



How do you develop partnerships with research, development and extension providers?

Regional NRM bodies are increasingly doing research, development and extension (RD&E) in their regions. This calls for the development of greater collaboration between NRM bodies and RD&E providers.

Who are RD&E providers?

RD&E providers include researchers, extension and communication professionals from universities, CSIRO, Cooperative Research Centres, centres of excellence, state government departments, R&D corporations, consultants, industry groups, and skilled individuals who have been directly employed by regional bodies.

How does an RD&E partnership work?

Regional bodies take different approaches to accessing expertise. They can directly employ experts and/or broker a partnership with an RD&E provider. The approach taken is often based on the availability of personnel or access to recognised networks.

An RD&E partnership uses the knowledge and skills of the partners to tackle NRM problems, make better decisions, and create positive change in NRM. Research partnerships can range from informal interactions between researchers and landholders to a large, structured research program.

This fact sheet summarises how regional bodies can develop partnerships with research, development and extension providers to improve natural resource management practices in Queensland.

Related topics

[How do you develop effective NRM partnerships?](#)

[What are the barriers and opportunities for participating in regional NRM?](#)

[Who should regional bodies develop partnerships with?](#)

[How do you encourage community participation in NRM activities?](#)

Why partner with RD&E providers?

The right RD&E partnership can help a regional NRM body to:

- tackle complex problems (e.g. multi-disciplinary or multi-scale)
- access the best scientists and build research capacity
- become involved in programs beyond the capacity of individuals or even groups
- increase efficiency, reduce duplication and give better returns on investment
- share the costs, risks and rewards of new projects with RD&E providers
- gain access to new ideas, technology, networks and expertise
- shape community attitudes and positive changes in behaviour



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Barriers to developing partnerships with RD&E providers

Unclear roles

The main barrier to developing effective partnerships with RD&E providers is a lack of understanding of the roles each partner plays in the collaboration. Partners must recognise that common goals and diverging priorities exist in any collaboration. Without a clear understanding of roles, confusion and conflict can occur further down the timeline of the project.

Poor project management

This includes unfocused or changing project objectives, 'good news only' reporting, lack of integration across catchment boundaries, and the competing expectations of partners that are not addressed at the outset.

Short-term funding and reporting structures

Short timeframes and small size research projects can also deter researchers from participating as it limits their ability to interpret trends effectively.

Volunteers

Having volunteers on the project can add challenges due to the time needed for meeting the reporting requirements of funding bodies and the in-kind component needed to apply for collaborative research funds. Volunteers and support staff can be under-skilled or overloaded, and may have limited commitment to ongoing monitoring.

Lack of skills and opportunities

For researchers employed in regional NRM bodies, the lack of secondments, transfers and training, and the lack of complementary skills in other staff, were disincentives for them taking up positions or remaining in regional NRM bodies.

However, partnerships and collaboration come at a cost because they can:

- require more planning and negotiating before research can begin
- be expensive (costs escalate with the number of partners)
- diminish the control and recognition of individual organisations
- introduce new risks to the project
- fail due to 'weak links' or external pressures outside of your control

10 tips for a successful RD&E partnership

1. Research what type of partnership is best for you (e.g. competitive tender, institutional alliance, collaborative project contract, multi-sector collaborative partnership).
2. Jointly develop (with partners) a clear understanding of the desired outcomes and the limits of the research.
3. Jointly define (with partners) roles and responsibilities (e.g. staff involvement, joint funding, in-kind support).
4. Involve the community—people who contribute to the research will better understand and appreciate the knowledge generated.
5. Communicate extensively—give equal weight to all participants' views and opinions (use scoping meetings, workshops, steering committees, advisory groups, field days).
6. Build trust with partners, budget for relationship-building activities, and acknowledge the value of sharing resources and data (e.g. clear terms of reference, leadership, adequate resources).
7. Monitor and record progress of research and development activities (e.g. annual reviews, peer assessment, stakeholder workshops).
8. Make information and results widely available to all partners and debate in an honest and vigorous manner (e.g. scientific publications, technical reports, partner reviews, regional conferences).
9. Plan and resource ongoing extension activities (e.g. industry liaison, specialist staff, knowledge brokers, training programs, field days).
10. Monitor the impact of RD&E activities with target groups (e.g. social surveys, improved ecosystem health, compliance to regulations, uptake of technology).

