SYNERGY ALBERTA RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT FROM THE PROJECT TEAM

1. INTRODUCTION

Through their annual strategic planning process in January 2013, the Synergy Alberta Board of Directors identified the following objectives:

Synergy Alberta Strategic Plan 2013-14

> **1.1** Determine current capacity of synergy groups as a baseline measure
> **1.2** Determine guidelines for synergy group membership in SA
> **1.3** Define synergy process

The Board adopted these objectives as an acknowledgement of the success to date of Synergy Alberta and current synergy groups. Synergy groups have each advanced on different paths, and the ability to adopt different approaches that meet the unique needs in a community is an important feature of synergy groups. At the same time, as the network of synergy groups matures, there will be significant benefits to identifying standards and expectations for membership in Synergy Alberta. Clear expectations for membership will enable Synergy Alberta to support the formation of new synergy groups provide tools and resources to facilitate the on-going growth and development of existing synergy groups and attract and retain more stable funding.

Synergy Alberta engaged four facilitators on the roster of facilitators to lead the project. Synergy Alberta staff, Gary Redmond and Brenda Barber, helped to launch the project, participated throughout, and ensured outcomes remained aligned with the objectives.

The Project Team consisted of:

> **Dave Hill**
> **Karla Reesor**
> **Gay Robinson**
> **Krista Waters**

The project was carried out in phases from September to December 2013:

Phase 1
Connect with all synergy groups to document their baseline capacity;

Phase 2
Interview a broad spectrum of Synergy Alberta stakeholders to identify their interests and perspectives on synergy groups;

Phase 3
Engage stakeholders through the Conference Workshop to share initial results and collaborate on defining key criteria for synergy groups;

Phase 4
Assess results and provide recommendations to the Synergy Alberta Board.

This report includes a summary of the input received and recommendations from the Project Team. Synergy Alberta stakeholders were very generous with their time, ideas and candour during the interviews and at the workshop. The recommendations from the Project Team are intended to reflect and respect, to the greatest degree possible, the interests expressed by stakeholders. A compilation of the workshop discussions is available at www.synergyalberta.ca

2. CURRENT CAPACITY OF SYNERGY GROUPS

As an initial step in the project, Krista Waters contacted all of the current members of Synergy Alberta. Through a review of on-line documents and telephone interviews, she collected information about each synergy group. Following is a summary of the range of results:

- Participants
  - *Community only*
  - *Industry only*
  - *Community, multiple industries and government*
- Level of engagement
  - *Inform*
  - *Consult*
  - *Involve*
  - *Collaborate*
- Typical meeting frequency
  - *Once yearly*
  - *Monthly phone calls*
  - *Every second month*
  - *More than once a month*
- Communication approaches
  - *Emails and phone calls as needed*
  - *Regular emails and meetings*
  - *Community outreach, e.g. public events, websites, newsletters*
- Budgets
  - *0$*
  - *$6K*
  - *$500K*
  - *$1.5 million*
  - *$60K*

- Leadership and staff
  - *Community volunteer-led*
  - *Industry and community chairs*
  - *Contract administrators*
  - *Contract facilitators*
  - *Executive Director and Administrative Staff*
- Structure
  - *No strategic plan*
  - *Informal executive*
  - *Mission, Vision, informal goals*
  - *Incorporated, multiple committees, formal planning process*
- Key accomplishments
  - *Reduced industry footprint*
  - *Best Management Practices*
  - *Collaboration, mutual understanding*
  - *Many companies around the table*
  - *Neighbours' Day*
  - *Plain language surface lease agreement*

When it was available, information about the current Vision or Mission of each group was also collected, along with geographic boundaries.

Current synergy groups vary widely in their purpose, size, structure, meeting frequency, membership and the approaches they employ. Some groups have what might be considered "gaps" in their processes or approaches, and some groups have developed effective tools for their own use. Seeking opportunities for groups to share their approaches is a valuable service being provided by Synergy Alberta.

