Designing a Strategic Outreach Education Program for Local Elected Officials in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

Purpose: To review the status of the project and draft outline of the final report.

Content: What we have done so far, what we have heard and how what we have learned will be reflected in the project report.

What has been done so far?

Developed focus group questions in consult with Local Leadership Workgroup.

Met with stakeholders at four meetings to discuss the questions and their recommendations and prepared summary reports.

> 1) Nov 9, 2016 -- Potomac River Basin Drinking Water Source Protection Partnership
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> 2) Dec 8, 2016 -- Maryland Association of Counties Winter Meeting
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> 3) Dec 20, 2016 -- Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) Drinking Water Source Protection Partnership
>
> 4) Jan 12, 2017 -- Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) Chesapeake Bay and Water Resources Policy Committee

What have we heard?

Detailed summaries of each meeting were prepared.

Participants included elected and appointed local government officials and staff. Local government representatives were from VA, PA, MD and DC.

The discussion at the meetings addressed up to 11 questions (Attachment 1) as far as possible with the time available. The participants in several of the meetings focused more of their attention on the first three questions, which deal with local priorities; how local natural resource issues fit within those priorities, and local policies and actions that protect and improve natural resources.

The recurring areas of concern for all groups were:

> **Economic Development -** Localities experiencing rapid growth are challenged to manage that growth and are looking for new economic opportunities, in order to grow local businesses and provide entry-level and higher-skilled jobs. The economy and affordability of environmental protection are key concerns in all jurisdictions. The public is feeling maxed-out on "taxes", which also includes fees for water, sewer and stormwater. Some localities also see economic development opportunities connected to natural resource and open space protection.

Infrastructure maintenance and financing - Deteriorating roads, bridges, transit water and sewer systems with insufficient funds to repair and maintain.

Public Health - Air quality, water quality, drinking water protection, water-based recreation.

Local natural resource issues - drinking water source protection, reforestation and forest protection, agricultural preservation, natural resource-based recreation and tourism

Public education – should be a priority in all areas. The connection between water quality, drinking water and the Bay and level of urgency for restoration and protection is hard to convey to the public, but it is essential to connect these issues for the public.

Natural Resource topics that local officials frequently linked to other priorities included: drinking water; flood prevention and mitigation; outdoor recreation; tourism – agro and eco-based.

Peer-to-peer, small-site-scale, and field trips and field days, are the best educational /information transmission modes that many participants said they have used; they noted that these modes are the most effective for landowners and for local officials, including elected officials**.**

How will what we learned be reflected in the project final report?

Recommendations will be provided in Six Key Areas summarized below.

The information in Sections 1 & 2 will be based on a combination of the CBP Management Strategies developed by the Goal Implementation Teams and the responses to the 11 Focus Group questions.

Sections 3 – 6 will be developed from research conducted by the Ecologix team, the Local Leadership Workgroup and the Local Government Advisory committee.

 (1) **The content that needs to be conveyed** – what do local elected officials need to know in order to increase their knowledge and capacity for watershed restoration and what are the local issues that connect the elected officials to this information/content:

- Based on guidance from the Bay Program, this section will be the primary focus of the report.
- The content needed was initially developed based on issues identifies in the CBP Management Strategies that require local government action, modified based on discussions with the LLWG, LGAC and Bay Program GIT staff.
- This is being further developed based on the focus group discussions of the 11 questions and guidance from the LLWG at this meeting.
- The recommended educational program content is organized into three parts:
    - Watershed Fundamentals;
    - Local priorities and their connections to the health of local waters and the Bay; and

       o   Local Best Practices, and how they can benefit each community.

