Setting the Course for Improved Water Quality

Stakeholder Advisory Committees

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A TMDL training program for local government leaders and other water resource managers – Session 4b

Presentation goals

- Provide tips for working with a stakeholder advisory committee
- Describe appropriate roles and responsibilities
  - Advisory committee members
  - Chairpersons
  - Project Managers

Involving stakeholders can be challenging!

- It is not easy to do it well!
- It can be a lot of hard work!
- It can take a good deal of time!

But the rewards to your project are significant!

"Democracy is like a raft: it won't sink, but you will always have your feet wet."

– Russell B. Long

Politician

Use a stakeholder advisory committee when…

The TMDL is expected to be controversial

There is strong public interest in the project and its outcome

The water quality problems are complex *(e.g. multiple impairments, point and nonpoint sources)*

You must depend on many interest groups to implement water quality solutions

Ask for members from existing groups with expertise in water quality

- County local water plan task forces
- Special project advisory teams
- MPCA basin teams
- Lake/river associations
- Hunting and fishing clubs
- Watershed district committees
- Drainage committees

Stakeholder Advisory Committees

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Membership should:

- represent key, diverse interests
- include known critics of the project
- include people with leadership skills
- ideally, include no more than 20-25 members (for basin scale projects)

Participants will learn about…

- How MPCA assesses water quality
- Tools to protect water quality (permits, ordinances, incentives)
- The sources of pollution
- Conditions that influence water quality

Participating citizens will learn about…

- How maximum pollutant load is determined
- How current pollutant load can be reduced
- How to determine whether we have been successful

Stakeholder Advisory Committees

Include those who will be:

- responsible for implementing the TMDL
- directly affected by TMDL Implementation Plan
- knowledgeable about technical and financial issues *(where feasible)*
- knowledgeable about existing programs and resources that can aid your project

Roles and responsibilities for committee members

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Determine if SAC members will be expected to:

- learn basics about watershed science
- do research
- participate in open houses, public meetings
- develop work products
- lead subcommittees
- advocate for the project

Roles and responsibilities for committee members

Clearly articulate:

- the importance of their involvement
- what you will expect of them
- that their role is ***advisory only***
- the time commitment they will make
- All opinions will be valued
- that a democratic process can be messy and sometimes challenging

Roles and responsibilities of the project manager

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Visionary

Planning consultant

Technical Advisor

Roles and responsibilities of the project manager

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Facilitator

Logistics coordinator

Writer Coach

Roles and responsibilities of the committee chair

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The Chair should be:

- a leader, but also a servant of the members
- sensitive to people's concerns
- articulate, clear, direct
- neutral, while protecting the minority
- able to share responsibility and credit
- patient, creative and flexible
- good with interpersonal skills
- a talented facilitator – everyone should get a fair hearing

Roles and responsibilities of technical advisors

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Technical advisors:

- play a critical role in TMDL projects
- are typically staff from MPCA or consulting firms, other resources agencies, or universities
- provide technical information and advice to stakeholders
- are highly collaborative when working with stakeholders

When you need a facilitator

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Facilitators can:

- improve meeting effectiveness by encouraging conversation
- diffuse anxiety when complicated or controversial issues arise
- create efficient group exercises that will get you from A to Z

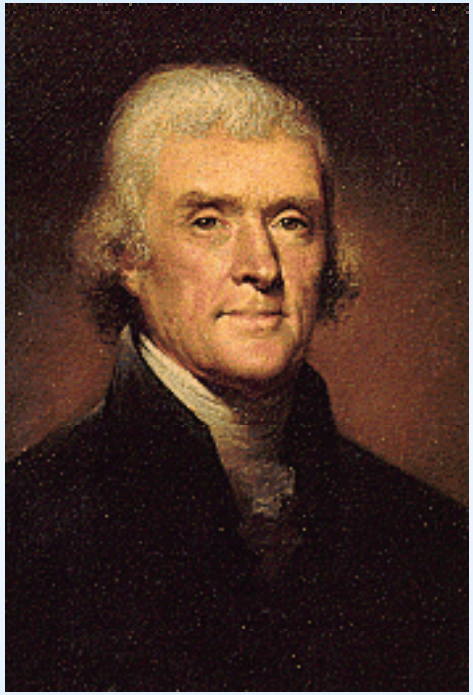
Roles and responsibilities for consultants

