River Catchment Restoration Fund Community Engagement and Benefit Realisation Strategy

Developed by Fisheries Management Scotland for use by river restoration project developers applying to the River Catchment Restoration Fund

April 2025

Contents

1. Introduction

There are many existing and emerging community benefit and engagement standards, guidance documents, and frameworks for ecosystem restoration work in Scotland including the National Standards for Community Engagement[1], the Learning, Evaluation and Planning (LEAP) Framework[2], the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Inclusion Good Practice Guidance[3], and the Community Inclusion Standard[4] which is a FIRNS-funding project that is still in development at the time of this writing. The aim of this report is to take aspects of these standards to produce a Community Engagement Strategy for the upcoming River Catchment Restoration Fund[5] (the Fund). The strategy is also designed to sit alongside the Fund's Monitoring Framework and align with Scottish Government policy[6]. This strategy is intended to support river restoration project teams interested in applying to the Fund by providing guidance on how to approach and integrate community engagement into their work.

A key goal of the Fund is to enable more holistic, inclusive river catchment restoration work. This integration can facilitate mutual learning, trust building and can increase awareness and support for the project itself. It is important that project teams feel empowered to take a proportionate engagement approach that is suited to their local context as well as the size and type of project. River catchment restoration can be a complex undertaking. Our aspiration for the Fund is that projects not only have a legacy of ecological improvement, but also that project teams build relationships with their community in the process and learn how to adapt their engagement approach in the future to fit their community's needs.

The Fund will support a range of projects that improve river ecosystems – see Figure 1 overleaf for a few examples. The Fund will also support community engagement initiatives that have clear objectives and may help to facilitate further restoration work in the future.

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[1] National Standards for Community Engagement | SCDC - We believe communities matter
[2] LEAP: A manual for Learning Evaluation and Planning in Community Learning and Development: Revised Edition
[3] Inclusion good practice guidance | The National Lottery Heritage Fund
[4] Community Inclusion Standard (Nature Finance Certification Alliance) and associated Route Map (Scottish Land Commission)
[5] This fund is in development as of March 2025 and is a collaborative project led by Fisheries Management Scotland.
[6] In its Natural Capital Market Framework, the Scottish Government highlights that one of the six principles for responsible 'high integrity' investment is community engagement and benefit. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 aims to promote communities having a say in decisions that impact their lives.
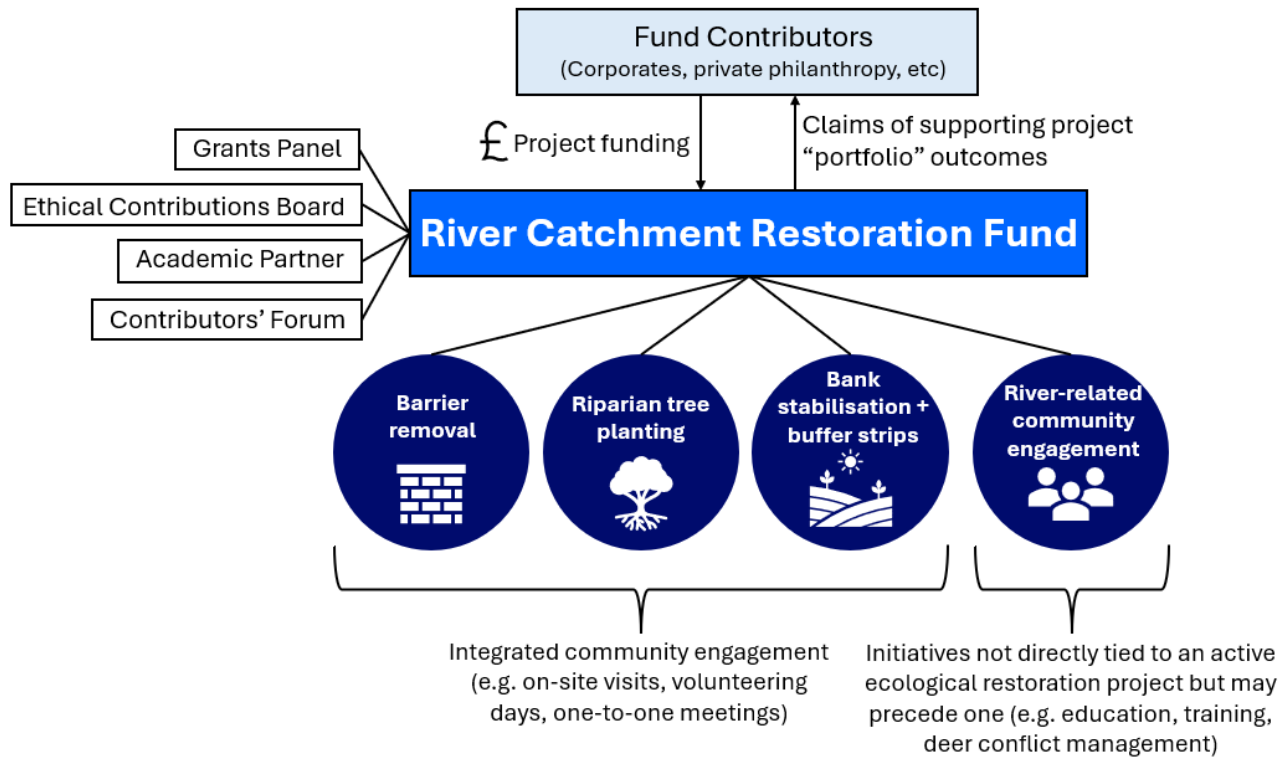
Figure 1 Indicative examples of projects that could be supported by the Fund

To communicate community engagement to contributors[7], the Fund is exploring a '**Community Benefit and Engagement**' outcome[8], which could sit alongside the more ecological-focused outcomes from the Fund's Monitoring Framework[9]. This community outcome could showcase to Fund contributors that wider benefits are being pursued through project work. Detailed community engagement information for each project may not be relevant to Fund contributors, so there could be high-level metrics collected from each project which could be "rolled up" to the Fund level for reporting purposes and presented in a simple infographic or dashboard[10]. See Figure 2 overleaf.

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[7] In the recent FIRNS Source to Sea project, a preliminary corporate engagement report found that corporations being targeted for a 'Source to Sea' Fund were interested in seeing community benefits and engagement as part of projects they supported, especially if they aligned with in-house engagement strategies.

[8] These outcomes will be market tested with potential contributors in the next phase of the Fund's development.

[9] The Fund's Monitoring Framework lays out a process for restoration project teams to monitor project outcomes and communicate this to fund contributors. The Monitoring Framework can be accessed here.

