



EUROPARC
F E D E R A T I O N

Guidance for EUROPARC Members' Participation Groups

INTRODUCTION & GOALS

Member Participation **Working Groups are a means to provide opportunities for direct participation of the EUROPARC Federation (EF) members in key discussions.** All Working Groups are formed to contribute to the vision and mission of EF, through the contribution of individuals from the membership with expertise on a particular topic.

This Guidance is based on previous versions produced and approved in the past. It aims to simplify the current system and ensure that Working Groups are more transparent and accessible for members.

Working Groups are very beneficial for EF members as they can help advance the agenda of EF in a participatory manner, as well as offer members the possibility of being part of key discussions in EF, support enriched opportunities for learning and very useful social interaction among members.

Working Groups should respond to specific well-defined topics, based on the current [EUROPARC Strategy](#), and should have **clear objectives and expected results in a specific period of time.**

Working Groups should be an effective means to

- identify challenges and opportunities in their topic area,
- provide analysis of a specific theme or topic,
- give support, input and advice on a particular area of work,
- promote innovation,
- in some cases, propose potential policy recommendations for EF,
- investigate and develop funding streams to resource projects, and
- sometimes help develop projects that deliver outputs of relevance to Protected Areas.

A well-functioning Working Group should ensure positive group dynamics to be effective and should lead to better collective and well-informed decisions on specific tasks.

ESTABLISHMENT OF WORKING GROUPS

The Directorate, taking into consideration the EUROPARC Strategy, the results from the yearly General Assemblies, the ongoing international agenda, the ongoing Council deliberations, as well as suggestions from ongoing discussions with members, will send a proposal to the newly elected Council three months after the Council elections, detailing a potential structure of the EF Working Groups for the period until the next elections. EF members are encouraged to be proactive in suggesting ideas to the Directorate about the topics of the Working Groups, including potential capacity and/or resources that they are ready to commit to support its functioning, and the Directorate shall consider such ideas for the elaboration of the proposal.

The proposal from the Directorate will include (half page per potential Working Group):

- Title of the Working Group
- Rationale (why) - providing a clear link to the EUROPARC Strategy
- Main objective(s)
- Operating time-scale

The Council, in agreement with the Directorate, will approve the final structure of the Working Groups in one of its regular meetings. This final decision will be communicated to the members and it will start to be effective immediately following that communication.

The Directorate, when deciding the proposal of the Working Groups to be submitted to the Council, and the Council, when deciding about their approval in agreement with the Directorate, will consider *inter alia* the following key issues:

- **What are the topics and tasks required? And how do we determine these?**
 - o This requires an analysis of the EUROPARC Strategy, bearing in mind such Strategy is an 8-year document, so likely not all topics can be addressed simultaneously.
 - o Furthermore, the main expected outcomes in principle are addressed in the Strategy. In any case, once the themes and topics are identified, then the management and exact outputs of the Working Groups are operational issues to be detailed by the Group itself.
- **Are these tasks or topics best facilitated by group work, or by other means such as consultants, individuals etc.?**
 - o This is a matter of experienced judgement as to the form the work should take. Setting up a Working Group raises certain expectations, so it should not be carefully considered if such expectations can be fulfilled.
 - o The Directorate will decide on the final proposal -and the Council will approve such proposal-, considering also that some topics and tasks can be undertaken through EF's engagement with other organisations or processes.
- **How and by whom are they "supervised" and report to?**
 - o All Working Groups will communicate and report directly to the Directorate, who will subsequently communicate with the Council about the progress made. In case the Working Group Chair is also a Council member, then the report will be done directly by the Chair.
 - o In general, it is the function of the Directorate to report on all aspects of the Strategy implementation to Council. Therefore, it is more efficient and effective to shorten the reporting and communication lines as much as possible.

Additional aspects need to be considered, and in some cases clarified, include:

- The size of the Working Group (around 7 members could be considered sufficient, probably with a minimum of 5 and maximum of 10);
- The type of meetings (face to face meetings are always positive, considering the limited budgets this can be a challenge – on the other hand, online meetings can provide the opportunity to have more open meetings, with additional experts

invited if needed).

- The skills and responsibilities of the Group members;
- How members are recruited;
- How they can be supported by the Directorate;
- The role of sections;
- How they report.

Those questions may elicit different responses, and therefore, different ways of working can be considered to fulfil the particular needs of each Working Group. In each case, these matters would be addressed by the Terms of Reference and Workplan (see below) of each Working Group.

