# Gratitude to and Acknowledgement of the First Stewards

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a conservation organization committed to creating a future in which nature and people thrive, and achieving our mission must encompass inclusion, collaboration, and supporting the original and current stewards of Earth's natural systems. We recognize that as an organization that owns and manages land, the systems and regulations of private property, protection, and lands and waters management that have been core to our work came at a dire cost to Indigenous Peoples. With these words, we acknowledge the traditional stewards, past, present, and emerging, and recognize our institutional history, responsibility, and commitment. We are committed to gaining deeper awareness of the history and enduring impacts of colonialism—including our own contributions to this history as an organization—and resulting responsibilities, including building partnerships based on respect, equity, open dialogue, integrity, and mutual accountability.

© AMI VITALE

# Partner-Centered Principles

TNC's work with Indigenous Peoples and local communities is based on building relationships, honoring self-determination, establishing trust, and focusing on shared interests. TNC's partner-centered principles include:

- **Indigenous and community-led:** We seek to understand what a community wants our role to be. Together with communities, we co-create plans that align with the communities' priorities and TNC's experience and mission.

- **Diverse and inclusive:** We recognize and respect the diversity of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and the diversity that exists within communities. We aim to center gender equity and inter-generational leadership in our work.

- **Grounded in reciprocity:** Our partnerships with Indigenous Peoples and local communities are opportunities for mutual learning, sharing, and benefit between the communities and TNC. We strive for transformational— not transactional—partnerships in the spirit of reciprocity.

- **Based on communication and accountability:** We listen deeply and open clear lines of communication. We commit to fulfilling agreed-upon roles and responsibilities, and to holding ourselves accountable for long-term partnerships and commitments.

- **Flexible, adaptive, and patient:** We strive to be flexible to the needs, realities, and competing priorities within communities. We recognize the interconnectedness of all things. And we learn from past mistakes.

We commit to and invite all other conservation organizations and practitioners to respect and uphold human rights standards including the **UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** and other relevant conventions, apply and monitor social and environmental safeguards, and appropriately support the governance, knowledge systems, and self-determined sustainable visions of current and future generations of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

We commit to uphold and fully respect the distinct and differentiated **rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities** and collaborate along shared principles and best practices to support, to the best of our abilities, the self-empowerment of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and their leadership and guidance in the inclusive and effective conservation of biodiversity, sustainable development, and mitigation of climate change.

# What's New in Version Two?

"Strong Voices, Active Choices: TNC's Practitioner Framework to Strengthen Outcomes for People and Nature, Version 1.0" was originally co-developed and released in 2017 by a diverse group of TNC staff spanning geographies and roles, and in consideration of program experience, subject matter expertise, and scientific literature. Over the past 5 years, the framework has gained traction and been applied within the organization as our common approach to partnering with Indigenous Peoples and local communities on shared environmental and human well-being goals. The feedback has been positive, with an increase in application and usage. Since its initial writing there have been new internally and externally developed studies and analyses. These efforts, along with social and environmental changes globally, have furthered our understanding and approaches in this area. Now is the right time for a "refresh" of the framework. Readers will find much of the content from the original conservation practitioners' document has been retained, with some adjustments and additions. These include:

- Indigenous Peoples and local community members' review and input on framework theory and narrative, ensuring relevance of tools for advancing Indigenous and local community aspirations and visions,

- Bringing forward a holistic view of natural systems by broadening the scope of the framework and associated content, language, examples, and evidence to be inclusive of and applicable to freshwater and coastal ecosystems, in addition to terrestrial ecosystems,

- Addition of new evidence and citations, and well as tools and resources from internal and external studies and sources,

- Update and refinement of the "Tools and Resources" sections to include fewer, more actionable tools, that are of greatest use to conservation practitioners implementing the framework,

- Clearer connection between the framework and the associated common measures and TNC's organizational metrics, and

- The formal addition of three crosscutting foundational elements that touch down in each pillar of the framework as critical enabling conditions for success:

  - Equitable Benefits, Impacts, and Inclusion,

  - Strong Connection to Knowledge and Place, and

  - Durable Outcomes for People and Nature.

