



**Trails
Development
Series**

**Part B: A Guide to
Community Consultation**



Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions
Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries



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Purpose of the document

The Trails Development Series is presented in four parts:

- **Part A: A Guide to the Trail Development Process**
- **Part B: A Guide to Community Consultation**
- **Part C: A Guide to using Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA)**
- **Part D: Checklists and Templates**

This document is Part B in the series and outlines various approaches to community consultation and identifies where consultation fits within each stage of the Trail Development Process.

The Trails Development Series has drawn extensively on:

- Chapter 10 of the *Western Australian Mountain Bike Management Guidelines* (2018), developed by DBCA in collaboration with DLGSC, WestCycle and the Western Australian Mountain Bike Association;
- *Trail Development Protocol and Sustainability Framework for Western Australia*, developed by Dafydd Davis for DBCA and DLGSC; and
- A report developed for DLGSC by Curtin University's Centre for Sport and Recreation Research, *Application of Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis for recreational trails decision making in Western Australia: Final technical report*, by Middle, I., Hughes, M., Middle, G. and Ty, M., Centre for Sport and Recreation Research, Curtin University, Perth, April 2017.



Photo: © Common Ground Trails, Photographer Erik Sandstrom

Introduction

Community engagement is a critical component of the Trail Development Process. Early in the Trail Development Process, trail proponents should explore what type of consultative and collaborative approaches are appropriate and when to conduct engagement activities. Effective consultation, collaboration and communication can positively contribute to each stage of the process.

State and local government officers who are developing trail proposals will be involved in all aspects of planning, identifying and clarifying values of the land; identifying current users and possible future users; understanding the extent of competing, conflicting and compatible land uses; and ultimately approval or non-approval of the trail proposal. In order to do this effectively, consultation and communication approaches must be embedded at each stage of the Trail Development Process.

Community and trail user groups developing a trail proposal need to deal with many of the same issues and will need to acknowledge the range of interests to be considered in addition to their own.

Early identification of the values associated with an area being considered for a trail can help ‘find’ the stakeholders who represent those values and who may be most concerned with the impacts upon them. Getting all stakeholders involved early in the Trail Development Process will help a trail proponent create the most effective consultative approach.

Choosing a Consultative Approach

Effective consultation can help manage stakeholder expectations, bring in useful information and provide a way to address potential conflicts early in the Trail Development Process.

Before starting the consultation process, determine who will do the work and whether they have the skill set to design and deliver whatever is required. There should be a clear understanding of when and how communication and consultation will be undertaken. The Steering Group may wish to include this information in their project framework document and develop a written communications plan.

- ▾ A communications plan template is available
- / in **Part D: Checklists and Templates** in the
- ▾ Trail Development Series.

There are several activities that should be undertaken to help scope the extent and nature of consultation planning. These are:

- Determine the scope for stakeholder involvement
- Clarify consultation objectives
- Determine types of consultation activities.



Photo: © Common Ground Trails. Photographer: Deon Baker

Activity 1: Determine the scope for stakeholder involvement

Information gathered during the Trail Development Process (Figure 4, page B10), particularly the Framework planning documents and the Impact Evaluation Checklist (IEC) can inform a proponent as to potential stakeholders. From this:

- Summarise the information gathered about stakeholders and their values, interests and issues
- Review the scope for stakeholder input into the proposal. For example, is it possible to change the trail corridors, add additional features, or avoid specific areas? Will the Steering Group be able to act on this type of feedback from stakeholders?

This information will support detailed consultation in later stages.

In assessing the scope for stakeholder input, it is helpful to consider the best practice guidelines and core values developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) (Figure 1). The IAP2 website (<https://www.iap2.org.au>) provides a wide range of information about community engagement frameworks and methods as well as access to resources.

• See **Part A: A Guide to the Trail Development Process** for more information.

Figure 1: IAP2 Core Values¹

1	Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
2	Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3	Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
4	Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5	Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6	Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way
7	Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

1. International Association for Public Participation – IAP2 Federation, accessed at <https://www.iap2.org.au> (Permission to use Core Values provided by IAP2 Federation)

Activity 2: Clarify consultation objectives

Consultation activity is most effective when it is clearly scoped, with a defined purpose. The overall aim is to be able to move forward confidently with the Trail Development Process knowing that the plan is sustainable, will be supported by stakeholders, and will be used once developed.

