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# A Partnership Journey: Guide for Community Groups and Businesses



This guide is for community groups, including not-for-profit organisations, and businesses. It will help you develop partnership opportunities that address the climate and biodiversity crises.

More than 4,000 species are threatened or at risk of extinction in Aotearoa New Zealand. Our country has one of the world's highest proportions of species at risk. As the effects of climate change increase, threatened species and habitats will become even more vulnerable. Urgent action is needed.

### **Partnerships can be powerful tools for protecting nature**

Partnerships can offer numerous benefits. By pooling resources such as expertise, funding, equipment and volunteers, partners can maximise their collective impact. Collaborating in this way allows community groups to expand or sustain their efforts, reaching broader audiences and achieving greater results.

Partnerships also enhance credibility and public perception for businesses, as community groups often have strong networks and loyal supporters. These alliances can help businesses gain and maintain a social licence and enhance employee engagement. Ultimately, the value of partnerships lies in their ability to combine strengths, amplify efforts and generate lasting, positive change for nature and society.

We uphold the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi – protection, participation and partnership – which ground the recommendations in this guide.


As you read, please remember that each partnership is unique and there is no one-size-fits-all approach.

### **The guide focuses on:**

- What to consider before partnering
- How to connect and collaborate effectively
- Key factors and tips for delivering successful partnership projects

### **Successful collaborations are underpinned by several guiding principles:**

- Aligned values
- Creating mutually beneficial outcomes
- Trust
- Longevity
- Understanding power dynamics
- Relationship management – mana enhancing
- Collaboration
- Transparency
- Avoiding duplication
- Shared language
- Curiosity



**Ehara taku  
toa i te toa  
takitahi,  
engari he  
toa takitini.**

My strength is not that  
of an individual but that  
of the collective.





# Pathway to creating an effective partnership

Step 1: Build a strong foundation

Step 2: Get ready to engage

Step 3: Create a partnership agreement

Step 4: Evaluate and review the partnership





# Step 1: Build a strong foundation

## REPORT

WWF's recent Nature Positive Aotearoa report shows that investment in nature needs to increase by approximately 6.5 times the current spend – or \$22.5 billion per year – if we are to meet key targets under the Global Biodiversity Framework.

*“Environmental DNA (eDNA) allows us to filter water from a stream and identify captured DNA. This means we don’t need to capture fish to know they’re there, and we can identify rare species without exhaustive searching.”*

– Derek Craig, Kaipātiki Project

## COMMUNITY GROUPS

### Mission and values

- Articulate your organisation’s mission or vision, values and overarching goals.
- Identify your organisation’s key needs, for example:
  - investment (minimum three years)
  - resources (HR, legal, finance or marketing)
  - equipment
  - knowledge
  - business capabilities
  - brand recognition
- Understand the value your organisation can bring to a partnership with a business, including:
  - localised expertise
  - knowledge
  - on-the-ground resources
  - data to support reporting
  - community engagement
  - volunteer days

## BUSINESSES

### Objectives

- Understand the objectives you’d like to reach through the partnership, including:

#### Environmental

- Support your sustainability and nature strategies.
- Meet your targets and goals.

#### Social

- Strengthen your social licence to operate.
- Improve community engagement.
- Increase employee engagement.
- Enhance mātauranga (Māori knowledge)
- Ensure an equitable transition.

#### Operational

- De-risk your business e.g. physical risks, regulatory and legal risks, market risks and reputational risks.

#### Marketing

- Raise awareness of your brand.
- Be seen as a purpose-led company.
- Increase brand loyalty.

#### Legal

- Prepare for upcoming regulation and frameworks e.g. the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) or Science Based Targets Network (SBTN).

