



RIVERWOODS

**RIVERWOODS INVESTMENT
READINESS PIONEERS**

Learning Reflections & Toolkit

RIVERWOODS INVESTMENT READINESS PIONEERS.....	1
Acknowledgments.....	3
Intro - What this is.....	3
How to use this learning.....	3
SECTION ONE - Quality of Participation.....	5
Improving participatory democracy processes.....	5
How did we address the quality of participation?.....	5
Which types of participation were most effective?.....	8
What was the impact of participation?.....	9
How did we support communities and landowners to feel able to influence change?.....	12
How did we work in new and innovative ways?.....	12
How did we encourage communities and partners to collaborate beyond this project?.....	12
How did we track impact?.....	14
How did we support reflection and peer-to-peer learning?.....	15
How did we show that change is a result of each element of the process, and not just an end point?.....	17
SECTION TWO - Amplification of Citizen Voice.....	19
Connecting People and Power.....	19
How did we support communities to claim power?.....	19
How did we encourage a mindset of 'emergent possibilities' rather than fixed outcomes?.....	20
How did the Riverwoods processes enable communities to claim real power?.....	22
SECTION THREE - Impact on Governance and Infrastructure.....	24
Building Democratic Infrastructure.....	24
What are the characteristics of a Democratic Infrastructure?.....	24
How did we build inclusive, equal networks for participation?.....	24
How did we think in a collaborative way - to break down siloed thinking and doing?.....	25
How did we get communities, landowners, stakeholders to collaborate?.....	26
How might we centre diverse voices and knowledge systems in this work?.....	27
CONCLUSION.....	29
How 'pioneering' was Riverwoods Investment Readiness Pioneers?....	29
APPENDICES.....	31
Learning Reflections & Toolkit.....	31

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Special thanks to the Project Team, in alphabetical order:

- Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)
- Democratic Society (Demsoc)
- Involve
- Scottish Wildlife Trust

We also thank Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for taking the plunge and funding Riverwoods Investment Readiness Pioneers.

Intro - What this is

Riverwoods Investment Readiness Pioneers is a project that aims to connect diverse groups of people in Scotland to explore and develop nature-based financing solutions. This initiative provided a platform for communities, landowners, and other stakeholders to collaborate and identify potential Riverwoods projects that could be financed using innovative mechanisms beyond traditional grants.

The project sought to harness the collective agency of these stakeholders to build a pipeline of investable projects that could contribute to the protection and enhancement of Scotland's natural assets. Through this process, Riverwoods aimed to support the development of new financial models that could unlock private investment and deliver environmental, social and economic benefits to local communities.

Here, we share a self-evaluation of the Riverwoods learning journey. This evaluation was initiated by Demsoc and completed by Involve during January to March 2023 across three areas:

1. Quality of participation
2. Amplification of citizen voice
3. Impact on governance and infrastructure

We cover the main insights and recommendations from the project in a practical and interactive way, to help continue and support Riverwoods partnership development.

How to use this learning

The Riverwoods learning is designed to be practical and interactive, with tools and templates available for download to help support similar projects.

To use this learning, you can start by exploring the three key areas of the project: quality of participation, amplification of citizen voice, and impact on governance and infrastructure. Choose the section that interests you the most and read through the insights and recommendations provided.

If you're interested in implementing some of the ideas presented in the learning, you can download the tools and templates provided for each section. These resources are designed to be practical and adaptable to a variety of contexts.

Finally, the [Riverwoods Ideas Wall](#) is a space for you to share your thoughts and continue the conversation. You can leave comments, ask questions, and engage with other participants to keep the learning alive and support ongoing partnership development.

SECTION ONE - Quality of Participation

Improving participatory democracy processes

Key line of Enquiry

How can we co-design and jointly implement a participatory democracy process with private and public/community sector participants, to conserve the riparian woodland in Scotland?

How did we address the quality of participation?

The Riverwoods Investment Readiness Pioneers project was launched in May 2022. Phase One came to an end in December that year, with Phase Two scheduled for April 2023.

Phase One concluded with funding grants to support the development of five out of the 12 submitted proposals.

In **Phase Two**, two of the five proposals were selected by our Riverwoods panel for recommendation for a further grant of up to £125k each to enable them to be investment ready by June 2024.

It was a new process for the Scottish Wildlife Trust, introducing an innovative approach to funding and involvement of stakeholders. Community participation was key to the project, to engage a wide set of people and partnerships.

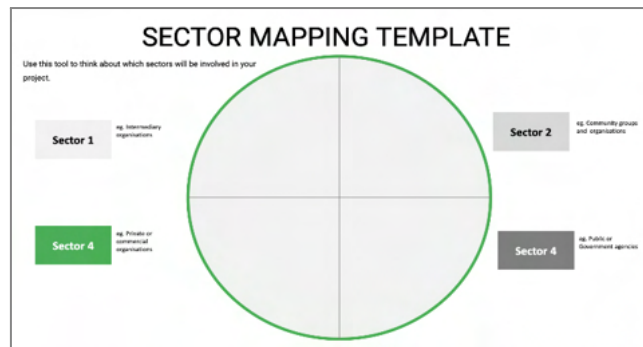
With few previous templates to draw on, tracking the quality of participation was an integral part of the project. The project design and process aimed to provide a good quality participation experience, including clear milestones and success points, and gathering feedback at each stage.

Innovation and learning were highlighted as the backbone of the participant journey at the project launch, with emphasis on no fixed methods for arriving at project proposals.

We were keen to promote the benefits of inclusive and participatory approaches with a cross-section of multiple stakeholders. This was embedded in the guiding criteria for project proposals – for instance – engagement with the community, partnership potential and public/environmental benefit.

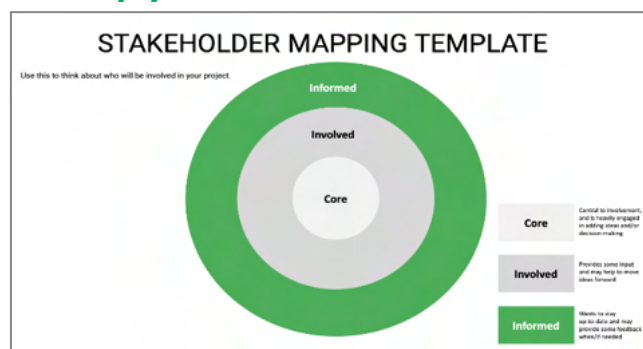
Feedback from participants was that a new energy was generated, which forged good future connections for new partnerships, or catalysed existing networks into action.

Use this tool to think about which sectors you might partner up with



Appendix 1.1

Try this template to map your stakeholders



Appendix 1.2

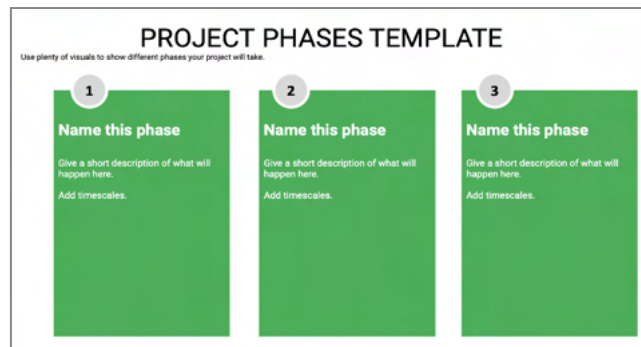
Finding out what groups needed was important, making sure that they had information to understand the project. Packages of support were developed along the way, responding to need – for example additional finance workshops. People involved in the project took up the offer of phone/video calls and emails to clarify things.

In order to facilitate public interaction with the projects, we engaged support from CoSLA through their CONSUL platform, which they normally provide for participatory budgeting undertaken by local authorities. CoSLA provided this service free of charge - they were interested to see how this platform could be repurposed for nature restoration projects.

Although some members of the public experienced accessibility issues with the CONSUL platform, the level of engagement and voting against the 12 proposal submissions achieved the project aims. It was described as 'enhancing the credibility of participatory budgeting as a method of local democracy.'

As a new initiative, we were exploring and testing how well all the project elements fitted together and worked as we went. Transparency in the participation process was iterated consciously throughout, based on our own internal sense-making and from feedback from people taking part.

Here's a template to help groups understand project phasing



Appendix 1.3

Some key takeaways from our experience in improving participatory processes through Riverwoods Investment Readiness Pioneers include:

1. **Co-design and joint implementation:** The importance of involving private and public/community sector participants in co-designing and jointly implementing a participatory democracy process cannot be overstated. This ensures that diverse perspectives are represented and that the process is inclusive and participatory.
2. **Quality of participation:** Tracking the quality of participation is crucial to ensure a good experience for participants, clear milestones and success points, and gathering feedback at each stage. Packages of support should be developed to respond to the needs of the groups involved in the project.
3. **Innovative approaches:** Using an innovative approach to funding and involvement of stakeholders can generate new energy and forge good future connections for new partnerships, or mobilise existing networks into action. In addition, inclusive and participatory approaches with a cross-section of multiple stakeholders are essential for success.
4. **Iteration and transparency:** As a new initiative, it's important to explore and test how all the project elements fit together and work. Transparency in the participation process should be iterated consciously throughout, based on internal sense-making and feedback from participants.
5. **Accessibility:** Ensuring accessibility for all members of the public is critical. Platforms and tools used for participation should prioritise being user-friendly and accessible, and consideration for additional support should be available for those who need it.

Which types of participation were most effective?

Outreach and promotion

The online sessions to launch the project and prepare communities had a wide and diverse reach. We did this by building a spreadsheet of as many intermediary cross-sector organisations as possible, using a combination of the Scottish Wildlife Trust's networks and desk research to gather contact details.

By cascading information about the opportunity through these networks, we were able to achieve a high level of interaction between different stakeholders using online collaboration tools, discussion, Q&A and feedback surveys.

With regular communication through a Riverwoods dedicated email-inbox, information and updates were shared and offers of support through one-to-one communication were taken up. We were able to form relationships and - if requested - connect people with Riverwoods experts for technical advice.

Participatory Selection process

The CONSUL platform was a new experience for some of us on the project team. And for COSLA, it was a different way of delivering a project using their platform. This in itself was exciting, challenging and a source of learning.

The platform held the 12 proposals as clear and tangible 'products,' which members of the public could explore, ask questions about and then vote to prioritise their top three.

Although the window for uploading proposals was open for a month, people were reluctant to be the first to make a submission. The 12 proposals were uploaded within a few days of each other. This reduced the time for the public to get involved.

Negative factors

Some of the feedback about the selection process we got was negative. For example, the process of registering with CONSUL felt intrusive for some, with feedback that too much personal information was requested in the process.

There were also complaints that the process was confusing (too many clicks to reach the projects) and not inclusive as there were no alternation options voting (e.g. text voting). Further confusion was caused by being able to vote (using thumbs up) on a comment, which some people thought meant they had cast one of their allocated votes.

The opportunities to link with people who made comments on proposals was limited - we relied on proposal organisations taking responsibility for checking comments regularly and making their response.

Positive factors

Positive feedback included that it was easy to review details of the projects as they were all in one place. Also that it was interesting to learn about other projects and be able to draw out good practice from their applications.

