

# Community Advisory Committee Guide

VERSION 2.0

JUNE 6, 2024



**EAO**

Environmental  
Assessment Office

**Version Control History**

Version #	Date (YYYY-MM-DD)	Modification
Version 1.0	2020-04-23	n/a
Version 2.0	2024-06-06	Updates to provide additional clarity, description of role of CAC, and address public feedback received

This document provides guidance to help environmental assessment participants and the public better understand British Columbia's environmental assessment process. It is not advice and does not replace requirements of the *Environmental Assessment Act*, 2018 or its regulations, or bind any decision-maker.

# Contents

- INTRODUCTION..... 4
- WHAT IS A COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE? ..... 4
- ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE ..... 4
- ROLE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OFFICE..... 6
- FORMING A COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE..... 7
  - Determining the Interest in Forming a Community Advisory Committee ..... 7
    - Amendments ..... 7
  - Selection of Committee Representatives..... 8
  - Developing the Terms of Reference..... 8
- TRAVEL AND OTHER EXPENSES ..... 8
- CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY ..... 8
- APPENDIX: COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE – TEMPLATE ..... 9
  - Purpose ..... 9
  - Guiding Principles ..... 9
  - Opportunities for Community Advisory Committee Representatives ..... 9
  - Scope and Expectations of the Community Advisory Committee ..... 10
  - Representatives and Roles ..... 10
  - Removal of Representatives from the Community Advisory Committee ..... 10

## INTRODUCTION

This document provides a summary of the purpose and role of the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) and includes the standard terms of reference for CACs that will be used for all projects. The terms of reference outline the purpose, objectives, guiding principles and key roles and responsibilities of the CAC.

Primary users of this guide are potential and current CAC members; however, other environmental assessment participants may also use this guideline to understand the role, responsibilities and functioning of the CAC in an environmental assessment.

This guide is intended to be read and interpreted in conjunction with [Section 22](#) of the [Environmental Assessment Act](#) (2018) (the Act), the Public Engagement Policy (2024), and the Public Participation Funding Program (2024).

## WHAT IS A COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE?

As described in [Section 22](#) of the Act, the Chief Executive Assessment Officer of the EAO must establish one or more CACs for an assessment (including amendments) *if there is sufficient community interest* (see blue box to the right) in a project. The purpose of a CAC is to provide information to the EAO on the potential effects of the proposed project on the community.

The format and structure of a CAC will depend on the potential effects of a project on a community and the community interest in a project.

The purpose of a CAC is to:

- Support information sharing between the EAO, community members and other stakeholders;
- Foster community learning about the environmental assessment process and the proposed project;
- Provide a venue for interested local community residents or local organizations in providing advice to the EAO on the effects of the project on the community, the environment and the use of the proposed project area;
- Provide details of opportunities to provide their input and advice; and
- Provide relevant information to the EAO to inform the assessment of the project, which must be considered in the development of the decision materials that the EAO sends to the decision makers.

How does the EAO determine *sufficient community interest*?

Although the Act does not define this term, the EAO uses information and data available to understand the community interest in a project, such as proximity and potential for effects of the project on a community, number of public comments received, and interest received by the EAO in creating a CAC.

See Section '[Determining the Interest in Forming a Community Advisory Committee](#)' for more information.

## ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The role of the CAC is to review the information and documents related to the environmental assessment and to engage in the process by providing advice and input to the EAO during the public comment periods and any other engagement opportunities that are provided. The CAC informs the EAO of specific local issues and impacts to the community they represent. It is not a requirement for individuals wishing to volunteer on the CAC to possess technical expertise related to the project or industry. If a CAC is established, the role of the CAC will be to provide input to the EAO at specific stages, as detailed in the Terms of Reference specific to a given project. This involvement may also include attending meetings organized by the EAO and participating in writing a report with recommendations to the EAO.

