



Great Barrier
Reef Foundation

Developing Community Action Plans: Achievements & Learnings

Community Action Plans

The Community Action Plan (CAP) Program is a pilot that aims to improve the engagement of the broader community in the protection of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. The collaborative planning process aims to connect community aspirations with regional and reef-wide priorities by establishing shared goals for community Reef protection, designing better ways to work together, identifying critical projects, and measuring and celebrating community outcomes.

Development process

In 2020/21, eight organisations from Cape York to Burnett Mary held hundreds of discussions and 26 workshops with community partners, Traditional Owners, scientists and Reef managers to create six regional CAPs.

The CAPs use an interactive planning approach intended to further empower community networks to tackle the complex issues facing the future of the GBR and the communities that rely on it - ranging from local climate action to habitat rehabilitation and protecting cultural values.

In 2021-2023, the program moves into implementation phase where project partners are translating planning into action. This included seed funding from the GBRF to kick start priority projects in each region and ongoing support for CAP Leaders and the GBR cross regional network.

Learning & adapting as we go

The program relies on regular input from partners and applies an action learning approach that is

continuously refined. As such, the monitoring, evaluation and learning plan (MEL) is an important tool to support program development and ongoing adaptation.

This paper shares some of the monitoring, evaluation and learning results from the CAP development process based on an analysis of survey results from CAP leaders and CAP community partners and participants.

The evaluation was conducted by social scientists at the Queensland University of Technology (Dean and Uebel 2021) for the Great Barrier Reef Foundation (GBRF). The report included an analysis of survey and interview results from CAP Leaders and CAP community partners and participants.





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Key results

The key outcomes identified from the five key program evaluation questions were:

Outcome 1. The program is a tool to help foster community ownership of Reef protection planning and action.

There were a number of indicators to suggest that the CAP development process led to increased community ownership of Reef protection outcomes identified in the CAP. This was displayed through feelings of pride or enthusiasm for the CAP, passion for the activities and continued commitment, through to inclusion of community priorities within plans. Workshop participants reported they plan to continue their involvement in the process (84%), and felt they had a capacity to influence CAP activities (76%) and feeling empowered to advocate for the CAP within their organisation (89%).

“The community had a real sense of pride of their work in developing the CAP and enthusiasm for implementing their CAP projects. They also wanted to be recognised [as their own entity].” - CAP Leader

Outcome 2. The CAP development process is helping to strengthen the quality of how communities are engaged in Reef protection actions.

There were a number of indicators to suggest that the CAP development process strengthened the quality of how communities were engaged in planning Reef protection actions. Two thirds (66%) of CAP leaders completing the online follow-up survey indicated that they observed some shift in the quality of how communities were engaged in planning. The most common type of response related to the collaborative nature of community participation, and development of new relationships and partnerships. Examples describing how community participation increased throughout the CAP development process included communities being listened to and having their voice included in plans, having a diversity of groups represented, including those not always involved in these types of activities and learning about new perspectives, including Traditional Owner perspectives.

Workshop participants reported high rates of agreement with statements related to feeling valued during the CAP development process (92% agreement) and feeling listened to during workshops (98% agreement).

“By bringing diverse communities and individuals together people could develop shared visions for Reef protection activities. Because of the diversity of groups involved, including groups that may not often get an opportunity to meet and discuss these topics, there was fantastic knowledge sharing on Reef related activities.”

-CAP Leader



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Outcome 3. Given the early stages of the program, there were fewer reported observations about an increase in how community contribution to planning and decision making is recognised and valued.

This type of outcome is likely to require longer periods of time to be clearly achieved and demonstrated. The potential for this outcome to be achieved with continued progression of CAP projects is suggested by willingness of decision makers to participate and contribute to community-led processes suggests a receptivity to community participation in decision making. The potential for this outcome to be achieved with continued progression of CAP projects is suggested by a number of factors. Principally, the willingness of decision makers to participate and contribute to community-led processes suggests a receptivity to community participation in decision making, which may be demonstrably valued with more time and experience.

