



## REGIONAL DISTRICT ISSUES & NON-LEGISLATIVE SOLUTIONS WORKING GROUP 1

# ACTION PLAN

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### Introduction:

In early 2004, the UBCM Executive approved a project aimed at pursuing non-legislative solutions to key regional district issues identified by UBCM members. Multi-party working groups were established to consider the issues, and to develop strategies to address them. One such group – Working Group 1 – was established specifically to develop an *Action Plan* designed to:

- improve the general understanding of regional districts in BC's system of local government
- address concerns related to the roles and accountability of regional district directors

To fulfill its mandate, Working Group 1 held three separate, full-day facilitated discussion sessions from May through July, 2004. The sessions were structured to allow Group members to fully explore the more important issues and challenges related to regional districts and the roles of directors. The conclusions and points of consensus that emerged from the sessions formed the basis of the Group's recommended *Action Plan*.

### Report:

This report introduces Working Group 1's *Action Plan*. The report begins by identifying the members of the Working Group. A set of principles used to guide the Group in its efforts to create the *Plan* is then reviewed. The purpose and rationale of the *Plan* are also explored.

The *Plan's* central feature – the *Tool Kit* – is

introduced next. Key groups to be targeted by the *Kit* are identified, as are the key players responsible for developing and/or using the *Kit*. A comment on the need for ongoing evaluation of the *Kit* is offered.

The report ends by identifying the basic phases and timeline suggested for implementing the overall *Action Plan*.

### Working Group Members:

Working Group 1 consisted of seventeen elected and appointed officials, including:

- Chair Susan Gimse (Squamish-Lillooet RD)
- Chair Ted Armstrong (Cariboo RD)
- Chair Marvin Hunt (Greater Vancouver RD)
- Chair Jim Abram (Comox-Strathcona RD)
- Chair Karen Goodings (Peace River RD)
- Mayor Allison Habkirk (District of Central Saanich)
- Mayor Randal Macnair (City of Fernie)
- Jennifer Bridarolli (City of Merritt)
- Rod Drennan (District of Spallumcheem)
- Douglas Holmes (Sunshine Coast RD)
- Gerry Kingston (Fraser Valley RD)
- Tom MacDonald (LGMA/GFOA)
- Richard Taylor (UBCM)
- Alison McNeil (UBCM)
- Brenda Gibson (MCAWS)
- Lois-Leah Goodwin (MCAWS)
- Deidre Wilson (MCAWS)

Taken together, the members of Working Group 1 represented a cross-section of the local government community in British Columbia. Allan Neilson-

Welch, a BC-based local government consultant, served as the Working Group's facilitator.

encourage and anticipate a broad level of involvement.

### Guiding Principles:

When developing plans it is useful to explicitly identify a set of principles to guide the undertaking, and to shape the ultimate product. The following principles were endorsed by the Working Group for its *Action Plan*:

- **Focused** — The *Action Plan* should be focused on regional districts — more specifically, on efforts aimed at helping people understand, work with and work within the regional district system. The call for an *Action Plan* is based on the premise that most of the problems, conflicts and frustrations surrounding regional districts exist because people do not fully understand how regional districts are structured and intended to function. Improving the general understanding of regional districts, and helping regional district directors to fulfill their roles, will eliminate many of the problems, conflicts and frustrations, which in turn will allow regional districts – and the local government system in general – to function more smoothly.
- **Practical** — The *Action Plan* should be comprehensive in terms of parties involved, actions proposed and materials developed. At the same time, however, the *Plan's* scope must be practical. There is little value in creating a plan that is so broad in scope it cannot be easily implemented.
- **Sustainable** — Despite best intentions, plans can fail because they lose momentum. Efforts need to be made to build sustainability into the Group's *Action Plan*.
- **Efficient** — The term "efficiency" used here refers to the *Action Plan's* use of resources. Various agencies and governments have created educational and advisory materials on regional districts. Where appropriate, the *Plan* should make use of existing materials.
- **Inclusive** — There are several bodies and groups that could be involved in helping to implement the *Action Plan*. The *Plan* should

### Purpose & Rationale:

The purpose of the recommended *Action Plan* is to improve the general understanding of regional districts, and to address, using non-legislative solutions, common concerns related to the roles and accountability of directors.

