

How to establish Regional Planning Groups



Government of South Australia
Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing

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Purpose of this guide

Designed to supplement the South Australian Regional Level Recreation and Sport Facilities Planning Guidelines, this guide explains what Regional Planning Groups are, why they are valuable, and how to establish and operate them. This Guide is intended for local government officers, elected members, regional bodies, state agencies, and sport and recreation organisations involved in regional facility planning, delivery and management of sport and recreation facilities.

Background

Sport and recreation connect communities, contributes to economic activity and tourism, and improves health and wellbeing. To maintain these benefits, South Australia requires quality, accessible and sustainable recreation and sport facilities.

Local Government is the major provider of recreation and sport facilities in South Australia. For the most part councils plan for and manage facilities on an individual council-by-council basis.

However, councils are facing several significant challenges including:

Facilities are ageing

Facilities are in need of major redevelopment or in some cases replacement to remain fit-for-purpose, affordable and sustainable to operate and maintain.

Inefficient provision and duplication

Traditionally councils have focused on providing facilities within their respective council areas which has been a contributing factor to the duplication of facilities and services within regions.

Increasing expectations

There is increasing pressure on councils from sporting bodies and the general community to provide higher-standard facilities.

Increasing pressure on open space

There is increasing pressure on open space due to an ever-increasing demand for housing supply close to population and activity centres.

Increasing budget pressures

It is becoming increasingly more competitive and difficult for councils to raise the capital required to deliver new quality infrastructure.

Given challenges such as these to create infrastructure of the future we need to look beyond municipal boundaries and find better ways to collaboratively plan, deliver and manage a strategic spread of recreation and sport facilities that better serve communities. One method of achieving this is through the establishment of Regional Planning Groups.

What is a Regional Planning Group and what do they do?

A Regional Planning Group (RPG) is a working group of partner councils and relevant stakeholders formed for a defined geography and/or common purpose to address shared recreation and sport needs. RPGs can be established for finite purposes (sunset groups) or as ongoing collaborations where continued coordination is beneficial.

Defining the region

For the purposes of an RPG, a 'region' may be defined by one or a combination of the following:

- Neighbouring LGAs with functional catchments (e.g., shared townships, travel patterns, service corridors).
- Recognised planning boundaries (e.g., Regional Development or State Planning regions).
- Sport participation or competition catchments (e.g., league or association structures).
- Natural geography or infrastructure networks (e.g., river systems, trails, transport corridors).

Typical functions

- Collaborate on the development and delivery of Regional Recreation and Sport Plans.
- Coordinate planning, delivery and management of regional-level facilities (e.g., trails, sports hubs).
- Undertake shared procurement to achieve cost-effective outcomes (e.g., lighting, synthetic surfaces, solar).
- Standardise data, methods and decision criteria across councils.
- Engage collectively with State and Federal Government agencies and peak bodies.



Benefits of establishing a Regional Planning Group

Strategic benefits

- Shared vision and priorities across council boundaries.
- A planned network that reduces duplication and addresses gaps.

Financial benefits

- Stronger business cases and eligibility for external funding.
- Economies of scale through joint procurement and resource sharing.

Operational benefits

- Consistent standards and coordinated lifecycle management.
- Improved data quality and comparable benchmarking.

Community benefits

- Better access to fit-for-purpose facilities and programs.
- Increased participation and wellbeing outcomes.

Principles for effective collaboration

- Collective benefit and equity across communities.
- Transparency and open communication.
- Evidence-based decision making.
- Respect for local context with a regional lens.
- Clear roles, accountabilities and resourcing.

How to establish a Regional Planning Group

RPG's do not have to be on-going; they can be established as a 'sunset' committee tasked with a specific outcome (e.g. group council purchasing of equipment and infrastructure). What is essential is that RPGs are established with a defined and agreed strategic intent and governance structure. One way of facilitating this is by following these steps:

STEP 1: Commit to action

- Confirm the purpose and expected outcomes, endorsed by senior leaders and elected members.
- Identify a champion (elected member and/or senior executive) to advocate for the RPG.
- Agree initial resourcing (project lead, officer time, administration).
- Formalise collaboration via a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).
- Hold an annual or biennial regional recreation and sport forum with councils (officers and elected members) in your Region to explore and identify opportunities for collaboration (e.g. develop a Regional Recreation and Sport Plan).



STEP 2: Set the Terms of Reference (ToR)

- Purpose, scope, authority and decision-making model (consensus, vote, weighted vote).
- Membership, chair and secretariat responsibilities.
- Meeting frequency and quorum.
- Conflict of interest and dispute resolution processes.
- Communication and reporting to councils and partners.
- Periodic review of activities against the ToR - activities and outputs should be reviewed against the Terms of Reference at least annually. Regional plans should be updated on a two- to four-year cycle, or when significant contextual changes occur.

Key things to consider

- ✓ Consider keeping your RPG small, preferably between 5 and 8 participants. In a larger group it can be more difficult to reach a consensus, and it requires more human resources.
- ✓ Take time to determine who should be on the RPG. It is important that the group has a sufficient blend of expertise, skills and diversity necessary to effectively carry out its role.
- ✓ Consider external appointments on to the RPG to provide expert advice about matters being considered by the group. For example, representatives from relevant State agencies (e.g. Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing) and/or State Recreation or Sport Peak Bodies.
- ✓ It is important to determine a communication strategy to keep the 'key decision makers' within each council informed of the group's progress (e.g. regular project bulletins).

STEP 3: Define the project scope and action plan

- Develop a project plan outlining approach, timelines and governance gates.
- Prepare an action plan allocating tasks, responsibilities and milestones.
- Hold a kick-off meeting to confirm objectives, roles and deliverables.

Key things to consider

- ✓ Before you start the process of developing the plan ensure you clearly understand what the project is aiming to achieve (what is the final product that stakeholders are after). Don't be afraid to set time aside to meet with executives from constituent councils to clarify the project purpose and as importantly their expectations. Do not forget to document the key discussion points.
- ✓ Hold a "kick-off" meeting/s of the RPG to discuss the project and develop the project and action plan. It's a great way for the group to clearly understand the project and ensure that everyone's ideas are considered.

References

South Australian Regional Level Recreation and Sport Facilities Planning Guidelines, Local Government Recreation and Sport Forum, Local Government Association SA, Office for Recreation and Sport, South Australia.

Decision-Making Guide, Sport and Recreation Facilities, Department of Sport and Recreation, Western Australia.

Embedding Community Priorities into Council Planning Guidelines for the Integration of Community and Council Planning, Local Government, Professionals Corporate Planner's Network, Victoria.



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