

Best Management Practices (BMPs) Verification Communications Strategy

Background: There is a growing demand for the tracking and reporting of practices and technologies to expand well beyond the sources the Bay watershed jurisdictions have traditionally relied upon—state agricultural departments and environmental agencies, USDA, and county conservation districts. Non-governmental organizations, private sector third party consultants, technical certified planners and businesses, agricultural producers, and even individual homeowners are now implementing and reporting on practices. Two areas of concern expressed by the jurisdictions and local stakeholders, regarding the accountability under the Bay TMDL, are 1) receiving credit for Best Management Practices (BMPs) implemented without state or federal cost share funding and 2) consistency and transparency in implementing this credit.

This chorus of calls for expanded tracking and reporting of practices is often countered by expressions of the need for strengthened verification of the installation and maintenance of the array of pollution prevention and reduction practices. Given the ever increasing importance that accounting for implemented practices is taking on within the partnership—Bay TMDL reasonable assurance, two-year milestones, offsets, tradable credits—the partnership is working on a framework whereby we can have both expanded tracking and reporting of practices AND verifiable confidence in the outcome of those implemented practices.

About this Communications Strategy: This draft Communications Strategy is offered as a supporting component of the Bay Program’s overall, cross-jurisdictional BMP Verification Strategy, requested by the PSC and now in development by the [BMP Verification Committee](#). ****Implementation of this or any communications strategy is dependent on approval, adoption, and implementation of the overall BMP strategy by the CBP partners.**

Incorporating a communications component into this process will enable the partners and the partnership to have consistent, clear messages both internally as they work together and externally as partners gradually build toward public implementation of BMP Verification protocols. Having solid internal understanding and messages will enable partners to more smoothly and consistently communicate about BMP verification with various external audiences and “implementers” across the watershed as the BMP Verification process moves forward.

CBP partner jurisdictions already have verification processes in place for many but not all sectors. **This communications strategy is not intended to replace existing communications or outreach efforts.** Instead, the Communications Workgroup offers it as a framework to:

- Support all CBP partners in understanding each other and the BMP Verification process;
- Support and strengthen work by partners with existing BMP implementers, and
- Offer an initial structure for communications and outreach that partners can use as a basis for efforts that can (and should be) specifically tailored to best reach and engage interested and prospective audiences in a given jurisdiction.

Definitions:

- “Communications” is defined as the dissemination and promotion of information related to BMP Verification for the purpose of increasing *awareness and understanding*.
- “Outreach”, a component of this Communications Strategy, is defined as the proactive employment of specific strategies, techniques and tools by which to *increase active participation* in BMP Verification.

Assumptions:

This Communications plan assumes the following:

- CBP Leadership and/or jurisdictions have provided clarity as to who is responsible for implementing outreach initiatives.
- Resources (ie: personnel, monies, grant funds for outsourcing of outreach) will be available to implement outreach strategies.
- Watershed jurisdictions *will be* active participants in the creation and implementation of any communications and/or outreach planning for their region.
- Each jurisdiction’s leadership, managers and critical agency staff have bought into the BMP verification framework and are educated about using it. This support will be critical to any kind of roll out to broader audiences.
- Before any broad, targeted active outreach initiatives launch:
 - o Whomever or whichever agency, organization or group leading any given initiative will have a solid understanding of audience needs or will conduct research to determine needs – *See the Needs Assessment Template provided at end of this document.*
 - o The requisite tools for reporting/tracking BMP Implementation and agency-based support structures needed by local implementers are fully functional.

Goals of this Communications Strategy:

- 1) To build understanding and support for BMP Verification process as a cross-jurisdiction, partnership effort through use of clear, consistent messaging by various partners as they work with each other and eventually “implementers”
 - a. By using similar messages, we all appear to be on the same page with our efforts, which strengthens our individual work
- 2) To provide partners and communicators w/in the partnership with clear, structured messaging that they can reference as they reach out to various audiences/”implementers”
- 3) To have consistent public messaging across partnership about what BMP Verification actually IS.
- 4) To educate and engage more ppl across the watershed in Bay restoration work and cleaner waters!

Audience(s): Audiences for communicating about BMP Verification are widely varied and are likely to become more so as the campaign progresses over time. At its top level, the BMP Verification audiences can be divided into three categories:

1. People **Who Understand** BMPs & Whose BMP practices **Are Verified** such as:
 - a. Agricultural community – farmers, land owners, soil conservation districts
 - b. Larger WWTPs / MS4 municipalities
 - c. Homeowners who have installed BMPs on their property and received credit

- d. Schools participating in Green Schools Program or similar
2. People **Who Understand** BMP's & Whose BMP Practices **Aren't Verified** such as:
 - a. Smaller WWTP's
 - b. Watershed restoration experts/groups
3. People **Who Don't Understand** BMPs or verification
 - a. Homeowners and homeowner associations
 - b. Business owners
 - c. Others - to be determined by jurisdictions and/or outreach/communications leads

The Communications Workgroup suggests the following as audiences, to be targeted with active outreach initiatives in the priority order outlined here. **Outreach to these groups can be done concurrently (not necessarily in order shown) and should be adapted by outreach team leads based on resources, level of effort required, effectiveness.**

One could consider the first primary set of audiences to be those connected with the CBP at all levels including Executive Council, Principals Staff Committee, Management Board *and* agency staff and implementers. These agencies and people will provide the critical foundation of information, expertise and support required for successful implementation of broader communications and outreach initiatives.