- Your SAC process should be “home grown”, reflecting you and the community
- Consultants should be used rarely, if ever, in leadership roles
- Consultants can provide facilitation skills, do research (focus groups, literature reviews, surveys, etc.), and provide technical expertise

Encourage meaningful participation

A common barrier to meaningful participation is that participants *lack the knowledge* that would allow them to fully grasp the issues and fully engage in discussion.

Allow time for the SAC to learn



"Information is the currency of democracy."

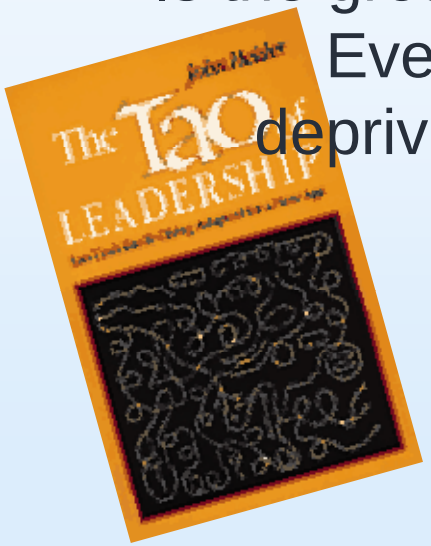
–Thomas Jefferson

Allow time for the SAC to learn

- Spend time early in process educating SAC members on TMDL technical material
- Ensure a basic level of science literacy before moving into development of solutions
- Strive for simplicity and clarity when developing information for your SAC
- Provide information in small doses, over time

A thought on conflict within committees

"Group process evolves naturally. It is self-regulating.
Do not interfere. It will work itself out.
Efforts to control process usually fail.
Learn to trust what is happening.
If there is silence, let it grow; something will emerge.
If there is a storm, let it rage; it will resolve into calm.
Is the group discontented? You can't make it happy.
Even if you could, your efforts might well
deprive the group of a very creative struggle."



–John Heider
The Tao of Leadership

Committees and consensus

Stakeholder Committees often operate on a consensus basis

Consensus is not essential, nor is it always a constructive outcome

WHY?

Committees and consensus

The most useful thing an advisory committee can do is

Develop recommendations which:

- are robust – not diluted to reach consensus
- reflect differing points of view
- offer many “good ideas” for consideration

Committees and consensus

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Pushing advisory committees toward consensus may inadvertently:

- Limit the number of good ideas developed
- Make committee members feel bullied to agree to ‘uncomfortable’ ideas
- Limit creativity

When the SAC process is complete

- Take time to celebrate!
- Help set realistic expectations for restoring water quality *(need for interim measures of success)*
- Encourage a patient, long-term perspective on restoration activities

When the SAC process is complete

- Continue to communicate with members, as you see fit, to keep them informed of progress
- Encourage them to share their knowledge
- Encourage advocacy at the local level

Tools for involving the general public in the TMDL process

- Focus groups
- Open houses
- Community fairs
- Public meetings
- Habitat restoration activities
- Press releases

Tools for involving the general public in the TMDL process

- Clean-up activities
- Full-page ads
- BMP Implementation
- Look for sponsors in new places
- Be creative!

Explore Minnesota Tourism

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Quick questionnaire available

To help you decide on the appropriate level of public involvement

To use as a starting point for conversations and planning activities

Summary

- Involving the public in some manner
  - is essential to the success of most TMDLs
  - is required to have your TMDL approved by EPA
- Determine the appropriate level of effort to put into public participation process
- Know what you are getting into and the resources that will be needed to succeed

Summary

- Work to meet basic public participation objectives
- Plan carefully before initiating a Stakeholder Advisory Committee process
- Encourage SACs to develop a range of potential solutions, if they desire
- Enjoy the journey as much as the destination!

“We forget that the water cycle and the life cycle are one.”

– Jacques Cousteau