

Community Excellence Awards

2018 Application Form

Please complete and return the application form by Friday, May 25, 2018. All questions are required to be answered by typing directly in this form. If you have any questions, contact awards@ubcm.ca or (250) 356-5193.

SECTION 1: Applicant Information

Local Government: Cowichan Valley
Regional District

Complete Mailing Address: 175 Ingram Street,
Duncan, BC, V9L 1N8

Contact Person: Brian Carruthers

Position: Chief Administrative Officer

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SECTION 2: Category

Excellence in Governance. *Governance processes or policies that are outcomes-based and consensus oriented; support and encourage citizen participation in civic decision-making; are efficient, equitable and inclusive, open and transparent; and exemplify best practices in accountability, effectiveness, and long term thinking.*

Excellence in Service Delivery. *Projects/programs that provide effective services in a proactive manner, demonstrate benefit to the community, and utilize performance measures, benchmarks and standards to ensure sustainable service delivery.*

Excellence in Asset Management. *Projects/programs that demonstrate a comprehensive system of asset management policies and practices, meeting and/or exceeding accepted best practices.*

Excellence in Sustainability. *Projects/programs that incorporate a long-term sustainability lens by considering cultural, social, economic and environmental issues in planning, policy and practice.*

SECTION 3: Project/Program Details

1. Name of the Project/Program:

Cowichan 2050 Regional Collaboration Framework

2. Project/Program Summary. Please provide a summary of your project/program in 150 words or less.

The Cowichan 2050 Regional Collaboration Framework project was initiated by the Cowichan Valley Regional District in September 2017 in response to increasing recognition amongst local governments and regional partners that cross-cutting regional challenges (e.g., climate change, growth) cannot be effectively addressed in isolation by any one local government or organization.

Recognizing that these changes bring challenges of a scope, scale and complexity the region has not seen before, Cowichan 2050 marks the beginning of a process and a way forward for regional partners to:

- Build more collaborative regional working relationships;
- Improve communications and information sharing;
- Support more coordinated planning on critical, region-wide issues; and
- Establish clear and measurable indicators of progress around regional livability, sustainability, and resilience.

Ultimately, this new approach will enable the Cowichan region to more effectively address current issues, plan for emerging challenges, and achieve significant collective impact at both local and regional scales.

3. Demonstrating Excellence. Please describe how your project/program demonstrates excellence in meeting the purposes of local government in BC and provides promising practices for others to follow.

As both a process and a commitment, the Cowichan 2050 Framework provides a statement of recognition that cross-cutting challenges such as those associated with climate change adaptation and population growth (e.g., sprawl, service delivery) cannot be effectively addressed in isolation by any one local government or organization. Moreover, it presents a clear opportunity for the communities of the Cowichan region to take hold of the future by beginning the process of creating a more proactive, collaborative and collective impact approach to regional planning. A new approach will enable the Cowichan region to more effectively address current issues, plan for emerging challenges, and achieve significant and positive collective impacts.

The Framework currently includes the three core components; it will be expanded upon and further developed as the process moves forward:

- Cowichan 2050 – Call to Action: A statement of commitment to regional collaboration that grounds the Framework that will be endorsed by local governments in June 2018.
- Cowichan 2050 – Regional Working Group Scope of Work: A scoping document that provides some structure around how regional collaboration will take place moving forward. Local government staff are core members of the Regional Working Group, but will be joined by First Nations, region-serving community organizations and other agencies and levels of government who have an interest in the Cowichan region and are a necessary part of any collective, collaborative action.
- Cowichan 2050 – Backgrounder: A regional “primer” that pulls together common policy themes from CVRD, local government Official Community Plans (OCPs), and

regional organizations and outlines opportunities for more proactive, collaborative action across different regional planning areas.

Collectively, these components demonstrate excellence in both the process and purpose of regional collaboration. Cowichan 2050 recognizes that effective governance in the face of rapidly changing and complex regional challenges, requires strong relationships and a willingness to build cross-sectoral coalitions that can facilitate coordinated planning and action at multiple scales (neighbourhood, local, regional, etc.). Importantly, this work requires both interjurisdictional collaboration and engagement of stakeholders from outside the local government realm, which in turn places new demands on local government staff and elected officials to develop the capacities necessary for collaborative governance.