[10] For example, see The Rivers Trust Catchment-Based Approach summary graphic or SMEEF's infographic

Key outcomes supported by the River Catchment Restoration Fund

Biodiversity and Ecosystems

Cold, Clean Water

Water Quantity

Climate Adaptation and Resilience

Community Benefit and Engagement

Select quotes / stories / photos from project teams or community members

250 school children visited a river

75 volunteers engaged in project work

25 farmers supported

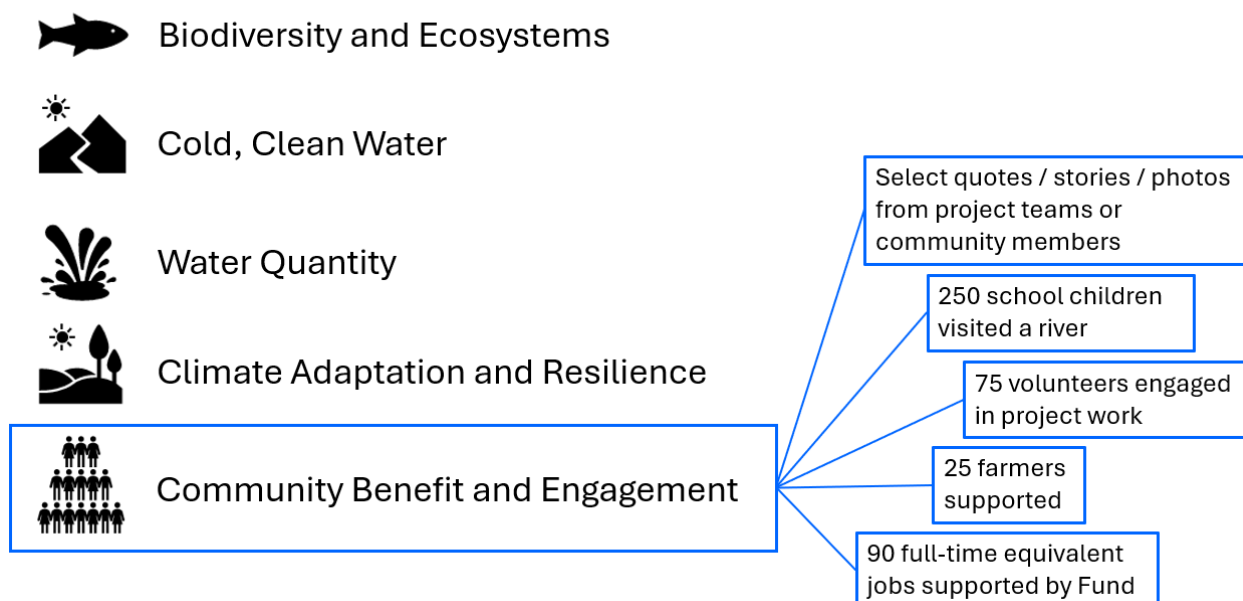90 full-time equivalent jobs supported by Fund

Figure 2 Fund outcomes and examples of engagement metrics that the Fund could report to contributors

The focus of this strategy will be on community engagement rather than community benefits since, in many cases, engagement is the route by which benefits are generated and can help project teams understand how the community would like to be involved[11]. This strategy is meant to be approachable to organisations and projects of all sizes and is meant to be adaptable as the Fund continues to develop.

2. Definitions of Key Terms

There are many definitions for "community". For the purposes of this strategy, "local community" is defined as the group(s) of people who live in or relatively near the restoration project site and would likely be impacted by a disruption to the *status quo*.[12] This will, of course, vary by restoration project, but will usually include the landowner. It could also include farmers and even those living downstream of the restoration site. "Community" can also refer to "community of interest" or those who spend time in or around the restoration site such as anglers or recreationists. These individuals may or may not also be part of the "local community" but may want to know about the project or participate in aspects of it.

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[11] Hannon *et al* (2024): Community participation for community benefits from natural capital projects
[12] Based on the definition in Community Land Scotland's 'Beyond Community Benefit' document.

"Community engagement" in this context is a process that allows local people to play a role in river restoration projects[13]. The key word is *process*. **At its heart, engagement is about relationship building, a process which takes time.** A restoration project is just a snapshot within a wider ambition to create a "social ripple effect" to drive greater restoration action and bring more people in. River restoration can take many forms and can occur in a variety of geographic locations. Similarly, engagement can vary from simple, one-way information to two-way dialogue. Engagement is often assumed to consist solely of consultations and be tacked onto project proposals. Figure 3 overleaf depicts several practical ways that community groups and stakeholders can be engaged in a restoration project, as well as examples of types of projects that could be suitable under each[14].
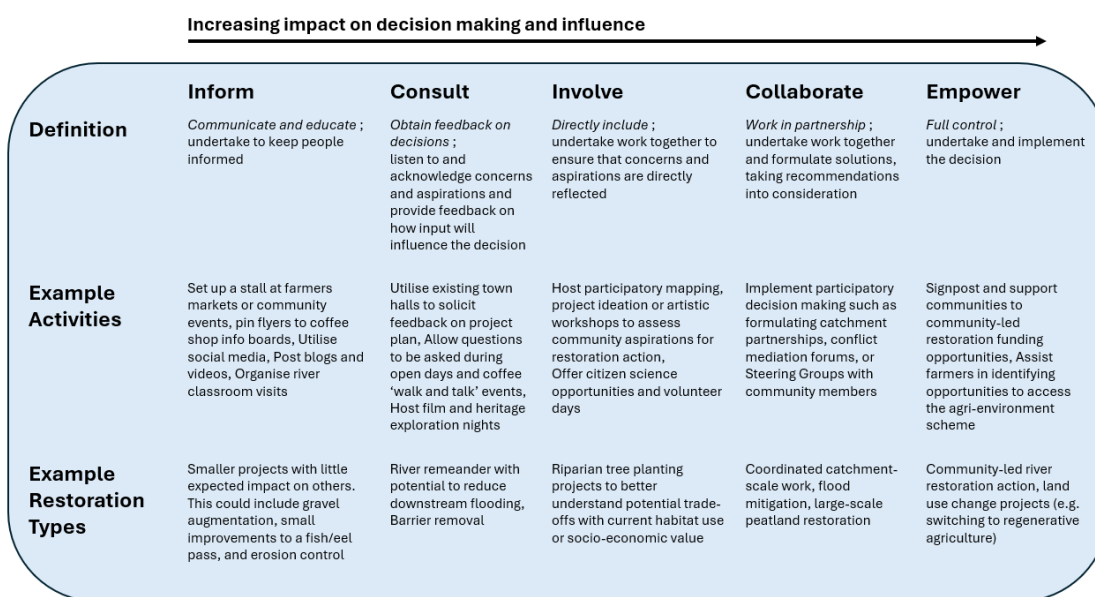
Increasing impact on decision making and influence →

