



# St Lawrence River Strategy Framework

*Facilitating connection for a beautiful and healthy  
St Lawrence River for all.*

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### **Words That Come Before All Else**

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'riikon:ra tanon teiethinonhwera:ton ne onkwehshon:ahne akwe:kon sken:nen akenhake tsi teionkwatawenrie ne ken:tho ohwentsia:ke tewen:teron... eh kati' niohtonhak ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

*We bring our minds together as one and give thanks for the people gathered here, that everyone is at peace here where we live on earth... now our minds are one.*

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'nikon:ra tanon teiethinonhwera:ton ne iethi:nistenha ohwentsia. Ne:e kiakotka'wenhake oh nahoten'shon:ah ne sken:nen akenhake ne ken:tho ohwentsia teionkwatawenrie... eh kati'niohtonhak ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

*We bring our minds together as one and give thanks for Mother Earth. She has given us everything we need to live in peace... now our minds are one.*

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'nikon:ra tanon teiethinonhwera:ton ne kaienthoh:sera.

Ne:e ionkhiia'takehnhahs no:nen tewatonhkariak... eh kati'niohtonhak ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

*We bring our minds together as one and give thanks for the food plants. They help us when we're hungry... now our minds are one.*

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'nikon:ra tanon teiethinonhwera:ton nekahi'shon:ah tanon ne kwah tkonwakowa:nen ken'niiohontehsha. Ne:e kanenhri:ne's ne kahi'shon:ah... eh kati'niohtonhak ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

*We bring our minds together as one and give thanks for fruits and especially strawberry, the head of the berry family... now our minds are one.*

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'nikon:ra tanon teiethinonhwera:ton ne ohonte'shon:ah.

Okia'ke kakhwa tsi tewatsta tanon okia'ke ne ononhkwa'shon:ah... eh kati'niohtonhak ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

*We bring our minds together as one and give thanks for the grasses. Some we use as food and some as medicine... now our minds are one.*

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'nikon:ra tanon teiethinonhwera:ton ne oneka'shon:ah, tsi kahnekaronnion, kanientara'ko:wa, kanientarahere, tsi iohonwa:taien tanon ne ohwentsiakonhshon iotnekahtenkionhake. Tsi she:kon wa:tons ionkwaha'tanawenhsta... eh kati'niohtonhak ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

*We bring our minds together as one and give thanks for water; the rivers, the lakes, the oceans, and that clean water keeps running all over the earth. It keeps our thirst quenched... now our minds are one.*

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'nikon:ra tanon teiethinonhwera:ton ne kentsion'shon:ah. Ne wahe kionkhiia:wis ne ka'satstehsera ne tohsa aetewatonhkariak... eh kati'niohtonhak ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

*We bring our minds together as one and give thanks for fish. They give us strength so we don't go hungry... now our minds are one.*

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'nikon:ra tanon teiethinonhwera:ton ne ononhkwa'shon:ah tsi she:kon ionkhiia'takenhnhas no:nen ionkwanonhwaktani... eh kati'niihtonhak ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

*We bring our minds together as one and give thanks for medicines, that they still help us when we are sick... now our minds are one.*

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'nikon:ra tanon teiethinonhwera:ton ne kontirio tsi she:kon ionkhiia'takenhnhas no:nen tewawistohs tanon no:nen tewatonhkariaks... eh kati'niihtonhak ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

*We bring our minds together as one and give thanks for wild animals, that they still help us when we are cold and hungry... now our minds are one.*

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'nikon:ra tanon teiethinonhwera:ton ne okwire'shon:ah tanon ne kwah tkonwakowa:nen wahta tsi nikakwirotan tsi she:kon eh nikontiehrha oh naho:ten shakoniahesha:on ne Shonkwaia'tison... eh kati'niihtonhak ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

*We bring our minds together as one and give thanks for the trees, especially maple, the head of their family, that it still creates sap as the Creator made it to do... now our minds are one.*

