

Lessons Learned Guidelines

What are “lessons learned”?

It is likely that in a project there are some things that you think would be valuable successes worth replicating in a new project and others that would be best not to repeat and do differently if you had the chance.

We refer to these reflections as “lessons learned,” and they can be powerful learning tools not only for you but for conservationists who will work on similar projects in the future. That is why we request them as part of your CEPF project’s final completion report.

Why does CEPF want to collect lessons learned?

Our intention is to share and use knowledge gained from your experiences working on CEPF-funded projects to promote the recurrence of successes and prevent shortcomings. We aspire to learn from one another, to be more efficient and effective with time and funding, and most importantly, to have the knowledge to replicate successful practices and avert undesirable outcomes.

What does CEPF do with your lessons learned?

Lessons learned are available in the final completion report of the [grantee projects](#) uploaded on the CEPF website. Some lessons learned may be compiled and featured in CEPF’s [learning library](#).

When should lessons learned be documented?

All CEPF grantees prepare a final completion report at the end of their project, which includes a section devoted to documenting lessons learned during the project. This section is best completed as a group activity when the team can reflect on the topic. Keeping track of lessons during project implementation is also a useful exercise.

What kind of lessons learned is CEPF looking for?

We are looking for lessons learned from every phase of your project—conception to close-out—that other grantees and conservationists may find useful. What challenges did you face and what advice would give another conservationist who encounters similar challenges? Additional questions that may help lead your thinking include:

- Was your project well thought out at the letter of inquiry level? Were risks identified and mitigated?
- Was your project timeline appropriate? If not, why?

- Was your team as efficient as possible? If not, why?
- Were all of the appropriate partners involved and were they involved at the appropriate times?
- Was your approach aligned with your project objectives?
- Did your project have the impact that you expected? If not, why?

Five steps to identify a lesson learned:

1. **Reflect:** It is important to discuss with your team what went well during your project and what didn't.
2. **Identify:** Reflecting will lead you to identify learning points by understanding whether there were any differences between what was planned and what actually happened. Those differences may be positive or negative. Note that what may be perceived as negative or a failure could be useful to future CEPF grantees.
3. **Analyze:** Take those learning points and analyze them. Why was there a difference between what you wanted to happen and what actually occurred? What were the root causes for those differences?
4. **Explain:** Now that you have analyzed what happened and identified what did not go according to plan, can you pinpoint what should be done in the future to avoid this shortcoming, or to repeat a success?
5. **Document:** Describe your lessons in your project's final completion report.

What information should be included when documenting a lesson learned?

Lessons needn't be long—a few sentences should suffice. We suggest detailing your lesson in two steps:

1. **Event:** Describe the challenge you encountered.
2. **Recommendation/solution:** If the event had a negative impact on your project, how did you solve it or what recommendation would you give to future grantees facing a similar obstacle? If the event had a positive impact, explain why you believe it was important to the success of your project.

Examples of lessons learned:

- We shared our project plans with community members, but we did not do so soon enough. In retrospect, we should have consulted them during the design stage instead of after we had already begun the project. If we had, they could have shared their concerns before our strategy was already in place. After we did

meet with them, we were able to adjust our plan so that they were satisfied, but it took extra time and money to make the changes.

- Before designing our management plan, we completed household surveys, key informant interviews, field visits and trainings. This helped us gather traditional knowledge about how to best manage the area's natural resources. As a result, we were able to design a better management plan.
- When we held our first two community meetings, there were no women in attendance, only men. At first, we assumed the women simply weren't interested in our project, but then we found out that it was because we were scheduling the meetings at times when women needed to do their household chores. When we changed the time of the next meeting, half the people there were women! If we had considered gender earlier, we would have had women participating from the beginning.

Additional Resources

- [A Guide to Capturing Lessons Learned](#), The Nature Conservancy