AWEI Pathways Retreat

05 November 2026, Die Stal Alumni Clubhouse, Stellenbosch University

Purpose **2**
Before the Retreat 2
Expected Outputs 2
Morning Sessions – Pathways for Impact **3**
Objectives 3
Session 1: Where are we now? **3**
Session 2: Revisiting the Theory of Change **3**
Session 3: Strategic priorities **4**
Thematic priorities 4
Geographic priorities 4
Stakeholder priorities 4
Delivery priorities 5
Session 4: Strategic choices **5**
Afternoon sessions – Pathways for Effectiveness **6**
Objectives 6
Session 1: Institutional structure **6**
Option 1 – Embedded within Stellenbosch University 6
Option 2 – Semi-autonomous institute 6
Option 3 – Hybrid model 6
Option 4 – Independent organisation 7
Session 2: Revenue model **7**
Session 3: Staffing, associates & students **8**
Core staff 8
Associates 8
Students 8
Gap analysis 9
Session 4: From strategy to implementation **9**
Stop – Start – Continue 9
Roadmap 9
Governance 10
Communications 10
Session 5: The way forward **10**
Light & wild refreshments **10**

Purpose

After eight years advancing an inclusive, sustainable wildlife economy across Africa, the African Wildlife Economy Institute (AWEI) is pausing to chart its next chapter. This retreat is designed to clarify AWEI's strategic direction, sharpen its Theory of Change, identify priority areas of work, determine the most appropriate institutional structure, develop a sustainable business model, and agree on the staffing and implementation priorities required for the Institute's next phase of development.

The retreat is intended to move from **purpose** to **strategy** to **structure** to **implementation**

- Why does AWEI exist?
- What should it do?
- How should it be organised?
- How will it sustain itself?
- Who will deliver it?
- What happens next?

Before the Retreat

- Short pre-reads to be circulated, including
  - AWEI's theory of change as it has evolved since 2018
  - A summary of current funding
  - A one-page evidence review drawn from Impact Reports
  - A short comparator brief on 2–3 other university-affiliated institutes that have gone semi-autonomous, hybrid, or fully independent

Expected Outputs

By the end of the retreat AWEI should have:

- A refreshed Theory of Change
- Agreed strategic priorities
- Defined thematic, geographic and stakeholder focus
- A preferred institutional direction
- A diversified revenue strategy
- Agreed staffing principles
- A high-level implementation roadmap
- Clear ownership of next steps

Morning Sessions – Pathways for Impact

Objectives

By the end of the morning, participants should have:

- Agreed AWEI's core purpose and Theory of Change
- Identified the Institute's highest strategic priorities
- Clarified where AWEI can have the greatest influence
- Begun identifying the implications for future programmes and partnerships

Session 1: Where are we now?

Begin by reflecting on AWEI's development to date

Discuss:

- What have been AWEI's greatest achievements?
- Where has AWEI had the greatest influence?
- What has worked particularly well?
- What has been less successful?
- What opportunities have emerged?
- What constraints have limited impact?

Review current projects, partnerships, funding sources, and outputs

Session 2: Revisiting the Theory of Change

Using the existing Theory of Change as the starting point:

Consider:

- Does it still reflect AWEI's purpose?
- Which assumptions remain valid?
- Which assumptions need updating?
- Are there missing pathways to impact?
- Does it adequately reflect the wildlife economy as an integrated system?

Clarify the desired long-term impact and the pathways through which AWEI contributes to that impact

Identify where AWEI creates value that few other organisations currently provide

Session 3: Strategic priorities

Having clarified the Theory of Change, determine where AWEI should concentrate its effort Discuss priorities across four dimensions

Thematic priorities

Determine which themes should be flagship areas

For example:
- Wildlife economy policy
- Sustainable use of wild species
- Wildlife-based enterprise
- Community livelihoods
- Wildlife economy finance
- Certification and standards
- Wildlife value chains – e g , foods and medicines
- Landscape restoration
- Landscape governance

Geographic priorities

Identify where AWEI is most likely to have influence rather than simply presence

Options may include:
- South Africa
- Southern Africa (SADC)
- Other regions
- Africa-wide (AU)
- Strategic international engagement

Stakeholder priorities

Clarify which relationships deserve greatest investment

These may include:
- National and local governments
- Local communities
- Private sector
- Regional and international organisations
- Development agencies
- Universities and students

Delivery priorities

Discuss how AWEI creates value Identify where effort should increase, remain stable or reduce

Possible areas include:
- Research
- Policy engagement
- Advisory services
- Executive education
- Professional training
- Knowledge products
- Convening
- Demonstration projects
- Collaborative learning

Session 4: Strategic choices

Review the discussions from the day

Ask:
- What should AWEI stop doing?
- What should AWEI continue doing?
- What should AWEI begin doing?