As conservation practitioners and organizations working to implement and build upon these shared concepts, now commonly known as **"The Voice, Choice, and Action Framework: A Conservation Practitioner's Guide to Indigenous and Community-Led Conservation, Version 2.0"**—or VCA Framework for short—we hope you find these updates useful and that they help you advance meaningful and durable conservation work. As we collectively grow, evolve, and nurture our rights-based approaches to community-led conservation, we strive to support and strengthen the voice, choice, and action of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

# An Introduction to the Voice, Choice, and Action (VCA) Framework

## Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

The VCA Framework is most applicable to people who:

- are connected to the lands, waters, and natural resources of their area or place including through strong familial ties, shared culture (e.g., language, religion, traditions, spirituality, Tribe), and shared practice ( e.g., farming, fishing, livestock keeping),

- have an inter-dependence on these systems for economic, familial, cultural, religious, and/or health and nutritional needs,

- have an interest in influencing the future health of living resources in the area,

- have historical or traditional precedents for self-governance in the area, and

- who have some level of communal or common property management over the area's natural resources.

The people described above may lack economic opportunities, alternatives, or employment, may face significant external development pressures, may be experiencing tangible impacts from climate change that are affecting their ability to manage, steward, and use their natural resources, and may include the original inhabitants of a place and/or people who have more recently settled in a place and have a close relationship with the area's lands, waters, and natural resources. Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous communities are communities whose members include the original inhabitants of a place and thus consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies who also inhabit the territories which the Indigenous Peoples originally occupied prior to colonization.[1]

### Core attributes of Indigenous Peoples:

Indigenous communities, Peoples, and Nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories and their ethnic identity as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions, and legal system (Martinez Cobo 1982). Additionally, we recognize and reaffirm that Indigenous individuals are entitled without discrimination to all human rights recognized in international law, and that Indigenous Peoples possess collective rights which are indispensable for their existence, well-being, and integral development as peoples.[2]

## Distinctions of Local Communities:

Local communities often have a similar connection to and dependence on lands, waters, and resources for their culture and livelihoods, as well as systems of communal or common pool governance of natural resources. However, members of local communities have not collectively self-identified as Indigenous Peoples. As such, collective rights under international law available for Indigenous Peoples' Nations may not be applicable or available to local communities. Regardless, we maintain our commitment to upholding the human rights of all local communities with whom we partner.

Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and local communities (LCs) are frequently referred to collectively as "IPLCs" in international conventions (e.g., Convention on Biological Diversity, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change). We recognize the distinction between "IPs" and "LCs," with IPs holding collective rights as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.[3] Throughout this document, we have refrained from using the acronym "IPLC" out of respect for this distinction between Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and instead spell out the full name with appropriate capitalization of "Indigenous Peoples" to recognize the diverse, sovereign communities who were living in specific regions when Europeans first attempted to name, categorize, and colonize them.

Indigenous Peoples and local communities are vital leaders in the pursuit of lasting solutions to the world's most pressing environmental and human well-being challenges. They manage or have tenure rights over more than 25 percent of the world's land[4] and more than double that is claimed but not yet legally recognized,[5] including interconnected systems of forests, grasslands, wetlands, rivers, lakes, the underlying groundwater, and coasts. With their territories harboring more than 24 percent of the world's tropical forest carbon,[6] and much of global biodiversity,[7] and with nine out of 10 of the 32 million fishers worldwide being small-scale or artisanal fishers,[8] Indigenous Peoples and local communities are among our most important partners, and have proven to be the most effective stewards of nature in the world—achieving greater conservation results and sustaining more biodiversity than government protected areas.[9-10]

Indigenous Peoples and local communities face challenges in achieving healthy and thriving communities and environments due to legacies and continued acts of colonialism, persistent inequities, and increasing consolidation of economic power. Expanding beyond this paradigm, when Indigenous Peoples and local communities' authority and capacity[a] to steward their lands, waters, and resources is strengthened, when livelihood opportunities exist that are aligned with their values, and when these opportunities and benefits are distributed equitably, then durable and lasting solutions for people and nature will result. As such, we work in partnership to support natural resource management and stewardship that is defined, led, and implemented by Indigenous Peoples and local communities; grounded in community values, knowledge, and perspectives; and focused on the interconnected issues of supporting vibrant communities, strong cultures, viable local economies, and healthy ecosystems.

---

a. For the purposes of the VCA Framework, authority is defined as the perception of natural resource users and rightsholders that a governance group genuinely represents their interests and has legal or customary jurisdiction to govern "their" natural resources[11]. Capacity is a multi-faceted concept generally conceptualized as "having the ability to act," and various types of capital including human, social, institutional, natural, and economic must be leveraged to do so.[12-13]

# The People/Nature Connection

The VCA Framework is grounded in the understanding that the health of the natural world and the well-being of people are inextricably connected. This goes beyond the concept of ecosystems services (i.e., the provisioning, regulating, and supporting functions that the environment provides for people) to an integrated holistic view that incorporates the various relationships and feedback loops in the social-ecological system[b] (Figure 1).

