BUILDING LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

A GUIDE FOR WATERSHED PARTNERSHIPS

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RECYCLED PAPER

KNOW YOUR WATERSHED

Why build a local partnership?

Partnerships are a key to effective watershed management. Through a partnership different people and organizations work together to address common interests and concerns.

Other terms such as "teams," "alliances" and "groups" can be used instead of partnership. What you call your organization and how it's structured is up to the group. In fact, effective organizations are as unique as the watershed itself.

A partnership is the easiest way to develop and implement a successful watershed management plan because everyone is involved from the beginning. That means the ultimate plan will truly have the consensus of all parties who have a stake in the watershed.

In addition, partnerships often result in:

- More efficient use of financial resources
- A spirit of sharing and cooperation
- Fairness which mimics impact
- More creative and acceptable ways to protect natural resources.

Partnerships can also be challenging. It takes time and skill to create successful partnerships. Maintaining motivation and enthusiasm is another challenge, especially if positive results don't happen quickly. All the relevant stakeholders must believe their efforts are needed.

As you build a local partnership, you will encounter these and other challenges. Remember, the benefits of partnerships usually far outweigh the challenges.

Who should be included?

In short, anyone with a stake in the watershed management plan (see list right) should be involved. Success depends on involving a good mix of people and organizations to put together and implement the plan.

You will need to find people to play a number of roles. These roles include:

- Technical
- Leadership
- Communication
- Education
- Political liaison
- Public policy

Some people who live outside the watershed may even have an important role to play because they benefit from or impact water or other natural resources within the watershed.

Typical Projects

- Field trips and tours
- Meetings and workshops
- Canoe trips
- Volunteer monitoring
- Cleanup and restoration days
- Educational programs for schools, civic groups and other local organizations
- Media relations
- Opinion surveys
- Focus groups

PARTNERS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

Landowners and managers
- *Trustworthy information sources*
- *Role models*
- *Peer pressure*

Financial institutions
- *Influence over management decisions*
- *Linkage with landowners*
- *Prestige for partnership*
- *Funding for programs*

Agri-businesses and industries
- *Distribute information and influence decisions*
- *Sponsor field days and demonstrations*
- *Donate equipment and services*
- *Funding for programs*

Farm organizations
- *Credibility and visibility for programs*
- *Existing communication channels*

Grass roots river/watershed advocates
- *Enthusiastic volunteer monitors*
- *Skills for writing grant proposals*

Soil and water, irrigation and water districts
- *Credibility within community*
- *Expertise in natural resource management*
- *Funding mechanisms*
- *Awareness of issues and solutions*

Water treatment plants
- *Technical expertise*
- *Funding mechanisms*
- *Ability to monitor data*

Local and county officials
- *Political leadership and credibility*
- *Land use and resource management decisions*
- *Financial support for projects*

Local and county government agencies
- *Financial and technical support*
- *Policies and decisions that affect the watershed*
- *Logistics, equipment and related support*
- *Data collection and analysis expertise*

Chambers of Commerce
- *Compatible, broader goals for local economy*
- *Concerns and interests of businesses*

Newspaper and radio
- *Coverage of watershed events*
- *Human interest stories*
- *Understanding of local information needs*
- *Ability to get information out quickly*

Students
- *Influence over efforts in the future*
- *Time and energy for "repetitive" tasks*

Teachers
- *Influence over values and beliefs*
- *Ability to shape future generations*
- *Source of information*

Women's groups
- *Influence over family decisions*
- *Interest and concern for health issues*

Religious leaders
- *Commitment to stewardship*
- *Ability to appeal to higher values*
- *Credibility and legitimacy*

Retired persons
- *Time and talent for teamwork*
- *Understanding of local conditions*
- *Credibility in community*

Civic organizations
- *Ongoing program activities*
- *Interest in and concern for community*
- *Fund-raising skills*

How to build a successful partnership.

How partnerships develop.

Successful partnerships take time to develop. Expect some highs and some lows. There are four main stages. These stages can be compared to how we learn to swim. Each involves specific feelings and actions. If you understand and prepare for these different stages, you will find it easier to move through the difficult stages to reach success at the end.

