




International Model Forest Network

Landscapes • Partnerships • Sustainability

Guide to Model Forest Governance

www.imfn.net



The Model Forest Development Toolkit is a collection of guides, frameworks and other documents that Model Forests can use during their development and operations to strengthen their organizational capacity and program delivery. The Toolkit is designed as a collection of modules or sections to allow for easy revision and quick reference. The following modules are currently available:

- Model Forest Development Guide
- Framework for Model Forest Strategic Plan Development
- Framework for Model Forest Annual Work Planning
- Impact Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook for Model Forests
- Guide to Model Forest Governance
- Guidelines for Reporting

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Model Forests are best understood as processes. They are also based on broad stakeholder involvement. Therefore, one of the most important early steps in developing a Model Forest is to clearly define an appropriate governance structure so that the roles and responsibilities within the Model Forest are clear to everyone involved. An appropriate governance structure is one based on the standards and norms of organizations in the Model Forest's country, and on social, cultural, economic and other values.

This guide is designed to help you as you develop an appropriate governance structure for your Model Forest. This guide contains two main sections:

- An overview of **key concepts and guiding principles**
- An overview of what is involved in **developing a governance structure** for your Model Forest, including identifying stakeholders, creating committees and working groups, outlining roles and responsibilities, and developing bylaws and ground rules



Photo credit: Urbión Model Forest, Location: Urbión Model Forest, Spain

ACCOUNTABILITY

As an organization, a Model Forest has a public profile, and it seeks to provide input into public discussions on resource issues. For a Model Forest to accurately represent its membership, it must define its structures and processes so it can be accountable to its stakeholders. Accountability is defined as “the processes through which an organization makes a commitment to respond to and balance the needs of stakeholders in its decision-making processes and activities, and delivers against this commitment”.¹

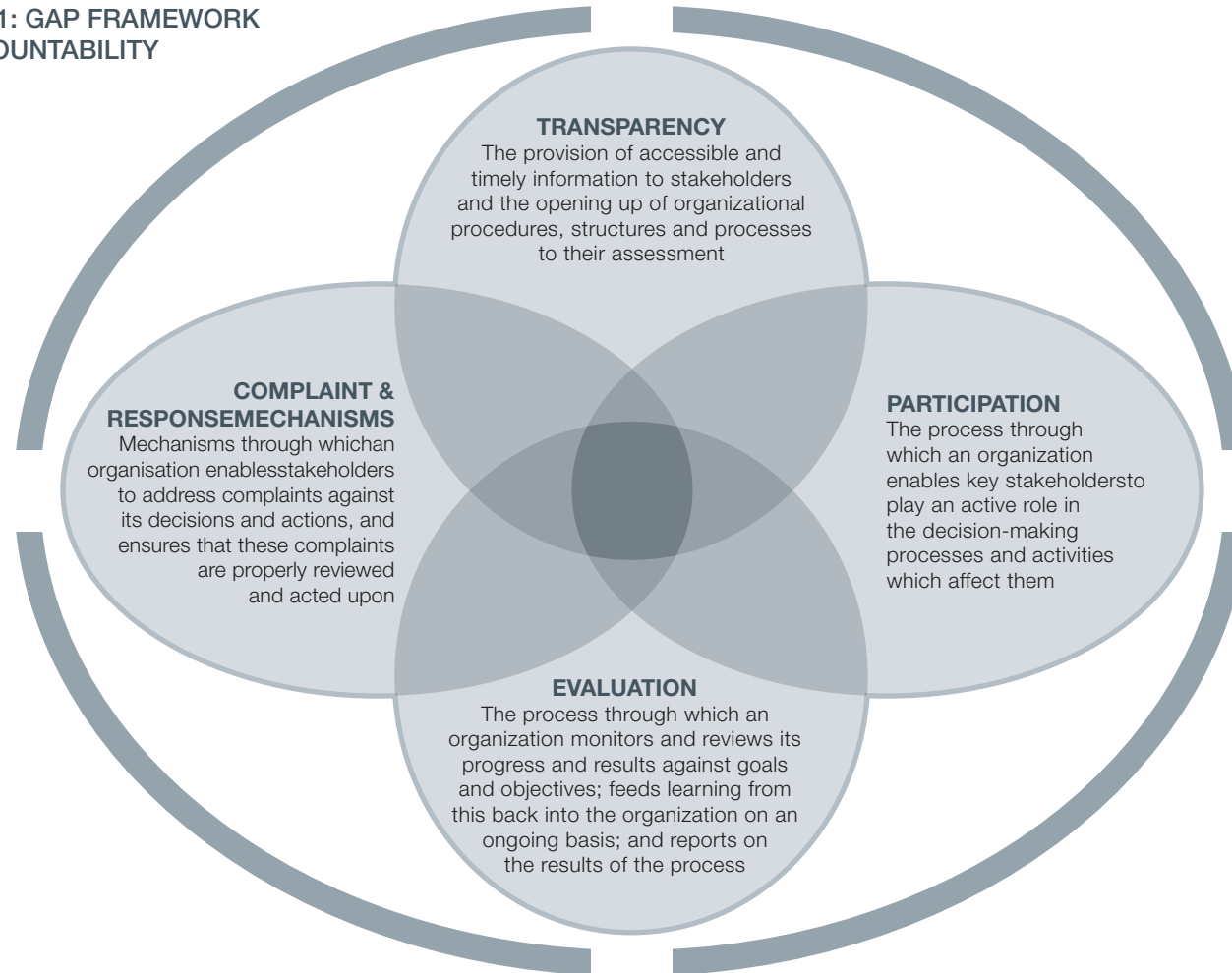
By developing a governance structure, a Model Forest creates a procedural environment in which stakeholders interact and decisions are made. The Model Forest becomes publicly active as a legitimate and credible entity. It establishes itself as a cohesive organization through a combination of clearly stated and documented goals and objectives, governance structures, decision-making processes and policies, management, follow-up processes, membership criteria and so forth.