(2) **Informational programs and delivery mechanisms** – what programs, etc. exist now that convey this content, and are there gaps that need to be filled:

- Information in this section is based on the responses to the 11 questions and discussions with the focus group meeting participants.
- This section will build on previous work for the Bay Program by Environmental Leadership Strategies (ELS), enhanced by input from the focus groups.
- Based on a detailed review of 10 effective training/educational programs currently operating in the Bay Watershed, ELS proposed a basic model for program delivery as follows:

- Focus group meetings held for the current study consistently recommended peer-to-peer, small-site-scale, and field trips and field days; these are the best educational /information transmission modes that are most effective for landowners and local officials, including elected officials**.**

(3) **Strengthening and/or expanding existing programs and delivery mechanisms** – how the existing programs can be tailored to better serve the needs of local elected officials:

- ELS project team concluded that no single existing program as now structured, demonstrated the ability and capacity to meet all of the needs expressed by the local elected officials.
- As a result of this lack of program focus on this group, the existing Bay education and natural resource programs have tended to have very low participation by local elected officials.
- The ELS project team concluded that a new delivery mechanism aimed at local elected officials is needed – that will convey knowledge and build capacity, relevant and tailored to each locality and the unique needs and learning styles of this target audience.
- Crafting a new delivery mechanism, based on priorities and needs of local elected officials, that adapts successful existing programs, is the most effective way to fill this gap.
- This approach will help local officials to access needed content and peer support.

(4) **The best way to coordinate these programs and delivery mechanisms** – what infrastructure is needed to coordinate programs and delivery mechanisms for this content to local elected officials:

- It is expected that the program will have a three-part structure, consisting of:
    - A Chesapeake Bay-wide coordination function performed by a partnership of non-profits and a Chesapeake Bay local government oversight group;
    - State-level coordination through existing state-by-state alliances of local government entities;
    - Local partners who will directly help to implement the program.

- Baywide Coordination
    - Baywide non-profits, including educational and training organizations.
    - Best able to coordinate the baywide curriculum development and regular updating, and the state and locally-tailored delivery platforms.
    - The allied non-profits will be ones that have a baywide network and that either singly or in combination, provide both depth and breadth of educational expertise.
    - The LLWG and the Local Government Advisory Committee to the Chesapeake Executive Council (LGAC) will provide oversight, guidance, and feedback.

- State-Level Coordination
    - As a general approach, two state-level local government associations will be invited in each state to be leading partners in this program.
    - Examples include:
        - Maryland – Maryland Municipal League and Maryland Association of Counties (MACO)
        - Pennsylvania – Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs and Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors
        - Virginia – Virginia Association of Counties (VACO) and Virginia Municipal League
        - West Virginia – Region 9 Eastern Panhandle Regional Planning & Development Council
        - Delaware – Delaware Department of Natural Resources and the Delaware Association of Conservation Districts
        - New York – New York Association of Regional Councils and the Upper Susquehanna Coalition
        - District of Columbia – Advisory Neighborhood Commissions and Metro Washington Council of Governments

- Local group delivery of program
    - Local groups are most trusted and have existing network with local officials
    - The local groups draw on content generated by the Bay-wide and State-level groups to prepare and deliver content that is most relevant to their network of local governments.
    - The appropriate local group will vary; ranging from county conservation districts, to local watershed and environmental non-profits, and others.

(5) **Cost estimates on strengthening and coordinating existing programs, and potential funding sources**; what will it cost to strengthen and coordinate these programs and delivery mechanisms, and where will the funding come from; and

- Costs will be estimated based on the specific structure of the program developed in Sections 1-4 described above.

(6) **Best ways to measure progress** – what are the measures of success in meeting the goals and milestones of this program.

- Before-and-After Surveys: The recommended top metric for measuring progress, is to start with a general survey on what the individual official knows about Chesapeake Bay and local waters/watershed issues and practices, before going into the program and then see what they know after.
- Set a target number, and percentage, of local elected officials in each Bay state to be reached by one or more educational sessions in this program per year. Then, compare the number of actual participants in each state per year, with the target number.
- Tracking "actions taken" on priority issues by local elected officials, before and after participating in this program, has also been suggested as a metric of progress.
- Ecologix is also assisting the Alliance for Chesapeake Baywith a project to develop baseline metrics to support measurement of progress and will include descriptions of that work in this report as well.