How do you approach an RD&E provider?

Each partner must contribute to the project in some way. Be clear about what you have to offer and what your expectations are. Provide details about any preliminary data or research that you are aware of. Existing staff skills, the ability to attract qualified staff, and opportunities for funding are also key attractors for collaboration.

Factors such as organisational structures, policies, procedures and timelines can constrain partners. Acknowledging these factors at the outset and understanding the necessary administrative processes will help you decide whether a partnership is feasible.

You should also be familiar with the relevant legislation, including ethics approval and other applications.

Checklist for developing partnerships

1. Does the issue suit collaboration?

- **Complexity**—does it require multi-disciplinary, cross-scale or high-risk research, or does it have a variety of stakeholders (e.g. community)?
- **Significance**—does the size and duration of the research warrant collaborative infrastructure?
- **Broad interest**—does the research have broad (generic) application, or is it of interest (and potential advantage) to more than a single entity?

2. What other suitable, trusted partners may be interested?

- **Objectives**—are there clear, understood, valued and compatible expectations and desired outcomes between potential research partners?
- **Resources**—are there adequate and complementary (non-competitive) resources and skills available?
- **Leadership**—does each partner have an effective internal champion, and is there a suitable, agreed program leader?
- **Cultures and processes**—are the differing cultures and processes of each partner understood and accepted?

3. Will management be fair and effective?

- **Recognition and reward**—will all participants (individuals and organisations) be adequately recognised and rewarded for their input?
- **Control and influence**—is there an appropriate balance between input and ability to manage or influence the investment?
- **Managing differences**—are there means to raise and address management issues and scientific differences as they arise?
- **Program development**—are potential partners willing to invest in (and accommodate an uncertain outcome from) a program scoping/development phase?

4. Will returns outweigh the costs?

- **Priority**—does the proposed research address a mutual, high priority issue, and still remain relevant to individual needs?
- **Efficiencies**—will it generate outcomes or returns that exceed the ability of an individual organisation?
- **Resources and risks**—will it attract funds and manage (or share) risks better than an individual organisation could?
- **Expertise**—will it attract a mix of researchers, facilities and extension services beyond the capacity of an individual organisation?

Rural women and new technologies: a cross-industry comparison

A collaborative research project in Queensland examined rural women's use of new technologies in relation to NRM. The study aimed to understand and capture the women's potential in using communication technologies such as the internet, email and teleconferencing, and farm management decision-support systems.

The project involved eight research, development and extension organisations. CSIRO researchers conducted the project, which was based on six case studies of women's use of new technologies in the dairy, cotton, beef, grains and sugar industries. Each case study used focus groups, interactive workshops and interviews.

The project profiled many 'successes' which influenced NRM decision making in five rural industries. The findings led to the development of a set of principles for improving communication and information technology learning for rural women.

Source: Bellamy, J et al (2002) Improving Resource Management Through Rural Women's Use of New Technology: A Pilot Study on Impediments and Opportunities for Learning Activities

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/APCITY/UNPAN024358.pdf>

Useful resources

Characteristics of effective natural resource partnerships

www.engagingcommunities2005.org/abstracts/S117-oliver-pe.html

Social Innovations in Natural Resource Management: A handbook of social research in natural resource management in Queensland

www.regionalnrm.qld.gov.au/research_sips/sips/social_economic/pdf/se03_handbook_intro.pdf

Integrated R, D & E for regional NRM (SE04)

www.regionalnrm.qld.gov.au/research_sips/sips/social_economic/se04.html