For clarity, it is not the role of individual members of the public nor the CAC to assess or otherwise commission studies or reports that would duplicate the technical review or responsibilities of the EAO’s Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).<sup>1</sup> Any submissions providing technical review would be subject to the *Professional Governance Act*.

For each project, there are at least four phases during which the EAO will conduct a public comment period, each for a minimum of 30 days. Public comment periods will be held on:

- The Initial Project Description and Summary of Engagement (during the Early Engagement Phase);
- The draft Process Order (during the Process Planning Phase);
- The Application (during the Application Review Phase); and
- Drafts of the Assessment Report and Environmental Assessment Certificate, with the proposed conditions and project description (during the Effects Assessment Phase).

See Figure 1 below for an overview of the environmental assessment process and where in the process the public comment periods are held. The EAO may conduct additional public comment periods and carry out other engagement activities in relation to the project. The CAC will be informed of any additional ways the CAC may be engaged and opportunities to provide input.

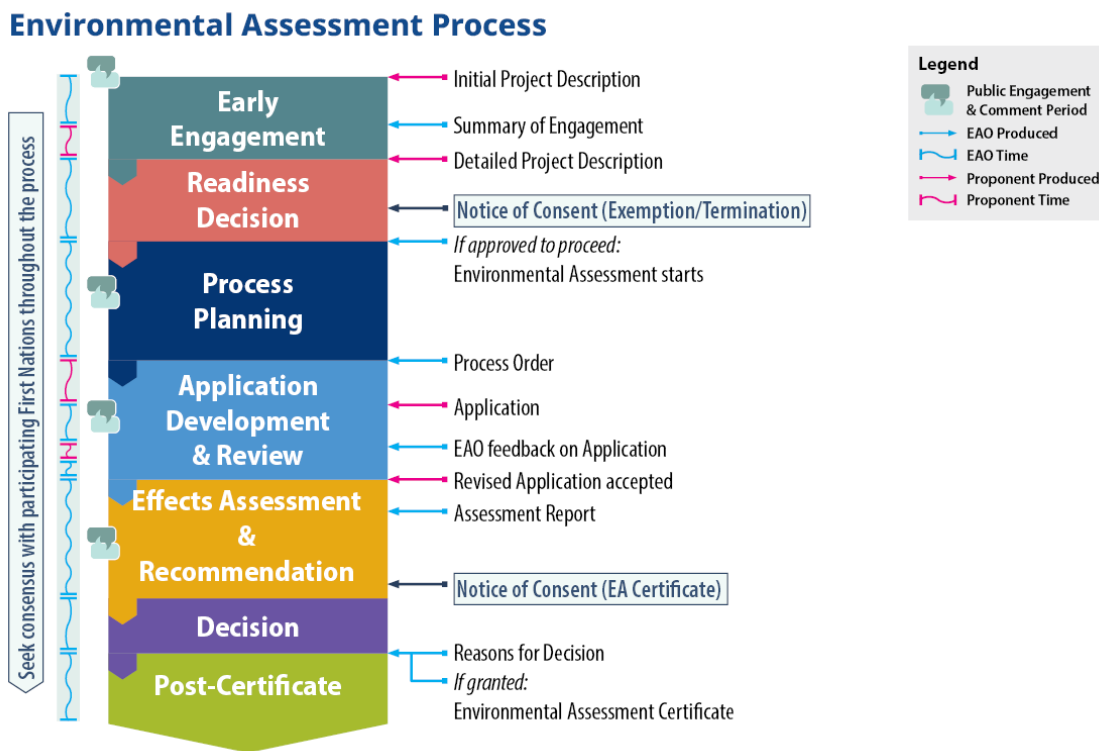


Figure 1. Overview of the environmental assessment process and identification of the public comment periods within the process

Input received during the public comment periods and through other engagement means such as topic-specific CAC meetings will be posted to the EAO’s Project Information Centre (EPIC). See the [Public Comment Policy](#) for details on the

<sup>1</sup> The TAC is established by the EAO to provide technical advice throughout the environmental assessment of a proposed project. The TAC is chaired by the EAO and made up of neutral and unbiased representatives with the mandates and technical expertise required to assess the technical aspects of a project, including appropriately qualified provincial and federal experts and regulators, First Nations, external consultants, and experts from local governments. For more information see the [Technical Advisory Committee Guideline](#).

consideration and posting of public comments. All advice and recommendations received from a CAC will be posted to the project's EPIC page or described in documents produced by the EAO such as public engagement summaries and the Assessment Report, which is used by the ministers to inform their decision. The information provided will be used by the EAO to assess the effects of the project on communities and make meaningful recommendations to decision makers regarding the project.

