National Level Collaboration – setting up for success

A snapshot of what we learned from the establishment phase of the Predator Free 2050 national collaborative process

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Top tips for setting up national-level cross sector collaboration processes

1 **Socialise** collaboration intents early, **invite** key people and Te Ao Māori wisdom round the table to shape a high level collaboration structure, process and initial governance approach so shared decision making is clear. Talk about pre-conditions for success and any work that may need to be done before things get 'formally' started.

2 **Develop** a high level agreement or charter that documents collaborative intent and a shared commitment by senior leaders to working collectively. This provides mandate for agency participants and a mechanism around which to bring senior leaders back together at regular points to report collaboration progress, trouble shoot on any challenges, and sign off on next step plans. Keep collective agreements visible to all involved, with new partner organisations proactively encouraged to also sign up as they come on board.

3 **Bring together** those agencies where there's the greatest potential for work programme alignment and shared investment, this is different to a stakeholder approach.

4 **Be clear** at the start what you're asking others to collaborate on and have a light structure for getting started. Starting with clearly defined goals and deliverables helps maintain group formation, practical action and focus.

5 **Enabling cross agency alignments** does not mean giving up independence or autonomy. Be clear together about what collaboration means for your context, including what you'll do together vs continue to do on your own.

Top tips for setting up national-level cross sector collaboration processes

6 People round collaboration tables need to have mandate and be able to make decisions. At government level, this means tier 3 managers. Additional technical expertise can be brought in as required or to progress agreed follow on tasks etc.

7 Resource a collaboration backbone or support team that includes specialist partnering, facilitation, communications, Te Ao Māori, programme and administration support capacity. Backbones also play a key leadership role in driving collaborative aspirations and agreed work programmes forward.

8 Embed a learning frame into your collaboration's DNA, along with expectations that approaches, processes and structures will need to be adapted as the journey unfolds.

9 Where there's strong reluctance to actively participate in collaboration, be prepared to respectfully let people or agencies go.

10 Effective collaboration requires trust. There's no way to shortcut the time needed to build trusted relationships – they're best grown by doing together.

The collaboration imperative

It is increasingly recognised that addressing complex issues requires multiple stakeholders to work collaboratively to find better ways of planning, engaging, investing and leading together.

While there are principles that can be applied, there are no perfect models or failsafe recipes. This is new, courageous work, requiring attention to relationships and a collective commitment to iterate 'best fit' approaches in real time as agencies begin their work together. This frequently involves both doing differently and doing some different things.

The Public Sector Act 2020 clearly signals greater expectations of a more agile and collaborative public sector in Aotearoa. Being and working with government agencies as partners in collaboration brings additional challenges and learning for all involved

This Snapshot shares learning from doing in the establishment phase of the Predator Free 2050 (PF 2050) national collaboration process. In sharing top tips and key lessons from their journey so far, DOC and its collaborative partners hope to support the path of other collaborative cross-sectoral efforts.

About Predator Free 2050

In 2016, New Zealand set itself the ambitious goal to rid New Zealand of rats, mustelids and possums by 2050. PF2050 has brought together central and local government, hapū and iwi, philanthropy, non-government organisations, businesses, innovators, science and research organisations, communities, land-owners and individuals to focus collectively on enabling the predator free aspiration. Over the last 5 years, collective action and investment has been enabled at local, regional national levels. A report analysing success against the seven interim goals is available from the DOC website.

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[1]   https://www.doc.govt.nz/moving-towards-pf2050

Setting up a national collaborative process

The Department of Conservation were designated as the lead agency to develop and lead the national strategy for making New Zealand predator free by 2050[1], with a national strategy and 2025 action plan approved by Cabinet in December 2019. The need to strengthen national-level coordination across key contributing agencies, and to move from separate action to collective impact, was identified early on as one of the key shifts required to deliver PF2050 outcomes.

In 2018, while there were some examples of cross-government coordination and policy development, there were few precedents at a national strategic level for involving a wide and diverse gathering of iwi, government and non-government organisations in collective planning and investment.

The aim of the national PF 2050 collaborative was to enable:

> shared leadership and ownership of the PF2050 vision and journey.

> role clarity – with clearer lines of sight between strategic goals, investment priorities and work programmes.

> strengthened relationships and coordination of activity across key agencies and workstreams.

> shared accountability for progress towards jointly identified goals and targets; and

> shared learning to facilitate continuous improvement.

For more on the set up of the PF2050 nationally collaborative process see Appendix 1.

Learning from doing – setting up for success

During February-April 2021, a developmental review involving participants involved in the PF 2050 collaborative national process was undertaken to assess how things were going so far and if/what iterations to the current collaborative model needed to be made for the next phase.