As suggested earlier, the *Action Plan* is based on the premise that many of the problems, conflicts and frustrations surrounding regional districts exist because people do not fully understand how regional districts are intended to function. Improving the general understanding of regional districts, along with the roles of regional district directors, will help to eliminate many of problems, conflicts and frustrations that persist. Eliminating these problems, conflicts and frustrations will, in turn, allow regional districts to function more smoothly.

### Tool Kit:

The central component of the proposed *Action Plan* is the development of a *Tool Kit* — a set of materials and resources that can be used by regional districts to fulfill the *Plan's* purpose. The *Tool Kit* features five different types of tools:

- Best Practices for regional districts to follow in their attempts to improve various audiences' levels of understanding
- Fact Sheets designed to address specific features, concepts and irritants
- a PowerPoint Presentation, on the fundamental points of regional districts, that can be adapted to suit different audiences
- Discussion Guides written to help regional districts and their stakeholders talk through complex issues related, primarily, to the roles and accountability of regional district directors
- a Regional District Booklet designed to educate a broad audience on the basics of regional districts

*Appendix 1* presents the proposed contents of *Tool Kit* in greater detail.

### Target Groups:

The *Tool Kit* is intended to serve as a resource for regional districts. Put differently, regional districts will be encouraged to put the tools in the *Tool Kit* to good use.

The groups targeted by the different tools in the *Kit* will be numerous and varied. Municipal councils and their members, for example, will be targeted by some of the best practices developed. Certain fact sheets will be targeted at land developers, or provincial government officials (outside of MCAWS) who interact regularly with regional districts. CAOs and senior staff of municipalities will be identified as possible targets of the discussion guides. First Nations, high school students and ratepayers will be targeted in key presentations.

In an effort to help regional districts match the various materials in the *Tool Kit* to the appropriate target groups, the *Kit* will include a user-friendly index. The index will list the key target groups and identify the materials best suited to each group. Certain materials will be well-suited to, and identified for, more than one group.

### Key Players:

There are several groups in the broader local government community that have an interest in improving the general understanding of regional districts, and in assisting regional district directors in dealing with some of the challenges they face. The following points identify these groups, and explore the potential roles they may play in implementing the *Action Plan*:

- **Regional Districts** — As suggested earlier, the *Action Plan* initiative is being undertaken at the request of regional districts. The *Tool Kit* that is expected to emerge from the *Plan* is intended to give regional districts the ideas and materials they need to correct misperceptions and address common challenges related to the regional district model, and the roles and accountability of regional district directors.

The regional districts, as a collective, have a significant role and level of responsibility with respect to the development of the *Kit*. Regional districts need to contribute ideas and share experiences that can be included as best practices in the *Kit*. Regional districts that have existing materials – PowerPoint presentations, information pamphlets, etc. – need to contribute these materials to the *Kit*.

Regional districts also need accept responsibility for actually using the *Kit* once developed. Regional district Chairs, with the support of their boards, need to be proactive in seeking opportunities to make presentations to member councils, to implement the best practices, to educate stakeholders using the fact sheets, and to initiate dialogue using the discussion guides. Chairs need to identify and enlist the help of other directors who are willing to assist in implementing the tools. Regional district CAOs need to make use of the materials in their dealings with their municipal counterparts.