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Definition	*Communicate and educate ;* undertake to keep people informed	*Obtain feedback on decisions ;* listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations and provide feedback on how input will influence the decision	*Directly include ;* undertake work together to ensure that concerns and aspirations are directly reflected	*Work in partnership ;* undertake work together and formulate solutions, taking recommendations into consideration	*Full control ;* undertake and implement the decision
Example Activities	Set up a stall at farmers markets or community events, pin flyers to coffee shop info boards, Utilise social media, Post blogs and videos, Organise river classroom visits	Utilise existing town halls to solicit feedback on project plan, Allow questions to be asked during open days and coffee 'walk and talk' events, Host film and heritage exploration nights	Host participatory mapping, project ideation or artistic workshops to assess community aspirations for restoration action, Offer citizen science opportunities and volunteer days	Implement participatory decision making such as formulating catchment partnerships, conflict mediation forums, or Steering Groups with community members	Signpost and support communities to community-led restoration funding opportunities, Assist farmers in identifying opportunities to access the agri-environment scheme
Example Restoration Types	Smaller projects with little expected impact on others. This could include gravel augmentation, small improvements to a fish/eel pass, and erosion control	River remeander with potential to reduce downstream flooding, Barrier removal	Riparian tree planting projects to better understand potential trade-offs with current habitat use or socio-economic value	Coordinated catchment-scale work, flood mitigation, large-scale peatland restoration	Community-led river restoration action, land use change projects (e.g. switching to regenerative agriculture)

Figure 3 engagement continuum is based on the International Association for Public Participation spectrum and adapted from the Highlands Rewilding Engagement Roadmap to fit this strategy[15].

While the columns to the right indicate a greater involvement in decision making, that is not to say that it will always be possible or appropriate for projects. Notice that empowerment is sometimes about thinking longer term and helping to drive community-led restoration action that aligns with their concerns and complements the actions currently being undertaken by project teams.

A "community benefit" would then be something positive that is intentionally delivered and meaningful to communities, usually identified through the process of engagement[16]. Examples of benefits include provision of citizen science opportunities, supporting local jobs, and

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[13] Hafferty, C. (2022) 'Embedding an evidence-led, best-practice culture of engagement: learning from the evidence'.
[14] Please note: The restoration types shown in the figure are simply examples. The context around a project and suitable engagement types will require a case-by-case basis.
[15] See Public Participation Pillars and Highlands Rewilding Engagement Roadmap
[16] As seen in the Scottish Land Commission report: Delivering Community Benefits from Land

increasing access[17]. However, the lines between community benefit and engagement are not always clear since engagement can in and of itself be a benefit.

Note: Other stakeholders who are crucial to engage in river restoration work but may not fall under the "community" definition includes groups such as the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Scottish Forestry, NatureScot, and the local council. While the Fund will look for evidence of the necessary engagement with relevant bodies, how to engage these groups is not the focus of this strategy.

3. Why Engage Communities with Rivers and Restoration?

The planning and delivery of river restoration projects is a people endeavour, often requiring compromise, negotiation, partnership building and extensive conversations. From the headwaters to the sea, Scottish river systems and their adjacent land hold economic, socio-cultural, and environmental importance for communities. Many enjoy rivers as recreational spaces to connect with nature such as bird watching, dog walking, angling, swimming and kayaking. Others may rely on adjoining land for their livelihoods. Downstream communities may have experienced events such as flooding in the past and may want a say in any planned natural flood alleviation work. Some may know their local river intimately while others may never have had a chance to visit their local river or know much about its ecology, natural function or the environmental pressures acting on it. Including people in environmental work, who may not be typically engaged, can contribute to more sustainable and equitable outcomes, especially if they are brought in earlier in the process[18].

Just as restoration will be an opportunity to increase river ecosystem health, it is also an opportunity to bring more people into what your organisation or partnership is doing. Being involved in restoration can deepen people's connection with their local environment, strengthening their sense of catchment stewardship and their desire to protect and regenerate it. This connection can serve as a gateway for involving communities in wider environmental issues such as tackling climate change and biodiversity loss. Every restoration action should aim to inspire that connection. National messaging on Net Zero and climate adaptation often feels distant, but local, tangible action on people's doorsteps is what brings them along.

Each fund applicant will be at a slightly different stage based on historical experience with engagement and restoration work. Many project teams already know their communities well and have been doing a lot to engage people in the areas where they work. After all, project teams are often members of the community themselves and have built relationships with people in their catchment over years of education, conservation, restoration and monitoring

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[17] There were some examples identified in a previous FIRNS report on Community Benefits.
[18] Löfqvist, S *et al.* (2023) 'How social consideration improve the equity and effectiveness of ecosystem restoration'. Available here.

work. Given that engagement is a *process* and that community needs and interests can change, there is a need for continual effort over time.

4. Engagement Process and Plan

We have learnt that many local river restoration project teams currently face significant challenges in undertaking community engagement within restoration work, including: low participation by community members, lack of funding, inflexible funding time scales, and team capacity concerns[19]. One of our ambitions for the Fund is to support project teams to expand engagement capabilities and mitigate the challenges they face with this kind of work. This section describes a process[20] for community engagement when applying to the Fund and tips to developing an effective plan.

> The reason that a written plan is important is that it ensures engagement actions are thought through early, risks are managed appropriately, and learnings can be incorporated into future plans, resulting in high-integrity project delivery.

The four stages depicted in Figure 4 are described in more detail in the following section.

Application
Early reflections on who to engage, why and how

Planning
Design Community Engagement Plan

Delivery
Deliver Community Engagement Plan

Reporting
Reflect and share engagement learnings alongside ecological monitoring

Figure 4 Project Stages through the River Catchment Restoration Fund

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[19] Challenges faced by ecosystem restoration project teams is explored in more depth in this report.
[20] This has been largely aligned with the Fund's Monitoring Framework process, is based off aspects of the LEAP framework, and learnings from the Community Benefits report from the FIRNS 'Source to Sea' project.