It is important to clarify the objectives for consultation activities. Objectives can be based on goals listed in the Public Participation spectrum as developed by the IAP2 (Figure 2). It is critical to decide on what level of public participation


is necessary to achieve the best outcomes for your trail proposal. In general, the more complex the project, the further to the right of the IAP2 spectrum you will need to operate within to design an effective participation approach.

‘Public’ does not simply mean the general community. It encompasses the full range of stakeholders from State and local government agencies, specific user groups, community groups, local businesses, adjoining landholders and so on.

Figure 2: IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum²

(reproduced with permission)

The IAP2 Federation has developed the spectrum to help groups define the public’s role in any public participation process. The IAP2 Spectrum is quickly becoming an international standard.



	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Public Participation Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the Public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

2. International Association for Public Participation – IAP2 Federation, accessed at <https://www.iap2.org.au>
Permission to use Public Participation Spectrum provided by IAP2 Federation.



Photo: © Anne Harris

Some examples of objectives are provided below. You may wish to include all of these objectives depending on the complexity and significance of your project proposal. Relevant objectives include:

- To inform stakeholders about the proposal
- To gather information from stakeholders to use in the Trail Development Process
- To ask for stakeholder comment about the proposal to ensure that all important issues are understood
- To involve stakeholders in reviewing and generating other options for the location or route for the trail or
- To work collaboratively with stakeholders on all aspects of the Trail Development Process.

Being clear on the objectives is important when inviting stakeholders to be involved. Stakeholders need to know what they're being asked to do, what sort of information and input is being sought, and what will be done with the information obtained. This sets their expectations for the process. If there is no scope for stakeholder input to influence development of the trail, this needs to be made clear.

Only the simplest of trail projects involving a minimal number of affected stakeholders, in a non-contentious location and without competing uses or community values would focus simply on the **INFORM** level of participation.

Most trail proposals will operate between the **CONSULT** and **COLLABORATE** parts of the spectrum and may move between them at different stages of the project. For example, at Stage 1 of the Trail Development Process while exploring the potential for a trail proposal, the proponent may stick to the **INFORM** stage and set up some information sources outlining their intentions, potential sites for identification, and desired outcomes for a trail. At later stages, the Steering Group may decide that it is appropriate to operate in the **INVOLVE** or **COLLABORATE** part of the participation spectrum.

It is unlikely any trail proposal would use the **EMPOWER** approach as decision-making for trails normally involves multiple authorities and stakeholders. However, a local government authority or other primary decision maker may decide to adopt this approach.

Activity 3: Determine types of consultation activities

Having determined objectives for consultation, proponents can consider how to meet these consultation goals. The IAP2 website (www.iap2.org.au) provides information on different tools to meet different levels of consultation objectives. Examples of consultation tools for each stage of the IAP2 public participation spectrum are shown below in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Examples of IAP2 Consultation tools

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets • Websites • Open houses/ days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment • Focus groups • Surveys • Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Deliberate polling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consensus building • Participatory decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ballots • Delegated decisions

At a minimum, a good flow of information to relevant stakeholders is fundamental and should be done as a standard activity throughout the Trail Development Process. More complex consultation and collaborative processes are required where information and support is needed from different stakeholders or complex, competing interests may need to be managed.

Typical **INFORM** level activities for trail development projects include:

- Production of a fact sheet
- Information on a web page, which community members can easily access.

More intensive **CONSULT** level activities to gather feedback from the general community or specific stakeholders can include:

- A public meeting or information session held to provide information about the proposal and options being considered. Attendees would be asked to provide comment at the meeting or via an online survey or response form
- A discussion paper could be developed outlining the proposal and options. People would be invited to submit comment via an online survey or response form
- An online forum created to gather input from people about how they currently use the site — for what activities, and how often

- Individual stakeholder interviews conducted to gather information.

For more detailed discussion, particularly at Stages 4-7 of the Trail Development Process, proponents might choose an activity that allows for discussion, interaction and collaboration to determine preferred options. Typical consultation activities at the **INVOLVE** level for trail development projects include:

- A planning workshop where participants are asked to help identify options for consideration
- An online discussion forum inviting responses to a series of questions relevant to the Trail Development Process
- A facilitated workshop where a structured process is followed to identify a preferred option.

Complex trail proposals requiring a number of stakeholders to work together or where the trail is particularly contentious should focus on the **COLLABORATE** level and use more complex, participatory techniques such as Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA).

