



Guidelines - Working Groups /Task Groups / Commissions / Forums

adopted by Council September 2009

Following the governance review throughout the Federation, it is pertinent that similar scrutiny is given to working groups of the Federation as a re-vitalisation and re-energising of these groups is necessary. These groups could be a strong “working arm” of the Federation, where issues of importance to the protected areas of Europe are examined and developed, BY protected areas FOR protected areas, with high membership participation and involvement.

Purpose

Working Groups of the EUROPARC Federation are set up to serve a specific theme or topic of interest to members of the Federation. The principal purpose of the groups is to serve the interest of the members through delivery of specific aspects of the Federation’s strategy and work plan.

Working Groups should be established on request from members or by the Council and should be approved by the Council only if a comprehensive, clear plan is presented by the initiator to present the aims and a tentative road map to complete the agreed task.

The working group’s mandate comes from the EUROPARC Council through the agreement of a remit and work plan, linked to the EUROPARC strategy. Terms of reference would be agreed with each group.

The functions of the groups would be some or all of the following:

- ❖ to address a given theme of interest to protected areas of Europe,
- ❖ to provide analysis,
- ❖ to propose and develop policy,
- ❖ to develop projects that deliver outputs of relevance to protected areas,
- ❖ to investigate and develop funding streams to resource projects.

Themes

The theme or topic proposed for a working group need to both reflect the priorities in the Federation strategy and also have some sense of future-proofing, i.e. looking ahead to issues of relevance to Europe’s protected areas.

Current themed topic areas:

Sustainable Rural Development

International Co-operation – incorporating Transboundary work

Climate change and Biodiversity – incorporating wilderness, corridors for migrating species

Communications and Education - incorporating education for sustainable development (UNESCO decade 2005 2014), junior ranger and training

Europeans Habitats and Species Management – incorporating wetlands, marine, Natura 2000 and European Habitats Forum

Every group should develop a lobbying aspect to its remit. The groups are advised to explore links with other Eurosite, ALPARC and other NGO working groups.

Structures

Groups can take different forms. The model of a convened group, gathering two or three times a year for a two to three day meeting is NOT the only format to be considered. E-forums utilising electronic means of communication should also be promoted.

Given the differing roles and format a new suite of terminology needs to be considered for use. Some could be considered.

Commission – used extensively by French Federation. Tends to imply authority and perhaps has a more investigative function.

Working /Task Group – Is generally a group brought together to work collaboratively on an assigned task

Forum – tends to be a discussion platform, seeking a consensus or range of views and opinions about a given subject under discussion.

Other terms can be explored! Suggestions welcome.

Verification groups

The groups currently working on verifying transboundary and Charter certificates (Transboundary STEC and Charter Evaluation Committee) are not considered working groups, but technical verifier groups. An annual report is expected from all verification groups.

Composition

A EUROPARC working group is intended to be a forum for co-operation and participation. Participants represent the interests and views and of members, from disparate sectors of the Federation, and bring expertise and experience of the theme or topic to the group.

Working Groups should be composed of a wide range of “experts” in a particular topic drawn from the membership of the Federation. Somewhere between four to six members would be considered ideal as it allows for a breadth of experience yet is not a financial burden on the Federation. As many countries and types of members (agencies and parks) should be represented as offer expertise on the theme.

Some external membership could be anticipated from experts outside protected areas, including academics and others.

Membership of the working group should be agreed by the Council and interested members should express an interest in being part of the working group. CVs and expressions of interest should be submitted to Federation headquarters.

It is important to ensure a wide representation of members as well as a good mix of experience. Membership will be reviewed every two years and some circulation of members is anticipated. Chairs will be elected by the group and will be up for re-election every two years should the group work for longer than this. Internal procedures within the group need to be created to facilitate this process.

In some situation sub groups may need to be established, particularly to deal with detailed technical aspects. These will follow the same procedures of official recognition of the Federation, or may be informal groups with no formal financial support.

Chairs and working group members may be asked to represent the Federation at events/conference etc relevant to the theme and topic under study.

It is very much recommended that one member of the group is a council member of the Federation.

Outputs

It is important that the work of the groups is closely aligned to the Federation strategy. As such all outputs need then to be reported to the Federation, its members and to funding bodies. Therefore maintaining and strengthening communication lines with all parties involved is essential.

To facilitate this, Federation Directorate staff will be assigned, where possible, to support and assist groups. Additionally a council member will be allocated as the advocate of the theme/topic within the council if the group does not include a council member.

Annual meetings of council/section and chair of groups might be convened, if resources allow, to discuss strategy and forward planning. Groups are expected to produce an annual forward plan, directly related to the strategy of the Federation. Outputs of groups will be presented in the Federation's annual report and promoted to members.

Possible outputs for a working group: project proposals to address themes from the EUROPARC Strategy, reports / publications presenting best practice relevant for protected area / Natura 2000 management or promoting the role of PAs for sustainable development, guidelines for management activities. Outputs need to be agreed with the directorate and embedded in the annual work plan of the Federation, which is the operational planning tool for the implementation of the strategy.

Finances

All Federation monies are accountable to the members and to specific donors. Procedures for eligible expenses will be provided. Ideally working groups would be supported with travel and expense costs for a maximum of two meetings per annum, within a given allocation. This is our aim although the allocation is speculative, based on an anticipated income, and is therefore regularly monitored and reassessed. This allocation would be for a maximum of two years. Should no project or other tangible work be realised then working groups would be dissolved and an e-forum of interested parties set up in its place. Whilst the Federation would endeavour to reimburse travel and meeting costs within agreed limits (travel claims are expected to be below 300 Euro per individual per meeting), contributions to some of these costs from the member organisations, in recognition of the benefits of having their staff member in a Federation working group, would be appreciated.

At the time of writing (January 2010) we are unable to support travel and subsistence. Groups could initially work via e-mail and internet. The EUROPARC team is working to identify and secure further sources of finance to support working groups.

A work plan indicating the groups anticipated output for the forthcoming year should be lodged to the directorate and agreed no later than October of the preceding year to enable budgets to the coming year to be prepared.

Procedure for creation of working groups

Members can propose themed working groups that meet the requirements presented above. **Members should indicate an expression of interest in establishing / being involved in a working group by sending an e-mail to Federation headquarters indicating what functions the working group could undertake to fulfil the Federation's strategy.**

The e-mail should briefly present at least the following:

- theme,

- objective of the working group,
- possible outputs,
- initiators,
- potential members if the proposal comes from a group of members,
- why the working group is considered important and the planned outputs relevant for the membership – indicate if there was a request from members (from the annual conference or a workshop for example)

CVs of working group members should be submitted when the request for the establishment of the working group is submitted or, if that's not possible, within four weeks of submitting the proposal.

Proposals submitted by the deadline will be analysed by the Council. Working groups accepted for the following two years will liaise with the Directorate to agree on detailed plans. Final structure and outputs agreed with the Directorate will be presented to the Council.

A copy of the Federation strategy is on the EUROPARC website. Please speak to EUROPARC staff if you need further advice and information.

Proposals should be received at Federation headquarters by 15 February 2010. The council will decide at its meeting in March 2010 the working groups for the next two years.

The numbers of groups the Federation can support will be dependent on the Federation's income, so the Council will agree by a list of priorities which groups will be supported.