

Women in Water Diplomacy Network North American Network Development Proposal

North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network Inception and Development Proposal *November 2023*

The Women in Water Diplomacy Network is a community of practice comprised of both formal and informal women decision-makers and experts, representing a wealth of collective experience and expertise in transboundary water management and decision-making engaged in some of the most water insecure regions of the world. Originating in the Nile Basin in 2017, the Network is now a global community of women water leaders (and male champions supporting gender equality) working collectively to strengthen women's leadership in transboundary water decision-making. **North American representatives have been actively involved in the Women in Water Diplomacy Network since the 2022 launch of the Network's Global Strategy 'A Path Forward for Women, Water, Peace and Security'.**

During the Network's Global Strategy launch event at the Stockholm World Water Week 2022, International Joint Commission Commissioner Merrell-Ann Phare endorsed the Global Strategy and encouraged its adoption across North America, saying *"there has never been a more important time for a Network like this to exist."* At [Women in Water Diplomacy Network events organized alongside the 2023 UN Water Conference](#), IJC Commissioners were joined in their support by the International Boundary and Water Commission, the Indigenous Women's Leadership Network and other leading women water experts from across North America, further building momentum to establish a North American Network branch.



Commissioner Henry Lickers, Commissioner Merrell-Ann Phare, Commissioner Adriana Resendez, Commissioner Maria-Elena Giner and Commissioner Robert Sisson; August '22.

On December 13, 2023, a broad consortium of partners co-convoked a side event at the annual Colorado River Water Users Association (CRWUA) conference in Las Vegas, Nevada to [launch the North American section of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network](#). The milestone launch event was **attended by approximately 150 water policy experts** and decision makers from a broad spectrum of stakeholder communities across the Colorado Basin including strong representation from Indigenous communities as well as Mexican representatives and a pre-recorded video message from IJC Canadian Commissioner Phare.



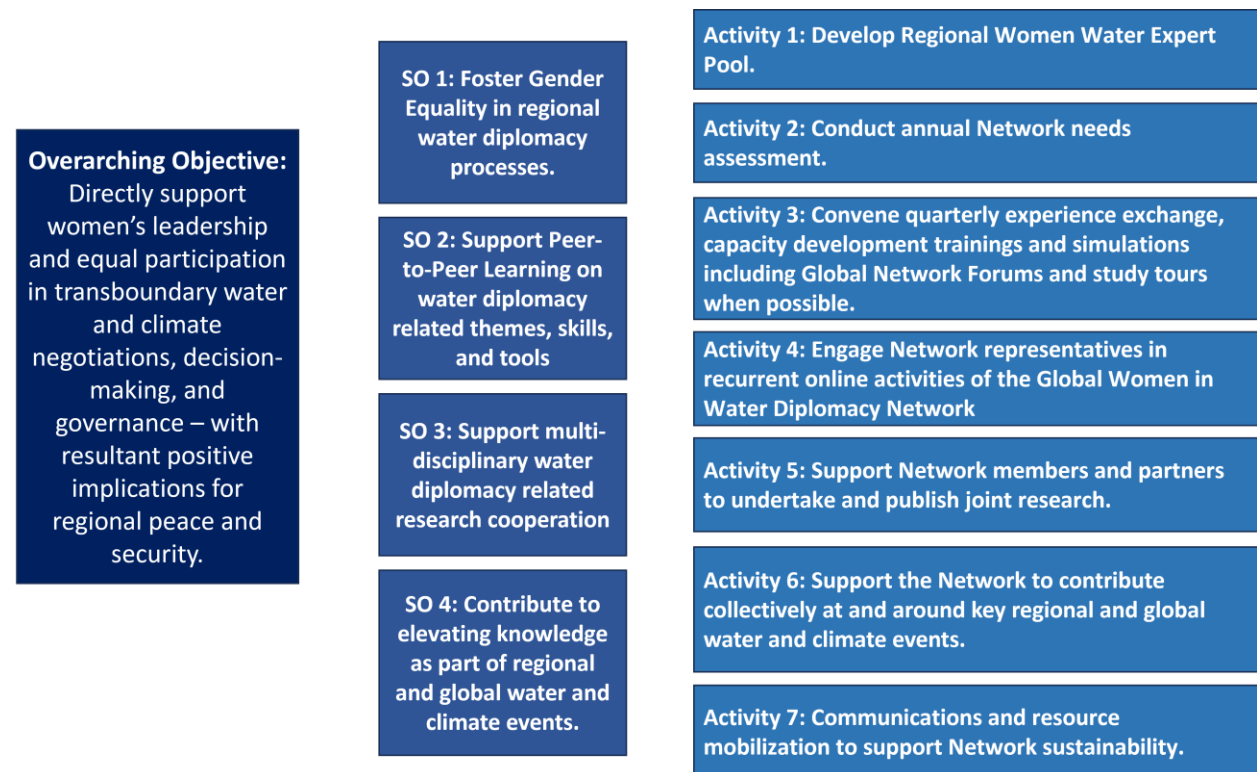
Participants at the December 2023 North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network Launch.

