



Bringing a Statement of Opportunity to the Alberta Water Council

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1 Background

The Alberta Water Council advises the Alberta Government, stakeholders and the public on effective water management practices and solutions to water issues, as well as on priorities for water research. The Council’s Board of Directors determines its priorities for work on important water issues in two ways. One way is through business and operational planning. The other is by accepting a statement of opportunity from a party that is affected by or has an interest in a particular water issue. A statement of opportunity is a way for stakeholders to formally bring issues to the Council for its consideration.

This document provides guidance to those contemplating a statement of opportunity to the Council (the “proponent”). It first describes how the Council considers and responds to a statement of opportunity. It then describes the information that should be included and the structure that should be used in preparing the statement. It concludes with answers to frequently asked questions about the process.

Any individual or organization thinking about presenting a statement of opportunity to the Council should review this document then contact the Council’s executive director to discuss the process.

2 How a Statement of Opportunity is Handled by the Council

2.1 Initial Screening

A statement of opportunity can be submitted to the Council at any time. It first goes to the executive director who reviews the material and conducts an initial screening to ensure the statement of opportunity and the issue(s) it describes meet the basic requirements for Water Council involvement. This step ensures that (a) the Council is the appropriate agency to deal with the issue, and (b) the statement addresses the criteria the board will use in deciding whether the topic should become a Council priority.

During this step, the executive director may determine that the issue should be handled in a different way; for example

- It should be referred to an existing government department or agency with a mandate to address the issue,
- The issue requires enforcement of existing regulations, or
- What is needed is research to gain a better understanding of the issue.

If the issue is more appropriately handled by another agency or process, the executive director will contact the person or organization that submitted the statement of opportunity and advise them of a better way to have their issue addressed.

If the proponent is not directed to a different agency or process, the executive director then considers a number of factors in deciding if the issues could be addressed by the Council, including, but not limited to, the following:

1. Does the statement of opportunity call for a strategic approach to the issue?
2. Is the issue being raised provincially significant, or does it affect multiple major basins?
3. Do many stakeholders have an interest in resolving the issue?

If the answers to these questions are “yes”, then it is likely an appropriate issue for the board to consider. As part of the initial screening, the executive director may clarify any specific process matters or concerns, which will vary from case to case.

The outcome of this work is a report to the board from the executive director. This report provides the results of the initial screening, advises the board on the “fit” of the issue with the Council’s mandate and indicates if resources are available for Council to pursue the issue. The statement of opportunity along with the report from the executive director will be presented to the board. Normally the stakeholder who submitted the statement of opportunity would make the presentation and respond to questions from the board.

2.2 Board Assessment

The board then makes a more substantive assessment by reviewing the information and assessing it against the criteria listed below to decide if an issue falls within its purview. The issue must meet one or more of the following criteria:

- It represents a strategic opportunity to advance the goals and directions of the *Water for Life* strategy.

- There is a potential risk of damage to: the environment, human health, the economy or the resource base.
- The issue is provincially significant, insofar as there are numerous occurrences over extended time and area, and it can be influenced and managed provincially.
- Members of the public, scientists or stakeholders are concerned about the issue and believe it is significant.

It is prudent for the party preparing the statement of opportunity to address these points in the material it submits; see section 3 below for further guidance.

Taking into account the above criteria, the board considers whether the issue can be addressed with existing Council resources and how the issue aligns with the current work plan. Often, the stakeholder presenting the statement of opportunity will include a commitment to provide at least some of the funding for the project. If the board decides that the issue is appropriate for the Council to address, it accepts the statement of opportunity and establishes a multi-stakeholder working group. This working group will define the issues and propose terms of reference for a project team to examine the issue and recommend solutions.