1. The forming stage

When a partnership is forming, people cautiously explore each other. Members are like hesitant swimmers. They stand by the side of the pool and stick their toes in the water. Feelings at this stage include excitement and optimism mixed with skepticism and anxiety. Activities include:

- Defining the job at hand and discussing how to accomplish it
- Deciding what information needs to be gathered
- Discussing concepts and issues
- Identifying all the barriers to getting the job done
- Increasing tension and jealousy

2. The storming stage

This is often the most difficult stage. Partners become impatient and begin arguing. They are like new swimmers. After they jump in the water, they are afraid they might drown and begin thrashing around. Feelings include resistance to change and negative attitudes about the success of the partnership. Signs include:

- Arguing about less important issues
- Becoming defensive or competitive (choosing sides)
- Developing unrealistic goals

3. The normalizing stage

People accept their role in the team, as well as ground rules (or norms). Conflicts are reduced and competitors become more cooperative. Like experienced swimmers, people realize they aren't going to drown and they help keep each other afloat. Feelings include acceptance of team membership and relief that things seem to be working out. Some activities are:

- Achieving harmony by avoiding conflict
- More friendliness and sharing of problems
- A sense of team cohesion and common goals

4. The performing stage

By this stage, the partnership has become an effective and close-knit unit. People begin to really work together. Like a winning relay team, the partnership works together well. Feelings include new insights about the partnership and each member's role as well as satisfaction with the partnership's progress. Some activities are:

- Constructive change
- Ability to work through problems
- Closer attachment to partnership

Building a successful partnership takes skill, time and patience. Here are some specific strategies to help.

Identify and involve the "right" people

All people with a stake in the watershed (stakeholders) should feel welcome to become a partner. Use the list (page 3) to start. In addition, consider the following three distinct groups.

- Those who are BOTH affected by and interested in watershed protection
- Those who ARE affected, but NOT interested
- Those who are NOT affected, but ARE interested

While each partner should understand and agree to their own roles and responsibilities, all partners should be able to take part in any decision or activity where they have interest and expertise.

Leadership comes from within

Leadership should emerge from among the members of the partnership. Someone will have to take the initial responsibility for getting members together. Once members are together, however, consensus regarding leadership will be necessary.

Leadership or coordination involves the ability to get people to voluntarily commit to goals and accept responsibilities. A top-down approach will not generally work.

The initial meeting(s) are critical to success. General meeting strategies and specifics for the first meeting are in the *Leading and Communicating* guide.

Build a common purpose

An important way to build a partnership is to develop a clear sense of your purpose through a statement. Partners should develop a concise purpose statement that defines general goals and responsibilities.

A carefully worded statement will serve as a yardstick for decision making, for measuring progress and will provide motivation for high quality. Make sure all partners are comfortable with the statement. Steps include:

- ❑ Ask for ideas from all partners
- ❑ Discuss the ideas and draft a statement
- ❑ Revise draft based on discussion
- ❑ Write a final statement
- ❑ Solicit statements of commitment from all partners

This process may not be easy and will take time. Remember, it's important to keep the statement general enough to encourage widespread support, but specific enough to identify goals and measure progress.

Purpose statement:
"The Blue Lake Watershed Partnership is dedicated to protecting the lake's quality of life and the economic vitality of land users in the watershed."

Establish attainable goals

To accomplish the purpose statement the group will need to set short- and long-term goals. These goals should include general strategies (e.g., increase support of watershed protection). Goals for more specific activities will also be needed (e.g., series of newspaper articles, tree planting, etc.).

How to build a successful partnership (continued).

Focus on the future in setting clear and attainable goals. Partners should assume specific responsibilities to accomplish within a definite time frame Partnerships often get stuck at this stage because past experience dictates what a group believes they can or cannot do. Do not let the past dictate the future.

Make best use of talents

Build the partnership around members' interests and strengths. Each member needs to contribute their unique talents. For example, some may be responsible for public contact while others will gather resource information.

Individuals can provide new ideas and approaches. Yet, the group shares responsibility for decisions and actions, as well as for successes. All members also should be able to express their opinions and offer constructive criticism.

Encourage communication and participation

Successful partnerships are built on clear and open communication. Discussion both during and outside meetings should be honest and open. Partners need to listen to each other and provide constructive feedback. See *Leading & Communicating* guide for details.

Balanced participation will also promote a spirit of trust and cooperation. Because each partner has an interest in the success of the partnership, each should participate in discussions and decisions.

It is also important to agree on decision-making procedures that encourage participation. Most effective decisions are made by consensus. This doesn't mean that everyone will be completely happy; but that everyone can live with the decision and feel decisions are fair.

Set up a flexible organization

There is no single partnership structure that will work in every watershed. Instead, your group should determine how formal the partnership needs to be. Partners can meet on a regular basis or only be contacted as needed.

Some division of labor and delegation of responsibility should be set up to take advantage of resources and expertise. Build on existing community organizations, such as informal groups of land managers, formal organizations and other community organizations.

Your local soil and water conservation district, natural resource agencies, extension, conservation clubs, Chamber of Commerce, service organizations (e.g., Lions Club or Jaycees) or a local business can provide valuable advice on organization and facilitation.

Subcommittees can be formed for activities such as media relations, fund-raising or demonstrations. Assignments might depend on the scope of the activities, goals and interests. They can also be organized to deal with specific resource management areas, such as soil erosion, recycling, manure management, storm sewer management or septic systems.

