Building Community Partnerships

A Guide for Creating Effective Land and Water Stewardship

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This booklet is part of the series, *A Guide for Creating Effective Land and Water Stewardship.* For additional copies of this booklet and others in the series, contact:

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COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

WHY FORM A COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Community groups or partnerships are a vital key to effective land and water stewardship. Through a partnership, different people and organizations work together to address common concerns and interests, using the diverse skills their members bring to strengthen their effectiveness.

Partnerships are the easiest and fairest way to develop and implement an effective stewardship plan. Because all the stakeholders are involved from the beginning, the plan you develop will have the consensus of everyone with a concern in the outcome.

In addition, partnerships often result in:

- more efficient use of financial resources
- a spirit of sharing, cooperation and fairness
- fewer negative social and economic impacts
- more creative ways to protect natural resources

However, working as a group can be challenging. It takes time and skill to create a good partnership. Maintaining motivation and enthusiasm is a particular challenge, especially if positive results don't happen quickly. All stakeholders must believe their efforts are needed. As you build a community group, remember, the benefits usually far outweigh the challenges.

WHO SHOULD BE INCLUDED?

To build a true partnership, anyone with a stake in the stewardship plan should be invited to contribute. Your group's success also depends on involving a good mix of individuals and organizations, to include people with a variety of interests, abilities and skills to fulfil the group's different needs.

Key responsibilities for participants may include:

- leadership roles
- technical roles
- communication roles
- educational roles
- political liaison and public policy roles

In addition to the people who actually make up your group, volunteers can come from a variety of sources. For example, local media can help create a public record of the partnership's objectives and accomplishments. They can put information about your group into geographic and historical context and make it easier to understand. Local, regional and national media may also create human interest stories about your group. Such articles help people relate to what the group is trying to do and remember its objectives.

Other people and organizations who may be able to contribute to your community partnership, without actually being a part of it, include:

- landowners
- agri-business and resource industries
- agricultural producer organizations
- environmental and conservation groups
- students, 4-H, Guides and other youth clubs
- civic groups, service clubs (Kinsmen, etc.)
- doctors, teachers and other professionals
- government agencies and representatives
- financial institutions
- professional facilitators

Each of these people or organizations can contribute different services, abilities and perspectives. Students have the time and energy for the many simple, repetitive tasks that need doing. Teachers and other professionals can share their commitment to social goals, as well as their credibility in the community. Representatives of financial institutions and businesses have the experience and knowledge to help with fund-raising. Government agencies have expertise in natural resource management, a knowledge of the rules and regulations your group will have to deal with, and an awareness of the potential problems and their possible solutions. Professional facilitators may be available from government agencies or may work as paid consultants to help your group achieve its goals.

WORKING WITH VOLUNTEERS

Except for the possibility of a paid coordinator or manager, members of a local stewardship group will be working as volunteers. This makes it critical that your group provide its members with a positive experience, a real sense of achievement, and lots of recognition for their efforts. Volunteers will also need a wide range of training and educational opportunities, so members can learn about local natural resources, the stewardship project itself, and about working as part of a volunteer group.

New volunteers will appreciate orientation sessions about the group. These sessions should cover the structure, policies, procedures and activities of the last three months. Make particular efforts to make newcomers welcome to the group, so they don't feel like outsiders barging in on someone else's party.

All members will benefit from training programs on creating and maintaining partnerships and on different aspects of land and water stewardship. Courses may be available through various government agencies or through local schools and colleges. A policy and procedures handbook could be designed and distributed to all members.

Volunteers will maintain their commitment and relationship with the group if they are treated as highly paid professionals. Try to estimate the time demands of the group's work and whether there will be any expense for which the volunteer will be personally responsible. Don't make unfair demands on the volunteers' time, nor overload those volunteers who can contribute critical skills and expertise. Make the responsibilities and the benefits of serving on the group very clear.

There are many ways of recognizing the work your participants do. Suggestions range from a simple, warm "thank you," to naming a 'member of the month' or having a profile of the person and his or her contributions published in the local newspaper. If the budget allows, the group might even be able to award a plaque or pin to its members after they have contributed a year of service. Asking a person for advice and guidance is a more subtle, and for some, a more motivating vote of appreciation.

SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

Building a successful community group takes skill, time and patience. Here are 15 strategies that will help:

1. Establish common ground and direction - A successful partnership starts with the commitment to understand, respect and address each member's concerns. All partners also need to know they're working toward a worthwhile purpose. Only when there is a mutual understanding of the issues, can there be a true agreement about the group's objectives and goals.

2. Identify and involve the 'right' people -
Community groups need people with communications, technical, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills. All people with a stake in the land and water management outcomes should feel welcome to become a partner, including people living outside the area who will be affected by the outcomes of your group's efforts. The group may also want to include people who have an interest in the general subject, though they don't have a stake in your local partnership. Build the partnership around the members' interests and strengths. For example, some members may be responsible for public contact, while others can gather information.

3. Select leadership from within the group -
Someone will have to take the initial responsibility for getting members together. Once members are together, however, the group should use consensus to select its leaders. Leadership and coordination of the partnership involves the ability to get people to

voluntarily commit to the group's goals and accept responsibilities. A top-down approach will not work.

GROWING YOUR GROUP

To get a sense of the minimum number of people needed for a stewardship group and the specific responsibilities the members may have, draw a five-column grid or matrix on a blackboard or flip chart. Label the first column *Tasks*, and the next four columns *Leader, Group, Committee, Individual*.

Have the group brainstorm their ideas on the specific tasks the partnership needs to accomplish and write these under the *Tasks* column of the rows. Now have the group decide whether the primary responsibility for completion of each task lies with the leader, the group as a whole, a committee, or an individual group member. At later meetings, refine the chart and fill in the names of individuals who are willing and able to take on each task.

4. Set your own ground rules - The partnership will probably need to set specific ground rules related to participation, discussion, confidentiality, constructive feedback, and expected time commitments. Setting ground rules helps people know what's expected of them and what's acceptable. An effective set of rules is one designed and agreed to by your group. Avoid using rules set by an *expert* or by another group, even if successful. Designing your own ground rules gives participants an opportunity to work together and assures a better buy-in to the protocols.

5. Pay particular attention to the first few meetings and activities - First impressions mean a lot. People are often sceptical at the beginning. Keep your initial meetings particularly positive, emphasizing what you know you can do, rather than things you're not sure about. *(See page 13, Getting Started.)*

6. Start with a few simple, short-term tasks - Be sure early projects are realistic 'winners' and have a good chance of success. This gives participants a sense of accomplishment and a strong, positive base that will be invaluable when dealing with more complex tasks.

7. Spend time together - It will take time to get the partnership working effectively, because it takes time to get to know each other. When possible, arrange for social get-togethers outside of meetings or other working times. Such events create closer relationships among members of the partnership. Sharing social tasks, for example, organizing potluck suppers or picnics, will enhance your skills in working as a group, without the pressure of achieving important objectives.

