

# A Guide to Municipal Cooperation: Succeeding in Regional Partnerships

## Quick Reference Guide

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### A Guide to Municipal Cooperation: Succeeding in Regional Partnerships

The Municipal Capacity Development Program (MCDP) Guide to Municipal Cooperation (GMC) is a valuable resource for elected officials, engaged community members, First Nation and Métis community representatives, government officials, consultants, planners and other professionals who strive to implement and uphold sustainable practices.

The purpose of the guide is to provide municipalities with the information, resources and tools that they will need to begin or continue effective working relationships with other municipalities. The full-length guide provides a wealth of information on:

- beginning a collaborative process;
- structuring an intermunicipal working group; and,
- maintaining a cooperative relationship.

The document also contains templates to guide municipalities when writing agreements, memorandums of understanding, and questions to consider when beginning the process.

### Intermunicipal and Regional Cooperation: What does it mean?

Intermunicipal and regional cooperation is an effective way for municipalities to work together or combine resources and knowledge to tackle issues of mutual concern and issues that cross municipal boundaries. Intermunicipal cooperation creates opportunities for municipalities to more easily achieve local priorities dealing with sustainable development, economic development, utilities, or the delivery of municipal services such as community planning through regional collaboration. This collective approach can be implemented through various means including cost sharing agreements, regional committees, joint facilities, shared professional staff such as bylaw enforcement officers, building inspectors, engineers or planners and even district planning. It is important to remember that intermunicipal and

regional cooperation is not the process of integrating municipalities, but working together to create or enhance local and regional opportunities and strengths.

## Content Overview

Building on related resources, the GMC provides information on, but not limited to, the following fundamentals of successful intermunicipal relations:

- Overcoming barriers to working collectively
- Stakeholder Identification and Group Formation
- Formal and Informal Group Development and Membership Responsibilities
- Communication Strategies
- Dispute Resolution Mechanisms
- Community Action and Regional Planning
- Developing Intermunicipal Agreements
- Budgets and Accounting

### **Overcoming Barriers to Working Collectively**

While some of the barriers to working on a regional level will most often be overcome after a working relationship has been established and trust has been built in time, there are some ways to address these barriers at the onset of a

partnership. This section provides some techniques to overcoming common barriers to working intermunicipally.

### **Stakeholder Identification and Group Formation**

There is not a required set of people and/or organizations which must be included in a regional group. Each situation is unique and a process of stakeholder identification should be undertaken at the onset to ensure inclusivity. This section provides an overview of stakeholder characteristics and types of stakeholders to consider, the roles taken by certain stakeholders i.e. decision making vs. advisory, how to approach potential stakeholders and how to keep them engaged in the intermunicipal process.

### **Formal and Informal Group Development and Membership Responsibilities**

Working groups can structure themselves through formal or informal arrangements. Formal arrangements are a technical or statutory approach to a working group while informal arrangements usually take form as handshake or verbal agreements and have no legal force. Depending on the situation, some groups can exercise both arrangement types. This section outlines the difference between formal and informal arrangements, provides examples of both types and details the procedural responsibilities associated with each form.

### **Communication Strategies**

Communicating effectively with stakeholders, members of the intermunicipal group, and the community can decrease disputes, increase productivity and support, and strengthen intermunicipal cooperation. Communication is more than providing minutes of meetings. A communication strategy will help you to maintain a sufficient level of communication among group members and with key stakeholders. This section offers numerous tools and templates to assist working groups in developing communication strategies.

**TIP:**

*Reaching each stakeholder may take different forms. Focus on each of the stakeholder groups or target audiences and the best way to provide information. Also use more than one communication tool to ensure each audience has received the message.*

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### **Dispute Resolution Mechanisms**

Working groups without dispute resolution mechanisms in place tend to dissolve when their initial needs have been met, when tough decisions need to be made, or when they simply cannot agree. By having dispute resolutions in place, municipalities can stay connected as a group when issues arise. A number of conflict resolution tools for cooperating on a regional basis are outlined in this section including, but not limited to, techniques to prevent

conflict when communicating with other members, establishing ground rules for group meetings and formal and alternative dispute resolution methods.

### **Community Action and Regional Planning**

When a group of municipalities have come together with the understanding they want to work collaboratively to address various needs and take advantage of certain opportunities then they should create a plan to address their desires. Community Action Planning (CAP) is the process by which the guiding members of an organization look to its future and develop the procedures and operations necessary to achieve that future. In this section the benefits of planning are discussed, and the action planning process and related implementation strategies are outlined.

The CAP process can often lead into or coordinate with a more formalized process such as the formation of a Planning District. A Planning District process requires that a district official community plan and local zoning bylaws be adopted by each council to ensure that the community and strategic planning processes becomes policy for each municipality involved. Information about formal planning methods is also provided in this section.

### **Developing Intermunicipal Agreements**

An intermunicipal agreement is a written understanding between two or more municipalities. Usually, these agreements set out specific



arrangements that state how the involved municipalities will share a particular service. Intermunicipal agreements allow municipalities to retain local autonomy while providing effective and efficient services. Included in this section are the benefits to developing intermunicipal agreements, a process to follow when creating comprehensive agreements, items to include in all agreements and various funding options to consider in any intermunicipal agreement.

### **Budgets and Accounting**

The document concludes with a section on working group budgets and accounting procedures. Intermunicipal groups who begin to develop projects from their community action plans should create a timely, realistic and responsible budget. A budget provides evidence of need and value to respective councils when determining the amount they can contribute to the process. A budget will also assist the group to remain accountable for the money spent to achieve the necessary outputs.

### **Conclusion**

Intermunicipal and regional cooperation is one of the most effective ways for municipalities to succeed. The GMC provides municipalities with the tools to work together regionally to:

- **Share knowledge.**
- **Enhance service delivery.**
- **Focus on building a strong region.**

- **Effectively plan for growth.**
- **Practise consistent planning.**
- **Increase the quality of life in the area.**
- **Share the risk, control and benefits of development initiatives.**
- **Ensure consistency.**

We hope that the full-length document serves as a useful resource in building effective and long-term intermunicipal cooperation across the province.

The Guide to Municipal Cooperation can be found at [www.municipalcapacity.ca](http://www.municipalcapacity.ca) or accessed from any of our partnering organization websites.



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