The platform was described as '*friendly*' and '*very informative,*' and the process - although a new experience - as one that '*gained traction*' as people got their heads around it.

Overall, it seems that the participatory selection process had both strengths and weaknesses. It is important to carefully consider the design of the platform and the registration process to ensure that it is inclusive, user-friendly, and respects people's privacy. It is also essential to provide opportunities for stakeholders to engage with each other and for feedback and communication to flow freely.

What was the impact of participation?

Split into two phases, the overall impact of proposals will not be realised until delivery in the medium and longer years ahead. Specific impact metrics were not set at the outset, other than the involvement of a wide cross section of organisations and members of the public.

Progress was tracked at each stage of the project using both quantitative and qualitative data. It has been shared on the Riverwoods and Consul platform along the way, so that people can see what's happened. In total during the Pioneers stage, we accessed 165 individuals through 94 different organisations from nine sectors.

Engagement data from CONSUL show that 907 people voted for proposals in total. The messaging boards where the public could ask questions and give feedback received 101 comments.

Phase One - Proposals submitted in total

Geographical reach shows 12 Riverwoods proposals spanning 10 Local Authority areas.

We were surprised at how many groups across different sectors took part in the project. Of the 12 proposals, the majority were submitted by Community Partnerships, including Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere, Cloudberry Communities CIC, Blairgowrie and Rattray Development Trust Bioregioning Tayside & The Cateran Ecomuseum, Lochgoil Community Trust Lochgoil Community Trust Ltd, and Balloch Castle Country Park Regeneration Group.

The second highest category were proposals from Fisheries and River Trusts: River Annan District Galloway Fisheries Trust & River Annan District Salmon Fisheries Boards, Northern District Salmon Fishery Board, and Forth Rivers Trust.

Two proposals were submitted by a Conservation Charity and a Countryside Trust: Buglife Scotland and Perthshire Nature Connections Partnership Lead Perth and Kinross Countryside Trust.

Not for Profit, Dark Matters Lab were the lead organisation for Trees AI Glasgow partnership's proposal.

One proposal was submitted by a Landowner, (Glenfalloch Nature Restoration).

Proposals by sector - Total

Community organisations	5
Fisheries/River Trust	3
Conservation/Countryside trust/charity	2
Not for profit organisation	1
Landowner	1
TOTAL	12

Phase One - Proposals selected

In Phase One, five proposals were selected to receive grants and move forward to Phase Two. These proposals were submitted by new community partnerships.

Interestingly, there is a diverse spread of sectors represented among the lead partners of these proposals.

Phase One finalists - proposals by sector

Community organisations	2
Fisheries/River Trust	1
Conservation/Countryside trust/charity	1
Landowner	1
TOTAL	5

Lead partners, awarded £4000k each out of a total budget of £20k for proposal development, were from a range of organisations:

- Balloch Castle Country Park Regeneration Group
- Bioregioning Tayside & The Catearan Eco museum
- Galloway Fisheries Trust & River Annan District Salmon Fisheries Boards
- Glenfalloch Nature Restoration

- Perthshire Nature Connections Partnership

Geographic spread of proposals



Phase Two - Proposals selected

Phase Two development plans recommended by the Riverwoods panel for investment readiness funding are from the following projects:

- Upper Tay Catchment Communities
- The River Ericht Catchment Regeneration Initiative

Lead partners are from a Countryside Trust and Community partnership, respectively.

Upper Tay Catchment Communities

"Perthshire Nature Connections Partnership (PNCP) is a long-term, nature-based vision to create a connection across Highland Perthshire between the Cairngorms and the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Parks. It works with a range of organisations across community, environment and land management. PNCP promotes integrated, large-scale ecological restoration of a sustainable and resilient landscape that provides environmental, socio-economic and health and wellbeing benefits to communities and land-managers."

The River Ericht Catchment Regeneration Initiative

"Our new River Ericht Catchment Regeneration Initiative has been set up in response to this crisis. With a founding group of local angling, environmental and community-led organisations, we want to take a catchment scale approach to reviving this important river system. We will seek to engage landowners, farmers, businesses, communities, educational institutions, and relevant

statutory bodies in restoring biodiversity, sinking carbon and enabling the sustainable livelihoods that depend on the Salmon and the river to thrive now and in the future.”

How did we support communities and landowners to feel able to influence change?

We were keen to explore how communities and landowners might truly feel like agents of change, rather than just participants in a process or series of workshops.

Whether they feel like ‘agents of change’ at this stage is hard to measure.

Feedback throughout was generally positive, for example that this was a useful opportunity to learn from others and benefit from access to wider knowledge, expertise, and best practice.

Comments included that it was an unusual process to take part in, with the focus on non-traditional grant making and exploration of new partnerships.

Peer support was valued, along with an opportunity to be creative.

How did we work in new and innovative ways?

Our aim was to safely experiment with processes and evolve our practice in how we execute work like this, beyond our usual toolkits and methods.

Working in close collaboration as a project team, we iterated new tools, templates and learning materials. An example is the online support package and explanations of the project guiding criteria.

Our one-team approach with weekly project check-ins meant we could pool our thinking and practice across our sectors.

We also learned what tools would be useful and give clarity, by listening to what people asked for at the Community Preparation workshops. We were able to create these tools and try new methods as we went along.

While the CONSUL platform was a new mechanism for our project team, we embraced its potential and navigated our lack of knowledge and uncertainty about its functionality. Through this experience, we recognised the development potential of the CONSUL platform for future, similar public engagement projects.

How did we encourage communities and partners to collaborate beyond this project?

To encourage communities and partners to collaborate beyond the project, we took a networked approach via intermediary organisations, successfully reaching both broad and deep into communities.

This cross-sector, cross-disciplinary approach could be improved further by removing obstacles and barriers to community involvement such as time, capacity, and greater clarity about the project's nature, boundaries, and the precise role the community can play.

Greater clarity

Specifically, there was a lack of clarity about the funding model and a dearth of concrete examples to illustrate what this might look like in reality. Participants in the Community Preparation workshop expressed the need for someone to come and look at their project to help them spot investment opportunities. In particular, there was cloudiness about the funding model and a lack of concrete examples to illustrate what this might look like in reality.

"It would be good to have someone come and look at our project to help us spot the investment opportunities. We don't tend to think along these lines."

Participant - Community Preparation workshop

By addressing these issues, we can leave behind a legacy of better collaboration and more robust investment opportunities for the future development of Riverwoods.

Partnership insight

Some community representatives said that engaging with landowners can be challenging. Equally, a few landowners were concerned about commitment in their connection with community groups.

This project has built confidence in those who did manage to form new partnerships and galvanise around a proposal. To encourage successful collaboration between communities and landowners, we found we needed to provide support in building trust, understanding each other's perspectives, and clearly defining expectations and commitments from both parties.

For future Riverwoods phases, a recommendation is to increase opportunities for open communication and dialogue, setting up joint workshops or activities, and facilitating relationship-building activities between community groups and landowners.

It may also be helpful to identify and address any potential power imbalances or conflicts of interest that could impact the partnership. This could involve setting up clear mechanisms for decision-making and conflict resolution, as well as ensuring that there is transparency around any financial arrangements or investments.

Investor insight

Communities told us that insight was needed to understand the motivation of investors, to create a stronger vision behind proposals.

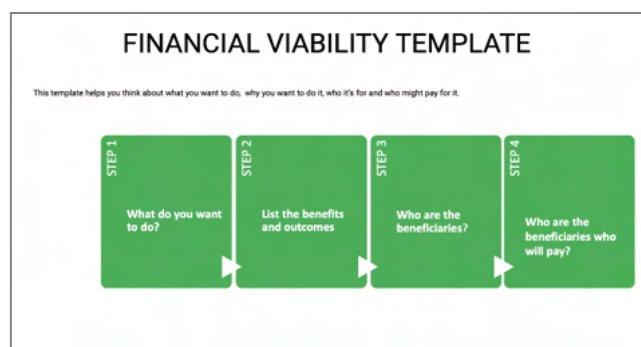
Additional workshops were delivered to explain and explore non-traditional forms of funding and nature-financing. The aim was to help proposers understand the value behind their work and angle more succinctly to those who will fund it.

"Do we have any clear calls from investors as to the sort of projects they want to invest in? We know they are keen on carbon sequestration projects - but what else are they looking for?"

"Aggregation would help a lot from an investor perspective. We probably lack this kind of infrastructure/map linking projects together on a national scale."

Participants - Community Preparation workshop

Here's a template for helping you to explore the financial viability of your project



Appendix 1.4

How did we track impact?

At the start, we anticipated how the project would unfold so that we could plan for impact measurement.

This included:

- Recruitment
- Geographic spread
- Numbers of proposals
- Quality of proposals
- Numbers in community selection process

It was important to set up systems for safe recruitment, so that we could track and monitor peoples' involvement. Consent processes to take part or to receive project updates were put in place at the outset. This meant we were able to monitor who signed up to take part and safeguard their involvement.

Tracking geographic spread, numbers of proposals, and numbers of public participants voting was all built into CONSUL.

Measuring the quality of proposals was measured via community interaction on CONSUL, and via the oversight and scrutiny of the Award Panel. The Panels' assessment was also shared back with the public towards the end of the voting process, to give people insight which could inform their final decisions.

Now that Phase One is complete, there is plenty of energy and exposure for the wider Riverwoods initiative to build upon.

As an example, we added in a workshop with Foundation Scotland to talk about funding for proposals that did not make it through Riverwoods Phase One. Although turn-out here was fairly low, similar events in the longer term would bring nature-based projects together for sharing ideas and learning about funding options. To make sure there is a high turn-out to similar events, we suggest planning well in advance, so that participants are aware of the base timetable and any event additions as our recommendation.

This connection of organisations who do not usually work together is an interesting model to expand; community groups and landowners for instance. The Riverwoods project shows us how capacity can be added to organisations, by bringing different combinations of people together.

To achieve an even wider, deeper participation reach, at grass roots level, more resource could be allocated to organisations who already have the trust of local communities. An even longer design phase would enable better understanding of context, need, and options available to meet that need.

Extra potential has been identified in the development of CONSUL, with more inclusive options for engagement. Also, to target local and national media harder and earlier in the project lifespan.

It was acknowledged that there are plenty of potential partnerships, but concern was expressed over having the capacity to bring them together in the Pioneers time frame.

How did we support reflection and peer-to-peer learning?

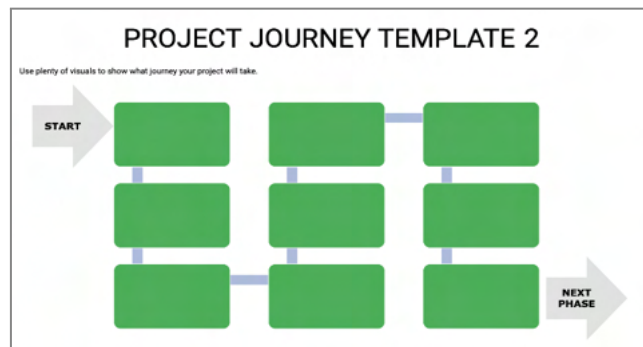
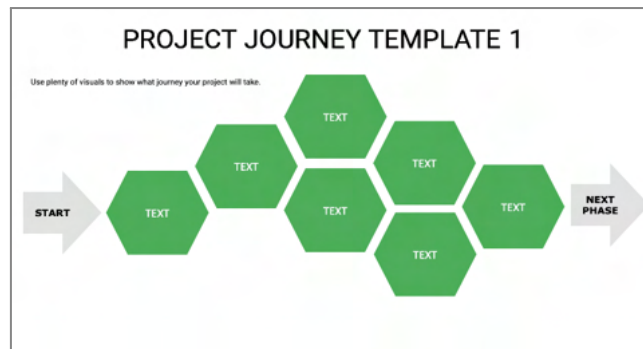
Learning and innovation were always at the heart of this project. We were clear that everyone - including us, the project team - had full permission to test, and fail. This was so that we could collectively learn, in order to find out what could work and what was pioneering.