8. Keep the regional scope manageable - Grassroots partnerships work best when the core participants live in the same area and know their community well. If dealing with an entire watershed, where representation from more than one community is desired, it might be more effective to subdivide your partnership into regional segments or to work as several separate partnerships. Be sure to develop a process to share information between the smaller regional partnerships.

9. Encourage communication - Successful group efforts are built on clear communication. Discussion should be honest and candid. Partners need to listen to each other and be able to express their viewpoints. They should provide constructive feedback, not just negative criticism. To encourage communication, set up the group's meeting room in a roundtable arrangement (*see page 16 - Physical Facilities.*)

10. Work as a group, not as individuals - Individuals provide new ideas and approaches, but the group shares responsibility for decisions, actions, successes and failures. Because everyone has an interest in the success of the group, everyone should participate in discussions and decisions. If some members of the group are unwilling or unable to participate in an active way, at least get them to share in the decision-making process. Today, most effective group decisions are made using a consensus process. The goal is to enable members to work together to achieve the desired results, despite their differences, rather than to eliminate those differences. This doesn't mean everyone will be completely happy, but that everyone can live with the decisions made and feels the decisions are fair.

11. Challenge the group regularly with fresh facts and information - Gathering new information on a continual basis will help the group better understand the situation and improve its effectiveness. New information will also keep discussions and participants from getting stale or going in circles and will keep the members motivated.

12. Build on the work of existing organizations -
Environmental organizations, tourism and business associations, government agencies and other formal or informal community groups may have similar goals. Seek these partnerships out so your group members can work together, pool experiences and skills, and achieve faster, more effective results.

13. Use the power of positive feedback - People respond to recognition and positive incentives. Never miss a chance to let people know they've done something worth doing. When possible, arrange for public acknowledgement of a person's contributions and involvement, as well as the group's efforts.

14. Keep organizational rules flexible - No single partnership structure will work for every stewardship group. Instead, your group needs to determine how formal the partnership structure needs to be, and the basic rules that will work for its particular set of circumstances. Some division of labor and delegation of responsibility must be established to take advantage of the group's resources and expertise, but it should be flexible enough to allow for individual interests. Each partner should understand and agree to his or her own roles and responsibilities, and all partners should be able to take part in decisions or activities where they have a particular concern or involvement.

15. Tap into existing sources of information - Technical information and scientific expertise are available through Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (AAFRD), Alberta Environment, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA), large environmental organizations such as Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever, universities and research institutions, and agricultural service boards. Also check the Internet for scientific information and relevant statistical data. AAFRD's award-winning web site, Ropin' the Web, **<http://www.agric.gov.ab.ca>** is an excellent place to start. Professional facilitators are also available through AAFRD.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

More information on organizational development and building community groups is available. (*See the inside back cover for a list of resource agencies and other references.*) The following free publications, available from Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development or on Ropin' the Web, may be particularly helpful.

- **Effective Leadership -** Agdex 1912-1
- **Effective Meetings -** Agdex 1922
- **Working with Volunteers -** Agdex 1926-30
- **Motivation and Leadership -** Agdex 1926-40
- **Promoting Your Organization's Activities -** Agdex 1926-50
- **Building Community Support for Your Project - Communication is the Key -** Agdex 1926-50-1

GROUP LEADERSHIP

WHAT MAKES A LEADER?

Community partnerships don't just happen. Their organization and success depends in large part on the leaders who emerge from the group. In a stewardship group, an effective leader is a person who sees his or her role as a guide or pilot, steering the group toward its destination, but not directing what that destination should be. Effective leaders are interested in the concerns of the group, but are also sensitive to the needs of the individuals who make up the group. In addition, effective leaders of community partnerships for land and water stewardship often have the following characteristics:

- They are aware of current social, economic and political situations, both in the community and in the larger world, and are eager to learn.

- They have good communication skills and can create interaction among the group members.

- They have the ability to integrate a variety of perspectives and promote consensus.

- They are able to share both responsibility and credit with others in the group.

- They are open to new ideas and recognize that good ideas can come from a variety of sources.

- They are well respected in the community for their knowledge, honesty and fairness, and are patient, creative and flexible.

LEADERS AND INITIATORS

In some communities, the person who gets a stewardship group started, may be the same person who keeps it going. But the people who make effective initiators are not always the same people who are effective leaders. Although initiators of community partnerships are usually passionate about the stewardship issues, leaders need more than this quality. True leaders are able to keep their own strong interests and views in perspective, so they can listen to other members of the group and find the best way to achieve the group's overall goals.

LEADERSHIP ROLES

The most obvious role of a community partnership leader is to coordinate activities and keep the partnership moving forward. The leader guides and motivates the members to achieve the purposes set for the partnership. A leader also handles or delegates administrative tasks, such as calling and conducting meetings, and clarifies the roles and tasks of the partnership's other members. In stewardship groups, leaders are also expected to take on their fair share of the day-to-day tasks and responsibilities.

Thus, to successfully coordinate the partnership's activities, a leader must be able to:

- **Help partners determine**, clarify and commit to the group's purposes. Good leaders inspire appropriate actions and keep the partnership's approach relevant and meaningful. They should not try to move the group in a particular direction.

- **Understand and balance** the needs and interests of the individuals in the group and the partnership as a whole. A good leader inspires the group's members to transcend their self-interest for the good of the partnership.

- **Create a positive atmosphere**. Enthusiastic leadership inspires confidence and is contagious. It helps people feel comfortable in the partnership and keeps them optimistic about what can be accomplished. An effective leader uses constructive feedback to build the commitment and confidence that makes the group successful.

- **Recognize and build** on the different strengths and skills of individual members and ensure people are available who have the skills that are needed to accomplish the group's purposes.

- **Create opportunities for others** by delegating responsibility and authority. Getting others to share the work not only helps things get done more readily, it increases ownership of the group's objectives among its members.

- **Motivate people** to accept and welcome change by enlarging their vision of the future and providing insight into the current situation.

- **Accept feedback** without attempting to explain, defend or deny criticism from other members. Leaders listen without interrupting, ask questions for clarification and acknowledge the feedback, particularly those items that they find are immediately valid. Good leaders take time to think about the import of comments they may not at first agree with and always thank the group for its feedback.

LEADING DISCUSSIONS

One of the key responsibilities of a group's leaders is to chair discussions and keep the dialogue moving. A leader must be skilled at asking questions, eliciting facts and opinions, giving feedback, summarizing the points that have been made, and guiding the group toward consensus when it's time to make decisions.

Some of the ways good leaders can improve their stewardship group's discussion sessions include:

Asking questions - Leaders should ask for clarification or ask people to repeat a statement in a different way if they feel comments are not clear to the group at large. Leaders can also help direct and encourage the discussion by asking open-ended questions rather than questions that require only a yes or no answer. Some good questions to ask include:

- "Could you give us an example?"
- "Has anyone had a similar experience?"
- "How does the group feel about this?"
- "Could you suggest a reference that would give more information and detail on this subject?"

Listening - Good leaders must not only listen carefully, they need to show they are listening. They should focus on the person speaking, avoiding distractions. Good listeners use body language to signal their attention and interest, for example, by nodding their heads. Good listeners are patient and let a speaker complete arguments without interrupting, even if they think they know what the speaker is about to say. Leaders should always respond to statements in some way, as silence can decrease performance and confidence.

