



Our Living Waters

Amplifying the impact of Canada's water community

Our Living Waters is a collaborative network of organizations working together under a common strategic framework to achieve the ambitious goal of all waters in good health by 2030. Reaching this goal means ensuring all our waters are free of contaminants and are safe for swimming and drinking; that our waters support life, an economy and a healthy environment including fish that are healthy, and safe to eat, and including our smallest freshwater species like aquatic bugs, which form the base of the food chain. We are reaching for inspiring results, and we know that no one organization, no matter how large, can achieve them on their own.

The idea for Our Living Waters emerged out of a number of studies, gatherings and conversations over the past few years that brought together perspectives of NGOs, grassroots groups and funders to explore ways to strengthen the water movement in Canada. Support from MEC and Tides Canada created an opportunity to convene a small group of individuals from water organizations and the funding community for a series of working sessions to dig deeper into this question.

Outlined in this document is the product of those working sessions, which occurred in 2013 and 2014, and the efforts of many in the freshwater community since then. At the second biennial Living Waters Rally, in October 2014, the Our Living Waters framework was discussed and debated by 110 delegates representing recreational, indigenous, cottager, faith, philanthropic, environmental, business, academic, and arts and culture groups. The Rally culminated with a resounding “thumbs up” show of support for Our Living Waters and a desire among delegates to actively engage in the next phase the initiative. Then, in 2015, a shared measurement system to support the aligned actions of many in the freshwater community was created, and continues to evolve to drive coordinated action as more and more organizations join the Our Living Waters Network to collaborate towards a sustainable water future for Canada.

Why OLV? An unprecedented opportunity

We are in the midst of an era of unprecedented change when it comes to the future of Canada's fresh water. Mounting pressures on rivers, lakes and streams; closed beaches, compromised drinking water supplies, flood and drought; and major changes to the laws and policies established to protect Canada's waters, are cause for major concern. But all of this change, while indeed troubling, also represents an unprecedented opportunity for Canada's water community. Why?

Because people care. Public opinion surveys show that Canadians share a deep connection to water. Regardless of political preference, where they live, or the state of the economy, water is overwhelmingly considered to be the country's most important natural resource.¹

People are concerned. These same surveys indicate that Canadians are becoming increasingly anxious about threats to the health of our waters.² Problems are no longer abstract. They are impacting lives and livelihoods, communities and economies, the built environment and bottom lines. And they are undermining the health of entire ecosystems.

And people are looking for leadership. Polling data also shows that people are more confident in NGOs, stewardship organizations and local groups than governments when it comes to protecting and restoring the health our waters.³ People look to us for leadership.

Our challenge: Networking for change

The pool of energy, experience and expertise that makes up Canada's water community is broad and deep. We are thousands of organizations working from coast to coast to coast on everything from stream restoration and public engagement to community-based monitoring and public policy reform. This breadth and diversity is a major source of strength. Yet despite our many efforts, Canada's waters continue to suffer.

Surveys and studies of Canada's water community, whether regionally focused or national in scope, indicate that there is a need and a desire to better coordinate our efforts—across the country and across scales. They speak to needs for stronger networks, a united voice, strategic collaboration, and evidence of our collective progress and impact (see below).

But better coordination will not happen automatically. It requires strategy and structure; time and resources; communication and commitment. The aim of Our Living Waters is to move beyond recognition of the need for better coordination toward a network to make it happen.

Coordination--The Key to Amplifying Our Impact

"We need dedicated time and money for people to work on a national strategy that is connected to the grassroots and regional groups and bringing that experience together in a really strong national voice."

- The Canadian Waterscape: Assessing the needs of Canada's water leaders (2011)

"The current piecemeal approach to addressing Great Lakes water issues is resulting in lack of clarity on whether real progress is being made on the health of the Great Lakes."

- The Great Lakes Waterscape: Assessing the needs of the Ontario water community (2012)

"With appropriate capacity, support, and opportunities for groups to connect and coordinate, this movement could evolve from a loose network of organizations into a strong and united voice for change..."

- The State of the Water Movement in British Columbia (2013)

"...water funders will need to actively work together as a community to leverage their resources, exchange knowledge, develop coordinated strategies and support integrated solutions."