More information on undertaking an MCDA workshop is available in **Part C: A Guide to using Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA)** in the Trail Development Series.

Where Consultation Fits in the Trail Development Process

Consultation has a role to play at all stages of the Trail Development Process, but it can have the most impact if undertaken early in the process, during Stages 1 to 4. Well-planned consultation during these stages will enable the views of relevant stakeholders to be identified and considered before Stage 4: Concept Planning of the Trail Development Process is finalised. If there are likely to be competing or conflicting values and views about the proposal, the consultative effort to understand different views, and work

together to resolve issues early in the process will improve the outcome.

Importantly, consultation and collaborative approaches to trail planning can gather critical information and bring it into the process when it has the best chance of being considered and incorporated (Table 1). Adopting a collaborative approach also signals an intent that the proponent is seeking to build the right trail, in the right places, the right way and for the right reasons.

Figure 4: Trail Development Process

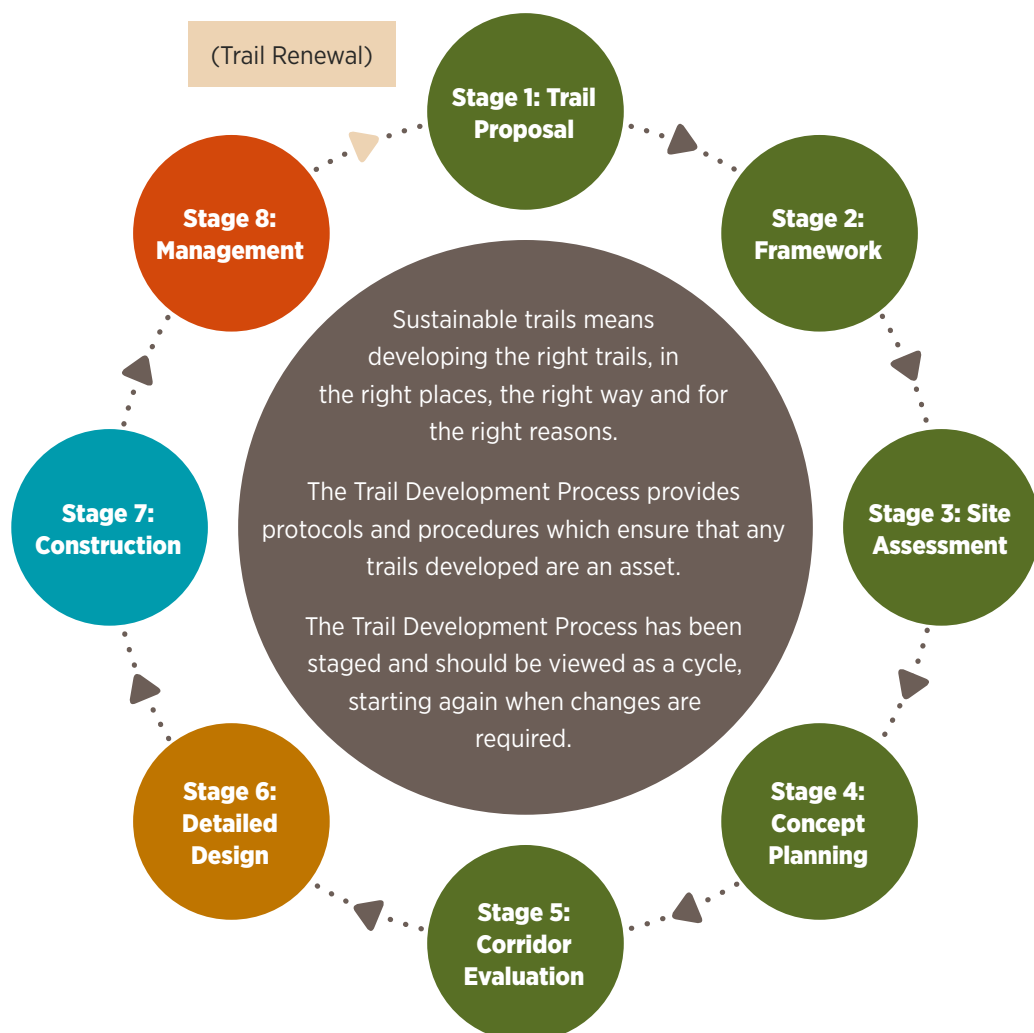


Table 1: Consultation issues to address during the Trail Development Process

	Stage	Key consultation issues to be addressed
1	Trail Proposal	What values are going to be impacted by the proposed trail? What stakeholders are linked to those values or will be affected by any proposed changes to the proposed trail site?
2	Framework	What level of consultation and collaboration will we need to effectively work with stakeholders and gather support for the proposal? Needs to be embedded into project framework.
3	Site Assessment	What information can stakeholders tell us about the areas including constraints, opportunities, other issues and approvals possibly needed?
4	Concept Planning	Who should be involved in developing a concept plan? Are there multiple trail options possible? Do we need to involve stakeholders in deciding a preference for the concept plan? What information should be provided in the concept plan to get stakeholder input and agreement?
5	Corridor Evaluation	What needs to be captured in the final design? What strategies could stakeholders suggest to address impacts.
6	Detailed Design	Have the Steering Group or regulatory agencies required significant changes to the draft concept plan that need to go back to stakeholders for confirmation and advice? Ongoing communication with stakeholders on detailed trail design and alignments physically flagged in the field. Consider needs of local users and community in regards upcoming impacts of construction. Consider interpretive materials and signage needs. Work with critical stakeholders on appropriate interpretive material.
7	Construction	Continue communications as construction progresses. Ensure any construction impacts such as road or trail closures, dust/noise issues are adequately communicated to impacted users or adjacent properties and work with them to limit impacts. Regular updates on progress to community and stakeholders.
