TOOLBOX 1

WATERSHED ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

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AND SUSTAINABILITY

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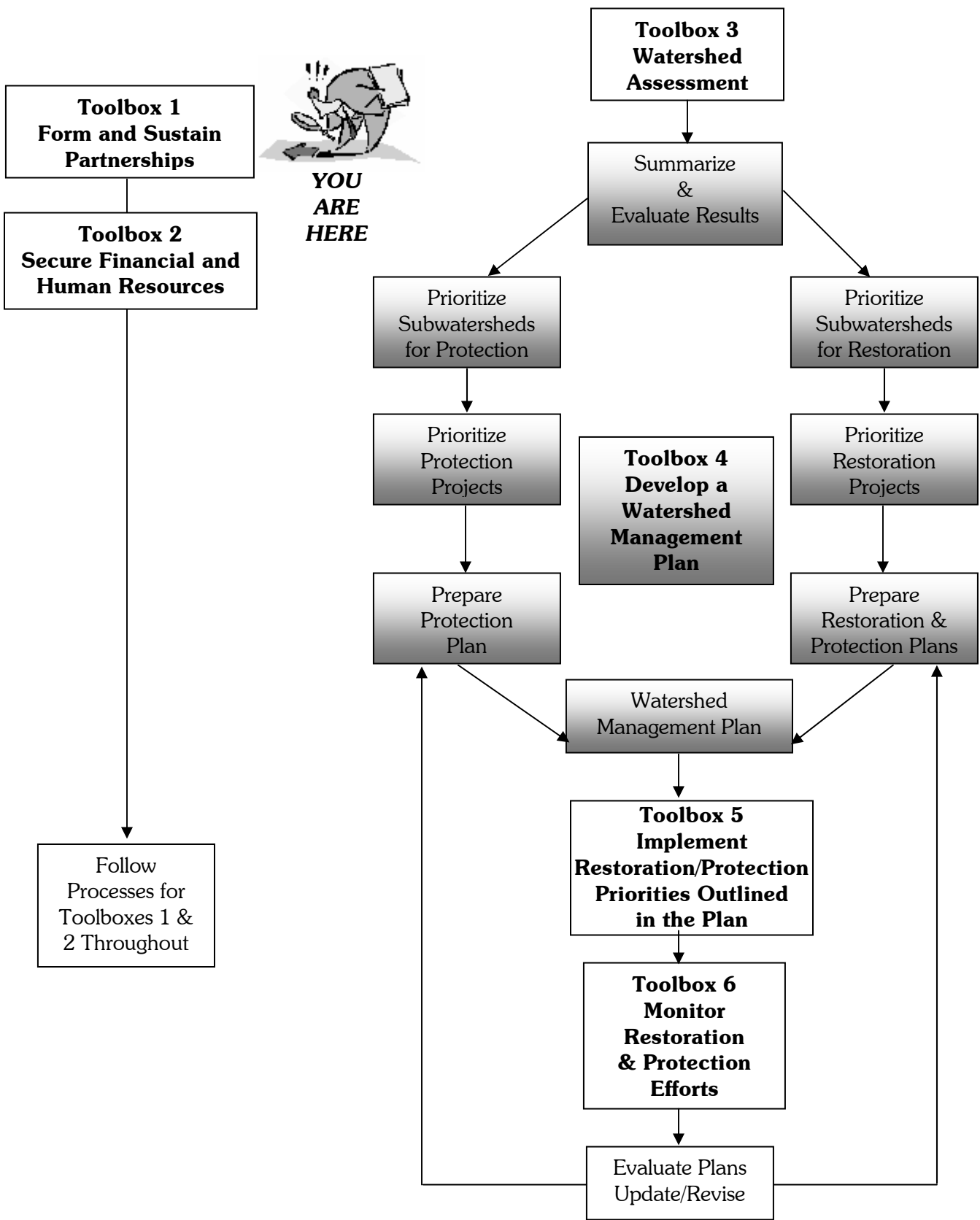
SELF EVALUATION

Please complete the following self evaluation to determine if there are areas for improvement or if you are ready to proceed to the next toolbox.

1. Are your meetings scheduled at convenient times?

2. Is the meeting process understandable to participants and observers?

3. Do you prepare an agenda and keep minutes for your meeting?

4. Does your group have agreed-upon ground rules for behavior?

5. Do you allow the public to participate in your meetings?

6. Does your group have a stated mission?

7. Does your group have stated goals?

8. Does your group have objectives to achieve the goals?

9. Do you have a diverse group of individuals in your organization?

10. Has your group maintained participation from members?

If you answered YES to all ten questions you may skip to Toolbox 2 of this guide. If you answered NO to any of the questions you may feel free to visit Toolbox 1 for suggested improvements or proceed to Toolbox 2.

Comprehensive Watershed Management
Planning Process

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Partnerships**

*YOU
ARE
HERE*

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Toolbox 1
Watershed Organization Development and Sustainability

Introduction

This Toolbox provides general information about starting and maintaining a watershed organization. Watershed organizations are voluntary and made up of people with a wide variety of backgrounds who share a common interest in improving and protecting the health of their watershed.