4.1 Application Stage

At the **Application Stage**, applicants could be asked preliminary questions such as:

- Organisation / Partnership Level
  - Where is your organisation in terms of its approach to community engagement?
  - What challenges has your organisation encountered that has made engagement difficult or prevented it so far?
  - Where does your organisation want to be in terms of community engagement?
  - What are the key steps to getting there?
- Project Level
  - Who might benefit from the delivery of this project?
  - Who might experience challenges if this project is implemented?
  - What community engagement have you undertaken specifically for this project thus far, if any?
  - At a high level, what types of engagement do you anticipate undertaking during your project to improve outcomes? Why?
  - Broadly speaking, what social outcomes would you like to achieve through engagement work supported by this Fund? (e.g. supporting local jobs, increasing awareness of river ecosystem importance, learning more about farming community)

The answers to these questions can serve as the basis for the project-level community engagement plan which you will be asked to design during the **Planning Stage**. There may be an option for project teams to set up a meeting with Fund staff during this stage to obtain advice on their intended approach. Project teams may also be asked to submit a rough estimate for anticipated costs of engagement activities[21] to encourage early thinking about resourcing needs.

4.2 Planning Stage: Designing a Community Engagement Plan

At the **Planning Stage**, projects have been awarded funds, but delivery has yet to begin. This stage is used to more formally identify relevant communities to engage with and to develop a **Community Engagement Plan**[22]. The Fund may also provide support and advice to project teams as they develop their plans. This should not be too onerous on project teams. The idea is for the plan to be proportionate to the scale of the project and relate to the interests of the geographical community and any communities of interest considered. A flood mitigation

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[21] This can include things such as the costs of community engagement specialists, staff time, venue hire, and tea/coffee.

[22] The ability to pay for staff time to produce these engagement plans is something that will be discussed by Fund developers. We recognise that the administrative side of things can be a burden on project teams and want to ensure teams are supported as much as is possible.

project would likely require wider engagement than a small gravel augmentation project, for example.

By the time project teams are writing their engagement plans, they may have already engaged landowners, identified potential project partners, and possibly engaged the community earlier on in the process. Depending on whether the project site needs more development work or is ready to hit the ground running, the focus of the engagement plan should be on what is reasonable for the team to undertake and how to best tailor the engagements to the community.

The Planning stage is broken down into three steps described as follows:

Step 1: Take a locally tailored approach to community engagement planning

The Fund is not looking to prescribe a standard approach to community engagement. The approach will depend on how well the project team already knows their community, how much engagement the organisation has done historically, the geographical and social context of the area, and the type of project that the team is looking to undertake. Our aspiration is to support efforts for project teams to be creative in the activities they plan and expand their reach[23].

During this step, the team will build on reflections from the **Application Stage** by establishing who to engage and why. Project teams could consider mapping community groups, individuals, and stakeholders to engage using the 3 I's Approach: Interest, Influence, Impact[24] or identifying 'change agents'[25] within the community to help advocate for the project. If multiple community groups have been identified to engage, note that different approaches and methods may be needed.

> It is recommended that project teams think beyond the scope of the current project. In other words, what kinds of engagement action *now* could help drive more restoration action *in the longer term*? This may require engaging with more than the "usual suspects."

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[23] Being creative in activity selection is also encouraged as part of the National Standards for Community Engagement

[24] Reed et al (2019) 'Analyzing who is relevant to engage in environmental decision-making processes by interests, influence and impact: the 3i framework'.

[25] See Step 4 in this engagement tips guide by WaterLIFE

Additional information that could help to inform communities to engage based on other local catchment priorities/community involvement in restoration can be found the following:

- Regional Land Use Partnerships
- Local Place Plans (examples from Fife Council)
- Local Biodiversity Action Plans (example from Highland Council)
- Fisheries Management Plans
- Feedback received from previous engagement or requests from community members (e.g. a request for more invertebrate kick sampling events)

Step 2: Set clear goals & objectives for engagement

This step is about taking the community groups mapped in Step 1 and articulating the goal(s) of engaging this/these groups. When deciding on engagement goals, it is important to think about what "good" would look like. This could build on the answer to "Where does your organisation want to be in terms of community engagement?" question from the **Application** stage. Goals for engagement could include:

- Learn more about community concerns (or lack thereof) related to water pollution
- Increase project team organisational capacity through citizen science monitoring
- Connect more people with their local rivers through walk and talks and open days
- Increase farming community's knowledge and uptake of the benefits of buffer strips
- Enable more effective deer management and reduce the need for fencing through building relationships with stalkers and foresters

It could be useful to map where on the "engagement continuum" project teams expect community members and groups identified in Step 1 to fall. This can help visualise the different ways groups can be engaged and identify relevant engagement methods. See an example in Figure 5 below:
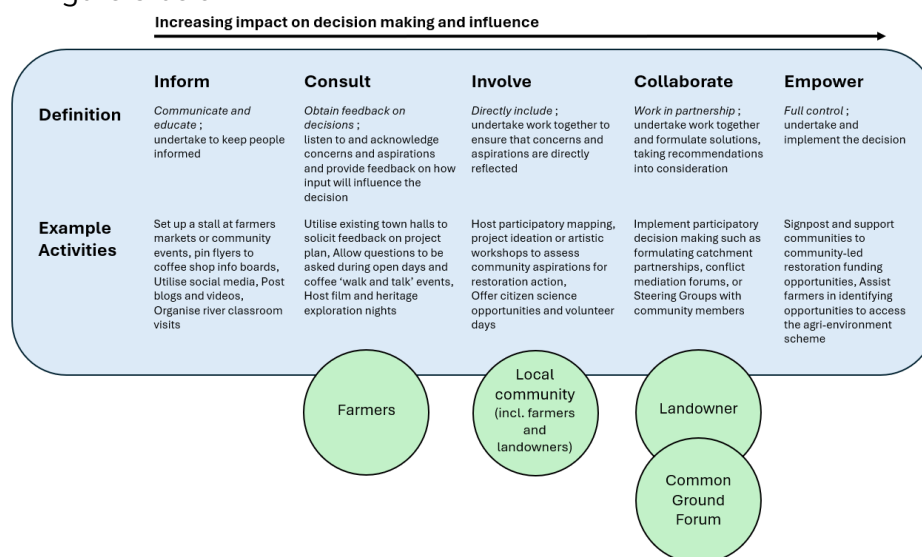

Figure 5 Example showing how different stakeholders could be engaged in a restoration project

Step 3: Identify methods and data to collect to fulfil objectives

After mapping community and stakeholder groups on the continuum in Step 2, project teams can then identify suitable methods of engagement, the corresponding activities, and what information they plan to collect.

> **Note**: Engagement doesn't always have to mean extensive workshops. In some cases, it can mean coffee chats in town, on the farm, or in a community space. Keep a log of sentiments shared by community members and use these for future restoration work development and engagement action.
>
> The project team shouldn't feel that it must do all the work itself. If the team wants to undertake engagement activities but doesn't have capacity or skillset to deliver, consider scoping in hiring a trained mediator or facilitator into the engagement costs.