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The full set of information about each group has been provided to Synergy Alberta to meet Objective 1.1 in the Synergy Alberta Strategic Plan.

3. STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

During September and October, the Project Team conducted telephone interviews with 20 stakeholders. The stakeholders included community members from synergy groups; producer, pipeline and transmission representatives from synergy groups and some who do not participate in synergy groups; municipal and provincial government representatives; and industry associations. Telephone interviews focused on:

- Experience with synergy groups and Synergy Alberta;
- Key defining features of a synergy group;
- Tools and approaches used by synergy groups;
- Hoped-for achievements for synergy groups;
- Support or resources needed;
- Value in being part of the Synergy Alberta network;
- Minimum criteria for synergy groups; and
- Reasons for participating (current or future).

Following is a summary of the important features of synergy groups as identified by the stakeholders:

Principles and Membership

- Respect.
- Safe space for dialogue.
- Commitment – working together to resolve issues.
- Inclusive – representation from community and at least one other group.
- Collaborative.
- Seek win-win outcomes.
- Transparency – activities and information are open to all.
- Responsible stewardship for the benefit of the community.

Operations

- It is critical to have a clear purpose and goals.
- Leadership is identified within the group.
- There is an expectation to share information within the group.
- Consultation occurs on some topics.
- A budget is set.
- An organizational framework is in place.
- There may be working committees in place.
- There is a facilitator for the meetings.

Communications and Outreach

- Discussions and issues are community-focused.
- There are opportunities for the broader community to be informed and involved.
- A website is maintained with current information.
- A range of communication tools are used to keep the group and the broader community informed, e.g. newsletters, newspaper ads, a Facebook page.
- There are at least two (and ideally more) meetings per year.
- Experts are invited to meetings to share information on key topics.

The full results of the stakeholder interviews have been provided to Synergy Alberta.

4. CONFERENCE WORKSHOP

Synergy Conference attendees and the stakeholders who were interviewed were invited and encouraged to attend the Synergy Workshop on October 28, 2013. In total, 80 people attended the workshop from companies, communities, associations and government.

The purpose of the Workshop was to share perspectives and work toward agreement on potential criteria for synergy groups. The Project Team shared an overview of the information collected through the initial phases of the project, and then participants worked in groups to discuss what it means to be part of a synergy group. Table discussions were focused on Principles & Membership, Operations, and Communication & Outreach. After the initial results were shared in plenary, the table groups further discussed the minimum and ideal criteria for synergy groups.

Facilitators took notes on flip charts for each table discussion. The notes were transcribed and summarized by the Project Team following the workshop and the full results were provided to Synergy Alberta.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PROJECT TEAM

Based on the information collected from the synergy groups, through the stakeholder interviews and at the Synergy Conference Workshop, the Project Team has developed recommendations in the following areas:

1. Determine guidelines for synergy group membership in Synergy Alberta (Strategic Plan Objective 1.2)
2. Define synergy process (Strategic Plan Objective 1.3)
3. Tools, Processes and Approaches
4. Additional Recommendations

It is the view of the Project Team that these recommendations will support growth and continuous improvement for Synergy Alberta and synergy groups.

5.1 Guidelines for Synergy Group Membership in Synergy Alberta

The following is the working definition of a synergy group that has been used by Synergy Alberta:

A synergy group is a community-based, multi-stakeholder group addressing the pressures and opportunities of resource development.

To support this definition, the Project Team recommends that Synergy Criteria, Synergy Principles and Additional Expectations be defined as the basis for membership in Synergy Alberta. While the following requirements and expectations may seem like a lengthy list, it is important to note that **many current members of Synergy Alberta already meet most of the expectations.**

These guidelines for membership are intended to apply to what might be considered "Full Membership" in Synergy Alberta. To accommodate other needs, different membership classes could be defined, such as "Associate Members" and "Member on Hold". An Associate Member could be included as part of the communication network, and would not have voting privileges. A

Member on Hold could be a synergy group that has addressed past community issues, and may not currently be active as a result of a reduction of industry activity.