Summarizing - At the end of each discussion, the group's leaders should give a brief summary of the points that have been made, paying particular attention to decisions made and items requiring action. In long discussions, a brief summary might be appropriate at the end of each segment.

Keeping people on track - Leaders have the responsibility to keep people from wandering too far from the topic under discussion. A short statement repeating the intent of the discussion and asking a question that will bring the speaker back to the main subject is a good way of ending irrelevant talk. A positive comment on what's been said and a reminder of time constraints can effectively end comments that go on too long.

Ending discussions - Good leaders recognize when there is little more to be gained from further discussion. They should call for a decision or have the group move on to another topic.

Encouraging brainstorming - Brainstorming is an effective way for groups to generate new ideas, but such sessions need to be managed well to be productive. Brainstorming sessions are time to share even the most unrealistic ideas, as they can be evaluated later on for their usefulness. Good leaders must set the stage for the brainstorming session by defining the purpose of the exercise and creating a relaxed, non-threatening atmosphere. Leaders may record these ideas themselves, using a flip chart or blackboard, or they may have someone else do the recording for the group.

Giving constructive feedback - Leaders should take time to compliment speakers for particularly good ideas. Good leaders must also be able to give both positive and negative feedback on the group's discussions. Feedback should be clear, non-judgmental and objective. Leaders should be specific and should not exaggerate their comments. They should make it clear they are speaking for themselves when they make a comment, and should give reasons for their comments.

THE DYNAMICS OF PARTNERSHIPS

THE PROCESS OF FORMING A GROUP

Successful groups or partnerships take time to develop. Expect some high points and some lows, some good days and some bad. Experts recognize distinct stages in the development of a successful group. Each stage involves specific feelings and actions. If your members understand and prepare for these different stages, it will be easier to move through the difficult phases to reach success at the end. One of the models of group dynamics, based on work done by Bruce Tuckman, recognizes the following five stages of group development:

1. The forming stage.

When a partnership is forming, people cautiously explore each other. Members are like hesitant swimmers. They stand by the side of the pool and stick their toes in the water. Feelings at this stage include excitement and optimism mixed with scepticism and anxiety. Activities include:

- defining the job at hand and discussing how to accomplish it
- deciding what information needs to be gathered
- discussing concepts and issues
- identifying the barriers to getting the job done.

2. The storming stage.

This is often the most difficult stage. Partners become impatient and begin arguing. Feelings include resistance to change and negative attitudes about success of the partnership. Signs include:

- arguing about less important or petty issues
- developing unrealistic goals
- increased tension and jealousy
- being defensive, competitive or choosing sides.

3. The normalizing stage.

People accept their role in the partnership, as well as the ground rules by which the partnership operates. The number of conflicts is reduced and competitors become more cooperative. People see chances for success and are more willing to help each other.

Feelings include acceptance of team membership and relief that things seem to be working out. Members work together to achieve harmony and solve problems. There is more friendliness and sharing of problems. A recognition of the group's common goals and a sense of cohesion prevail.

4. The performing stage.

By this stage, a successful partnership has become an effective and close-knit unit. People enjoy working together and can work successfully through problems. Feelings include new insights about the partnership and each member's roles, as well as satisfaction with the group's progress. Constructive change is apparent.

5. The adjourning stage.

Separating and ending are part of any group's life cycle, and may be a time of both satisfaction and sadness. It's important to be conscious of this so the group is motivated to tie up loose ends, hand things off to others, celebrate the group's achievements, share the sense of loss on ending the group, and cement relationships for future work on other issues.

MOTIVATING GROUP MEMBERS

Nothing motivates people like success. Celebrate even small achievements, both within the group and with the public. Demonstrating the small successes helps people see how well things are working before the group tries bigger projects. Other common motivations people give for working in stewardship groups include:

- a desire for professional or personal growth
- a sense of accomplishment
- enjoy working with others
- meeting new challenges and people
- a sense of community
- a sense of responsibility to future generations
- a desire to improve the place they live
- benefits to society as a whole
- social expectations and interaction
- the expectations of employers or affiliates

USING CONSENSUS

Regardless of how cooperative the people in your partnership are, some problems will ultimately arise. Analyse the problems to find solutions. Think of each obstacle as the group's challenge, rather than an individual's. The truth is, many problems in a partnership occur because the group lets them happen.

One of the best ways to overcome the obstacles that may be a part of group efforts is to develop a consensus process. As has been noted, **consensus doesn't mean everyone**

totally agrees or is completely happy with all the decisions the group makes. It does mean everyone is willing to live with the group's decisions.

Partnerships that use a consensus process to make decisions gain a better understanding and respect for different viewpoints in the group and different cultural and personal values. They also have better working relationships between the participants, more informed, creative, balanced and enduring decisions, and a greater commitment to the decision-making process and its results.

Effective consensus decisions also share the following characteristics:

- **Total participation**
  All interests are identified and discussed.

- **All partners are responsible**
  Everyone helps plan the group's activities and offers suggestions to make them more effective.

- **Decisions are made by mutual agreement** Partners modify options and seek alternatives until everyone agrees the best possible decision has been reached.

- **Partners educate each other**
  Group members spend time discussing the history of the issue, their perceptions and concerns, and their ideas for solutions. Newcomers to the group are given time to assimilate information and are informed about the group's past activities, decisions and accomplishments.

- **Partners are responsible for implementation** The group identifies ways to implement solutions and takes responsibility for their implementation.
- **The consensus process is flexible**
  As the needs and circumstances of the partnership change, the consensus process and the group's leaders and members are flexible enough to change with it. However, the partnership's basic principles of consensus building and the group's objectives are adhered to.

- **Common definitions are used**
  Partners discuss and agree on constructive definitions, to ensure everyone is talking about the same thing.

- **People are kept informed**

Partners keep others in their group, as well as people living in the community, aware of important decisions and actions.

n **Multiple options are identified**

Partners seek a range of options to satisfy their respective concerns and avoid pushing single positions. All partners know their input is welcome.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO CONSENSUS

Consensus is critical to effective partnerships, but there are obstacles which may limit your group's efforts to achieve it. Analyse the group's problems and look for ways to overcome these obstacles:

- **Decreased levels of commitment or interest**

The effort to achieve consensus may get bogged down. Look for small, but meaningful things people can do to help the consensus process along.

- **Rush for accomplishments**

Some partners may push the group to reach consensus, either because they are impatient or are pressured elsewhere. Ensure everyone has a reasonable amount of time to consider the options before trying to reach a decision.

- **Blaming others or feeling blamed**

Assigning blame is a natural tendency when considering problems. However, the blamed person may become defensive, angry and even more unwilling to change. Blaming also causes people in the group to take sides and get distracted from the group's goals. Focus on solutions, not causes.

- **Digression and tangents -**

Some people tend to drift off the subject in group discussions aimed at reaching consensus. A certain amount of digression may be useful if it promotes new ideas, but often it just wastes time and causes the group to lose sight of the real purpose of the discussion and the need to reach consensus. Good leadership is needed to keep discussions on track.