In this Toolbox, we assume you are starting your organization from scratch. In practice, many watershed groups in Pennsylvania are already formed and functioning. If that is the case for your group, you will still find ideas here to help you.

Developing and sustaining a watershed organization is the first step in comprehensive watershed management planning.

"Before you begin the process of forming a new watershed group, you may want to explore other existing organizations in your community and their purposes. Perhaps it may be more efficient to work within an established organization, with a similar mission."

What Is Watershed Organization Development and Sustainability?

Organizational development of a watershed association has many components such as creating a successful partnership, choosing a structure, mission and goals, membership recruitment, effective meeting management, and longtime group sustainability. In a word, it is about starting out in the right direction and staying the course.

Why Should You Develop And Sustain A Watershed Organization?

With so many environmental impacts adversely affecting the water quality and quantity within our watersheds, it has become critical for community members to take a pivotal role in protecting our precious water resources. No one person can do it alone. It takes a team effort with common goals and commitment to make improvements to the quality of our watersheds. A watershed approach requires the partnership, involvement and personal investment of landowners, developers, farmers, government officials, homeowners, environmental groups and others in the watershed if real progress is desired.

Developing a watershed organization and recruiting from a diverse group within your community 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:

- Enhanced communication and coordination of resources

- A spirit of sharing and cooperation

- Fairness which minimizes the potential for negative social and economic impacts

- More creative and acceptable ways to protect natural resources

- Solutions more likely to be adopted

- Various areas of expertise and financial/human resource project contributions

- Tangible, on-the-ground results

What Are the Suggested Steps of Developing and Sustaining a Watershed Organization?

There are many ways to develop and sustain a watershed organization. The following six steps are adapted from *Watershed Stewardship: A Learning Guide* (2002) by the Oregon State University Extension Service:

1. Create a successful partnership.
2. Choose Your Group's Vision, Mission, Goals and Structure.
3. Hold Effective Meetings.
4. Define a Decision Making Process for Your Group.
5. Communicate Effectively.
6. Deal With Stumbling Blocks.

You will find more detail and some helpful resources for each of the suggested steps below.

STEP 1. CREATE A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP.

A watershed organization is one of the few ways to transcend jurisdictional boundaries. Here are some characteristics of successful and unsuccessful partnerships.

Successful Partnerships:

A. **Broad Membership** – Anyone who is concerned about the condition of their watershed should be invited to join the watershed association. A common guideline is to involve everyone. Successful partnerships in watershed organizations involve a diverse group. See Appendix G on Membership. Some suggested groups and individuals that could be represented include:

- Landowners

- Community organizations, citizen groups and informal community leaders
- Local government officials and chambers of commerce
- Representatives from state and federal environmental, natural resource, and land management agencies
- County Conservation Districts
- County Planning Commissions
- Environmental and conservation groups
- Sporting Groups
- Farmers
- Financial Institutions, commercial, agriculture, industry and professional organizations
- Individual citizens

Including as many interests as possible will help to draw members with skill areas that will benefit the organization such as:

- Technical
- Leadership
- Communication
- Education
- Financial
- Political liaison
- Public policy/Legal

Some people outside the watershed's boundary may even have an important role to play because they benefit from or impact water or other natural resources within the watershed. Potential partners include:

- Mass Media
- Financial Institutions
- Agri-business & Industries
- Farm Organizations
- Environmental Conservation Groups
- Retired Persons
- Civic Organizations
- Other watershed organizations

In addition to the typical individuals likely to be involved in your watershed organization, consider some important "types" of participants. They may be from any background but have certain characteristics that serve the group. Here are some examples:

- **Champions –** These individuals choose issues that have meaning to them personally. They are willing to go to bat for the interests of the whole organization, and are driven to "make a difference".

- **Catalysts –** They are the "sparkplugs" who initiate, prod, and make things happen by the sheer force of their wills.

- **Sponsors –** These participants provide direct financial support to your group.

- **Doers –** Here are the folks who get things done. They often work behind the scenes to make the shared vision of the watershed become a reality.

- **Supporters –** They are the folks who occasionally are active and support local efforts.

B. **Local knowledge**-Enhance stewardship by tapping into the expertise of a wide range of individuals and groups who live in the watershed and know the watershed as well as the local economy.

C. **Effective communication** – Use effective communication to solve problems and reach agreements.

D. **Common Vision –** Create a commonly shared vision that can build long-term support and improve project implementation.

E. **Collaborative Decision Making –** Make decisions by consensus. This takes much time and effort but ensures that everyone's needs and concerns are addressed. In this way, successful partnerships come up with more generally accepted decisions than they would if only a few people are involved.

F. **Pooled resources –** Use the resources of other watershed organizations, volunteer monitoring groups and others in the community.

Unsuccessful Partnerships:

A. **Conflict among key interests or individuals that remains unresolved.**

Example: Recreational interests may want to have Greenway Corridors along streams throughout the watershed. Landowners with land along streams see this as a violation of privacy. You may need to assure landowners that appropriate signage will be a part of the Greenway project. You definitely need to include landowners in your discussions. Perhaps you can provide them with positive success stories from other areas.