SYNERGY CRITERIA

While fulfilling their mandate, Synergy Alberta member groups will meet the following Synergy Criteria:

1. Synergy groups include active participation from three broad stakeholder groups[1]:

   Community
   - Residents
   - Local organizations

   Government and Regulatory
   - County or Municipality or Municipal District
   - Alberta Energy Regulator, National Energy Board
   - Provincial Departments
   - First Responders

   Industry
   - Oil and Gas Producers
   - Pipelines
   - Service Companies
   - Midstream or Downstream Operators
   - Aggregate Companies

2. Synergy groups work collaboratively to resolve local pressures related to energy and resource development.

3. Synergy groups promote mutual understanding through education and dialogue.

SYNERGY PRINCIPLES

While fulfilling their mandate, Synergy Alberta member groups will conduct their business according to the following Synergy Principles:

1. **Respect** – participants will be treated with respect at all times. Everyone deserves to have his or her views heard.
2. **Transparency** – The group's activities will be conducted in a manner that is open and transparent. Information about the group and the opportunity to participate in its activities will be available for all interested stakeholders.
3. **Responsiveness** – The group will respond to the needs of local stakeholders whenever possible. Participants will seek input and respond to feedback provided.
4. **Accountability** – Participants will follow though on commitments made. All participants are accountable to the group.

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[1] The sub-categories shown within each stakeholder group are intended as examples only. It is expected that each synergy group will include participants from the three broad categories and not necessarily from each of the sub-categories.

ADDITIONAL EXPECTATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP

The Project Team has identified additional responsibilities that should be expected of synergy groups. These tasks will help to build a stronger network and promote transparency within and between groups. While these tasks are "expected", there should be some discretion for groups who are unable to meet one or more of the expectations from time to time.

To be a member in good standing, synergy groups should be expected to:

1. Meet the Synergy Group Criteria and follow the Synergy Principles.
2. Pay annual membership fees.
3. Provide representation at the Annual General Meeting.
4. Develop and maintain a Terms of Reference, and provide a copy to Synergy Alberta. (See Attachment B for a suggested outline.)
5. Communicate information about Synergy Alberta to group participants.
6. Maintain a website, either independently or through Synergy Alberta.
7. Establish a budget and clear accountability for use of funds.
8. Provide to Synergy Alberta an annual update on the activities and accomplishments of the group, the current industry participants and numbers of other participants. Synergy Alberta could use the information to prepare its annual report, and to focus on relationship building with key organizations that may or may not be participating in synergy groups.
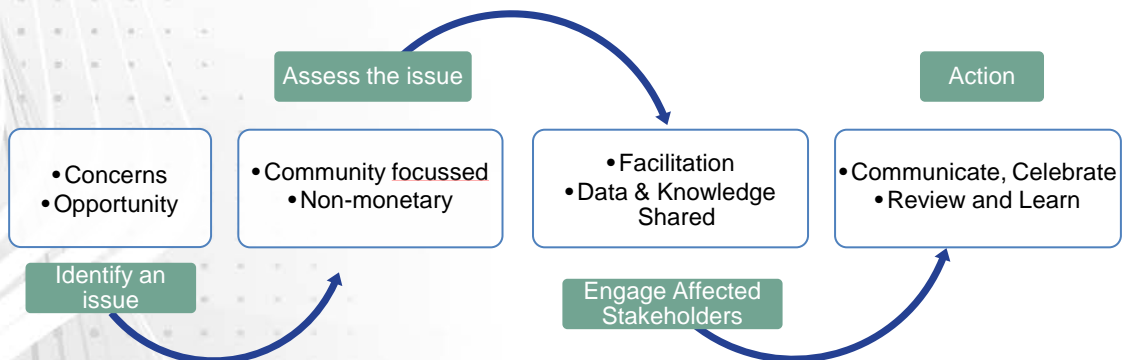
> **RECOMMENDATION 1**
> Adopt the Synergy Criteria, Synergy Principles and Additional
> Expectations as the basis for full membership in Synergy Alberta.