While a separate internally focused Reflective Review Report discusses findings and next step actions for PF2050 in more detail, this Snapshot summarises some of the higher level key learnings from establishing cross sector national collaboration processes. It brings together both perspectives of national collaborative process participants and the author's own 'outside in' reflections from the PF 2050 national collaborative journey so far.

Setting the Right Foundations

Right relationships

Start with an honest check-in on health of existing relationships. Where there are tensions, longstanding or unresolved issues, or points of potential conflict on the horizon – proactively raise and address these early and collectively. Talk things through, accept there will be discomfort, find points of shared commonality and craft principles and processes to guide your work together.

Shared pathways and anchors

Sit down with key players likely to be involved in collaboration and talk through ideas for getting started, actively invite others to input to shape collaborative models or frameworks before things get started. Intentionally discuss the kind of collective leadership needed to enable success at national and/or systems level and tease out different roles, responsibilities and mechanisms to facilitate shared governance. In some cases collective leadership structures may already exist, while in other cases they may need to be intentionally created and/or mandated to guide and oversee emerging collaborations.

Tools such as Collaboration Charters can be a useful call to collective action and way to invite and secure early commitments to collaborate across diverse agencies. They also provide relationship building opportunities at senior levels and a mechanism to bring people back together at key points, whilst also providing an initial lightweight governance mechanism. Socialise draft agreements well ahead of signing time, keep Charter intents visible to participants in the collaboration process that follows. Proactively invite opportunities for others to sign up as they come on board.

Strong, compelling vision

Starting with a clear call for collaborative action puts the end target out front from the very start. It enables people and groups to more easily align efforts and stay on track - especially when things get difficult, which they inevitably do.

Big, bold visions also require agencies to be more courageous and actively take on more risk by trying new or different things, including taking more directive leadership roles to bust existing silos and BAU. Vision champions can also be useful – inspiring, respected leaders based across the wider system and at different levels who can actively cheer-lead and encourage participation and commitment towards the big goal that's been set.

Kaitiakitanga and mātauranga Māori

The reality is that any new collaborative process seeking to authentically involve Māori to enable kaitiakitanga and embed mātauranga will be hampered by legacies of Crown/Iwi relationships. Traditional Pākehā collaboration models that see one or two Māori included on working groups or creation of a stand-alone Māori group or caucus, fail to enable processes, principles and approaches that are truly driven by Māori themselves in ways that work for them. This may mean that different start points need to be enabled and specialist Te Ao Māori expertise brought on board early to convene and broker conversations to determine most appropriate pathways ahead, including resourcing to support participation.

People and Power

Collaboration parameters

Working together to enable shared outcomes doesn't mean participating organisations have to give away their autonomy or independence. Not everything has to be collectively decided, owned or shared. What does matter is getting clarity early on what collaboration means in the context of those participating so that different parameters, mandates, accountabilities and constraints can be openly discussed, understood and navigated. Management of responsibilities and accountabilities to both collaborative partners and Ministers is especially important to discuss openly.

Egos in check

Successful collaboration requires that egos be left at the door – they're not helpful, and frequently result in competitive, self-serving behaviour that stands in the way of finding shared understandings. Diverse perspectives are important but when they stay in silos they retain their power and reinforce difference rather than commonalities.

Equity of participation

When collaborations involve both government and non-government agencies, power imbalances need to be talked about early so that it's shared and equitable. Not all agencies have the same resource base or ability to participate in national collaboration processes. Find ways to support participation - financially and in kind e.g. supporting travel etc, enables power to be more evenly shared.

Government as an enabler

The 2020 Public Service Act brings with it a need and an opportunity for the public sector in Aotearoa to change traditional views about core roles. It encourages a new dynamic, whereby legislative and consultative roles are expanded to include facilitation, convening and enabling. Greater provision for power sharing also provides scope for new collaborative structures and accountabilities to supplement and/or replace direct accountabilities to Ministers.

Taking advantage of this opportunity requires both government and non-government partners be open to new possibilities and proactively push boundaries to create new fit for purpose collaboration tools and mechanisms that support joint decision making, shared leadership and co-investment potential. It also requires government partners to act actively share expertise and trust communities – helping them to build their capacity to lead and deliver too.

Working with community

Different ways of being

While government departments understand each other well and expectations are more easily managed because they're working in the same system, collaborations involving a mix of government, non-government and iwi partners bring a different set of dynamics. Government cannot behave or act with the same urgency or flexibility that community, iwi or private sector agencies can. From a government perspective, this means acknowledging that local or community-based action and expectations of what's possible will always be ahead of you. From the community side, it means taking time to understand government processes, accountabilities and ways of working to understand both the constraints and opportunities that partnering with government brings. Openly acknowledging what's possible and what's not in real time can reduce frustration and also provide opportunities for new 'work arounds' to be found.

