometimes peer to peer knowledge exchange could be over facilitated. We found that sometimes it was better to support people to get together but then get out of their way. An example of this was during our 2022 online resilience festival which was a series of independent events spread over a week. We set up a Slack channel for participants to have a place to ‘meet’ and connect outside of the individual workshops- however we saw really limited activity on the platform. Similarly, our attempts to replicate online ‘mingling’ sessions akin to coffee time at an in-person conference were also poorly attended. When we elicited participant feedback, however, there were a surprising number of people who said they had grown their networks as a direct result via linked-in invites, or private messages connecting with other participants during sessions. So we succeeded in helping people build their networks, but not in the way we had imagined.

So make space and time for relationship building. Create a structure, but also don’t be afraid to step back to let people find a way that suits them. And not everything will work – that’s ok.

### 8. Flexible funding is priceless

Flexibility existed at two key levels in the Fund. The first was for Fauna & Flora at the grant management level. The trust and broadmindedness of our donors allowed us to combine scaling up our existing tried and tested activities with piloting new approaches, such as partner exchange visits and online action learning sets. It also allowed us to pivot during the grant, effectively responding to areas of emerging need in a timely way that was relevant to all parties, and not obligating us to follow a plan designed unilaterally years earlier.

The flexibility of this funding was very much appreciated by our partner organisations. Making funding available for organisations to strengthen their internal systems and processes is rare. Funding so flexible that it can be adapted to meet each organisation’s individual priority needs is rarer still. The opportunity to apply for funding that could be adapted to their priority needs within the wider umbrella of organisational resilience was an incredible opportunity and enabled multiple conservation organisations to make real progress in such a wider range of areas.

## Fauna & Floras Partnership and Organisational Development Team

This briefing document was produced by the Fauna & Flora's Partnerships and Organisational Development Programme, a cross-cutting team with a global remit, supporting staff and partners in all Fauna & Flora programming.

Our programmatic vision is a world where strong partnerships and resilient partners have resulted in our partner organisations achieving and sustaining their conservation goals.

## Thank you!

We would like to thank Arcadia for their ongoing support towards our and our partners conservation efforts.

If you have any questions about this report or need further information about Fauna & Flora, do not hesitate to contact Chloe Hodgkinson on [chodgkinson@fauna-flora.org](mailto:chodgkinson@fauna-flora.org)



Underwater view of mangrove roots covered with colorful invertebrates. Tobacco, Guyana, Belize. Credit: Zafar Kizlikaya, Fauna & Flora

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