In the diagram below, the **blue pathway** represents one in which environmental conservation strategies lead to changes in ecosystem integrity—and subsequently ecosystem services—which then impact human well-being. This is the pathway most frequently recognized and referenced among conservation organizations. Another pathway, which is equally important in community-led conservation, is represented by the **orange pathway**—programs engage in socially oriented conservation strategies (e.g., capacity building, sustainable livelihoods, etc.) which lead to social change, which impact both human well-being and ecological integrity directly. At the same time, peoples' well-being impacts their ability, capacity, and willingness to engage in stewardship actions, as depicted by the **green pathway**. Finally, in places where there is a deep connection to lands, waters, and resources, peoples' perception of the health of those places may directly impact their health and identity (**red pathway**).
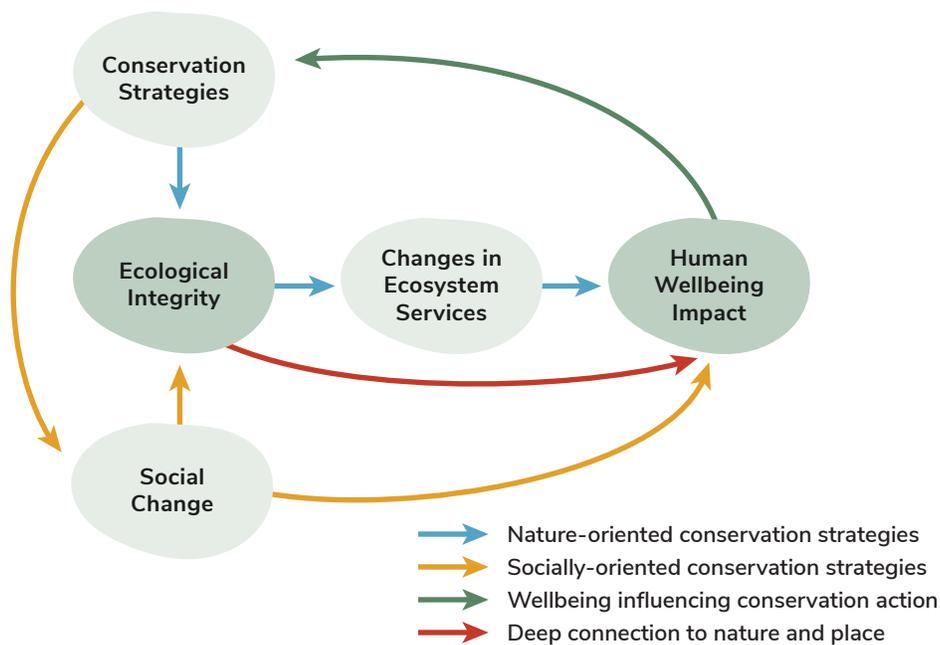


**Figure 1:** *Diagram of the people/nature connection*[14]

---

b. Social-ecological system refers to the integrated concept of humans-in-nature, and emphasizes the linkage between the natural environment and social systems dealing with property rights, resource tenure systems, systems of knowledge pertinent to environment and resources, and world views and ethics concerning environment and resources.[15]
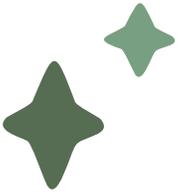
# Narrative Theory of Change

Our common approach to supporting Indigenous and local community authority and capacity in natural resource management and decision making is the VCA Framework. The VCA Framework is intended for situations where human well-being and environmental outcomes are linked and interdependent, where the leadership of Indigenous Peoples and local communities is essential to achieving shared goals, where power imbalances may hinder achieving positive results for people and nature, and where projects may significantly impact local communities.

Equitable and lasting positive results for people and nature generally requires the presence of the VCA Framework's interdependent and mutually reinforcing four pillars and three foundational elements (Figure 2). The four pillars of the framework (rights, capacity, decision making, and livelihoods) represent the characteristics necessary for successful community-led conservation. In fact, a recent systematic review and analysis suggests that as more of these four pillars are present, a higher probability of successful joint environmental and socio-economic outcomes emerges.[16] The three foundational elements (equity, knowledge and place, and durability) represent enabling conditions critical for enduring community-led conservation.