The Global Accountability Project (GAP) framework identifies four intersecting dimensions of accountability: transparency, participation, evaluation, and complaint and response mechanisms (see Figure 1). To be accountable, a Model Forest should integrate all four dimensions into its policies, procedures and practices, at all levels and at all stages of decision-making and implementation.

For a Model Forest to accurately represent its membership, it must define its structures and processes so it can be accountable to its stakeholders.

¹ Blagescu, M., L. de Las Casas and R. Lloyd. 2005. Pathways to Accountability: The GAP Framework. London: One World Trust. <http://www.oneworldtrust.org>

FIGURE 1: GAP FRAMEWORK OF ACCOUNTABILITY



GOVERNANCE VERSUS MANAGEMENT

As with any organization, a Model Forest's governance structure contains two closely linked functions:

- 1) **Governance** – The essential direction, resources and structure needed to ensure that the Model Forest meets its strategic directions
- 2) **Management** – The program activities and support needed to accomplish the strategic directions

Governance functions are usually reserved for the board of directors, partnership committee or other governing body. These functions include identification of strategic directions, resource development, financial accountability and leadership development. Management functions are generally delegated to staff and include areas such as administration and program planning and implementation.

CONSENSUS

Managing by consensus does not necessarily mean getting unanimous agreement. It means that all stakeholders arrive at a mutually acceptable decision. Some may abstain from a vote, for example, while others may agree to support a decision without being enthusiastic, but in both cases the decision would be accepted.

Managing by consensus assumes two things: information is available to all participants, and the issue is fully debated before a decision is made.

Consensus-based management may not apply to all aspects of a Model Forest. For example, it may not cover day-to-day management. Consensus-based management is mainly used during full stakeholder meetings, where the partnership considers strategic issues, resolves broad financial questions and identifies program activities. Consensus is needed so that stakeholders continue to support the Model Forest as it evolves. (Note: Some decisions may require a recorded vote, depending on the Model Forest's legal standing and the laws of the country or jurisdiction where it is located.)

