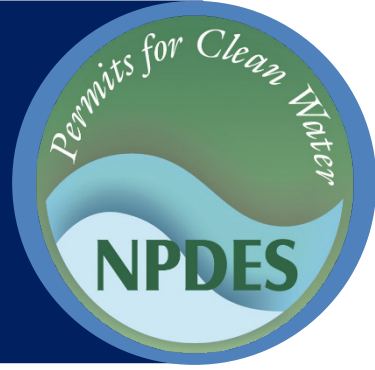




# Stormwater Best Management Practice

## Developing Outreach Strategies for Residents and Businesses



**Minimum Measure:** Public Education and Outreach on Stormwater Impacts  
**Subcategory:** Promoting the Stormwater Message

### Description

Public education and outreach are key to any effective stormwater management program. Addressing a particular source of pollution—household chemical and paint disposal, lawn care, pet waste, or car washing, to name a few—through outreach to residents, property owners, developers and businesses helps to raise awareness and change behavior. In addition, when community members are aware of the links among land activities, stormwater discharge, storm drains and local water resources, they may be more likely to support other municipal efforts to control stormwater impacts.

### Steps for Creating an Outreach Strategy

A comprehensive strategy is important to ensure you use outreach resources effectively, reach the right people with the right messages, and coordinate with other municipal programs. This fact sheet presents an overview of the steps to create and implement such a strategy (Figure 1).

EPA provides more detailed advice for following these steps in the 2010 manual *Getting in Step: A Guide for Conducting Watershed Outreach Campaigns*. While creating a strategy can seem daunting, especially for busy municipal officials who may not have backgrounds in outreach and marketing, *Getting in Step* and several other tools in the “Resources” section can help make it more manageable.

### Determine Goals and Objectives

The key threats to water quality in the community will likely drive the overall goals and objectives for your

outreach plan. For example, if the municipality needs to address harmful algal blooms in waterways, one goal might be to reduce fertilizer applications by property owners. Objectives are specific steps to take to achieve the goal, such as “Provide information to property owners about alternatives to fertilizer use, via door-to-door canvassing and direct mail.”

Before deciding on objectives—exactly how to go about achieving the goal—it is important to understand the people you hope to engage and what might stand in the way of their adopting different practices for managing potential pollutants.

### Understand Your Audiences

You should tailor your outreach and education to the audiences you want to reach. This means you need to identify exactly who your audiences are—that is, who is the education for? Who do you want to empower to take action? To be effective, municipal officials need to listen to the people they want to reach. Ideally, you should collect the following information for each audience:

- What does your audience care about? What are their values and concerns?
- Whom does your audience trust?
- How does your audience like to receive information?
- What does your audience already know about the issue?
- What barriers to taking action does the audience face?

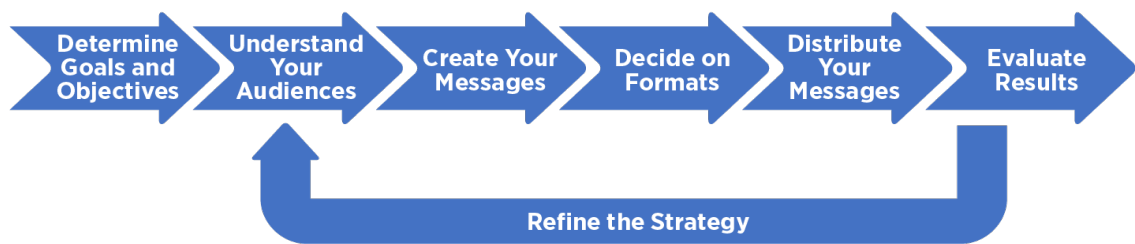


Figure 1. Steps for creating an outreach strategy

### Example Audiences for Stormwater Education and Outreach

- Landowners, landscaping companies, condominium associations, and others responsible for lawn and landscape practices.
- Businesses such as automotive repair shops, car washes, carpet cleaners, parking garages, restaurants and manufacturing facilities.
- Builders, contractors and developers working on construction sites.
- Teachers and students in local schools.
- Dog owners.
- Municipal workers responsible for landscaping, street sweeping and other activities.

Researching these questions, rather than making assumptions about your audiences, will produce a more comprehensive communications strategy. If time and resources allow, you can gather this information through a variety of means, such as informal open houses, forums, workshops, or webinars; social media engagement; structured interviews, focus groups, or surveys; or demographic and historical information such as [U.S. Census data](#). See the [Soliciting Public Opinion](#) fact sheet for more information on how to effectively obtain information and input from a specific audience.

### Barriers and Benefits

Your research can include understanding potential barriers that might prevent your audiences from taking action. Lack of knowledge may not be the only barrier to initiating different ways of doing things. For example, dog owners may be aware that they should dispose of their pets' waste properly, but they may find it inconvenient to do so in public areas. Installing and maintaining a pet waste station with motivational signage may help overcome the barrier to changing behaviors.