- **Lack of flexibility**

Some partners have just one way of thinking or doing things. Ask them directly what can be done to make them more willing to consider other options. The consensus process will flounder if the resistance of a few people keeps the group from moving forward.

- **Conflicting goals or missions -**

Because partnerships involve diverse members, the group has diverse expectations. Some see the consensus process as a way to pursue their own agenda. Make sure everyone is heard.

- **Attribution and criticism**

People sometimes assign or attribute negative motives to others when they disagree with or don’t understand the other position. Stay focused on finding the real explanations for disagreements.

- **Overbearing or dominating partners**

Some partners (often those with authority or expertise) may try to have undue influence over the consensus process. Such *experts* feel they have all the answers and discourage discussion or overly criticize other people’s ideas. Good leadership can ensure everyone has a fair hearing.

- **Feuds**

Partners who have long-standing personal feuds may still have similar goals and be part of the same stewardship group. Unfortunately, even though they try, these people are often unable to overcome their personal animosity for the good of the partnership. Address this problem directly to keep the consensus process moving ahead in a calm, productive manner. Try to keep people with personal animosities on different committees. Group leaders should not appear to take sides.

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

Partnerships must be especially careful with dominating people and others with difficult personalities. Even very difficult people may have significant contributions to make to the group’s efforts. When problems occur repeatedly with a particular person, take care not to over-react. Some behaviors are only minor interruptions and can be accepted by the group as a whole. However, certain behaviors are continually disruptive and slow the progress of the group. Leadership is a critical factor dealing with disruptive behavior. If a group member seriously impedes progress on a regular basis, the leader may have to ask the person to leave. Some good ways to deal with difficult people include:

• Do nothing. Ignore occasional problems.

• Talk informally with disruptive partners outside the group setting. Give constructive feedback.

• Discuss general concerns at the beginning of a meeting without pointing out particular partners.

• For particularly disruptive behavior, it may be necessary to confront individuals in a more assertive manner, one-on-one, outside regular group meeting times. Suggest some constructive changes that might be appropriate. Ask the person if he or she sees a better way of dealing with problems, or if there are reasonable ways the group can improve the situation. Leave people with options, rather than demands.

• When other approaches have failed, the leader may need to address the person in front of the group. Focus on the disruptive behavior, not on the person. Be objective but assertive.

SOURCES OF CONFLICT

Conflict is disagreement that results naturally when individuals or groups with different attitudes, beliefs, values and needs attempt to work together in a partnership. Such conflict can be healthy and can result in mutual benefits when effectively managed. Healthy conflict can lead to growth, innovative ways of thinking, and a greater variety of options. However, conflicts can also originate from past rivalries, from overly competitive personalities, or from trying to negotiate without sufficient knowledge or when the timing isn’t right. Conflicts can also arise through poor communication or lack of communication, when people feel they are left out of things, or when they don’t truly understand what’s being said.

Conflicts within stewardship groups also develop because clean-ups and other environmental actions can take a long time to show results. Some members of the group may want or expect changes to take place more quickly than others. The group may need to be reminded from time to time that effective stewardship programs can, in the long run, result in both economic and environmental benefits. The goal of cooperation is for everyone to win, by each having at least some needs met.

Public conflicts, like those that can occur between stewardship group members and other local residents or partnerships, often are rooted in trying to balance environmental protection with jobs and economic growth. Such conflicts are sometimes more difficult to resolve because the people who benefit may not be the same people as those who pay the costs.

Good planning, both long- and short-term, and good leadership can help reduce conflicts in a community partnership. The key to managing conflict effectively when it does occur is to focus on what's important to each stakeholder. Look for common and complementary interests. The goal of cooperation is for everyone to win by developing solutions that address these interests.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

Finding common ground is one of the key elements of successful group development. Below are four steps to effective management of conflict and agreement within the group.

Step 1: Analyse the conflict

The first step in managing conflict is to analyse and understand the nature of the dispute. A professional facilitator, or an unbiased outside party, may be particularly valuable in helping the group understand what needs to be resolved. Solutions may come from personal experiences or the history and experiences of the community as a whole. Ask questions to find out why people have taken their respective positions. Examples of questions would be: "What are your concerns related to this approach?" or "What is it about this idea that you disagree with?" It is also important to identify and reinforce areas of agreement.

Step 2: Determine best management strategies

Once the group has a general understanding of the conflict, they will need to find and select the most appropriate strategies for dealing with it. Avoid voting on simple yes and no solutions. Opposing members will feel their concerns haven't been met. If the discussion gets heated, take a short break. When the group reconvenes, summarize the discussion to that point and emphasize the areas of agreement. If more information is needed to make a good decision, table the discussion until the information is available.

Step 3: Negotiate

Skilful negotiation can help bring about agreement when conflicts develop within a partnership. When negotiating, all parties should remember they're dealing with people who have their own unique needs, emotions and perceptions. Separate the people and personalities from the problems. Conflicts based on perceptions usually exist only in peoples' minds. As such, they make negotiations particularly difficult.

Negotiating usually works well in a partnership, because people have similar objectives. Conflicts arise largely because they have different ideas about how those objectives can best be achieved. For example, an objective may be to reduce litter in a local stream. Different members of the group may strongly favor either mandatory recycling, a deposit on bottles and cans, or an organized clean-up day as the means to reduce the litter. Focusing on the objectives, rather than the methods by which they can be achieved, will make negotiations run more smoothly.

Partnerships that are going through negotiations, whether they are negotiating with members of their own group or with other organizations, should:

- Search for a variety of answers that enlarge the group's scope or vision. Take time before accepting or rejecting solutions.

- Examine conflicting interests to find alternatives.

- Strive for criteria that are legitimate, practical and unbiased. It may help to explore the criteria used in making past decisions.

- Keep fairness, efficiency and scientific merit in mind.

Step 4: Ratify and implement

Once negotiation is complete, the group will need to ratify the agreement and get support from all the organizations and individuals with a stake in the outcome. Once an agreement is ratified, the group needs to develop a plan to put the decision into action, monitor progress, and resolve any further problems that may occur.

A Plan for Successful Negotiating

Formal negotiations are used to settle serious disputes between members of the same group, or to resolve issues with other organizations.

Initiation and assessment - One partner raises the possibility of negotiation and begins the process. Key players and spokespeople are identified. Each side is willing to collaborate. Sufficient time and resources to support the effort exist.

Ground rules and agenda - All partners in the negotiations commit to the process, the ground rules for communication, negotiation and decision making, and the objectives of the negotiation process. An agenda of issues to be covered is developed. Parties determine which issues are negotiable and which are not. Meeting times and places are set. People are contacted and encouraged to attend. Minutes and information are sent to all stakeholders.

Joint fact-finding - The group agrees on what information is relevant to the conflict, including social, economic, scientific and technical issues. A record is made of what is known and what needs to be learned. There is agreement on the resources and methods used to get information.

Reaching agreement - Areas of agreement and disagreement are outlined. Acceptable and unacceptable compromises and trade-offs are agreed upon. A list of options is created and evaluated. Objective criteria are used to evaluate the options. Parties are willing to compromise to achieve acceptable solutions.