- **UBCM** — UBCM's support and promotion of the *Action Plan* are considered critical to the overall success of the initiative. The following efforts by UBCM would be particular helpful:
  - ✓ writing a joint letter of introduction to the *Tool Kit* (to be signed by the UBCM President and the Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Issues)
  - ✓ promoting the *Tool Kit* in editions of *UBCM News* (each edition could profile one best practice, fact sheet or discussion guide)
  - ✓ sponsoring regional district discussion sessions, using the discussion guides, at UBCM and Area Association events
  - ✓ using the materials at a (yet-to-be-established) Directors' seminar, which could be titled "Communities in Partnership" (the seminar, ideally, would be attended by both new and seasoned electoral area and municipal directors)
  - ✓ hosting an online version of the *Tool Kit* on the Civic Net BC website

In addition to providing support, it is hoped that UBCM would accept the overall responsibility for the development of the *Tool Kit*. It is not being suggested that UBCM should be responsible for actually undertaking the work required to develop the materials. It is being proposed, rather, that UBCM take responsibility for organizing and overseeing the efforts of the groups (e.g., regional districts) that agree to build the *Kit*. One body needs to take the lead in ensuring that the *Kit* gets developed; the Working Group feels that UBCM is the logical body to play this role.

- **MCAWS** — The support of MCAWS, like that of UBCM, is considered critical to overall success of the initiative. A joint letter from the Minister and the UBCM President (noted earlier) would be helpful, as would a link from the Ministry's website to the *Tool Kit*.

Beyond indicating its support, the Ministry could help to develop the materials for the *Tool Kit*. Staff at the Ministry certainly have the experience and skills to assist in producing fact sheets, best practices (drawing on lessons "from the field"), a general regional district booklet, and other components. There are some overlaps between the materials envisioned for the *Tool Kit* and materials already being developed within MCAWS. Ministry staff are well positioned to identify and take advantage of these overlaps.

Finally, the Ministry has a role to play in using the *Tool Kit*. Specifically, MCAWS has the opportunity to use presentations and other materials in meetings with other ministries that need to deal with regional districts.

- **LGMA** — As the organization that represents senior local government staff both from municipalities and regional districts, LGMA has a keen interest in helping to raise the overall understanding, and perceived value, of regional districts in the local government system. LGMA could help, specifically, in the following ways:

- ✓ a formal statement of support, by the LGMA Executive, for the *Tool Kit*
- ✓ promotion of the *Kit* in editions of

*Chapter 290* and at LGMA events, including LGMA Chapter events

- ✓ inclusion of discussion sessions, using the discussion guides, at LGMA functions
- ✓ inclusion of the *Tool Kit* materials – in particular, the discussion guides – in MATI I, II and III curricula

- **Working Group 1** — Working Group 1 was created to develop the *Action Plan*. With the submission of this report, the Working Group will have completed its mandate. Should the Group be disbanded, or should its mandate be extended to include some other role?

The members of the Working Group recommend that the UBCM Executive extend the Group's mandate to include an evaluation role. More specifically, the Group feels that it could add value to the overall effort by evaluating, on an ongoing basis, the implementation of the *Tool Kit*. In this role, the Group would be in a position to provide appropriate recommendations on a regular basis to the Executive. Regular recommendations would add to the sustainability of the *Plan* – one of the guiding principles of the initiative.

Potential roles for municipalities in developing and/or promoting the *Tool Kit* were discussed by the Group. The Group decided that municipalities – councils, municipal directors, staff – would likely be involved in only a minor way, at least initially, in development and promotion. The primary responsibility for the *Tool Kit*, as noted, rests with regional districts.

There will be elected and staff officials from certain municipalities who will wish to assist in the promotion, and even the development, of the *Kit* materials. Such individuals should be encouraged.

### **Evaluation:**

As a general rule, every new initiative should be evaluated periodically in order to ensure that efforts are reaching their intended audiences, and achieving their intended effects. The Working Group's recommended *Action Plan* is no exception

to this rule.

Initiatives can be evaluated, and results measured, either quantitatively or qualitatively. After some discussion, the Working Group determined that qualitative measures are most appropriate for the *Action Plan*. Much of the evaluation, the Group determined, could be based on informal feedback received by Group members and others at key events, and through regular discussions. Group members suggested that they, and others, will learn quickly from their peers whether or not the *Kit* is being used and, if so, whether or not it is making a positive difference.