B. **Group has no clear purpose.**

Example: Some folks want to do in stream projects, some folks want to work with schools, some are concerned about smart growth, some are there to protect their own interests. Your meetings are unstructured and little is accomplished. Membership is dropping. You need to go back to establishing your mission and goals, which will help to define your purpose.

C. **Unrealistic goals or deadlines.**

Example: You may set a goal to restore a stream bank. You set the goal for next spring. However, you must first apply for a grant, then find a contractor and obtain permits. This may take over a year to complete the necessary steps. Do your homework and assign deadlines that can be met. Constantly changing your deadlines is discouraging for a group.

D.   Key decision makers are not included or refuse to participate.

Example: Your group wants to see ordinances implemented, but you have no township officials working with you. You would like to see agricultural best management practices implemented on farmlands, but you have no farmers in your group. You have industries in your town that may have resources to help you, but they haven't been invited to participate in your activities. Seek out community decision makers early in the process of organizing. You will and have an *inclusive* organization and benefit from their involvement.

E.   Not all participants stand to benefit from the partnership.

People can view benefits differently. If there is not a direct benefit for participants, find something they can do to make them feel useful. Remember, if this is a volunteer group, volunteers don't stay if they feel they have no purpose.

F.   Some members stand to benefit much more than others.

Depending upon the goals of your organization/partnership, there may be instances where some members may gain from your activities. Make sure you draw all of the members into participation and decision-making. Find a role for everyone. If the people who stand to gain are leading the charge, you will run the risk of losing support from other members. Be sensitive to this point.

G.   Some members have more power than others.

Some members may have more power than others on different issues your group becomes involved with. Be careful not to confuse power with leadership. Stick to your meeting agendas. Limit discussion times if someone is monopolizing the meetings. Include everyone, even if it is a smaller role for some than for others.

## STEP 2: CHOOSE YOUR GROUP'S STRUCTURE, MISSION, AND GOALS

Group Structure

Many organizational problems arise when the group does not choose an organizational structure in the first place or mixes and matches components from different structures.

The following six models are typical organizational structures in the United States. Each works well in certain situations and each has disadvantages. Realize that at different times and in various situations, your group may opt for different models.

Model 1 - Rigid

This structure is organized for stability with a focus on maintaining the system. The top people usually make decisions with little input from members. (Figure 1) This organizational structure depends on strict controls and an ultra-stable environment for success. Its downfall is change.

Figure 1 - The Rigid Organization
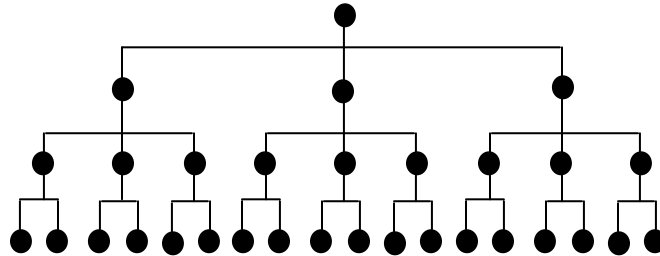
- Strict control
- Organized for stability
- Majority vote or no vote
- Slow and ineffective in dealing with change

Model 2 - Project Teams & Task Forces

In this model, teams of people from different organizations work together toward a specific goal. (Figure 2) The disadvantages of this model are that the participants maintain their primary loyalty to their own sponsoring organizations and have little real power. Problems are delegated up through the chain of command.

**Figure 2 - Project Teams and Task Forces**
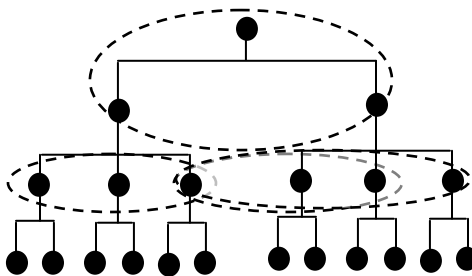
- Environment is changing rapidly
- Organized for handling specific problems
- Focus in on improving situation
- Uses interorganizational project teams and task forces
- Primary loyalty to own organization
- Problems are delegated upward
- Team members have little power
- Majority vote

Model 3 – Matrix

This model is built for flexibility and a rapidly changing environment. It diffuses control with an informal method of coordination. Most decision-making is by consensus. (Figure 3) The disadvantages are that responsibilities are less clear and there are more people to connect with. Achieving real consensus takes time.

**Figure 3 - The Matrix Organization**
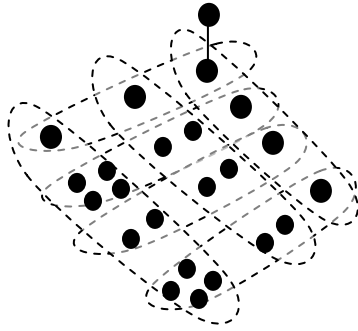
- Environment is changing rapidly
- Organized for flexibility and change
- Meets the demands of special situations
- Focus in on end product
- Encourages flexible and innovative behavior
- Diffuses influence and control
- Coordination is informal and decisions are by consensus
- Teams have free rein within clearly defined and agreed upon parameters

Model 4 - Project Organizational

In a project organizational model teams have free rein within clearly stated parameters. (Figure 4) Loyalty is to the project and not necessarily to the organization. Decisions are by consensus.