We felt it was important to encourage peer-to-peer learning and understand the benefits of this, in order to develop a culture of reflection for the project.

Setting this as our culture, peer learning was designed into the process. Evaluation and reflection points were added along the way to gather feedback. We wanted to spark innovative approaches between different groups and encourage new forms of collaboration.

The learning journey was promoted to participants from the outset, so they were aware of what was ahead. Learning was shared back at touchpoints along the way so that people could see what others were saying.

Have a go at planning your project journey using one of these templates



Appendix 1.5

We did this through email communications and follow-up workshops, including a final overall reflections session with people who took part, as captured and shown below.

Feedback from participants at the end of Phase One



Appendix 1.6

Here's a similar template to download for your project reflection

	BEFORE	DURING	AFTER
<p>REFLECTIONS TEMPLATE</p> <p>Use this template to review a project at different stages.</p> <p>Think about:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What worked well2. What worked less well3. What could have been done differently			

Appendix 1.7

How did we show that change is a result of each element of the process, and not just an end point?

We designed the Participant Journey to be exploratory and collaborative as it was based on forming new partnerships and co-designing together.

At the start, people described the project as being too complex – namely the funding model and the voting process.

The project timescale presented a problem for some participants. At a Community Preparation workshop, a community group representative was vocal in their reluctance to spend lots of time and effort in putting forward a proposal which might then fail.

A critique we heard was that *"unless you've got your potential group of people together already, that timeframe is only going to privilege certain kinds of people."* **Participant - Community Preparation workshop**

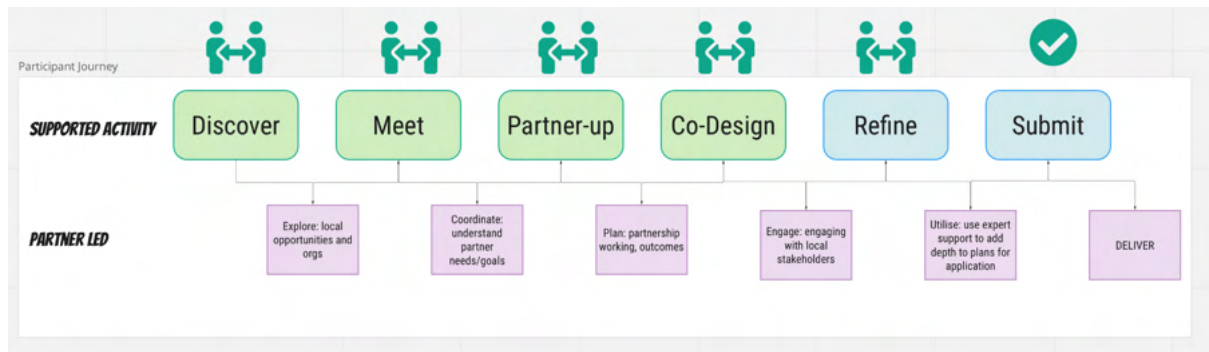
Another participant in this workshop thought it was a *"...brilliant idea but seems like a big project to start."*

Here, we stressed the various ways of getting involved from leading a proposal, supporting a proposal, to getting involved during the community selection phase in prioritising proposals.

One participant shared their approach to collaboration on leading a proposal at one of the online events: *"Gather stakeholders around a table and start discussing targets and needs. Repeat a few times with new stakeholders."* **Participant - Community Preparation workshop**

Keeping in touch with all proposers in Phase One, we felt there was an opportunity to link them with alternative funding streams at the workshop with Foundation Scotland, to explore eligibility for their partiality realised proposals.

Riverwoods Investment Readiness Pioneer - Participant Journey



Appendix 1.8

Our key learning is that **change can be emergent** - from an accessible and collaborative process - rather than as a point at the end of a process.

SECTION TWO - Amplification of Citizen Voice

Connecting People and Power

Key line of enquiry

How can we ensure that public interest and conservation efforts are at the heart of the project planning?

How did we support communities to claim power?

The project ethos was to inspire people to get together and address a local riparian issue in a way that would attract interest in investment. Through the launch event and series of Community Preparation workshops, we encouraged community group representatives, landowners, social enterprises, community development and outdoor education organisations to embrace the Riverwoods vision and think about how they might restore woodland, improve the Scottish landscape and bring benefits to wildlife and local people.

We were upfront about amplifying public voice throughout the project and beyond, with a range of ways people could be involved in shaping it. During the launch and promotion phase, participants gave feedback on what they needed and where anything was not clear.

Emphasis was on throwing the net wide, to reach as many people as possible. We offered to connect groups as a way of bringing new partners together. This was picked up by a participant at a Community Preparation event, when sharing how they wanted to link with other stakeholders: *"We need lots of different groups and people to lead. Matchmaking offer of linking up with Young People / BAME community groups / disability groups is good."*

Some nervousness was expressed by partners and participants over the methodology of the public vote versus the Award Panel in making decisions.

The process we used included a full panel review of each proposal, with a simple grading evaluation: fair, good, strong for voters to consider published on CONSUL. Members of the public were encouraged to read each proposal, comment, ask questions and indicate their strength of support with a thumbs up/thumbs down function. Finally, each member of the public had up to three votes to cast. This was to mitigate favouritism towards more densely populated areas.

The public did not have the *ultimate* say in prioritising the top five, however.

Extra scrutiny was given to the top six proposals by the Award Panel and one of these was not put through. Detailed feedback was not provided for the 12 proposals, but an overview of the selection process, scoring by the selection panel and outcomes of the public voting were [provided publicly](#), with signposting for alternative funding sources.

We saw evidence of small scale social movement through new partnerships, plus the numbers and geographical spread of people who got involved in the project. How connected these people stay in following the progress of Riverwoods projects is yet to be determined.

In the RSA paper, *Releasing energy for change in our communities*¹ social networks are described as “the invisible connections between people that form communities.”

We learned that a major factor to support how we strengthen this connection, or glue between individuals to form networks for change, was regular communication through our networks and on the Riverwoods website. Producing clear messaging about the project aims and phases helped to connect people as a network and create communities sound a shared endeavour.

*“Network needed to connect people so they don't have to knock on every door themselves. Particularly difficult if the people behind the doors don't yet know of innovative solutions.” Participant - **Community Preparation event***

How did we encourage a mindset of 'emergent possibilities' rather than fixed outcomes?

In every workshop and email communication with people involved in Riverwoods Pioneers, we emphasised that this was about **innovation** and **vision**, as opposed to more traditional project funding applications.

For many, this mindset was difficult to grasp - particularly against the two phase funding allocations and community selection process.

We know this, because participants took up our offer to have 1:1 calls with us to talk in detail and help them understand how they could tackle a local project. Building a narrative around vision and potential was challenging for us too!

To encourage this mindset, positioning the offer clearly, and having regular support for people to make sense of it, was key. We needed to revisit how we were describing the phases at each step of the way.

1

<https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/projects/psc/health-as-a-social-movement/rsa-releasing-energy-for-change-in-our-communities-report-nov-11.pdf>, Burbidge, RSA Action and Research Centre, 2017

Example of a slide we shared at Community Preparation workshops, to try and clarify what a proposal should cover - and not cover

What is a proposal?	
What it is	What it isn't
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Timebound - Jan 2023• Multiple stakeholders• Discovery• Innovative• Exploratory• Participatory and inclusive• Long-term, scalable, durable• Phased• Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consultation• Delivery of an existing project• Short-term, quick fix projects• Fixed method• Right or wrong way

Appendix 2.1

Here are similar templates for defining and scoping a project

PROJECT DEFINITION TEMPLATE

Clarify what your project by pinpointing what it is and what it isn't.

WHAT THIS IS	WHAT THIS ISN'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/>

SCOPING TEMPLATE

Use this template to think about what's in scope for your project. Is there anything that is out of scope?

IN SCOPE	OUT OF SCOPE
<div style="border: 1px solid gray; border-radius: 15px; height: 100px;"></div>	<div style="border: 1px solid gray; border-radius: 15px; height: 100px;"></div>

Appendix 2.2

Making sure we have lots of visual elements in place was critical to help people understand the journey ahead.

Diagram to describe the community engagement process in Phase One

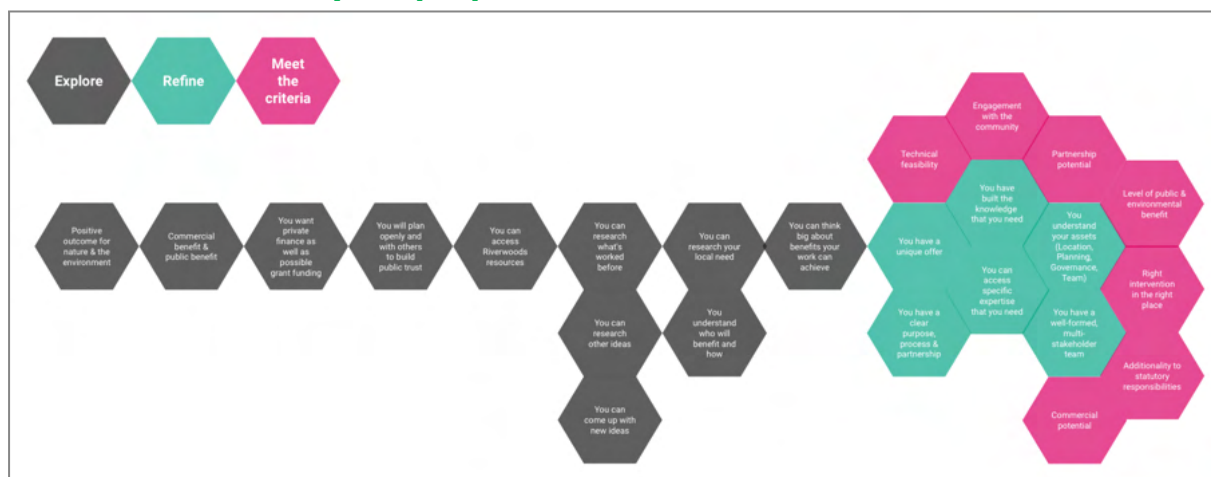


Appendix 2.3

We encouraged each participant to think about the unique approach they take to think about ideas for proposals. So long as the application criteria was addressed, there was no right or wrong way to get involved.

This is illustrated in the pick and mix diagram *How to think about your proposal*.

How to think about your proposal



Appendix 2.4

How did the Riverwoods processes enable communities to claim real power?