Organizing a Stewardship Group - Two Examples

There are probably as many ways of organizing a community-based stewardship group as there are such partnerships in Alberta. The following case studies are given as just two examples - each community will find its own best way.

MOSQUITO CREEK: The Lower Mosquito Creek Water Users Association is comprised of local agricultural producers and other residents with property along the creek, east of the town of Nanton, Alberta. The group was formed largely under the impetus of Diana Andrews, one of the landowners in the watershed. Andrews says she got concerned when she became aware of water quality problems in the area. "I was alarmed about the water quality in Mosquito Creek, but as one person, what can you do? I attended the public hearings on the Little Bow-Highwood Project and when the decisions calling for an 80% reduction in nutrient loading from Mosquito Creek came down, I saw it as an opportunity to pro-actively address the issues, rather than wait for problems to emerge. Two days later, I had phoned everyone on the creek, talked to them individually and got about 75% of the people out to a community meeting."

Those attending the meeting decided then and there to form a community partnership to deal with two major areas of concern - the impacts of agriculture on water quality in the creek and nutrient loading in the creek from the Town of Nanton's sewage system. Two committees were established to investigate these issues and suggest action plans. Andrews was elected as chairperson of the water users group.

"We've been very successful in achieving our short-term goals, because we had a crucial deadline to meet," Andrews said. "The hardest thing now, is to keep up our momentum and deal with the long-term issues. Some of our members are still very enthused, but many are burned out. We're regrouping and analysing our future direction."

CROWFOOT CREEK: In the early 1990s, the Bow River Water Quality Task Force reported its findings, showing contamination was coming from a small tributary called Crowfoot Creek. Wheatland County's Agricultural Service Board called a meeting of residents in the Crowfoot Creek watershed to present the results of the study. "While agriculture was a factor, the results showed that impacts to our water quality were coming from every aspect of community life, including the urban sector and industry," said Jim Laslo, agricultural fieldman for the county. "We felt the key to creating a successful stewardship program would be to involve a group of people with interest and expertise, who were also representative of the whole community."

With the help of Maureen Bolen, a rural development specialist from AAFRD, people in the community identified what they felt were the major issues and opportunities. Later, resource people from the Agricultural Service Board, AAFRD and others talked about what could be done and the funding that might be available. A newsletter was published, more meetings were held, and articles about water quality were published in the local paper. More than 75 people turned up at a 1998 workshop to learn about riparian management. The idea to form the Crowfoot Creek Watershed Group came from this workshop. Laslo chaired the group until it was ready to elect its own leaders. Leaders were then elected by the group, from within the community, though advisors from government, industry and other agencies such as Ducks Unlimited worked with the partnership. Bolen helped the group members understand their roles and responsibilities and provided training in leadership skills, consensus building and group dynamics. The group also hired a professional watershed coordinator, with a background in environmental sciences, to help with implementation of the action plan they devised.

Laslo says the key to having an effective stewardship group is for the local stakeholders to take ownership of the group and get things done on their own. “Peer pressure is very effective in implementing change and increasing the adoption of better management practices.”

GETTING STARTED

INITIAL MEETINGS

As mentioned, your group's first few meetings are critical to success. Having a professional facilitator to guide the process can be very helpful. At your initial meetings, the group has eight important tasks.

1. Build a common purpose - A good statement of purpose will help the group focus on its real aims. You can define your group's purpose by developing a clear and concise statement of what the group wants to do, for whom, and for what benefits. For example, your statement of purpose might be:

> "The ______ Watershed Alliance is dedicated to protecting the stream's water quality, the economic well-being of land users in the area, and the watershed's recreational benefits for residents and visitors."

A carefully worded statement of its overall purpose will aid the group's future decision making and will provide motivation. It will also serve as a yardstick for measuring progress.

It's important to keep the statement general enough to encourage widespread support, but specific enough so the group can measure progress and clearly identify goals and activities. Make sure all partners are involved in developing the statement and that it accurately reflects what the group plans to accomplish. Review the statement, to make sure everyone is willing to commit to it. This process may not be easy, but it will be time well spent.

2. Establish specific measurable goals to achieve your purpose - Goals are the specific ends that will help your group accomplish its purpose and define and prioritize its activities. Goals may be both short- and long-term. They may include general strategies (for example, increasing knowledge of watershed issues among area residents) and objectives for more specific activities (such as working with the media to publish a series of articles on the importance of tree planting). Goals should be measurable, so the group knows when they have been fulfilled.

The main purpose of the Crowfoot Creek Watershed Group in Wheatland County, for example, is to adopt beneficial management practices so that water leaving the watershed will be of the same or better quality than water entering it. Two of the specific goals the group set to accomplish this purpose were to increase the awareness of water quality issues in the watershed, and to monitor the quality of the water in the creek on a regular basis. Activities developed to achieve the first goal included an in-depth, one-on-one survey of area residents on water quality awareness and information, and the publication of a biannual newsletter. Water quality monitoring stations were established and maintained in several places along the creek to accomplish the second goal.

3. Set and follow reasonable time frames -
It is critically important, especially at the outset, that your group's goals be attainable, so that the partnership will experience success, rather than get bogged down in difficulties. The group should set reasonable deadlines for specific tasks, then work to fulfil them. However, they should also be prepared to move on to other tasks at the end of that time, even if assignments aren't completed. Unfinished work can be completed later. Sometimes the reasons the work wasn't completed are obvious. If not, the group should assess the difficulty, to improve the setting of timetables in the future.

To define group purpose:

- **Ask for ideas from all partners**
- **Discuss the ideas**
- **Draft a preliminary statement**
- **Discuss and revise the draft statement**
- **Set the final statement of purpose, basing it on group consensus**
- **Solicit commitment from all partners**

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4. Appoint or hire a coordinator - Because a land or water stewardship group will involve many stakeholders and many issues, the need for good coordination is critical to success. A coordinator ties all the pieces and people together and helps implement the group's plans. Key areas where a coordinator is useful include maintaining contact with the partnership members, securing funding and training for the partnership, organizing meetings and field days, and acting as the primary contact for the group. Ideally, the coordinator should be based within the community, so she or he has a good understanding of its people, needs and experiences.

5. Establish committees to divide the work load and get things done more effectively
Committees can also help reduce burn-out of volunteer leaders. Form committees for responsibilities like fund-raising, communications, or water quality monitoring. Individual assignments will depend on the scope of the activities and the group members' goals, skills and interests. Each committee should select its own leader and develop a schedule and a sub-set of ground rules, keeping its responsibilities to the larger group in mind.

6. Focus on the future - Groups often get stuck in the early stages because past experiences dictate what the members believe they can or cannot accomplish. Don't let the past dictate the future.

7. Get to know one another - To work well together as a group, people have to feel comfortable with each other. In part, this comes about naturally over time, but your group can help things along. Start your first meeting by asking participants to introduce themselves, and give their personal reasons for joining the partnership. It may also be helpful to have members state their perceptions of the group's most important challenges and the expectations they have for the partnership. Plan events which will also help the group members get to know one another socially.

