

Louisiana Watershed Initiative Region 8 Regional Steering Committee Bylaws & Procedures

Background

Following the Great Floods of 2016, Gov. Edwards issued an executive order that charged state agencies to coordinate statewide flood risk management efforts through a watershed approach, which acknowledges how water naturally moves throughout our communities. State agencies named in the order make up the Council on Watershed Management, which oversees all activities associated with the Louisiana Watershed Initiative.

Through the implementation of its programs, the LWI coordinates enhanced technology, planning, policy and engagement with state agencies, regional partners, and local communities to build support for an improved, long-term, state and watershed region management framework that can more effectively address mounting flood risks statewide.

Funding to support efforts of the Regional Steering Committee (the Committee or RSC) is available through recovery dollars from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to enable proactive approaches to water management statewide. These dollars have been programed through the Office of Community Development (OCD) via the Regional Capacity Building Grant (RCBG) Program, for which the Committee is charged with:

1. Adopting an annual work plan
2. Providing input in the development and ultimate implementation of longer-term, formalized coalition with the ability to adopt different levels of a governance structure for project coordination and prioritization. This long-term entity is intended to outlast specific event-related funding allocations and to provide a sustainable, institutional basis to increase continuity, improve flood resilience, and enable more effective flood prevention within our region.
3. Developing a regional watershed project inventory
4. Participating in the selection of projects totaling up to 5 million dollars, in coordination with the Watershed Initiative Round 1 Projects Program

Purpose

The purpose of the Committee is to provide policy guidance to the Council on Watershed Management and advance regional coordination for watershed/floodplain-based flood risk reduction and water management.

In an effort to operate efficiently, consistently, transparently, and in accordance with the goals of the Louisiana Watershed Initiative, this document provides the procedures for the administration of the RSC for Region 8 of the Louisiana Watershed Initiative. The procedures contained herein provide the rules by which the Committee will be formed, how the membership will be composed, what rules and regulations will apply to its proceedings.

Open Meeting Laws

As an advisory committee established for the purpose of providing advice and recommendations to the Council on Watershed Management and the Louisiana Office of Community Development (hereinafter "Grantor"), this Committee constitutes a "public body" under La. R.S. 42:13 and is thus subject to and will follow the Louisiana Open Meetings Law (La. R.S. 42:11-28). Consequently, in the event of any conflict between any term, condition, or provision set forth herein and any mandate of the grantor or Open Meeting Law, the latter shall prevail.

In addition, the Committee will follow the guidelines of the Louisiana Office of Community Development and provide notice at least 5 business days of notice for any official meeting of the Committee or sub-committee.

In accordance with 42:14 of the Open Meetings Laws, any individual or representative of any organization will be allowed to address the Committee on any agenda item that requires a vote be taken. To exercise this privilege, no prior request for placement on the agenda is necessary. Comments from the public may, at the discretion of the Chairperson be entertained at the beginning of the agenda or be after introduction of an item to be voted on and before any discussion by members of the Committee. The Committee shall not be required to entertain comments on any item which does not require that a vote be taken and/or does not appear on the agenda, however the Chairperson shall have the discretion to hear such comments.

A person wishing to comment on any agenda item may be requested, at the discretion of the Chairperson, to complete a "public comment form" provided prior to the meeting indicating the specific agenda item that he/she would like to address. When committee meetings are hosted virtually the chat box will serve as a substitute for public comment forms.

Any person appearing before the Committee in connection with such agenda item shall first state his/her name and shall limit his/her remarks to three (3) minutes. However, the Chairperson may deviate from this time limitation unless his/her decision is overridden by a majority vote of the Committee. All statements shall be directed to the Committee as a whole and not to any specific member. No person shall speak more than once per agenda item. No dialogue between members of the Committee and/or other members of the public shall be permitted, except at the discretion of the Chairperson and then only to clarify the nature of questions and/or comments.

Any person who has been recognized to speak to the Committee on an agenda item shall reserve his/her comments to matters that are strictly relevant to that specific item. All comments shall be presented in a respectful manner, and participants must conduct themselves orderly and with civility.