*“As part of our L’Oréal for the Future program, we actively seek partnerships that contribute to our nature regeneration goals, along with other interconnected sustainability priorities. The Puhinui partnership with Te Pu-a-Nga Maara stands out as a remarkable collaboration, as it fosters nature regeneration, empowers young women, and honours the invaluable indigenous wisdom.”*

– L’Oréal Group



# Step 1: Build a strong foundation

*“Our partnership funds were used to help finance jobs that contribute to a restoration vision led by the local community in line with mana whenua aspirations. Rangatahi are upskilled and offered paid employment in work that embeds local mātauranga Māori knowledge into their everyday mahi, with the goal of equipping them to one day lead their own restoration projects.”*

– Krissy Bishop, Te Pu-a-Nga Maara

## COMMUNITY GROUPS

### Data and outcomes

- Consider the social and environmental outcomes you are already delivering, including:
  - enhancing restoration for priority ecosystems and habitats
  - implementing recovery plans for at-risk species
  - providing employment opportunities for rangatahi (young people)
- Assess the environmental data your organisation captures, or could be capturing, that might be useful for businesses. Use technology e.g. Environmental DNA, water quality sensors or thermal-imaging drones in wetlands to reduce wildlife disturbance.
- Consider social data such as people employed or upskilled in protecting and managing biodiversity and numbers of volunteers.
- Identify your cultural and wellbeing indicators, including:
  - connection to nature
  - upskilling in mātauranga (Māori knowledge)
- Consider if your data could contribute to a wider data set like the Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy.

## BUSINESSES

### Investment considerations

- Consider the type of investment you want to make. Do you want to be actively involved or make a one-off donation? Do you want a long-term strategic partnership or one-off support for a campaign?
- Recognising that positive outcomes for nature take time, aim to secure multi-year funding. A minimum of three years is ideal, as it will support partner organisations’ planning for resources.
- Remember staff volunteer days have running costs that should be included in your overall budget.

### Build the business case

- Create a business case including the key drivers and opportunities for investing and taking action for nature.
- Consider taking the ‘head, heart and hand’ approach. Head is the data, heart is the emotive storytelling and hand is the skills needed.
- Present the business case to get buy-in and sign off from senior leadership for the partnership.



### TIP

Consider the type of investment you want to make as it will have tax implications. For example, donations are unconditional gifts with no benefits in return. You don’t pay GST and can claim a tax rebate. On the other hand, partnerships offer benefits like volunteering and impact reports and you do pay GST.



## Step 2: Get ready to engage



### TIP

Focus on outcomes you can report on easily. Don't over-commit, especially in the first year when the partnership is still in the development phase.

### COMMUNITY GROUPS

#### Get fit for partnership

- Define your organisation's partnership package and financial tiers, such as bronze, silver and gold. Ensure you add in deliverables (a tangible or intangible good or service produced as a result of the partnership) such as volunteering days, support with communications or storytelling.
- Be clear about the value of each tier, including the tangible and measurable outcomes. Note, these might need to be adapted depending on the business's needs.
- Consider including operational costs into your fundable packages.
- Before approaching a business, gather as much information as possible about its motivations and goals. Look online for its sustainability reports, sustainability or Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) strategy and targets. This research will help you tailor your approach.
- Funding from a business can come from different departments, e.g. corporate affairs, marketing or sustainability. Understand each team's needs and budgets. Can you consolidate and pitch to all of them?

### BUSINESSES

#### Understand your business's interface with nature

- Assess your interface with nature. Consider where you operate and the key locations in your supply chain.
- Assess your impacts and dependencies on nature in these areas.
- Impacts are the ways in which your business affects nature. The TNFD defines it as changes in the state of nature (quality or quantity), which may result in changes to the capacity of nature to provide social and economic functions. Impacts can be positive or negative. Examples of impacts include water use, carbon emissions, water and soil pollutants, pesticide use and erosion.
- The TNFD defines dependencies as ecosystem services that an organisation relies on for its business processes to function. Examples of dependencies include energy, water, land/soil, flood protection/defences, climate regulation, knowledge or data e.g. biomimicry or genetic information.
- The Sustainable Business Network can support you if you're not sure how to start.

### TOOL

[WWF's Risk Filter tools - the Water Risk Filter and Biodiversity Risk Filter - enable companies and investors to assess and act on nature-related risks to strengthen resilience.](#)

### REPORT

[Lyttelton Port Company's Nature-related Disclosures report demonstrates one way to describe the impacts and dependencies a business has on local ecosystems, and the risks and opportunities that arise to the business as a result.](#)



## Step 2: Get ready to engage

### TIP

Go to the business's website and social media channels to see how it talks about nature and community. Use similar language and imagery in your pitch.

