



Creating a Joint Working Group for First Nation- Municipal Partnerships

Creating a forum to collaborate on joint community economic development priorities has proven to be a best practice for First Nations and municipalities. Informed by First Nation-municipal partnerships across Canada, this tool provides guidance for creating an effective Joint Working Group (JWG).

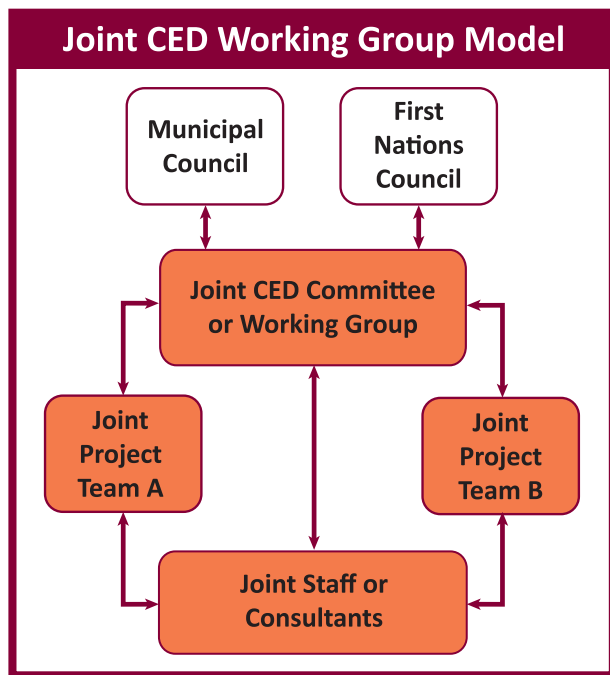
Why create a Joint Working Group?

A JWG provides a shared table to:

- grow the government-to-government relationship
- identify shared community economic and social development priorities and initiatives
- develop joint plans and oversee their implementation
- capitalize on funding or development opportunities
- coordinate communication activities
- share community and regional information, opportunities and issues

What specifically is a Joint Working Group and who should be involved?

Simply put, a First Nation–municipal Joint Working Group is a shared table for elected leadership and staff to meet regularly, share information and plan. Successful JWG's have a clear mandate and terms of reference (TOR); members are appointed by their respective councils; and the group meets monthly. A JWG may have the authority to set joint community economic and social development priorities, host relationship-building activities and allocate resources for the partnership. An effective JWG includes:



- At least one **elected official** from each community (chief, mayor, warden, or councillor) who holds the portfolio for the issue under discussion, or a representative from that office
- At least one **senior staff person** from each community (band manager, city manager, chief administrative officer), or the most senior person responsible for an issue, such as an economic development officer
- **Administrative and communications staff** for support
- Others to provide a **diversity of perspectives**, such as elders, youth or community members

As the partnership grows and the number of joint initiatives increase, some JWG's establish sub-committees or project teams to allow smaller teams with specific expertise to help forward the joint initiative. It's wise to clearly identify the governance structure, mandate, membership and responsibilities of each group, committee or team in a JWG terms of reference.

When and how should Joint Working Groups meet?

Meet in person when possible: face-to-face connection helps build trust. Meet regularly (monthly at a minimum) when first establishing the JWG and re-evaluate once momentum and commitment are established. Set a standing meeting day and time.

Consider rotating the meeting location between the First Nation and the municipality and consider meeting in a location other than a boardroom. Show each other around your offices and make introductions to the rest of the staff.

Some months it may feel as if there isn't anything urgent to meet on, but meet anyway. By maintaining this consistent schedule, your partnership is prepared to address emerging opportunities and issues.

“The core of our partnership has got to be communication. We shared the same schools, hockey rinks: we knew one another but our elected officials didn’t have a venue that they could communicate regularly at. The foundation that we’ve created is just a strong network of communication between EDOs, councillors, mayors and chiefs and even our citizens in our communities.”

Justin Roy, Director of Economic Development, Kebaowek First Nation, Quebec

Limit the formality of the meeting; encourage people to be relaxed and ready to laugh to form better relationships. JWG’s often connect members by including an ice-breaker question at the beginning of the meeting and building a coffee break in the agenda.

Who is responsible for what?

Assign key responsibilities among the group members: a chair, a note taker, and a meeting organizer. Make sure everyone understands their responsibilities. Consider rotating the responsibilities along with the location to include each community.

Use a standing JWG meeting agenda template, including time for check-in and information sharing (**see Template #1**). Record the group consensus on decisions, next steps, and action items to share with JWG members. Determine a platform for sharing documents, such as Dropbox, Google Drive, or SharePoint, and assign someone from the group to manage and organize this platform to ensure continuity since elected official and staff turnover is inevitable.

How to get started?

Once your partnership has agreed to establish a JWG, co-create shared principles to guide meetings and communication. Create your own or build from the CEDI Dialogue Principles used by many First Nation-municipal partnerships (**see Template #2**). Some partnerships include traditional or culturally significant laws or ways of being.

When collaborating between governments, respect unique governance structures, jurisdiction and legislation. Terms of Reference are a best practice for JWG’s. Most importantly, co-created terms highlight the shared understanding of how partner communities agree to work together, with respect to the autonomy and unique culture of each government and community (**see Template #3**).

How is a Joint Working Group maintained?

Your relationship is a long-term investment and will grow over time. Be patient. Ask questions. Invest time and resources to learn together and do so internally with your own council and staff. Address difficult issues as they arise. Practice consensus-based decision-making and lean into your shared principles. If you hit a rough patch, consider using an external facilitator to help guide a discussion and keep the meeting constructive.

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Be consistent about attending meetings. It can be frustrating to explain everything to someone new. If it happens too often, the group may lose its connection. Ensure your TOR clearly outline expectations for meeting attendance and cancellation. Establish a joint communications strategy to address who speaks on behalf of the group, when and how.

Spend time clarifying a shared vision, values and actions for your partnership. Once those are clear, develop a work plan. Review these elements regularly and conduct a relationship check-in at least once a year. See [Stronger Together: A Toolkit for First Nations-Municipal Community Economic Development Partnerships](#) for templates to support your JWG, including Tools #14 (Scope Vision, Actions and Values) #18 (Conduct a Relationship Check-in) and #19 (Renew Your Partnership Agreements).



THE JOINT FIRST NATIONS-MUNICIPAL CED PLANNING PROCESS

This diagram shows how joint CED works over time. Communities connect and reconnect in a fluid way as new staff members and elected officials join the process. They move through the cycle of visioning, deciding and acting multiple times as their relationship strengthens and becomes a partnership, and as different projects and priorities emerge. The circle and braid hold the framework in place, and represent how the weaving together of different communities makes them healthier, more resilient and stronger, together.

“I was surprised how little I actually knew about some of the history of First Nations in our area, even though we have been directly involved with Hiawatha First Nation for my whole life . . . I had a lot to learn and the first few meetings that’s what it was really about, establishing these relationships . . . It took a while but it finally dawned on me if we are going to sit down and have a relationship with all of the partners around the table we need to know something about each other. We need to understand why things are important to them.”

Joe Taylor, Mayor of Otonabee-South Monaghan

Most importantly, bring your full councils, staff and communities together whenever possible: for community and cultural events, partnership milestones or celebrations for example. Share your government-to-government partnership with community members and invite them to be part of your growing relationship.

This guide has been created by the First Nation-Municipal Community Economic Development Initiative (CEDI), implemented jointly by Cando (Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers) and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), which has supported First Nation-municipal partnerships creating joint community economic development initiatives since 2013, learning from these partnerships while co-creating best practices for long-term, respectful and equitable First Nation-municipal partnerships.