

ENHANCED STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

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To / Contact info	BCWD Board of Managers
From / Contact info	Camilla Correll, PE; Evan Murdock; Will Martin
Regarding	Enhanced Stakeholder Engagement Recommendations

Background

Key to managing a natural resource is understanding the relationship between that resource and the people and communities that engage with it. Every human on earth resides within a watershed, breathes air, and consumes natural resources from places both local and remote. Similarly, these resources are impacted by the ways in which people live with and within them. A watershed can be a home, a food source, or a pollution disposal facility. How and where these activities take place will impact the health of the watershed and its inhabitants both present and future. Stewardship is the act of balancing the environmental and resource needs of the present communities with the needs of future generations. This is a shared responsibility that falls to all the stakeholders that interact with a given resource, yet often there is a lack of awareness from stakeholders about their relationship with the resource, and a lack of understanding by resource managers about the stakeholders who are present in the watershed.

The Browns Creek Watershed District (BCWD) develops and implements programs that support the health of our waters and the communities that depend upon them. This work demands a careful balance between serving the District's constituents, protecting the environment, and funding projects that maximize public benefit. Like many other public entities, the BCWD has been experiencing many challenges reaching the intended beneficiaries of their programs. Education and outreach efforts have been poorly attended, the Citizen Advisory Group numbers are declining, grant programs and assistance programs are not reaching the people who are most likely to benefit from them, and public comment periods receive limited participation, to list just a few examples. This lack of engagement has also resulted in a lack of participation from some groups and communities that have not historically been engaged with watershed and natural resources planning and programming initiatives within the watershed.

EOR has developed a strategy for identifying and engaging these communities in order to increase engagement within the watershed. This strategy aims to achieve the following goals:

- Identify communities and organizations that have not historically been engaged with and by the District.
- Increase awareness of the watershed, the Watershed District, and efforts by the District and its partners to protect and improve the resource.
- Foster a sense of place and pride within the District. How many people know what watershed they reside in? How many people are aware of the activities of the District?
- Increase the effectiveness of projects and interventions by better understanding the needs of communities within the watershed.

Recommendations for Next Steps

The proposed framework employs a four-phased approach to develop relationships and build trust and connection within the watershed:

- Phase 1: Identifying partners and initial contact
- Phase 2: Characterizing the watershed stakeholders
- Phase 3: Outreach and marketing
- Phase 4: impacts assessment

Phase 1 Tasks

Identifying community partners

EOR proposes an initial strategy of identifying and contacting communities within the watershed through boots-on-the-ground canvassing. We propose contacts by District board members or designated volunteer liaisons who can effectively communicate the mission of the District, initially to leaders and organizations with whom they have an existing relationship, and later to other identified organizations with an interest in the health of the watershed and its community. EOR staff will develop an approach strategy and standardized narrative to be used to ensure all contacts disseminate and gather the desired information.

Initial points of contact could include houses of worship, schools, community and fraternal organizations, and similar institutions and organizations that represent distinct communities. Using the EOR-developed interview tool, canvassers can identify the demographics of the group; leverage those connections to discover new points of contact with other communities (a so-called "snowball sample"); and build relationships between the District that the community it serves.

EOR staff can help identify these groups as well as organizing and analyzing the data obtained; however, it is critical that the board of managers, Citizen Advisory Board members, and District staff also be present to build relationships and trust with the interviewees. The goal of this effort is to understand what various groups know about the District and the activities the District performs to enhance the watershed for their benefit and enjoyment. To that end, interviewers will ask the following questions:

- What do different stakeholders know about BCWD and their role in the region?
- How are different stakeholders benefiting from the BCWD's programs?
- How are different stakeholders contributing to the goals of the BCWD?
- What barriers exist for different stakeholders to benefit from BCWDs programs?
- How would different stakeholders like to partner or benefit from BCWDs programs in the future?
- How would different stakeholders like to be involved in developing an equity framework for the BCWD?

The responses from these interviews will be summarized and used to expand upon the stakeholder map and to provide recommendations for next steps. This process will produce qualitative results that will inform further quantitative survey efforts described in Phase 2.

Stakeholder mapping

Performed concurrently with the above effort, the stakeholder mapping will include a meeting with the District to identify the stakeholders they would like to reach and a list of organizations, committees, and non-profits working with these stakeholder groups. EOR staff will organize this data into a stakeholder map showing key characteristics of the various stakeholders.. This map will include BCWDs programs, the intended beneficiaries of those programs, and key partners of those programs.

Developing relationships

Once community partners have been identified and initial contacts have been made, District managers (in consultation with EOR) will select a subset of people who express an interest in developing further cooperation with District activities, as well as a subset of communities that are likely to benefit disproportionately from targeted conservation projects within the watershed. These groups will be invited to participate further in developing strategies moving forward.