PARTICIPATION

Participation is “the process through which an organization enables key stakeholders to play an active role in the decision-making processes and activities that affect them”.² A key point here is that participation must allow for change. There is no point in allowing stakeholders to be involved if they have no opportunity to influence a decision.

PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Model Forest stakeholders are individuals, groups or institutions that are interested in, are affected by or can affect (positively or negatively) a Model Forest's decisions about resource management and programming priorities. In many Model Forests, the stakeholders who voluntarily work together to identify a common vision, who address issues of mutual interest and who are formally recognized in the Model Forest's governance structure are referred to as “partners”.

Participation must include the ability to be involved at all levels of decision-making, including making Model Forest policies and identifying and carrying out activities.

TRANSPARENCY

The decision-making process and other accountability mechanisms, whether consensus-based or not, should be transparent that is, clearly understood by others. Transparency refers to “an organization's openness about its activities, providing information on what it is doing, where and how this takes place, and how it is performing”.³ People and organizations should understand how the Model Forest operates and how they can become involved.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

According to the Institute on Governance (IOG), a non-profit organization that explores, shares and promotes the concept of good governance, “good governance is about both achieving desired results and achieving them in the right way”.⁴ IOG identifies five principles of good governance (see Figure 2), which are based on the United Nations Development Program document Governance for Sustainable Human Development.

FIGURE 2: GOOD GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES

GOOD GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES	IOG TOOL FOR ASSESSING PARTNERSHIPS BASED ON GOOD GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES
Legitimacy and Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone who needs to be is at the table. • There are forums for bringing stakeholders together. • The forums are managed so that the various voices are listened to and the dialogue is genuine and respectful. • There is a consensus orientation among those at the table.
Direction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All stakeholders share a joint and clearly articulated vision of their goal. • All stakeholders see how their organization can contribute to the vision. • Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. • Stakeholders have adequately adjusted to any changes to the vision over time.
Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a clear idea among participants of what constitutes success. • Performance is monitored and reported on. • The framework for performance measurement and reporting is developed jointly. • There are sufficient resources to build and maintain the partnership. • The different contexts in which the stakeholders work are understood and accepted.
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The accountabilities of all participants are clear. • There is an open, transparent and accountable relationship among the stakeholders. • The stakeholders accountability relationships to their respective organizations are recognized and respected. • The partnerships effectiveness is reported publicly.
Fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All stakeholders believe they receive sufficient value from the partnership. • The stakeholders, and the broader public, benefit from the partnership. • The laws that govern each stakeholder are recognized and respected.

⁴ Institute on Governance. Undated. **Governance Basics: What is good governance?** http://www.iog.ca/boardgovernance/html/gov_whagoo.html

Model Forests establish their governance structure, as well as their technical, quality control, management and other structures and procedures, according to the standards and norms of their country and region. In Canada, for example, a Model Forest generally constitutes itself as a legal, not-for-profit public association. It usually structures decision-making through its high-level governing body (such as a board of directors), its stakeholder meetings, its technical bodies and its staff. Each group has specific roles and functions.

The governance structure is a decision-making framework that reflects the cultural, social, political and economic realities of the area. The governance structure also supports consensus building among stakeholders, suits the local context and addresses stakeholder needs. It should also help achieve the Model Forest's vision and expected long-term impacts.

It is important to realize that your Model Forest may need different approaches to governance at different stages in its development. Governance structures must meet your current needs and not be mired in tradition and past practices. You should review your governance structure periodically to ensure that it is still appropriate.

When developing the governance structure for your Model Forest, you should spend time on the following:

- Identifying stakeholders
- Creating key positions, committees, groups and structures
- Outlining roles, responsibilities and accountability
- Developing policies, bylaws and ground rules

Your stakeholder group may be small at first, but it should grow over time.