## ROLE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OFFICE

The EAO is responsible for conducting the environmental assessment in accordance with the requirements of the Act, its regulations and the EAO's policies and practices. Throughout the assessment process the proponent undertakes efforts to identify stakeholders and potentially affected communities, ascertain their concerns, and determine their preferred modes of engagement. However, the EAO has a statutory obligation to ensure the implementation of meaningful public participation as specified by the principles set out in the Public Engagement Policy (*coming soon*).

These statutory obligations include determining whether there is sufficient interest to establish a CAC. To fulfill this obligation, the EAO must familiarize itself with the community context, ensure that proposed engagement strategies effectively reach targeted demographics, and identify any population disproportionately affected for appropriate engagement.

The EAO tailors engagement opportunities and methods with the project's CAC in response to feedback and community interest in the project. By forming a CAC to share information with and receive advice from interested members of the public, the EAO seeks to provide individuals with better tools to engage in an environmental assessment and to submit meaningful input and advice on the potential effects of the proposed project on the community and potential mitigation or enhancement measures.

The EAO organizes and facilitates engagement with the CAC. In engaging with the CAC, the EAO will:

- Describe the environmental assessment process and keep the CAC informed of milestones and engagement opportunities;
- Provide timely access to the environmental assessment process and related publicly available technical documents;
- Provide information on the role, activities and representation on the TAC and any interaction with the CAC to support information sharing;
- Keep the proponent and TAC apprised of CAC input and key issues that arise;
- Invite CAC representatives to provide their input through the EAO-led public comment periods throughout the environmental assessment and participate in local open house opportunities;
- Assess the level of community interest, availability, demographics, scale and effects of the proposed project, and accessibility needs of the community and determine the appropriate engagement opportunities, such as directly seeking the advice of CAC representatives and establish other engagement opportunities, such as surveys, virtual and/or in-person CAC meetings, discussion with TAC members, and community events;
- Clearly articulate the purpose, role, expectations and abilities of the CAC to representatives early in the process; and
- Supply documents and supporting information in an accessible format.

The EAO will reflect how and where CAC and other public input was used in the EAO's assessment of the effects of the project in engagement summary reports and the Assessment Report, to ensure that the issues, concerns and knowledge provided are considered by decision makers when making their decision on whether to issue an Environmental Assessment Certificate. The ministers, in making their decision on a project, must consider the decision materials provided and may consider any other matters that they consider relevant to the public interest.

## FORMING A COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

### Determining the Interest in Forming a Community Advisory Committee

The decision to form a CAC is made during the Process Planning Phase of the environmental assessment. Information gained during the Early Engagement and Process Planning Phases, along with any other relevant information related to community interest in the project, is used to determine whether there is sufficient community interest in a project to establish a CAC. When determining whether there is sufficient interest, the following will be considered in the decision:

- Proximity of the project to communities, including seasonal or temporary residences;
- Potential for the project to affect communities;
- Proximity to important or sensitive community and natural places such as: municipal boundaries, parks, schools, hospitals, housing, water supplies, roads, railways, watersheds, important species habitat areas, sensitive ecosystems, biodiversity hotspots, and protected and recreational areas;
- Amount and scope of comments received during the Early Engagement public comment period on the Initial Project Description and the public comment period during Process Planning;
- Geographic distribution of the subscribers (whether they are residents living near the project or farther away);
- Turnout and outcomes of public engagement activities undertaken during Early Engagement and Process Planning;
- Input received from local governments on their preferences for engagement in the environmental assessment;
- Input received from the public, including residents, businesses, local/community non-government organizations and other public stakeholders, on their preferences for engagement; and,
- The number of people who have indicated they are interested in participating in the CAC during the Early Engagement and Process Planning phase public comment periods.

