**Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Business Planning**

**Key questions:**

1. What are business plans, and how are they different from CAP plans or strategic plans?
2. For what projects or strategies should an operating unit develop a business plan?
3. What is an appropriate “unit” of business planning?
4. When should a business plan be developed?

**What are business plans, and how are they different from CAP plans or strategic plans?**

Business plans provide a comprehensive snapshot of the rigorous thinking behind our conservation projects, from conceptualization to execution.  A good business plan summary includes and builds on the information and strategies identified through strategic/conservation planning, but complement it with details such as phasing of work, staffing, financial analysis, funding plans, and risk assessment.

They clarify important details such as: why we are working where, what we are working on, how we will roll out or strategies, how we’ll know we are making progress, what we think it will cost when, how we will pay for it, who is presently working on it and what capacity gaps exist, as well as the critical assumptions and risks.

**For what projects and strategies should an operating unit develop a business plan?**

As a best practice, business planning should occur at all levels and for any significant project or strategy undertaken by TNC. In practice, however, business plans will likely only be required for any regional or focal area project/strategy directly linked to a “global priority.” The primary audience is TNC’s Executive Team and other TNC units critical to project execution (funding, government relations, science).

In addition, it is also recommended that business plans be developed for other projects/strategies that—relative to a region’s or focal area’s total conservation portfolio—have some mix of the following attributes: Large private fundraising goals; large budget; promise major conservation outcomes to donors; are especially complex; high risks (e.g., reputational, financial, legal, ecological); *and/or* high external visibility.

**What is an appropriate “unit” of business planning?**

In concept, a business plan can be developed at any organizational level, from an entire region to a single small project; if the scope is too large, then stated outcomes will be diffuse, stated strategies will be generic and it will be difficult to be both succinct and specific in making the business case.

In practice, the goal is to select “planning units” that allow articulation of a small number of compelling, explicit, time-bound and related conservation outcomes backed by a tight and succinct business case that provides enough detail to convince potential donors, investors and ourselves that the expected outcomes are feasible (e.g., financially, politically) and that we and our partners have the strategies, teams and resources to achieve them.

Identifying the right unit is an art because the problems were trying to solve and the solutions we propose are highly variable in scope and complexity and prospective donors have different expectations. We’ve posited a set of key questions to guide business planning and experience suggests that if the scope is right, a business plan can be summarized in about 20 detailed PowerPoint slides. Although there may be exceptions, if you can’t make a compelling case using this format, the planning unit is likely too large in scope (e.g., too many different major outcomes, too many different and unrelated strategies, too long a timeframe). In many cases, you’ll want to focus business planning on the big near-term intermediate results and related strategies that must be successful in order to achieve the expected longer-term outcomes. In general, the right planning unit is typically a single big cross-cutting strategy with specific outcomes or a subset of the major strategies in a very large geographically bound project.

**When should a business plan be developed?**

Business planning is a constant and iterative process, akin to adaptive management. TNC projects should develop business plans on a schedule mutually agreed to with the Chief Conservation Strategy Office, based on project leadership, team capacity, and organizational priority. Business planning is predicated on good conservation planning – a clear understanding of targets, opportunities and solutions, goals, threats, prioritized strategies, and progress measurement approach. Dedicated project leadership is essential. Plans developed without the direct involvement of the project manager and their teams are rarely implemented as written.