
One Watershed, One Plan Program Evaluation: Executive Summary

Board of Water and Soil Resources
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Executive Summary

Background

Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) asked Management Analysis and Development (MAD) to evaluate administration of the One Watershed, One Plan program to date. Specifically, MAD explored four evaluation questions:

- How well is the One Watershed, One Plan program achieving the vision of the Local Government Water Roundtable recommendations?
- What value do planning participants derive from the One Watershed, One Plan program?
- What are BWSR's contributions to the successes of the One Watershed, One Plan program?
- How can BWSR improve its support for the One Watershed, One Plan program?

To get answers to the evaluation questions, MAD administered a survey of One Watershed, One Plan participants from local government units (LGUs) and conducted interviews and focus groups with a wide group of stakeholders, including LGU staff and officials, BWSR staff and leadership, state agency staff, LGU association leadership, non-LGU staff who served on Advisory Committees, and consultants who have worked on One Watershed, One Plan projects. MAD collected data throughout fall 2021 and received input from over 350 participants.

Although the focus of the evaluation was BWSR's contributions and areas for improvement, it was difficult for evaluation participants to remain within that scope, resulting in some findings and recommendations that are beyond BWSR's programmatic control.

Findings

Although there was variability in evaluation participants' perspectives depending on which watershed effort(s) they participated in, MAD found that participants generally:

- Have positive perceptions of the One Watershed, One Plan program.
- Feel the program is achieving the Local Government Water Roundtable's vision.
- Appreciate and agree that watershed-level planning is the right thing to do and find value in their plans, despite challenges and the time-consuming planning process.
- Were driven to participate by the availability of planning grant funding and non-competitive implementation funding.
- Feel like the right stakeholders were present for planning efforts, but that plans would benefit from more public participation and involvement of parties beyond local government.
- Have been able to maintain local control over their plans.
- Gained value from building or strengthening relationships and having to prioritize across political boundaries and individual interests.
- Feel their plans are driving the actions of their organizations.

- Found BWSR staff support to be helpful and a key resource in their planning efforts, and mostly relied on BWSR staff, despite access to helpful guidance and planning resources provided by BWSR.
- Found support from other state agencies to be at least somewhat coordinated and useful, but opinions differed depending on the state agency in question.

When MAD asked how the One Watershed, One Plan program can be improved, participants generally want:

- Increased BWSR staff capacity.
- Increased consistency and clarity in the guidance from BWSR across staff and written resources.
- Increased alignment of support from other state agencies.
- To see more examples and hear about best practices from other watersheds.
- Help making the significant shift from planning to implementation.
- Additional or improved guidance, guidelines, and expectations.
- A reduction in the complexity and burden of the planning process.
- More funding for implementation and flexibility with implementation funding.
- Clear guidelines and expectations for the plan evaluation process and continued BWSR support with plan assessments and evaluation, including staff support and funding.

Recommendations

Based on the most common themes from the evaluation findings, MAD offers the following recommendations for ways that BWSR could make the One Watershed, One Plan program even more effective.

- **Build capacity of BWSR staff:** BWSR staff are an essential support for local planning partners. Their capacity and impact could be increased by hiring more staff, increasing consistency across staff and resources, and providing additional professional development.
- **Help decrease the burden on planning partners:** Participants find the planning process valuable, but said it takes significant time and effort. The planning process could be easier and simpler by providing more support and encouragement for pre-planning preparation; offering a menu of best practices based on existing plans; ensuring planning partners and consultants understand what is necessary and how to simplify plans; and helping reconcile the comprehensiveness of plans with the need to prioritize.
- **Support successful plan maintenance:** Participants want to know ahead of time what the guidance and expectations will be for assessing and evaluating approved plans. They would also benefit from support and resources to address capacity issues when it comes to these processes.

MAD also offers additional considerations that would address less-common themes, which are also more likely to be beyond the scope of the One Watershed, One Plan program. The additional considerations are related to:

- Helping manage expectations when it comes to anticipating positive improvements in water quality.
- Further aligning support from state agency staff.
- Helping planning partnership select and manage consultants.
- Encouraging more public engagement and diverse representation.
- Supporting the transition from planning to implementation.
- Increasing funding and offering additional funding flexibility.