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'nikon:ra tanon teiethinonhwera:ton ne otsi'ten'okon:ah tsi she:kon ionkwathon:te karenni:ios ratiha:wi tanon ne kwah tkonwakowa:nen a:kweks tsi nihohsenno:ten... eh kati'niihtonhak ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

*We bring our minds together as one and give thanks for the birds, that we still hear the nice singing that they bring, especially the head of the bird family-the eagle is its name... now our minds are one.*

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'nikon:ra tanon teiethinonhwera:ton ne iethisohto'okon:ah ratiwe:ras tsi she:kon a:se shonnon:nis tsi kahnekaronnion... eh kati'niihtonhak ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

*We bring our minds together as one and give thanks for our grandfathers the thunderers, that they make new waters... now our minds are one.*

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'nikon:ra tanon teiethinonhwera:ton ne kaie:ri nikawera:ke tsi she:kon eh nihatiiehrha tsi naho:ten shakoniahesha:on ne Shonkwaia'tison... eh kati'niihtonhak ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

*We bring our minds together as one and give thanks for the four winds, that they still do what the Creator has asked them to do... now our minds are one.*

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'nikon:ra tanon teiethinonhwera:ton ne Shonkwa'tsi:ah kiehkehnehkha karahkwa tsi she:kon tehohswathe:ton tanon ro'tariha:ton ne ohwentsia:ke.

Ka'satstenhsera o:ni tehshonkwa:wis... eh kati'niihtonhak ne onkwa'nikon:ra.  
*We bring our minds together as one and give thanks for our brother, the sun, that it is still bright and warms the earth... now our minds are one.*

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'nikon:ra tanon teiethinonhwera:ton ne lethihsohta ahsenthennehkha karahkwa tsi she:kon iethi:kenhs tanon tsi she:kon ronwati'nikonhrarakies ne ratiksa'okon:ah... eh kati'niihtonhak ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

*We bring our minds together as one and give thanks for our grandmother, the moon, that she is still in charge of when children are born... now our minds are one.*

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'nikon:ra tanon teiethinonhwera:ton ne  
otsistanohkwa'shon:ah. Ne:e iakokia'tahseronnia'tahkwa ne iethihsoktha ahsenthenhnehkha  
karakwa... eh kati'niihtonhak ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

*We bring our minds together as one and give thanks for the stars, that they dress the sky for our  
grandmother, the moon... now our minds are one.*

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'nikon:ra tanon teiethinonhwera:ton ne kaie:ri  
niihonkwe:take ne wahi ronwatirihonte ne aionkhiia'tanon:na ne onkwehshon:ah ... eh kati'niihtonhak  
ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

*We bring our minds together as one and give thanks for the four messengers; their job is to take  
care of the people... now our minds are one.*

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'nikon:ra tanon tenthshitewanonhwera:ton ne  
Shonkwaia'tison tsi akwe:kon roweienenta:on ne ohwentsia:ke tsi naho:ten tehshonkwa:wi ... eh  
kati'niihtonhak ne onkwa'nikon:ra.

*We bring our minds together as one and give our thanks to the Creator for everything that he has  
done for the people... now our minds are one.*

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## 1. Overview

### 1.0 Vision

A beautiful and healthy Kaniatarowanenneh (St. Lawrence River) for all.

### 1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the Kahnekarónnion (River) Strategy Collective is to facilitate inclusive and equitable communication and collaboration along the St. Lawrence River and beyond.

To achieve increased communication and collaboration, the River Strategy Collective cultivates a community agreed-upon, value-informed space for people and organizations from across the region to gather, connect with each other, share knowledge and information, and identify opportunities to work together towards shared goals for the river.