Capture strategic choices rather than attempting detailed work planning

Summarise:
- Updated Theory of Change
- Strategic priorities
- Key unresolved questions

These outputs become the foundation for the afternoon discussions

Afternoon sessions – Pathways for Effectiveness

Objectives

By the end of the afternoon participants should have:

- Agreed the preferred institutional model
- Developed a sustainable revenue strategy
- Agreed principles for staffing and partnerships
- Identified implementation priorities and next steps

Session 1: Institutional structure

Having agreed what AWEI wants to achieve, consider the institutional arrangements most likely to enable success Discuss four broad options

Option 1 – Embedded within Stellenbosch University

Advantages:

- Strong academic credibility
- Student pipeline
- Potential for administrative support
- Established governance

Challenges:

- Limited flexibility
- University processes
- HR, finance, and procurement constraints
- Restricted commercial activities

Option 2 – Semi-autonomous institute

Remain within the University while increasing operational flexibility Discuss governance, branding, fundraising, and financial management implications

Option 3 – Hybrid model

Retain formal links with Stellenbosch while establishing an independent vehicle for selected activities such as advisory services, executive education, or project implementation Consider how responsibilities would be divided

Option 4 – Independent organisation

Explore what would be gained and lost through becoming fully independent

Discuss implications for:
- Governance
- Fundraising
- Staffing
- Reputation
- Academic collaboration
- Students
- Financial sustainability

Conclude either with a preferred direction or a due-diligence process if further analysis is required

Session 2: Revenue model

Review current revenue model and explore options for a diversified and sustainable funding strategy

Potential revenue streams include:
- Competitive research grants
- Philanthropic funding
- Government contracts
- Executive education
- Professional training
- Advisory services
- Consulting
- Partnerships with industry
- Publications and knowledge products

For each revenue stream discuss:
- Strategic fit
- Income potential
- Required investment
- Risks
- Compatibility with the preferred institutional structure

Agree the desired future funding mix

Session 3: Staffing, associates & students

Begin with the capabilities required to deliver the agreed strategy rather than existing positions

Core staff

Identify the functions requiring permanent capacity

Possible areas include:
- Research leadership
- Policy and advisory leadership
- Partnerships and business development
- Programme management
- Operations and finance
- Communications

Associates

Review current role of associates and revise as needed

Consider:
- Subject-matter experts
- Senior fellows
- Country associates
- Technical specialists
- Training faculty

Clarify expectations regarding:
- Engagement model
- Remuneration
- Intellectual contribution
- Branding
- Quality assurance

Students

Discuss the role of postgraduate students in delivering impact

Consider whether students primarily contribute through:
- Research
- Innovation
- Field programmes
- Future recruitment
- Collaborative learning

Explore options for prioritising Stellenbosch students or engaging with students across the continent

Gap analysis

Compare the desired future model with current capacity

Identify:
- Capability gaps
- Overcapacity
- Succession needs
- New recruitment priorities

Rather than designing a detailed organisation chart, agree guiding principles

For example:
- Maintain a lean core team
- Scale delivery through associates
- Keep students central to the research pipeline
- Invest in business development capability if advisory services and training become significant revenue streams

Session 4: From strategy to implementation

Translate retreat decisions into an implementation roadmap

Stop – Start – Continue

Review decisions about:
- Theory of Change
- Strategic priorities
- Institutional structure
- Revenue model
- Staffing

Roadmap

Develop workstreams with possible owners and indicative timelines

Possible workstreams include:
- Structural and legal due diligence
- Updated Theory of Change
- New fundraising strategy
- Advisory service development

- Executive education pilot
- Associate framework
- Communications strategy

Governance

Identify decisions requiring approval by:

- University leadership
- Faculty
- Board
- External partners

Communications

Develop a communications sequence For example:

1. Internal team
2. Faculty leadership
3. University leadership
4. Existing partners and funders
5. Wider stakeholder community

Session 5: The way forward

Review all retreat outputs and confirm:

- Decisions made
- Issues requiring further analysis
- Immediate priorities
- Success measures

Agree responsibilities for maintaining the implementation roadmap and monitoring progress

Light & wild refreshments