3.1 Identifying stakeholders

A Model Forest, viewed as a process, is as much about the people who sustain themselves from the landscape, their impact on its resources and their human development as it is about trees and forest products. Model Forest stakeholders work to define a shared, locally relevant vision for the sustainable management of their forest-based landscape, then collaborate to achieve that vision for the benefit of all stakeholders.

Your stakeholders need not live within the physical boundaries of your Model Forest. In fact, many Model Forests involve organizations from outside their area. Also, while some stakeholders remain constant through the life of a Model Forest, others change over time as your issues, programming and needs change.

Model Forests tend to identify new stakeholders and encourage them to participate as gaps in knowledge, issues or value representation emerge. Sometimes organizations become interested as they learn more about a Model Forest and its activities.

Here are some factors to consider when identifying stakeholders:

- **Influence**—Influence goes beyond how much power a stakeholder wields to bring about change. It also includes the absence of influence. Consider the needs and interests of those who may be affected by decisions but have no power to influence those decisions.
- **Responsibility**—Examine a potential stakeholder's responsibilities. These may include regulatory responsibility for compliance with laws, policies and regulations; contractual or legal responsibility to other organizations; financial responsibility to donors or others that provide resources; and ethical or moral responsibility to those that are affected by, or that can affect, decision-making in the Model Forest.
- **Representation**—Consider not only the different values and uses of the landscape that the Model Forest should represent, but the legitimacy of a representative and the number of interests represented. Legitimacy here refers to the extent to which a stakeholder truly represents its interests. The parties the stakeholder claims to represent should support the claim.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Are any values, resource uses or issues not represented or under-represented in your stakeholder group?
- Are there stakeholders or other groups not currently involved that could help achieve your identified goals?
- Do your stakeholders represent a diversity of interests? Stakeholders may include industry, community groups, government agencies, non-governmental environmental and forestry groups, academic and educational institutions, national parks, indigenous groups, private landowners and others.

3.2 Creating key positions, committees, groups and structures

Once you have identified an initial stakeholder group, the next step is to develop an organizational structure that allows for active participation and decision-making by the group. As noted before, it is important that your decision-making process be participatory and transparent, and reflect cultural, social, political and economic realities. In addition, your governance structure should support consensus building among stakeholders.

You should also realize that not all stakeholders will want to be involved in the same capacity or with the same intensity. Although all the stakeholders are equal, their roles and responsibilities will vary in absolute terms, as well as over time and activity. Some will be passive partners who see their membership as an ongoing opportunity to publicly support the concept and its local application. Others will have niche interests and may limit their participation to annual or technical meetings. Still others will plunge into periods of intensive involvement, followed by lulls that reflect the annual management, planning and project delivery cycles. While many may play an active role in Model Forest governance, others may participate only through working groups and specific projects.

Model Forests usually have four key levels of governance:

- 1) Governing body
- 2) Stakeholder committee
- 3) Technical or advisory committees
- 4) Staff

This organizational sketch is based on Model Forest experience to date and it uses typical governance terms, but it is only one of many options available for structuring Model Forests.

An effective governance structure is designed to accommodate a diversity of involvement, and to ensure accountable and transparent decision-making.

GOVERNING BODY

Whether it is referred to as a management committee, an executive steering committee or a board of directors, a Model Forest requires a body that meets regularly, oversees staff and provides direction and authorization on strategic issues.

The governing body is ultimately responsible for all aspects of governance and management of the Model Forest as an organization. This group makes sure that a Model Forest's resources are effectively applied to support the strategic directions. It meets regularly with Model Forest staff to review activities, project developments, new proposals, problems and financial reports. It also approves budgets and makes decisions on its own or on recommendation from management.

The governing body is typically elected at the annual stakeholder meeting or is chosen through another agreed-upon process. Governing bodies vary from as few as seven members to more than 30 in one Model Forest. The composition tends to reflect the diversity of the stakeholder base. In some Model Forests, the governing body and the stakeholders committee are the same group.

STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE

A Model Forest generally has one group made up of representatives from all stakeholders. This stakeholder committee usually elects a president or chair, as well as a board of directors who are responsible for overseeing programs and ensuring that annual plans are implemented as endorsed by the committee.

The stakeholder committee typically makes decisions at periodic forums or similar events that address broad questions of strategy, program direction and policy. During these forums, the governing body and the bodies that manage and deliver projects on the stakeholders` behalf report on their activities in the previous year and present plans for the next year. The forum allows stakeholders to discuss and debate strategic and operational issues in the presence of the governing body.

Some stakeholder committees meet formally only once a year, or more frequently under extraordinary circumstances. Others—for example, Russia’s Gassinski—have had as many as eight meetings a year. In the Model Forest of Newfoundland and Labrador in Canada, it is the stakeholder committee, referred to as the “management group”, that meets regularly, while the board of directors meets only a few times each year.

More frequent meetings can be advantageous, particularly during the start-up phase when projects, research objectives and other strategic issues are being elaborated and Model Forest partners are forging a relationship.

SOME OF THE STAKEHOLDERS IN THE ULOT WATERSHED MODEL FOREST (PHILIPPINES)

- CHC Forest Planters Association
- Department of Agrarian Reforms
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Education, Culture and Sports
- Department of the Environment and Natural Resources
- Department of Trade and Industry
- Foundation for Philippine Environment
- Guinayangan Multipurpose Cooperative
- KAPPAS Youth Federation
- Mabuhay Multipurpose Cooperative
- municipal/local government units
- Paglaum han Brgy. San Rafael, Inc.
- Parent-Teachers Association
- Philippine Army
- Samar Island Biodiversity Project
- San Rafael, Taft Integrated Farmers Cooperative

SOME STAKEHOLDERS IN THE PRINCE ALBERT MODEL FOREST (CANADA)

- Canadian Forest Service
- Canadian Institute of Forestry, Saskatchewan Section
- Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations
- First Nation Island Forest Management Inc.
- Lac-La-Ronge Indian Band
- Montreal Lake Cree Nation
- Prince Albert Grand Council
- Prince Albert National Park
- Resort Village of Candle Lake
- Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment
- Saskatchewan Forest Centre
- Saskatchewan Forestry Association
- Saskatchewan Research Council
- Weyerhaeuser Limited (Saskatchewan Division)

SOME OF THE STAKEHOLDERS IN THE FORMOSEÑO MODEL FOREST (ARGENTINA)

- The Government of the Province of Formosa
- Ministry of Public Services and Works
- The Nacional University of Formosa
- Municipality of Laguna Yema
- Poultry Commission of Pozo de Maza
- Central West Development Program B Technological Validation Centre
- Forestry Bureau
- Collage of Forest Engineers of Formosa
- Technical Association of West Formosa
- Indigenous Development Foundation
- Producters
- Indigenous Toba Community
- Indigenous Wichi Community

Creating an organigram is useful in some cases, especially if there are a number of committee groups and partners.

TECHNICAL OR ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Model Forests benefit greatly from the input and guidance of specialists. This professional expertise is often contributed through formal or informal technical or advisory committees, sometimes called “working groups”.

A technical or advisory committee is usually composed of the leaders of the Model Forest’s programs or core projects. For that reason, this type of committee can be instrumental in helping Model Forests create and maintain an integrated, focused package of programs and projects. As well, committee members can often get additional expertise and resources from within their home organizations.

The size, composition and activity level of the technical committee will vary according to need. Some committees are project-specific and disband once their project is completed. Generally, however, there is at least one permanent technical committee that operates in an advisory capacity to both the governing body and the staff. Technical committees meet as needed.

Technical committees are often created to undertake preparatory work leading up to management decisions (e.g., developing policies, procedures and recommendations for high-level consideration; reviewing and recommending projects and activities as part of an annual work plan). They may also carry out specific tasks, such as fundraising, and work with staff to implement operations, activities and projects. They can assist in:

- Spreading the workload among more participants
- Enhancing the involvement, learning and satisfaction of stakeholders
- Developing and making use of participants expertise
- Facilitating decision-making between meetings of the governing body

You should develop terms of reference for each technical committee and have them approved by the authorized body. At a minimum, the terms of reference should include a definition of the committee’s roles, responsibilities, tasks, reporting relationships and membership.