As an experiment, there is plenty to develop from the Riverwoods work. Our approach was to design moments of collaboration in ways that shared power and knowledge between wide-ranging groups. This can be seen in the application criteria, which welcomed and encouraged new partnerships between different sectors.

The mixture of community led and landowner involvement is a stand-out achievement of the project, along with the range of sectors and organisations who took part. We learned that there are many existing and emerging cross sector partnerships.

One of the seven mandatory sections was to describe community engagement within the proposal. Though wide ranging, much of this was aspirational. Proposals highlighted the need to link with schools, residents and other groups in the community.

Three of the 12 proposals referenced citizens scientists as a priority, with one already established project - Citizen Esk Project - <https://forthriverstrust.org/project/citizen-esk/>

Reviewing progress of community engagement processes from a democratic perspective will sit well in the next phase of the Riverwoods Blueprint Project, evaluating the longevity and sustainability of collaborative working to deliver conservation projects.

Moving forward, the Riverwoods Blueprint Project has the opportunity to review and develop areas that were not covered in the Pioneers work, to ensure continued progress.

From our learning, we suggest these provocations are further explored in this phase:

- How can we make existing systems more open to change?
- How might we disrupt known power dynamics in existing systems? How can we involve and include a wider range of voices?

SECTION THREE - Impact on Governance and Infrastructure

Building Democratic Infrastructure

Key lines of Enquiry

How can financing of conservation efforts be based on good governance principles?

What are the characteristics of a Democratic Infrastructure?

Our mission was to reach and engage as many landowners, communities and networks as we could, to invite new thinking for strengthening public riparian spaces. We wanted Scottish communities to have more agency in relation to nature-based assets, whether that was climate change related, or centred in health and well-being. The aim was to get people thinking about innovative ideas which would attract new funding into communities.

To make a qualifying proposal, associated governance arrangements were needed. We provided loose guidance on governance, stating that anyone could be the grant holder, as long as their proposal was legal, and the lead proposer had sound financial arrangements.

We also stipulated that we would monitor the level of personal benefit of the lead applicant to ensure that it did not exceed any public/environmental benefits. The final governance conditions were that proposals would be more successful with a cross-section of partners and robust engagement with local communities.

Project proposals should focus on commercial potential, technical feasibility, the right intervention in the right place, and additionality to statutory provision.

Transparency, clarity, accessibility and collaboration, were core characteristics we sought from the Riverwoods Pioneers.

Keeping these principles in mind in the design phase helped us plan each stage of the project, with space for iteration based on participant feedback as we went along. Building the project infrastructure would have been even more democratic if representatives from community groups had been part of our project team, co-designing the journey with us.

How did we build inclusive, equal networks for participation?

Our aim was to build a networked infrastructure, which was consented, open and accessible for a diverse membership. To achieve this, we sought to reach as many stakeholders as we could, to get involved and contribute to the overall learning process.

Our scattergun approach could have been improved with more detailed onboarding, to understand our stakeholders' specific needs. We were aware that

our workshops were fairly generic and not tailored to some individual circumstances - for example disabilities, or people with English as a second language.

Our online Community Preparation workshops would have benefited from being delivered in a variety of formats - in-person small groups, using a range of participatory tools for example.

How did we think in a collaborative way - to break down siloed thinking and doing?

To begin with, we employed a stakeholder segmentation mapping tool to help us identify and prioritise potential collaborators, based on their relevance and interest in our project.

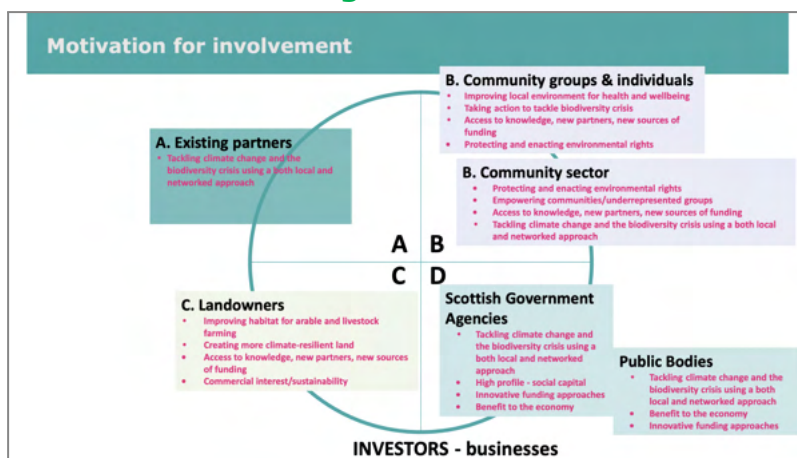
We also mapped their reasons for wanting to get involved, so we could tailor our outreach and engagement strategies accordingly.

Riverwoods Investment Readiness Pioneers - Stakeholders by sector



Appendix 3.1

Stakeholders - reasons to get involved



Appendix 3.2

The methodology had both successful and flawed aspects.

While we managed to reach a diverse cross-section of stakeholders by leveraging a network-of-networks approach, we could have gone further and engaged more deeply, especially with community groups that are traditionally harder to reach. We relied heavily on pre-existing networks and known contacts, which limited our outreach.

Desk research did link us with a few people who may not typically be part of known networks; new groups who popped up on radio interviews, students, and local residents for example. However, these groups - though interested - did not go through to submit proposals or join others to make a partnership proposal. Reasons given were lack of time, capacity or a mismatch in remit, (for instance, a need to focus on mental health issues rather than develop nature-based investment ideas).

To address this, we recommend gaining a deeper understanding of the incentives and barriers that different individuals and groups face when accessing similar opportunities and collaborating in meaningful ways. We also suggest making the process more continuous and flexible, so that people can join at any time and participate in ways that suit their unique circumstances.

How did we get communities, landowners, stakeholders to collaborate?

Our challenge was to bring disparate stakeholders together, who may have conflicting aims or different priorities.

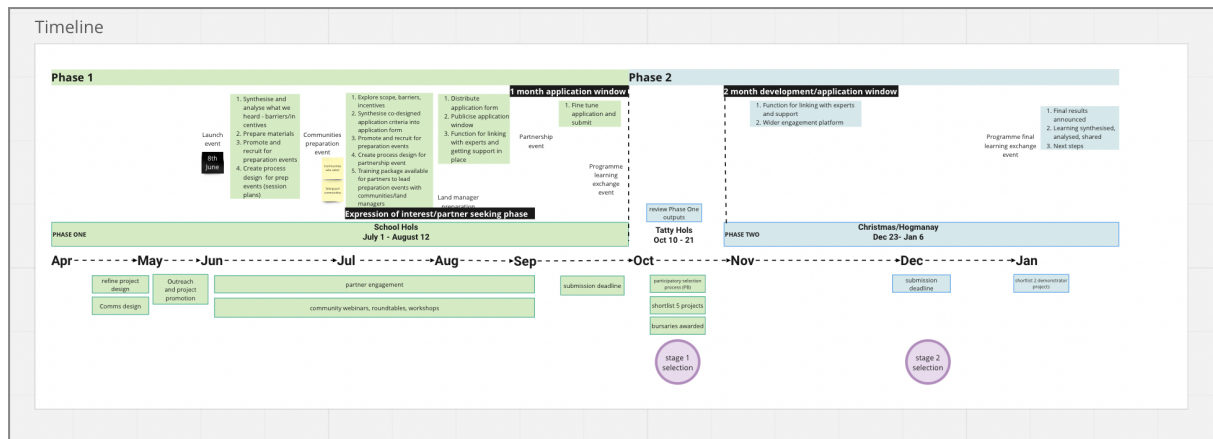
Having a clear, defined and shared purpose was key for getting people on board the Pioneers journey.

While they seemed to sign up in principle to the vision and aims of the project, it was clear that for community groups in particular, that having capacity to get involved was moderated by their individual organisational agendas or structures.

We also encountered engagement fatigue in some groups, who did not feel able to get involved in 'yet one more thing.'

Having a defined timeline organised around holidays and farming commitment helped to get our stakeholders onto the same page.

Riverwoods Investment Readiness Pioneers - Timeline



Appendix 3.3

How might we centre diverse voices and knowledge systems in this work?

To centre diverse voices and knowledge systems in this work, it's important to actively seek out and include perspectives from underrepresented communities and groups. This could involve targeted outreach and engagement efforts to connect with these groups, and ensure that their voices are heard and valued throughout the process.

One way to do this is through co-design and co-creation processes, where community members are involved in shaping the project from the beginning. This can help ensure that the project is relevant and responsive to their needs and priorities. This would enable greater understanding of the infrastructure and conditions needed for a wider system of stronger, more democratic public space.

A key consideration here is *who* can help put this in place? Who does a 'democratic infrastructure' belong to? Who has the power to strengthen public space? We learned that power can be diffused and distributed equally from the community groups who submitted proposals as existing partnerships from multiple sectors.

[Democratic infrastructure](#) is defined here as a set of elements that enable continuous development, reinforcement and reimagination of democracy in a defined context.

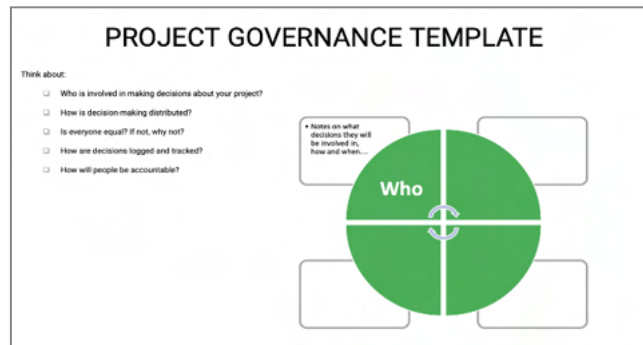
This includes:

- flexibility
- impact over time, and
- the capacity to enable democratic self-improvement.

Applying this to Riverwoods, we encouraged people to reimagine ways of tackling local issues and how this might be funded, as a long-term approach to riparian restoration and community development.

Further focus on governance - what this means and what it looks like for different groups - would be a recommendation from this point on, utilising a [deliberative systems thinking approach](#) (understanding and analysing democracy concerning different perspectives). Alongside governance, accountability is another focus to make sure decisions are carried forward into action.

Actively plan who is involved and how they are involved in governance and decision making, using this template.



Appendix 3.4

Other themes to pick up in the Riverwoods Blueprint Project include:

- How might we build up capabilities and capacities in these places for durability and longevity, and community and climate resilience?
- How do we link the topics of democracy and climate in the approach in actionable, accessible, tangible ways, so that people make the connection and see value in taking these approaches forward?
- How can we make Democracy Work for Everyone?
- How can communities take the lead on building capabilities with each other?
- How can we / partners / the programme support them to do this?

CONCLUSION

How 'pioneering' was Riverwoods Investment Readiness Pioneers?

As a project team, being able to design and then articulate the purpose and pathway for the project felt like a mixture of being both complicated and pioneering at the same time! We were actively trying new ways of doing things, exploring new routes to get there and paving the way for others to come together on the Riverwoods journey.

One participant described the experience as:

"...overly complex voting, especially for the voting demographic."

