

Tool IV.

The Strategic Plan



Program of activities, Strategic Plan

A Model Forest's program of activities reflects the values, needs and management challenges at the community, regional and national level. It reflects the diverse values that stakeholders attribute to the landscape, while also addressing the needs of the community at large. In addition to traditional forest products, values may include food, medicine, recreation, fish and wildlife habitat, water quality and quantity, soil conservation, recreation, aesthetics and conservation of biodiversity.

A Model Forest's program of activities:

- Increases knowledge
- Assesses impacts
- Develops and tests new approaches to the sustainable management of forest-based landscapes and natural resources

A Model Forest partnership develops, applies, measures and monitors a package of projects that reflects its needs and expectations.

A Model Forest's activities and projects generally fall into a few program areas, including the following:

• **Partnership development and maintenance (including conflict mitigation):** Developing and maintaining partnerships, either through expansion or institutional capacity building, is an important activity for Model Forests. At a minimum, regular meetings help strengthen a Model Forest partnership. However, it is also important to hold capacity-building workshops and training sessions, particularly for those who are unfamiliar with working in an open, consensus-based forum. Model Forest managers assume principal responsibility for liaison with, and maintenance of, the partnership.

Because a Model Forest is a long-term initiative, it is important to maintain the interest and contribution of its stakeholders. This requires vision, patience and the constant and public advocacy of the Model Forest's supporters. Experience shows that three factors are critical to encourage and expand stakeholder interest and involvement: Networking between professionals and Model Forests, Collaborative projects and Involvement in the broader international dialogue on sustainable development policy.

• **Applied research:** Model Forests generally place more emphasis on putting research results into practice (applied research) than on undertaking new research. In the Model Forest context, applied research includes identifying and applying criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management. Some Model Forests carry out data gathering, resource inventories and information management as well. Usually Model Forests are not directly involved in land or resource management, which is the responsibility of tenure holders and management agencies, but they can help stakeholders do the following: Address their management issues, Develop tools to improve management and decision-making and Test and demonstrate innovative practices.

• **Community sustainability and livelihood development:** With few exceptions, Model Forest partnerships around the world place a high value on maximizing economic opportunities. However, they also recognize the need to balance economic activity with non-economic values.

- **Communications, public awareness and knowledge transfer:** Model Forests are expected to make the public aware of their vision, goals, activities and impacts. Communications and public awareness activities can build the public's interest in becoming involved in sustainable development. In many instances greater public awareness, combined with other activities, is an important element in achieving an objective or impact. A key activity for a Model Forest, then, is to share its achievements with others, both inside and outside its boundaries.

- **Capacity building:** Model Forests take on many activities to encourage local participation in sustainable management. These activities include internships, public participation processes and the development of tools that enable communities to integrate social, environmental and economic factors into decision-making.

- **Networking:** Every Model Forest benefits from sharing its experiences and learning from others who have developed local solutions to sustainability challenges. Often this sharing and learning are possible because of the links between Model Forests.

One way Model Forests can build links, as well as improve their performance, is to exchange information on events and developments involving sustainable development at all levels. Besides operating within the International Model Forest Network (IMFN), Model Forests also operate publicly and transparently within the broader community of resource management professionals.

Another way to build links is to participate in networking activities like these:

- Regional, MMFN and IMFN-wide events on specific themes(e.g., biodiversity, geographic information systems, local- level indicators of sustainable forest management)
- Technology transfer initiatives
- Web-based data storage and exchange
- Case studies and experiences in economic diversification
- Sharing of developments in decision-support tools
- Technical and expert exchanges between Model Forests



The IMFN established its Networking Committee to identify networking activities and encourage information sharing between Model Forests. As well, the IMFN Global Forum brings together Model Forest representatives from across the IMFN every three years.

- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Effective planning involves making sure that the impacts a Model Forest expects actually take place on the ground. Impact monitoring and evaluation lets a Model Forest measure its progress, assess whether its activities are leading to the expected impacts and make any necessary adjustments.

- **Management and administration:** A Model Forest should have enough funds in its budget to support a staff that is the right size and skill level for the size and complexity of the Model Forest. The mix of activities that a Model Forest adopts, and the importance it assigns them, will reflect local priorities and needs, since the activities are based on the choices made by stakeholders. The Model Forest group should be careful that the program of work is not simply a collection of individual initiatives, but is instead an integrated, mutually reinforcing set of initiatives that will lead to better management and planning in the future.

Steps in Model Forest Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is not always a clear, predictable or linear process. It does not always flow smoothly from one step to the next. Rather, it is a creative process that requires flexibility to meet the diverse needs of Model Forest participants.

Eight basic steps in Model Forest strategic planning can be identified

1. Getting ready

PURPOSE: To clarify the process involved and the information required for strategic planning.

OUTCOME: A plan of action that clearly states who will be involved, the information required, the steps involved in gathering and analyzing that information, the way the final plan will be written and communicated, the resources required and the critical timelines.

