



Building Community Capacity for Public Involvement in Watershed Projects

Regional Division, Watershed Section

What Is It?

Engaging a community means more than simply allowing citizens to react to the policies and decisions already developed by government organizations. The goal is to make sure a community has safe and productive environments where citizens and stakeholders can come together to dialogue about issues of concern to them and create their own visions and strategies for change in their communities. Building community capacity also involves finding and developing citizen leaders that can carry these strategies forward through implementation.

How Do We Encourage It?

State agencies can provide the leadership, tools and coordination to help local project teams assess, build and tap a community's capacity to engage the public. This must happen on a project by project basis, learning as we go and improving techniques and tools over time.

What Approach Will We Use?

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) project teams will be encouraged to use a simple planning framework (see other side) that uses an assessment of conditions within the community to guide choices about public involvement actions. Actions need to reflect a community's unique circumstances, needs and constraints. This planning framework is part of a system of products and services to be defined by feedback from users, project teams, public involvement specialists and others and to be tested bit-by-bit within watershed projects. Based on early feedback, the initial vision for this Community Capacity Support Service includes:

1. **Community capacity strategic planning cycle** – A protocol (working draft, generic scenario) for implementing this planning framework will be available in the fall of 2010. Three additional documents will eventually accompany the framework: (a) An overlay cross-referencing current practices to its steps; (2) a process map that relates parts of a watershed project (including local comprehensive water planning) through time, the affiliated people and organizations and some touch points within the process for public involvement; and (3) sample budgets. Work plan boilerplate language is currently available.
2. **Interactive Idea Bank** – An interactive multi-media electronic archive of best practices and research on public involvement, video clips, success stories, personal narratives, etc., will help project teams think outside-the-box.
3. **Specialist network** – A consortium of practitioners and organizations specializing in group dynamics and civic leadership development will provide project teams access to skills and expertise they cannot justify developing within their own ranks.
4. **Practitioners' forum** – On-line or Video forum to tap collective knowledge across the state. A platform for invited speakers to share expertise.
5. **Performance tracking framework** – A means for local citizens and state/local governmental agencies to track project and program progress, appreciate their real accomplishments, and communicate success to key sponsors and other stakeholders.

Community Capacity Strategic Planning



Know the Community

1. **Frame the problem:** Describe the water issues in a community's own terms. See water quality issues through relevant lens: health, economics, children's world, food, recreation and destination, property values, etc.
2. **Assess potential for engagement:** Local institutions, culture, and history affect a community's readiness to involve citizens. Identify and characterize audiences to be targeted by civic engagement actions.

Choose Best Ways to Involve People

Actions that are relevant to local citizens and to the water resource problem can be identified and strategically grouped according to the preceding assessment.

Integrate Civic Engagement into the Project Plan

Recruit citizens, stakeholders, partners to finalize and participate in the plan. Create a project performance management scheme.

Engage Citizens

Track progress; lessons learned. Make stories, anecdotes and indicators of success visible.

Learn and Adjust

Adapt engagement practices; reframe the problem; grow sponsorship as progress is made.

This plan-do-check framework enables *seamless transitions* between different phases of the total maximum daily load (TMDL) and Watershed Project process: Analysis, Planning and Implementation. The framework encourages project teams and their citizen members to plan their civic engagement actions strategically, based on accurate assessment of community values, beliefs, and points of view regarding options and choices to accomplish watershed protection and restoration. By enabling adaptive management continuity across phases of work handled by different Agencies and organizations, the framework supports interagency coordination.