For others,

"It was new and different and difficult to explain to people so they could get their heads round it, but when they did it made sense and they got behind the opportunity."

"I had some idea of what the end would look like, but there was lots of uncertainty, so it did feel like we were pioneering a new route."

"It was very new to our emerging group - none of us had been involved in anything like this before - so motivating."

"Pioneering in the sense that the model of the ultimate funding covers a wide range of uses all of which will enhance nature."

"For us and our community and the partnership group we had already it was very pioneering - none of us had ever been involved in something like this & that was motivating."

"The more we talk to different potential stakeholders, the more they realise how new a field this is and that creates an energy field that we can tap into."

In the RSA publication *Releasing energy for change in our communities*², we learn that in order to harness community energy for change we need to:

²

<https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/projects/psc/health-as-a-social-movement/rsa-releasing-energy-for-change-in-our-communities-report-nov-11.pdf>, Op Cit

1. Find ways for each **individual** to feel they have a sense of agency, that they have control over the things in their lives that most matter to them.
2. Support **communities** to develop a collective sense of agency so that they are able to respond to local issues.
3. Help **organisations** to recognise what they need to do differently to support emergent social movements.

As outlined in the RSA publication, finding ways for individuals to feel a sense of agency, supporting communities to develop a collective sense of agency, and helping organisations to recognise what they need to do differently are essential for harnessing community energy for change. These principles provide useful pointers for the blueprint phase of Riverwoods.

At the start, the scope was too broad for people to engage. To make Riverwoods Investment Readiness Pioneers a reality, a lot of guidance and encouragement was needed to support local people into collaborative partnerships.

At the end of this review, we have found that a broad range of actors - landowners, communities, scientists - can generate pioneering value that is welcomed by the nature financing world.

Based on the feedback from the participants and the principles of harnessing community energy for change, it seems that Riverwoods Investment Readiness Pioneers was indeed pioneering in its approach to connecting diverse groups of people for nature-based financing.

The true pioneering element was in the connecting of people who would not usually consider working together, particularly in relation to nature finance. We found that support and clear parameters were needed for people to make these innovative connections.

The project required support and guidance to encourage collaboration and build a collective sense of agency. However, the project's impact and long-term success will be determined by the local results it achieves in Scotland.

Overall, Riverwoods Investment Readiness Pioneers appears to have made valuable contributions to the field of nature finance by bringing together different actors and generating pioneering value.

We look forward to seeing the local results and impact of this pioneering engagement across Scotland in the longer-term.

Pandora Ellis and **Rachel Nixseman** 2023
on behalf of **Riverwoods Project Team**

RIVERWOODS

APPENDICES

Learning Reflections & Toolkit

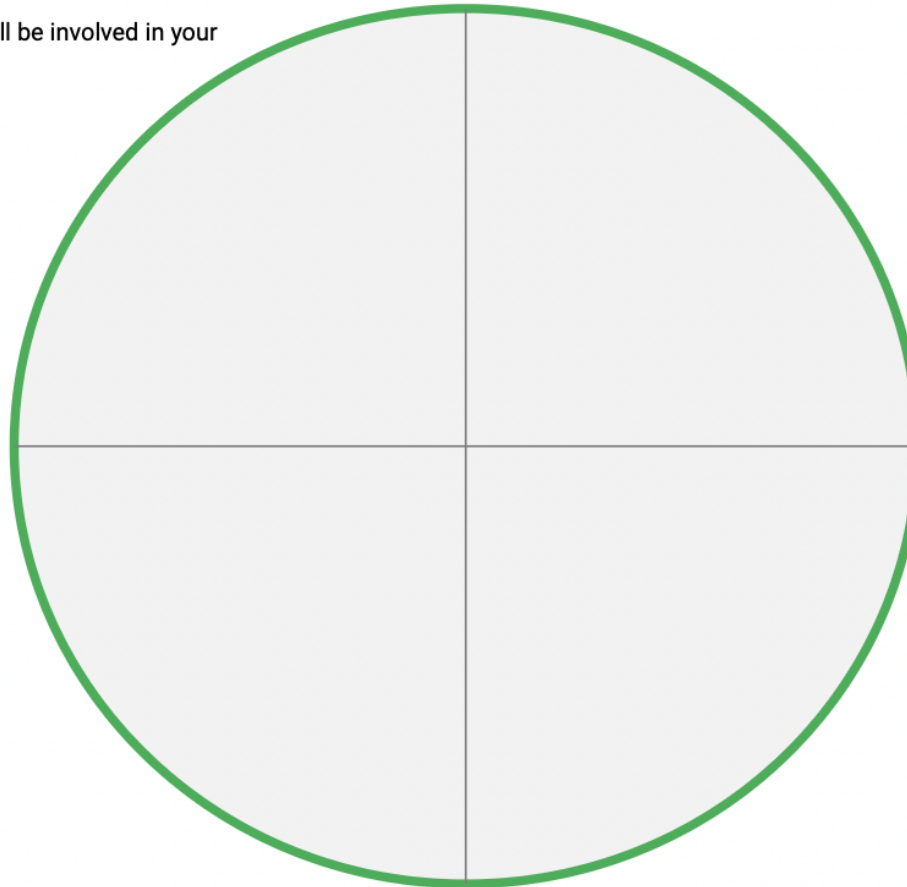
Appendix 1.1 Use this tool to think about which sectors you might partner up with

SECTOR MAPPING TEMPLATE

Use this tool to think about which sectors will be involved in your project.

Sector 1
eg. Intermediary organisations

Sector 4
eg. Private or commercial organisations



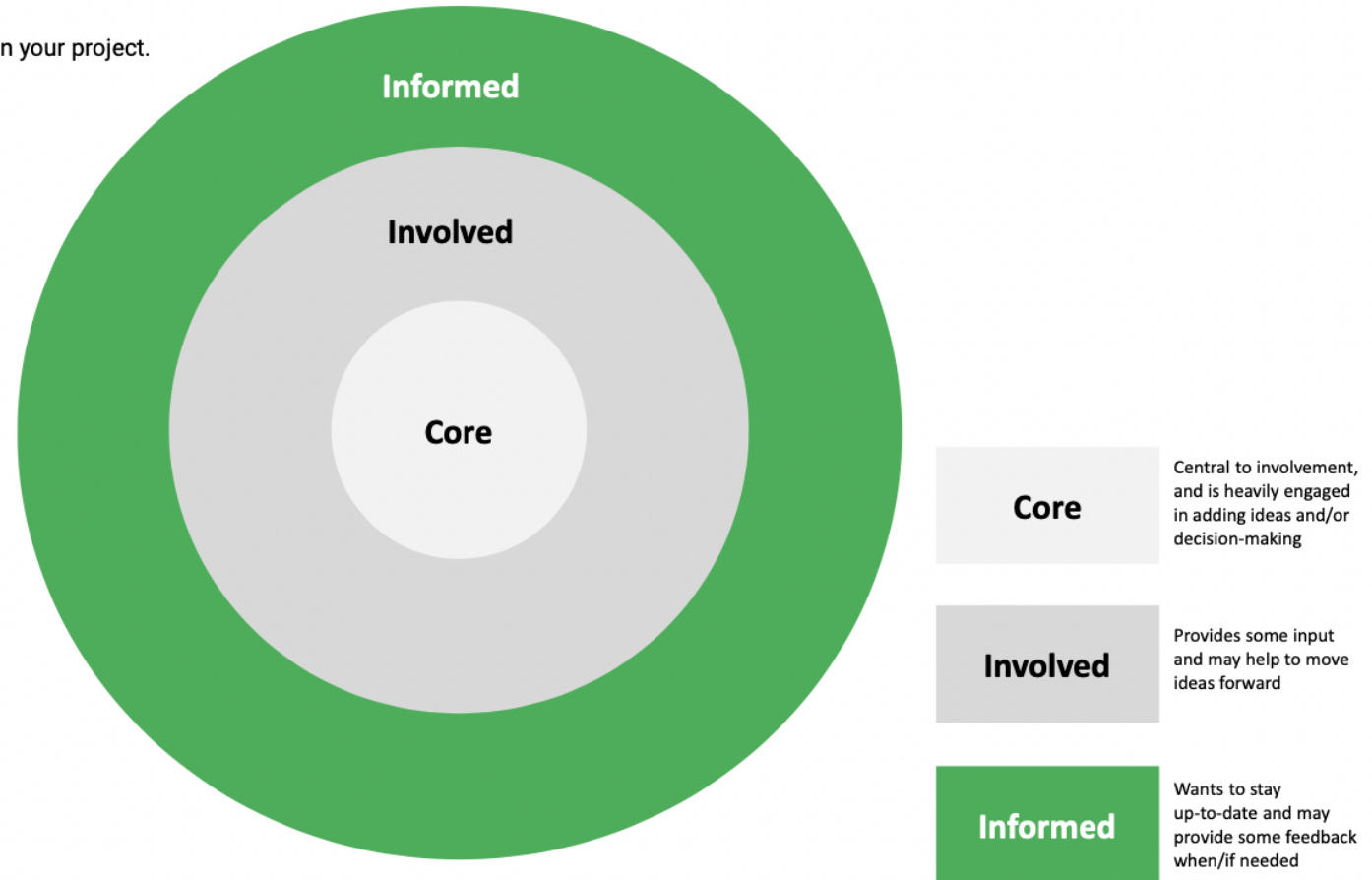
Sector 2
eg. Community groups and organisations

Sector 4
eg. Public or Government agencies

Appendix 1.2 Try this template to map your stakeholders

STAKEHOLDER MAPPING TEMPLATE

Use this to think about who will be involved in your project.



Appendix 1.3 Here's a template to help groups understand project phasing

PROJECT PHASES TEMPLATE

Use plenty of visuals to show different phases your project will take.

1

Name this phase

Give a short description of what will happen here.

Add timescales.

2

Name this phase

Give a short description of what will happen here.

Add timescales.

3

Name this phase

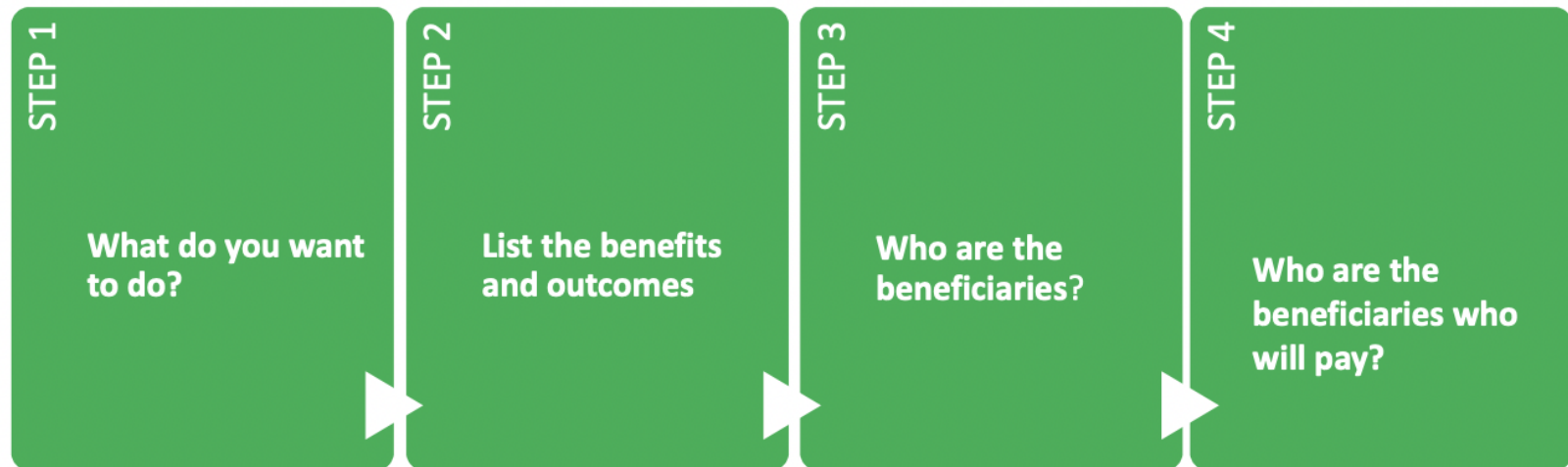
Give a short description of what will happen here.

