



WPACs of Alberta Governance Manual

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Prepared for the Alberta WPACs

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WPACs of Alberta Governance Manual

Background

This document outlines the process that the Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) of Alberta have agreed upon to build a strong foundation for collaborative decision-making. This manual will support work across WPACs in areas related to governance projects and topics of interest to WPACs.

This document outlines the elements and principles needed for successful inclusive decision-making. It also describes how WPACs will proceed with conflict resolution and sharing the decisions with a larger audience.

Vision, Mission and Values

The WPACs have developed shared vision, mission, and values statements to guide our collaborative work. We need to know where we want to go before we can figure out how to get there.

The collaborative intention behind the shared vision, mission, and value statement is vital to strategically plan the direction of WPAC collaborative work, in a way that facilitates input from all involved in the work of WPACs. It ensures the voices of each WPAC are heard and incorporated into how WPACs move forward.

Vision:

WPACs are valued Water for Life partners, working collectively within areas of common interest to achieve environmentally, socially, and economically healthy and resilient watersheds.

Mission:

Our mission is to collaborate and support each WPAC by sharing resources, experiences, and opportunities, so that we are effective in achieving our vision.

Values:

We value the uniqueness and perspectives of each WPAC

We value collaboration, integrity, and transparency

We value trust, respect, and building authentic partnerships

We value Indigenous knowledge and perspectives

We value collecting and sharing credible information in a neutral, unbiased manner

Benefits of Collaborative WPAC Work

Building and maintaining stronger relationships between WPACs, all levels of government, Indigenous communities, and stakeholders is essential for the ongoing effectiveness of WPACs and to position WPACs as leaders in watershed management. WPACs must be visible and relevant to funders and stakeholders as trustworthy and credible leaders in community discussions. Building upon our current reputation and trust with stakeholders will increase our value with funders, and all levels of government.

We will demonstrate our value to our members, stakeholders, and funders by showing leadership on critical topics that influence watershed management and health.

It is an opportunity, not a requirement, to collaborate.

This manual will support governance with the Alberta WPAC Collaborative, as well as work on province-wide projects and important topics of interest to WPACs.

Purpose of the Manual

This manual is a means for WPACs to work collaboratively on topics of mutual interest.

This manual is designed to build WPAC capacity, and our confidence in working collaboratively province-wide, where we can have more impact and build recognition of Alberta WPACs.

WPAC uniqueness strengthens the whole

Each WPAC is unique, with a diversity of stakeholders, watershed issues, and passionate members. Each WPAC also has its own strengths, and areas for improvement. The unique characteristics of each WPAC are important to share with all WPACs to strengthen our collective work going forward.

Uphold WPAC Independence

This document lays out how *collaborative* decisions will be made by the WPACs of Alberta, ensuring all voices are heard. It does not, however, supersede the decision-making processes of any individual WPAC. This manual is a tool to help ensure all voices are heard when working together.

Collaboration is an opportunity, not a requirement

Involvement in any Alberta WPAC initiative is encouraged, as it is a way to collaboratively address topics pertinent to our work. It is *not* a requirement. It is expected that not all WPACs will be, or need to be, involved in every collaborative initiative.

Foundations

Manual Principles

Participatory

Participation in the collaborative work of the WPACs is a voluntary opportunity. It is also expected that those who choose to do so should *fully* participate. It is important that all voices are heard and respected.

Collaborative

All WPACs will act in good faith to strive for consensus and will work collaboratively as per the Alberta WPAC Memorandum of Understanding and this manual.

Striving for Consensus

All WPACs use consensus-based decision-making. Consensus is reached when each stakeholder can live with the outcome. Stakeholders may not achieve all their goals, but the optimal solution is what is in everyone's best interests. The resulting recommendations are likely to be more innovative and longer-lasting than those reached through traditional negotiation processes.

Consensus decision-making brings together a group of people in an attempt to address interests or concerns underlying each party's position on an issue. The focus is on finding solutions to the problems faced by each party so every participant can agree to a final set of recommendations.

Consensus making also involves individuals being able to understand and articulate their own underlying interests. This means that the group needs to create a safe and trusting environment where people are comfortable to express opinions, ideas, and concerns. The environment must be without prejudice or censure and should encourage candour, honesty, respect, and trust. Participants should know what is expected of them throughout the collaborative process. Everyone must know and trust the process—even where trust has yet to develop¹.