5.2 Defining a Synergy Process

The term "synergy process" has been used for many years without having been defined. It is often used to describe a situation where various stakeholders come together to discuss or resolve issues.

In the view of the Project Team, the two most common uses of the term "synergy process" refer to the steps taken to form a synergy group, or the steps taken to resolve issues. Several synergy groups have formed as a result of steps taken to resolve issues, so at a high level, the one process may reflect both uses of the term.

A Synergy Process to form a group, or to resolve an issue generally includes the following:

Assess the issue

Action

- Concerns
- Opportunity

- Community focussed
- Non-monetary

- Facilitation
- Data & Knowledge Shared

- Communicate, Celebrate
- Review and Learn

Identify an issue

Engage Affected Stakeholders

> **RECOMMENDATION 2**
> Adopt the Synergy Process that includes Identifying an Issue, Assessing the Issue,
> Engaging Affected Stakeholders, and Action

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Further elaboration on the process will be included in the Synergy Group Guide (see Section 5.3).

5.3   Tools, Processes and Approach

There is a broad range of information that can be collected or developed to support new and existing synergy groups. The Synergy Alberta website currently includes a collection of resource materials, and suggestions for additional tools have been raised through this research initiative. Using the existing resources and building on these with new tools and processes, a Synergy Group Guide would support the formation and development of synergy groups.

An outline of the Synergy Group Guide is included as Attachment A. The Guide would be developed for use as a printed document and as an on-line resource.

Information about a Terms of Reference will be one of the key tools in the Guide. Preparing a Terms of Reference should be an expectation for all member groups, and the Guide will provide a template and options for the Terms of Reference. Attachment B is an outline for a Terms of Reference.

> **RECOMMENDATION 3**
> Proceed to develop a Synergy Group Guide.

5.4   Additional Recommendations

5.4.1   Grandfathering

To acknowledge and respect the range of synergy groups that are presently members of Synergy Alberta, providing a grandfathering option may make it easier to move ahead with more clearly defined membership criteria. The existing groups that meet most, but not necessarily all, of the criteria could be given the option to retain membership for a period of up to 3 years while they work toward achieving the expected criteria.

> **RECOMMENDATION 4**
> Allow existing synergy groups to retain membership for up to 3 years while they work toward achieving all of the membership criteria.

5.4.2   Continual Improvement of Synergy Groups

Once formed, there are a number of tools and approaches that synergy groups will consider as they move toward becoming the "go to", active and engaged group that meets the continuing needs of the community, industry and government. Best practices for the continual improvement of synergy groups include:

- Community Outreach – sharing information about the synergy group and inviting participation on an on-going basis.
- Facilitation – ensuring there is skilled, neutral facilitation for synergy group meetings to support effective discussions.

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- A suite of communication tools – using a variety of communication approaches (e.g. email, newsletters, newspaper ads, website) to reach participants and the broader community.
- Increasing levels of public involvement – considering and using opportunities for consultation, involvement and collaboration rather than simply informing the group.
- Regular meetings – establishing a schedule for meetings.
- Growing the number and scope of participants – seeking additional participants within the current sectors and expanding the reach to different sectors where there may be interest.
- Development of local operating practices – identifying the practices that will meet local interests and also align with industry needs.
- The use of special project committees – establishing committees for specific tasks, such as developing local operating practices or planning events.
- Develop policies and procedures – document policies and procedures to promote consistency and transparency in operations.

Many synergy groups currently follow these best practices and significant learning could occur by sharing the approaches used. Options, tips and templates for these practices will be included in the Synergy Group Guide.

> **RECOMMENDATION 5**
> Encourage and support synergy groups to implement synergy best practices.