**Figure 4 - The Project Organization**
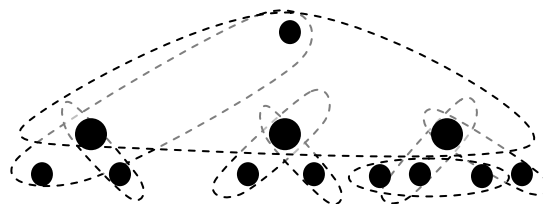
- Environment is changing rapidly
- Organized for flexibility and change
- Focus is on end product
- Coordination is informal
- Teams have free rein within agreed-upon parameters
- Decision is by consensus
- Focus can confine future decisions if project changes significantly

Model 5 - Organic Network

This model is an open-ended system of ideas and activities with little clear structure and few definable boundaries. A core group of members sets a strategic direction and then steps out of the way as others take over the idea and move it forward. (Figure 5) This model works in community action settings where the intent is to get people involved in making the community a better place to live. It provides the most flexibility and opportunity for spin-off organizations.

Figure 5 - Organic Network
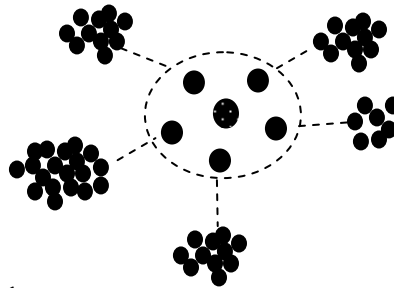
- Environment is rapidly changing

- Organized for flexibility and change

- Core members set a strategic direction and provide operational support

- Open ended system of ideas and activities with consensus or total agreement

Whether you choose one of the models described above or not, you may wish to incorporate and/or apply for tax-exempt status. See the box below for more information on these subjects.

To incorporate or not to incorporate - that is the question.

NOTE: You may not need to incorporate if you can form a partnership with another nonprofit that is incorporated.

The main disadvantages to forming a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation are:

- Additional paperwork for maintaining corporate records, tax correspondence, and annual IRS reports.

- Payment of incorporation costs and fees.

- The time and energy necessary to maintain the corporation.

The main benefits of incorporation are:

- Limited Liability - when acting as an unincorporated association or as individuals pursuing a common goal, each person may be individually liable if sued by another person or organization. By incorporating, limited liability is conferred. A suing party can only reach the assets of the corporation.

- Tax Deductible Donations - after attaining 501(c)(3) status, the organization can attract donors that wish their donations to be tax deductible. Under current IRS regulations, donors can deduct an amount up to 50 percent of their adjusted gross income on their annual tax return. Corporations may also deduct up to 10 percent of their annual taxable income. See IRS Publications 526, 561, and 535.

- Eligibility for Funding - almost all local and state government agencies and privately operating foundations require funded organizations to have 501(c)(3) status. A routine part of funding applications is a request for an IRS determination letter as proof that the organization has attained 501(c)(3) status.

- Ability to use Public Service Announcements on local radio and television stations

- Ability to use discounted space from internet service providers

- Lower postal rates on third class bulk mailings

- Ability to use interns from local universities

Taken from *Forming a Non-Profit 501(c)(3) Federally Exempt Corporation in Pennsylvania to Pursue Environmental or Citizen Activism* **Prepared by the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF) Thomas Alan Linzey, Esq. (see page 1-19 of this toolbox – under "Helpful Resources" # 6).**

How to Incorporate:

- Seek legal advice from an attorney who specializes in this topic, preferably pro-bono (free).

- Draft a mission statement (See below) that clearly defines your organization's goals including:
  - What the organization intends to do.
  - Who will benefit from the organization's existence, and how.
  - Specify the services and projects your organization will perform.
  - What partnerships your organization intends to develop.

Draft bylaws that state the details of how the organization's meetings will be structured and run.

- Seek funds needed to pay for the incorporation fees, e.g. fundraising, group dues, and donations. If your organization will be requesting donations within Pennsylvania you must register with the Bureau of Charitable organizations prior to beginning any fundraising activities (exemptions and exclusions should be verified by contacting the Bureau). Information, forms and instructions are available by contacting:

The Department of State
Bureau of Charitable Organizations
124 Pine Street, Third Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101
Telephone: 800-732-0999
Web: www.dos.state.pa.us/charity/indes.htm

- Acquire a Taxpayer Identification/Employer Identification Number at the IRS via telephone at 800-829-3676 or download an SS-4 form at www.irs.ustreas.gov/bus info/co/index.html

- Open a bank account for your organization. You will need the Taxpayer/Employer ID Number from above.

- Establish a system for record keeping and accounting early in the process. Official records of items such as board meetings and financial records will be needed to be maintained and preserved for the life of the organization.

Developing a Vision or Mission Statement

The process of developing a vision or mission statement for your watershed group is a great opportunity for people to come together, take a realistic look at the watershed and work cooperatively to describe a direction they want to go. It takes good information and hard work to make a link between the present and the future.

The success of creating a vision and its later acceptance by a watershed community directly correlates to the diversity of the group who developed it. Broad interests yield broad support; limited interests bring limited support.