An implicit benefit of the consensus process is that mutual understanding and respect develops as people search together for the best solutions. Consensus is based on being able to live with the decision, and importantly, being able to see yourself in the solution.

If a final decision violates someone's fundamental moral values, or those of the WPAC collaborative, they are obligated to block consensus. Blocks cannot be used to prevent the group from continuing to discuss an issue, nor used because you do not agree. Blocking is restricted to concerns that clearly disregard the core principles and values of the group. Make sure your

¹ Clean Air Strategic Alliance. (2014). *CASA guide to managing collaborative processes*. Retrieved from <https://www.casahome.org/consensus-process/>

concerns are communicated to the group early — do not put them on the table at the last minute². If there is a clear will (vast majority) to move in a certain direction, one or two dissenters or blockers should not stop progress. It is incumbent upon blockers to help work out a solution. Those with passionately held objections with the work should put in the effort to make it better, or stand aside/opt-out of the decision. These will be noted in meeting minutes and documentation.

For the Common Good

Decisions are to be made that in the best interest of all WPACs involved.

Watershed Focused

WPACs are involved in many issues related to land and water management planning. As such, any topic pertinent to water and watershed management can be discussed. This includes, but is not limited to, the Water for Life Action Plan, Alberta Water Futures, and issues pertaining to environmental stewardship, habitat and habitat restoration, land use issues, as well as pertinent social and economic topics.

Inclusive

Everyone with a significant interest or stake in the issue should be involved in the decision-making process. Ensure access to the decision-making is equitable.

Shared Responsibility

It is the responsibility of everyone involved in the decision-making process to ensure this process, and any other associated agreements, are upheld, and adhered to. Those involved will also be responsible for ensuring the thinking and input processes will result in good decisions that reflect the other principles mentioned above.

Education

This is an opportunity for learning. WPACs will collaborate with topic experts and knowledge holders to gather understanding up front about the given topics.

Accountability

The parties are accountable to both their WPACs and to the process that they have all agreed to.

Embracing Disagreement

Disagreement is healthy and good, and helps everyone learn what we can do better. Divergent thinking is an important aspect of participatory decision-making, as it also allows novel ideas and

² Clean Air Strategic Alliance. (2010). *Consensus decision-making toolkit: A Martha Kostuch legacy*. Retrieved from <https://www.casahome.org/uploads/source/PDF/CDM-toolkit-web.pdf>

a variety of opinions to emerge and aides in considering new perspectives. It is important to be respectful of all ideas as they may assist in decision-making³.

Working with these divergent ideas, options, opinions, and perspectives can be frustrating, but it is a key piece in coming to an inclusive decision that is reflective of the values WPACs hold and the ingenuity to address challenging issues.

Where there is disagreement, our communications, records, and documents will reflect this, noting areas of agreement as well as the areas of disagreement where more discussion is needed.

Decision-making for WPAC Managers

To aid in decision-making and ensure the transparency of those decisions, the following procedures are agreed upon and will be used by all WPAC Executive Directors, or the designated alternate. All new WPAC Executive Directors and alternates will be informed about these procedures, and agree to adhere to these procedures in order to make decisions in the context of the collaborative.

There will be opportunities to provide input up front, learn about the topic, and ask questions before a decision is expected.

When making decisions together, Executive Directors will:

- Gather ideas and input before any decisions are made, including from staff, knowledge holders, and board members. Input may be gathered via survey, interview, at a meeting, by reviewing existing WPAC documents, etc., and will vary depending on the topic and activity.
- Adhere to consensus-based decision-making. As true consensus-making requires a longer time frame, it should be applied to larger project-based decisions (i.e. final document sign off), and fundamental operating decisions only. Consensus may not be achieved at all stages of a collaborative initiative. Managers should collectively decide if consensus is required.
- Hold a super majority vote (8 out of 11 WPACs) if consensus cannot be reached. Dissenting opinions will be noted in the minutes, if they want to be noted.
- Follow up with opt-out or e-vote for financial decisions to allow for individual WPACs to deliberate.