Project teams should think about which indicators would help them understand whether the engagement was a success. This could include volunteer feedback surveys, informal feedback chats with community members, and observing a greater number of people attending events than in years past.

The below table is one suggested template for mapping out the intended actions within a Community Engagement Plan[26]. A similar version could also be used by the Fund. The Fund could also consider adding a risk register to understand any potential need for revision down the line. Once the Engagement Plan is complete, which includes the list of stakeholders to engage from Step 1, community and stakeholder continuum from Step 2, and a completed template similar to the table below, the Fund can approve final costing figures, and the team will be ready to start!

Activity description	Target audience	What is the intended change?	Cost (£)	Timetable	Measure of success

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[26] This template is based on the Activity Plan Good Practice Guidance by the National Lottery Heritage Fund

Additional recommendations for selecting engagement methods and activities:

- Utilise clear, accessible communication on your website and when hosting events and meetings. Positive messaging and digital inclusivity are key.
- Understand what motivates people to engage in the water environment[27]. Hint: Wildlife and wellbeing benefits of rivers generally seem to resonate well. Try flipping the perspective from "What do we want communities to do as part of their engagement?" to "What do these communities already enjoy doing, and how can we support or facilitate those activities to encourage engagement?" Thinking this way can help broaden participation and attract a wider range of people.
- Consider going to your audience rather than expecting them to come to you. This could include attending existing community group meetings, rather than expecting people to attend an additional meeting organised by the project team. This can help reduce engagement fatigue.
- Get creative! Organise river photography competitions, river cultural heritage sessions, art sessions, or storytelling events along the river. Diversifying the types of activities undertaken and times of day can help to reach different audiences.
- For any volunteer opportunities, utilise existing network to expand and make efforts to reach additional groups not previously engaged[28].
- Utilise local artists and contract local food providers to cater for events.

4.3 Delivery Stage

During the **Delivery Stage**, engagement action is undertaken alongside any ecological work. As engagement needs from the community may change over the course of the project[29], the Fund may be open to discussing and accommodating reasonable changes.

4.4 Reporting Stage

Once at the **Reporting Stage**, along with any required ecological monitoring laid out in the Monitoring Framework, some reporting and reflections on the engagement actions may also be required. Reporting is often considered an onerous process, and the Fund team is working

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[27] See this short report from WaterLIFE.

[28] Explore the Make Your Mark Toolkit for some tips on planning volunteer events.

[29] E.g. Project teams wanting to change course once realising that hosting open nights to discuss restoration work in the catchment would suit their community better than providing volunteer opportunities where turn out is low.

to ensure that it is as streamlined as possible and that all the information collected has a purpose.

Projects may be asked to report on simple engagement metrics such as the number of jobs supported, individuals engaged, and meetings held[30]. Projects may also be encouraged to share creative and emotive engagement metrics such as photos, videos, or soundbites from participants on their engagement experience. Permission from these participants should always be sought first before collecting and submitting such material.

Project teams might also be asked to have a debrief meeting with Fund staff to discuss engagement reflections and provide feedback on the project process overall to support continuous learning and improvement in the future[31].

Questions to prompt this engagement evaluation reflection could include:

- How did our outcomes measure up against what was actually achieved?
- What benefits did our engagement efforts bring about?
- What challenges did we face?
- Did we choose the right engagement methods? Why or why not?
- Did we include anyone outside of the 'usual suspects' through our engagements?
- What is something new that we have learned about our community/communities and how can we use that to design more effective engagement going forward?

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[30] The Fund may be able to pay for staff time to report.
[31] VOiCE has project teams self-evaluate based on the National Standards for Community Engagement. See 'VOiCE – Review' video here.

5. Additional Support for Project Teams

We know that the challenges and time associated to do community engagement well are significant. We want this Fund to support our project teams in delivering this work. Below is a list of support offerings[32] currently under consideration by the team developing the Fund.

- The Fund signposting additional sources of funding on its website to supplement engagement action.
- The Fund providing a portal for project teams to share best practices for engagement as well as offering resources and training .
- The Fund providing staff to help to support project teams in engagement plan design and how to increase effective communication on the work that teams are doing.
- The Fund investigating options such as multi-year funding and full-cost recovery to support continuous community engagements and benefits.
- The Fund exploring what a 'Capacity Building and Development' outcome would look like. This was mentioned in the Monitoring Framework and could include skills building and training provision and time to develop restoration work.
- The Fund paying for project team staff time for engagement plan designing and reporting.
- The Fund supporting internship programmes within river restoration to inspire the next generation and help project teams with capacity.
- The Fund is supportive of community benefits being generated through hiring local contractors and jobs based in the region that the project is happening as part of its strategy to support communities where these restoration projects are taking place.
- This strategy and process must be fit for purpose. Therefore, the Fund welcomes feedback on the processes to continuing to adapt and evolve to best support our projects.

The ultimate goal of the River Catchment Restoration Fund is not only to leave a lasting positive impact on the environment but also to foster stronger relationships between project teams and their communities. By tailoring engagement to fit the local context and build on what communities already enjoy, restoration teams can open up new, inclusive opportunities for participation. Teams shouldn't feel pressured to manage every aspect of engagement alone — if capacity or expertise is limited, bringing in a skilled facilitator is a worthwhile investment. Ultimately, if the Fund can provide advice to project teams on their engagement plans, financially support engagement activities, and encourage knowledge sharing, there is a lot of opportunity for greater and lasting river catchment restoration work that delivers multiple benefits for nature and people.

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[32] Most of these were inspired by findings from the Source to Sea Community Engagement report.

6. Key References

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7. Appendix 1: Engagement Plan Worked Examples