The Cowichan 2050 project focused on developing this capacity by bringing together local government staff, elected officials, representatives from the eight First Nations with reserve lands in the Cowichan region, and region-serving organizations to kick-start the process of working towards a more collaborative regional planning and decision-making model. Relationship building was a core component of the project, as was the establishment of a permanent regional working group mandated to continue the important work of developing improved mechanisms for regional collaboration and coordination.

What further sets Cowichan 2050 apart as a model for other jurisdictions to follow is the project's emphasis on relationship building and the cultivation of a culture of collaboration. While many regional districts have sought to collaborate through the development of a regional growth strategies (RGS), not all jurisdictions are ready for this type of statutory policy tool, while others have developed RGS documents that largely sit on shelves and not used to their full potential. Too often, relationship building is overlooked when these strategies are first developed, which in turn can make implementation a challenge. This project focused on encouraging the relationship building that is necessary for more committed regional collaboration. This process helped those involved develop shared understandings about the challenges facing their respective communities and the region as a whole. It also helped both staff and elected officials recognize the value of collaboration, both within the local government sphere and outside it, and to begin addressing the silos that exist both between organizations and within them.

Cowichan 2050 also offers promising practices for regions without regional growth strategies in place. While the CVRD may work towards development of a regional growth strategy through future phases of the Cowichan 2050 process, the Framework establishes both a commitment to, and a forum for, more coordinated and collaborative regional planning. Extending this collaboration beyond local governments at this early stage, it is expected to lay the foundation for a more inclusive approach to regional growth in the future.

4. Category Criteria.

A. Please describe how your project/program meets the objectives of the category you have applied under. Refer to S. 3 of the Program & Application Guide.

Excellence in Governance: Cowichan 2050 was primarily focused on laying a foundation for improved regional collaboration and governance. The objectives outlined in the final Framework include:

- Build more collaborative regional working relationships;
- Improve communications and information sharing;
- Support more coordinated planning on critical, region-wide issues; and
- Establish clear and measurable indicators of progress around regional livability, sustainability, and resilience.

These objectives all support an outcomes-based and consensus-oriented approach to decision making, which is in direct alignment with the central purpose of this project: to get local governments and other regional partners moving in the same direction in terms of planning and decision making.

The project exemplifies principles of equity and inclusiveness in that partners that operate outside the local government realm were included in the process right from the start, despite some initial concern that this approach would make it more difficult to have frank conversations or reach consensus on key issues. First Nations and representatives from region-serving organizations ended up playing a key role in regional working group meetings. Ultimately, their involvement shaped the Framework and its three components in fundamental ways.

The project demonstrates best practices in accountability, effectiveness, and long-term thinking by establishing a forum for more coordinated long-range planning. The Regional Working Group (which to this date has involved over 40 participants from 13 organizations) established through this project will continue to meet regularly to coordinate on key issues, which will help to ensure that local governments are making the most of their collective resources rather than working at cross purposes. In addition, elected officials from Cowichan communities intend to officially endorse the Call to Action in June of 2018, which will help the region's local governments hold one another accountable moving forward.

Finally, the Cowichan 2050 Regional Collaboration Framework is intended to be public facing. While this stage of the project was primarily focused on engaging staff and elected officials, the public's introduction to the Framework and associated engagement will take place during the next phase of project work. This process will help to ensure openness and transparency, while also giving the public the information they need to hold elected officials accountable. For example, once the Call to Action is made public, citizens will have a clear sense of what their elected officials have committed to.

B. In many cases projects may meet the criteria of more than one category. If applicable, please describe how your project meets the criteria of one or more other categories.