Add timescales.

Appendix 1.4 Here's a template for helping you to explore the financial viability of your project

FINANCIAL VIABILITY TEMPLATE

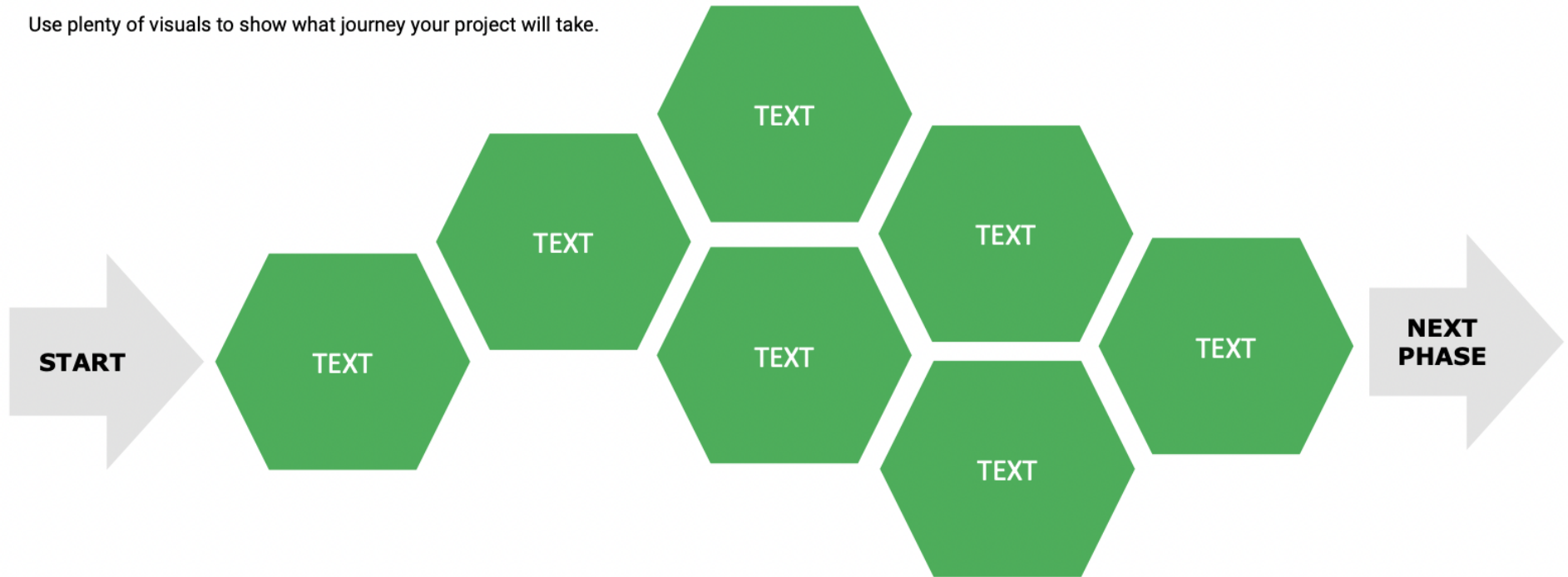
This template helps you think about what you want to do, why you want to do it, who it's for and who might pay for it.



Appendix 1.5 Have a go at planning your project journey using one of these templates

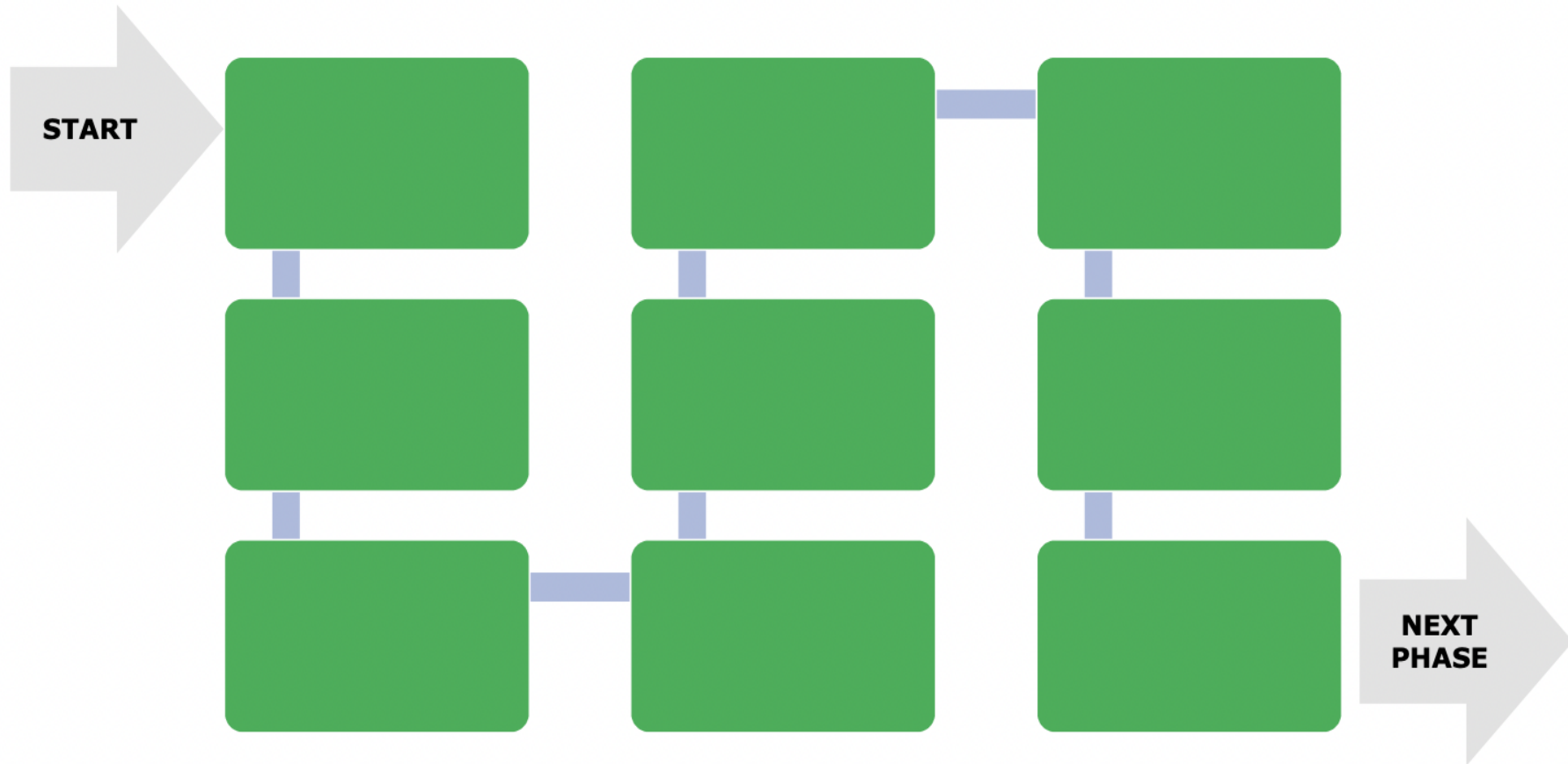
PROJECT JOURNEY TEMPLATE 1

Use plenty of visuals to show what journey your project will take.

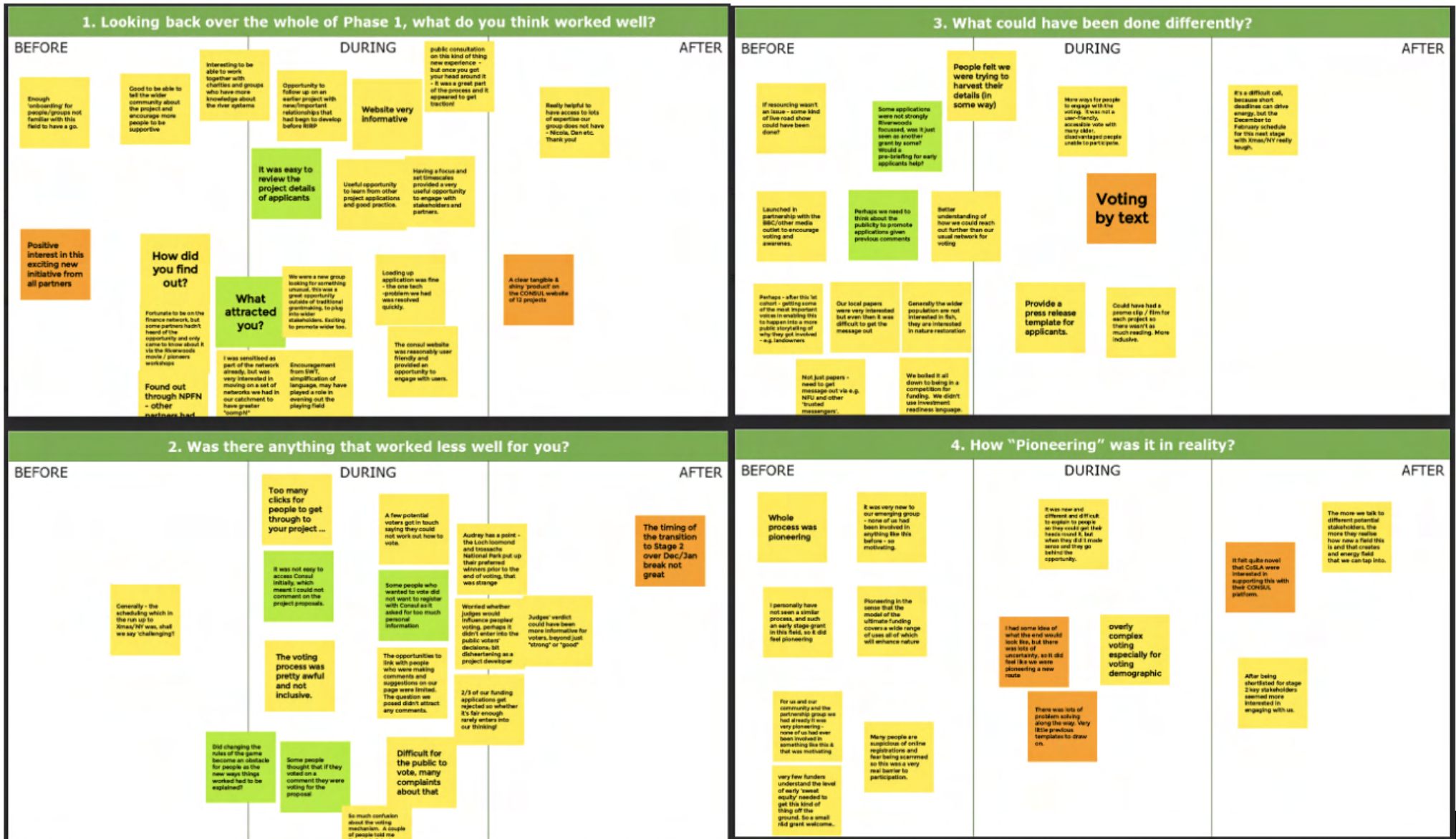


PROJECT JOURNEY TEMPLATE 2

Use plenty of visuals to show what journey your project will take.