2. Doing a strategic analysis

PURPOSE: To identify, collect and analyze the information required to set strategic directions.

OUTCOME: A prioritized list of critical issues, needs and challenges that Model Forest stakeholders plan to address.

What challenges do your stakeholders face concerning the sustainable management of the landscape? What are the common elements?

What do your stakeholders require to be effectively involved in sustainably managing the forested landscape? What are the common elements?

What sustainable development challenges currently exist on the Model Forest land base?

What concerns do stakeholders have regarding the sustainable management of the land base?

It is important to pay attention to landscape elements that may be common to several or all stakeholders and those that may affect a particular stakeholder.

What are your country's and district's priorities in relation to the national forest program and natural resource management?

What international agreements, treaties and conventions are of interest to or apply to your Model Forest?

What constraints or impediments do you face to developing and operating an effective Model Forest?

What do your stakeholders need or expect from their involvement in the Model Forest?

What does the Model Forest want that it does not have (what are you trying to achieve)?

What does the Model Forest want that is already present (what are you trying to preserve)?

What does the Model Forest not have and not want (what are you trying to avoid)?

What does the Model Forest have now that it does not want (what are you trying to eliminate)?

Who is already working on areas that interest your Model Forest? What are they doing?

Are they already involved in the Model Forest, or can they become involved?

What is the potential niche or area of expertise for your Model Forest?

3. Setting strategic direction

PURPOSE: To establish consensus on the vision, mission, objectives and expected impacts of your Model Forest.

OUTCOME: Agreement on the vision, mission and objectives of your Model Forest, as well as a logic model outlining your expected impacts.

- What is your Model Forest's vision? Has it changed?
- Have you made progress toward achieving it in the past several years?
- What are the values that underpin your work?
- Are those values being adhered to?
- Is there any conflict between those values and what your Model Forest does or how it does it?
- Are the expected long-term impacts clear?
- Is your Model Forest clear about its final desired results?



4. Developing an implementation strategy

PURPOSE: To identify program areas and activities that will lead to achieving your strategic directions over the life of the strategic plan.

OUTCOME: Identification of, and agreement on, the program areas and types of activities the Model Forest must undertake to achieve its strategic directions.

In developing an implementation strategy, you should ask:

- What can our Model Forest do to achieve our vision and expected long-term impacts?
- What activities will accomplish this?
- Does what we are proposing make sense in terms of our strategic directions?
- Are there other things that we as a group should be doing?

The implementation strategy should contain the following:

- Overview of the general approach you will use to achieve your strategic directions
- Identification of who will be involved in the activities
- Overview of the outputs of the proposed activities
- Timeline for implementation (such as a Gantt chart)



An important component of all planning is prioritizing - determining what is most important. To organize your priorities, ask yourself these questions:

- What are your Model Forest and stakeholders best qualified to offer regarding the identified issues?
- Is anyone else already doing what your Model Forest can do? If so, what can your Model Forest add?
- In the areas where your Model Forest is most qualified, where can it make the biggest difference?
- Where will your Model Forest have the most leverage?
- What are the pros and cons of your selected actions?
- Will these activities make the best use of available resources?

5. Financial planning

PURPOSE: To identify the financial resources needed to implement your strategy as well as the sources of funding.

OUTCOME: Identification of financial and other resources required to achieve your strategic directions.

6. Identifying the governance structure

PURPOSE: To identify the governance structure that will enable your Model Forest to make effective decisions involving all stakeholders.

OUTCOME: Identification of an accountable, transparent and effective governance structure that suits your Model Forest context and complies with the laws of your jurisdiction.

What is the most effective way to involve people, undertake activities and achieve your strategic directions?

Do you have a transparent and accountable organizational structure that allows full and open participation by interested parties?

Does your governance structure include effective ways of involving new stakeholders over time?

Should any of your existing structures be changed? Are any additional structures required?

7. Putting the strategic plan together

PURPOSE: To consolidate the information generated during the strategic planning process into a single document - the strategic plan.

OUTCOME: Final strategic plan.

Three main groups should review your strategic plan:

1. Stakeholders - Once the draft is prepared, the larger stakeholder group must review it to ensure that their issues and ideas are included. This review, which can occur during a workshop, ensures consensus on the strategic plan and allows for a final approval.

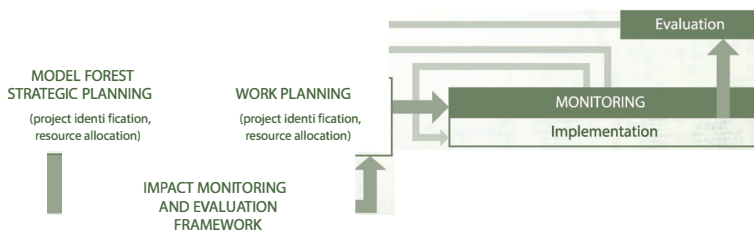
2. National or Regional Program Counterpart - The national or regional program counterpart and the national or regional sponsoring agency should also review the draft. This person or agency should also be involved in the entire strategic planning process.