Audiences across the watershed to be targeted over a 1-3 year period:

- Municipalities/Counties (local governments) – with potential focus on MS4 permittees first
- Agricultural Community – ie: farmers, land owners who lease farm land, ag. industries
- Conservation Districts
- Non-Governmental Groups – ie: Watershed associations, stewardship programs, green schools such as MD Sea Grant, Master Gardeners, Alliance for the Ches. Bay, Ches. Bay Foundation, etc.
 - local messaging may be different for these; different audience than others.

Other Influencers/amplifiers including:

- Public Land Managers
- Businesses (incl. tourism, seafood industry, real estate,)
- Developers
- Schools / school children / education / academic community
- Media

Overall Messaging should focus on 3 things:

- Rewarding efforts
- Accuracy & Consistency
- Partnership

1) Rewarding Efforts

- a. By verifying the BMPs – implementers knowing their investment is in place and is working as it should
- b. We are doing this to ensure that people implementing pollution reduction practices are getting the right credit for their actions to make their local waters clean.
- c. A lot of important pollution reduction practices has already been implemented, but may not have been fully recognized previously. This collaboration will mean everyone gets credited for their effort.
- d. Verified BMPs will provide peace of mind that investments in implementation are functioning and will have the desired impacts.
- e. Publicly:
 - i. People/Communities are part of creating clean healthy waters
 - ii. Local efforts result in local benefits – must appeal to ppl’s self-interest
 1. If all county residents report verified BMPs, it saves taxpayer dollars (county/municipality spend less money on BMPs to reach the TMDL).
 2. Locally-implemented BMPs mean cleaner local waters for safe swimming and healthier resources – more fish, crabs for us to eat!
 3. Small efforts when added together can have large results for a community.

2) Accuracy

- a. Verifying implemented practices will help identify those having the greatest impact on cleaning up local waters and those that need improvement.
- b. Verifying implemented practices is critical to understanding monitoring data and other observed trends found in the water quality conditions of local streams and rivers.
- c. Model is only as good as info we put in; BMP Verification means we’ll be using the best possible info from all the players
 - i. appeals to environmental groups who are concerned with undeserved credit being given; and farmers, local govt’s who are concerned about not getting enough credit
 - ii. appeals to those that are concerned that practices are not being reported in a consistent manner

3) Partnership

- a. All the Bay states & DC are working together – it’s a big project that can make a difference
- b. (for localities) This is about the transfer and sharing of tools and information across watersheds to help you (or your community) meet required standards for clean water. Once you learn it, it should make your work better/easier, not harder.
- c. It’s a strong collaborative effort to get cleaner waters and improved conditions that will benefit everyone.
- d. Local implementers are important partners in restoration efforts, too. They know what is being done in their communities and their participation is essential to achieving our shared

- goal of clean water locally and throughout the Bay watershed.
- e. Ensuring those who pollute the most are asked to reduce the most can only be done through building a complete picture pollution reduction practices implemented within local and regional watersheds.
 - f. This effort will help localities obtain buy in from the public for their program. When individuals feel that their actions count, they are more likely to be vested in efforts to achieve the goal.

Tools:

Until implementation is ready to move ahead, it is not practical to further plan on the use of various communications methodologies and outreach tools since these will have to be tailored to each audience and each partner jurisdiction. *See the Needs Assessment Template*

Communications tools

CBP's Communications methods and tools used to promote and share information with these audiences will vary as needed by audience and by jurisdiction and region. *See the Needs Assessment Template.*

Typically, CBP Communications tools typically include:

- original online news features
- press releases
- editorials
- social media releases and messaging
- photo/video products
- web-based resources
- supporting print materials

Outreach tools

Outreach, which actively engages audiences in participation on BMP Verification rather than solely providing information, can be done in many ways and is, in fact, already being done in the jurisdictions by state agencies, non-profit or other organizations. A full understanding of work already underway is needed before any new initiatives are launched. *See the Needs Assessment Template*

Efforts should be tailored, in each case, to meet the needs of the specific target audience. Outreach teams would employ the communications materials above as part of their work and participate in the creation of other supporting materials. Specific outreach opportunities might include:

- person-to-person conversations
- peer-to-peer gatherings for local implementers/governments
- web-based initiatives/campaigns
- ad campaigns
- organized town meetings
- articles in professional publications
- targeted events or mailings

CBP partners might also consider launching an organized watershed-wide campaign in which CBP representatives (presumably from the BMP Verification panel or committee) speak to targeted groups such as: Soil and Water Conservation Districts, watershed organizations, state agency's regional offices, municipal associations, large associations or conferences (such as Md. Municipal League or MD Association of Counties).

Establishment of a travelling component of any outreach efforts may also be effective as this person or people could both engage localities and offer technical support.

Communications/Outreach - Needs Assessment Template

DESCRIPTION - Describe what you are seeking to do.

AUDIENCE

Define your audience or proposed audience? Who are the stakeholders you'd like to engage?

- Core audience:
 - Examples:
- Other audiences:
 - Examples:

How did you determine these are the 'right' people?

AUDIENCE NEEDS

What are your audience's needs?

How will outreach efforts meet those needs?

List any specific outreach strategies or communications products that you imagine will be required to meet them?

ORGANIZATIONAL NEEDS

Why should our organization (or agency or group) pursue this outreach effort? What do we hope to gain?

MEASURING SUCCESS

What are goals (quantifiable or other) for this outreach effort?

How will you know you have been successful? What are the criteria for success?

RESOURCES

Will this be a one-time effort, or will it be ongoing and require maintenance?

What kind of resources (staff, time, people) are needed to:

- 1) Develop/Create
- 2) Disseminate
- 3) Maintain
- 4) Ensure success

Describe your ideal project timeline.

RESEARCH

List similar projects that you know to exist and that could be used as resources in development of your efforts.