### 1.2 Values

- Peace, Friendship, Respect
- Connection, Collaboration, Community
- Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility
- Environmental Protection
- Healing & Trust Building

### 1.3 The Kaniatarowanenneh (St. Lawrence River)

The St. Lawrence River, known as Kaniatarowanenneh ‘great waterway’ in Kanien’kéha (Mohawk), flows from Lake Ontario to the Atlantic Ocean and covers an ecologically diverse territory that has sustained and nourished communities for millennia.<sup>1</sup> Niigaani-gichigami, or ‘leading sea,’ in Anishabemowin)<sup>2</sup> Kahnawake and Montreal at the eastern end of Lake St. Francis—is a significant zone of connection, joining the communities and ecosystems of the Great Lakes basin and those of the Atlantic coast. Over three centuries ago, the region was recognized as Gdoo-naaganinaa, meaning Kohserà:ke—One Dish territory—establishing and affirming a relationship between the Nishnaabeg (Anishinaabe) and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy based on respect for territorial sovereignty and mutual responsibilities to care for shared land and water.

The St. Lawrence River has experienced significant transformations and ecological degradation over the last few centuries. Settler colonial expansion, conflicts, and industrial development have imposed borders, claimed land and resources, restricted movement, and disrupted vital relationships with the land and water. In the 20th century specifically, a dramatic expansion of large-scale infrastructure and industrial activity had significant impacts on the ecology of the St. Lawrence River. The construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway and Power Projects in the 1950s facilitated large-scale shipping, water level control, and electricity generation. The construction also inundated homes and culturally and spiritually significant places, disrupted livelihoods, and altered the hydro-morphology of the river. Urban

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<sup>1</sup> Darren Bonaparte (n.d.) “Kaniatarowanenneh: River of the Iroquois,” Wampum Chronicles <https://www.wampumchronicles.com/kaniatarowanenneh.html>.

<sup>2</sup> “The Great Lakes: An Ojibwe Perspective” (2015) The Decolonial Atlas <https://decolonialatlas.wordpress.com/2015/04/14/the-great-lakes-in-ojibwe-v2/>

development, industrialization, and shipping further transformed the river, contributing to the introduction of invasive species, spread of contaminants, water flow disruptions, and habitat loss. Emerging threats, such as climate change pose new challenges for the health of the St. Lawrence River ecosystem that we are only just beginning to investigate.

Many groups, agencies, and individuals are working hard to restore and protect the health and wellbeing of the St. Lawrence River and they have achieved remarkable progress in a number of areas. Barriers to communication and collaboration have, however, been a persistent challenge in these efforts. These barriers result, in part, from complex jurisdictional borders and governance structures that have tended to exclude the interests and ways of knowing of marginalized communities and individuals.<sup>3</sup> The central aim of the River Strategy is to address impediments to consistent and inclusive communication to better support effective and equitable responses to environmental challenges facing the river and our communities.

#### 1.4. St. Lawrence River Area of Concern

In the late 1980s, the St. Lawrence River near Cornwall/Massena/Akwesasne was declared an Area of Concern (AOC) by the United States and Canada as part of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. Remedial Action Plans (RAPs) were developed for both sides of the St. Lawrence River AOC (at Cornwall/Akwesasne and at Massena/Akwesasne), with the goal of defining water quality issues and identifying remedial actions needed to improve the health of the river. Each RAP is overseen by a local multi-stakeholder group comprised of community groups and members, government organizations, rights holders, industry, and environmental organizations. The northern RAP (Canada/Akwesasne) is overseen by a group called the St. Lawrence River Restoration Council (SLRRC) and the southern RAP (the United States/Akwesasne) is overseen by a group called the Remedial Action Committee (RAC). Through the SLRRC and the RAC, significant progress has been made to restore the AOCs. The RAPs will continue to be implemented until all of the remedial actions are completed and the area is in recovery or restored.

#### 1.5 The Need for Something More

Since the early 2000s, numerous discussions and initiatives have sought to address communication and collaboration issues along the St. Lawrence River. Listed below are some examples of these efforts. The final River Strategy framework document will include an appendix describing major governance frameworks and initiatives along the St. Lawrence River, including those based in the Thousand Islands and along primary tributaries.

