BC Water Metering Pilot Project
Community of Practice (CoP)
Terms of Reference
April 2025

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1.   Introduction

The Provincial Government Budget 2024 committed to new measures to help mitigate and better respond to the impacts of climate emergencies. Priority infrastructure projects and programs to decrease flood risks and strengthen drought resiliency were highlighted. This included $50 million for a Water Meter Pilot Program ("the Program") to help fund metering projects in smaller communities throughout BC.

Participating water service providers will be asked to collect data and information on water production and consumption trends throughout the project. They will also be asked to actively participate in both an adjunct research program and a Program of practice. The ultimate goals of the Program are as follows:

• Improve understanding of the impact water metering can have on reducing community water demand.

• Improve understanding of the impact water metering can have on reducing non-revenue water including leakage in distribution systems.

• Develop best practices for water metering in the following areas: procurement, project implementation, rate setting and customer billing, water consumption data management, customer engagement, system loss management, and supporting conservation projects.

• Use the results of the project to create and share information and best practices.

Throughout late 2024 and early 2025, the Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs invited small and medium sized communities to apply to participate in the Program through an open selection process. Nineteen organizations were chosen from across British Columbia representing First Nations communities, improvement districts, regional districts, and local municipalities. These organizations will work together to help the Province achieve the Program goals.

To support the Program, the Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs is establishing a "Water Metering Community of Practice" (CoP) to support effective and efficient implementation of metering projects across the pilot project communities.

These Terms of Reference outline the roles and responsibilities of the CoP to ensure participants are aware of the mandate and expectations. They also establish the advisory and information sharing nature of this group.

2.   Mandate, Role, and Structure

The purposes of the CoP are to share information and best practices to improve participants' knowledge and performance in the area water meter installation and water conservation, support the Province's adjunct research program, and develop "made in BC" best practices for other jurisdictions to implement their own metering programs in the future.

Core elements may include information sharing, making recommendations on priority actions and activities for the Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs and its consulting support team, sequencing, partnerships, allocation of effort, developing best practices, and resourcing.

Topics that may be of interest to the CoP include:

• procurement of meter installation services;
• water meter technology;
• installation project planning;
• installation logistics and customer communications best practice;
• post-installation customer service and communication;
• water meter software, billing systems, other information systems, and system integration;
• water meter data;
• creating or updating supporting bylaws (waterworks bylaws, water conservation bylaws, rates and fees bylaws, etc.);
• non-revenue water management;

- volume based billing and conservation-oriented water rates;
- communications best practice – volume-based billing;
- meter asset management;
- organizational change management
- source water monitoring; and
- adjunct research program support and findings.

2.1 Role

The role of the CoP is advisory and information sharing. The Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs will have ultimate responsibility for Program decisions at the Provincial level. Participating organizations will have ultimate responsibility for decisions about water metering and conservation in their respective communities. The primary focuses of the CoP are to share information and best practices on Program implementation, and to support effective implementation of the adjunct research program.

2.2 Structure and Membership

Membership on the CoP consists of operational staff from participant communities and designated Provincial Government staff. The work of the CoP will be managed by an independent consulting team that has been hired to run and facilitate the process (their specific roles are described in Section 7, below).

There is no renumeration from the Provincial Government for participation in the CoP, as it is expected that member's organizations will cover such costs as outlined at the application stage.

It is anticipated that CoP members will generally be operational staff from the water, infrastructure or public works departments of Program participants' organizations who are tasked with overseeing local meter project implementation. However, it is also anticipated that topics of interest to other parts of their organizations, such as Finance, Communications, Customer Service, or Information Technology, will arise over the course of Program implementation. This will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis but may involve collaboration opportunities through a shared Teams space, special meetings for these colleagues, joint meetings, webinars, shareable recordings of the CoP meetings, or other solutions.

Continuity is important. it is expected that CoP members will attend all meetings as best they can. In the event that a member is unable to attend a meeting, they should advise the organizers as soon as possible. Requests to designate an alternate are discouraged but may be approved by the Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs on a case-by-case basis.

Requests from observers to attend meetings will also be considered on a case-by-case basis. If an observer wishes to attend an upcoming meeting, it is requested that they inform the organizers prior to the meeting to inform logistics planning.

3. Community of Practice Deliberations

Deliberations by the CoP will include those issues that are related specifically to the Program. Deliberations will not focus on Provincial Government water or infrastructure-related policy generally or administration of other Provincial Government grant programs.

If scope issues arise which are believed to be outside Provincial Government jurisdiction and/or the intended scope of the Program, they will be sent to Ministry of Housing Municipal Affairs staff for direction on how to proceed.

Issues determined to be outside the scope of the process will be documented and, where applicable, referred to the appropriate agency. Issues involving broader topics that are best addressed or directed to other pieces of legislation or regulations could form the basis of additional recommendations in the Program final report that will be prepared by the consulting team.

3.1 Deliverable

The deliverables from the CoP process will be meeting records that summarize key issues or best practices identified and recommendations to inform subsequent Program development.

4. Community of Practice Member Responsibilities

4.1 Member Responsibility

Members of the CoP are responsible for:

1. Attending each meeting.

2. Providing comments in advance or appropriate information to the facilitator in the event of an expected absence.

3. Preparing for each meeting by reading meeting minutes, studies, and other material distributed as part of this consultative process; every effort will be made to distribute pre-reading materials at least seven days prior to meetings.