Appendix 1.6 Feedback from participants at the end of Phase One



Appendix 1.7 Here's a similar template to download for your project reflection

REFLECTIONS TEMPLATE

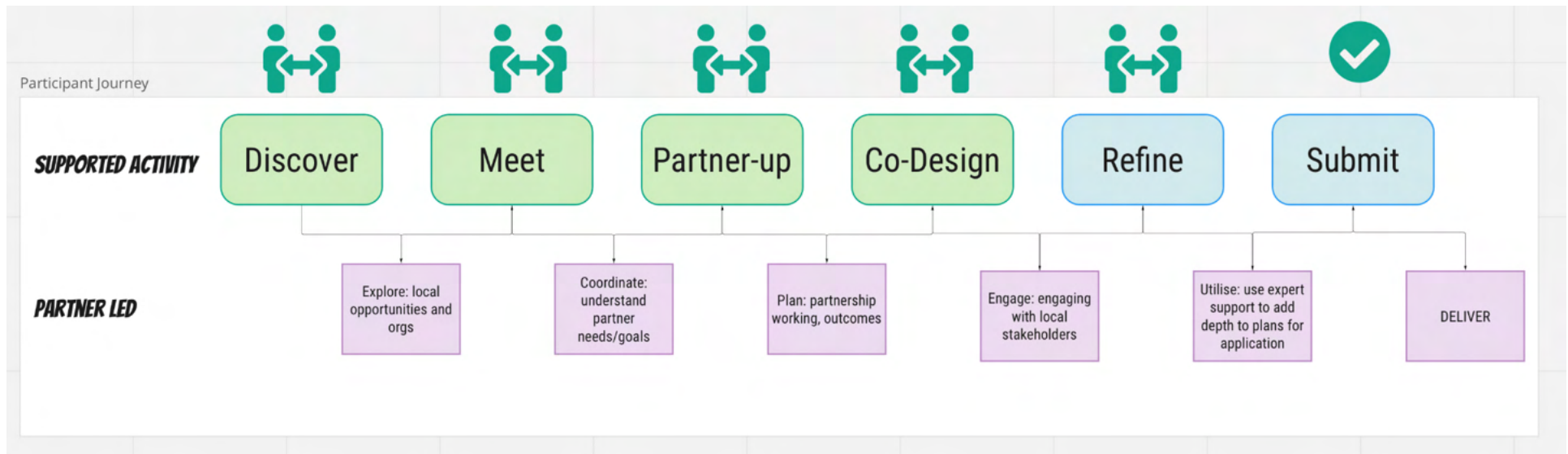
Use this template to review a project at different stages.

Think about:

1. What worked well
2. What worked less well
3. What could have been done differently

	BEFORE	DURING	AFTER

Appendix 1.8 Riverwoods Investment Readiness Pioneer - Participant Journey



Appendix 2.1 Example of a slide we shared at Community Preparation workshops, to try and clarify what a proposal should cover - and not cover

What is a proposal?

What it is

- **Timebound** - Jan 2023
- **Multiple stakeholders**
- **Discovery**
- **Innovative**
- **Exploratory**
- **Participatory and inclusive**
- **Long-term, scalable, durable**
- **Phased**
- **Learning**

What it isn't

- **Consultation**
- **Delivery of an existing project**
- **Short-term, quick fix projects**
- **Fixed method**
- **Right or wrong way**

Appendix 2.2 Here are similar templates for defining and scoping a project

PROJECT DEFINITION TEMPLATE

Clarify what your project by pinpointing what it is and what it isn't.

WHAT THIS IS

-
-
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-

WHAT THIS ISN'T

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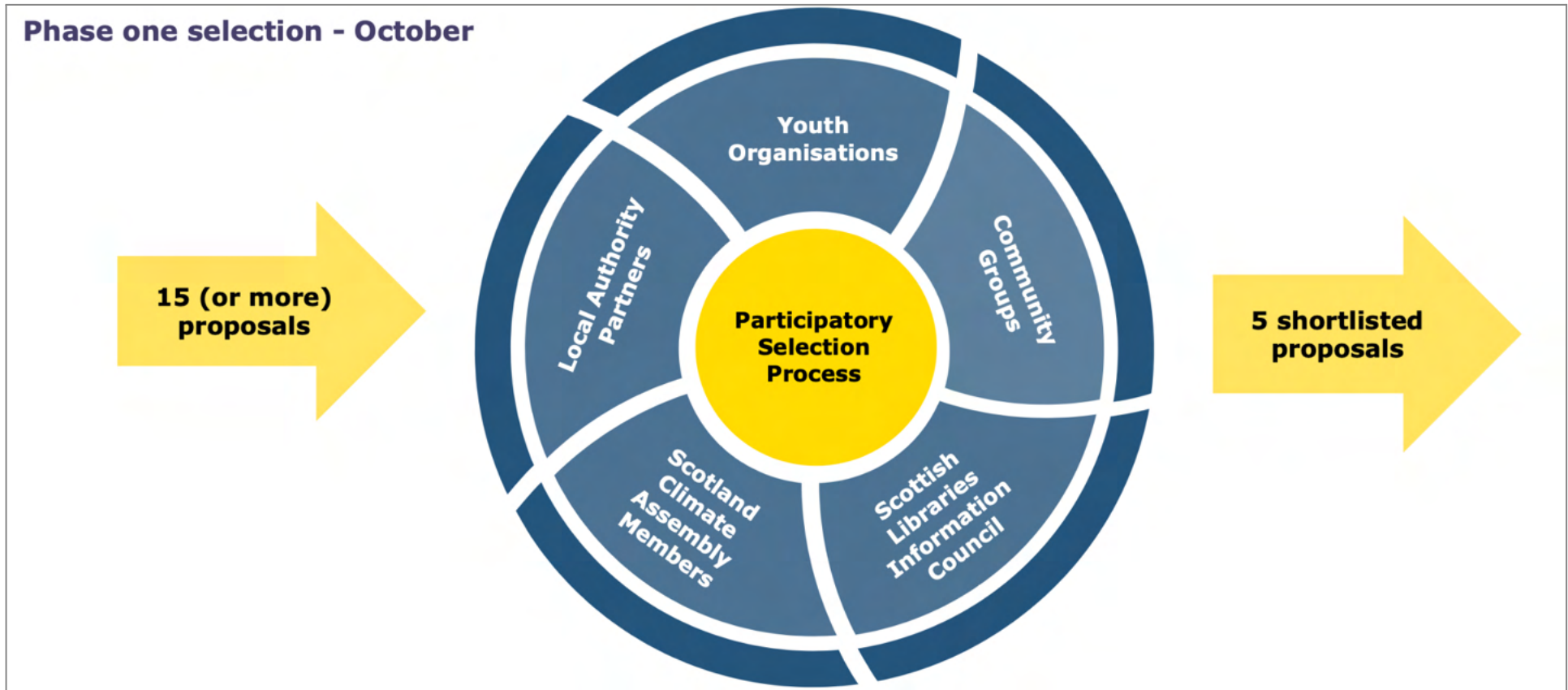
SCOPING TEMPLATE

Use this template to think about what's in scope for your project. Is there anything that is out of scope?