MEMBERS OF THE WORKING GROUPS

Membership of the Working Groups - as well as the level of commitment that is devoted to them - is a voluntary - personal or organisational - decision. EF member organisations (individuals and organisations themselves) can signal their interest to be part of a Working Group to the Directorate, who will create the first list of members. Once the Working Group is running, expressions of interest will be channeled from the Directorate to the Working Group for consideration.

It is fundamental for EF, as a membership association, to provide opportunities for its members to participate in its functioning and discussions. As EF members work on the common goals agreed as a Federation - goals that are intended to provide benefits to the membership as a whole-, individuals from EF members offering their time, expertise and ideas to specific Working Groups would benefit in many ways of their involvement in Working Groups. Such benefits include:

- Being on top of the European discussion on key topics of interest for Protected Areas and international biodiversity conservation.
- The opportunity to shape EF's decisions and actions from the outset.
- Increased collaboration with other members of EF by working on common projects or actions.
- Being part of a team with people with different skills and abilities, being exposed to different ways of working, which will develop skills in each individual, adding those skills into the member's organisation.
- Improved personal competencies, such as better communications skills, improved language ability -as working in a second language-, and better collaboration skills working in a multi-cultural and diverse international team.
- Building a social and professional network, which can be beneficial for the EF member as well as for individuals.
- A sense of common achievement, pride and satisfaction and celebration of their role and success of the Working Group in supporting an international agenda.

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND WORKPLAN OF THE WORKING GROUPS

Once the Council, in agreement with the Directorate, approves on the Working Groups, the Directorate will designate a Directorate liaison for the Group and, together with the Council, will appoint a Chair. Then, the Chair with the Directorate will convene a first meeting of its members. The first task of the Working Group will be to develop its Terms of Reference and its Workplan, on the basis of the proposal approved by the Council. The terms of Reference will include:

- Short description of the rationale for the Working Group, based on the original proposal.
- Refined objectives of the Working Group, based on the original proposal.
- Expected (and achievable) outputs, as agreed between the Directorate and the Working Group members - they could be accompanied by a short description of the main kinds of activity expected (e.g. advisory, related with a specific project implementation, focused on a particular process or theme, others).
- A timeline for the achievement of the goals & production of results, as well as the foreseen lifespan of the Working Group (if such lifespan goes beyond the next Council elections, it will be noted as a potential proposal for the next term).
- Practical organisational issues such as:
 - Chair,
 - Any other potential role (e.g. vice-chairs, subgroup leads, others)¹,
 - Potential subgroups, or
 - Frequency of meetings.

Furthermore, all Working Groups will (and this will be reflected in the Terms of Reference):

- Report their work directly to the Directorate, so it can be collected as progress towards the achievement of the EUROPARC Strategy. The Directorate, in turn, will report this work to the Council during its regular meetings (unless a member of the Council is directly involved in the Working Group, in which case such reporting can be done directly by the member of the Council).
- Agree with the Directorate:
 - if, when and to what extent should a Working Group or its members speak on behalf of EF or represent it, and
 - potential identified opportunities to highlight the work of the Working Group or present results or ideas (e.g. at the General Assembly or external events).

The Workplan will reflect the specific activities and timescales that the Working Group expects to develop to achieve its goals.

¹ It is encouraged that functions of any roles for members are carefully described, both to manage expectations and to ensure the type of participation is adequately supported and managed to achieve the goals needed. It is important to consider challenges in any potential delegation of responsibilities, in order to enable some of the benefits to be realised by both the participant and EF, without compromising either the quality-of-service EF seeks to deliver, and indeed the reputational integrity of EF.

“STANDING” WORKING GROUPS

Some specific topics are ongoing and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Therefore, “Standing” Working Groups will be constituted ‘by default’ following each Council election for these topics, including at the moment:

- The Periurban Parks Working Group
 - It would include/correspond to the current Periurban Parks Commission.
- The European Charter for Sustainable Development Working Group (ECST Working Group)
 - It would include the current Standing Committee on the Charter and Charter-Net, structures which can be absorbed into this group, remain as subgroups, or any other choice the Working Group might decide.
- The Transboundary Programme Working Group (TB Working Group)
 - It would include the current Standing Committee on TB and Task Force on TB, structures -which can be absorbed into this group, remain as subgroups, or any other choice the Working Group might decide.