3 Guidance in Preparing a Statement of Opportunity

This section provides guidance to stakeholders who wish to submit a statement of opportunity for the Council to consider. A statement of opportunity should clearly and concisely describe the issue, why it is a concern, and how it fits within the Alberta Water Council's mandate. It should indicate who the client is for the outcome and should include the following sections:

1. Background on the issue and why it is important
2. Why it is appropriate for the Council to work on this issue
3. How the issue aligns with the Council's core business, goals, and mission
4. The expected benefits of the Council's involvement in the issue
5. Potential stakeholders who would be involved in developing terms of reference for the project
6. How timeliness of response would affect the issue.
7. Recommendation to establish a working group along with points that the proponent believes should be covered by the draft terms of reference for the project.

3.1 Background on the issue and why it is important

This section should describe the issue and provide rationale for why the issue is important and needs to be resolved. Not all of the points below may apply to every issue, but these are examples of things to consider in this section:

- Is human or ecological health being affected? How? What impacts have been documented (include sources)?
- What are the economic impacts related to this issue?
- What research has been done to better understand the issue?
- Is this issue a concern across the province? For example, how large an area, how many operations, or how many individuals are affected?
- Are many groups or individuals concerned about this issue and interested in finding a solution?
- How will successful resolution of this issue benefit Albertans and the environment?

3.2 Why it is appropriate for the Council to work on this issue

This section should explain why the Council is the appropriate agency to address the issue. In particular, explain how this issue relates directly to one or more of the three goals and three key directions in the *Water for Life* strategy. The strategy's goals are:

- Safe, secure drinking water supply
- Healthy aquatic ecosystems
- Reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy

The strategy's key directions are:

- Knowledge and research
- Partnerships
- Water conservation

Examples of other potential reasons why the Council should be involved might be that:

- A fresh approach to the issue is needed, especially if previous attempts to resolve it have failed. Indicate if previous efforts have been made to resolve this particular issue and, if possible, briefly note the outcome.
- The Council's multi-stakeholder, consensus-based process is an appropriate approach to resolving the issue. How would a consensus approach help to address this issue?
- The Council has experience with this or a similar issue. Indicate if previous Council projects might be helpful in addressing this issue, either in terms of their process or the outcome.

3.3 How the issue aligns with the Council's core business, goals, and mission

The Alberta Water Council's mission is to be a stakeholder partnership that provides leadership, expertise and advocacy to engage and empower individuals, organizations, business and governments to achieve the outcomes of the *Water for Life* strategy. The Council's Business Plan, available online at www.awchome.ca, describes the goals and strategies that guide it in setting priorities.

The statement of opportunity should explain how work on this issue would support and advance the Council's mission, goals and strategies.

3.4 The expected benefits of the Council's involvement in the issue

This section is a place for the proponent to briefly describe the desired outcome and how the Council's involvement will improve the resolution of the issue. For example:

- The Council's reputation and credibility for innovative solutions will increase the likelihood that key stakeholders will come to the table.
- The Council's successful use of consensus is likely to achieve a more lasting solution.
- The involvement of a wider range of stakeholders may result in a more integrated and creative solution.

3.5 Potential stakeholders who would be involved in developing terms of reference for the project

This section should identify those groups and organizations that have a stake in the outcome and who have indicated an interest in working together in a consensus process to find solutions. Some or all of these stakeholders would be approached to select an individual to participate on a Council working group to prepare terms of reference for the project. Often these organizations (and sometimes the same individuals) continue to serve on the project team that will actually develop recommendations for the board to consider. Typically, between 8 and 16 stakeholders are listed in the statement of opportunity, and additional stakeholders may subsequently be suggested by the board or the working group itself.

The list should include representation from each of the four broad categories on the Water Council:

- Government of Alberta and Provincial Authorities
- Government (federal, municipal, First Nations, Métis)
- Industry
- Non-Government Organizations

3.6 How timeliness of response would affect the issue

Sometimes consensus approaches take longer than other problem-solving approaches. Is resolution of this issue time-dependent? In other words, does it require a solution within a specific time frame? If so, indicate what that time frame is and what the consequences would be if the issue is not addressed by then.