***“It is with like-minded organisations that we want to forge and maintain long term relationships that will see us care for the whenua for generations to come. We are kaitiaki of right now and we must support this kaupapa to ensure the whenua is thriving where trees, birds, insects and people can live together in harmony.”***

– Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei

### COMMUNITY GROUPS

- Create a document presenting your partnership opportunities, tailored for a business audience. This is known as a ‘pitch’. It could be in the form of a Powerpoint presentation, Word document or a designed document. Free templates are available on Canva. Key elements to consider include:
  - your strategic mission or vision and goals
  - outcomes you can help a business reach
  - what is unique about your organisation
  - processes you follow to ensure rigour and credibility. Do you have a statement that details your finances, charitable status, governance, health and safety policies etc?
  - testimonials
  - photos of your organisation, such as your people and your work, to bring the document to life
- Reassess the business following the pitch to ensure it matches your values.

### BUSINESSES

- Prioritise impacts based on which are most material (important) to the business. There are different approaches to prioritising. You could focus on:
  - the potential scale and impact on business operations or revenue
  - specific locations where nature-related impacts are most acute
  - issues where stakeholders are applying pressure
  - where there is the greatest opportunity for positive impact
- Consider the type of actions needed to mitigate impacts and dependencies and help meet your goals.
- Research organisations and create a brief to send to community groups or NGOs. Try to be clear on desired outcomes and the level of engagement within the brief.
- When you receive a proposal from an organisation, arrange a face-to-face meeting to discuss it.
- Explore value alignment between organisations for long-term partnership and their ability to meet social, environmental and cultural outcomes.
- Provide feedback if you decide not to work with an organisation.



### TIP

Options for mitigating your impacts and dependencies include planting, wetland restoration, pest control, protection of marine or threatened species, system change or innovation.





*“When done well, partnerships have the ability to create impactful and mutually beneficial outcomes. They should never be considered as a transaction or done just to meet compliance. They should be grounded in Kotahitanga to create unity, togetherness, solidarity and collective action. They should also be fun!”*

– Stephanie Vercoe, Impact and Investment Lead, Sustainable Business Network

## Step 3: Create a partnership agreement

### COMMUNITY GROUPS AND BUSINESSES

#### Stakeholder engagement

- Understand the involvement and aspirations of mana whenua. Engage early and empower mana whenua to propose the scope and extent of their involvement. Understand their aspirations and how you can enhance them.
- Understand the cultural significance of the area and how it aligns with your project.
- Bring in diverse voices such as ecologists, scientists, iwi and hapū and key stakeholders from the business.

#### Look beyond finances

- Explore additional resources the business may be able to offer, e.g. equipment, access to land, knowledge, finance, communication capabilities, connections or opportunities for skill development.

#### Draw up the contract

- Together, draw up a formal contract with clear deliverables, timelines and flexibility for tweaking. SBN can support you with creating a contract or sharing best practice.
- Use plain language to ensure both parties have a shared understanding. Be curious and ask questions if unsure.

- Agree on Key Performance Indicators that are easy and realistic to measure, track and report:
  - Activity monitoring. Track progress against the restoration actions in your project plan, e.g. planting numbers, plant survival rates or number of possums caught in traps.
  - Outcome monitoring. Track the progress of your combined restoration actions towards achieving your project goals and vision, e.g. an increase in the number of bird species in your project area.
  - Keep in mind that ecological outcomes are long term. Even when a project is going well, there will be no detectable change within three years.
- If necessary, carry out baseline monitoring before the project begins to understand the current attributes of the site. Consider quantitative e.g. numbers, data and qualitative e.g. behaviour change, storytelling, interviews etc.
- Avoid burdening partners with complicated reporting requirements. We recommend reporting on how funds were allocated with associated invoices, if possible. Alternatively,

the community group could consolidate its work into one annual report for all funders.

- Applying a staged approach can be useful. Plan differently for years 1, 2 and 3 with long-term goals in mind.
- Keep in mind that partnerships between business and mana whenua can also be intergenerational, spanning 35 years or more. Map out key roles and responsibilities to avoid misunderstandings.
- Optimise the budget. Balance the time and resources spent on regular check-ins, requiring preparation and funds, with the actual programme delivery. This will ensure efficient use of the budget while maintaining effective oversight.