##### 1.5.1 Brockville Workshop

In 2009, a workshop was held in Brockville, Ontario to discuss holistic management, partnership approaches, and future directions for a potential St. Lawrence River Strategy that would protect the health of the system. Discussions centered on what the strategy should include, how the strategy could

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Arquette, Maxine Cole, Katsi Cook, Brenda LaFrance, Margaret Peters, James Ransom, Elvera Sargent, Vivian Smoke, and Arlene Stairs (2002) "Holistic Risk-Based Environmental Decision Making: A Native perspective," *Environmental Health Perspectives* 110, suppl 2, 259-264; Elizabeth Hoover (2017) *The River Is In Us: Fighting Toxics in a Mohawk Community*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press; Francis, Abraham (2019) Haudenosaunee Forest Stewardship [MSc Thesis, Cornell University] eCommons.



address research and monitoring needs, the establishment of priorities, and the identification of opportunities for action and engagement amongst the public and organizations. Around 50 participants from different organizations attended, and this conversation paved the way for further discussions at a later date.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.5.2 Great River Network

The Great River Network is a community hub based in Cornwall/Akwesasne made up of over 50 environmental organizations, agencies, and volunteers. Formerly known as the St. Lawrence River Protection Network, the network was formed in response to a 2015 incident involving the overturning of two tugboats in the St. Lawrence River near Cornwall/Akwesasne. In the aftermath of the event, concerned individuals and environmentally oriented groups in the region identified a need for a coordinated, community-led organization able to effectively communicate with authorities and respond to environmental issues, including issues outside the purview of the RAP framework. The Great River Network has mobilized hundreds of volunteers to participate in community-led conservation and restoration activities, including the collaborative Great River Cleanup initiative<sup>5</sup>

### 1.5.3 French Planning Workshop

In 2017, the St. Lawrence River (Cornwall/Akwesasne) AOC hosted a working group to review the progress of the AOC. It was again recommended that a longer-term framework for community action was needed for the Upper St. Lawrence River to address concerns falling outside of the scope of the AOC. The working group proposed the development of a Common Agenda and Vision Statement in order to achieve a 'beautiful and healthy St. Lawrence River' for generations to come. This discussion led to the addition of 'the St. Lawrence River Strategy Initiative' as one of the actions in the Lake Ontario Lakewide Action and Management Program (LAMP), a component of the 2021 Canada- Ontario Agreement (COA) on Great Lakes Water Protection.<sup>6</sup>

### 1.5.4 Great River Rapport

In 2018, the St. Lawrence River Institute of Environmental Sciences ('River Institute'), in partnership with the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, initiated the Great River Rapport, an ecosystem health report focused on the Upper St. Lawrence River. From the outset, the intention of the project was to engage with communities across the entirety of the Upper St. Lawrence River region to identify concerns and priorities with respect to the river. Based on consultations with community members and over 50 scientists, the project selected a suite of 35 ecological indicators. Research on the status of each indicator is currently underway and findings will be shared in both detailed technical reports and public-facing reports that are designed to be widely accessible. This initiative has helped to bring together groups and communities that engage with the river, including government agencies (federal,

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<sup>4</sup> French Planning Services Inc. (2009) "The Mighty St. Lawrence People and Partnerships. Summary of International Discussions. Developing a Holistic Approach for Working Together and Managing the River," Brockville, ON.

<sup>5</sup> Leigh McGaughey, Mary Ann C. Perron, Dale Phippen, Patricia O'Hara, Georgia Bock, and Jeffrey Ridal, (2022) "Community Involvement Critical for Revitalization: Grass-roots initiative key to environmental remediation and restoration in the Great River (St. Lawrence River)," *Journal of Great Lakes Research* 48(6), 1498-1504.