Community voice, participation and connection

While coordinated government and national level approaches are important, they don't exist in isolation from communities. In fact, most of what's decided at national collaborative tables is ultimately aimed at improving effectiveness 'in place' - in regions and local communities. Connections between national, regional and local collaborative processes are important to consider as various processes develop. Finding best ways to involve and embed community experience, mindsets, voice and realities is critical so that what is devised at national level also pays attention to community and how things will land on the ground.

Aligning Strategic and Operational Collaboration Commitments

Clarity of delegation

Commitments made by senior leaders to support collaboration must be supported by clear internal direction around mandate, expectations and resourcing so that as things get 'delegated down' that clarity is enabled early for representatives participating in cross sector collaborations. Leaving it to agency representatives to work this out for themselves means that early opportunities to signal strategic priorities are often missed, internal agency buy-in reduced with potential for 2nd tier managers to divert energies of 3rd tier collaboration participants elsewhere.

Make time requirements as explicit as you can

Signalling upfront, likely time commitments of collaboration participants in the first year is important to help build capacity and continuity of attendees. Active participation in collaboration means capacity to do more than go to meetings. Starting with an estimation of hours provides a 'no surprises' frame and allows participants to secure resource to support their full participation and/or signal constrains on their time up front.

Internal alignments to enable collaborative intents

It's difficult to collaborate on big goals with external partners if organisations aren't also able to 'rewire' internally to power up capacity for some new delivery intents. Collective leadership commitments create expectations that resources and action will follow.

Equipping the Backbone Team

Skillsets

A range of essential skills have been identified for a collaboration backbone:

> Deep understanding of the nuances of **partnership, stakeholder management and collaborative practice** that supports group formation, working through 'chaos' and development of partnering tools and mechanisms to proactively iterate processes and improvements in real time.

> **Te Ao Māor**i –indigenous expertise and a network of iwi/Māori relationships within the backbone team is advisable so that cultural considerations and conversations can inform model and process development from the very start.

> **Specialist facilitation skills** to bring and confidently hold diverse groups of people together and work through any conflict if and as it arises.

> **Administration support** – to convene hui, prepare agendas and summary meeting notes focused on action points that come promptly back to working groups to encourage early action.

> **Programme support** – that provides financial, planning, policy, brokering and budget expertise to support collaborative groups with their work.

> **Communications** – to cross fertilise and share emerging thinking and action across different participating groups to help prompt further alignment, connections and opportunities.

> **Leadership** – to drive shared agendas, including working with lead government agencies to link and leverage commitments across government agencies. The latter is more easily achieved from within government, than pushed from outside.

Capacity

Resourcing establishment of multi-layered collaboratives requires a multiskilled team with dedicated capacity. While this may be grown over time, collaboration support resource requirements shouldn't be underestimated, with 3-5 FTE the norm for backbones of most North American collective impact initiatives.

Time and Urgent Patience

To build trust based relationships

Collaboration is built on trust, which takes time to build and develop. It can't be rushed. Meeting and doing things together the best way of building connections. Making time within collaboration processes to informally gather, share kai and get to know people as people is also vital.

Growing Collaboration Cultures

Mindsets

Working collaboratively with other agencies to achieve shared goals is hard work and requires understanding that power must be shared, compromises often found and new ways of working enabled by talking, planning and doing together. It's a different BAU, that requires deep listening, attention to relationships, good two-way communication to feed information to and from your agency and putting your hand up to contribute to agreed tasks.

Constant communications

Engagement with senior leaders need to be more than 'one off' as things get started. Regular communications updating progress, as well as organising annual processes for senior leaders to come together helps maintain interest, commitment and buy-in.

Regular updates to all collaboration participants are also key to building a broader shared sense of activity and momentum. It provides opportunity for additional connections to be made and further collaboration opportunities sparked.

Technology

Shared technology platforms that enable shared data storage and access to information and online communication are essential. They're also problematic for government departments with strict and often inflexible security/privacy requirements that limit use of common tools. This barrier needs to be busted now so that technology effectively supports collaboration in a way that works for everyone.

Focus on commonalities

When and as things get fraught, it's important to focus on what collaboration partners have in common rather than what divides them. Reminders of high level shared outcomes can help bring people back together, noting that a commitment to collaboration doesn't mean that everything has to be done together. Aligned intents can also be supported by diverse tactics and different approaches led by different partners.