3. International Model Forest Network Secretariat (IMFNS) and the MMFNS - The IMFNS and the MMFNS have considerable experience reviewing strategic plans and can offer sound advice on their content, structure and more. A review by the IMFNS and a regional network can also help link Model Forests for networking purposes.

8. Evaluating and revising

PURPOSE: To periodically assess the success of activities as your Model Forest works toward its strategic directions; to revise your strategic plan for the next planning period.

OUTCOME: Improved strategic plan and implementation of activities for the following year.



Other things to consider:

- Annual business planning
 - Framework for monitoring and evaluation of impacts
 - Communication strategy
 - Strategy for resource mobilization
- Secretariats Network and other Model Forests can advise you.

Without a sense of stakeholder ownership, the plan will not likely be put into operation.

Meeting and Workshop Requirements

Because Model Forest strategic planning involves a diverse group of stakeholders, it is generally carried out through a series of workshops and smaller meetings. The number of workshops and meetings depends on factors such as whether you have gone through a similar process before; how many needs, issues and challenges must be addressed; and how much time is available.

The planning process should involve several core workshops and meetings between smaller groups to discuss items and move the process forward. The gaps between workshops should be neither too long nor too short, so you can maintain momentum while enabling your members to commit the necessary time. Pauses between core workshops also provide time for reflection and extra consultation.

Length of Planning Process

The entire planning process, from initiation to endorsement of the final strategic plan, should be completed in three to four months. Otherwise, you will lose momentum and your planning efforts may stall or fall apart. A number of factors could affect the amount of time required for strategic planning:

- **The degree of commitment to the Model Forest and the strategic planning process** - Stakeholders must understand what a Model Forest is and why strategic planning is important. If there is little understanding or commitment, then you will have to devote time to increasing these.
- **The amount of new information** - The level of awareness of stakeholder needs, issues and challenges will affect the time required, as will the level of knowledge about national priorities and international conventions. A recent evaluation of your Model Forest and its programs could provide valuable information to speed up the process.
- **The level of agreement on priorities** - Major disagreements over current priorities and resources usually mean it will take time and energy for participants to agree on future priorities.
- **The level of trust among stakeholders** - The level of trust among those involved in the planning process can either hinder or support discussions.
- **Involvement of all stakeholders** - The more stakeholders involved, the longer the process may take. You may have to use different planning approaches to ensure the full participation of different stakeholders.



Sample Planning Process

What follows is an example of a brief planning process. It includes an introductory workshop and four core workshops, supplemented by smaller meetings and a final workshop. Please note that this is an example only and that you should develop a process that works with your Model Forest.

1. Introductory Workshop - This can be held during an already planned Model Forest stakeholder meeting. In this workshop, review strategic planning concepts and processes and develop a timeline. Next, establish a subcommittee to draft the strategic plan based on information generated during upcoming workshops and meetings.

2. Core Workshop: Strategic Analysis and Setting Strategic Directions - During this facilitated session, identify past Model Forest accomplishments as well as current stakeholder needs, issues and challenges. Emphasize the identification of landscape-level issues. Prioritize issues where possible and use them to establish strategic directions.

3. Supplemental Meetings - The drafting subcommittee summarizes the strategic analysis and strategic directions. As well, interested parties discuss any unresolved or contentious issues. Present the results of these discussions at the next core workshop.

4. Core Workshops: Implementation Strategy - You may need at least two core workshops to develop the implementation strategy. Hold supplemental meetings in between as needed, so that you produce the correct information and complete the strategic planning in a timely fashion.

5. Core Workshop: Governance Structure - This component may not require a full workshop and may instead be built into other activities. For a well established Model Forest, this step generally involves a review of the existing governance and decision-making structure.

6. Subcommittee Drafts Strategic Plan - Once the information is collected for the basic elements of your strategic plan, the strategic planning committee or drafting subcommittee should draft the plan.

7. Strategic Plan Reviewed by Others - Throughout the planning process, the national program counterpart, the IMFNS, your regional network and others should review the information and draft documents. Allocate enough time for feedback during the review process.

8. Final Workshop: Stakeholders Review and Endorse Strategic Plan - By this stage most, if not all, contentious issues should be addressed. At this final workshop, review your entire strategic plan to make sure it is coherent and feasible and meets your partners' needs.

- Description of the Model Forest area
- Key issues, challenges and stakeholder needs
- History of Model Forest development
- Strategic directions
 - Vision/mission
 - Objectives
 - Expected impacts
 - Logic model
- Implementation strategy
- Financial plan
 - Expenses
 - Funding
- Governance and administration
- Other
 - Signature page
 - Executive summary
 - Annexes