<sup>6</sup> French Planning Services Inc. (2017) "St. Lawrence River (Cornwall) Area of Concern. Recommendations to Revise Delisting Criteria," Appendix 3 – Beautiful and Healthy St. Lawrence River: A Framework for Community Action, Cornwall, ON.

provincial/state, and local), environmentally oriented community groups and individuals, and industry. The project's high level of engagement with diverse partners and communities helped to create the momentum to relaunch this River Strategy initiative.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Approach and Structure: How the River Strategy vision will be achieved

The River Strategy will support efforts to achieve increased connection among those who work on the river by serving as a hub that brings together different voices and facilitates equitable communication and collaboration to collectively address issues. The River Strategy aims to link people and organizations who are connected to the river and serve as an inclusive platform for collaboration. Members are provided with a community, support, guidance, and resources by joining the Collective.

It will do so by facilitating discussion among different organizations and by working in a way that is guided by a Two Row Wampum approach, which calls for cooperation in support of common interests while also respecting rights to autonomy and sovereignty.<sup>8</sup>

The River Strategy will support different levels of involvement through the governance structure described in section 3.2. It will be guided by a Steering Committee, which will be composed of diverse stakeholders and rights holders from across the St. Lawrence River. The Steering Committee will identify priorities for the River Strategy that are informed by subcommittees.

To facilitate connection, the River Strategy will maintain a website in which anyone can access information relevant to the St. Lawrence River as well as its tributaries and downstream regions. This website will foster access to a directory of organizations and groups that work on the river, events, and job postings. The website will also serve as a platform to engage collective members and the public with meetings which will further facilitate connection among all different groups and organizations. To maintain engagement, a quarterly newsletter will be circulated to highlight upcoming events, new membership, and general updates about actions taking place in and along the river.

A funded coordinator will be responsible for maintaining and updating the website, organizing meetings, and facilitating connection among members and the public.

### 2.1 Approach

#### 2.1.1 The Kaswentha (Two Row Wampum)

The River Strategy Collective is guided by a Two Row Wampum approach. The Kaswentha Two Row Wampum treaty belt dates back to the 17th century and features alternating rows that symbolize two vessels that are traveling the river of life side-by-side, guided by the values of peace, good mind, and strength. Signatories of the treaty recognize that their two societies are distinct and should remain this way. It thus calls for cooperation among both parties in support of common interests, while respecting

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<sup>7</sup> "What's the health of the river?" (2022) Great River Rapport [www.riverrapport.ca](http://www.riverrapport.ca).

<sup>8</sup> James Ransom and Kreg Ettenger (2001) "'Polishing the Kaswentha': a Haudenosaunee view of environmental cooperation," *Environmental Science & Policy* 4(4-5), 219-228.

difference and a right to autonomy.<sup>9</sup> Wampum belts of shell beads sewn on cloth or animal hide are important symbols of the strength, complexity, and perseverance of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

This approach means members of the Collective will work together in a way that is guided by the values of Peace, Friendship and Respect among distinct societies.<sup>10</sup> It calls for cooperation among western and Indigenous parties in support of common interests, while respecting difference and a right to autonomy.<sup>10</sup>

Through a Two Row Wampum approach, the River Strategy aims to facilitate the inclusion of Indigenous concerns, rights, and perspectives are represented and respected in the efforts and collaborations of all partners to achieve the shared goal of a beautiful and healthy St. Lawrence River for all. The aim is to work together honoring the Kaianere'kó:wa or 'Great Law of Peace', which is based on the principle of strength through union.

### 2.1.2 Memorandum of Understanding

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be in the form of a document in which all parties with intention of joining the River Strategy will sign to communicate that they agree to work collaboratively to achieve a beautiful and healthy St. Lawrence River through a Two Row Wampum approach. This document will outline commitments, including cultural sensitivity training, that will be required for inclusion in the collective.

## 2.2 Region/Scope

The River Strategy is a multi-national initiative that is being established for the Upper St Lawrence River (spanning from Kingston/Cape Vincent in the west, to the end of Lake St. Francis in the east), this initiative will also be inclusive of areas that expand beyond the scope of the Upper St. Lawrence River. It is important to connect all communities along the river, to work together and communicate across boundaries. The River Strategy is expected to continue growing in scope and geography, as needed.