Example 1: Small gravel augmentation project in a rural crofting community. The gravel is needed due to an upstream weir.
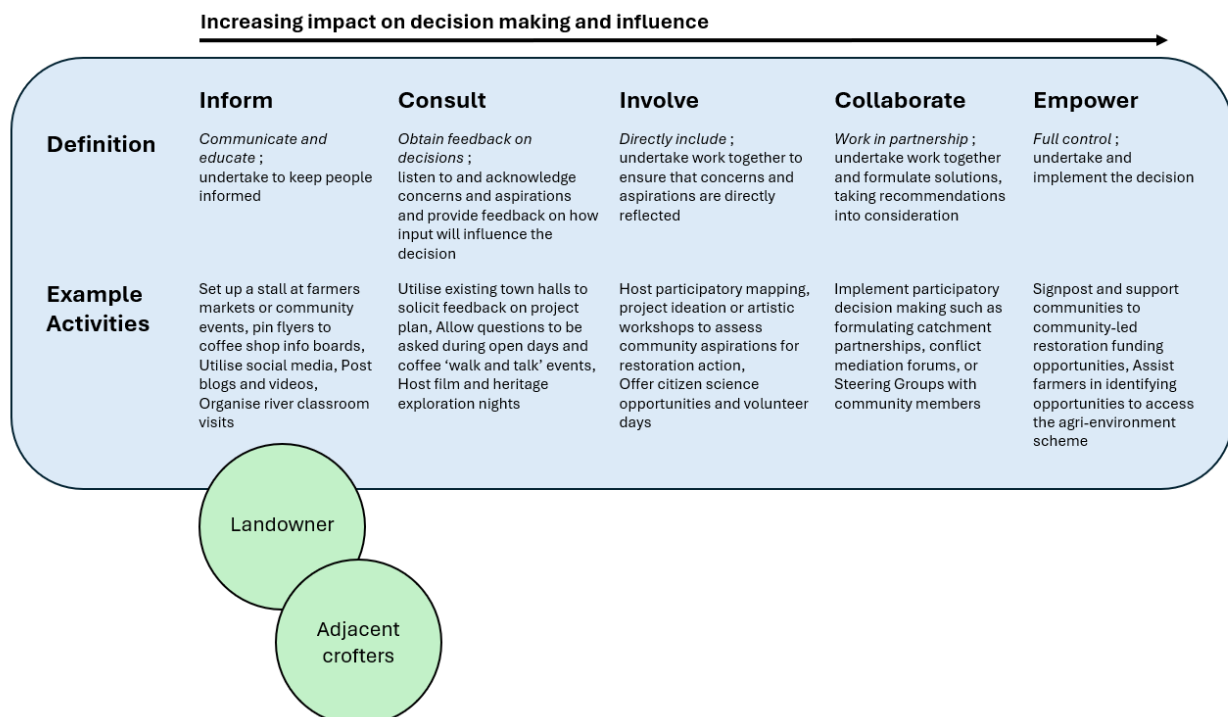
Application Stage:

- Organisation / partnership level
    - *Where is your organisation in terms of its approach to community engagement?*
        - Our organisation is a small local fishery trust, so we have not done a lot of community engagement thus far.
    - *What challenges has your organisation encountered that has made engagement difficult or prevented it so far?*
        - We struggle with capacity to deliver engagement activities above the necessary engagement for landowner approvals.
    - *Where does your organisation want to be in terms of community engagement?*
        - We would like to develop our relationships with the local crofting community whose land is adjacent to a few target tributaries. We want to understand their feelings about the river and salmon more broadly and help seek their support for the weir removal.
    - *What are the key steps to getting there?*
        - In terms of engagement, we would like to focus on electrofishing observation days, croft visits, and weir removal advocacy. We need additional capacity and skillset to help us deliver these ambitions. We would appreciate any support that the Fund can provide us.
- Project level
    - *Who might benefit from this project? Who might not?*
        - Wild Atlantic salmon and other freshwater biodiversity will benefit from this project as it will create suitable spawning habitat. Anglers will benefit as there will be additional fish in the river. We do not know of any recreationists who spend time in this reach of river but if there are, they might enjoy the additional biodiversity benefits.
        - There are no immediate concerns around who might not benefit from this.

- o *What engagement have you undertaken specifically for this project thus far, if any?*
  - ▪ We have discussed the project with the landowner and obtained official approval. The crofters we have spoken to do not seem opposed to this project.
- o *What engagement is your team planning to undertake over the course of the project?*
  - ▪ Informal meetings with crofters
  - ▪ Invitations for crofters to observe electrofishing monitoring

Planning Stage - Engagement Plan:

The relevant parties to engage would be surrounding crofters and landowner. Prior to applying for the Fund, the project team has spoken to the landowner and surrounding crofters about where the gravel will be added, the reason why, and when monitoring will occur. The goal of the project from an engagement standpoint is to raise awareness among crofters about the benefit of suitable gravel in the river and to help advocate for barrier removal in the future.

Interest	Influence	Impact
	Landowner	Crofters

Increasing impact on decision making and influence

	Inform	**Consult**	**Involve**	**Collaborate**	**Empower**
Definition	*Communicate and educate ;* undertake to keep people informed	*Obtain feedback on decisions ;* listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations and provide feedback on how input will influence the decision	*Directly include ;* undertake work together to ensure that concerns and aspirations are directly reflected	*Work in partnership ;* undertake work together and formulate solutions, taking recommendations into consideration	*Full control ;* undertake and implement the decision
Example Activities	Set up a stall at farmers markets or community events, pin flyers to coffee shop info boards, Utilise social media, Post blogs and videos, Organise river classroom visits	Utilise existing town halls to solicit feedback on project plan, Allow questions to be asked during open days and coffee 'walk and talk' events, Host film and heritage exploration nights	Host participatory mapping, project ideation or artistic workshops to assess community aspirations for restoration action, Offer citizen science opportunities and volunteer days	Implement participatory decision making such as formulating catchment partnerships, conflict mediation forums, or Steering Groups with community members	Signpost and support communities to community-led restoration funding opportunities, Assist farmers in identifying opportunities to access the agri-environment scheme

Landowner

Adjacent crofters

Activity description	Target audience	What is the intended change?	Cost (£)	Timetable	Measure of success
1:1 meetings with crofters	Crofting community	Build relationship with local crofting community to discuss weir impacts on local river fish populations	Staff time rate (£)	2-3 months before gravel is to be introduced to the stretch of river	Meetings secured with at least 30% of local crofters. We will track total number of meetings held and people engaged.
Electrofishing observation day	Crofting community + local community	To make crofters and community members more aware of the biodiversity that lives in the rivers and the impact that the gravel will have	Cost of providing on-site tea, coffee and biscuits to crofters and others who attend	During the Monitoring stage (1 year after gravel augmentation)	At least 1 crofter showing up to observe part of an electrofishing session.

Reporting Stage:

Project legacy: The site will be monitored for salmon and sea trout populations, and we will continue to engage with the crofters and landowner to introduce more gravel across the estate. We are simultaneously working to get the upstream weir removed.