³ Kaner, S., Lind, L., Toldi, C., Fisk, S., & Berger, D. (2014). *Facilitator's guide to participatory decision-making*. 3rd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Boss. 401 pp.

- Set quorum at 8 out of 11 WPACs. For significant decisions (as determined by the collective), all WPACs must have the opportunity to voice their perspective. Not all WPACs must participate.
- Make use of facilitators as needed to aid in difficult conversations, as resources permit.
- Provide items requiring feedback ahead of meetings, and through the Statement of Opportunity (SoO) process, to facilitate providing input. It is incumbent on those who cannot attend a meeting to review the agenda, and provide feedback.

Statements of Opportunity

- Decide what topics will be pursued, based on SoOs provided to all Executive Directors.
- Allow each WPAC to decide for itself if it requires a board decision, or an Executive Director decision, as per their own policies.
- Provide the required written or email approval as the clear approval sign-off mechanism, so there is no room for misunderstanding. All approvals must be recorded in the SoO file. No response will be considered opting-out, but not stopping the process, and recorded as such.
- Record documentation for each opportunity for participation, and decision-making. All decisions on a particular initiative must be recorded in the Statement of Opportunity file for that project. For significant decisions and documents of agreement (i.e. the MOU, final documents, SoOs, fundraising decisions), signatures will be required (pdf of signature on document). In other cases, email agreement is sufficient.
- Record the names of the WPACs that have approved each SoO, and who is abstaining. Dissenting views will only be recorded if the person/group chooses to have their view recorded. For example, WPACs may add their own logo and signature/name once they have approved it.
- Ensure that if a board member wishes to have a topic brought forward, it must go through their own board, then through their Executive Director to the collaborative as a Statement of Opportunity, as per the provided criteria. Board members are not to go to the collaborative except through their Executive Director (or alternate). Committees are also required to bring forward SoOs when proposing major projects that will require resources (i.e. funding, extra staff time).
- Ensure that for each topic that is brought forward, the proponent must develop and present a Statement of Opportunity to the WPAC Managers. It is not the responsibility of the WPAC Managers to develop a Statement of Opportunity, or facilitate the supporting research.

Review and approval of documents

- WPAC Managers will be given the opportunity to review and comment on draft documents before they are approved and/or shared.
- Ensure clear and realistic timelines and deadlines are set and agreed upon, according to scope, and situation. Deadlines must be recorded in the SoO, and adhered to. When agreed upon, deadlines may be extended within reason to accommodate board discussions. A minimum of 10 working days is expected. No response will be considered opting-out.
- Be expected to share information with their Board of Directors and/or staff once approval is given, and garner responses in a timely manner within timelines given. No response will be considered opting-out.
- Get written approval from all WPACs is required on communications and documents that are being made public. No response will be considered opting-out.
- Set a scheduled virtual meeting between quarterly WPAC Managers meetings set aside for making real time decisions, with motions made during the meeting, not coming in haphazardly. This could be done using email vote or Zoom vote to get answers in real time. Votes can be sent in beforehand (if absent). These meeting times can be used as needed.
- Provide opportunities to give input up front and learn about the topic. This is meant to be a learning opportunity as well as a decision-making tool. It is important, therefore, to ask as many questions as possible while working towards consensus.
- Ensure boards are given the opportunity to review and comment on draft and final documents and seek clarification before they are approved and/or shared.
- It is highly recommended that WPAC policies and/or by-laws be put in place to allow for electronic voting to allow for more timely action on time-sensitive issues.

Use best practices for engaging boards, when required. Each WPAC will follow their own policies and procedures.

Statements of Opportunity

For new projects, initiatives or events, the proponent must develop a Statement of Opportunity (SoO) for consideration and decision by all WPAC Managers. Once agreed upon, these Statements of Opportunity will be saved as a file in the WPACs Google Drive.

The Statement of Opportunity will be where discussions are recorded to eliminate long email chains, and to ensure that decisions are not constantly being questioned or changed. The SoO will

track all decisions and discussions related to that project/task/event, including what WPACs want to be involved.

SoOs are required when resources are being requested, and when we need or want all or most WPACs to be involved. Not all WPACs must participate, it is up to each to decide. WPACs are still able to collaborate with each other on other projects, grants, etc.