8. Learn from others - In addition to government agencies, other community partnerships, conservation groups, agricultural boards, and research organizations may already have data of importance to your stewardship group. The residents of your area themselves may be the best source of information about its people, politics and heritage.

GATHERING RELEVANT MATERIALS

Before the group starts on any actual projects or activities, it will need data on the resource base and other factors to form its goals. Stewardship groups often get started because data about the current condition of the watershed or land base become available and provide the impetus for change. This information will usually come from federal, provincial, or municipal government agencies. These same agencies may also provide the technical advisory team the group will need when working on its action plan.

It may also be worthwhile for the partnership to assess the situation with field trips, where group members can see things through their own eyes. Current or former landowners are excellent resource people on these explorations. (If the landowners are not members of the group, they should, of course, be consulted to get access to the land.)

Maps will be an important resource for the group. You may need maps showing boundaries, terrain, the location of all surface water bodies and groundwater resources, roads, soil types, land uses, oil wells and other resource claims, recreational areas and communities. Fish and game surveys, economic development trends and demographic information such as census data may also be important. Much of this information may be available as part of a Geographic Information System (GIS), that will help you understand the relationship of one set of data to another. (More information on GIS is given in "Getting to Know Your Local Watershed," the second book in the series, A Guide for Creating Effective Land and Water Stewardship.)

Some of the questions the group may need to answer before getting started include:

Water Quality:
- What are the levels of nitrogen and other nutrients in area streams and lakes?
- What contaminants are present?
- What is the condition of local groundwater aquifers?

Streambanks and Lakes:
- Does water flow throughout the season?
- Are stream channels downcutting or becoming wider and flatter?
- Are there frequent algal blooms in the lake?
- Is there evidence of livestock damage?

Riparian Vegetation:
- Are noxious or invasive weeds present?
- Is there a healthy community of trees and shrubs along the streams?
- Is there a buffer strip between the stream and cultivated fields?

Pasture Land:
- Do pastures have a good mix of edible grasses and small shrubs, with few weed species?
- Is there sufficient organic material in the soil?
- Do grasses have a sufficient period of rest to recover their growth and vigor?
- Is land use appropriate to slope and soil conditions?

Crop Land:
- Are there grassed waterways and buffer strips to prevent erosion and filter runoff?
- Is there an adequate crop residue cover to prevent erosion?
- What tillage practices are being used?

Wetlands:
- Have natural sloughs and other wetland areas been retained to provide water storage, purify water, and reduce erosion?
- Do area wetlands provide critical natural habitat? What kinds of wild plants and animals do they support?

Demographic, Economic and Social Issues:
- What are the upstream and downstream uses (cities, industrial lands, livestock, etc.) of the water in area streams?
- What are the principal ways people in the area make a living? What is the standard of living?
- Is the population older or younger than average?
- Are there economic impediments to an effective stewardship program, for example higher farm production costs, increased taxes, or lower profits?

- Are there financial incentives for effective stewardship programs, in the form of tax breaks, financial assistance for technological innovations, wildlife stewardship programs or subsidies?
- Are conservation easements a possible tool for land or watershed stewardship programs?

FUNDING

In Alberta, most community stewardship groups partner with other agencies or existing organizations to obtain funding for their activities. Information on sources of funding is available from municipal, provincial and federal government agencies. Funding may be obtained from other stakeholders such as agricultural producer groups and the oil and gas industry, or from government programs and private organizations such as Wildlife Habitat Canada or the Wild Rose Foundation. You can also try raising funds locally, on a project by project basis or for the group's efforts as a whole.

Your group should have some idea about the general level of funding that may be available as you plan activities. Keep in mind that most funding bodies require some contribution from the group itself, such as volunteer services, materials or cash.

PHYSICAL FACILITIES

All of the best planning efforts can be wasted if the physical setting of your group's get-togethers is overlooked or equipment doesn't operate properly. The following checklist may be helpful.

_ Find appropriate meeting spaces. Members' homes may be suitable for committee meetings, but are usually not large enough for meetings of the entire group or for open houses or other open-to-the-public gatherings. Meeting space may be available free, or for a small fee, at local community halls, schools, churches, or clubs. One of the group's business partners may also be willing to make space available for meetings. Appoint someone to double check shortly before your meeting with the people in charge of the facility, to be sure the room hasn't inadvertently been given to someone else.

_ Appoint someone to be responsible for making sure there are chairs, tables, water, chalkboards or flip charts and other such accessories. A seating arrangement where people can see each other is of great importance in a local group. For discussions where the entire group is involved, use a roundtable arrangement of chairs, to emphasize the point that everyone is equal and to encourage dialogue. If committees are meeting jointly, set up several groupings of separate tables and chairs.

_ Check the lighting, acoustics, ventilation, and temperature of the room before the meeting. Make sure rest rooms are available and well-cared for. Ensure there will be nearby parking for all participants.

_ At large group meetings, or when many members are new to the group, have name tags for everyone. If new members are expected, have someone to look after registration and have appropriate forms on hand.

_ Make sure audio-visual aids are available, in good working order, and that the relevant people know how to use them. The group may want to appoint someone with training to operate audio-visual equipment on a regular basis. Such equipment is often available from the facility the group uses for meetings, but in some cases you’ll need to borrow or rent equipment from other sources.

IMPLEMENTING AN ACTION PLAN

PREPARING FOR ACTION

Once your group has established its purpose and goals, it will need a good program or action plan to move things along and achieve the group's ends. An action plan focuses the group's resources on activities that achieve the goals. This also helps to increase member involvement.

Developing a plan requires time, thought and commitment from the members. As already discussed, it also requires a well thought-out statement of purpose that briefly describes what the organization plans to do, for whom and how. Frequent discussion of the group's purpose helps keep members on track and ensures that everyone is aware of why the organization exists. It also allows the group to review its goals and keep on track in the months ahead.

The partnership can make designing an action plan a little easier by doing the following:

Identify alternatives and set priorities
Make sure the group's goals are clear, then look at a variety of solutions, ideas and activities to achieve those goals. Let the group's creative juices flow. Use brainstorming techniques, discussion groups, surveys and suggestion boxes to generate ideas and involve all the members. Make activities interesting and fun, while ensuring they are goal-oriented and within reach.

Review your resources
List all the resources your group has — money, time, physical facilities and human resources. Compare the costs for each alternative suggested with the resources available. Don't automatically discard a good idea because there aren't sufficient resources to implement it. Perhaps a modification of the activity will enable the group to proceed. You may be able to get the money or volunteers required by extra fundraising efforts or by sharing resources with other groups. Creativity can also help stretch limited resources.

Fill in the details
On a flow chart, outline the specific tasks to be done, the persons or groups responsible, and the dates each task should be started and completed. This written record becomes an easy to use, valuable reference that keeps group members informed and on track. It can be the basis of regular progress reports and helps build accountability.

Make decisions

Once all the ideas have been compiled and the necessary resources inventoried, it's time for making decisions. Assess the risks involved in different courses of action. Focus the group's efforts. The temptation to try to accomplish everything can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction. If there are many ideas, go back to the overall purpose of your partnership to help decide which activities need to be started now, which are longer term, and which can be eliminated.