4. Being accountable to other CoP members.

5. Abiding by the code of conduct during the process as outlined below.

4.2 Community of Practice Operating Guidelines

The CoP will continue from Spring 2025 through to at least December 2027. Meetings will be held bi-monthly or more frequently depending on Program needs and the interest of members. Meetings will typically be held virtually via Microsoft Teams. Meetings will be held at the call of the Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs Lead. The Ministry Lead reserves the right to call for closed meetings to discuss topics of a commercially sensitive nature, or issues specific to confidential regulatory practices.

Depending on level of interest and commitment from members, the CoP may continue beyond 2027 and possibly grow to include new member communities. This may involve transitioning the hosting of the CoP from the Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs to another suitable organization.

4.3 Code of Conduct

All CoP members will endeavour to:

1. Work constructively and collaboratively to address areas of mutual concern.

2. Support an open and inclusive process.

3. Treat others with courtesy and respect.

4. Listen attentively with an aim to understand.

5. Be concise in making a point.

6. Speak in terms of interests instead of positions.

7. Be open to a range of outcomes (as opposed to being attached to certain outcomes in advance of the process).

8. Let opposing views co-exist.

9. Avoid disruption of meetings (e.g., cell phones, multi-tasking, etc.)

10. Allow issues that fall outside the meeting agenda to be addressed later.

11. Deliberate with a view to arriving at consensus.

4.4 Information Sharing

CoP members are encouraged to share documentation and information they develop for their own metering projects with other members of the community to improve program delivery efficiency for all. The following may help guide this information sharing:

- sharing local information and documentation is encouraged but not required;

- all CoP members are asked to respect the intellectual property of other members' organizations;

- when a member shares information or documentation with the CoP, they may place limitations or restrictions on use. For example:
  - they may request that it only be shared within the CoP and not shared with non-member organizations or with the public;
  - they may request that the author or source of the information or documentation be identified and recognized;
  - conversely, they may request that the source of the information or documentation not be identified;
  - they may place limitations on how documentation may be modified or tailored for other users' needs; and
  - they may request that information not be posted on publicly accessible spaces such as online;

- use restrictions or limitations will be documented in CoP minutes and, if appropriate within the documentation itself. Members are asked to respect this guidance or to seek authorization from the source of the information/documentation if there is a specific need to vary from the guidance.

5.   Consensus Decision-Making

Consensus is a goal but not a requirement of the advisory and information sharing process. For the purposes of clarity, consensus is defined as a decision that participants can accept, without having to agree on all the details of any recommendations put forward. Meeting documentation will identify areas of agreement, areas of discord, and reasons behind them.

The decision-making process to determine the CoP's position on a particular issue or when making a recommendation will not be by majority votes. In fact, there will be no voting *per se*, but there may be ranking exercises carried out at various points to gain insight of where broad agreement may lie.

When the CoP cannot reach agreement on a recommendation (non-consensus), the meeting notes will record and indicate differences of opinion and reasons for non-consensus. Members in disagreement will be responsible for describing what part(s) of a recommendation do not meet their needs and possible alternative solutions.

5.1   Openness and Criticism

If left unaddressed, dissatisfaction can become destructive and undermine the effectiveness of the CoP. Members agree to raise criticisms of the process or the emerging results as agenda items for discussion in an open manner rather than taking them behind the scenes and talking negatively about the process. CoP members will bring issues of dissatisfaction or criticism to the attention of the facilitator to be addressed in between meetings or raised at upcoming meetings.

6.   Public Communication

The Program is intended to be an open, transparent process. The Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs will manage external communications about development of the Provincial Program. No member should speak to the media on behalf of the CoP. All media requests related to the Provincial Program should be directed to the Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs who will in turn address them and report back to the CoP. Local communication about implementation of metering programs in individual communities is the responsibility of the respective member organizations.

7.   Community of Practice Support

A consulting team will serve as an independent resource and support to the Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs throughout Program planning and implementation. The consulting team plays the dual role of providing technical support and managing and facilitating the CoP process. The consulting team consists of staff from Kerr Wood Leidal and Econics.

The facilitator(s) will assist the CoP's deliberations through:

1.   Coordinating and managing the overall planning process.

2.   Structuring meetings to encourage free and open discussion of relevant issues.

3.   Remaining impartial and objective throughout the process.

4.   Ensuring that the Code of Conduct is followed.

5.   Ensuring that all parties are heard and that differences are adequately addressed.

6.   Creating a collaborative problem-solving environment and promoting creative thinking to overcome roadblocks and obstacles.

7.   Being respectful of participants' time and making the best use of meeting time.

8.   Preparing draft meeting summaries within a timely fashion after each meeting.

9.   Preparing and coordinating pre-reading packages for members in order for them to come to meetings prepared.

7.1   Information Systems

The project support team (see Section 7) will establish and maintain an online platform using Microsoft Teams and access will be made available to all CoP members. This will be used for the following purposes:

• document storage and sharing including meeting minutes, agendas, presentations, resources, etc.;
• channels for discussion and information sharing on topics of interest; and
• virtual meeting coordination.

If a CoP member is unable to access the Microsoft Teams virtual environment for any reason, the support team will explore alternative solutions.

8.   Changes to Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference presented in this document may be amended from time to time as needed.