- Approximate number of people to be engaged: 8-10
- Approximate jobs to be supported over the course of the project: 0.5
- Number of meetings to be held: 5

Example 2: **Large-scale riparian planting project in the headwaters adjacent to a stalking estate. High river temperatures and bank erosion are the key ecological drivers of the project.**

Application Stage:

- Organisation / partnership level
    - o *Where is your organisation in terms of its approach to community engagement?*
        - Our organisation has done some volunteer tree planting work, citizen science volunteer days and led consultation processes for woodland creation in the past. The most positive feedback we receive is on the citizen science days – people seem to really enjoy it.
    - o *What challenges has your organisation encountered that has made engagement difficult or prevented it so far?*
        - Low/inconsistent turn-out and in-kind staff time to run these events.
    - o *Where does your organisation want to be in terms of community engagement?*
        - We are trying to think more strategically and longer term, so we would like to work with the adjacent estate owners to reduce deer numbers to give the trees the best chance to survive.
        - We also want to engage the local community in citizen science monitoring training to support us with water quality monitoring efforts.
    - o *What are the key steps to getting there?*
        - We already know the landowner on the adjoining estate but would want to engage them further.
        - We already have an Education & Engagement Officer employed in the team to help deliver the citizen science work but could also use some civil mediation/facilitation support for the deer management aspects.
- Project level
    - o *Who might benefit from this project? Who might not?*
        - Livestock farmers in the headwaters have told us that they've noticed the increased erosion so would appreciate if we can help them stabilise the banks. They are okay with us putting in fencing to keep out deer and livestock.
        - Some farmers are concerned about subsidy payment impacts if they allow buffer strips to be established. They are ideally looking for compensation for the forgone grazing land or at least a flood gate.

- o *What engagement have you undertaken specifically for this project thus far, if any?*
  - We have obtained landowner approval for the work and have had preliminary conversations with farmers who are generally happy for us to plant and introduce natural erosion control measures.
- o *What engagement is your team planning to undertake over the course of the project?*
  - Establish a deer management working group
  - Continue with citizen science work. There is a small community within 10 miles of the planting site that we could target. This is the community where a lot of our existing volunteers live.
  - Post a blog series on our website with an email for people to provide feedback
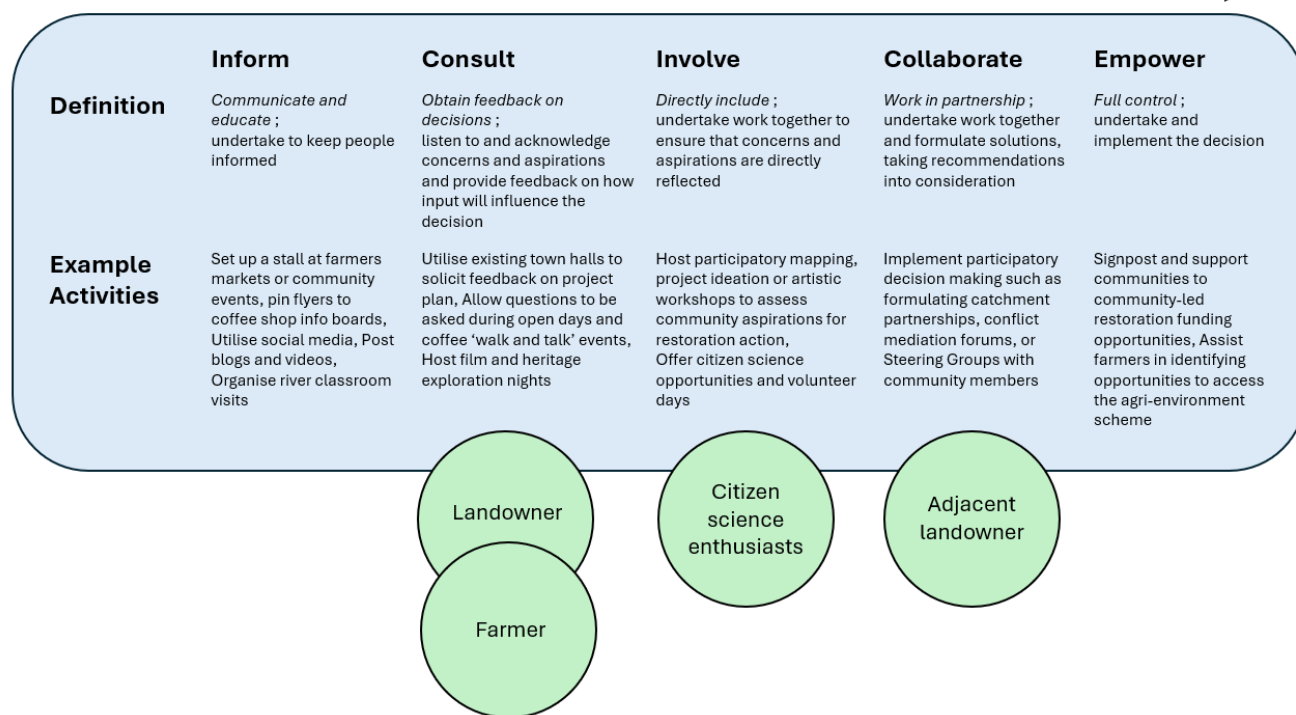
Planning Stage - Engagement Plan:

The relevant parties to engage would be the landowner, adjacent landowner of the stalking estate, farmers, and local community members interested in citizen science.

Interest	Influence	Impact
Citizen science enthusiasts	Landowner; Adjacent landowner	Farmer

Prior to applying for the Fund, the project team has gained approval from the landowner to plant, and the farmers are generally on board. We have also had some conversations with the neighbouring landowner of a stalking estate to try to work with them to reduce deer numbers. So far, they are not interested so we could use some more support there. The landowner of the estate where the tree planting is taking place has a relationship with the neighbouring landowner, so we are exploring opportunities for them to collaborate and mitigate the deer impact risk. We will post notices in the local community about where the trees will be planted, the reason why, and what kind of monitoring community members can expect to be invited to.

The goals of the project from an engagement standpoint are to enhance human-river connection through offering popular kick sampling training sessions and to ensure the longer-term survival on the trees by engaging with neighbouring estates to control deer numbers.