Evaluate progress

A part of any successful action plan is the group's evaluation of its progress and success. Measurement criteria should be identified early in the planning process, so activities can be designed with evaluation in mind. Set regular and specific times to measure success. Evaluation shouldn't be left only to the end of things. Reviewing the action plan regularly ensures the process is on track. Periodically, analyse the current situation, looking for changes in circumstances that may call for alterations of the existing plan. The group should also look for gaps in the existing programs and for social, legislative or technological changes that could dictate changes in the plan.

Make sure there is some built-in flexibility so plans can change when circumstances dictate. If the action plan is not on track, analyse the reasons and seek solutions, rather than assigning blame. Learn from the group's failures and celebrate your group's success.

CREATING EFFECTIVE COMMITTEES

The action plan will probably suggest the group form committees to save time and to more fairly split work loads and responsibilities. Committees can break the group's work into meaningful and manageable chunks, and remove time-consuming detail work from meetings of the whole partnership. They allow more people to be involved and expand the support base of the organization. Committees make better use of the specialized skills and interests of individual members. Newcomers can gain valuable insight into the group and develop confidence by serving on committees. Once a subject has been reviewed in detail by a committee, an overview of the issue and a set of recommendations can be brought to the group as a whole.

There are two basic kinds of committees. Standing committees are created by the standing orders, rules, by-laws, or regulations of an organization. They function on a permanent basis. Finance and fund-raising committees and nomination committees are examples of standing committees which would be important in a typical group. Ad hoc committees are appointed for a specific purpose on a short-term basis. For example, an ad hoc committee might be appointed to plan an open house or oversee an individual water monitoring project.

Too many committees can be as big a problem as too few, especially if the responsibilities of the committees aren't clear. Make sure each committee has a specific purpose and the authority to fulfil its responsibilities. Establish time limits for ad hoc committees. Pick committee members who have the skills and interests to do the work. Committees need to understand their responsibility to the larger membership, and how they are to report on their subject. If the committee has a budget, the restrictions on how money can be spent should also be crystal clear. Deadlines for the committee's reports on particular subjects should be firm and realistic. A method of performance evaluation for each committee should be established. It is also vitally important to recognize the contributions of the committee members both within the committee and in the larger group.

Members of ad hoc committees will usually serve for the life of the committee, but terms of office should be established for standing committees. It's wise to rotate members' terms of office, so committees don't suddenly find they have a completely new roster of members. Because committees may meet more frequently than the full group, it's generally a good idea to give the responsibility for filling sudden vacancies to the committee itself.

Terms of reference for standing committees should be included in the organization's policy manual. Terms of reference for ad hoc committees should be recorded as a motion. These terms of reference are then available to all organization members.

Committee membership

Committee members should be selected on the basis of their skills, interests and commitment. Three to seven people is a good size for most committees. An uneven number of members makes voting easier.

As noted, committees should elect their own chairpersons. The committee chair should be someone who works well with others, has good communication skills, organizes effectively, motivates people, and keeps people on task. Other responsibilities of the chair may include preparing and presenting committee reports, ensuring a successor is groomed to assume the chair's role in the future, setting agendas, calling meetings, and ensuring that all members have the opportunity to contribute.

Committee reports

Committee chairpersons usually report to the general meeting through an oral summary, but there should be a written document of the committee's work and decisions as well. Clearly written committee reports ensure the record is easily understood by future members. It may be useful to design a template for committee reports that would help standardize these documents and make them easier to read. Reports should be concise, but should show that a full discussion was held and all options were considered. Where appropriate, specific recommendations and the people who made them should be recorded.

GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Good participation is the key to good discussions. Well managed group discussions allow all members to have input and feel part of the decision. They also limit individual contributions, so everyone gets to participate. Try these participation-getting techniques:

Quick comments - Invite everyone to give a one or two sentence comment on the subject under discussion, to get a quick look at people's thoughts on the issue.

Buzz groups - Buzz groups are created by breaking the big group into smaller groups. Buzz groups can be used to break the ice, generate ideas and encourage maximum participation. One person in each buzz group can be appointed the recorder to report on the discussion when the larger group reconvenes.

Brainstorming - Brainstorming can generate spontaneous and diverse ideas and allows the group to build on one another's suggestions and pool their creativity. You can filter out the best suggestions when the brainstorming session ends. Brainstorming means:

No idea is criticized.
All ideas are acceptable.
All ideas are recorded.

HOLDING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

Meetings are an important component of local group activities. The following tips will help ensure your group's meetings are run efficiently and fairly:

Establish rules of order - Rules of order ensure that the meeting is run in an efficient manner and that all members can get involved in the group's discussions and decisions. They also help keep the group focused on the tasks at hand. Robert's Rules of Order, available on the Internet and at local libraries, have been a standard for conducting meetings since the late 1800s. However, your group can use another system or devise its own.

Prepare an agenda - The secretary and chair should prepare and distribute an agenda well ahead of the meeting, making sure that all meeting arrangements are in order and ensuring that all members understand their responsibilities at the meeting. The agenda should give the date, time and place of the meeting and outline the subjects that will be discussed. When members receive their agenda, they should read it to prepare for the meeting and make sure all topics they want discussed are included. If the agenda can't be sent prior to a meeting, hand it out at the beginning of the meeting and ask if anything needs to be added.

Today's Agenda
Call to order
Approval of the agenda
Approval of the last meeting's minutes
Chairperson's report
Treasurer's report
Committee reports
Unfinished business from last meeting
New business
Set date, time and place for next meeting
Refreshments and Social Time

Schedule wisely - The agenda should be arranged to meet the individual needs of your group, but it is generally a good idea to place key items for discussion near the beginning of the meeting when members have more energy. Regular meetings should be kept to two or three hours at the most. Plan the agenda to ensure you don't run out of time. Try to start and end meetings with items that will unite, rather than divide the group. Be sure to plan some social time for people to enjoy refreshments and get to know each other better. If refreshments are scheduled in the middle of long meetings, to give people a break from the group's efforts, be sure to set a definite time limit so the group can get back to work. If the meeting is shorter, schedule the refreshments at the end of the meeting, so people can take as much time to socialize as they like.

Maintain a balance - Meetings should be used for a combination of discussion, participation and activities. Be sure the agenda is appropriate for the meeting's time frame. While participation is important, the chair may have to set and announce appropriate time limits for discussion of each item so the group can move on to other important tasks.

REGISTERING YOUR PARTNERSHIP AS A SOCIETY

Whether you call your partnership a group, team, alliance or society, it can simply be an informal gathering of people with a common purpose or concern. However, you may want to register as a formal non-profit society. While registering a society takes a bit of extra work and expense, it can help with some kinds of fund-raising projects and grant applications. Registering as a society is also useful if the group wants to issue tax-deductible receipts for donations, or own property and enter into contracts in its own name. In some cases, the group may need to register to get a bank account. Registering as a society may also give your partnership greater status, which will help you get and keep members.