SoOs are screened according to the following criteria⁴:

- The work proposed must align with *Water for Life* priorities and directions, the 4 roles of WPACs, or address emerging issues common to multiple watersheds.
- There should be evidence of funding, or interested funders identified, to support the proposed piece of work, and there should be a place within current WPAC work plans
- The issue or project must be provincially significant.
- The SoO must demonstrate that a number of WPACs believe this is an important issue or project, are concerned about it, and are interested in finding a solution.
- The SoO should demonstrate that a strategic-level approach would be best for addressing the subject.
- The issue or project should be well-suited to the consensus decision-making process, and there should be sufficient time to go through this process.
- Ensure the project is best-suited to be addressed by Alberta WPACs.

Each new project/initiative/event must be designated to a committee or working group, or create an *ad hoc* group to work on it.

For guidance on how to develop a Statement of Opportunity, see the information provided by the [Alberta Water Council](#). A template is available on the [WPAC Google Drive](#).

Policy Advice

This manual can be used to guide WPACs to develop our ability to share knowledge from the diverse and well-informed stakeholders on WPAC boards and within our membership. It is an important opportunity to help our government partners, at all levels, to use our wealth of knowledge to make decisions and develop policy that will be supported by Alberta residents and stakeholders.

This manual can aid in the development of collaborative, flexible, inclusive, and transparent watershed policy advice. We want all voices to be heard and incorporated into any decision made. This is not lobbying, but is focused on sharing neutral, unbiased information as part of our advisory role, and to depolarize challenging community issues. It can be used to identify emergent issues,

⁴ Modified from Alberta Water Council. (2016). *Bringing a statement of opportunity to the Alberta Water Council*. Retrieved from <https://www.awchome.ca/about/bringing-forward-an-issue/>

work on WPAC response to these issues, uphold positive and collegial relationships with key partners, and uphold norms, and quality control.

Advisory Role and Neutrality

This manual is designed to help WPACs use their advisory role in a more collaborative way. This manual is not about lobbying or advocacy. It is vital that we all adhere to neutrality.

The WPACs are a collaborative forum for all voices working for watershed health through education, action, and stewardship. Reports including the State of the Watershed Report and the Integrated Watershed Management Plan guide WPACs understanding of watershed health. They are intended to ensure collaborative, educated decision-making and to identify where future research is required. The existing planning documents that guide WPACs will transcend political and sectoral polarization.

Neutrality does not imply a lack of a stance on protecting the health and resilience of the watershed. Neither does neutrality imply a lack of attention to the best scientific information on watershed health or the many perspectives represented by the WPACs. It means that WPACs will not choose sides when it comes to public statements, projects, programs, elections, or political debates. WPACs will remain focused on data and factual information that supports an understanding of the watershed itself when providing information for political and regulatory decision-making.

WPACs are committed to providing neutral, scientifically-driven public statements and reporting on issues relevant to the health of our watersheds. WPACs Board Directors and staff will not make public statements that represent specific political or sectoral interests, or positions on specific issues or projects.

Inclusion Process

Where there is disagreement, our communications and documentation will reflect this, noting areas of agreement, as well as the areas of disagreement where more discussion is needed.

WPACs are not obligated to join all initiatives, but are encouraged to participate, and provide feedback. Collaboration is an opportunity, not an obligation. The collective will be stronger when we all work together.

It is imperative for the sake of the collaborative that attempts are made to have all parties participate, address any concerns and come to a consensus (or vote if needed), so that all voices are heard and included.

If the need arises, mediation with a third party is an option.

Committees and Working Groups

To facilitate the work of the WPAC collaborative, committees and working groups will be beneficial.

Committees are open to any Executive Director (or alternate) who wants to be involved. The Education and Outreach Committee and the Technical/Science Committee are predominantly comprised of WPAC staff, volunteers, or Board members who are engaged with that work. Committees can meet only as needed.

Terms of Reference (ToR) must be developed for the committees, and appoint a chair. Follow good project management. ToR must state communications authority.

All committees, working groups, *ad hoc* groups, and subcommittees report directly to the Executive Directors. These groups are **advisory**, and all final decisions are reserved for the WPAC Executive Directors.

Governance Committee

The WPAC Governance Committee is responsible for maintaining and developing policies and procedures to support collaboration.