5.4.3 Change Management

"Change management is the application of a structured process and tools to enable individuals and groups to transition from a current state to a future state" (Prosci, http://www.prosci.com/change-management/definition)

While individuals were very willing to share ideas and perspectives throughout this research initiative, there will be a challenge in asking some people to make change within their current synergy groups. Prosci is a leader in change management research and they have a well-known model for change management that includes the following elements to enable successful transitions:

- **Awareness** of the need for change;
- **Desire** to participate and support the change:
- **Knowledge** on how to change;
- **Ability** to implement the required skills and behaviours;
- **Reinforcement** to sustain the change.

Strategies that could be put in place to support and sustain the change could include the following:

- Share the information that supports the change
  Share the findings from this research project, including a summary of the results from the stakeholder interviews, with synergy group members and other stakeholders to build awareness of the need for change.
- Thank the current synergy group participants
  As part of the rollout of the new expectations for synergy groups, acknowledge and thank the participants for their efforts to-date in building the synergy network. Without the efforts of current participants, there would not be a need to continue to enhance the synergy network. Synergy Alberta could consider creating thank you cards or some other

recognition for current participants as a way to acknowledge the end of one era and to invite participants' support for the next Synergy Alberta phase.

- Develop and Pilot the Synergy Group Guide
Before implementing the changes in membership requirements, complete a solid draft of the Synergy Group Guide, and pilot the Guide with one or more groups, or within a region. The proposed spring workshop in Grande Prairie would be an ideal opportunity to share the draft Guide, and additional opportunities could be identified. Inviting feedback on the draft will help to build buy-in and will improve the quality of the product. The Guide will be an important tool and resource to ensure that groups have the necessary knowledge about the expected changes. A final version of the Guide should be in place before any changes are expected for synergy group membership.

RECOMMENDATION 6
Create a change management plan to transition to the new requirements for synergy group membership and roll out the Synergy Group Guide.

5.4.4 Support from Synergy Alberta

Synergy Alberta can play a key role in supporting groups through the change and sustaining the change. There will be a need to support groups in meeting the membership requirements, and an on-going need to encourage and support groups in adopting best practices. This improved clarity on the expectations for membership and continual improvement helps to define a role for Synergy Alberta in on-going engagement with the groups.

Synergy Alberta could identify a suite of services that it will offer to synergy groups. The services could include: working with a group to develop a Terms of Reference, support with other tools or approaches in the Synergy Group Guide, connecting synergy groups who may be able to provide mutual support, and continuing to offer website services.

As an additional support and incentive, Synergy Alberta could consider providing a one-time grant to groups after they have met the initial membership requirements (e.g. meet the Criteria, commit to the Principles, pay dues, provide a Terms of Reference, provide a membership list, have a budget in place and a website.) The grant could be viewed as an offset for any costs that may be incurred to meet the requirements, and may also be seen as a reward or benefit of full membership. The grant may also encourage groups to meet all of the requirements in a more timely way. The amount could be in the range of $500 to $1000.

RECOMMENDATION 7
Identify and communicate the support that Synergy Alberta will provide to synergy groups through the transition, and on an on-going basis. Consider a one-time grant as an incentive or reward for fulfilling the membership requirements.

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6. CONCLUSION

Synergy group members and stakeholders are a passionate group. Some are fiercely loyal to their own group and their current approaches. Others are passionate about the concept of bringing people together to discuss and resolve issues, and may not be focused on any one approach. Within both camps, there will be people who will be supportive of new directions, and there will be some who are "late adapters" and more resistant to change. Synergy Alberta is tasked with the challenge of choosing a path that will achieve its long-term objectives and also respects the needs and interests of its present members.

To implement any change, adopting a "Synergy Approach" that includes on-going engagement and regular communication with its members will be an important step for Synergy Alberta. Being a model for effectively involving and supporting its stakeholders will be a valuable role for Synergy Alberta, and will set it on the path for continued success.

Attachment A

SYNERGY GROUP GUIDE - OUTLINE

The purpose of this guide or handbook is to provide practical tools for both emerging groups and those groups already more developed. It will also be user friendly and informative for those considering initiating a synergy group so that they understand what specifically would be involved. It will include worksheets, examples of group outcomes, and other useful information to assist in developing effective synergy groups.