8	Management	Management body for trail should continue to communicate with user groups and other stakeholders on events, trail maintenance and deal with unexpected impacts or community tensions as they arise.

In the following pages, general approaches to consultation and collaboration are described, and consultative actions are recommended for each stage of the Trail Development Process. By Stages 3 and 4 of the Trail Development Process, it should become clear whether a process such as Multi-criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) is needed to assist discussion and facilitate resolution of any identified conflicts or concerns.

The benefits of using MCDA and a comprehensive guide to undertaking this process is provided in **Part C: A Guide to Using Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis**, in the Trail Development Series.

Suggested consultation actions and approaches are provided on the following pages for each stage of the Trail Development Process.

It may be helpful to read the following sections in conjunction with **Part A: A Guide to the Trail Development Process**, in the Trails Development Series.

Stage 1: Trail Proposal

Undertaking preliminary background investigations and gauging support for a trail project early is vital. A few initial checks can go a long way to help avoid problems and wasted resources later in the process.

In the early stages of a new trail project, it is a good idea to do a quick check to determine whether there are any immediate and obvious constraints that could prevent development of a trail in the target area. This requires some desktop or Internet research to check for major constraints such as:

- A management plan for the proposed area that explicitly precludes the proposed trail
- A master plan exists and the proposed area is not supported by the master plan

- Restricted areas such as public drinking water catchments or disease risk areas
- Other significant values which may preclude the proposed activity, such as mining or forestry.

This desktop research can also help identify relevant stakeholders for the proposal.

Table 2 (see page B13) provides a list of government organisations that may be potential stakeholders or regulators depending on the location of the proposed trail and its impact on any protected values such as conservation or heritage.

Table 3 (see page B14) is a list of potential non-government stakeholders who may also be affected — positively or negatively — by the proposal or have relevant opinions.

Consultation Actions

Initial research should include a desktop review of the proposed land area and discussion with:

- The land owner/manager to see whether the proposed use would be supported
- Any major user groups for the proposed site.

A project developed without community involvement and support may not meet community needs and therefore not be used as hoped. This would result in a waste of resources.

Identification of the relevant stakeholders for this proposal at this stage is essential, as they will need to be brought into the Trail Development Process at the next stage. Think about their role in relation to the proposal (e.g. as a land owner, regulator, interest group), what values they might hold in relation to the proposal, and how the proposal could impact their interests.