District staff will develop ongoing contacts with these organizations and – in consultation with EOR staff – will develop strategies for maintaining and building relationships. This could include broad outreach efforts such as newsletters, community building activities such as volunteer days or informational tours, and targeted individual contacts and check-ins to maintain connections. The end product will be a 24-month plan that will be implemented by District representatives. The intent of this plan is to engage and build, and maintain relationships with the previously identified community partners.

Initial Survey planning

Key to understanding the success of outreach efforts is having measurable before-and-after data on the conditions you hope to affect. Prior to increased engagement efforts, the identified stakeholders will be surveyed as to their knowledge of the watershed, the Watershed District, conservation issues within the watershed, and similar desired metrics of change.

The Social Indicators Data Management and Analysis Tool (SIDMA - <https://iwr.msu.edu/sidma/Info/About.aspx>) may provide a useful framework for gathering and interpreting these data and will greatly reduce the administrative burden of developing and disseminating a survey that meets professional standards from scratch.

EOR will leverage existing relationships with the developers of the SIDMA tool to assess its usefulness for this task. We will develop a rigorous survey protocol (sampling methodology, target sample sizes, etc) to inform the development of a survey tool in Phase 2.

Phase 2 Tasks:

Measure baseline awareness

We will develop a survey tool designed to assess the current understanding of and attitudes towards the watershed and the District -- perhaps additional questions as time and funding allow. EOR will either disseminate the survey in-house or contract with a professional survey firm to contact the target audience within the watershed.

EOR staff will summarize the findings of the survey in a summary report. These data will also be used to establish a baseline against which to measure the effectiveness of engagement efforts.

Phase 3 Tasks:

Outreach projects

Depending on budget and timeline, a range of outreach and marketing efforts are possible to raise awareness of the District and its efforts – especially among those communities who have not been engaged with the District and its mission. These include – but are not limited – to:

- Development of a Story Map detailing projects, natural and cultural resources, and people with compelling stories within the watershed.

- Professionally produced video shorts showcasing residents, cultural and natural resources within the watershed as well as District projects and activities (see for instance <https://climatewisconsin.org/>); develop a YouTube Channel showcasing District activities and resources.
- Development of a comprehensive summary of the economic benefits of the watershed’s resources.
- A history of the District’s efforts in the region and the impacts of those activities.
- A natural and cultural history of the region – provide information on place names, historical residents, and the indigenous peoples of the region.
- Development of a “Speakers Bureau” of local experts and “watershed ambassadors” who can provide presentations to interested groups (Scouting groups, schools, 4-H, churches, cycling groups, etc) within the watershed.
- Educational signage initiative, identifying project sites and key locations (watershed boundaries, highest/most upstream location, etc) within the watershed. These will include a QR code linking to the information in a range of accessible formats and languages, as well as other interpretive materials (story maps, histories, audio/video tour, etc).

Engagement best practices training

EOR will develop and deliver a training on stakeholder engagement best practices to the District board and staff to help guide decisions on engagement plans moving forward. This will include information on how to identify target audiences, how to ensure key stakeholders are being engaged, and how to track and document successes. This training could be carried out in person and can also be recorded for future use as the District continues to refine their efforts.

Phase 4 Tasks

Post project assessment

After implementation of the above outreach strategy, EOR staff will again implement the previously developed survey tool to track changes in stakeholder knowledge and support for District efforts. We will provide a project report documenting the entire project and measured impacts.

PHASE 1 DELIVERABLES

EOR will provide the following deliverables for the first phase of the project. Later phases level of effort will be determined in part by the outcomes of Phase 1.

Phase 1 – Assessment of current condition

- Develop, disseminate and analyze baseline awareness survey data

Deliverable	Description	Staff	Estimated Cost
Targeted initial contacts list	Research and compile list of roughly 25 proposed initial contacts for community leaders, in consultation with District board members		\$1,500
Initial contact tool	Develop an engagement tool that will allow District representatives to present themselves to the targeted organizations and collect meaningful data in a consistent and repeatable manner.		\$2,500

Deliverable	Description	Staff	Estimated Cost
Relationship development strategy	Develop a 24-month relationship building strategy to guide continued engagement with leaders, with a menu of suggested activities across a range of approaches.		\$1,000
Engage with SIPES developers	Leverage existing contacts with the developers of the Social Indicator Planning & Evaluation System to determine how best to adapt their system to characterizing and understanding the population of the watershed.		\$1,000
Survey protocol development	Design a survey protocol (sample strategy, target sample sizes, dissemination strategy, etc) aimed at understanding stakeholder's current knowledge of the watershed. Does not include survey development or dissemination.		\$2,500
Preliminary project report	Summary of phase one efforts and analysis.		\$1,500
TOTAL			\$10,000