## 2.3 Roles and Responsibilities

The River Strategy will provide opportunities for varying levels of involvement by organizations and individuals.

General Public	The general public will have access to the website, which will include a list of members and contact information, access to resources, including information about funding opportunities, relevant job postings, and education materials, links to freely accessible data, and reporting on the ecosystem health of the St. Lawrence River (through the Great River Rapport and other initiatives).
River Strategy Collective (Signatories of the MOU)	River Strategy members will belong to the Collective. As appropriate, members will be welcome to participate in annual meetings,

<sup>9</sup> Ransom and Ettenger "Polishing the Kaswentha," 221-222.

<sup>10</sup> Duhamel "Peace, friendship and respect: The meaning of Two Row Wampum"

	<p>subcommittees and working groups, attend cultural sensitivity trainings, post information relevant to their organization on the River Strategy website and share highlights from their work in River Strategy newsletters and meetings. Members will also be encouraged to pursue independent and/or collaborative projects/initiatives that align with River Strategy priorities.</p> <p>Collective members will also provide feedback to the Steering Committee and subcommittees regarding priorities.</p> <p>Anyone with an interest in the river can become a member of the Collective, for example community groups, non-profit organizations, municipalities, academic institutions, industry, government agencies, researchers etc.</p>
Steering Committee	Steering Committee members will participate in two to three meetings a year, review and update priorities, form subcommittees on an as-needed basis, and communicate activities to River Strategy Collective members.
Subcommittees	<p>The purpose of subcommittees is for groups of individuals with common interests to focus on specific priorities and objectives, collaborate to achieve common goals, and provide feedback about areas in need of attention relating to the St Lawrence River and subsequent regions.</p> <p>Subcommittees will be formed by the Steering Committee, with input from general members of the Collective, and will provide opportunities for members of the River Strategy Collective to share updates, knowledge, and information, identify potential opportunities for collaboration and coordination related to priority areas/themes identified by the Steering Committee.</p>
Working Groups	Working groups will be created on an as-needed basis by subcommittees to focus on specific areas of interest. The working groups provide River Strategy Collective members with opportunities to collaborate on specific goals or projects. Working group activities may include the coordination of events, collaboration on projects, grant proposals or publications, or focused efforts to identify and address barriers to collaboration on specific environmental issues.

### 2.3.1 Steering Committee

The aim of the Steering Committee is to oversee the activities of the River Strategy and make governance decisions. Its membership will be made up of representatives of the different organizations involved in the River Strategy Collective. The Steering Committee will be composed of:

- 15-25 members – An effort will be made to ensure inclusion of representation from the region for all jurisdictions including Akwesasne (Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne), Quebec, Ontario, New York, the United States, and Canada at all times, as well as a mix of representatives from government, community groups, not-for-profit organizations, academic institutions, and the private sector. Ideally, the Steering Committee should also

include representation from each of the five sections of the St. Lawrence River. Representatives from groups connected with St. Lawrence River tributaries, as well as Lake Ontario and the Lower St. Lawrence River, will also be welcome to serve as Steering Committee members.

- Two Co-Chairs: When possible, at least one Co-Chair position should be reserved for a First Nations individual/representative from the region, who will be nominated by the Traditional Ecological Knowledge Subcommittee.

The role of the Steering Committee will be to:

- Meet two to three times a year (most often virtually, for the purpose of accessibility).
- Produce an annual report and host an annual get-together.
- Create a terms-of-reference (TOR) to guide meetings, processes, and working relationships.
- Reach decisions using a consensus-based approach that reflects the structure of the traditional Grand Council.<sup>10</sup>
- Make decisions and identify priorities based on information and recommendations provided by the subcommittees. These priorities will, ideally, serve to facilitate collaborative, collective action by members and inform the priorities of funding agencies supporting work in the region.