This project also meets the criteria for the Excellence in Sustainability category, as sustainability was a major focus throughout project work. Indeed, the motivation for the project initially came from the CVRD's 2016 Corporate Strategic Plan, which identified a need for a regional planning strategy or framework to support more "sustainable and coordinated growth and development in the region". While it quickly became clear that the region's local governments were not ready to develop a comprehensive regional growth or sustainability strategy, key drivers of change in the region include population

growth and climate change, and "make our region more sustainable" is identified as one of four "cornerstone" regional aspirations in the Cowichan 2050 Backgrounder. More broadly, the Framework lays the foundation for project partners to begin working together to more proactively address challenges such as growth and development, which—in the absence of a regional growth strategy—is absolutely critical for long-term regional sustainability.

SECTION 4: Program Criteria

- 5. Leadership.** Describe the extent to which your local government acted as a local or regional leader in the development or implementation of the project/program.

The CVRD has acted as a regional leader in the development of Cowichan 2050 by initiating the project and stewarding it through to the completion of phase one. Our organization convened three Regional Working Group meetings and an Elected Officials Forum, making key decisions throughout the project that enabled its success. This was by no means a straightforward or simple process, as there was initially some confusion about, and hence resistance to, the project. We tackled these challenges head on by facilitating additional meetings with the CAOs and senior staff from the region's local governments to hear their concerns and address any outstanding issues. This approach helped to build trust and buy-in for the project, and by the time the most recent Regional Working Group meeting was convened in April, the tone had changed considerably. This shift is exemplified by the support shown for the project by the region's CAOs in this video: <https://vimeo.com/269150406/7453ddedc9>.

The CVRD plans to continue in a leadership role by stewarding the next two phases of project work, which in the immediate term involves managing the process of moving forward with Call to Action endorsement by the CVRD Board and the four local government Councils (Town of Ladysmith, Municipality of North Cowichan, City of Duncan, Town of Lake Cowichan) before the end of June (as was agreed at the May Elected Officials Forum), and convening the next Regional Working Group meeting for later June 2018. The CVRD has committed to continuing to organize and convene Regional Working Group meetings on an ongoing basis, and also has plans to kick off the public facing component of this work in the coming months.

- 6. Partnerships and collaboration.** Describe the breadth and depth of community and/or regional partnerships that supported the project/program and the extent to which internal and/or external collaboration was evident.

This project was all about building relationships and fostering a culture of regional collaboration. In total, 65 participants took part, including over twenty elected officials, senior staff and CAOs from the CVRD and the region's four local governments, senior staff from Halalt First Nation and Cowichan Tribes, and representatives from region-serving organizations, including Social Planning Cowichan, the Our Cowichan Communities Health Network, and the Cowichan Watershed Board. Other participants included the representatives from the regional School Board, Island Health, and the Province. Three Regional Working Group meetings were held over the first phase, along with an Elected Officials Forum and a regional CAOs meeting that also included senior staff from the region's local governments.

At each Regional Working Group meeting, space was made for informal relationship building over meals, and all three meetings included significant time for group conversation and discussion. This led to a truly collaborative approach to the Cowichan 2050 project, which is best exemplified by the project's shift in scope from a strategy to a framework. Initially, the project's final outcome was conceptualized as a regional planning strategy, but it quickly became clear at the regional working group meetings that more work was required to lay a foundation for more collaborative regional planning before diving into strategy development. The CVRD was receptive to this change, as our organization's core objective for Cowichan 2050 was to facilitate a relationship building process that would ultimately support more collaborative regional planning. It was clear that we needed to be flexible in order to meet our partners where they were/are rather than push them through a project/process they were not yet ready for.

The decision to include both First Nations and region-serving organizations (rather than limiting participation to local government staff) in Regional Working Group meetings was also an important one. While it would no doubt have been easier to complete the project had participation been constrained to local government staff, the inclusion of external partners was recognized as being critical to the larger process. We were aware that doing this work any other way would be business as usual, which is the opposite of what our region needs at this time. By building region-wide partnership and participation into this model from the get go, we are far more likely to succeed in our efforts to maintain momentum for Cowichan 2050 going forward.

7. Innovation and promising practices. Describe the degree to which the project/program demonstrated creativity and innovation, and contributed to increased efficiency or effectiveness.

Background research carried out as part of this project confirmed that there is no precedent in the province for the Cowichan 2050 process. Research further determined that the larger Cowichan 2050 approach fits leading edge approaches, including “new regionalism” and “collective impact” planning.

