

An aerial photograph of a city during autumn. A wide river flows through the center, flanked by lush green and yellow trees. On the left bank, there are several large, multi-story apartment buildings and a parking lot. A multi-lane road runs parallel to the river. The sky is a soft, hazy orange, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall scene is a mix of urban development and natural beauty.

Building Communities of the Future Through Water

Strategic Plan for 2022-2027



March 2022

Communities across Canada face an uncertain and rapidly changing future, including major challenges linked to global pandemics, climate change, shifting population distribution, and declines in biodiversity and ecosystem health. CWN developed its strategic plan for 2022-2027, *Building Communities of the Future Through Water*, to support communities in meeting these challenges.

This new plan outlines CWN’s goals and approach for enabling communities to get to a future that is resilient, equitable and healthy by collaborating around water.

About CWN

Who we are

Canadian Water Network (CWN) is a respected and trusted accelerator of knowledge into practice and policy. We have 20 years of experience and a strong track record of enabling cross-sector conversations and collaborations to generate actionable knowledge and advance progress on Canada’s most pressing water-related challenges.

As a neutral broker with no advocacy role or political mandate, CWN has attained a high level of trust among a broad spectrum of stakeholders across and beyond the water sector. This unique position allows us to fulfill a critical role in advancing collective action. CWN believes that water presents a powerful opportunity and gateway to reach broader societal outcomes. We work in areas where effective cross-sector collaboration around water can achieve progress on complex environmental, social and economic issues.

CWN initiatives engage diverse stakeholders with shared goals to support successful outcomes for Canada’s water sector and beyond. **As context experts, we leverage Canadian and international knowledge and experience in a way that is inclusive and relevant for real-world decision-making.** CWN helps decision-makers move forward by providing the clarity and confidence they need to make informed decisions.

Learn more about [CWN’s story](#).

Purpose and core beliefs

CWN’s purpose is to get communities to the future they want *through* water.

“Water is a powerful convener and opportunity for collective action. We are all affected by water, we all affect water, and we can all relate to water.” — Carl Yates, Canadian Water Network Board Chair and Interim CEO of the Atlantic First Nations Water Authority

Water is foundational to the health and safety of communities and ecosystems, and central to Canada's economic prosperity. Our collective health and well-being are closely linked to water within urban and rural working landscapes, as well as protected and natural areas. In addition to guiding our actions to achieve water quality, water quantity and biodiversity endpoints, there is a growing recognition that water management is at the heart of many complex challenges. Increasingly, whole-of-society approaches are being used to incorporate more diverse perspectives, identify shared risks and benefits, and advance broader, community-wide goals. CWN enables alignment around water to accelerate progress on societal outcomes.

With this focus on community goals framing CWN's work, there is also a recognition that success must be defined from the perspective of the relevant stakeholders. The desired outcomes and future as envisioned by communities must in turn guide the approaches used and activities undertaken.

CWN is driven by the core beliefs that:

- **Aligned and meaningful collaborations involving stakeholders within and beyond the water sector are fundamental to achieving progress on shared goals that are linked to water.**
- **Advancing these shared goals requires a focus on outcomes as defined by the relevant stakeholders.**

Mission and approach

CWN's mission is to enable Canada's water leaders to be at the heart of forging pathways for community success.

Whereas water-related challenges are often regional, national or international in scope, their impacts are acutely felt and experienced at the local level — and the best solutions are frequently regional or local as a result. It is essential that national and global knowledge and experience is brought forward and understood in a way that can best inform decisions. CWN recognizes and serves that need.

The broader context and knowledge base relating to shared challenges is critical for framing a clear understanding of the regional and local issues and needs, as well as the decisions faced by leaders within and beyond the water sector. CWN provides credible insights and learnings based on Canadian and international experience to improve the ability of water leaders to consider, position and convey the basis and rationales for their decisions.

Given the centrality of water to the health, safety and prosperity of Canadian communities, CWN believes that water organizations are natural leaders for making progress on shared challenges. CWN initiatives provide opportunities for collaboration among Canada's water leaders, facilitate connections to leaders in other sectors with a shared interest in water, and enable collective progress toward shared goals.

Activities

CWN is an established context expert in the Canadian water space. We apply our approach through structured initiatives that are developed in response to opportunities where credible insights and knowledge can help communities move forward on water-related challenges.

To advance our mission of enabling Canada's water leaders to be at the heart of forging pathways to success, we undertake a range of interconnected and iterative activities that:

Connect people and knowledge to advance shared goals

- We connect people and knowledge to deliver insights and enable diverse stakeholders to share ideas, explore new thinking, build relationships and identify opportunities.

Clarify possibilities for progress through water

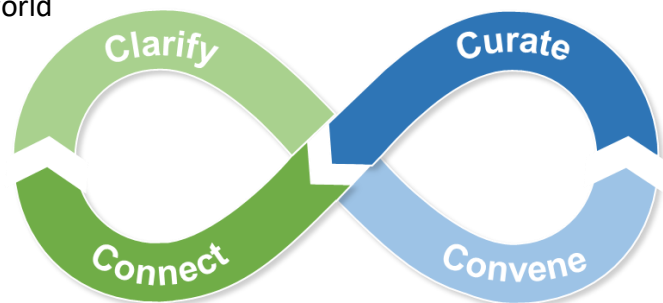
- We clarify and elevate important narratives by better framing the issues, perspectives and key roles across sectors, highlighting the realities and possibilities for progress, and paving the way to identify co-benefits and opportunities to converge around solutions.