Table 2: Potential Government Stakeholders

(Adapted from Middle et al. 2017³)

Stakeholder	Interest
Parks and Wildlife Service (Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions)	Managers of lands and waters vested in the Crown and managed for conservation and recreation — including national parks, marine parks, nature reserves, State forest and other lands with conservation values.
Department of Water and Environmental Regulation	Regulators of Public Drinking Water Source Areas (PDSWA) or other area with restricted or limited access. Responsible for native vegetation clearing approvals.
Water Corporation	Responsible for management of some PDSWA and other water assets (pipelines, well heads etc.) that may need to be considered.
Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety	Land may be subject to State agreements, exploration permits, mining leases or an operating mine.
Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage	Responsible for registration of protected Aboriginal cultural heritage sites and issuing of approvals relating to possible impacts on these. Management of unallocated Crown land.
Western Australian Planning Commission (Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage)	Managers of some Crown land, especially in the metropolitan area, vested in the WAPC and managed by DPLH. Also responsible for various land planning approvals.
Heritage Council (Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage)	Unlikely stakeholder, but will be interested if a State heritage listed property is on the subject land.
Forestry Products Commission	Managers of harvesting operations on State Forests for production or subject to state agreements.
Department of Fire and Emergency Services	State emergency management responsibilities — e.g. fire, flooding.
Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries	Advocate for trails and active recreation. Collaborative partnership with Lotterywest to provide initial assessment of trails grant.
Local government	Land may be vested with local government (who may also be the proponent) and the proposal may require local planning approval. Local governments are likely to have a working knowledge and relationship with the relevant local conservation or Friends of groups and local Aboriginal groups.
Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development	May have an interest if subject land is outside the Perth metropolitan region.
Regional Development Commissions	Interested in economic development in their region, including tourism.
Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation/Tourism WA	General interest in tourism.

3. Adapted from Middle, I., Hughes, M., Middle, G. and Tye, M. *Application of Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis for recreational trails decision making in Western Australia: Final technical report*. Centre for Sport and Recreation Research, Curtin University, Perth, April 2017, p. 26

Table 3: Potential Community Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Interest
'Friends of' groups or local conservation groups	Where all or part of the subject land or existing trail has a local volunteer group who are active in its protection and management.
Traditional owners or other local indigenous organisations	The subject land may be the subject of an existing or outstanding native title claim. Even where no native title exists, local traditional owners may still have an interest in the proposal.
Local recreation or community groups	Existing users of land either directly affected by proposed trail or using shared local facilities that may be affected.
Adjoining land owners	May be affected by trail construction impacts. Trail use may also impact their land or enjoyment of their land or provide a potential business opportunity.
Relevant local businesses	Tourism or recreational businesses that may service possible trail users or who might face competition from new incoming businesses or who might access the proposed trail site for alternative purposes that would be affected by the trail.
Local heritage groups	Who may have an attachment to or information about the proposed site and its local historical significance



Stage 2: Framework

Developing a clear framework is essential to the successful and sustainable delivery of every trail project. The framework informs the planning, design and delivery process and clarifies the key issues.

Not having a clear framework in place can cause confusion and undermine the delivery and sustainability of a project.

The first recommendation is to establish a Steering Group to plan the project. The Steering Group's role is to develop the project framework, establish project objectives, appoint a project manager, and formally agree to the process to be followed.

Importantly, the Steering Group needs to gauge what the level of interest is likely to be in the trail proposal. A key conclusion at this stage is whether a wider consultative approach is likely to be needed. The scope and scale of the project will also determine the level of general public consultation needed as well as direct and targeted consultation with direct stakeholders such as regulators, affected land owners, State and local government, and local business and tourism operators.

Consultation Actions

If the Steering Group answers YES to any of the following questions, this indicates that a consultative process will be needed for this proposal:

- Does more than one party need to agree to the trail?
- Are there multiple current or potential users of the land that suggest several stakeholders need to be involved?
- Are there complementary, conflicting or competing interests that need to be considered?

This information will need to be recorded and an agreed consultative approach included in the project framework. The framework template is included in **Part D: Checklists and Templates** in the Trails Development Series.

Stage 3: Site Assessment

This stage builds on land use identified in Stage 1 and included in the Framework (Stage 2).

Specifically, the site assessment reveals the complexity of the project and answers these questions:

- What legislative approvals will be required?
- Are there any exclusion zones?
- What else happens in the target area — other land uses, activities or management considerations?

- What aspects of the landscape and topography offer great opportunities for a trail at the level being proposed?

The outcomes of the site assessment will show three types of areas:

1. Areas where trail development is permitted
2. Areas that preclude trail development
3. Areas where trail development is dependent on further studies and approvals, e.g. Aboriginal heritage sites, areas of threatened fauna.

Consultation Actions

If the site assessment identifies special interest groups, other recreation users, neighbours, and the wider community whose interaction with the site may be impacted by the proposed trail, a consultative process will be needed for this proposal.

Local residents and regular users know their area well and may have good suggestions for inclusions. Seeking their input may provide information that is critical to the concept plan and determining trail alignment options.