#### TIP

When drafting the contract, consider a meeting aimed at achieving a mutual agreement. We recommend a half-day workshop to foster relationship-building and provide ample time for discussing challenging areas. Having an external facilitator can be beneficial, as they ensure that all voices are heard, create a collaborative environment and support co-design throughout the process.



## Step 4: Evaluate and review the partnership

### COMMUNITY GROUPS AND BUSINESSES

#### Evaluation

- Evaluate and refine the partnership as it matures. Set key dates for reviews. Be open to honest discussions. Review what went well, what went wrong and improvements to help build trust.
- Allow for an annual review and flexibility to pivot to respond to external factors.
- Report on partnership successes by including interviews, stories and impact statistics in annual reporting.
- Look at how you can link the partnership into existing events or create new engagement opportunities. For example, do you have an annual sales team event or AGM that you could tie in with a volunteer day? What annual events, such as Matariki, World Environment Day, Conservation Week etc, could you amplify?
- Consider staff engagement opportunities. Can you plan a 'kai and kōrero' session or a volunteer programme?

#### Marketing and communications

- Work on integrating the partnership across all levels of your business.
- Establish nature education and training for every employee. Each employee should understand what nature regeneration is, why it matters and how the business is taking action. SBN can support you with training opportunities.
- Set up regular meetings with the senior leadership team to maintain buy-in on the value of the partnership. Encourage them to lead by example by getting involved in volunteering and field visits.
- Develop a marketing and communications plan to share your partnership progress and positive impact. Use storytelling to create meaningful connections.
- Explore using each other's communication channels, marketing and public relations abilities to enhance the partnership.
- Measure staff and community engagement, quantitative and qualitative, for reporting and marketing.
- Be mindful of greenwashing. Make sure you have done the mahi and gained respect before promoting the partnership.



***“The Adopt a Drain programme is about connecting community and businesses with their patch, their impact, and giving them simple tangible and regular solutions to work towards. We educate and then we continue to check in with inspiring and action-based solutions. A partnership in this sense doesn’t have to be financial, it’s about building trust to achieve mutual impact. A whole of community approach.***

– WAI Wānaka

#### REPORT

Auckland Council’s report on Lessons for successful Mana Whenua engagement shares tips for those who want to engage well with mana whenua, but who might not know where to start. These recommendations provide a starting point for ensuring engagement starts well and continues positively.



# Manaaki whenua, manaaki tāngata, haere whakamua.

If we care for the land, if we care for people,  
we can move forward into the future.





## How can the Sustainable Business Network help?

The Sustainable Business Network is Aotearoa New Zealand's largest sustainable business organisation, representing a diverse cross-section of the business and sustainability communities. We're at the forefront of change, driven by a vision of a world where people and nature prosper. We provide the tools, knowledge and connections needed to accelerate the shift to a sustainable future.

- **Training** – We can help your business identify its nature-related impacts, dependencies and risks. Co-create a tailored action plan to help you prioritise your next steps.
- **Invest** – We can match you with an impactful on-the-ground project that helps deliver multiple benefits such as environmental and social outcomes, meeting climate goals and avoiding greenwashing risks. Our selection process for projects is built on long-standing relationships with landowners, iwi and hapū, communities and local agencies. We provide regular reports and impact data to investors.
- **Volunteering** – We can create opportunities for you and your staff to get involved in these projects by volunteering time or donating resources.
- **Membership** – Join SBN to connect with like-minded businesses, upskill your team, tackle challenging issues together and share the great work your business is doing.

Please contact [gemma@sustainable.org.nz](mailto:gemma@sustainable.org.nz) for more information about SBN's Nature Programme.

Thank you to **Auckland Council's** Environmental Services team for your valuable collaboration in the development of this guide and for your ongoing partnership of [SBN's Nature Programme](#).

For a comprehensive study of the current state of play of business and nature that identifies key opportunities for businesses to take nature action. Please download our Report: [The Transformative Role of Business](#).

***“The protection of our native biodiversity requires a collaborative, systems approach including an active role for the private sector. SBN is playing a crucial broker role by bringing community groups and private sector closer together to unlock funding opportunities through meaningful partnerships.”***

– Sam Hill, General Manager Environmental Services, Auckland Council





[sustainable.org.nz](https://sustainable.org.nz)

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