Comments or language of a lewd, insulting, or provocative nature shall not be tolerated or permitted. Members of the public shall remain silent unless and until recognized as a speaker by the Chairperson. Moreover, personal and derogatory remarks shall be deemed inappropriate. The Chairperson may, therefore, dismiss any speaker who violates the dictates of this policy.

If an organization, formal or informal, wishes to address the Committee on any specific agenda item, then such entity shall select one person as its spokesperson. This limitation shall not prevent others who are associated with the organization from speaking on their own behalf.

Duties & Responsibilities

Working in conjunction with the RPC, this Committee shall assist in the development and delivery of work products requested by the grantor and endeavor to form a permanent watershed coalition within the parameters defined by the Louisiana Watershed Initiative. The Committee shall further exercise such powers and discharge all other duties and responsibilities as dictated by the grantor, the grant applicant (RPC), and/or the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. All activities conducted by the RSC shall be in compliance with all federal, state, and local laws and regulations, including the Open Meetings Laws and Public Records Laws of Louisiana contained at Revised Statutes 42:11 et seq., and 44:1 et seq.

Committee members are expected to attend all meetings. Failure to attend 3 consecutive meetings without explanation acceptable to the other members constitutes grounds for removal from the Committee. Should a member miss more than 4 meetings in a twelve month period, the Fiscal Agent will be tasked with coordinating a new appointment amongst parishes represented and may request that the appointing agent for such member appoint another member.

Composition of Committee

Criteria and guidance for the composition of the Regional Steering Committee was set forth by the grantor and consists of 11 total members. The Committee shall be composed of at least 2 representative(s) from each of the 5 parishes which comprise Region 8, namely: Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard and St. Charles. In the event a committee member is unable to attend a meeting, the member may appoint an alternative designee to attend and vote in their place.

Organization & Structure

The Committee shall appoint a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson. The Chairperson shall serve as the presiding officer at each meeting, and in the absence of the said Chairperson, the Vice-Chairperson shall serve in that capacity. Moreover, the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson shall perform all other duties and responsibilities as commonly ascribed to such offices.

Both the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson shall be elected by simple majority vote at a regularly scheduled meeting of the Committee. Where a quorum is present, each shall serve for the duration of the Committee or, upon the resignation or cessation of membership of such officer, until his or her replacement is elected. Both the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson shall be voting members on any and all matters that come before the Committee.

The RPC, as grant applicant, is hereby designated as the recording Secretary and Clerk for this Committee

Conflict of Interest

RSC members are subject to the Louisiana Government Code of Ethics and HUD conflict of interest rules, and should not participate in any discussion, deliberation or voting on matters prohibited under those provisions. A committee member must recuse themselves from deliberation and abstain from voting on any matter taken up by the Committee that may affect a business or other entity in which he or she has a significant interest.

Procedural Rules

Except as otherwise dictated by the regulations and mandates of the grantor and United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, or the Louisiana Open Meetings Law, this Committee shall be governed in all proceedings by the most current edition of Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised. The Committee shall meet as dictated by the fiscal agent, the RPC, all such meetings shall be announced in advance and shall further be open to the public in accordance with Louisiana Open Meetings Law. Moreover, the meetings shall be conducted pursuant to a written agenda approved by the Chairperson of the Committee, working in conjunction with the fiscal agent/watershed coordinator, and published in advance in accordance with Open Meeting Law and direction provided by the grantor. At any meeting, only members of the Committee may vote but there shall be an opportunity for public comment prior to any vote. A quorum shall be defined as no less than fifty percent (50%) of the membership required at each meeting in order for any action items to be voted upon by the Committee or RSC.

All decisions of the RSC shall be by majority vote of the membership present at a meeting where a quorum is present, if required by law. All votes shall be recorded in the minutes or records of the RSC. As previously set forth herein, all members of the RSC shall be entitled to vote on any matter coming before the Committee.

Approval & Amendments to Procedures

These procedures and any amendments thereto shall be approved by majority vote of the members of the Committee. No amendment that restricts or limits the requirements of Open Meetings or Public Records laws will be permitted.

Dissolution

This Committee shall exist only for such period of time as required by the Louisiana Watershed Initiative acting pursuant to the rules, regulations, and dictates of the grantor and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, with the intention that it will be replaced by a permanent entity.