If the range of issues and concerns or the geographic scope of the Project is considered large enough to benefit from the participation of more than one CAC into the assessment process, and there are enough candidates to draw upon for potential membership, the Chief Executive Assessment Officer may decide to establish more than one CAC.

In the Process Planning phase of the environmental assessment, the EAO formalizes how the environmental assessment will be carried out for a project. If the decision is made to establish a CAC or CACs, the Process Order will set out how the committee or committees is/are to be engaged. An Assessment Plan is included with the Process Order which specifies the procedures for the assessment as well as engagement details and timelines and the roles and responsibilities of each of the environmental assessment participants, including each CAC, for each subsequent phase of the environmental assessment. During the Process Planning Phase, the EAO consults and obtains feedback on the Assessment Plan from members of the public, technical advisors, local governments, participating Indigenous nations, and interested organizations. See the [Process Planning Policy](#) for more information on the Process Planning phase.

Based on the community setting, the EAO also selects appropriate public engagement methods, such as virtual meetings, surveys, workshops, community events, and open houses. When the public engagement approach includes a CAC, the CAC may take a variety of forms and the EAO expects to tailor the role of the CAC to the circumstances of the project, the environmental assessment and the community.

#### Amendments

For amendment processes, the Chief Executive Assessment Officer may decide to establish a CAC if they consider there is sufficient community interest, and it is warranted by the nature of the amendment under consideration. If a CAC is established, the EAO will hold a public comment period on the amendment application (see the [Amendment Guide](#) for

more information). The CAC is established during the development of the amendment procedures, and the EAO will reach out to any previous CAC members to assess their interest in participating in a CAC on an amendment.

## Selection of Committee Representatives

A CAC will consist of up to 12 community representatives, and membership is at the EAO's discretion. The process of nominating representatives may involve a combination of individuals expressing interest via the CAC link on EPIC and individuals identified by the EAO based on the information gathered during the Early Engagement and Process Planning Phases. Committee representation should reflect the range of demographics and concerns present within the community.

The following considerations may guide the EAO's selection of committee representatives:

- Ability of an individual to represent a concerned or interested group or organization within the local or regional area, including a disproportionately affected group or demographic;
- Specific knowledge or expertise that will contribute to the environmental assessment process regarding potential effects - both positive and negative – of the project on the community and its surroundings;
- Familiarity with the community or region, including a historical understanding of changes that have occurred within the community and to the project's receiving environment;
- A representative that is recommended by a local government; and/or
- A representative that is recommended by a community group, non-governmental organizations, or labour union.

It may happen, particularly in smaller communities, that representatives of the community are, or become over the course of the project, representatives of local government (councillors). In this case it is important to be aware that if 'quorum' were reached (a majority of a council is in attendance) during a CAC meeting, it would represent an official council meeting which is to be avoided. If this occurs, one or more councillors will be asked to leave a meeting.

## Developing the Terms of Reference

The EAO will create a detailed Terms of Reference for any CAC, with input and agreement from CAC representatives. The Terms of Reference will guide the CAC's work and role in an environmental assessment as an advisory body, and would include the purpose of the CAC, roles and responsibilities, operating rules/standards of conduct, and procedural and administrative details.

## TRAVEL AND OTHER EXPENSES

As described in [Section 22\(2\)](#) of the Act, a representative on a CAC may be paid reasonable and necessary travelling and out-of-pocket expenses incurred in carrying out duties of the committee. Please see the [Public Participation Funding Program \(coming soon\)](#) for more information.

## CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

Representatives of the CAC are entitled to their privacy, and no names or identifying information about CAC representatives are to be shared with the public or the proponent without the representative's consent.



