



Candidate Whale Heritage Site

Establishing a Steering Committee

To coordinate and facilitate the development of your Whale Heritage Site (WHS) initiative, we suggest that your organisation forms a steering committee. We encourage you to seek out enthusiastic, creative and passionate individuals who can serve on the steering committee and help launch, maintain, and sustain your Whale Heritage Site application process.

What is a Steering Committee?

At its core, the "steering committee" is a "governing device" used to organize key project stakeholders and empower them to "steer" a project (or group of projects) to successful conclusion.

And "steering" is the key word.

Steering is not managing. Managing gets the job done, but steering determines what the job is. We all know that every project must be led by an underlying purpose and a vision. To deliver required results, that purpose and vision must be clearly defined, it must be monitored and it must be maintained. **That's the role of the project steering committee - to deliberate, make decisions, advise, provide strategic oversight, and to serve as the primary "advocate" for all the assigned initiatives.**

Here are some tips for forming an effective WHS steering committee:

- **Include staff, volunteers, and community members.** The steering committee's impact and resilience depends on the commitment, experience, and engagement of its members.
- **Ensure that the membership is diverse and inclusive.** The most effective steering committee includes diverse representatives from both your own organisation and the

broader community. Focus on individuals who are familiar with your site, its challenges, and the opportunities it offers. Think beyond your normal contacts to other community stakeholders that could be influential or possess different skills, such as through the arts.

- **Assign leadership.** Select co-chairs to serve as leaders for the steering committee. Having two chairs helps increase the group's efficiency and distribute responsibilities. These leaders are responsible for facilitating the steering committee meetings and keeping the members engaged about the progress being made.
- **Keep it simple and meaningful.** The steering committee processes can be simple and informal — its purpose is to serve as a mobilizing force, not a bureaucracy. Nonetheless, you should have an agenda for each meeting and stay on time in order to respect the time people are volunteering for this effort. Make your meetings meaningful and purposeful for everyone involved.
- **Meet on a regular basis.** Meeting on a regularly scheduled basis helps keep members engaged and activities moving forward. It's best to set up a series of meetings scheduled at the same date/time each month (either in person or by conference call) so members can plan their calendars.
- **Establish sub-committees / workgroups.** At some point, you may want to establish sub-committees or workgroups to focus on various goals and activities. Allow members to self-select the workgroup on which they want to dedicate their time and energy.
- **Use the Whale Heritage Site logos carefully.** Carefully consider how best to use the WHS 'Candidate' logo. Involve Steering Committee members in this discussion and be careful to ensure that all key stakeholder groups have been notified and are in agreement before deciding on where and how the logo should be used so that it benefits the process.
- **Indigenous peoples.** Groups of people who originally populated certain parts of the world, now often marginalised by nation states, are called by many names, for example Aboriginals, First Nations and Native. In recent years the term Indigenous peoples has gained currency to describe these groups. Tourism can assist cultural revitalisation of indigenous communities and be a force for empowerment. On the other hand, it may see the often marginalised people and their villages becoming mere showcases for tourists, their culture reduced to souvenirs for sale, their environment to be photographed and left without real engagement.

It is essential that all indigenous communities living inside or linked to a proposed Whale Heritage Site are offered the opportunity to engage with the process from the beginning. The views of indigenous people must be heard and carefully considered,

their specific needs addressed, and their role in the Whale Heritage Site application process clearly defined and agreed upon.