

# INITIATIVE FOR WATERSHED EXCELLENCE

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## THE NEED

Watershed-based stakeholder groups and local governments need cost effective technical tools for scientific support, engineering support, and information technology, as well as assistance with legal issues, project management, outreach and education, and planning support. They also need assistance in developing legal authorities for activities such as permitting, enforcement, contracting, fund raising, land use planning and resource management.

## THE VISION

The United States Environmental Protection Agency, Region 4 (EPA) envisions the formation of Watershed Management Support Institutes (or Centers of Excellence for Watershed Management), covering specific geographic areas and based on appropriate defining factors such as a Level III Ecoregion-based concept. This Institute is made up of one or more colleges or universities and draws upon multiple disciplines. Key disciplines will be in the areas of environmental sciences, engineering, community planning, marketing, behavioral sciences, economics and computer sciences, but are not limited to these.

The Watershed Management Support Institute (Institute) provides hands on, practical products and services to promote the growth of local stakeholder associations committed to improving or maintaining the natural and economic resources of their watersheds. The Institute helps communities to identify watershed-based problems, and to develop and implement locally-sustainable solutions. The Institute provides outstanding customer service and is seen as the premier local resource—the One-Stop Shop for watershed planning and management assistance.

## OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Watershed Institute are: to promote the development and growth of local stakeholder involvement committed to improving or

maintaining the natural and economic resources of their watersheds; to provide training and technical assistance on topics of concern or interest to local watersheds; to provide local residents with information on the quality of the natural resources of their community.

The Watershed Institute will also provide aid communities in developing and implementing locally developed solutions once they have determined the problems that threaten their economic and/or environmental sustainability. This aid includes developing cost effective tools and products associated with watershed management approaches such as stream assessments, water quality monitoring, studies on the effectiveness of best management practices, watershed management plans, etc.

## BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF UNIVERSITY SUPPORT

EPA will assist in identifying start up money and will assume additional funds will be leveraged, as needed. The Watershed Institute will draw upon expertise of many faculty members, as well as graduate and/or undergraduate student services. The Institute will also draw upon other local, state, and federal resources and expertise to minimize “reinventing the wheel.” The Institute will help build local stakeholder capacity, but will also build the capacity of your institution to teach environmental management to traditional and nontraditional students. It is assumed that the Institute will not need substantial involvement from EPA to make this project succeed. Data will be collected to demonstrate that you have been successful in achieving results. Information concerning results will assist in seeking additional funds after the end of this project.

The Institute will seek out customers that need your services and products, and activities will be intended to meet the needs of your local stakeholder customers, and creativity will be utilized to meet those needs in an economically-sustainable manner. Special attention will be paid to under-served populations in nearby watersheds. The Institute will report on success at the end of each year and the end of the project and your experiences will be shared with others.

## EXPECTED RESULTS

At the end of 3 years, the Institute can point to 5 new watershed-based stakeholder associations that have been formed, in part, due to the Institute's Support. At the end of 3 years, the Institute has collected statistically significant customer survey data to verify that the Institute provides a high level of value and relevance to surrounding communities. The Institute will be self-sustaining at the end of 3 years.

At the end of 3 years, the Institute will meet the following Program Performance Measures from EPA's Strategic Plan:

- At least 5 Watershed-Based Plans are developed that meet EPA's current Guidelines for the Clean Water Act 319 program (see [www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/EPA-WATER/2003/October/Day-23/w26755.htm](http://www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/EPA-WATER/2003/October/Day-23/w26755.htm))
- At least 1 Watershed-Based Plans (that meets EPA's current Guidelines for the Clean Water Act 319 program) is substantially implemented such that the actions in the Plan are completed or underway.
- Document measured or estimated sediment, nitrogen and phosphorus load reductions (in pounds per year) resulting, at least in part, from the support the Institute has provided to local stakeholder associations.

## POTENTIAL PRODUCTS OF THE WATERSHED INSTITUTE

Services and products developed by the Watershed Institute could include (but are not limited to): organizational development and operation; identifying critical sources of watershed pollution; identifying cost-effective watershed management solutions; watershed plan development; water quality assessments; conflict resolution and facilitation; Geographic Information Systems support and mapping; information exchange; local land use ordinances evaluations and recommendations; financial management support; marketing and outreach; and grant writing support

Likely tasks that the Institute might perform to complete this project include: establish a multi-disciplinary team; establish the administrative oversight for the Watershed Management Support Institute; identify critical needs of local watershed stakeholder associations; develop and publish an inventory of information and resources available on the surrounding Level III Ecoregion; market services and products to surrounding communities; provide services and products for 3 Years; and evaluate effectiveness.

## CONCLUSIONS

A successful Watershed Institute will provide stakeholder groups and local governments cost effective access to technical tools to identify watershed-based problems and to develop and implement locally-sustainable solutions. The results of this initiative will have contributed to developing students who are aware of watershed management approaches and the various components associated with the process. They will then be able to go out and contribute to the stewardship of their own watersheds wherever they live. The effort will also gain recognize the benefits of having students (and their energy and enthusiasm) involved in developing applied products and services that will be used by communities to manage real-world water issues. In an era where financial resources to support watershed management are being stretched, we need to make use of every available means to provide cost effective support for communities who want to address water quality and resource issues in their local watersheds. EPA believes this approach can move us forward in this direction.