It may also be necessary to include representation from more than one county depending on watershed boundaries. If the watershed is too large, the group may want to subdivide it into smaller watersheds with their own partnerships.

Why partnerships succeed.

Partnerships are successful for a number of reasons. Your challenge is to determine what motivates people and make sure these motivations are met.

Some individuals may contribute because their jobs require such cooperation. Many people also enjoy working with others and meeting new challenges. They also may see the potential for professional and personal growth, as well as a sense of accomplishment.

External factors can also motivate partnerships, including public expectations and organizational mandates for cooperation.

Informal, social interaction can provide the glue that holds a partnership together. Encourage these types of interactions and build on the motivations.

Why partnerships fail.

Most people agree with the notion of partnership, at least in principle. However, partnerships may be unsuccessful for a variety of reasons.

- Past failures
- Lack of commitment
- Worry about lost independence
- Lack of credit for own contributions
- Personality conflicts
- Power struggles or turf battles
- Partners that do not agree on realistic roles and responsibilities
- Differences in cultural and personal values

Keys to successful partnerships

Establish a sense of need and direction
All partners need to know they're working toward a worthwhile purpose. They also need to know what is expected of them.

Select partners based on existing and potential skills, not personalities
Partnerships will need technical or communications, problem-solving and interpersonal skills.

Pay particular attention to the early meetings and activities
First impressions mean a lot. People are often skeptical at the first meeting and may be suspicious of other partners.

Set some ground rules
The group will probably need to set some specific ground rules related to meeting participation, discussion, confidentiality, constructive feedback and expected contributions.

Start with a few short-term tasks that have a good chance for success
Be sure that early projects are realistic and will be seen as "winners" in the eyes of the partners.

Challenge the group regularly with fresh facts and information
New information (that you will be gathering as a partnership) will help to better understand your situation and improve your effectiveness.

Spend time together
It will take time to get the partnership working effectively. Spend time (outside of meetings if possible) to get to know each other.

Use the power of positive feedback, recognition and reward
People respond to positive incentives in the partnership setting just as they do as individuals.

How to build consensus.

Identify obstacles.

It's important to recognize and overcome obstacles to establishing and maintaining a successful partnership. These include:

Lack of time or other resources
Many partners will also have other commitments. They may not view this as an important use of their time or other resources.

Low levels of commitment or interest
This can happen if the effort gets bogged down or partners aren't kept active.

Individualism and the "American way"
To many, the idea of working together is contrary to beliefs in self-sufficiency and competition. Some people tend to feel it is a sign of strength to be able to solve problems on their own.

Loss of autonomy or recognition
People (especially those who represent organizations) worry that a partnership means a loss of freedom or control over their own priorities and activities. Some also worry they may not get enough credit for the work they do within a partnership.

Conflicting goals or missions
Because partnerships generally involve diverse members, including businesses, government agencies and advocacy groups, the partners often have different goals and expectations. In fact, some see partnerships mainly as a way to pursue their own agenda.

Blaming others or feeling blamed
It is a natural tendency to blame others for problems. Partners may blame each other for lack of progress. This may lead to the perception that they are being unfairly criticized.

Overbearing or dominating partners
Some partners (often those with authority or expertise) have too much influence over a partnership. Such "experts" often discourage discussion or criticize others' ideas.

Reluctant partners
Most groups have one or more members who never speak. Problems arise unless these partners are encouraged to be active in some way.

Competition between partners
Partners who have long-standing feuds may attempt to continue the feud in the partnership. These tend to be based on past problems.

Unquestioned acceptance of opinions as facts
Some people try to present their own personal opinions or values as facts (without supporting evidence).

Rush for accomplishments
Some partners may push to "do something" either because they are impatient or are pressured from elsewhere. These partners often reach their own conclusions before the rest of the group has time to carefully consider all options.

Attribution and criticism
People often assign (or attribute) negative motives to others when they disagree or don't understand the other position. This delays seeking real explanations for problems.

Digression and tangents
People tend to drift off the subject. Some digression may be useful if it promotes new ideas, but often it wastes time. Unfocused discussions can result from poor leadership.

Floundering
Partnerships may have trouble starting and finishing projects. They get stuck in a rut. Some partners may resist moving forward.

Lack of flexibility
Some partners may have just one way of doing things and seem unable to adapt to change.

Overcome obstacles.

Regardless of how cooperative the people in your partnership are, some problems will ultimately arise. There are several ways to overcome obstacles:

Anticipate and prevent obstacles whenever possible. This often works best by spending time up front getting to know each other, establishing ground rules, and agreeing to individual roles and responsibilities.

Think of each problem as a group challenge (rather than as an individual problem). We have a natural tendency to blame individuals for problems. The truth is that many problems occur because the group lets them happen.