Minimum requirements for registering a society in Alberta:

1. You must have five or more people in your group.
2. The aims of the society must be scientific, cultural, recreational or charitable, rather than for business.
3. You must provide a name and address for your society.
4. You must have a stated set of objectives for forming the society and a set of bylaws outlining the way the society will be organized and the rules that will govern its activities.

Societies need not be legally incorporated, but incorporation ensures that the individual members cannot be held responsible for the society's debts and liabilities.

For Internet information on registering a society, go to
www2.gov.ab.ca/gs/information/clctc/incorporating_societies.cfm
or phone the Registry Office on the Alberta Government Riteline, toll-free, at 310-0000.

BUILDING COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Your local partnership and its goals generally represent changes in the community. Typically, about 10% of the community will support your partnership at the start, and about 10% will oppose it. These opponents or supporters are unlikely to change their position. The remaining 80% are usually undecided, indifferent or sceptical. **Failure to bring this 'silent majority' on-side can seriously jeopardize your group's success.** Various communication strategies can be used to win the support of the silent majority. Talking with neighbors, peers, family members and community leaders can be particularly helpful.

Begin consulting with the community right from the start. This helps build trust, support and understanding for the project. If the project proceeds too far before the public is informed, there may be problems with rumors and the spreading of misinformation. Submitting news releases to your community newspaper at the start of your campaign will help your group spread the information.

However, it's important that key community people and project stakeholders are well informed prior to any media releases. Share project information with the community early enough that it still has a chance for input, but not before you have the basic support of the partnership. Whenever possible, provide a contact name and information about any upcoming activities related to your project. People are often motivated to ask questions or provide input after they learn about the project through the media.

BUILDING SUPPORT

Knowing the community is critical to building support. One of the first steps is to identify the individuals and organizations in the community who will be affected by the project, as well as those who have power and influence. Developing a community social profile is vital to creating effective communication strategies.

Inviting the public to express its views and concerns about the project can help to enhance community support and ultimately the success of the project. If the community doesn't support your project, stand back and try to be objective. Has your group provided enough information? Is the timing good? Has the group made use of the feedback it asked for? There's no integrity to inviting public participation if the decisions are already made. Take advice from the community, then let people know where their input has made a difference. The community can help set priorities, define issues and find contributions.

Informal conversations allow people to keep in touch and share ideas with others in the group. Pointed discussions with key people, over coffee or through a few quick phone calls will often do the job. Such discussions should be two-sided exchanges. You want to share your ideas, ask questions and discuss your view of the benefits of the partnership to the community. But you must also be prepared to listen to other people's ideas, concerns and suggestions.

INFORMING THE PUBLIC

Open houses are one approach for spreading information to the community. An open house allows the public to learn more about the project and provides an opportunity for people to briefly express their concerns or support. Ensure opportunities to provide written or oral input. Ideally an open house is held at a community hall. People can come and go at their leisure during designated hours. Take-home materials should be available for reinforcing your group's message. Project displays should always be manned by knowledgeable people. Open houses can be used successfully at various stages of the project.

Semi-permanent displays at libraries or other public gathering places may also help get the group's message across. Use the same materials as those displayed at open houses or create similar displays using more durable materials.

Posting information about your group on an Internet site can give you additional community support as well as wider coverage. A group member may have the skills to create the web page, or the group can hire a professional web page designer.

Consider whether public forums may be useful for your situation, especially once the community is aware of your group and its work. A public forum allows for meaningful, in-depth dialogue and gives participants the opportunity to voice concerns about the project and provide input regarding alternatives. The group may want to consider having a professional facilitator chair the forum and design a process for clarifying issues and exploring options. Plan to communicate outcomes from the public forum once it's over. This can be done through media coverage, a newsletter, or another public meeting.

A printed fact sheet outlining the project, including timelines, budget, features and benefits, is also a good way to inform the public. Make the fact sheet short and easy to read. Fact sheets can be distributed to the public via the mail, household drop-offs, grocery bag stuffers, newspaper inserts or other appropriate methods. Encourage comments, questions and suggestions. You can use a postage-paid return card to increase feedback and to monitor community support. Conveniently located drop boxes for the return of these cards is a less expensive option.

Other ideas for reaching different people in the community include:

- one-on-one surveys of opinions and ideas.
- communicating through school newsletters or at parent advisory meetings to reach young families.
- placing posters or giving talks in senior activity or residential centres to reach older residents.
- hosting noon-hour presentations in a central location to reach working people.
- addressing Chamber of Commerce meetings and town council to reach business people.
- free community service announcements on farm radio stations to help publicize your efforts in the local agricultural community.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

BOOKS and ARTICLES

Finding Common Ground - Maureen Barnes. Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, 1997.

Leadership is an Art - Max De Pree. Doubleday Books, New York, 1989.

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People - Stephen R. Covey. Simon & Schuster, New York, 1989.

Watershed Restoration: Principles and Practices - edited by J.E. Williams, C.A. Wood, M.P. Dombeck. American Fisheries Society, Bethesda, Maryland, 1997.

Building Consensus for a Sustainable Future: Putting Principles into Practice - Cormick, Dale, Edmond, Sigurdson and Stuart. National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy, Ottawa, 1996.

Development Sequence in Small Groups - Bruce Tuckman, in *Psychological Bulletin 1965, 63 (6).*

Stages of Small Group Development Revisited - Bruce Tuckman, MaryAnn Jensen, in *Group & Organization Studies 1977 (4).*

INTERNET SITES

Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development
http://www.agric.gov.ab.ca

Alberta Environment
http://www.gov.ab.ca/env

Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration
http://www.agr.ca/pfra

The Health of Our Water: Toward Sustainable Agriculture in Canada
http://res2.agr.ca/research-recherche/science/healthy_water/toc.html

Know Your Watershed
http://kyw.ctic.purdue.edu/KYW/

Alberta Watersheds
http://www.albertawatersheds.org

B.C. Water Resources
http://www.elp.gov.bc.ca/wat/cws/cwshome.htm

VIDEOTAPES (available from AAFRD district offices)

Taking Charge: Leadership in Agricultural Organizations (#392-1-1)

Journey to Consensus: Land Use Conflict (#392-9)

Finding Common Ground: Negotiating Agreement (#392-10)

AGRICULTURAL SERVICE BOARDS

Check individual phone listings under your local county or municipal district government offices.

PFRA DISTRICT OFFICES

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada:

Hanna District Office - (403) 854-4448

Lethbridge District Office - (403) 327-4340

Medicine Hat District Office - (403) 526-2429

Peace River District Office - (780) 624-3386

Red Deer District Office - (403) 340-4290

Vegreville District Office - (780) 632-2919

Westlock District Office - (780) 349-3963

AAFRD
Regional Conservation Coordinators

Barrhead Regional Office - (780) 674-8305

Fairview Regional Office - (780) 835-2291

Lacombe Regional Office - (403) 782-33-1

Lethbridge Regional Office - (403) 381-5117

Vegreville Regional Office - (780) 632-5466

ALBERTA GOVERNMENT RITE-LINE
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then the number you are seeking, or ask the operator for the office or person you need