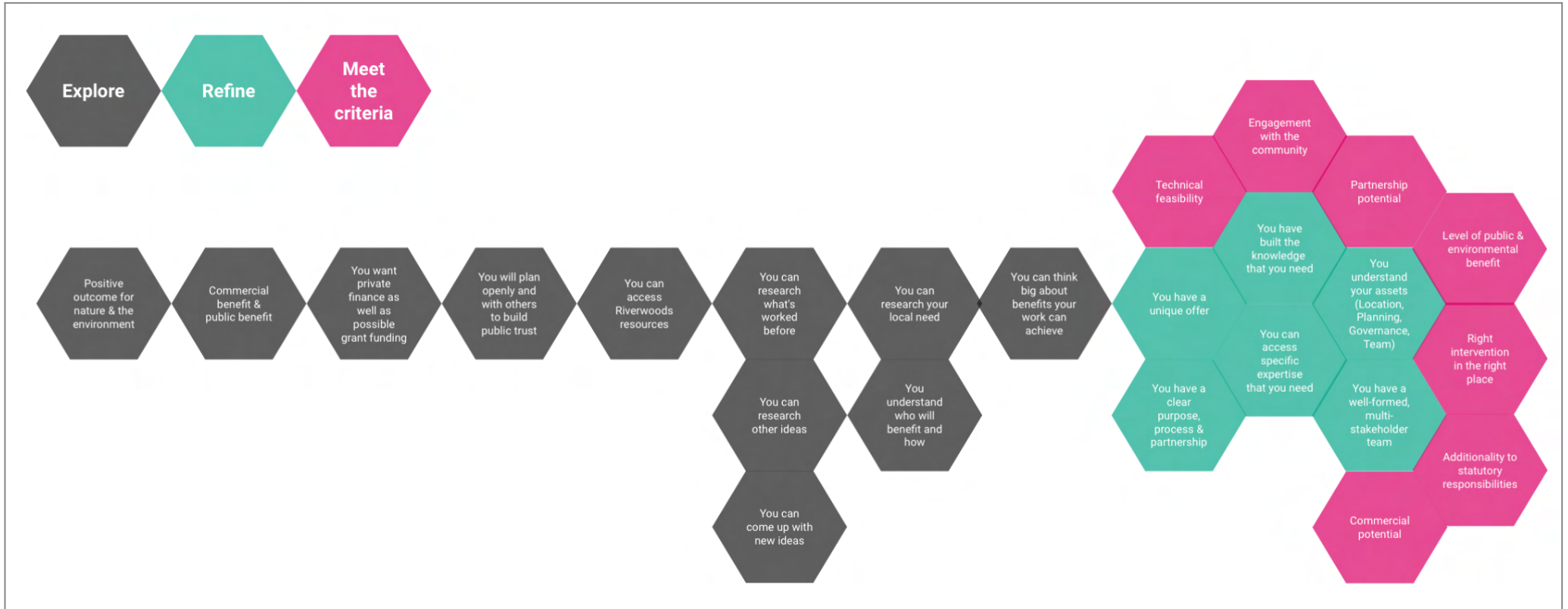
IN SCOPE

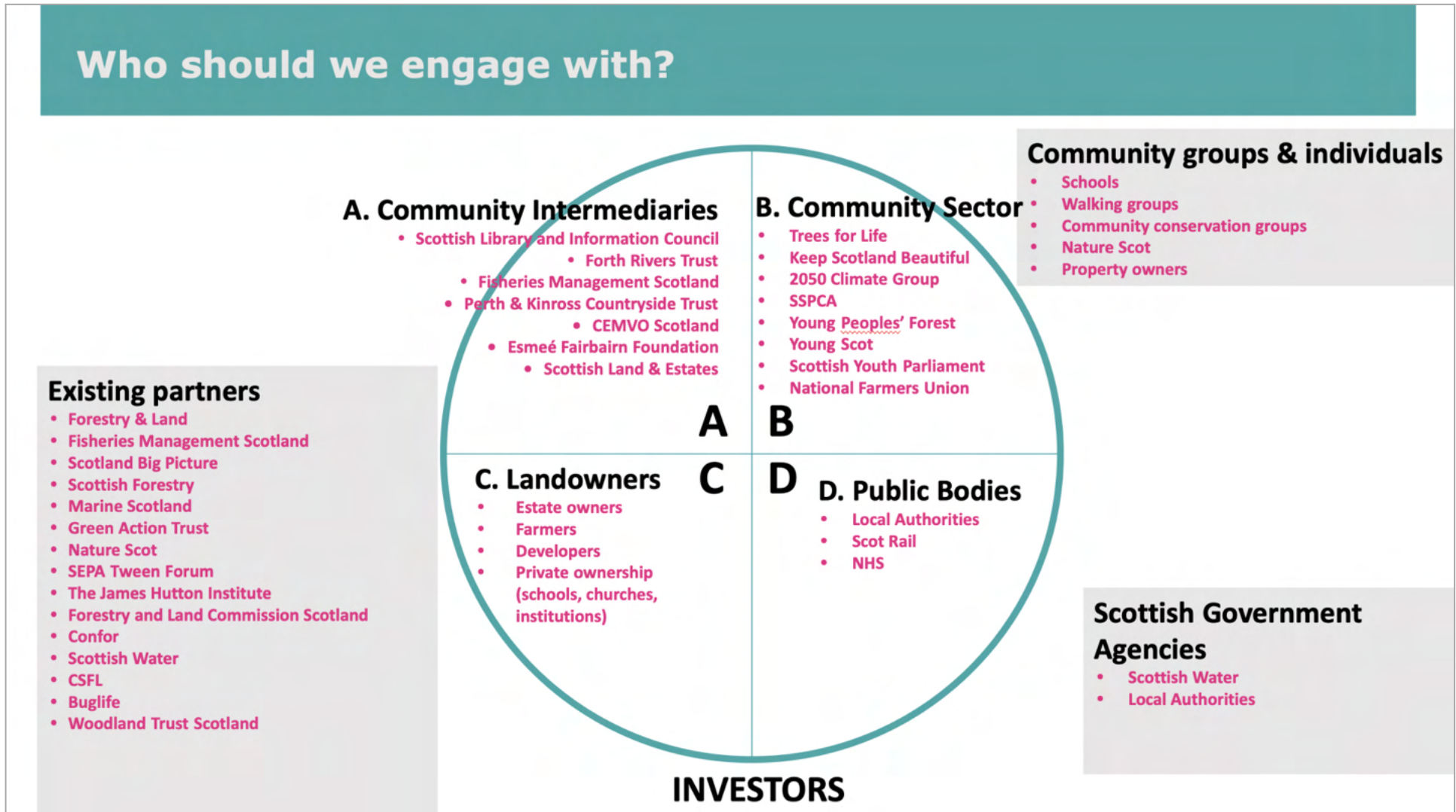
OUT OF SCOPE

Appendix 2.3 Diagram to describe the community engagement process in Phase One

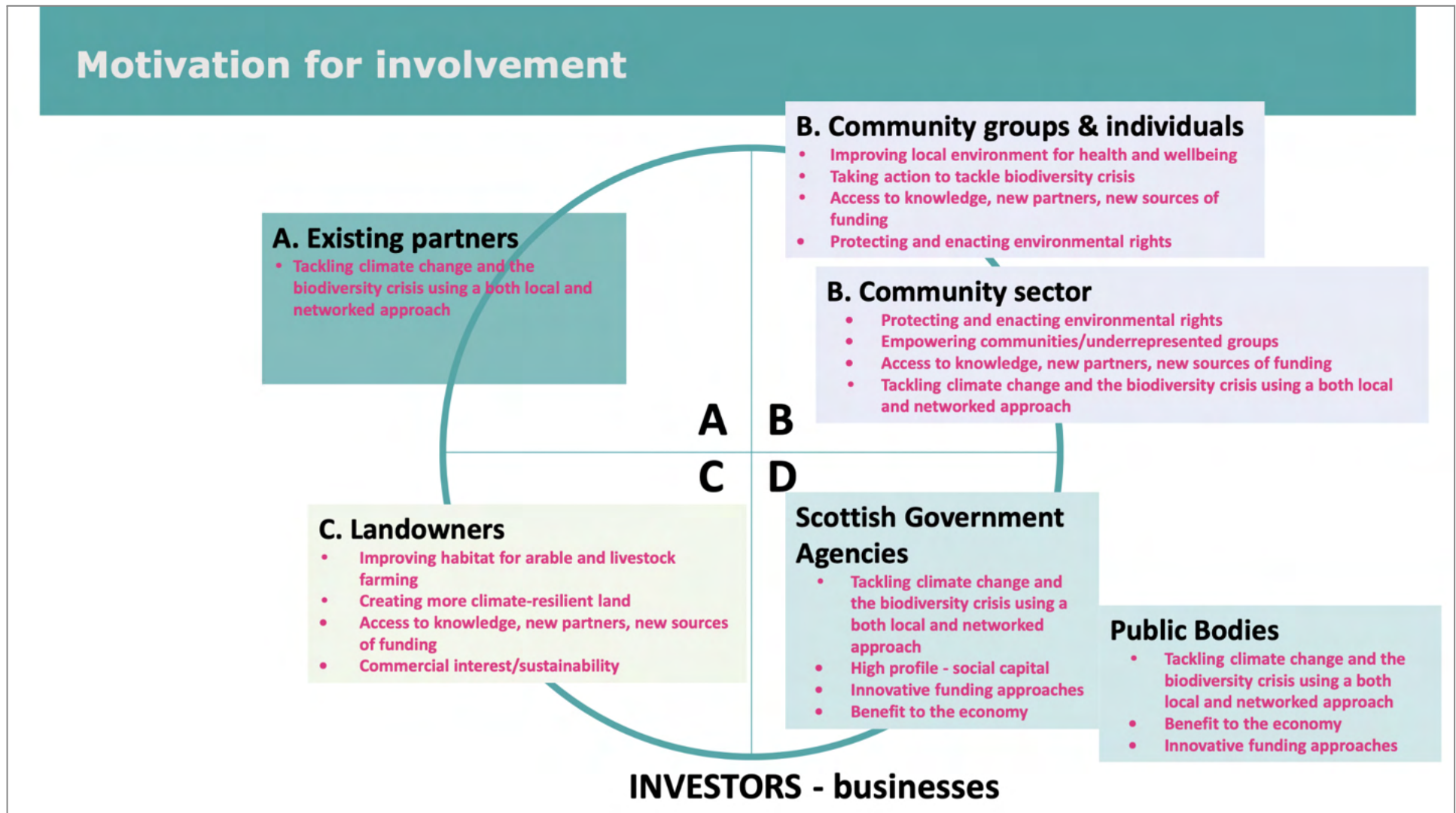


Appendix 2.4 How to think about your proposal

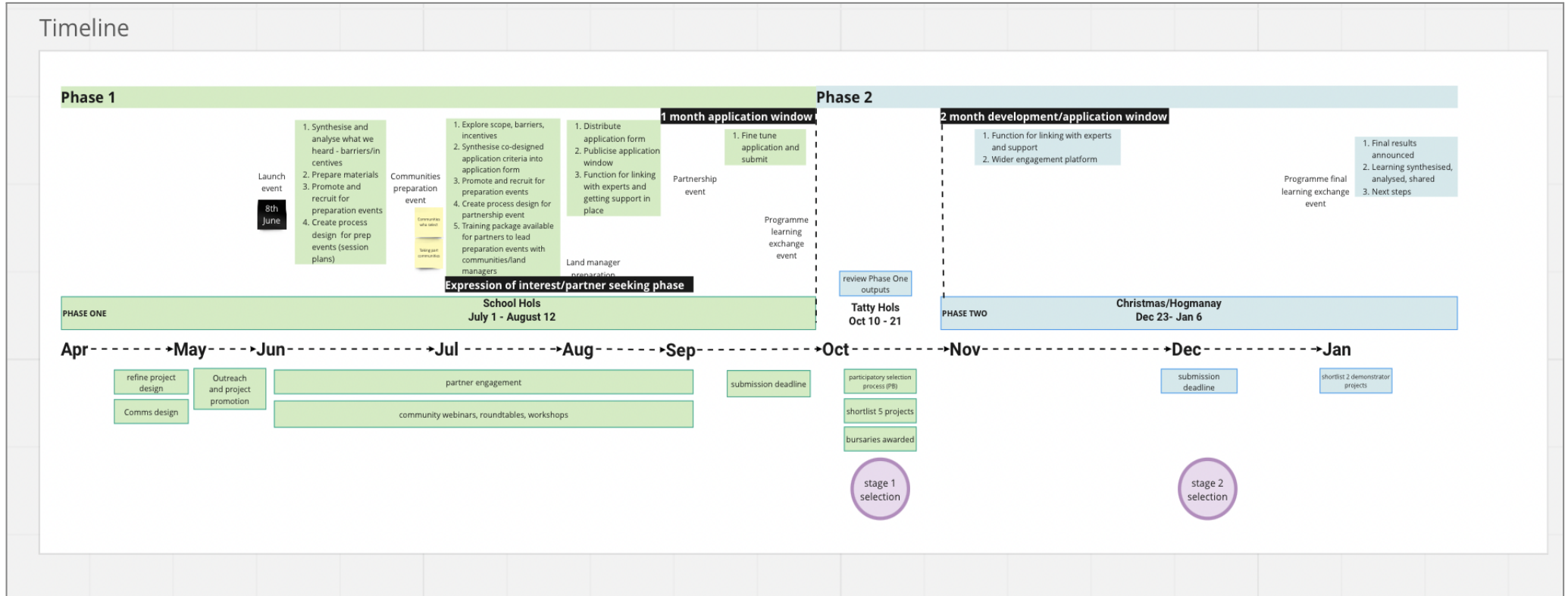




Appendix 3.2 Stakeholders - reasons to get involved



Appendix 3.3 Riverwoods Investment Readiness Pioneers - Timeline



Appendix 3.4 Actively plan who is involved and how they are involved in governance and decision making, using this template

PROJECT GOVERNANCE TEMPLATE

Think about:

- Who is involved in making decisions about your project?
- How is decision-making distributed?
- Is everyone equal? If not, why not?
- How are decisions logged and tracked?
- How will people be accountable?