Since the North American Network launch, the Environmental Law Institute and partners in North America have convened several community consultation events to raise awareness about the new branch and solicit inputs into the development of the Network. The first community consultation for the North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network was held online on January 29, 2024. The event was attended by 35 participants from across a diversity of North American communities, including representatives of Indigenous Nations and local, state, and federal organizations. A [second consultation event was held with the Ten Tribes Partnership \(TPP\)](#) and provided an opportunity to connect and share

information with the Tribal Nations’ leadership in the Colorado River Basin. A third consultation was on April 11, 2024 as part of the [IJC - International Joint Commission \(IJC\) Semi-Annual Meeting](#) in Washington D.C., United States. The session was attended by approximately 50 participants from both U.S. and Canadian Sections of the IJC alongside representatives from IJC partners and stakeholders. These consultation sessions helped to contextualize the North American Network within the broader global Women in Water Diplomacy Network, explore key questions including the geographical scope of the Network, the stakeholder communities that should be represented, how participants would like to engage with the Network, and ideas for resource mobilization. Initial support for these consultation sessions was provided through a small grant by the Walton Family Foundation as well as direct contributions of key organizations keen to see the development of the Network in North America such as the National Audubon Society, University of Arizona, the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, among others.

This proposal outlines the objectives, actions, results, timeline, and financing needs for a two-year engagement to be led by ELI on behalf of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network Process Support Team in collaboration with the global Women in Water Diplomacy Network, regional partner(s), and Network participants in North America. An overall two-year budget of \$300,000 is anticipated to achieve the proposed outcomes and results.

The overarching objective of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network in North America development program is to directly support women’s leadership and gender equality in transboundary water and climate negotiations, decision-making, and governance in North America.



The overarching objective will be achieved by advancing four strategic objectives (SOs) through seven interrelated activities, which are illustrated in the above diagram and detailed below. The SOs and

targeted activities identified and prioritized based on inputs received in the North American Network events, consultations, and their evaluations.

Objective 1: Foster gender equality in regional water diplomacy processes. The Network will drive initiatives that elevate women's roles in transboundary water governance and decision-making and address underlying drivers of gender inequities in water governance from local to transboundary levels. The Network will contribute to empowering young water professionals in support of the next generation of water diplomats as well as engage male champions of gender equality across its programming.



Objective 2: Support quarterly peer-to-peer learning, capacity development and experience exchange sessions on water diplomacy related themes, skills, and tools across the North American Network enhancing knowledge, coordination, and trust-building among Network members and partners.



Increasing water stress from climate change impacts, population growth, and a lack of good water governance has put focus on the urgency to address regional water security challenges, particularly in water insecure transboundary basins and spurred efforts to support decision makers to address and improve the management of shared waters. Building on regular consultations and needs assessments to identify knowledge gaps and areas for water diplomacy related joint learning and trainings, the Women in Water Diplomacy Network will design innovative water diplomacy experience exchange-based workshops around critical themes such as international water law, environmental peacebuilding, multi-level governance, climate security, and disaster risk reduction as well as briefings on key issues in current North American shared waters.

