

## Communicating the Solution and Developing Support

*Greater than the tread of mighty armies is an idea whose time has come.*

Victor Hugo, Nineteenth Century French Poet

*To gain the support of elected officials, make a success story look like it was their idea.*

Borough Official, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, 2013

Although you may have created a great solution for financing stormwater improvements in your jurisdiction, much work remains. Next you must develop a plan or strategy that – because it demonstrably addresses the problem in a technically workable, economically efficient, politically acceptable, and legally and ethically defensible fashion – convinces decision makers to support it. You may encounter unexpected barriers in this effort, but as Louis Pasteur, the Nineteenth Century French chemist said, “Chance favors the prepared mind.”

### Advocating for a Dedicated Funding Mechanism for Stormwater

Of course, there are several common ways used to pay for stormwater such as impact fees, bonds, a tax, general funds, or even grants, but nothing seems to be as effective at providing sufficient revenue or is as equitable as a stormwater utility fee. Let’s assume the solution your community decides to pursue in order to meet increasing stormwater costs is a stormwater utility. Creating a utility is going to be a big decision mainly because collecting fees from property owners is a nontraditional means for gaining revenue; and administering a utility will require reorganizing local government operations. In general, making big public decisions requires strong coalitions of stakeholders to convince the public and elected officials that their proposed plan for implementing a dedicated funding mechanism such as a stormwater utility fee for stormwater merits their full support.

Who are the potential stakeholders? It could be a variety of organizations, citizens, or businesses that make the foundation of your community. In some cases, the initial stakeholder group may consist mostly of internal municipal staff that has stormwater as a component of their day-to-day job. It could also be the church minister, the head of a local watershed organization, the president of the chamber of commerce, the middle school principal, or the neighborhood association vice president. Ideally, it could be members from all of these groups that represent different sectors of the community.

A useful method for communicating with stormwater stakeholders is to work with them on writing a plan of action or a strategy that will effectively educate and engage the community and elected officials and articulate the need for improving the level of funding for stormwater. In a series of meetings of stakeholders and, likely, over several iterations of updating or modifying your strategy, you can reach joint decisions about how a utility would work and what resources are required to succeed. Your goal will be to achieve a shared belief among stakeholders that theirs is a joint endeavor, a coalition for positive change. Coalition members do not need to agree with every detail of the document, but in the end, they should agree to

support it. In fact, you should anticipate that there will be areas of your strategy that are not accepted or supported by everyone involved and approaches for reaching consensus by the majority of the group should be discussed early on. Because creating a utility is a big decision, you may find it helpful to gain the support of some stakeholders by phasing the utility in over several stages. As you write, you will want to monitor, as much as possible, attempts to create counter strategies and efforts to dilute yours.

To help guide development of the proposal, analyze the arenas for decision-making. Such analysis may suggest, for example, that you include an elected official in writing the document; likewise, you may find it advantageous to include staff members who work directly with decision makers. Also, draw on and incorporate the results of your previous work in gaining an initial agreement, formulating the problem, and creating a solution. Most importantly, continue to pay attention to the goals, concerns, and interests of stakeholders so as to cultivate a winning coalition.

You should be willing to accept improvements to the strategy and should express that willingness to stakeholders keeping in mind this is a team effort if successful implementation of a dedicated funding mechanism is the end result.

If you are a staff member in your jurisdiction, you have an opportunity to play several important roles in developing the document and making it into a convincing strategy to form a utility. You can help:

1. Identify stakeholder participants;
2. Convene and provide logistical support for meetings;
3. Prepare documents, such as research on what other communities have done, options for group consideration, draft improvements, and organizational support that keeps the process moving forward;
4. Affirm your intention to help implement the utility once it has been adopted;
5. Demonstrate that the strategy is coming from well-informed sources;
6. Illustrate how the proposal is tailored and adapted to your community;
7. Assure technical feasibility and quality;
8. Elucidate the resources required for administration;
9. Clarify how the utility will be cost effective; and
10. Explain how other options were considered and why they were not adopted.

Ultimately, it will be the elected officials who will decide whether or not your jurisdiction will create a stormwater utility. You should be prepared and willing to take the time to continue working on a strategy until it has attracted a winning coalition. If, by the end of this phase, the necessary coalition has not formed, to continue working on the utility you must consider cycling back through the previous phases of formulating the problem and creating a solution. When you succeed, you will move on to the next phase – designing for implementation.

## Lessons Learned

- A persuasive argument for creating a stormwater utility is: Everyone contributes to stormwater; therefore, everyone should pay for it. **Water Department Officials, City of Lynchburg, Virginia**

- Political support is enhanced by having “homegrown information,” e.g. stream monitoring data logger (HOBO) data from local streams, to make your case. **Borough and Township Officials, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania**
- A powerful positive message is to identify potential stream improvements as assets to the community for recreation – trout fishing, for example – historic preservation, and tourism and other forms of economic development. **Borough and Township Officials, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania**
- Bringing in speakers – i.e., credible experts – helps to communicate information to decision makers and the public. **Borough and Township Officials, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania**
- Draft a proposal that takes into consideration the results of the previous phases. **Bryson and Crosby**
- Accept as many modifications as improve the proposal, but do not sacrifice key solution components. **Bryson and Crosby**
- Make sure the proposal includes a budget estimate for implementation. **Bryson and Crosby**
- If significant opposition to the proposal arises, be prepared to create more opportunities for informal review of it. **Bryson and Crosby**