Increasing impact on decision making and influence →

	Inform	**Consult**	**Involve**	**Collaborate**	**Empower**
Definition	*Communicate and educate* ; undertake to keep people informed	*Obtain feedback on decisions* ; listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations and provide feedback on how input will influence the decision	*Directly include* ; undertake work together to ensure that concerns and aspirations are directly reflected	*Work in partnership* ; undertake work together and formulate solutions, taking recommendations into consideration	*Full control* ; undertake and implement the decision
Example Activities	Set up a stall at farmers markets or community events, pin flyers to coffee shop info boards, Utilise social media, Post blogs and videos, Organise river classroom visits	Utilise existing town halls to solicit feedback on project plan, Allow questions to be asked during open days and coffee 'walk and talk' events, Host film and heritage exploration nights	Host participatory mapping, project ideation or artistic workshops to assess community aspirations for restoration action, Offer citizen science opportunities and volunteer days	Implement participatory decision making such as formulating catchment partnerships, conflict mediation forums, or Steering Groups with community members	Signpost and support communities to community-led restoration funding opportunities, Assist farmers in identifying opportunities to access the agri-environment scheme

Landowner

Farmer

Citizen science enthusiasts

Adjacent landowner

Activity description	Target audience	What is the intended change?	Cost (£)	Timetable	Measure of success
Offer citizen science opportunities that align with monitoring timing for the project	Citizen science enthusiasts	Offer additional opportunities for people to enhance their connection with their local river and biodiversity	£XX,XXX	Opportunities aligned with monitoring plan cadence	Grow citizen science community network
Hold a series of meetings with landowner, adjacent landowner, stalkers, and local foresters to discuss deer management options	Landowner, adjacent landowner, stalkers, and local foresters	Increased deer management over the next 5 years to allow planted riparian trees to grow	Cost of meeting space, refreshments and staff time to plan logistics	Ideally, 2-3 months before trees are planted. If this is not feasible, we will do it after trees are planted since they must go in during the winter months.	Hold at least 1 meeting with all parties aforementioned.
Post a blog series on our website to inform others what we are doing and why	Local community, general public	Keep the public informed and allow opportunities for feedback	N/A	Throughout project delivery and monitoring	Post at least 5 blogs and have informal chats with local community members to check whether they are aware of the project

Reporting Stage:

Project legacy: Longer-term goal is to reduce deer numbers and expand riparian planting in conjunction with peatland restoration in other areas in the catchment which are severely degraded.

Approximate number of people to be engaged: 20-30

Approximate jobs to be supported over the course of the project: 3

Approximate number of blogs to be posted: 5

We will provide photos from all events held.

8. Appendix 2: Further Examples

Fund Outcome	Examples			
	Engagement goals & objectives	**Activities & actions**	**Linkages between actions and outcomes**	**High-level portfolio outcomes**
Community Engagement and Benefit	Increase local awareness of environmental pressures on rivers and biodiversity	Run 'Salmon in the Classroom' sessions; Engage local farmers to discuss benefits of restoration work to their own business; Open up the site for visits to discuss project benefits with interested community members; Share data and science about local rivers with community groups, using messaging that is relevant to them; Host invertebrate kick sampling training days; Publish a blog series of the work on the organisation's website along with contact information	More people are engaged with the river restoration work and are given the opportunity to ask questions. More people are brought into what the organisation is doing and can help to spread the message.	Number of people engaged

Number of events held

Quotes from community members

Photos from events |
| | Utilise local knowledge and community ambition to help guide future river restoration project prioritisation | Host participatory mapping workshops to identify areas of flooding; Organise one-on-one meetings with different community groups to understand hopes and concerns; Signpost community-led funding opportunities | Leaving more space for conversation, sharing science and listening to the expertise of locals can build trust and empower communities to help shape future restoration action | Number of meetings

Number of people engaged

Quotes from workshops or summarised themes from conversations |
| | Increase nature stewardship and foster a sense of connection | Tree planting volunteer days; Facilitated river walk; Art projects | The more people who are interacting with the river and learning about its surrounding biodiversity, the more they will care about the outcome of the project | Number of people engaged

Number of events held |

	Support local job creation	Hire local contractors where possible; Co-fund a project officer or staff support with another organisation or as part of a partnership	Hiring locally and using local expertise where possible will support community wealth building and foster more community connection	Number of full-time equivalent jobs supported
	Help mitigate potential conflict with undertaking restoration work	Utilise groups such as the Centre for Good Relations to address and manage conflict within the catchment	Addressing potential conflict within a project will mitigate risk and increase the chances of long-term success	Number of people engaged

Number of meetings |

9. Appendix 3: Additional Resources and Ideas

Engagement Planning Resources

- [National Standards for Community Engagement](#): From the Scottish Community Development Centre
- [VOiCE tool](#): A free resource that supports project teams in planning and recording their engagement activities

Facilitators

- [Centre for Good Relations](#): They specialise in civic mediation, facilitation and dialogue
- [The Common Ground Forum](#): This group can help facilitate discussion specifically around deer management
- [Deciding Matters](#): A small, independent, participatory democracy organisation supporting governments, communities and people to re-think power and shape the decisions that will impact them

Citizen science data considerations

- Sign up for a [Cartographer](#) account, which is led by the Riverfly Partnership, to house collected citizen science data.
- [Here](#) is a guide and decision framework as to when to best use citizen science approaches for monitoring.
- Utilise existing RiverFly network to help with monitoring

Other examples of engagement ideas and methods

- Useful series of restoration engagement [recorded webinars](#) from the Canal Rivers Trust (e.g. Creating Connections within your Wider Community, Engaging your Local Council, Supporting your Volunteers, What's Your Story)
- Utilise [padlets](#) – an online bulletin board – to communicate project updates and allow community members to add feedback.
- Hold a conversation document log to submit to funders who you have been speaking to and what was discussed, including any issues that were raised
- Find ways to bring communities closer, not further, from their rivers.
- Utilise ArcGIS to keep track of ecological needs, landowner interest and community interest housed with multiple map layers to identify opportunities. This idea was inspired from the Kyle of Sutherland Rivers Trust which has used this in the past for opportunity mapping.
- Have a stall at local events to talk to people about what you do – keep it casual.

- Bring in local artists and musicians to collaborate on the key themes of your project
- Posts to website with contact information for questions and comments
- Setting up a stall at a local market
- Conduct one-on-one informal conversations
- Scenario co-development with farmers, community, etc to understand restoration priorities and have two-way communication
- Landowner-led collaborative forum with the community, local council and project team

Example engagement indicators[33]

- Full-time equivalent jobs and internships created
- Number of educational activities offered
- Number of people involved in volunteer and engagement opportunities
- Equity in conservation: the extent to which the project delivered a fair and inclusive process as measured by the National Standards for Community Engagement or other social justice indicators.

Legacy considerations when planning engagement activities

- How can my organisation build in continued engagement into my organisation's culture to continue expanding our reach?
- How are you planning to communicate to relevant community members how their input has influenced a project? Sharing back is key to continued engagement efforts.
- Are there ways that the community can continue to reach you and provide feedback after the project completes?
- Where are there uncertainties in the outcomes of my engagement and how is my team mitigating them?

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[33] These indicators and the legacy considerations were largely adapted from here: Hafferty, C *et al.* (2023) 'A Recipe for Engagement in Nature-based Solutions and Nature Recovery'. Available at: https://www.agile-initiative.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Recipe-for-Engagement.pdf.