Roles of the Committee

1. Ensure the collaborative processes outlined here are upheld and adhered to,
2. Update and revise the WPAC Governance Manual,
3. On-board new Executive Directors to the WPAC Governance Manual, and shared files,
4. Develop policies and procedures as requested by the WPAC Executive Directors, and
5. Responsible for keeping the Executive Director, or alternate, contact list up to date.

WPAC Education and Outreach Committee

There is a benefit to all WPACs in providing the opportunity for Education and Outreach (E/O) staff to get together to network, generate ideas, share resources, and align communications with provincial scale initiatives. They will provide an opportunity for the education and outreach staff from the 11 WPACs to meet as required, where they may share information and resources useful to their work. They will work jointly on projects and opportunities to further provincial scale watershed projects identified and approved as a priority by the WPAC Executive Directors.

Roles of the committee:

1. Share programs and resources (such as communication plans, project charters, lesson plans, etc.) between WPACs to reduce repetitive staff inputs and promote consistent messaging province wide.

2. Provide support, mentorship, and project updates to new E/O or communications staff.
3. Develop common WPAC graphics, messaging, and information materials that can be used province-wide. Identify key provincial watershed concerns, priorities, goals, recommendations, targets, and implementation in regard to education and outreach.
4. Engage with Alberta Environment and Parks, Community Engagement Branch Staff to receive updates on GOA programs, available resources, Water Literacy Strategy, and other relevant work.

Technical/Science Committee

The role of this committee is to lead scientific collaborations that require a group of technical experts.

The Committee will:

- Engage with Alberta Environment and Parks to received updated technical information for all WPACs
- Share information and projects between WPACs
- Provide support, mentorship, and project updates to new technical or watershed planner staff
- Identify key provincial watershed concerns, priorities, goals, recommendations, targets, and implementation

Other *ad hoc* working groups or subcommittees can be formed as needed, and are not a long term commitment. Each group will need to appoint a lead point person upon convening. Examples of *ad hoc* groups may include:

Fund Development Working Group

- Identify funding opportunities
- Coordination of joint applications

Water for Life Action Plan Working Group

- Coordinate response to implementation review

Submission to Government and Elected Officials

When communicating with government staff and elected officials, it is vital that WPACs coordinate and put their best foot forward.

To this end, WPACs will:

- Require WPAC Board input and approval (as per individual WPAC bylaws or board policies).
- Include individual WPAC logos of all signatories, as well as the Alberta WPACs logo.
- Communicate with neighbouring WPACs when involved in communications (event communications, in person meetings, etc.), especially with shared municipalities, to collaborate where possible, and reduce confusion.

Each WPAC will decide how and when to speak to local elected officials (MPs, MLAs, municipalities). We want to reduce confusion with elected officials who are already talking to their local WPACs. We need to be careful of politics, and respectful of the relationships WPACs have created.

Committees can provide suggestions and templates for communication initiatives, but cannot make final decisions, or broadcast communications.

Public Reporting

WPACs agree to:

- Include individual WPAC logos of signatories, as well as the Alberta WPACs logo.
- Include all WPAC logos or names as well, whenever possible.
- If quorum is achieved, and a super majority vote is upheld, we will use the WPACs logo, even if there is no consensus, and there are dissenting opinions.
- Shared visual identity for brochures, compendium, etc.
- Quality control of documents or discussions needed.
- A clear motion and vote is needed to decide when and how something is released internally, externally, publicly or to elected officials.
- All managers know how, when, where public communication is happening, so they can prepare and respond accordingly.
- Managers will assign communication responsibility depending on audience of communication.

Alberta WPACs



Chair/Executive Director
Athabasca Watershed Council

Chair/Executive Director
Battle River Watershed Alliance

Chair/Executive Director
Bow River Basin Council

Chair/Executive Director
Lakeland Industry and Community
Association

Chair/Executive Director
Lesser Slave Watershed Council

Chair/Executive Director
Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance

Chair/Executive Director
Milk River Watershed Council Canada

Chair/Executive Director
North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance

Chair/Executive Director
Oldman Watershed Council

Chair/Executive Director
Red Deer River Watershed Alliance

Chair/Executive Director
South East Alberta Watershed Alliance