

Association of Kootenay and Boundary Local Governments

Strategic Planning Workshop

November 8, 2019

8 am - 2 pm, Creston, BC

Meeting Summary



On November 8th, the Executive Board and Executive Director of the Association of Kootenay and Boundary Local Governments met to review, discuss, and update their strategic plan. The original plan was drafted in 2015, and updated in January and November of 2018. This third update meeting focused on identifying goals that have been completed or are nearly complete, and prioritizing remaining goals to be completed over the next 1-3 years. The group also worked with the Core Values and Mission of the organization, created a Five-Year Vision Statement, and conducted a SWOT Analysis.

Present

President Roly Russell (Regional District of Kootenay Boundary)

Vice President Clara Reinhardt (Radium Hot Springs)

Director Garry Jackman (Regional District of Central Kootenay)

Director Rob Lang (Village of Kaslo)

Director Ron Popoff (City of Cranbrook)

Director Ange Qualizza (City of Fernie)

Director Diane Langman (Village of Warfield)

Past President Rob Gay (Regional District of East Kootenay)

Executive Director Carolyn Maher

Facilitator: Alison Sayers, MA, Sayers Consulting

Regrets: Director Adam Casemore, (Regional District of Central Kootenay)

After introductions and a brief overview of the meeting agenda, the group identified the Core Values of AKBLG as follows:

Representative

Tolerant of Diversity

Honesty and Genuineness

Learning Culture

Open Communication

Relevance

Sense of and Appreciation of the Kootenays

Productivity and Action

Next, the AKBLG Mission Statement was discussed and one change was made:

“To assist our members in providing effective, responsible, and accountable local government through dialogue **engagement**, education, and advocacy”

The group then worked together to create a Five Year Vision Statement, first by creating individual statements and then combining them into a group statement as follows:

It is November 8th, 2024, and AKBLG:

- Has an effective and efficient governance model
- Is comfortable with its own identity as a geographically diverse and culturally unique Kootenay-based rural organization
- Has a focus on advocacy, internally and externally, with its members and outside organizations
- Is committed to Reconciliation and has a membership that reflects this commitment
- Brings more political and financial resourcing and empowerment to rural areas in the Kootenays
- Is financially sustainable
- Promotes year-round collaboration among and between its members to increase regional advocacy effectiveness

A SWOT Analysis was then conducted to determine where the Executive and the organization as a whole experience challenges that may hinder goal accomplishment, and also to identify strengths that can be leveraged in order to reach goals. External opportunities and threats were also identified:

Strengths

Good geographic diversity around the Executive table

Good gender balance on Executive

Good municipal/rural balance on Executive

Very active and enthusiastic board membership that is willing to take on extra work

There is competition for Executive seats at election time

Good convention management and execution

Good relationship with UBCM

Membership is appreciative of how unique our communities are

Financially viable

Stable staff

A two year election cycle means stability on the Executive

Our regional reputation is good

We are unrestricted as to how we achieve our mandate - we are a nimble organization

Weaknesses

File management system could be improved
Budget supports Executive to meet only six times per year
Cost is high for small municipalities to send members to AKBLG convention

Opportunities

Relationship with UBCM could be leveraged better
Better engagement with our MLAs and MPs
Sourcing other means of funding
High school and college students attending convention
Meet at another time other than at UBCM, or improve our UBCM meeting
Members of Executive could be on boards of more organizations
Reconfigure AKBLG Bylaws and Constitution to enable First Nations to join us
Many former Kootenay politicians have history/memory we could tap into

Threats

Travel challenges due to geography and geographic diversity
Possibility of losing sponsorship at convention
Local governments election cycle
Provincial elections
More resolutions bypassing local government associations; UBCM is not tightening this process
There are other conventions that mimic what we do = competition for attendance
Competition for sponsorship money

The group then removed completed goals from the Strategic Plan, prioritized remaining goals, and added new goals as follows:

Strategy 1: Increase our success at advocacy for and on behalf of members

1. Implement a resolutions process as follows: 1) Board tracks and follows up on actionable advocacy issues. 2) Resolutions Committee will present two highest priority resolutions to the board. 3) Board will assess the best strategy for advocating for its members, including strategic advocacy at UBCM.
2. Respond to membership input regarding regional issues members want the Executive to advocate for on their behalf at UBCM or any political, corporate, or social media opportunities
3. Create Executive Roles and Responsibilities policy
4. Explore more diverse ways of advocating on behalf of members