Due to the interdependent nature of the VCA Framework, we do not imply an order to the pillars and foundational elements. All aspects are needed for lasting positive outcomes for people and nature, and multiple aspects are often implemented simultaneously. Further, context (e.g., existing community capacities, jurisdictional policy and institutions, ecosystem type, drivers of change, history, etc.), informed by a thorough situation analysis, will dictate which aspect(s) to prioritize in a program's strategy.

........................................................................................................................

# Visual Representation Symbolism

The artwork resembles a **turtle**, which is a creature that thrives in all major biomes. The turtle is also a prominent part of the creation stories among many Indigenous Peoples. The canvas resembles a **hand drum**, which symbolizes the heartbeat of the universe. In many Indigenous cultures, the hand drum is a sacred tool that connects heaven and earth, while also maintaining the rhythm of the world order.

The four (4) pillars are integrated in the form of the turtle's feet. The **bear's** footprint is a symbol of protection, while the Northern Lights surrounding it are symbolic of the everlasting connections with our ancestors. The **eagle** is widely recognized as a symbol of leadership. The **fire** is a symbol of a gathering place and is surrounded by dancing flames which are symbolic of people interacting in unison with one another. Finally, the **sun** is a symbol of life eternal, and the rays of light emanating from it represent joy, energy, and vitality.

The foundational elements are integrated in the form of representative images in three (3) distinct regions on the turtle's back. These regions are separated by symbols of water that are connected in the middle by a **sacred hoop**. The sacred hoop, sometimes referred to as a medicine wheel, is a reminder that everything is related, and all things are in a continuous process of growth and progression.

The turtle's head is constructed using flowing water elements, representing life's journey. By its very nature, the head represents wisdom, while the heart below it shows connectivity to the heart & soul.

# Visual Representation of the VCA Framework

"**ALL** pillars and foundational elements are interconnected and interdependent, and needed for lasting positive results for people and nature"
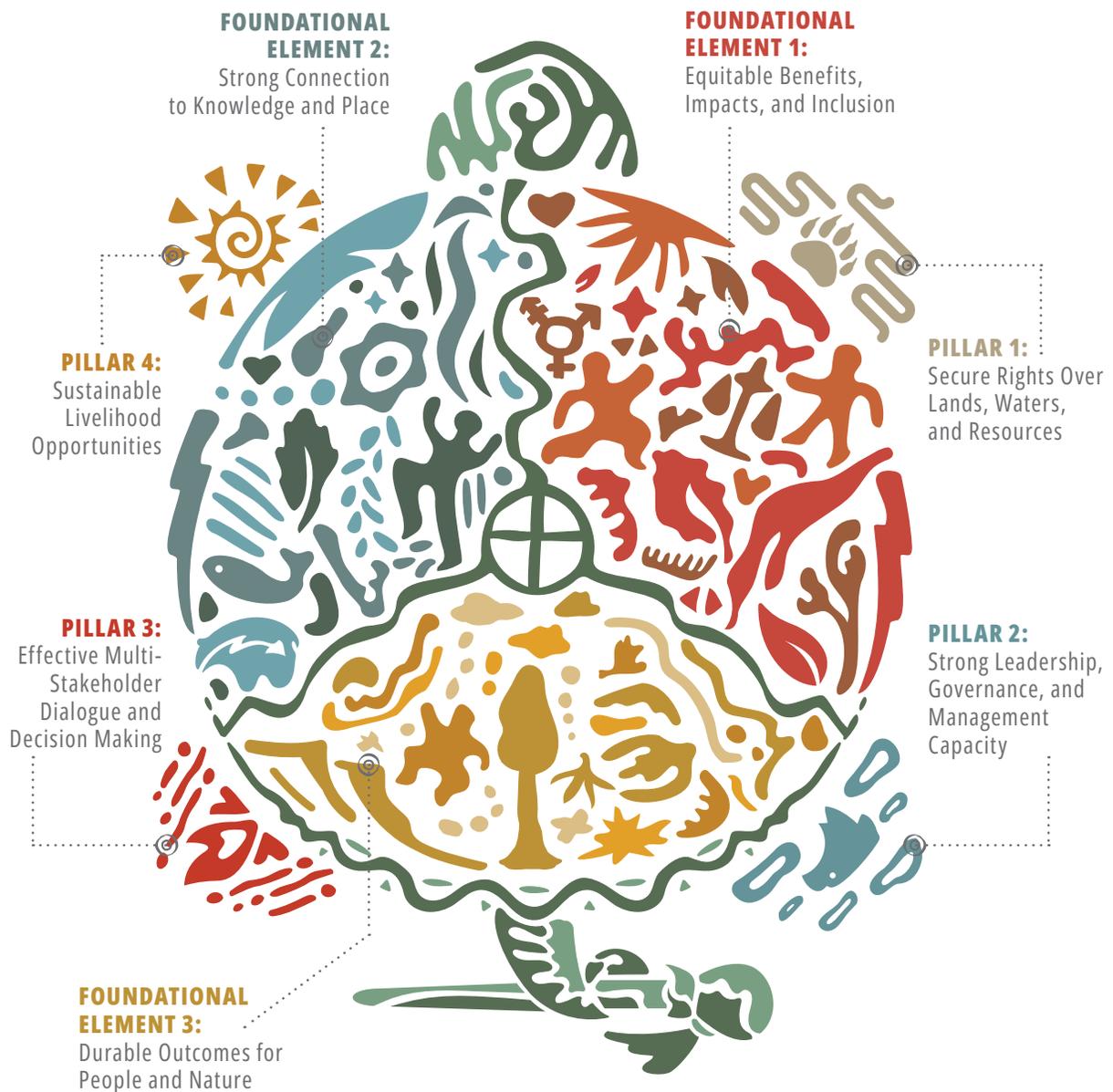
**FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENT 2:**
Strong Connection to Knowledge and Place

**FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENT 1:**
Equitable Benefits, Impacts, and Inclusion

**PILLAR 4:**
Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities

**PILLAR 1:**
Secure Rights Over Lands, Waters, and Resources

**PILLAR 3:**
Effective Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue and Decision Making

**PILLAR 2:**
Strong Leadership, Governance, and Management Capacity

**FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENT 3:**
Durable Outcomes for People and Nature

**Figure 2:** *Visual representation of the VCA Framework*

# Pillars of the VCA Framework

## ⊙ Secure Rights Over Lands, Waters, and Resources

**PILLAR 1**

Refers to both the actual legal status as well as the perception by Indigenous Peoples and local communities that their rights over lands, waters, and resources will be upheld by other members of society, including external communities, corporate entities, and the government. It is dependent on the type (e.g., ownership, management, withdrawal, use, or access) and form (e.g., communal, public, or private) of rights that are held, and the acknowledgement and enforcement of those rights by customary and formal institutions. When Indigenous Peoples and local communities have rights over lands, waters, and resources that are recognized and enforced by society and the government, they are better able to assert their interests in how these resources are used and managed. In turn, this can result in stronger community security and engagement in natural resource management and sustainable natural resource use, especially in situations where the community has a strong stewardship ethic, robust governance structures, accountable leadership, and economic opportunities that are closely linked to environmental stewardship and sustainable management of resources.

## ⊙ Strong Leadership, Governance, and Management Capacity

**PILLAR 2**

Refers to the multiple capacities of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to lead decision making about lands, waters, and resources; maintain clear and equitable rules and processes for management of natural resources; and the skills, knowledge, and technology to engage in forums, administrate business and finances, and manage natural systems. When Indigenous Peoples and local communities have individuals, leaders, and institutions with strong capacities, they are better able to achieve the collective action, community cohesion, and effective governance needed for sustainable natural resource management; respond to external threats to lands, waters, and resources; pursue, exercise, and defend their rights; develop sustainable livelihood opportunities; and participate in decision making that impacts the lands, waters, and resources on which they depend.

**PILLAR 3**

## ⊙ Effective Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue and Decision Making

Refers to the ability of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to organize or attend, voice thoughts and knowledge, and see uptake of their ideas and desires in forums that bring together multiple actors with an interest in lands, waters, or resources. These forums can occur at the local, regional, national, or international scale, can overlap in mandate or authority, and can have the goals of knowledge exchange, conflict resolution, and/or decision making. When Indigenous Peoples and local communities effectively and meaningfully engage in multi-stakeholder dialogue and decision making, and lasting structures are established to maintain that engagement, natural resource management decisions better reflect diverse perspectives on sustainability, incorporate unique insights on management and resilience, and benefit from a sophisticated understanding of the interconnectedness of people and nature. Additionally, Indigenous and local community rightsholders benefit from increased voice and visibility, a stronger negotiating position to advance their vision for economic prosperity, and a leveling of power dynamics.