### 2.3.2 Subcommittees

Subcommittees will be created on an as-needed basis by the Steering Committee and will play an important role in the activities of the River Strategy Collective. The purpose of subcommittees is for groups of individuals with common interests to focus on specific priorities and objectives, collaborate to achieve common goals, and provide feedback about areas (geographic and subject area) that in need of attention relating to the St Lawrence River and subsequent regions. Subcommittees can be initiated by members of the Steering Committee and proposed by general members of the Collective.

Subcommittees have no obligation to be active for a set term, but consideration should be made for a longer-term commitment. Once initiated, subcommittees are expected to develop Terms of Reference, with support from a River Strategy template. Subcommittees can be composed of an unlimited number of members from both pre-existing subcommittees, working groups, Steering Committee, and general members of the River Strategy Collective. Members can join a subcommittee by indicating their interest to the chair of the subcommittee or by being invited by subcommittee and/or Steering Committee members to join. All Collective members are welcome to sit on multiple subcommittees. As the River Strategy grows, it is expected that there will be a variety of subcommittees with diverse purposes and scopes that reflect the needs of all regions of the St Lawrence River. Subcommittee chairs are expected to communicate about subcommittee activities to the Steering Committee, and at Annual General Meetings.

### 2.3.3 Working groups

Working groups will be created on an as-needed basis by subcommittees to focus on specific areas of interest. The purpose of working groups is for individuals to collaborate on specific goals or projects. Working group activities can include the coordination of events, collaboration on projects, collaboration on publications and grants, and more. Working groups can be initiated by Steering Committee, subcommittee, or general Collective members, with preference for initiation by a subcommittee that already has a scope which encompasses working group priorities. Working groups can be composed of members from both pre-existing subcommittees, the Steering Committee, and general members of the River Strategy Collective. There is no minimum or maximum number of members in a working group. Members can join a working group by indicating their interest to the chair of the working group or by

being invited by subcommittee and/or working group members to join. All members of the Collective are welcome to be a part of multiple working groups. Chairs of working groups are expected to communicate about activities to the parent subcommittee, Steering Committee, and at Annual General Meetings. There is no obligation for working groups to be active for a set term.

### 2.3.4 Decision Making

Decision making within the River Strategy Collective will be by consensus. Consensus-based decision making is a collaborative process which entails the entire group contributing to a decision, while respecting the group and individual members.<sup>11</sup> The goal is to consider the best interest of the collective, while also considering individual ideas. Consensus does not require that all members are in agreement, however, all members must consent to a final decision.<sup>11</sup> An idea must be adjusted until all members consent.<sup>11</sup> If an individual does not consent to an idea, it must be acknowledged by the group and the individual must provide an alternative.<sup>11</sup> Consensus-based decision making requires the group to have agreed upon values and principles.<sup>11</sup>

### 2.3.5 A Backbone Organization

A full-time coordinator position will be needed to hold the initial funding for the River Strategy, manage the website, organize events, help organize both subcommittee and Steering Committee meetings, create and circulate meeting agendas and minutes, connect members to funding opportunities, network between groups, encourage membership, act as a point of contact, and manage social media and other communications. We anticipate that volunteers will take on some of the roles, and that additional staff may be added as funding and the needs of the organization grow and change over time.

The River Institute commits to finding seed-funding for the River Strategy for the next 3-5 years. Over that time period, the Steering Committee should explore options for making the River Strategy financially sustainable over the long-term.

## 3. Timeline

- January 2023-2024 – new membership recruitment
- June 2023 – Steering Committee formed (to finalize framework and develop Steering Committee TOR)
- August 2023 – comments incorporated into a final framework draft
- November 2023 – TOR developed for Steering Committee
- October 2023 – soft website launch completed
- December 2023 – Science Subcommittee formed
- March 2024 – MOU created
- March 2025 – website finalized<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Horn-Miller, K. (2014). "What Does Indigenous Participatory Democracy Look Like? Kahnawà:Ke's Community Decision Making Process"

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