Here are some examples from watershed associations in Pennsylvania:

The Anderson Creek Watershed Association is formed to promote the restoration and enhancement of the natural resources within Anderson Creek Watershed. This mission will be accomplished by educating the public, promoting the wise use of resources, encouraging the partnerships necessary to restore and conserve water quality and quantities and by securing the technical and financial resources to meet this challenge.

To restore Wells Creek to what it was in the early 20th century: a viable trout stream. We plan to do this by installing passive treatment systems on up to five major AMD discharges.

The purpose of the Shoup's Run Watershed is to restore and preserve a safe water supply, to provide a safe natural environment for people, plants, and animals, and to address the problems of water quality and quantity, stormwater management, stream bank erosion, acid mine drainage, and illegal dumping within the watershed.

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. Here are some ideas for developing a mission statement:

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

This process may not be easy and will take time. However, be careful not to get bogged down in the process and waste too much time. You could risk losing members by "wordsmithing" your mission statement to death. Potential conflicts need to be discussed and resolved. Remember, it's important to keep the statement general enough to encourage widespread support, but specific enough to identify goals and measure progress.

Goals

Goals are specific, straightforward statements of expectations that relate directly to the organizations' mission. They can be short or long term in duration. The hardest part of setting goals is in determining as a group which ones are priorities.

An example of short-term goals would be to:

1. Review existing township ordinances
2. Meet with township officials in each township in the watershed to discuss the development of a new or improved ordinance for riparian conservation

The long-term goal would be to have a riparian conservation ordinance passed in each township in the watershed.

Roles and Responsibility of a Watershed Group Member

Now that we have addressed organizational structure, mission, and goals, we need to consider the responsibilities of your watershed group members. Each member has two distinct sets of roles and responsibilities: content and process. Content focuses on **what** you do, and process focuses on **how** you do it. The following is a general guide to the roles and responsibilities that each member should undertake:

- Advocates for the group's vision, mission, shared values and goals.
- Maintains a holistic perspective to keep all members on track.
- Liaison between interested community members and group members.
- Assists in creating possible solutions by monitoring positive, open communications.
- Arranges adequate time to carry out his or her group responsibilities.
- Listens to other group members and follows the rules established by the group.
- Participates in group discussions and decision-making.
- Occasional financial and moral support.
- Serves on standing committee and appropriate subcommittees.
- Be "big picture" oriented.
- Reports back regularly to the full group and is accountable.

It is important to have standing or long-term committee members, as it is to have short-term committees. Long-term committee members work on:

- Steps needed to achieve a specific goal.
- Being informed about the overall concerns of the group.
- Advocating for the group's vision, mission, and goals.
- Assisting in keeping members focused and on track.
- Sharing information with the group.

Short-term committees:

- Work on specific issues.
- Include all affected constituencies.
- Have one member act as liaison to the full group.
- Are aware of what the group is trying to accomplish.

Some watershed groups are fortunate enough to have staff. If your group does not have staff, responsibilities should be equally shared among group members.

> Remember that it is crucial to the overall health of your group to celebrate the positive and not focus on the negative. Take time to appreciate and reinforce each other!

Encouraging and Maintaining Participation

Getting all potentially affected groups and individuals to participate requires more than simply announcing meetings. You need to use every form of communication and education available to get people engaged in actively participating. The following are tips to encourage participation:

- Use the media to announce ongoing events and publicize special activities.
- Use peer-to-peer networking. Have members call or visit neighbors, colleagues, and others who may have an interest in your activities.
- Use field or site visits to make the issues tangible and build enthusiasm.
- Use newsletters and brochures to advertise the group's efforts.
- Consider innovative outreach measures such as music, art, and theater to publicize the partnership.
- Take advantage of community events as an opportunity to get your message out.
- Don't forget food!

Rarely will all of the people that your group needs step up and volunteer. In order to encourage a broad participation, try appealing to people's sense of stewardship, citizenship and service. Demonstrate how the problem you're addressing affects a diverse group of people and how each person can make a unique contribution to the solution. Publicize your successes and link them to a particular group you are trying to reach.

Group member burnout is a common, serious problem in watershed partnerships. The following are tips to help with this common problem:

- Start with small, manageable projects that are likely to be successful.
- Document and celebrate your successes.
- Use on-the-ground projects to give participants a sense that they belong and are really making a difference.
- Use positive feedback and recognition as incentives for continued participation.

- Assign various tasks to different members, but choose wisely. One person cannot do it alone!
- Build on sources of community pride.
- Continually revisit and stress successes and achievements.
- Make it fun…provide refreshments at meetings or plan light, social events for members.

STEP 3: HOLD EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

Since meetings are a necessary part of our lives and important to forming partnerships, it is important to have meetings, which are effective, productive and serve a purpose. Meeting "just to meet," will turn people off very quickly. Most people dislike attending meetings, but if they can come away from them with a sense of "that was worthwhile for me," they are more likely to return. Remember, always have an agenda set for the meeting and follow it.