Experience exchanges can provide critical opportunities for riparian decision-makers and negotiators from a shared basin to come together in a sustained exchange over time to build trust, share knowledge and build relationships. Throughout these engagements, guidance from senior decision-makers, experts and/or negotiators with direct experience from relevant real-world basin/regional processes provide relevant problem-solving and capacity enhancement opportunities. The methodology seeks to foster an informal 'safe space' atmosphere to support learning, build trust and peer-to-peer exchange focused on regional water cooperation opportunities and challenges and recognizing the expertise and experience of the diverse Network participants. Connectivity between participant-decision makers is maintained beyond the workshop environment to provide an additional channel of communications and knowledge exchange nurtured by the Network's Process Support Team. Moreover, the method provides space to participants to listen, share their visions on different regional water diplomacy processes, move towards a shared understanding of priority challenges, clarify mandates, and identify priorities and confidence building measures. Monitoring and evaluation processes will be designed to capture participant feedback on the approaches used to facilitate exchanges and events, as well as to improve training content.

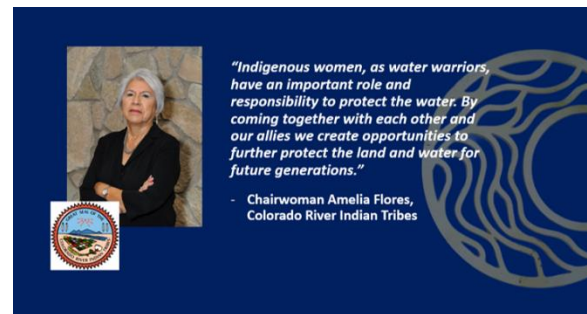
Objective 3: Support multi-disciplinary water diplomacy related research cooperation among North American Network members and partners.

Transboundary research cooperation efforts can support basin decision-makers and stakeholders by fostering a shared vision and understanding of concerns and contribute to eroding gaps in information and knowledge. Linking formal basin stakeholders with expert sources of research and knowledge supports both technical and political actors to make informed decisions and increases the willingness and abilities of a range of actors to take informed cooperative decisions on shared waters. The Women in Water Diplomacy Network will foster joint research amongst its members and supporters contributing both to the growing literature in the field of water cooperation and environmental peacebuilding, and, likewise, to elevate women-led research excellence including under-represented perspectives and local knowledge holders such as Indigenous women riparians. The results of joint research will be disseminated by Network members, supporters, partners, and Process Support Team and communicated in special issues of relevant journals, open access reports, peer-reviewed articles, and/or policy briefs, designed for a variety of target audiences, including the public.



Objective 4: Contribute to elevating knowledge around the intersecting themes of women, water, peace, and security as part of regional and global water and climate events.

Despite long efforts to foster inclusive policy dialogue spaces, many critical global water and climate dialogues retain rigid gender and economic barriers negatively impacting women's equal participation and influence. Guided by the Network's Global Strategy, the Women in Water Diplomacy Network in North America will identify strategic milestone events at national, basin, regional, and global levels for collective engagement to advance shared objectives and priorities and tangibly impact the trajectory of water security discourse. Key events in the proposed implementation period already identified include the Santa Fe hosted Colorado River Symposium, the Colorado River Water Users Association conference, the 2026 United Nations Water Conference expected to take place in March in New York, among others.



To support the Strategic Objectives, ELI will drive seven core activities:

ELI will identify and engage regional water diplomats and experts across all Network activities (Activity 1)

ELI will undertake a recurrent stakeholder mapping to develop an expanded North American Women in Water Diplomacy experts pool in collaboration with partners and engage identified stakeholders across Network activities including formal leaders representing Indigenous, local, state, federal bodies as well as informal water related actors such as academics and civil society. The Network will aim to include a balance of both formal and informal water diplomats as well as young professionals across all its engagements to foster intergenerational dialogue and knowledge sharing.

ELI will conduct an annual needs assessment (Activity 2) to inform training needs and priorities of Network participants. The annual needs assessment will focus on identifying themes, tools, and

opportunities for regional knowledge exchange which can be developed as part of the Network's quarterly water diplomacy trainings.

ELI will convene quarterly water diplomacy trainings including regional/basin and inter-basin experience exchange, capacity development and negotiation simulations (Activity 3). Six of the quarterly trainings will take place online and two will take place in-person back-to-back with Network collective engagements at key regional and international policy meetings (see Activity 6). ELI will engage leading global and regional experts to provide innovative and contemporary content for the trainings as needed. As resources allow, Network representatives would also be invited to future Women in Water Diplomacy Global Network Forums and study tours.