**PILLAR 4**

## ⊙ Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities

Refers to the ability of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to pursue culturally aligned livelihood opportunities (e.g., adding value or stability to existing livelihoods, adopting new livelihoods or businesses bolstered by access to loans, credit, and other financing, or obtaining employment or compensation for good stewardship) that are in accordance with their vision for the future and enable them to thrive in place. When Indigenous Peoples and local communities have livelihood opportunities that are environmentally sustainable and culturally aligned, they are better able to assert their environmental and economic interests while maintaining a stronger negotiating position against unsustainable development options that degrade the environment and are poorly matched to their cultural values.

# Foundational Elements of the VCA Framework



**FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENT 1**

## ⊙ Equitable Benefits, Impacts, and Inclusion

Refers to the ability of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and the intersecting social identities that comprise the community, to benefit equitably from partnerships, maximize positive impacts and minimize negative impacts (particularly to vulnerable or underrepresented social identities), and achieve equitable participation in decision making, training, and economic opportunities. When Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and the various intersecting identities that make up communities, can participate and benefit equitably from conservation initiatives, stewardship activities are strengthened by the unique perspectives and knowledges of different community members and the longevity of community decisions and actions is increased, leading to better outcomes for both people and nature.



**FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENT 2**

## ⊙ Strong Connection to Knowledge and Place

Refers to the continued existence, use, and transmission of Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' place-based knowledge, language, culture, stories, and traditional practices that are critical to their well-being, and are the foundation for the success of their natural resource governance, management, and livelihoods. When Indigenous Peoples and local communities can maintain, revive, strengthen, use, and transfer their knowledge—which is often rooted in time, culture, and place—they are better able to center natural resource management decisions on principles of reciprocity, and ensure future generations can benefit from traditional ways of knowing and being.

## ⊙ Durable Outcomes for People and Nature

**FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENT 3**

Refers to the external enabling conditions that influence the long-term success of community-led stewardship, including the existence of conservation finance to fund long-term operating and management costs; a favorable local, regional, national, and international policy environment; and the diffusion of innovation through networks and scaling without compromising values. When Indigenous Peoples and local communities have access to finance that covers the full cost of stewardship activities; favorable government institutions that elevate their collective rights and participation in policy-making; and the ability to achieve the needed scale of impact through expansion, replication, and diffusion of successful models of community-led conservation, their efforts to thrive in place are more likely to achieve long-term social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

# Monitoring and Evaluation of VCA Framework Implementation

See **"Tool 1: VCA Framework Measures Guidance Document"** for guidance on monitoring implementation of the VCA Framework

We developed a monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) approach for use by programs implementing the VCA Framework, which includes common measures. These measures facilitate our ability to speak about outcomes across programs and geographies from a place of evidence, build the evidence base for socially oriented conservation strategies, foster shared learning, and enable adaptive management. The approach aims to strike a balance between consistency and flexibility—with 10 common outcome-level measures and the ability to choose from a menu of context-specific indicators to inform them. Five of the 10 common measures align directly with TNC's organizational metrics (indicated by an asterisk in Table 1), and therefore offer an opportunity to increase the efficiency and impact of monitoring efforts. Table 1 depicts the common VCA Measures along with the associated VCA pillar or foundational element.

**Table 1:** *VCA Common Measures.*

| VCA Framework Pillar or Foundational Element | VCA Common Measure |
|---|---|
| Secure Rights Over Lands, Waters, and Resources | *1) Number of people with increased security of rights over traditional lands, waters, or resources |
| Strong Leadership, Governance, and Management Capacity | 2) Number of people with increased governance capacity<br><br>3) Number of people with increased natural resource management capacity |
| Effective Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue and Decision Making | *4) Number of people with increased ability to meaningfully participate in decision making about traditional lands, waters, or resources |
| Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities | *5) Number of people with increased sustainable, place-based economic opportunity |
| Equitable Benefits, Impacts, and Inclusion | Equity considerations suggested for each common measure (see individual sections of **guidance document**) |
| Strong Connection to Knowledge and Place | 6) Number of people with increased connection to knowledge and place |
| Healthy and sustainably managed traditional lands, waters, or resources[c] | *7) Number of hectares of land or waters/river km/km coastline protected<br><br>*8) Number of hectares of land or waters/river km/km coastline under improved management<br><br>9) Number of hectares of land or waters/river km/km coastline with improved ecological condition<br><br>10) Number of hectares of land or waters/river km/km coastline with improved health of culturally important places or species |

*VCA Measures marked with an asterisk align directly with TNC's organizational metrics.*

---

c. Note, while "healthy and sustainably managed traditional lands, waters, or resources" is not a VCA Framework pillar, it is an explicit environmental outcome of the framework, and closely linked to Indigenous and local community human well-being. Therefore, we include these measures to understand the environmental outcomes of our strategies.

