Design Operational Plan

What Is an Operational Plan?

Along with your Action and Monitoring Plans (Steps 2.1 and 2.2), the Operational Plan is the third part of your completed Strategic Plan. It defines how you will operate in practice to implement your action and monitoring plans – what your capacity needs are, how you will engage resources, how you will deal with risks, and how you will ensure sustainability of the project's achievements.

An Operational Plan does not normally exist as one single standalone plan; rather the key components are integrated with the other parts of the overall Strategic Plan.

The key components of a complete Operational Plan include analyses or discussions of:

- **Human and Other Capacity Requirements –** The human capacity and skills required to implement your project, and your current and potential sources of these resources. Also, other capacity needs required to implement your project (such as internal systems, management structures, engaged partners and Network NOs and POs, and a supportive legal framework).
- **Financial Requirements –** The funding required to implement your project, your current and potential sources of these funds, and your most critical resource and funding gaps.
- **Risk Assessment and Mitigation Strategy –** What risks exist and how they can be addressed.
- **Estimate of Project Lifespan, Sustainability, and Exit Strategy –** How long your project will last, when and how you will exit your project (if feasible to do so), and how you will ensure sustainability of your project's achievements.

Your Strategic Plan may only be considered complete when these components have been defined, at least in broad terms. As the project moves into Implementation, several of these components are then defined in more detail and tested in reality. Thus the Operational Plan provides a critical bridge between the Action and Monitoring Plans (Step 2) and Implementation (Step 3) of those plans.

The level of detail and formality of your Operational Plan will vary depending on the size and complexity of your project or programme. Small projects may only briefly touch on each of these topics before moving on to implementation. Large, complex programmes should be able to provide evidence that they have addressed each of the components of an Operational Plan. The larger the programme, the more extensive and formal the treatment of each component should be.