Fair – Open – Honest Meetings

Fair meetings include consideration for:
- Meeting times
- Applying ground rules if necessary
- Accommodating special access needs
- Various communication styles so everyone can participate

Open meetings:
- Are straight forward and understandable
- Have only one agenda
- Participants understand their roles
- Have a safe environment for exchange of all ideas

Honest meetings:
- Take everyone's input and identify common areas of interest and focus on those
- Include a posting of desired meeting outcomes
- Eliminate hidden agendas
- Acknowledging that there are some topics the group will never reach a consensus on, so your group will not focus on these topics
- Not promising what you can't deliver

Tips for a Successful Meeting

1. Ask for additions or revisions to agenda.
2. Use the agenda. It will help to keep you on track.
3. Use a meeting manager/facilitator.

> **Ground Rules**
>
> 1. Don't interrupt people who are speaking.
> 2. Please hold questions until end of presentation.
> 3. Allow everyone a turn to speak.
> 4. Have fun!

4. Use ground rules (if needed). Ground rules are often a good idea when a group meets for the first time. Posting ground rules at subsequent meetings serves to remind everyone of how they should treat each other.

5. Keep notes on flipcharts.

6. Use different communication styles.

7. Start on time. Finish on time. Keep it short. Be sure facilitator moves along and does not let one person monopolize or get off topic exclusively.

8. Have and use a decision making process.

9. Keep your mission in mind.

10. Document decisions and agreements.

11. Evaluate.

12. Record minutes of meeting.

13. Create attendee list with attendee contact information.

STEP 4: DEFINE A DECISION MAKING PROCESS FOR YOUR GROUP

Most of us make daily decisions without thinking about it. Group decision making is more challenging but gains us an ability to influence or add value to something larger. Group decision making can take time, but once completed, gives people a feeling of ownership.

Ways to Make Decisions
- yes/no choices
- either/or choices
- let the facts decide
- weigh pros and cons
- majority decisions
- consensus decisions

Considerations for Decision Making

- Agree on a clear decision making process

  Consensus building *is vital to any community planning or public participation process. With help from a good meeting manager or an unbiased moderator/facilitator,* participants can raise issues, ask questions and move toward reaching consensus on a topic. It may be helpful to break big decisions into small agreements to lay a foundation for a larger decision. In situations where issues involve deep value differences, high stakes or win-lose situations, consensus building may not work.

  For example: Pursuing water quality enforcement actions against landowners rather than first performing outreach and education activities.

- Define the issues. Gather the necessary information to define the issues/problems.
- Categorize the list.
- Decide which issues to resolve (keeping your mission in mind).
- Set your goals.

> The terms vision, mission, goals and objectives are often used interchangeable. However, they are all distinct parts of the puzzle.
>
> *Mission*: answers why an organization exists or why a project is starting.
>
> *Vision*: summarizes the ideal state of an organization or project, i.*e*., desired future condition of a watershed.
>
> *Goal*: transforms a vision into a distinct statement of direction or what your group wants to accomplish. Goals can be short term or long term.
>
> *Objective*: breaks a goal into tasks that are measurable and time-oriented.

Setting Priorities for the Group

In most cases, watersheds have numerous issues that could overwhelm a group if priorities are not identified and worked toward in an orderly plan.

- Make a list of the issues.
- Rank the list of issues (again, keeping your goals in mind).

  Note: If the list is too long or the group is a large group, it may help to break into subgroups.

- The group may develop an overall priority across the issues.

Common Pitfalls in Decision Making

- Ignoring a full definition of a problem and moving immediately to a discussion of solutions.
- Ignoring systematic analysis of the problem and the current or controversial aspects of the problem.
- Ignoring the need to establish criteria or standards by which solutions will be measured or evaluated.
- Concentrating solely on the quantity of the decision while ignoring the need to gain group acceptance of the decision.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

Learning to communicate effectively can help your group build trust and respect, foster learning and accomplish goals. Here are some tips and resources for improving internal communication - communication within your group - and external communication and external communication - communication with other groups, stakeholders and the public at large.

Internal Communication

Make sure you have clearly documented "ground rules" for communicating that are clearly understood by all members. Here are some examples of questions that clear communication ground rules could address:

- When will meetings take place? How often? Who calls the meetings or does other duties requiring intergroup communication? Do meeting notices have to be in writing?
- Who is in the group? Who is on the subcommittees? Who needs to know what? Who gets notices about subcommittee work session, outcomes, etc?
- How will subcommittee actions be communicated to the rest of the group?
- How will agreements or decisions be communicated to all group members?

External Communication

The smaller your organization and budget, the more important external communication skills become to your work. Strategic communications are the key to changing behavior and influencing policy. Here are some suggestions:

- Develop a brochure or handout that summarizes your group and the watershed.

- Create a display to use at community festivals, workshops and events.

- Press releases in local papers.

Publish meeting dates and times

STEP 6: DEAL WITH STUMBLING BLOCKS

Although members of your watershed group share a common interest and commitment, they see things from a variety of perspectives. Your group is bound to stumble from time to time. Here are some of the most common stumbling blocks and some tips on keeping them from derailing your group.

A. Conflict

A good definition of conflict is "natural tensions that arise from differences". One of the most common misunderstandings about conflict is that it always has a negative impact. In fact, a conflict that is worked through can bring about very positive results. Keep in mind you're all volunteering to do positive things for the community and the watershed and try to let that concept resolve conflict early on. The key to managing or transforming conflict is to understand and use three basic concepts:

#1 The common causes of conflict are:

- o Avoidance of conflict; most people, out of fear or habit, tend to change to be like the other.
- o Unwillingness to express feelings and thoughts directly and clearly.
- o Need to be right.