COMMITTEES OF THE EASTERN ONTARIO MODEL FOREST (CANADA)

Committees work under the direction of the Board of Directors to provide an important knowledge base and a source of advice for the EOMF. Nested within these committees are various ad-hoc working groups focused on more specific tasks. The detailed mandates of these groups are periodically reviewed and documented in the governance procedure.

- Forest Science Committee: Provides advice on all science related matters and undertaking or directing selected activities that involve a high degree of science.
- New Forest Initiatives Committee: On-the-ground implementation of activities, and the pursuit of new opportunities, covering all spheres of Model Forest influence.
- Communications Committee: Provides advice on all communications matters and overseeing the development and implementation of the Communications and Outreach Strategy.
- Governance Committee: Oversees overall governance processes required to sustain the organization such as equity generation, nomination and awards, and administration.

STAFF

Besides establishing the group structures noted above, a Model Forest must also define how it will carry out its activities. To that end, Model Forest staff usually coordinate the development of an annual work plan, with input principally coming from technical committees and, on occasion, the governing body.

Most Model Forest projects are implemented by stakeholder organizations under contract with the Model Forest. The Model Forest management team is responsible for overseeing these projects. In some cases, staff may be hired to directly implement projects.

A Model Forests permanent staff usually includes, at a minimum, a project manager, a communication or technical officer and an administrative support person. The actual number of staff varies considerably depending on available resources, the scope of the annual work plan, and in some cases the reporting and tracking requirements of sponsoring agencies. In some countries, staff might be paid for or provided by the host government, a stakeholder or an international donor, or a combination of all three.

STAFF POSITIONS AT THE MANITOBA MODEL FOREST (CANADA)

- General Manager
- Community Programs Officer
- Education Coordinator

KEY QUESTIONS

- Does your governance structure demonstrate, in practice, methods of encouraging meaningful participation by stakeholders?
- Is your Model Forest managed by consensus and is the decision-making structure transparent?
- Has your Model Forest established technical or advisory committees to develop your program and report to the stakeholder committee?
- What opportunities exist for stakeholder involvement in Model Forest decision-making, particularly for new groups?
- Does your governance structure include an effective means of involving new stakeholders over time?
- Does your governance structure exclude or inhibit involvement by any groups?
- Does your Model Forest have a committee of stakeholders that identifies goals for sustainable management, sets priorities and development targets, and establishes policy guidelines for the overall program?
- Can most of the population access the Model Forest through a stakeholder who represents their principal activity, value or area of interest?
- How can your Model Forest be organized to most effectively involve people, carry out its activities and achieve its strategic directions?

3.3 Outlining roles, responsibilities and accountability

Clearly outlining the roles and responsibilities of each level of governance boosts accountability and transparency, two key principles in Model Forest governance.

Your Model Forest's accountability to stakeholders, donors and others—whether or not the Model Forest is a legal entity—must be clear and well established. Accountability comes from a combination of factors: clear and documented strategic directions (e.g., through a strategic plan), governance structures, decision-making processes, membership criteria and so forth. As for transparency, an independent review or audit of your Model Forest's financial management is a good tool, one that also builds credibility with stakeholders and potential donors. Depending on your status, independent review may be a legal requirement for your Model Forest.

The best way to outline roles and responsibilities is to prepare an accountability table that covers three categories:

- **Who is accountable**—List the key positions, committees, groups and structures (known as accountability groups). You can limit the list to those responsible for performance reporting in some way (e.g., general manager, president, board of directors, key committees and working groups).
- **What they are accountable for and their roles**—Outline the roles and responsibilities of each accountability group and note what each is accountable for. Roles and responsibilities are limited to those that relate to accountability within the Model Forest. An exhaustive list of responsibilities is not required.
- **Whom they report to**—Outline the reporting relationships of each accountability group (to whom each group reports). Where applicable, identify reporting roles at three levels: Model Forest, regional network and IMFN.