The Group also determined that efforts to evaluate the initiative should be supplemented with a more formal, annual survey of UBCM members. In simple terms, the survey would attempt to find out whether, in the eyes of members, the *Tool Kit* was working. The survey would likely consist of two parts: one part that remained constant over the years, and one part that changed annually in an attempt to ask questions of particular relevance at any given time.

As noted earlier, Working Group 1 recommends that the UBCM Executive extend the Group's mandate to include responsibility over evaluation.

**Implementation:**

In order to achieve its purpose, the *Action Plan* needs to contain a set of specific steps and tasks, as

well as a detailed timeline for key players to follow in completing the steps and tasks. Working Group 1 will be presenting these details to the UBCM Executive in a separate report. For the time being, it is useful to simply identify the key phases of the *Plan*, and the broad timeline for implementation.

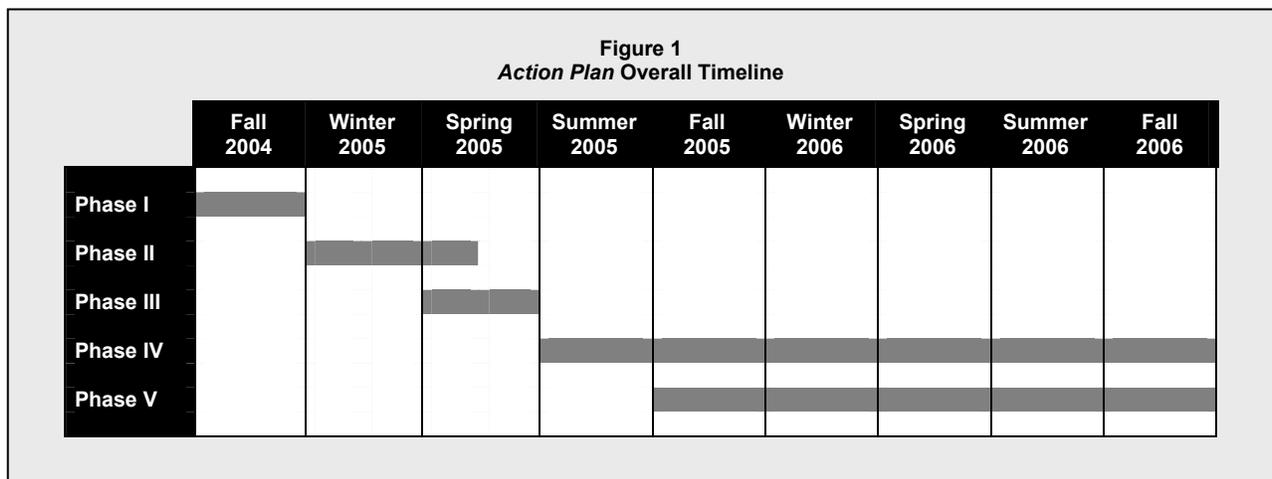
There are five basic phases to the *Action Plan*:

- Phase I: Obtain Support of Key Players
- Phase II: Develop *Tool Kit*
- Phase III: Educate Users of *Tool Kit*
- Phase IV: Promote and Implement *Tool Kit*
- Phase V: Evaluate Efforts

Figure 1 presents the simplified, two-year timeline to guide the overall implementation.

**Conclusion:**

This report has presented Working Group 1's recommended *Action Plan* — a *Plan* designed to improve the general understanding of the regional district model, and address key concerns related to the roles and accountability of regional district directors. The central feature of the *Action Plan* is the *Tool Kit*. It is hoped that regional districts throughout BC will help to develop, and will use, the materials and resources in the *Kit*. Working Group members are confident that, if put to good use, the *Tool Kit* will achieve the *Action Plan's* aims.



# A1

## THE TOOL KIT

The central feature of the *Action Plan* is the development of a *Tool Kit* — a set of materials and resources that can be used by regional districts to

achieve the aims of the *Plan*. Table A1.1 profiles the proposed contents of the *Tool Kit*.