- The Future of Freshwater Funding in Canada: Mobilizing Collective Resources for Healthy Watersheds (2014)

Harnessing our collective impact

The process for developing Our Living Waters has been guided by Collective Impact—an approach to strategic coordination that is gaining momentum among NGOs, community and grassroots groups, and funders (see below).⁴ Collective Impact is founded on the recognition that no single organization, however well managed or funded, can single-handedly address complex social and environmental issues. Achieving large-scale, systemic change requires engagement, alignment and coordination of many, diverse organizations and efforts.

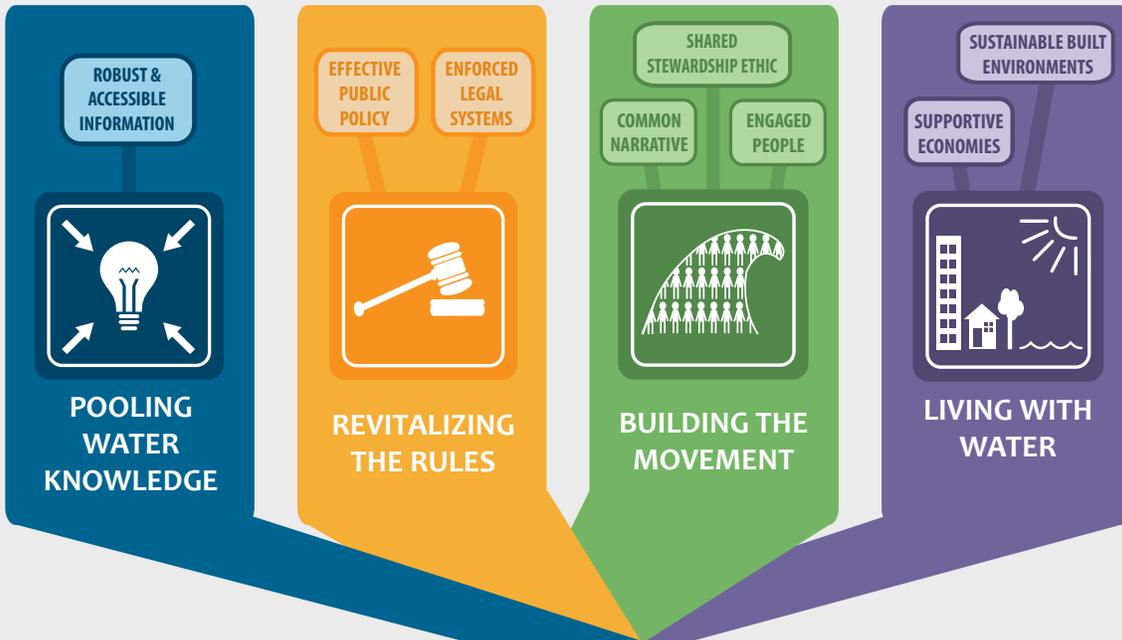
Five Key Ingredients Define Successful Collective Impact Initiatives⁵

1. **Common Agenda:** A shared vision for change supported by common goals and a joint strategy.
2. **Shared Measurement:** Collecting data to track and report on progress against shared outcomes.
3. **Mutually Reinforcing Activities:** Differentiated activities coordinated through a common action plan.
4. **Continuous Communication:** Consistent and open dialogue across many players to build trust, sustain momentum and celebrate success.
5. **Backbone Infrastructure:** A management team with the resources & skills to convene and coordinate diverse organizations and to undertake shared measurement and reporting.

A common water agenda

Harnessing the potential of Collective Impact starts by coming together around a common agenda for change. The diagram on the following page illustrates the strategic framework that lays out a common agenda for Our Living Waters. It consists of a **an ambitious goal** and eight **winning conditions**—the basic requirements for success—organized under four **strategic themes: Revitalizing the Rules; Pooling Water Knowledge; Living with Water; and Building the Water Movement.**

Our Living Waters Strategic Framework



A map of Canada is shown, with a white heartbeat line running horizontally across the bottom of the map area. To the right of the map, the goal is stated in large, bold letters.

GOAL
ALL WATERS IN CANADA IN GOOD HEALTH BY 2030

From common agenda to coordinated action

The ambitious goal: All waters in Canada in good health, sets the overarching vision and high-level direction for Our Living Waters.