When you're involved in a conflict, ask yourself these questions:

- o "Am I avoiding this conflict unnecessarily?" It might be easier in the long run to deal with the problem now, before it turns into something bigger.
- o "Am I directly expressing how I feel or think?" Take a minute to stop, collect your thoughts, and share them clearly and directly with the individual or group.
- o "Is it really important to me to be right?" Often we forget that both sides of a conflict might be right. A time of conflict is an important time to practice active listening and

the principle "Everyone has a piece of the truth." By doing so, you may find that others are as "right" in their truths as you are in yours!

#2 Your personal history with conflict affects how you react to it.

Successfully managing conflict requires moving beyond past emotional experience with conflict and learning new skills to deal with it well.

One way to do this is to recognize – first in you and then in others - the difference between positions and interest. In conflicts, people often voice their ***positions***. They state their "stand" and then "dig in" on what seems to be two or more drastically opposing sides. Once a discussion or interaction gets stuck on position, no deeper understanding or resolution occurs. On the other had, when ***interests*** – the myriad beliefs and values that underlie positions – are explored and communicated, similarities can be noticed and built upon to acknowledge or create common ground.

#3 Ironically, communication, or the lack of it, can get groups into conflicts, but it also is the only thing that can get you through conflict.

You'll need strong communication skills to manage all types of conflict. There are times when a neutral third party can be really useful. Don't hesitate to call in someone who has training in facilitation or mediation skills to fill this role.

B. Covert Agenda

Covert agendas usually come up if a group has stumbled during the development of its partnership or group structure, or has a lack of clarity around group processes, meetings management and communication. Sometimes people leave things muddled on purpose, and the lack of clarity and inclusiveness makes it easier to carry out concealed, self-serving plans. But most often, unintentional confusion builds an environment in which unwarranted paranoia creeps up that "some type of covert agenda is going on here."

Here are some suggestions to keeping either imaginary or real covert agendas from happening:

* Be deliberate about your partnership – take the time to get appropriate people involved.

* Learn about possible organizational structures and pick one that works for your group.

* Keep the group's vision, mission and goals visible, so everyone can help keep your activities guided toward them.

* Cultivate an environment where trust and respect can exist among different viewpoints and perspectives.

C. Decision Making Outside of Meetings

It's especially easy to fall into this trap in the early stages of your group's life. During this time, trust has not developed, and agreements and structures don't exist yet. Although it's usually not intentional, members talk outside of meetings and forget they're not the only ones with opinions or perspectives. These "decisions" can be treated as if they were made by the larger group, thereby leaving others "out." When this happens intentionally, it can splinter a group and damage relationships.

To avoid this stumbling block, raise this issue in your first meeting and make a temporary or permanent ground rule related to decision making. Then, as soon as possible, agree upon a clear group decision-making process. Make sure this problem isn't ignored. Talk about it openly. Remember, people are not likely to meet group expectations when they don't know what they are.

D. Group Members Not Taking Ownership of the Group Process

Remember, although your group may have a leader or "sparkplug" who calls meetings and has great ideas for projects, all members play a part in helping your group work well or causing it to fall apart.

Group meetings, or any other situations where people come together to accomplish or learn something, have four things in common:

  * They have a clear purpose.
  * They're well organized and effectively handled so all participants can share, learn and teach. Meetings start and end on time.
  * Participants leave feeling they have gained something from the experience and were encouraged to give something to others.
  * Input is solicited.

E. Lack of Clarity Regarding Decisions

This stumbling block is similar to "C" (decision making outside of meetings). It feels different and rarely is premeditated. When agreements or decisions aren't made clearly or documented in writing, one of two things happens: either the topic is repeated at meetings or, worse, decisions are remade outside the group and denied later. Fortunately, like most stumbling blocks, taking the time and energy to form a clear group structure with defined ground rules really alleviates this problem.

Having a clear organizational structure and effective meeting management is the beginning. Add to that a clear understanding of how decisions will be made, and you'll have a framework to keep your group from stumbling over this problem. Any member of the group can help with this vital function by keeping track of whether or not decisions are clearly stated and recorded. Designate a notetaker and make sure that meeting minutes are distributed to the whole group. At the very least, you will be able to pick yourselves up, and keep from stumbling over this one again.

F. Politics and History of Working Together

Labels such as "it's the old boys club," or "that's the tree-huggers group," and others can be an obstacle to good group work. If you've never run into this problem before, consider yourself lucky. Many groups have people that " are used to working together" or represent only one aspect of an issue. Although it might seem easier at first to work only with people you're comfortable with, this approach causes many groups to run into trouble or ultimately fail.

Effective watershed groups are effective because they have members that represent *all* aspects of the watershed's interests. When you're seeking members, ask yourselves, "What benefit/drawback will this person have in relation to our purpose?"

Diverse members often bring challenges to the group, but they also bring different skills and viewpoints that ultimately strengthen the group by helping it reach a broader audience, get the attention of new or different elected officials, or gain access to needed resources. Good group processes and a clear group mission help keep all members – no matter how diverse the group – on track.