To our knowledge, this approach is without precedent in BC. While several jurisdictions have regional growth strategies in place, as we noted earlier, the more challenging work of building the relationships that ultimately facilitate the implementation of such strategies is often neglected. At best, this neglect may simply result in the regional growth strategy not being implemented well, while at worst, it can cause or contribute to protracted disagreement among member municipalities and/or other regional partners (e.g., First Nations). In contrast, we expect that the approach that we've initiated through this project will help to build trust and foster a culture of collaboration that will no doubt be invaluable for future projects.

From this perspective, key promising practices from this work include:

- Being willing to step back and meet partners where they are rather than force a project that doesn't have buy in
- Focusing on process and letting the process determine the outputs
- Recognizing the need to involve other regional players besides local government if a new regional approach is the objective (this amounts to focusing on governance, not government)

- Recognizing that involving a wider range of regional players is worth the extra effort in the long run, especially given the pace of change and the complexity and interdependence our communities face today.

8. Public engagement and communications. Describe the extent to which public engagement was foundational to the success of the project/program, including the use of communication tools such as social media.

Public engagement and communications was an ongoing consideration over the course of this project. Initially, we had planned to include a significant public engagement component, but as the scope of the project shifted away from strategy development, it became apparent that Cowichan 2050 was primarily a staff and elected officials-focused initiative.

Instead, the project focused on communications through social media and a project website, and on honouring past work by drawing considerably on past public engagement projects which informed the regional aspirations articulated in both the Backgrounder document and the Call to Action. Cowichan 2050's overarching vision was also drawn from an existing regional vision that was first developed in 1992 and confirmed in 2009.

We also ran a region-wide Speaker Series to both accompany and compliment Cowichan 2050. The Speaker Series covered topics such as sustainability, complete communities, resilience, and public engagement in civic spaces and included a number of well-known speakers (Charles Montgomery, Happy City; Gil Penalosa, 8-80 Cities)

We used Speaker Series events to share information about Cowichan 2050 with the public, and as the Speaker Series is ongoing, we will likely continue to do so as we move forward with Framework roll-out and implementation. A key component of this roll-out will involve sharing the Call to Action across our communities, which we hope will encourage the public to hold elected officials accountable on some of the key issues and aspirations identified in the Framework documents.

9. Transferability. Describe the degree to which the process or outcomes of the project, or other learnings, could be conveyed to other UBCM members.

Regional collaboration is critical to planning and decision making in every region in BC, yet as we worked on this project, we found that there is virtually no precedent for establishing a standing regional working group with senior staff representation, let alone one that is also inclusive of First Nations and representatives from local region-serving organizations. While this approach may not work as well in larger urban regional districts like Metro Vancouver, it has significant potential as a model for regional districts of a similar size to the CVRD.

Though the conditions that led to the process and outcomes of Cowichan 2050 were specific to the CVRD, the process and outcomes themselves are highly transferable and could easily be conveyed to other UBCM members. In particular, the establishment of a standing Regional Working Group with broad representation from across the region has much to offer as a model for regional relationship building and collaboration, particularly as local governments continue to build stronger relationships with First Nations.

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SECTION 5: Additional Information

- 10.** Please share any other information you think may help support your submission.
The three documents prepared as part of the Cowichan 2050 process are attached for the committee's information, to substantiate the information provided in this application.

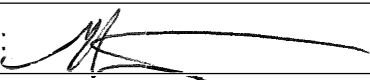
SECTION 6: Signature

Applications are required to be signed by an authorized representative of the applicant.

Name: Brian Carruthers

Title: CAO

Signature:



Date: May 23, 2018

All applicants are required to submit:

- Signed application form. Applications should be submitted as Word or PDF files.
- Five representatives photos of the project. Photos should be submitted as JPEG files.

If you choose to submit your application by e-mail, hard copies do not need to follow.

Submit applications to Local Government Program Services, Union of BC Municipalities

E-mail: awards@ubcm.ca

Mail: 525 Government Street, Victoria, BC, V8V 0A8