1. **Introduction**
   - Purpose of guide
     - o Practical help and tips to perform as a synergy group
     - o Reference tool
     - o Resources - List of resources and contacts including Synergy Alberta

2. **Forming a Synergy Group**
   - Requesting information and materials from Synergy Alberta
   - Making contact with key stakeholders
   - Requesting assistance from Alberta Energy Regulator to determine stakeholders (potential membership) and boundaries
   - Emphasis on multi-stakeholder profile of group

3. **Topics/Terms of Reference (See Attachment B for more details)**
   - Preparing a synergy group Terms of Reference
     - o Background
     - o Purpose/Goals
     - o Membership/Participation
     - o Roles and Responsibilities
     - o Operations
     - o Communication and Documentation

4. **Discerning Appropriate Issues**
   New issues need to be clarified and adopted as appropriate by the group.
   - A series of "test" questions can be developed which would help to determine the adoption of issues
   - Reference a list of actual issues and outcomes dealt with by a variety of synergy groups
   - Determine what is needed to further a dialogue amongst stakeholders
   - Prioritizing issues may be required based on the impact and relative ease of dealing with each

5. **Education Sessions**
   Education Sessions are a common tool used by synergy groups. Some topics, particularly if they are controversial, may need further explanation and understanding.
   - How to determine scope of a topic
   - Sourcing of education providers
   - Tips on selecting providers

6. **Agenda Template**
   - Merits of having a formatted agenda template
   - Critical elements of an agenda
   - Meeting summary notes process and template

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7. **Open House Planning**
   - Determine purpose and desired outcome of the open house
   - Determine what measures will be used to determine success
   - Logistics and planning for an open house

8. **Communication Options**
   A wide variety of tools and options exist for effective communication strategies. This section will outline a number of these along with their strengths and limitations.

9. **Facilitation**
   This section will outline the various aspects and choices for this important aspect of synergy groups.
   - Weighing the benefits of hiring a facilitator
   - Check list for facilitators

10. **Decision-Making Protocol**
    - Reference various processes for arriving at consensus
    - Strongly recommend training sessions on interest-based communication skills
    - Seeking interests rather than positions

11. **Forming Subcommittees**
    - When to form subcommittees
    - Process in selecting a subcommittee or task group
    - Clarifying their purpose and accountability

12. **Considerations for Forming an Incorporated Society**
    - Situations where incorporation may be desirable
    - Options to consider and steps to follow

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Attachment B

TERMS OF REFERENCE – OUTLINE

In order for a synergy group to stay focused and run effectively, it is useful for the group to develop Terms of Reference. This document outlines the synergy group's purpose, as well as details on membership, responsibilities and operations. Here is a suggested outline for a Synergy Group Terms of Reference document.

1. **Background**
   Include a brief history of the group and why it was formed.

2. **Purpose/ Goal**
   Provide the mission, vision and goals of the group. Give a general description of the type of issues that will be discussed and which issues won't be discussed. Identify the group's minimum level of engagement – inform, consult, involve or collaborate. List any group principles or values.

3. **Membership / Participation**
   Identify the geographic boundaries for the group. Outline who can be members or participants, how they will be recruited or selected and whether there is a limit to the length of time someone can be involved. Discuss any policies about attendance, sending alternate representatives or allowing observers at the meetings.

4. **Roles & Responsibilities**
   Outline expectations for the group and its members. Identify any leadership positions and the responsibilities of these roles. Discuss the group's responsibility and relationship to the broader community.

5. **Operations**
   Provide details on meetings – time of day, location, length and frequency. List the group's Ground Rules and how the meetings will be facilitated or chaired. Outline the group's structure and committees and the decision-making process to be used. Indicate how the group will be funded and any policies about financial management.

6. **Communication & Documentation**
   Describe how the meetings will be documented and how this information will be distributed. Provide details on how the group will communicate with the broader community, Synergy Alberta and other synergy groups and organizations.

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