Convene structured discussions that move communities forward

- We convene initiatives that bring together diverse stakeholders to advance discussions leading to action, resulting in deeper knowledge and insights, and enhancing water leaders' confidence to pursue pathways for success.

Curate relevant knowledge to inform real-world decision-making

- We curate knowledge in a way that is more inclusive of relevant sources across sectors and informed by the real-world context in which decisions are made, revealing its significance and impact.



Core values

CWN's core values flow from our purpose, core belief and mission, and are central to our approach and activities. These values are:

Trust — We provide credible knowledge and actionable insights by seeking and incorporating relevant viewpoints in a way that is transparent and best achieves shared goals.

Agility — We are ready to adapt and adjust as needs and priorities change.

Empowerment — We help colleagues and network participants do impactful work and make informed decisions.

Connection — We create a safe and equitable space for people with different perspectives and diverse backgrounds to engage, learn from one another and achieve shared goals.

Intentional leadership — We convene the efforts of emerging and seasoned leaders on key issues where aligned and meaningful connection can lead to success.

2022-2027: Building Communities of The Future Through Water

Future challenges are already here

CWN's strategic plan for 2022-2027, Building Communities of the Future Through Water, focuses on supporting water leaders as central players in addressing the challenges at our doorstep while forging pathways to achieve future shared goals through cross-sector collaboration.

Canada and the world are experiencing and attempting to manage the impacts of major challenges like the global pandemic, climate change, shifting population distribution, and declines in biodiversity and ecosystem health. The actions we take now are critical for both our present and our future. There is also an increasing recognition that societal inequities embedded within our structures and systems are exacerbating these challenges and affecting our ability to respond effectively.

Setting a near-term course toward a better future

CWN's purpose is to get communities to the future they want *through* water. Our conversations with water sector stakeholders and key allies in other sectors that affect or are affected by water reveal that the shared future communities want is one that is resilient, equitable and healthy.

CWN's Strategic Plan 2022-2027 uses this desired future, as articulated by water stakeholders and cross-sector allies, to frame CWN initiatives over the next five years as we work to enable Canada's water leaders to be at the heart of forging pathways for community success.

Specifically, communities throughout Canada are expressing a desire to proactively build toward a better future that is:

Resilient — Enabling communities to address a changing climate and world.

Equitable — Enhancing their ability to recognize and meet community and societal needs.

Healthy — Protecting and ensuring personal, community and ecosystem health.

Strategic goals

CWN's three strategic goals effectively frame our work over the next five years. These three goals will guide our decisions, design and implementation as we support water leaders in forging pathways to a resilient, healthy and equitable future. The goals are based on CWN's experience and engagement with our many partners, as well as an assessment of the most strategic opportunities to deliver on CWN's mission. They clearly reflect CWN's niche of enabling water leaders to play a central role in advancing shared community goals through alignment around water issues.

Collectively, these strategic goals articulate what success looks like over the next five years.

Strategic Goal #1 – Water organizations as anchors

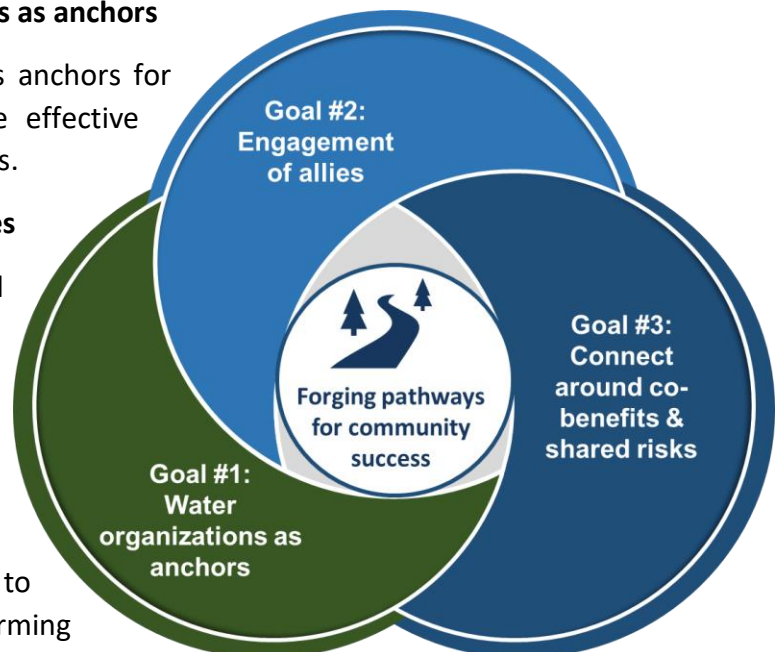
Water organizations are recognized as anchors for community building, leading to more effective prioritization of actions and investments.

Strategic Goal #2 – Engagement of allies

Water leaders are increasingly engaged with key allies across and beyond the water sector to work toward resilience, equity and health.

Strategic Goal #3 – Connecting around co-benefits and risk

Co-benefits and shared risks are core to connecting sectors for impact, informing actions and investments that involve water.



Implementing the strategy

Over the next five years, CWN will identify opportunities and organize and implement our activities (connect, clarify, convene and curate) through annual plans that support CWN in achieving the three strategic goals. As communities continue to face uncertainty and change, CWN's strategic plan for 2022-2027, Building Communities of the Future Through Water, sets a near-term course for our work toward a resilient, equitable and healthy future.