

Stakeholders

Public involvement naturally requires the inclusion of stakeholders. Stormwater stakeholders are individuals or groups in the community that impact or are impacted by a municipality's storm water program. They have a vested interest in the waterbody and storm water activities. Stakeholders might include citizens, local school groups, community leaders, local and state government representatives, non-government organizations and business owners in the watershed. Stakeholder meetings can be in the form of a local storm water management panel, a public meeting, or any type of interactive, information-sharing event.

List Stakeholders

Determine which citizens are most affected by the storm water program. Stakeholders will need to be identified by whether they live or work in the watershed or by their activities. Involving stakeholders in the storm water program is an important first step in forming a watershed organization. To identify stakeholders, a survey can be conducted that seeks to answer the following questions:

- Is a certain segment most affected by the cost of implementing the storm water program?
- Will a segment of the community have difficulty understanding what the program is about?
- Will the municipality find support among environmentalists?
- Does a segment of the community object to government intrusion as demonstrated by the storm water regulations?
- Has the municipality established good working relationships with large industries in the community that also have storm water permits?
- Is the community already part of a strong watershed organization? (If so, this group can form the core for stakeholder outreach.)

Clearly express the purpose and authority of your stakeholder involvement program. Stakeholders who have an interest in stormwater issues can then determine whether the program will be able to meet their interest or not. Providing upfront guidelines will help to ensure that the right stakeholders are at the table. Be careful not to exclude stakeholders – disenfranchised stakeholders could prevent implementation of the plan later.

Gather information

One of the greatest benefits of stakeholder meetings is the sharing of ideas from people of all backgrounds and all interests. Some participants will be more knowledgeable than others, and they can share their expertise. This knowledge base may be in many different forms, not necessarily water science based. It could be recreational, cultural, and historical. Interviews, surveys and a watershed situation assessment may all be used to gather appropriate information.

Organize Stakeholders

Flyers and media stories can be used to educate stakeholders and to prepare them for a public meeting. Municipalities might also choose to speak before homeowner, civic, and business groups or to contact a strong watershed organization, if one exists. Once initial stakeholder education has begun, a meeting can be held. Work with community groups to organize the meeting. The first meeting will set the tone for those to follow. Rules for conducting the meeting must be agreed upon and can be addressed with the following questions:

- Will the meeting be facilitated?
- Will decisions be made by consensus?
- What approach will the group take?

Hold stakeholder meetings

To be effective, stakeholder meetings must be attended! Finding an appropriate location for the meetings, such as a local school auditorium or a public library, is vital. The location must be easily accessible, able

to accommodate the number of participants, and equipped with the appropriate resources, such as outlets for projectors, speakers for microphones, and tables and chairs. Most important is the time the meetings are held. Stakeholders who work during the day may have difficulty attending a mid-morning or early-afternoon meeting. Typical after work commutes must also be considered. If the meeting is held during dinner hours, try to serve refreshments. The better the timing and location, the easier it is for people to attend.

Always plan a time for a question and answer period for each stakeholder meeting. If certain questions can not be answered during the meeting, report back the answer in the minutes or newsletter, and also at the next meeting.

Inform the public

Stakeholders should be informed of water issues in their community and solicited to contribute ideas and concerns. One way to do this is through stakeholder meetings, where participants can hear what others have to say and contribute their own ideas. In addition to inviting the stakeholders, representatives from several local newspapers, radio stations, and television news departments should be included. Journalists, broadcasters, and others who attend the meetings can let others know what happened, when the next meeting is, and how they can get involved. Meeting minutes/newsletters should be made available to all stakeholder and to the public at large. Stakeholders should be held responsible to inform their constituents.

After the meeting, do not rely solely on the media to inform the public of what happened at the meeting. The media may report only on disagreements or discussions that are more sensational than substantive. The media can also intimidate people from speaking for fear of being quoted and encourage others to dominate the discussion for the same reason. The meeting leader may want to prepare a news release that summarizes the results of the meeting and distribute it to the local media within the next day or two.

Make use of partnerships

Certain stakeholders might belong to other groups with overlapping concerns. In such cases, resources can be pulled together to achieve corresponding goals. For example, a local natural resources council, a parks advisory group or a county environmental planning board may be able to help the stormwater stakeholder team.

Costs involved

The costs associated with stakeholder meetings consist mainly of planning and conducting the meetings. The flyers, mailings, or other means of announcing the meeting incur costs for design, production, copying, and distribution. There also might be rental fees for a meeting location. Producing and distributing minutes of meetings might involve additional costs. You may consider hiring professional meeting facilitators to run the meetings.

References

For more information see the EPA website on stakeholder meetings:
[http://cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/stormwater/menuofbmps/invol_5.cfm]

Local Watershed Planning: Getting Citizens Involved [<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/WECO>]