

Enhancing Local Government Engagement in the Chesapeake Bay TMDL's Midpoint Assessment and Phase III WIPs

Purpose. To enhance local government engagement in watershed protection and restoration by coordinating communication and outreach efforts with local governments on the Chesapeake Bay TMDL's Midpoint Assessment and Phase III WIPs.

Project Origin. The Partnership's Local Government Advisory Committee (LGAC) recently convened a meeting of key state, federal and local stakeholders (known as the Local Government Engagement Initiative (LGEI) ¹) to discuss how to better align individual and collective communication and engagement initiatives directed towards local governments about the Midpoint Assessment and the Phase III WIPs. Targeted and streamlined messaging to address the questions – “What do you need me to do and why should I care?” – has been a need expressed by LGAC members and reflected in several assessments conducted on Phase III WIP communications (e.g., Phase III WIP Stakeholder Assessment). The project described in this backgrounder is a result of that meeting in an attempt to understand how better to engage local governments in watershed protection and restoration.

Key Participants. Mary Gattis, LGAC Coordinator, was awarded funding by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Town Creek Foundation to lead this short-term local government engagement project. The Hatcher Group will provide technical assistance to LGAC through EPA's contract with Tetra Tech. LGEI is the Partnership group, facilitated by LGAC, overseeing this work. Rich Batiuk and Lucinda Power are the EPA points of contact.

Project Elements. The major deliverable is to develop a road map to facilitate local government communication and engagement on the Midpoint Assessment and Phase III WIPs. It is expected that the road map will address the following questions and issues:

- What needs to be communicated? When? To Whom? For What Purpose? What is the best format for delivery? Who are the (best) messengers?
- Key messages that align specific Midpoint Assessment and Phase III WIP tasks/decisions important to targeted local elected officials and staff
- Resources needed for the state jurisdictions to develop their respective local engagement strategies as part of their Phase III WIP development

Other project deliverables include an electronic catalogue of current and planned communication and engagement efforts by the state jurisdictions and key Partnership groups, such as the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the Choose Clean Water Coalition.

¹ See the excel spreadsheet entitled “Local Government Engagement Initiative Partners” for a listing of all LGEI partners.

The overarching goal of this project is to build the necessary infrastructure, including the tools and resources needed, for the state jurisdictions to effectively engage their local government partners in the Phase III WIP development and implementation processes. It is anticipated that this road map will serve as a template for the states to use when drafting their individual Phase III WIP local engagement strategies².

Timeline. A draft road map will be available for review by the LGEI in early October 2016. A final road map will be delivered to the Partnership, as well as a plan for how to distribute and implement the road map, by early December 2016.

Longer Term Vision. Although local governments are a critical partner in Phase III WIP development and implementation, the state jurisdictions will need to engage a wide array of partners to meet their WIP and Bay TMDL goals. To build on this work and the discussions EPA has already conducted to date with the seven Bay watershed jurisdictions and the Chesapeake Bay Commission, the intent is for The Hatcher Group to continue their work and expand the road map beyond just local governments to ensure that all involved partners and key stakeholders are fully informed about the Midpoint Assessment, its objectives, its schedule and upcoming opportunities for their direct involvement/engagement.

Beginning in early 2017, a specific focus of this next communication and outreach phase would be engaging the partners and stakeholder listed below so they are fully involved in reaching agreement on the jurisdictions' Phase III WIP planning targets, development of local area planning goals, and building their jurisdiction's Phase III WIPs.

- Regional partners: MWCOG, SRBC, ICPRB
- State associations of local governments
- State and regional associations of conservation districts
- Chesapeake Bay Foundation (HQ and state offices)
- Riverkeepers and Waterkeepers
- Choose Clean Water Coalition
- Agribusiness associations
- Homebuilder associations
- State municipal authority associations
- State farm bureaus
- Counties, townships, municipalities
- Conservation districts
- Watershed organizations

² EPA's expectation for the development of these local engagement strategies can be found in the document entitled "Prelim PhIII WIP Expectations_DRAFT_v6.27.16".