Strategy 2: Raise the Profile of AKBLG

1. Invite high school and college students to attend AKBLG convention
2. Reconfigure AKBLG Bylaws and Constitution to enable First Nations to join
3. Gather information regarding attendance and cost of attendance of smaller municipalities at AKBLG convention
4. Establish a five-year budgeting cycle and financial plan
5. Explore expansion of convention sponsorship pool, perhaps through actively pursuing small business sponsorship

Strategy 3A: Improve Internal Organization Functioning - Role Clarity

1. Clarify roles and responsibilities of AKBLG and Executive as hosts of the Columbia River Treaty Local Government Committee.
2. Finalize the 2019 contract for the Executive Director
3. Finalize the 2020 contract for the Executive Director
4. Clarify the Executive Director's decision-making authority
5. Clarify roles of the ED vs. roles of the Executive
6. Practice and demonstrate good governance
7. Implement Governance Orientation for new Executive members

Strategy 3B: Improve Internal Organization Functioning - Executive and Committee Meetings

1. Increase psychological safety at Executive meetings
2. Increase the effectiveness and efficiency of Executive, committee, and organization work

Action Steps were then created for the highest priority goals, which are detailed on the accompanying spreadsheet, AKBLG Strategic Action Plan.

After a brief discussion of next steps, the meeting adjourned at 2:00 pm.

Recommendations for Further Work

- 1) **The Core Values and Five Year Vision Statement should be reviewed with all board members present** (if possible) for wording changes and overall edits.
- 2) **The Vision Statement and SWOT Analysis deserve further review against the Goals, and gaps should be identified.** For example, if there is any aspect of the Vision Statement which does not have goals in service of its realization, the Executive should discuss whether or not to remove that portion of the Vision Statement, or create goals (with a timeline) in its service. Likewise, if there are Opportunities, Threats, and Weaknesses from the SWOT Analysis which the Executive would like to actively address, the group should ensure that there are Goals within the plan to do this.
- 3) There was some sense among at least a few group members that AKBLG tries to accomplish too much given the limited resources of the organization. **The Executive and the Executive Director should take the time to engage in honest and focused discussion regarding organizational capacity, specifically whether or not the organization is able to effectively accomplish all of the goals that were identified in the plan,** within the time frames identified. This is particularly important if the group wishes to add new goals (see above), and will help with preventing long-term human capacity issues, such as burnout, overwhelm, and frustration.
- 4) **Discussion regarding Strategy 3B Goal 1 (Increase psychological safety at meetings) generated some discussion at the workshop. Further dialogue should be prioritized, and it is the opinion of the consultant that more action steps to address this goal are needed.** Directly addressing the human dynamics of the group in a timely manner will help harness more group energy towards ensuring successful goal and task accomplishment. While this type of discussion is never easy, and may be uncomfortable in the short term, over the long term it will increase the comfort and positiveness of individuals' experiences within the group, resulting in more balanced participation. These changes will also work directly in service of meeting the group's goals of increasing effectiveness and efficiency of the organization (Strategy 3B, Goal 2), and demonstrating and practicing good governance (Strategy 3A Goal 6). It will also provide greater organizational alignment with several Core Values and the first line of the Five Year Vision Statement.
- 5) **The Executive and Executive Director should identify methods and tools to ensure that the Strategic Action Plan continues to guide the work of staff and board.** One simple method that many organizations find helpful is to include "Strategic Plan - Progress and Updates" as a standing agenda item near the beginning of every board and committee meeting. Some organizations also find that between-meeting email reminders are helpful. However, every organization is unique in terms of what works best for them. The Executive and ED should take a few minutes to identify other tools and methods for ensuring the plan stays alive and active within AKBLG over the next three years and beyond.
- 6) **Due to annual turnover on the Executive, it will be helpful for the group to spend extra time at its June meeting every year reviewing the plan in depth** in order to bring new board members up to speed on its progress, and provide an opportunity for new members to contribute to goal and task accomplishment.