G. Rules, Regulations and Bureaucracies

Legal stumbling blocks can get in the way of working collaboratively. Refer to Appendix F of this Guide for a listing of some regulatory programs you should be aware of. Note that this listing may not be all inclusive. When in doubt about whether your group is affected by one of these laws or regulations, stop and find out for sure.

H. If Not Your Group, Then Who? / Turf Battles

The pitfall of trying to do it all yourself is ever-present. There are many reasons why some tasks may not be appropriate for your group to undertake. Maybe key research or technology doesn't exist yet or isn't available to your group. Maybe an activity would make local people uncomfortable. Maybe the problem needs to be looked at not just from an ecosystem perspective, but also from a community and workforce perspective. Keep in mind that by partnering, more work can be done with pooled resources.

Saddling yourself with impossible tasks creates frustration that could have been avoided.

The key to avoiding this and other "If not us, who" and turf battle situations is to not get tunnel vision.

Here are two examples - Local watershed groups who perform monitoring can and do partner with Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) who can often test water samples using the STP lab. This saves the group expensive analytical costs and also forms a relationship between dischargers and environmental groups. Another example is a partnership with colleges or universities that can also help with lab analysis as well as providing interns.

Helpful Resources

1. ***Community Tool Box*** of the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program.

    This is a collection of techniques to help you get organized and turn your vision into reality.

    You can order the toolbox at:

    > National Park Service
    > Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, Community *Tool Box*
    > 1849 C Street, NW
    > Mail Stop 1010
    > Washington, DC 20240
    > www.nps.gov/rtca

    > National Park Service
    > Philadelphia Office Northeast Region
    > 200 Chestnut St.
    > Philadelphia PA 19106

2. ***Watershed Stewardship, A Learning Guide* EM 8714**

    A thorough notebook that will guide your organization through Creating Successful Groups, Watershed Science and Monitoring and Evaluating, Managing and Improving Watersheds. You can order this from:

    Publication Orders

    > Extension & Station Communities
    > Oregon State University
    > 422 Kerr Administration
    > Corvallis, OR 97331-2119
    > Phone: (541) 737-0817
    > The cost is $42.00

3. Go to www.greenmediatoolshed.org for tips on external communication.

4. ***The Conservation Technology information Center (CTIC)*** at Purdue University has a large selection of materials to assist watershed organizations on a variety of topics. Many of the materials can be viewed at:
    www.ctic.purdue.edu/Catalog/WatershedManagement.html#Guides

    > You can also use the address and phone number below for ordering:

    > The Conservation Technology Information Center
    > 1220 Potter Drive, Rm. 170
    > West Lafayette, IN 47906

    > Phone: 317-494-9555
    > Fax: 317-494-5969

    > There is a cost for the materials.

5. ***How to Form Your Own Watershed Organization in Pennsylvania* – and *Communicating Your Message: Tools for Building Partnerships and Sharing Your Watershed Success Stories "Fact Packs"*** of the Pennsylvania Organization for Watersheds and Rivers (POWR).

These booklets detail the steps needed to take a group of concerned citizens and turn them into an actual watershed conservation organization along with tips on communicating a message. You can order these and other "Fact Packs" for watershed organizations at:

> POWR
> 610 North Third St.
> Harrisburg, PA 17101
> Phone (717) 234-7910
> Fax (717) 234-7929
> e-mail: info@pawatersheds.org
> http://www.pawatersheds.org/ click on "publications" and then "fact packs"

6. ***Forming a Non-Profit 501(c)(3) Federally Exempt Corporation in Pennsylvania to Pursue Environmental or Citizen Activism*** Prepared by the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF) Thomas Alan Linzey, Esq.

This manual details the pros and cons of incorporation and provides sample articles of incorporation. You can get a copy of the manual at:

> Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF)
> 2859 Scotland Road
> Shippensburg, PA 17257
> Phone (717) 709-0457
> tal@cvns.net
> http://www.celdf.org

7. The ***Watershed Assistance Center of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy*** has numerous publications available for watershed groups. They also provide direct technical assistance to watershed groups. You can contact them at:

> Watershed Assistance Center
> 246 S. Walnut St.
> Blairsville, PA 15717
> Phone (724) 459-0953
> Fax: (724) 459-4721
> http://www.paconserve.org/rc/wac.html

8. The ***Consortium for Scientific Assistance to Watersheds*** (C-SAW) is a team of specialists who provide eligible watershed groups or local project sponsors Program Management and Scientific Technical Assistance through the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's (PADEP) <u>Growing Greener Program</u>. The service is at no cost to eligible groups. To request assistance contact the RC&D Council in your area:

   a. Capital Area 717 948 6633

   b. Endless Mountain 570 265 5288 ext. 5

   c. Headwaters 814 375 1372 ext. 4

   d. Mid – State 717 248 4901

   e. Penn Soil 814 266 8160 ext. 5

   f. Penn's Corner 724 834 9063 ext. 3

   g. Pocono Northeast 570 282 8732 ext. 4

   h. Southeastern PA 215 541 7930

   i. Southern Alleghenies 814 263 7900 ext. 5

For more information on C-SAW, go to <u>http://pa.water.usgs.gov/csaw</u>