 

Advancement of Western Air Planning in the WRAP

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Background

The Western Regional Air Partnership (WRAP) is a voluntary partnership of states, tribes, federal land managers, local air agencies and the U.S. EPA whose purpose is to understand current and evolving regional air quality issues in the West. The WRAP Board (Board) directs and provides oversight of the activities performed by the WRAP. [The WRAP Charter](https://www.wrapair2.org/pdf/WRAP%20Charter%20approved%20by%20the%20WRAP%20Membership%20July%202014.pdf) outlines the purposes of the WRAP and memorializes the powers and duties of the Board, including that the Board:

*“establish a Technical Steering Committee from the membership to oversee and direct the technical and analytical work of WRAP staff, contractors, and work groups*”

The [WRAP Strategic Plan](https://www.wrapair2.org/pdf/WRAP%20Strategic%20Plan%20final%20March_2015.pdf) presents five goals to meet the vision of the WRAP membership, which is to be the leading technical and planning information source for air quality management in the West:

1. Provide a forum for regional collaboration on technical and planning topics of common interest to the members.
2. Share and act on the current and future priority technical support needs of the members.
3. Provide timely and efficient access to needed technical information that is credible, current, comprehensive, and consistent for air quality management decisions.
4. Deliver technical support, training, products, and other services that meet the priority needs of the members.
5. Advocate and advance western technical issues for resolution.

Regional Work Management Approach

The Technical Steering Committee (TSC) has oversight of the technical tasks that are performed within the WRAP. In particular, the Board approved the TSC-drafted [WRAP workplan](http://wrapair2.org/pdf/2018-2019%20WRAP%20Workplan%20update%20Board%20Approved%20April.3.2019.pdf) which specifically defines the tasks to be completed by the WRAP, the timeframes for completion, and the work groups and subcommittees responsible for the completion of these tasks. The Workplan represents a comprehensive plan of those tasks necessary for the advancement of western regional efforts, particularly for western regional haze planning, including allocation of available budget and staffing over a specific timeframe. However, as WRAP progresses towards future planning efforts it is important that the Board and TSC identify those areas that could benefit from additional technical analyses and further research. These efforts may include but are not limited to continued western U.S. regional haze planning support, ozone planning support, international impacts on western State air quality, oil and gas considerations, fire and smoke planning, etc. For these topics, the TSC, under Board oversight, may be in a unique position to advance knowledge or research in order to benefit western organizations as they continue planning efforts for these topics.

With continued completion of the 2018-2019 WRAP workplan tasks, and in the absence of a subsequent year workplan, it is important for the Board to establish the structure by which WRAP will continue to provide western organization support on topics that impact western air quality. This document outlines steps by which the TSC could review available information and technical efforts in order to identify knowledge or research gaps for western air quality topics of interest. In those instances, where the TSC identifies gaps, it may be appropriate for TSC staff to pursue supplemental efforts to improve these gaps.

*add simple flow chart for these steps*

1. The TSC identifies a topic or issue of interest
2. TSC Co-Chairs secure an expert to discuss the topic at a future TSC meeting
3. The topical expert presents background information on the topic and identifies knowledge gaps, when they occur and are known
4. TSC members ask clarifying questions of the topical expert in order to bound the issue
5. TSC members discuss additional analyses, if they exist, for which TSC members or an external contractor could improve knowledge gaps
6. TSC members determine feasibility of future work based on the follow questions:
   1. Does a knowledge gap exist, if so, what additional work would benefit this gap?
   2. Would further research into this knowledge gap benefit western state, local, tribal, or federal planning efforts?
   3. Are there resources available (either WRAP members or contractors) to further research the gap?
7. Where the TSC determines that additional work is warranted and can be supported by the TSC, a project lead should be identified
8. The project lead should then scope the project needs and provide those to the TSC at the following meeting
9. The TSC will present this project to the Board for potential Board feedback and approval
10. Upon Board approval, the TSC and/or the appropriate Work Group will provide assistance to the project lead as needed to ensure project advancement
11. The project lead will provide the TSC and/or the appropriate Work Group with updates at subsequent meetings in order to ensure project advancement and support of project needs

Budgeting and Staffing

The approach described will also require a process that ensures sufficient ongoing staffing and budget to accomplish the regional air planning support efforts. The approach described above resembles how the WRAP operated in something of an “entrepreneurial” fashion for the 2011 to 2016 period for the majority of its regional work effort by competing for grants and funding opportunities that generally served the interests of the WESTAR-WRAP membership. This changed when a structured Workplan was developed by the TSC and dedicated funding for Regional Haze analysis and planning was provided by the WESTAR-WRAP membership spanning the mid-2017 through mid-2020 timeframe.

Historically, the WRAP has employed a successful operational business model where WRAP member agencies define analysis and data needs, and provide oversight and direction through Work Groups composed of subject matter experts spanning the WRAP membership. Typically, firm fixed-price contracts are issued by WESTAR to a university or private consulting firm, and WESTAR is responsible for managing the process of completing the deliverables. Continuing that business model will require ongoing base level funding for WESTAR-WRAP staff to convene the Work Groups and facilitate the contract work. Contracts to be awarded will need to follow the WESTAR Procurement Policy. The less-structured approach above, i.e., no formal integrated Workplan with defined deliverables and timing, means that WRAP members in the form of the TSC and any standing or ad hoc Work Groups, will have to more fully account for, and manage the work to be accomplished.

Equally important, the WRAP Board as it represents the more than 70 active and diverse member agencies of the WRAP organization will need to work with WESTAR as the host of the virtual organization, to secure funding, and to plan and acquire ongoing budget and staffing resources that would satisfy the WRAP organization’s needs. Base funding for some staff support and limited technical analysis activities by the WRAP exists in ongoing grants to WESTAR from EPA and from the NPS on behalf of the state and federal Cooperating Agencies sponsoring the Intermountain West Data Warehouse – Western Air Quality Study project, as well as some intermittent funding for “add-on” tasks from WRAP member agencies or private entities, which complement base efforts under EPA and NPS IWDW-WAQS-related grants. WESTAR could identify what level of staff support and technical work is possible for any regional work identified and proposed through the approach described above.

The WRAP Board, through its Administrative Subcommittee on Funding, would need to have ongoing coordination and consultation with WESTAR to sustain regional work underway and plan acquisition of funding and any additional staffing for new work efforts. A significant issue beginning in mid-2020 and continuing onward is the ongoing maintenance of a base level of regional technical capacity for western U.S. modeling and data delivery systems, both of which are strongly endorsed and heavily used by the WESTAR-WRAP membership, and would cost far more to re-start than to maintain. Typically, sometime elapses between the point when a funding entity commits to support work by WRAP through a grant award, contract, or other funding mechanism to WESTAR and when the work can begin. The less-structured approach and potential task-by-task funding mean that work on a task will require sufficient budget to be in place at WESTAR before starting.