Creating Structure – but not too much

Adapt as you go, learn to improve

Embedding learning and adaption into core model design means that starting collaboration structures and governance processes can be relatively light weight and evolve as things progress in real time so that they are fit for purpose. Gathering regular feedback is essential to both inform collective learning on progress to date and support proactive decision making on priorities for next step iteration and adaption.

Rob and duplicate

In collaboration, while there's a need to provide room for groups to create their own approach, not everything has to start from scratch. Having group or workstream planning templates that sit within an overarching shared framework means that people don't have to spend too much time on process and can focus on building content instead.

Appendix 1 – Predator Free 2050 National Establishment process

A relatively lightweight collaborative structure that used collective impact principles[2] was framed, with the intent to get started and iterate collaborative processes and models with those involved in real time. Key elements within the PF2050 national collaborative framework were:

> creation of a high level PF2050 Collaboration Charter to build visibility of PF2050 and secure participation and buy-in to a national collaboration process. A Charter signing breakfast was hosted by the DOC's Director General and attended by the leaders from several national organisations.

> setting up six collaborative workstream groups[3] made up of 6-10 representatives from key national organisations, with a group lead/co-lead appointed by group members. Groups generally meet monthly, with some sub-group work in between, via a mix of virtual and face to face gatherings.

> each workstream group developing shared priorities and an action plan, with the process for preparing the latter determined by each group. Next phase work is currently underway with Treasury to prepare a joint investment plan and 2022-23 budget bids aimed at resourcing priority investment areas and enablement of the wider national PF2050 strategy.

> backbone support from a dedicated PF 2050 Collaboration Support unit within DOC tasked with programme and process leadership, coordination, facilitation and group work programme support. As of March 2021, 2.25 FTE staff were supporting the national collaborative process.

> regular meetings of the leads and co-leads (Leads Group) from each of the six workstream groups to share information, oversee implementation of the national level collaborative work programme and inform process and programme improvements.

It was envisaged the collaborative groups would be set up in the first 12 months. However, this process took longer than expected due to availability of key agency personnel, resourcing, the onset of COVID-19 and the pressure of other work programme priorities. The first Collaborative Leads Group meeting happened 20 months after the first workstream group was established in November 2020, with the group quickly finding their feet and determining their collective leadership role going forward.

Around 50 people from over 30 organisations are currently involved in the PF2050 national collaborative process. Participating organisations cover time and travel costs for their staff to attend meetings and undertake agreed tasks. DOC covers the core costs involved in supporting the national collaborative process, including meeting venues/catering, coordination and programme support staff time.

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[2] https://www.collectiveimpactforum.org/

[3] A process for establishing collaborative workstream groups was piloted with the first two groups and then used for following groups as they were established. This involved a 2 day offsite hui that was a mix of relationship building, sharing current PF work programmes and collaboration aspirations, scoping of shared priority areas and next steps, along with principles and processes for working together.
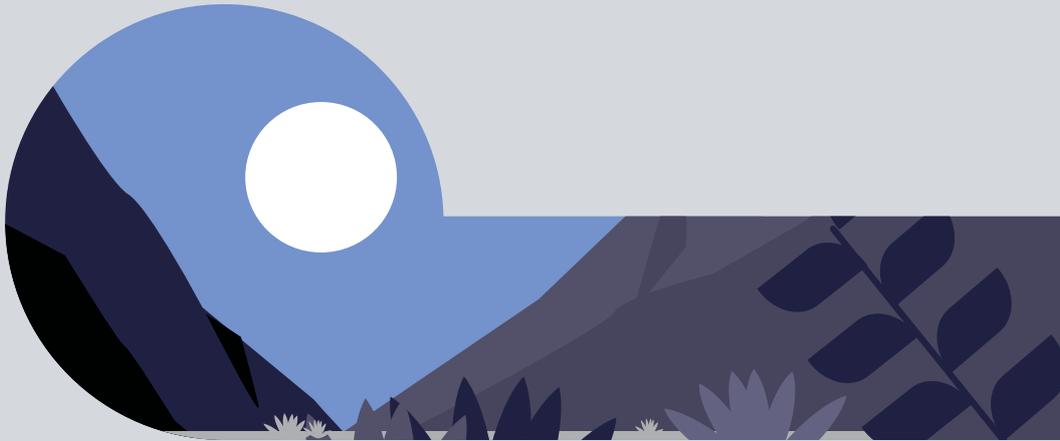
About Predator Free 2050

Predator Free 2050 is an ambitious goal to rid New Zealand of the most damaging introduced predators that threaten our nation's natural taonga, our economy and primary sector.

Predator Free 2050 (PF2050) brings together those who envision a flourishing Aotearoa with abundant native wildlife and forests. Communities, iwi, experts, businesses, government and non-government organisations, and individuals like you are all working together to achieve it.

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About Powerdigm

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