**Figure A1.1**  
**Proposed Contents of *Tool Kit***

Tool	Description
Best Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ develop a series of best practices (BPs) for regional districts (RDs) to follow in their attempts to improve various audiences' levels of understanding</li> <li>➤ most BPs to be based on actual experiences from RDs that have proven effective</li> <li>➤ BPs to consider creating:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- holding RD meetings throughout the region (in an effort to increase profile and understanding of RD)</li> <li>- organizing a "council of councils", or a "plenary gathering" of all elected officials in the region</li> <li>- making presentations to member councils on contributions to RD services</li> <li>- giving briefings to councils following RD board meetings</li> <li>- publishing RD quarterly newsletters / updates</li> <li>- publishing a "RD Page" in local newspapers</li> <li>- involving local MLAs in RD discussions</li> <li>- undertaking strategic planning for the regional district corporation</li> <li>- building strong inter-jurisdictional staff relationships</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ a series of BPs to focus on media relations:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- educating media representatives on the basics of RDs</li> <li>- approaching the media</li> <li>- producing a press release</li> <li>- issuing joint press releases (e.g., with member municipalities)</li> <li>- working with your (RD) communications staff</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Fact Sheets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ fact sheets could be produced to address specific misunderstandings and irritants</li> <li>➤ as their title suggests, fact sheets to provide only the facts — i.e., not written to provide advice to RDs</li> <li>➤ fact sheets to consider:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the RD role in land use planning approvals</li> <li>- RD voting rules</li> <li>- the process for establishing RD services</li> <li>- the financing of RD services</li> <li>- service reviews – purpose, options, processes</li> <li>- similarities and differences between RDs and municipalities</li> <li>- RDs and property tax notices</li> <li>- the Municipal Finance Authority and RDs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Tool	Description
PowerPoint Presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ a customizable, shell presentation on regional districts (purposes, structure, functions, issues) could be created and adapted for use by RDs in different settings</li> <li>➤ potential audiences to include any group that interacts with RDs, or any group that may be interested in learning more about what RDs exist to do: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- staff from provincial ministries and agencies</li> <li>- municipal councils</li> <li>- municipal staff</li> <li>- First Nations</li> <li>- school classes</li> <li>- various groups of residences (service recipients)</li> <li>- organizations from the development industry (e.g., UDI, CHBA, etc.)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Discussion Guides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Working Group discussions revealed that several issues and challenges related to regional districts, and the roles and accountability of directors, are inherently complex</li> <li>➤ regional districts that encounter these issues can be encouraged to explore them through open discussion; open discussion among stakeholders, it is expected, will help to improve the understanding of the roles and accountability of directors, as well as, more broadly, the regional district model</li> <li>➤ discussion guides in the <i>Tool Kit</i> could assist regional districts in structuring such exchanges</li> <li>➤ each guide could identify and describe an issue, present the different perspectives on the issue, and present questions intended to prompt and guide discussion</li> <li>➤ the potential issues to be featured in discussion guides include those explored in detail by the Working Group at its second discussion session: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the promotion of regional vs. local interests in decision-making</li> <li>- the relationship between councils and their municipal directors</li> <li>- directors' responsibilities to the RD corporation</li> <li>- responsibilities of individual council members (non-directors) in regional district business</li> <li>- the relationship between RD staff and directors</li> <li>- balancing the dual roles of the RD Chair (CEO and local advocate)</li> <li>- the EA director as the voice of the EA</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ discussion guides could be presented and tested at group events such as UBCM's annual conference and UBCM chapter meetings, and at UBCM-sponsored seminars for directors</li> </ul>
Regional District Booklet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ a general information booklet outlining the basics about regional districts in BC</li> <li>➤ booklet could be titled "An Introduction to BC's Regional Districts"</li> <li>➤ UBCM has a booklet (the "Yellow Booklet") on local government in BC, including regional districts; material from this booklet could be updated for the regional district booklet</li> <li>➤ the audience for the booklet would be broad</li> <li>➤ distribution could be "passive" (e.g., make booklets available at civic buildings and online); or, distribution could be "active" (e.g., mail booklet directly to all households and businesses)</li> </ul>