Your accountability table may not include every position, committee or group in the Model Forest, but it should clearly indicate the various roles and responsibilities. One way to examine roles and responsibilities is to determine who would make a recommendation and who would approve something.

3.4 Developing policies, bylaws and ground rules

Growing pains are to be expected in the initial stages of a new Model Forest. Debates are frequently heated and views often one-sided. Decision-making processes will be untested, and an unfamiliarity with working together may strain the resolve of the stakeholder group. However, assuming that stakeholders have made a commitment to the Model Forest concept, and that each stakeholder comes to the table prepared to treat others with respect and consideration, debate can be constructive and decisions can reflect broad stakeholder input.

As a part of their overall governance framework, Model Forests usually develop policies. There are four general types:

1) Framework and governance policies

- Reflect the values and mandate of the Model Forest
- Set limits on activities
- Provide the principles to guide decisions—principles may include mission statement, constitution and bylaws; organizational structure, including roles and responsibilities; committee terms of reference; etc.

2) Operational or executive policies

- Provide a framework for managing the Model Forest as an organization
- Include areas such as financial and personnel management

3) Administrative or functional policies

- Govern the day-to-day delivery of services and activities of the Model Forest

4) Conflict of interest policies

- Help with managing real and perceived conflicts
- Cover areas such as disclosure of direct and indirect financial interest, disclosure of conflicting organizational interests, anti-nepotism
- May focus on board members—their compensation, reimbursement for expenses, use of organizational property, gifts and gratuities, political activities
- May also encompass committee members and staff

As well, many Model Forests formulate bylaws that govern how they operate. If a Model Forest becomes a legally registered organization, bylaws are often required as part of the registration process. While the actual requirements may vary depending on legislation, here are the typical items that appear in bylaws:

- Corporation name (legal Model Forest name), address and seal
- Who the members are, how to become a member, conditions associated with membership, termination
- Meetings of the membership and voting
- Number of directors in the governing body, eligibility and terms
- Nominations and elections
- Meetings of the governing body (how many per year, quorum, notice of meetings)
- Duties and powers of directors
- Officers of the governing body (election, term, duties, resignation and removal)
- Standing committees of the governing body
- How to keep minutes, general information on books and records
- Fiscal year of the organization
- Audit
- How to amend bylaws

In addition, some Model Forests develop ground rules to guide stakeholders' participation in the Model Forest. Ground rules are not formal governing regulations. Rather, they define a series of operating principles that each stakeholder and individual agrees to follow.

GROUND RULES OF THE MODEL FOREST OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR (CANADA)

The Model Forest of Newfoundland and Labrador developed ground rules early in its development. Though they have been revised on occasion, their fundamental principles remain. For example, the ground rules state that an open seat will be maintained at meetings “to signal the commitment of the Management Group to expand its membership” and to generally conduct its affairs and undertake activities openly with full opportunity for meaningful involvement. Each new stakeholder (or participant, in cases where the stakeholder changes its representative) is given the ground rules as part of an orientation package. The ground rules are periodically reviewed by the Management Group (stakeholder committee). They are also included in the Model Forest’s annual work plan to remind everyone of the principles by which the Model Forest is operating.



Photo credit: Guillaume Roy, Lac-Saint-Jean Model Forest, Location: Lac-Saint-Jean Model Forest, Canada

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CONCLUSION

As you develop a governance structure for your Model Forest, keep in mind these principles:

- Your governance structure should be guided by principles of accountability, transparency and consensus.
- The final governance structure must be developed by your stakeholders and be consistent with your local context.
- Governance structures can vary considerably while still maintaining the basic Model Forest principles.



Photo credit: Tierras Adjuntas Model Forest, Location: Tierras Adjuntas Model Forest, Puerto Rico



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