

Collaborative Stewardship Starter & Builder Kit

Resource: What to Measure, How to Measure, and When to Measure

What to Measure

What to measure will differ depending on the collaborative's stage, goals, and capacity—there is no one-size-fits-all set of indicators. It is important for partners to agree on what matters most to track, how the information will be used, and to keep measures focused and manageable rather than create extra burden.

Assessing Pulse for Continuous Learning – Pulse assessments look at how the collaborative is functioning right now and where capacity may be building or stretched. Examples of indicators described below help support day-to-day decision-making, adaptive management, and learning, while building transparency and trust among partners.

- Clarity of shared purpose, goals, and land and/or seascape priorities
- Partner participation and engagement levels
- Partner satisfaction with the collaborative and its operations
- Quality of relationships, trust, and communication
- Effectiveness of coordination and facilitation
- Clarity of governance and decision-making processes
- Progress on early goals, milestones, and work plan activities
- Staffing and backbone capacity (e.g., time, roles, support)
- Partner bandwidth and ability to meet commitments
- Availability of technical expertise, data, or tools
- Early signs of stress, misalignment, or capacity gaps

Evaluating Impact or Change Over Time – Impact assessments in these stages look for early signs that the collaborative is gaining traction and building momentum. The indicators identified below demonstrate readiness for growth, inform scaling

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decisions, and show early value to partners and funders—while keeping the primary focus on learning and course correction.

- Increased partner trust, alignment, and shared ownership
- Increased quality and quantity of connections/relationships
- Improved coordination and resource sharing (e.g., information, data, equipment)
- Strengthened collaborative capacity (e.g., staffing, systems, processes)
- Early stewardship activities and outcomes completed or pilot projects launched
- Ability to attract new resources, funding, or partners
- Ability to leverage existing resources, funding, or partner expertise
- Enhanced partner cultural awareness and respect
- Shared learning practices in use (e.g., reflection, feedback, adaptation)
- Clear lessons documented to inform next stages

How to Measure

Assessing Pulse for Continuous Learning – Pulse assessments should be simple, practical, and realistic given available capacity. Common approaches include regular partner check-ins, short surveys, reflection sessions, simple dashboards, and basic tracking of actions and milestones. Capturing stories or partner feedback can also be useful. These methods help teams spot capacity strain, identify gaps, and make timely adjustments to coordination, staffing, and other support.

Evaluating Impact or Change Over Time – Showing long-term impact usually requires more structured approaches, such as baseline and follow-up assessments, tracking outcomes over time, interviews with partners or communities, and mixed-method evaluations. Periodic external reviews or support from academic partners or consultants can add rigor and credibility, especially when assessing collaborative performance, scale, and the value of capacity investments

When to Measure

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Assessing Pulse for Continuous Learning – Pulse assessments should happen regularly—monthly, quarterly, or around key decision points—to track progress, surface challenges, and support adaptive management. Early on, it is helpful to clarify questions, decide what to track, and establish simple assessment habits that are sustainable over time.

Evaluating Impact or Change Over Time – Impact evaluations are best done at key milestones, annually, or at the end of major phases or funding cycles. Over time, the timing and scope of evaluations should evolve with the collaborative’s maturity and resources, ensuring they remain useful, manageable, and aligned with stewardship priorities.

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