“A clear sentiment that positive outcomes for the GBR will only be achieved in partnership and through collaboration, bringing the whole community on the journey e.g. increasing respect and recognition of First Nations' values of cultural and natural assets - our shared heritage.” – CAP Leader

Outcome 4. The program is showing signs of improving place-based community engagement to strengthen outcomes for the Reef.

Evaluation of the CAP development process largely focused on social outcomes of the CAP development process, rather than specific environmental outcomes for the Reef, or World Heritage values more broadly. Further outcomes are proposed to be implemented through CAP projects. Evaluation suggested that ensuring plans and projects focus on local needs can strengthen motivation and engagement. Survey respondents and interviewees highlighted the importance of the CAP projects to provide opportunities for community members to contribute to Reef-related outcomes.

“One of the really positive outcomes for people was actually coming together with other people who [they] weren't normally interacting with, and people realizing we've all got the same issues that we want to deal with that ... being able to actually form something that's a bit collective and united in in aspirations, I think, is probably why people value it.” – CAP Leader

Outcome 5. A key outcome of the CAP development process articulated by CAP Leaders was the opportunity to develop new relationships and strengthen existing relationships with community partners to support ongoing action.

It is likely that these stronger relationships—and associated elements such as trust, shared understanding, effective communication—will support ongoing collaborative efforts. Evaluations also indicated that the investment prospectus is seen as an important tool and the potential for greater opportunities for funding are valued by participants. A number of CAP leaders indicated that securing funding is part of the longer-term focus for the projects.

“I think we achieved some goals, and helped to build a foundation for [the future]. It offers a great place to grow from and I'm proud of what our partners helped bring to life, but we need more time and more support for CAP leaders and communities. Looking forward to next steps.” – CAP Leader



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Highlights at a glance



90%

Of CAP leaders observed an increase in community ownership of Reef protection actions



66%

Of CAP leaders observed a shift in the quality of how communities were engaged in planning



40%

Of CAP leaders could identify specific examples of increased valuing of community participation by decision makers

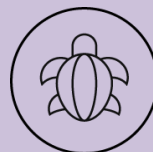


Feedback from workshop participants indicated that having a shared vision was associated with increased likelihood of continuing engagement



6

CAPs and investment prospectus developed by 8 CAP leaders



Cross regional themes emerged across CAPs such as local climate action, turtle conservation and coastal habitat protection & restoration



1,207

People engaged in developing the CAPs including over 2000 hours from volunteers



54

CAP projects developed including input from 125 partner organisations



14

Community and Traditional Owner led CAP projects provided with seed funding



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Key learnings to date

Key learnings from the CAP development process will help support continued adaptation and improvement. Key learnings include:

There is demand for these types of activities. Participants value the opportunity to engage in collaborative programs such as this to build bridges between different types of groups and provide a platform for building relationships and partnerships.

Building trust and shared understanding takes time. Programs need to ensure groups have realistic expectations about the time involved in building collaborations and that program design and implementation processes allocate adequate time.

Providing more flexibility can better align with local needs and strengths. Enhanced options for simpler entry points and modular approaches could help to better align the process with local needs and strengths.

Online community engagement is not a replacement for face to face. However, it can offer new pathways for some types of engagement, depending on the context and participants.

Establishing clear expectations is important. Collaboratively designing programs takes a new level of trust, boundaries and open dialogue and participants need clear expectations about their involvement.

Support for connecting is vital. Support from a central 'backbone organisation' is important to support overarching program support and the regional CAP leader roles.

Shared measurement offers benefits and challenges. It provides a useful structure but requires notable up-front investment and may only show benefits later in the program implementation.

Ensuring top-down processes don't detract from community-centred processes is a complex balance. Allocating more time for enabling community-led pre and post workshop, and/or simplifying the structured requirements of the program can address potential imbalances.

Demonstrating community influence can strengthen ongoing engagement. Community feeling valued and listened to, can strengthen ongoing engagement.



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