ELI will engage Network representatives in online activities of the Global Women in Water Diplomacy Network (Activity 4) such as the Network's recurrent events on International Women's Day, Women in Diplomacy Day, and the Year-in-Review event.

ELI will support Network members and partners to undertake and publish joint research (Activity 5) on critical and innovative themes of water diplomacy of contemporary relevance in North America. ELI will work closely with Network members to identify priority themes for joint research and publication and support publication as a Special Issue in a peer-reviewed journal, such as *Water International*. This will serve not only to achieve the benefits of the joint working process but also to highlight the diverse and important knowledge of women water professionals in the region.

ELI will support the Network to contribute collectively at and around key regional and global water and climate events (Activity 6). In-person trainings are expected to be held back-to-back with Network engagement at key water and climate events.

Finally, **ELI will undertake broad communication efforts to raise awareness and mobilize new sources of financing or in-kind resources to support the sustainability of the North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network (Activity 7).**

Implementation of proposed activities is expected to **foster and sustain boundary crossing relationships between water related decision makers and experts from across North America and its diverse constituencies.** A Network of peer-experts can serve to erode closely held in-group and out-group associations, enabling conflict/competition 'unfreezing', and make space for new thinking, new perspectives, and new knowledge intersections that can challenge prevailing, status quo concepts and broaden the diplomatic space to inform official processes. Further, particularly in times of heightened political tensions boundary crossing communities can provide alternative channels of communications between neighboring countries' decision makers to inform decision making and negotiations in real time.

Immediate results of the proposed activities include the opportunity for dialogue and peer-to-peer mentoring and capacity development among participating women water diplomats through engaging in Network activities. Enabling Network members to join in collective learning and action is likewise expected to increase commitment to advance inclusive, cooperative solutions to transboundary water challenges among basin stakeholders and decision makers, improving the enabling environment for cooperative approaches with resultant impacts on peace building in the region. Through collective, visible, joint participation at a critical policy dialogue event, the Network will elevate the recognition of the importance of gender equality, and women's leadership specifically, at all levels transboundary water negotiations

and policy processes, strengthening shared convictions and providing positive inspiration to women and men across the water, climate, and development sectors. Overtime, the program is expected to catalyze several key **intermediate outcomes** including improved coordination and information exchange between regional decision-makers through recurrent Network engagements and through joint engagement in regional and international policy discussions.

ELI is a sector leader in monitoring and evaluation and project personnel have specific expertise and experience in M&E. Stakeholders will be recurrently evaluated throughout the duration of the project to foster learning, efficiency, and co-creation.

Proposed Activities Timeline:

Activity/ Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24		
Activity 1	Ongoing throughout program.																									
Activity 2	Y1 Assessment													Y2 Assessment											End of Program Assessment	
Activity 3	Y1 Q1 water diplomacy training - online						Y1 Q3 water diplomacy training - online			Y1 Q4 water diplomacy training - online			Y2 Q1 water diplomacy training - online			Y2 Q2 water diplomacy training - online							Y2 Q4 water diplomacy training - online			
Activity 4					Year in Review online event			Women's Day online event			Women in Diplomacy Day online event						Year in Review online event			Women's Day online event			Women in Diplomacy Day online event			
Activity 5	Ongoing throughout program.																									
Activity 6				Y1 Q2 water diplomacy in-person training and collective engagement at regional/ international policy event																				Y2 Q3 water diplomacy training - in person / on the side of UN Water Conference 2024 + collective engagement at UN Water		
Activity 7	Ongoing throughout program.																									

Financing and Development Partner Reporting

ELI and Women in Water Diplomacy Network partners have no current funding resources to directly support development of a Network branch in the North America, as such resources and partners are being actively sought to achieve the aims outlined in this proposed development program. An overall two-year budget of \$300,000 is anticipated to achieve the proposed outcomes and results.

For additional details on how to support the Women in Water Diplomacy Network please contact:

Elizabeth A. Koch, Senior Manager, Environmental Law Institute
Process Support Team Lead, Women in Water Diplomacy Network
koch@eli.org