

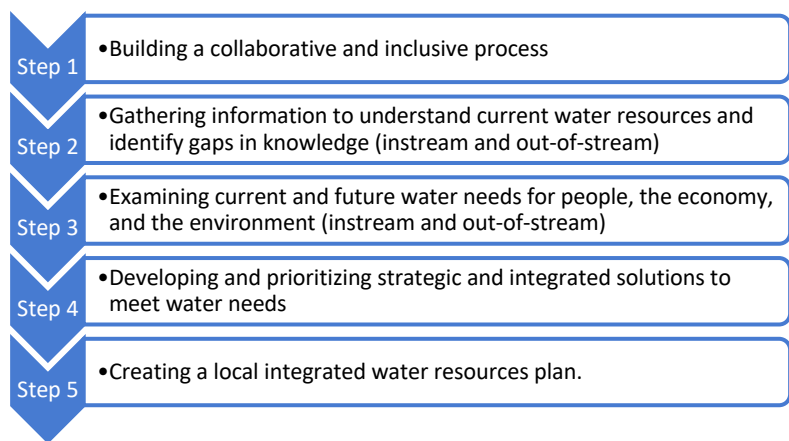
Integrated Place-Based Water Resources Planning: Revising the Five-Step Planning Framework¹

Place-Based Planning Guidance

In 2015, the Oregon Legislature passed ORS 536.220, which granted authority to the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) to make grants and provide technical assistance to communities engaging in place-based integrated water resources planning. In 2016, OWRD awarded grants to four pilot place-based planning groups:

- Lower John Day Place-Based Partnership
- Harney Community-Based Water Planning Collaborative
- Upper Grande Ronde River Watershed Partnership
- Mid-Coast Water Planning Partnership

OWRD drafted planning guidelines based on the principles in Oregon's Integrated Water Resources Strategy (IWRs). The guidelines included a five-step framework that the groups were expected to follow. At the outset, OWRD provided detailed guidance for Step 1. Detailed guidance for the other steps was developed later. In 2021, OWRD contracted with the National Policy Consensus Center and Oregon State University Cooperative extension to evaluate the pilot program. Key findings and recommendations regarding the five-step framework are described below.



Findings

OWRD anticipated it would take the groups about three years to complete the five steps. However, most of the planning groups took nearly twice that long to develop their Action Plans, and one group required even more time.

- All the groups were slowed down by Step 2 (assessing the existing and future water supply) and Step 3 (identifying existing and future water needs). Progress was slow because data were not readily available, non-existent, or collected at spatial or temporal scale inappropriate for local-level planning.
- The planning process also took longer because detailed guidance for Steps 3, 4, and 5 was not available until several years into the program.
- OWRD intentionally provided initial guidance that was in draft form and relatively general so that the groups could adjust the framework fit their specific planning contexts. Although helpful in allowing for flexibility, this approach contributed to confusion as to how the groups should proceed, leading the groups to produce reports for Steps 2 and 3 that were much more detailed than they needed to be.
- The groups used various forms of consensus decision-making and sought to engage a diverse set of water users; both of which took more time than the groups had anticipated.

¹ This factsheet was produced for the Oregon Water Resources Department by: Downey, J., R. McLain, S. Boyers, and E.J. Davis. May 4, 2022. National Policy Consensus Center and Oregon State University Extension Service.

Recommendations for Improving the Five-Step Framework

Recommendations from the planning groups and state agencies for improving the framework are listed below.

Planning Steps and Recommended Actions
<p>Step 0 (new): Build a foundation for place-based planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spend time building trust among stakeholders and between planning groups and state agencies.• Create pre-packaged sets of data and analyses for Steps 2 and 3.• Revise existing planning guidance with input from multiple state agencies
<p>Step 1: Build a collaborative and inclusive process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide a “boot camp” for planning group members in how to conduct a multi-stakeholder process, community outreach, facilitation, and consensus decision-making, water sciences, and water laws.• Provide on-going cross-collaborative learning opportunities and opportunities for information-sharing between state agencies and planning groups
<p>Steps 2 and 3 (combine): Gather information to understand current water resources, examine current and future water needs for people, the economy, and the environment, and identify gaps in knowledge with attention to both instream and out of stream resources, needs, and data gaps.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide groups with pre-packaged data and data analyses, including assumptions underlying models• Provide training in data interpretation and building scenarios of alternative water futures• Where data credibility is contested, engage the planning groups in data production or analysis
<p>Step 4: Develop and prioritize strategic and integrated solutions to meet water needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide training in the use of decision support tools for prioritizing strategies.
<p>Step 5: Adopt a local integrated water resources plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have Step 5 guidance ready at the beginning of the planning process to allow the groups to set appropriate and achievable goals.• Provide clear sideboards for state review criteria for the Action Plans to reduce uncertainty within the planning groups as to what to include in their plans.
<p>Step 6 (new): Implement a local integrated water resources plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide implementation guidance• Incorporate monitoring and evaluation to increase accountability• Incorporate a requirement for a periodic plan update and state review

Need for Alternatives to the Five-Step Framework

The five-step framework did not work well for the Harney Basin group, which was in an area experiencing a groundwater crisis. Given the urgency to come up with solutions to that crisis, after completing Step 1, that group undertook Step 4 (identify and prioritize strategies for solving water resource issues) while working on Steps 2 and 3. However, they found that working out of sequence was challenging because detailed guidance for Steps 3, 4, and 5 was not initially available. Participants recommended that the state provide an alternative place-based process or suite of processes that could be used in areas where water is already overallocated.