The winning conditions are envisioned as a set of circumstances that when brought together are likely to deliver on the goal. Arranging them under the four strategic themes provides a simple organizing structure to plan for and advance coordinated action. The intent is to create an integrated framework to facilitate mutually reinforcing activities, by multiple groups and organizations, networked to drive progress toward the BHAG.

Winning Conditions Defined

Winning Conditions “A set of circumstances that when brought together are likely to achieve a goal”		Strategic Themes
Robust & Accessible Information	Accessible, scientific, traditional and local knowledge to monitor, assess, and report on freshwater health and to anticipate and understand emerging issues	Pooling Water Knowledge
Effective Public Policy	A public policy framework supported by financial and institutional capacity for sustained, effective implementation	
Enforced Legal Systems	Legal systems are accessible and establish standards and processes that are enforced and ensure accountability	Revitalizing the Rules
Shared Water Stewardship Ethic	A diverse population of individuals and organizations with a shared stewardship ethic ensuring the health of our waters	
Common Water Narrative	A shared story connects regions and winning conditions	Building the Movement
Engaged People	Constituencies with influence engage in effective collective decision making and exercise authority	
Sustainable Built Environments	Human-made surroundings and their supporting infrastructure function in harmony with watershed ecosystems	
Supportive Economies	Economic systems supports healthy watersheds	Living with Water

The Our Living Waters Network: Moving from idea to action

Building on this foundation, we can begin moving from idea to action by joining together in a network of organizations who are committed to working together to achieve our ambitious goal of all waters in good health by 2030.

There are many benefits to becoming a OLW Network member. Here are a few:

1. Canada is a vast country with many freshwater advocates responding locally to the threats facing our waters. The OLW Network helps us span the country through a shared measurement system that clarifies how our actions are aligned, can be scaled up, and whether our collective actions are making a difference.
2. Members learn from each other, increase their peer-to-peer network, take advantage of partnerships, and amplify their own organization's efforts through collective support.
3. Members have access to collaborative funding activities that address priorities for freshwater health across the country. Members can help advise on these priorities through activities like our biennial Our Living Waters gathering, annual surveys and participation in working group activities.

Moving Forward

Coming together around a common agenda and sustaining better coordination are no easy feats. We all have our own objectives, milestones, projects and programs to manage. We are all strapped for time and money. The time scale is daunting—a decade, likely more, to mark progress against our ambitious goal.

But we also know that we are facing an unprecedented opportunity to make big change. We know that people care, that they are concerned, and that they are looking for leadership. And we know that seizing the opportunity to make big change will mean working better together.

That is the point of the Our Living Waters Network. Our Living Waters is not about asking organizations to do different things, or about everyone doing the same things. It is about strengthening the water movement and amplifying our collective influence and impact to lead Canada to a sustainable water future.

¹RBC Water Attitudes Study 2014. Available at <http://www.rbc.com/community-sustainability/environment/rbc-blue-water/water-attitude-study.html>; Freshwater Insights Canada 2013: A National Survey of Canadian Attitudes on Fresh Water conducted by Fathom6 Strategies for the Canadian Freshwater Alliance.

²According to Freshwater Insights Canada 2013, 77% of Canadians believe water degradation will become a serious problem in 10 years if nothing is done to improve its management.

³Freshwater Insights Canada 2013.

⁴See www.collectiveimpactforum.org, www.fsg.org, and www.ssireview.org for a growing body of literature on Collective Impact. Collective Impact is one of four granting streams in the Ontario Trillium Foundation's ReDesign205 process (see: <http://www.otf-redesign2015.ca>).

⁵Adapted from: Channeling change: Making Collective Impact Work (Hanleybrown, Kania & Kramer, 2012). Available at: http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/channeling_change_making_collective_impact_work.

⁶The goal of the EU WFD is to achieve 'good status' for all surface waters by 2015. 'Good status' refers to both ecological status and chemical status. For more see: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/objectives/status_en.htm. For analysis and commentary on what Canada can learn from the EU framework see Shared Water, One Framework by Émilie Lagacé at <http://www.flowcanada.org/document/301>.