A decision should be made, dependent on the complexities of the site, as to whether to commence community consultation now or wait until the concept plan stage.

Stage 4: Concept Planning

The purpose of the concept plan is to illustrate what the trail system may look like, address key strategic priorities, and physically flag and digitally record broad corridors in the field. Concept plans form a crucial consultation tool that can be presented to partners and stakeholders.

Concept plans are built around maps of the area, including topographic maps, which show the indicative trail corridors.

The mapping that is undertaken as part of the concept planning shows visually where the trail/s could go, what features it passes, and what elements it contains to meet the needs of the key user groups.

In the draft concept plan, the configuration and layout of the trails have not been finalised and can be amended. The map becomes a consultation tool.

If there are potential conflicts of opinion or complex management issues, Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis might be considered as a useful tool.

See **Part C: A Guide to Using Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis** in the Trails Development Series.

The consultation may help to refine the options or may help the Steering Group decide which option is preferred. This enables the Steering Group to approach Stage 5 of the Trail Development Process with a good indication of how stakeholders view the proposal.

Consultation Actions

The draft concept plan and maps are the main tools in meetings with stakeholders. Having a physical map helps to present the options under consideration, and enables stakeholders to ask questions, seek clarification, and express their views on the proposal, and identify the most important values. This discussion provides information that will help refine the proposal. Depending on what's most relevant to the proposal, the purpose of the discussion could be to develop the trail options, or to seek feedback on options that have already been identified.



Photo: © Common Ground Trails, Photographer: Erik Sandstrom

Stage 5: Corridor Evaluation

The purpose of corridor evaluation is to identify detailed constraints and formally establish and agree on the location of trail corridors with land owners/managers and other stakeholders. The corridor evaluation should be developed into a report that can be used to seek approvals to proceed with Stage 6: Detailed Design.

Stakeholder or community consultation undertaken earlier in the process has led to the identification of a favoured alternative for development of the trail. If the consultation has been thorough, all the key issues will have been identified, and any mitigation measures discussed, allowing the Steering Group to proceed with confidence.

Consultation Actions

With a firm corridor in mind, access and approval needs to be secured from the landowner/manager. This relationship is important and can be strengthened through frequent communication.

Ongoing regular communication with all proposal stakeholders should continue. If the trail needs to shift within the proposed corridor to accommodate environmental concerns or to enhance the trail, these adjustments should be included in the communication to keep interested stakeholders informed.



Stage 6: Detailed Design

Detailed trail design makes it possible to accurately identify construction costs, resource and material requirements, and timeframes for development.

Consultation Actions

If anything changes, or it turns out to be more expensive than the budget allows, there may be a need to scale back the project, and some key stakeholders may need to be consulted to refine the design.

Again, it is important to keep stakeholders advised of changes and updates. Depending on the size of the project, a regular update email to stakeholders, or update on the project website will satisfy this requirement.

Significant effort may be needed to source additional funding for the trail. Stakeholders may be approached for cash or in-kind support, or for letters of support that can be used in funding and/or grant applications. If a strong relationship has been developed through the process, it makes it easier to have funding and support discussions if needed at this point.

During detailed design it will become clear whether the trail needs signage or interpretive material. If so, a consultative process may be needed to determine where signage should go, what it should say, what maps should be included, and what information could be provided to enhance the visit for trail users. It might be useful to create an advisory group to assist with this specific task.

Photo: © Common Ground Trails, Photographer Erik Sandstrom

Stage 7: Construction

The construction phase is where the trail is built, using sustainable construction techniques and standards as far as possible.

Consultation Actions

Adjoining landowners and others in the area may be impacted during the construction phase. For example, normal access to the area may not be possible during construction, or stockpiles of materials and equipment may interfere with normal movement in the area. This is short-term, and usually well planned to minimise intrusion and disruption. However it is best to continue regular contact with stakeholders to keep them advised of the schedule, provide a point of contact if people have questions, and be accessible if there are issues to be resolved.

Stakeholders may be interested to follow construction progress, and regular photos or visual records should be posted regularly to satisfy this level of interest.

Stage 8: Management

Trails require ongoing management and maintenance, as outlined at Stage 2: Framework.

Consultation Actions

Continue working with local stakeholders, adjacent and affected businesses and community groups to keep them informed on developments and issues as they arise to ensure ongoing management is done appropriately.





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