

PA Clean Water Gathering

CLEAN WATER PROGRESS TEAMS:

Staff Building/Staff Retention

Background

In October 2023, DEP's Bureau of Watershed Restoration and Nonpoint Source Management (BWRNSM) hosted the first Clean Water Gathering of State Program Action Leaders and Countywide Action Planning (CAP) leaders. Over 80 partners, representing county, state, and federal organizations, came together to celebrate successes and discuss high level needs, issues, and challenges to continued progress on Pennsylvania's Phase 3 Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) and Countywide Action Plan (CAP) clean water nutrient reduction goals.

The issues and challenges discussed in the meeting fell into three focused challenge areas:

- Technical and Administrative Assistance
- Staff Building/Staff Retention
- Funding and Multi-Grant Coordination

A team formed around each of these challenge areas to address issues at greater depth.



Featured Team: Staff Building/Staff Retention Progress Team

Following the Clean Water Gathering, BWRNSM's Chesapeake Bay Watershed Restoration Division team coordinated the formation of a collaborative team made up of volunteers drawing from county and state action leaders as well as other partners. The Staff Building/Staff Retention Progress Team's objective was to address priority challenge areas related to staffing, staff development, and staff retention.

Team Members

- Kristen Wolf (DEP)
- Teddi Stark (DCNR)
- Karen Books (DEP)
- Josh Glace (Larson/CAP Coord.)
- Erica Tomlinson (Tioga Co CD)
- Willie Null (Clearfield Co. CD)
- Doug Wolfgang (SCC)
- Erin Letavic (HRG/STAC/CAP Coord.)
- Erin Trouba (CACAT)
- Elizabeth Grant (Cumberland Co. PC)

Additional Contributors

- Allyson Gibson (LCWP)
- Angie Bowman (FPAC-NRCS)

At the team's first meeting, they reviewed the multiple challenges raised at the October 2023 Clean Water Gathering and chose five to prioritize. The team's Priority Action Items were:

1. Make management and leadership training available
2. Diversify staff hires
3. Regionalize staff, especially for smaller conservation districts and planning commissions
4. Promote cross training
5. Allocate dedicated funding annually for administrative staff

Addressing Priority Action Items

Progress Teams worked together to develop recommendations to address their Priority Action Items. These recommendations are known as “Strategies for Success” and are designed to be actionable and focused.

Each recommendation discusses what should be done to address the Priority Action Item including how steps could be taken to move forward, who should be engaged, and when that could occur.



Staff Building/Staff Retention Strategies for Success

Make Management and Leadership Training Available

- Expand current training resources and make them accessible.
- Retitle/update/expand the current PACDs Leadership.org survey and associated modules.

Diversify Staff Hires: Hire Staff with Different Backgrounds

- Conduct a workforce analysis of conservation jobs.
- Analyze job descriptions and requirements among conservation jobs across the state.
- Individual organization hiring analysis: Identify a broader target audience, conduct general outreach and awareness on social media, participate in job fairs and events.

Regionalization: Regionalize Staff, Especially for Smaller Conservation Districts

- Create an office, like the state district office, that would be available to assist every county with technical, administrative, legal, and HR work.
- Survey the conservation districts to find what kind of regional staff would be the most helpful.

Cross Train to Build on Employee Knowledge and Address Turnover

- Regionalize some positions to provide support when highly skilled positions are vacant.
- Streamline reporting to make it easier for individuals to move across programs.
- Encourage a mindset shift at the conservation district level, specifically among conservation district managers, to make cross training a priority.

Allocate Dedicated Funding Annually for More Administrative/Program Staffing

- Regionalize administrative positions to handle grant requirements as applicable.
- Simplify reporting to reduce administrative burden.

Next Steps

Once finalized, the Strategies for Success will be shared among a broader audience of partners and leaders at a second Clean Water Gathering in January 2025.



“I think the key to success is learning to be okay with change...this is our opportunity to be more open to different suggestions, possibilities and ideas.”

- ERICA TOMLINSON, TIOGA COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT MANAGER