

BMP Verification *Communications* Strategy **Communications Workgroup**

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. One of the primary areas of concern expressed by the jurisdictions and local stakeholders regarding the accountability under the Bay TMDL is receiving credit for Best Management Practices implemented without state or federal cost share funding.

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/implementation of the overall BMP strategy.

Incorporating a communications component into this process will enable the partners and partnership to have consistent, clear messages internally as we gradually build toward public implementation of the overall strategy. 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 outreach or communications. Instead, the Communications Workgroup offers it as a guideline 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 a guideline for communications if/when partners begin reach out to new people (audiences) to engage in the BMP verification.

Goals:

- 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: 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
 - a. Agricultural community – farmers, land owners, soil conserve. Districts
 - b. Larger WWTPs
2. People Who Understand BMP’s & Whose BMP Practices **Aren’t** Verified
 - a. ie: smaller WWTP’s
 - b. ie: Watershed restoration experts/groups
3. People Who **Don’t Understand** BMPs

The Communications Workgroup suggests the following as audiences, to be targeted in the priority order outlined here:

Yr 1 - Priority audiences – Initial Roll out

- Municipalities (local governments)
- Agricultural Community – farmers, land owners who lease farm land
- Conservation Districts
- Watershed Groups – local messaging may be different for these; different audience than others.
- Partner “chains of command”
- Media

Yr 2-3 – Priority audiences – (Based on success of Yr 1 targeting)

- Developers
- Public Land Managers
- Businesses
- Schools / school children / education / academic community

Yr 3+ - Priority audiences (based on success of prior efforts)

- Tourism industry / seafood restaurants – influencers/amplifiers
- Property owners (homeowners)

Overall Messaging should focus on 3 things:

- Rewarding efforts
- Accuracy
- Partnership

1) Rewarding Efforts

- a. By verifying the BMPs – implementers knowing their investment is working
- 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 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 will need to 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!

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
- 3) Partnership
- a. All the Bay states & DC are working together on this – it's a big project that can make a difference
 - b. It's a strong collaborative effort to get cleaner waters and improved conditions that will benefit everyone.
 - c. 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.
 - d. 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.

Tools:

Methods and tools used to reach these audiences will vary as needed by audience and by jurisdiction and region. Until implementation is ready to move ahead, it is not practical to further plan on the use of various communications methodologies and tools since these will have to be tailored to each audience and each partner jurisdiction. However, possible communications methods and tools will likely include: traditional/non-traditional press releases, op eds, social media releases, social media outreach, television/radio spots, person-to-person conversations, posters, ads, town meetings and many others. The hiring of a professional PR firm may also be helpful at some time in the future.

Appendix A: Results of S.W.O.T. exercise by Comm Wkgrp, exploring the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to communications related to the BMP Verification strategy.

Strengths:

- BMP Verification can be Real / tangible; real people doing real things
- Answering a need – certain localities (western MD) feel the need for this – concerned about not getting credit for what they're doing.
- Positive thing (when getting credit)
- Collaborative effort
- Using sound science [from diverse sources]
- Public support for the Bay and Tributaries

Weaknesses:

- The name of it - “BMP”
 - Need exists for better name & branding
- Length of the process
- Privacy issues with convincing people to report BMPs – address required for use on data sites, etc.
- Data collection (gaps) – can you get enough people to provide information on their own?
- Differences among partners – internal challenges
- Lack of buy-in
- No timeline [for implementation] – creating a communications strategy for a concept that isn't complete.
- Costs associated with putting BMPs in place
- Questions of credibility
- Duplication of existing efforts?
- Audience diversity / Challenge to effectively reach audiences
- Differences in BMP time scales – is it a “one time” BMP? How to assure it will continue to function and be effective the way it did when it was first implemented and counted.
- Trust
- Reasonable expectation of success – will not be 100%!
- Accuracy of the model – the models are not designed for local level accuracy, but this is what people are wanting/expecting – effecting perception?

Opportunities:

- Cost – could allow jurisdictions/municipalities/individuals to choose whichever BMPs provide the most financial incentives / choose most cost effective BMP to implement.
Opportunities to have BMP installation paid for (at least partially)? The verification process is also about identifying the most [cost] effective BMPs.
- Reaching new audiences
- Collaboration
- Stories – a “treasure trove” of people, stories, good work
- Actual progress [that can be seen]
- Message consistency – have a media training? Media needs to stick to their talking points so that everyone is on the same page
 - (Could be a challenge or weakness too!)
- Credit
- Innovation – creation of new BMPs coming out of the verification process?
- Improving / Helping the understanding of conversion – helping people buy-in
- In the control of “the people”

Threats:

- Misinformation
- Limited resources
- Opposing groups – people battling our message, undermining the process in some way
- Conflicting messages
- The program NOT working – technical or otherwise
 - Unintended consequences, problems, hold-ups, etc.
- Lack of actual progress [after promoting it]
- Getting / accessing data
- May shine light on those who are NOT doing their share and are not buying-in
- The economy – people less willing to spend on an “extra” like a rain barrel
- Politics / political opposition / bureaucratic “red tape”
- Cultural Aesthetic – ie: a tidy lawn vs. native gardens
- Obtaining data – people don't feel the urgency to offer it up