## APPENDIX: COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE – TEMPLATE

### Purpose

The purpose of a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) is to advise the Environmental Assessment Office (EAO) on the potential effects of the proposed project on the community.

The purpose of a CAC is to:

- Support information sharing between the EAO, community members and other stakeholders;
- Foster community learning about the environmental assessment process and the proposed project;
- Provide a venue for interested local community residents or local organizations in providing advice to the EAO on the effects of the project on the community, the environment and the use of the proposed project area;
- Provide details of opportunities to provide their input and advice; and
- Provide relevant information to the EAO to inform the assessment of the project, which must be considered in the development of the decision materials that the EAO sends to the decision makers.

### Guiding Principles

**Respectful Communication:** CAC representatives engage in respectful communication and seek to provide informed input in a constructive manner. CAC representatives are responsible for conducting themselves in accordance with the public comment and moderation guidelines as described in the [Public Comment Policy](#) and contributing constructively during public comment periods and any other established engagement activities to meet the stated objectives.

**Issues-based Participation and Scope Accountability:** To support mutual learning and constructive engagement, the EAO provides the CAC with information on the environmental assessment process and the proposed project. CAC representatives provide input that identifies issues or concerns or otherwise contributes to a better understanding of the potential effects of the proposed project on the community. CAC representatives avoid providing comments that only adopt a position for or against the project; rather CAC representative comments should focus on clearly articulating any interests or concerns about the project as proposed by the proponent. The CAC is intended to supplement, not duplicate or oversee, the TAC established by the EAO for the environmental assessment of the project.

**Transparent and Timely Sharing of Information:** The EAO informs the CAC early and regularly about the proposed project, the environmental assessment process and engagement activities. CAC comments and proponent and EAO responses will be clearly documented and accessible on the EAO's Project Information Centre and will be directly shared when possible.

**Inclusivity:** The CAC is open to interested individuals who have information that enables them to provide the EAO with advice on the effects of the project on the community. This will allow the EAO to capture a diverse range of knowledge and perspectives on the potential effects of the proposed project on the community. The CAC is intended to complement, not displace, other public engagement opportunities occurring throughout the environmental assessment of the project.

### Opportunities for Community Advisory Committee Representatives

CAC representatives will be invited to:

- Review and familiarize themselves with the information provided to them by the EAO on the project and the environmental assessment process;
- Provide input on the draft Process Order, Application, draft Assessment Report and the draft Environmental Assessment Certificate, including proposed conditions and project description; and
- Participate in any other engagement opportunities that may be established. Additional opportunities and the role of the CAC will be described in the Assessment Plan for each project (see [Process Planning Policy](#)).

## Scope and Expectations of the Community Advisory Committee

The scope of the CAC is to provide advice on the potential effects of the project on the community, the environment and the use of the proposed project area. Although members of the CAC may have technical expertise, it is not required to participate on the CAC. Any technical review provided will be considered in the assessment. The CAC also may describe concerns regarding project design, but the CAC is not able to require the proponent to change project design or mitigations.

The CAC is intended to provide advice to the EAO that represents the community that may be impacted (negatively or positively) by the proposed project, and less so individual views and opinions. It is expected that the CAC seek ways to obtain additional community advice where possible, in particular where there could be effects on certain populations which may not be able to interact with the EA process regularly. The CAC may be asked to develop a recommendations report for the EAO regarding their understanding of potential effects to the community.

CAC members are accountable for conduct and deadlines established by the Project Lead at the EAO, as the delegated decision maker responsible for the EA process.

## Representatives and Roles

In the CAC Terms of Reference for the Project, a table will be included that lists representatives and identifies their roles.

## Removal of Representatives from the Community Advisory Committee

If a CAC representative is found to not abide by the standards of conduct, behaves in a way that undermines the functioning of the CAC as outlined in the Terms of Reference, or is absent from CAC proceedings repeatedly without a valid reason, they may be removed by the CAC at the project lead's discretion.