Be careful with difficult people. When problems occur with a particular person, take care not to over-react. Some behaviors are only a minor disruption. On the other hand, certain behaviors are very disruptive and slow progress.

Building consensus.

One of the best ways to overcome obstacles is to build consensus. Effective consensus decisions share the following characteristics:

Total participation and responsibility
All major interests are identified and brought together. Everyone helps plan activities and offers suggestions to make them more effective.

Education
Partners spend time discussing the history of the issue, their perceptions and concerns, and ideas for solutions.

Information
Partners keep their own groups and the rest of the people who live in the watershed informed.

Common definition
Partners discuss and agree on a constructive definition of the problem.

Identifiable options
Partners seek a range of options to satisfy their respective concerns and avoid pushing single positions.

Mutual agreement
Partners don't vote; but modify options or seek alternatives until everyone agrees that the best decision has been reached.

Implementation
The group identifies ways to implement solutions.

Ways to maintain consensus:

- Actively involve a broad range of stakeholders and citizens as partners in planning and implementing the watershed management effort.
- Ensure each partner has the opportunity and responsibility for meaningful contributions.
- Document, publicize and celebrate the successes through an ongoing recognition program and communication campaign.
- Designate an effective and respected project leader who can maintain the activities of the partnership.
- Identify and manage conflicts early in the process
- Make sure activities are exciting and fun to maintain interest and commitment.

TEAMBUILDING EXERCISES.

Partnerships need help to develop to their highest potential. Three exercises that can be used to build a more successful partnership follow.

Exercise 1

Member Introductions

This serves as a warm-up activity for the group during the first meeting. Simply go around the room and ask each person to share the following information about themselves: name, profession, affiliation, how long they've lived in the area and expectations for the partnership or meeting. It could also be helpful to ask each person about their perceptions of the most important watershed management issues.

Exercise 2

Responsibility Chart

This can be used to match people with responsibilities for developing and implementing your watershed program. This exercise is best used after a plan has been developed.

The objective is for partners to assume responsibility for the main tasks. Draw a chart on a flip chart. First the partners identify all the tasks that need to be carried out. List these down the chart as rows. Across the top, label the three columns—leader, group and partner. Considering one task at a time, the group decides who has primary responsibility for completion of each task. If it is a partner, the person's name is listed.

Exercise 3

Handling Disruptive Group Behavior

Through this exercise, the group decides how to deal with problems that arise. This may be most helpful if the partnership seems to have stalled or conflicts have arisen.

The group's first step is to list types of disruptive behaviors (see *Leading and Communicating* guide). Remember, there are no right or wrong answers in brainstorming. List all ideas on a flip chart. Continue until everyone has listed all their ideas.

Use consensus to reduce the list to two or three of the most important types of disruptive behavior. Discuss responses for each of these. Three types of responses might be: preventive, minimal intervention (discussion) and higher intervention (confrontation). Using a flip chart, put these as headings on three columns.

Then brainstorm possible responses for each and write them in the appropriate column. When the list is complete, discuss the pros and cons of each activity. As a group, decide which options are the most appropriate for each of the main disruptive behaviors.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION.

To start down the road toward an effective local watershed partnership, you may want to read other guides from the Conservation Technology Information Center by calling (765) 494-9555. A $2.50 fee is charged to cover postage and handling.

Getting to Know Your Local Watershed
Leading & Communicating
Managing Conflict
Putting Together a Watershed Management Plan
Reflecting on Lakes
Groundwater & Surface Water: Understanding the Interaction
Guide to Information and Resources
Nonpoint Source Water Quality Contacts

The author acknowledges the following sources of information that were used in developing this guide. You may also find these publications helpful. Most of these can be found through your local bookstore.

Creating the High Performance Team.
Steve Buchholz and Thomas Roth, 1987, New York, NY: Wiley.

Solving Community Problems by Consensus.
Susan Carpenter, 1990, Washington DC: Program for Community Problem Solving.

Team Building: Issues and Alternatives.
William G Dyer, 1977, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

The Team Handbook: How to Use Teams to Improve Quality.
Peter R. Scholtes and Associates, 1988, Madison, WI: Joiner Associates, Inc.

The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization.
Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, 1993, New York, NY: HarperCollins.

About this guide....

This guide is one of a series for people who want to organize a local partnership to protect their watershed. This series will not solve all your problems. They were designed to provide guidance for going through the process of building a voluntary partnership, developing a watershed management plan and implementing that plan. Because the characteristics of each watershed are unique, you may wish to select and use the portions of this guide that are applicable to your particular situation.

Although the series is written for watershed-based planning areas, the ideas and process can be used for developing other types of plans (such as wildlife areas) to match the concerns of the partnership. Regardless of the area, remember a long-term, integrated perspective—based on a systematic, scientific assessment—can be used to address more than one concern at a time.

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