

# EcoTipping Points Facilitation Guides

## Reverse It: Finding the Lever

Time: 2-3 hours

Difficulty: Moderate to Hard

Materials: Printed copies of the Map It diagram for each participant, markers

This session uses the map the community built to find where and how to intervene. There's no formula — every community faces a different set of environmental and social challenges. But this framework will guide the community in their search for strategies that are forceful and doable: a vicious cycle mapped, levers strong enough to turn things around identified, and a test of whether the community has the resources and commitment to pull it off.

You're working toward a shortlist of 1–3 candidate interventions specific enough to plan a first step.

## Steps

### 1. Reconnect to the map

Distribute printed copies of the Map It diagram. Having the map in hand changes the dynamic: participants can annotate, point, and return to it throughout the session.

Walk through it briefly. Don't assume people remember the previous session:

"Last time we mapped how [X, Y, Z] connect and reinforce each other. At the end, the group identified places where the community might have some ability to act. Today: what would actually change this?"

Return to those circled nodes from the Map It session. Invite participants to add any new ones they've thought about since. That's where this session begins.

### 2. Look for where the connection broke

Before the decline started, the ecosystem and community usually supported each other. Something broke that relationship: a new market, a technology, outside pressure, a policy change. Those break points are worth locating precisely.

Ask:

"Where in this diagram did things once work differently? Was there a time when the health of [the forest / the fish / the soil] and the wellbeing of families here supported each other, before they started working against each other?"

Mark those points. There may be several — in a system that has spiralled deeply, an early break often gets amplified by reinforcing cycles that came later. Look for breaks at different points in the chain, not just the earliest one.

Then ask which of them the community can actually influence. The overlap between "where the connection broke" and "where we have agency" is the shortlist.

This overlap is a useful starting point for finding levers. Some levers will map directly to where the break happened. Others will work at different points in the chain. The goal is to find the places with the most pull on the whole system.

### **3. Ask if someone nearby already solved this**

Before designing anything, ask:

"Is there a household, a village, a farm nearby where this problem doesn't exist, or where it used to exist and got better? What are they doing differently?"

If yes, study it before inventing anything. A solution developed within the same ecological and social constraints — same soils, same seasons, same pressures — is often more credible and easier to adopt than one brought in from elsewhere.

### **4. Introduce patterns from similar cases**

Bring in ETP case material as analogy, not prescription. For each candidate intervention point, ask whether any ETP case looks structurally similar:

Resource extracted faster than it regenerates (including reef and fish populations): Apo Island. Fishers agreed on two rules: a permanent no-take sanctuary covering a fifth of the reef, and a ban on destructive fishing methods. Fish populations recovered within a few years, and the surrounding fishery improved because the protected area was producing more fish than before. The community gave the reef the conditions to restore itself.

Community benefit disconnected from ecological health: Khao Din. Restructure farming so the land's health and the family's income move together.

Dependence on external inputs: Punukula. Replace cash inputs with labor and local knowledge.

Degraded water or soil: Gopalpura. Restore the infrastructure that natural cycles depend on to support community life.

The question isn't "do what they did." It's: what structural move made this work, and is that move available here?

### **5. Generate lever candidates**

Ask the group to identify 3–5 specific things the community could do that might shift the system. Push past the obvious: the most effective lever often isn't the most visible one. Encourage candidates that work with what the ecosystem can do on its own, given the right conditions.

Useful prompts:

"If you could change one thing in this diagram that you actually have some control over, what would it be?"

"What would have to be true for the ecosystem to begin recovering on its own?"

"Is there a practice, a rule, or a resource that used to exist here that the community has the knowledge to restore?"

A lever that draws on ecological memory — on species behaviors and ecosystem cycles the community already understands — is often more durable than one that requires new outside knowledge. Nature's own self-healing capacity is one of the most powerful forces available; the facilitator's job is to help the group find where to let it through.

*Facilitator tip: If you already have a sense of what the lever should be, hold it back. Share it only after the group has generated its own candidates. Present it as one more option to evaluate. A process that performs participation while seeking ratification is the most common failure mode in this work.*

## **6. Test each candidate**

Run 3–5 candidates through a group feasibility check. The questions below apply to rules, collective agreements, restoration practices, governance changes, and other types of initiatives:

Can people tell whether this is being followed or carried out?

Can the community track progress without sustained outside help?

Can it be adapted as conditions change, using knowledge that already exists here?

Does it require governance structures that don't yet exist?

Can the community provide the time, energy, and resources to carry it out?

Will it involve short-term sacrifices that create excessive burdens for some members? If so, how will those burdens be shared?

Does the community have the leadership needed to manage and enforce commitments?

Starting small: can you run a pilot version that builds commitment and resources before scaling up?

Does this change who benefits from the resource, or does it just change how things are done while leaving the same people in control?

## **7. Rank and close**

Help the group rank candidates on three dimensions: how many loops in the system does this affect (leverage), how significantly does it shift the system dynamic (impact), and what can they

realistically start (feasibility). Give weight to candidates that harness natural recovery processes (what the land or water will do if given the chance).

Close with:

"The point isn't to find the perfect lever. It's to find one worth testing. What would tell you, within the first year or two, whether this is working?"

## **Watch For**

The group jumps to solutions early. Let them name the solution, then run it through the feasibility check rather than shutting down the energy.

Every option feels too small. Usually means the group has correctly identified that real change requires structural shifts that feel politically impossible. Ask: "Given that, what's a move that still points in that direction?"

The group can't agree. Either the analysis wasn't complete (go back to the map) or there's a real conflict of interest that hasn't surfaced yet. Ask: "What's the disagreement actually about?"

You already know what the lever should be. Share it only after the group has generated its own candidates, and present it as one more option to evaluate. Running a process that performs participation while actually seeking ratification is the most common failure mode in this work.

## **Materials Note**

Bring printed copies of the Map It diagram and distribute them at the start of the session. A map participants can hold and mark up changes the dynamic.