**TOOL 1: GUIDE—VCA FRAMEWORK MEASURES GUIDANCE DOCUMENT**

As the original VCA Framework gained traction across programs, we heard a call from conservation practitioners for simple, common, adaptable, and feasible guidance to monitor outcomes generated by implementing the VCA Framework. Given the framework's focus on socially oriented strategies informed by the people/nature connection, and backed by mounting evidence, this guidance places emphasis on tracking indicators of human well-being in addition to the environment. The guidance is intended to explicitly link to **TNC's Shared Conservation Agenda (SCA)** and **Conservation by Design 2.0**, and help programs adopting the VCA Framework provide information to monitor their progress on human well-being and environmental outcomes to inform TNC's broader efforts.

Additionally, a **self-paced online training curriculum on VCA Framework Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)** is available on **conservationtraining.org**, which covers MEL plan development; ethics, human rights, and equity in MEL; focus group and key informant interview design; social survey design; data collection tools and implementation; data management systems and processes; and data visualization and communication. For access to the training curriculum, contact **conservationtraining@tnc.org**.

All "Tools and Resources" materials referenced within this document can be accessed at **www.tncvoicechoiceaction.org**

# Understanding Freshwater Resource Characteristics and their Implications

The VCA Framework was written to be applicable across terrestrial, freshwater, and coastal ecosystems. Freshwater resources[d] have certain unique characteristics that are not shared with terrestrial or coastal ecosystems. Appreciating the unique characteristics of freshwater resources is critical to understanding the nuances in how to apply the framework successfully.

**Mobility:** Freshwater resources are inherently mobile, creating the potential for high variability in flows and resource availability across space and time, and increasing the speed at which impacts to the resources are distributed. Further, due to this mobility, connectivity is essential for many species and processes. Freshwater resources management must therefore be adaptable because the availability changes over time, and it can be expensive to make freshwater resources available when and where they are needed by people.

**Impacts on quality and quantity**: The state of freshwater resources in one location reflects the cumulative effects of all upstream aquatic and terrestrial uses (including agriculture, livestock rearing, manufacturing, electricity generation, and transportation) and governance in upstream jurisdictions, in addition to climatic and other factors. Therefore, whether water will exist for downstream users—and the quality of that water resource—is not guaranteed, often with very short time spans between cause and effect due to the high mobility of water. Further, the approach to freshwater resource management may differ depending on one's location in the watershed.

**Observational challenges**: Freshwater resources are often difficult to observe and monitor (e.g., groundwater, migratory fish stocks), which poses greater challenges to developing an accurate understanding of these resources, establishing boundaries around rights and governance, and providing the feedback users require to manage them. This is particularly challenging in the face of climate change.

**Externalities**: Externalities—or costs/benefits not reflected in the price charged for goods and service—shape and influence power dynamics among freshwater resource users. Being located upstream provides certain advantages over being located downstream, and power imbalances act to either counter or reinforce these dynamics. This has been an issue in many transboundary water systems, where upstream users have developed infrastructure and diverted water resources away from tributaries or rivers, leaving downstream users with reduced water availability and more erratic flows. Such disputes are heightened in times of increased water scarcity, such as from rapid population growth, climatic variability, and civil unrest.

**Non-substitutable and essential**: There is no substitute for freshwater—it is necessary for all life on earth. Given its status as a basic human right, people rarely have ownership rights over water. Instead, the most relevant types of rights associated with freshwater are access, withdrawal, and exclusion rights (more on this in the "secure rights" section). Water is the driver behind many economic sectors (e.g., agriculture, energy production, manufacturing) and as such, distribution and management are often very contentious.

---

d. Freshwater ecosystems include groundwater and springs, rivers and streams, lakes and ponds, and wetlands. The term "freshwater resources" implies the water itself as a resource, in addition to the aquatic organisms that live within the water.