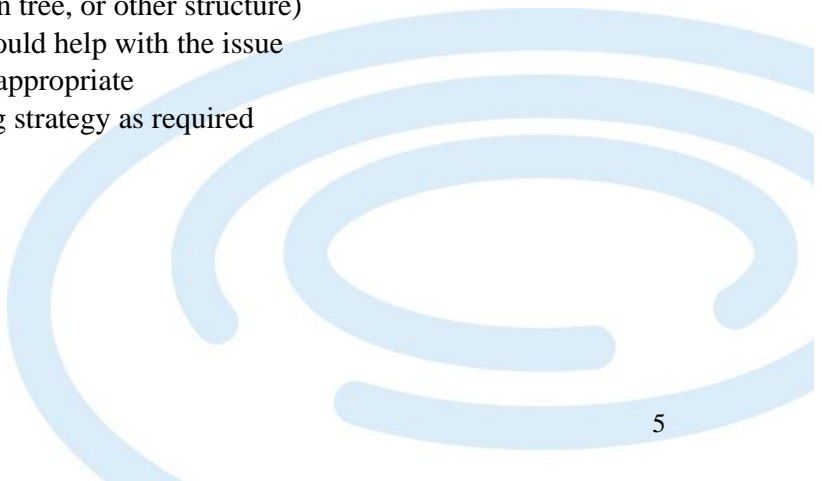
3.7 Recommendation

This section should include a recommendation asking the Council's Board of Directors to establish a working group to develop draft terms of reference for a project team to address the issue. The exact wording will depend on what the desired outcome is.

This section should also indicate what actions or key tasks the proponent believes need to be part of the draft terms of reference for the project. This will give the board some idea of the size and potential scope of the project, but it will be up to the working group to develop terms of reference that go to the board for final approval.

For example, terms of reference might need to include the following actions:

- Gather information on the issue (specify if there are particular information gaps that need to be filled)
- Conduct a literature review on some aspect of the issue
- Develop a framework (or decision tree, or other structure)
- Identify and evaluate tools that could help with the issue
- Undertake public consultation if appropriate
- Develop a budget and fundraising strategy as required



4 Frequently Asked Questions

1. When can a statement of opportunity be submitted?

The board meets at least three times a year. A statement of opportunity can be submitted at any time to the executive director, who will complete the initial screening in a timely manner and determine if the issue is an appropriate one for the board to consider. The length of time to do the initial screening depends on the issue and the completeness of the submitted statement.

2. How and where does my organization submit a statement of opportunity?

The statement can be submitted electronically or in hard copy and should be sent to the address noted at the end of this document. Statements of opportunity should be no more than ten pages in length.

3. How will I know if the Council will consider our statement of opportunity?

Every stakeholder who submits a statement of opportunity will receive a written acknowledgement that it has been received. The executive director is likely to contact the proponent during the initial screening process and will notify the proponent of the results of the initial screening. If it is determined that the Council is not the appropriate place for the issue to be addressed, the proponent will be advised of other more suitable mechanisms or processes. If the issue is something that the Council could address, the proponent will be notified well in advance of the board meeting at which it will be considered. Normally, the proponent will be asked to make the presentation and respond to questions from the board at that meeting, and the board will make a decision about whether it will form a team to work on the issue at that time.

4. Is my organization expected to provide funds in support of the project?

The Council will provide a project manager and administrative support to the project. Those stakeholders who bring an issue to the Council typically do provide at least some financial support or have a mechanism whereby funds can be generated to support the work. The amount of funds required depends on the issue, and could include funding for consultants, workshops, literature reviews, public consultations, and other activities. The project team will determine the work it needs to have done and will also develop a budget to support these activities.

5. What happens if the Council thinks our issue is important but doesn't have the resources to do the work at this time?

The board could agree to defer work on the new issue until other projects are completed, at which time staff resources could become available. The board could also direct that the new work be considered when the next annual budget and operational plan are developed.

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