Also consider potential benefits—what might motivate your audiences to adopt new behaviors. For example, to encourage property owners to change fertilizing practices, the Chesapeake Bay Program promoted culinary, rather than environmental, benefits using the tagline “[Save the crabs—then eat ‘em.](#)” To promote lawn care without excessive watering or pesticide use, King County, Washington, gave out “[habit change kits.](#)” These included practical information and a lawn sign featuring the spokesfish “Bert the Salmon” so that people could

show their neighbors they used better lawn care practices.

For commercial audiences, you might provide incentives and recognition for businesses that use practices to effectively reduce stormwater pollution. Some recognition programs target all businesses in the community, while others focus on specific industries. [Hawaii's Green Business Program](#), for example, recognizes businesses that use environmentally friendly operations. In Portland, Oregon, the [EcoBiz](#) program certifies automotive shops, landscapers and car washes that use industry best practices to protect the environment. These programs can give businesses marketing opportunities and generate goodwill for them in the community.

### Create Your Messages

Your research to understand your audiences, as well as the barriers to and benefits of the desired behaviors, will help you in crafting your messages. The messages that are clear, specific, and easily understood by the people you want to reach can also appeal to something your audience values. Your messages might specify the actions you would like them to take—for example, letting vegetation grow taller along a stream, pumping septic tanks, or conducting soil tests before fertilizing lawns. Vague messages without specific calls to action—“We all contribute to nonpoint source pollution”—might help build awareness but are not effective for changing behaviors and may not resonate with audiences unfamiliar with some of the terms.

### Decide on Formats and Distribute Your Messages

Consider how your audiences prefer to receive information (social media, traditional media, in person, etc.), and develop your products accordingly (e.g., videos or tweets for social media, presentations or handouts for in-person meetings). Many people access information on their mobile devices, so fact sheets and other materials in PDF format may not be ideal. In today's era of “information overload,” short, visually oriented products and videos may have the best chance of capturing your audience's attention. Also, consider that simply putting information on your website and expecting people to go there is not as effective as finding ways to get your messages and materials to people where they are: community events, civic organizations, social media channels, property owner or trade associations. Remember to take languages and literacy levels into account when developing and distributing your information products.

## Evaluate Results and Refine the Strategy

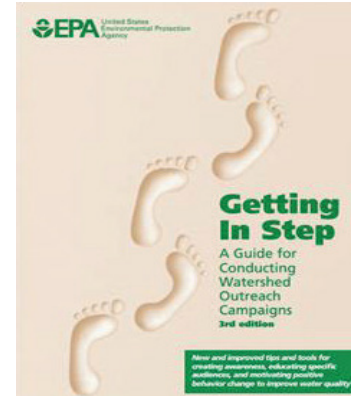
Your strategy can include metrics you will track to evaluate the impact of your outreach and education efforts. “Process” metrics—such as the number of webpage views, report downloads, social media followers, conference attendees and brochures distributed—can tell you something about the number of people receiving exposure to your messaging and the number of times people hear a message. They can give you information about whether your strategy’s implementation is working as intended. However, they do not tell you if you are achieving your goals. Therefore, consider also identifying what you can measure to track outcomes. Outcomes are the short-term or long-term results of a given activity, such as reduction of nutrients or fecal coliform levels in a waterbody.

Both process and outcome metrics can help you evaluate the effectiveness of your strategy, so that you can adjust or scrap ineffective components while supporting or enhancing those that are working.

## Additional Resources

*Nonpoint Source Outreach Toolbox (EPA-841-C-05-003)*. This is a resource for municipalities who are developing outreach campaigns targeting suburban residential populations for watershed and stormwater pollution control efforts. The toolbox includes a catalog of more than 700 outreach products and media materials.

*Getting in Step: A Guide for Conducting Watershed Outreach Campaigns (EPA 841-B-10-002)*. This guidebook provides some of the tools you will need to develop and implement an effective watershed outreach plan. It can help stormwater program managers address public perceptions, promote management activities, and inform or motivate stakeholders.



EPA Getting In Step Guide

*Public Outreach for Integrated Wastewater and Stormwater Planning*. This report presents approaches for implementing outreach activities to support integrated planning, the process of evaluating and prioritizing tasks to meet Clean Water Act obligations. The report also provides a list of resources and detailed case studies.

*Soak up the Rain*. This program was created to encourage citizens and municipalities to take action about the problem of polluted stormwater runoff. The website offers a suite of tools that can be used as-is or customized to supplement and encourage outreach efforts.

*Evaluation of the Role of Public Outreach and Stakeholder Engagement in Stormwater Funding Decisions in New England*. This evaluation report contains important lessons learned related to the role of public outreach in community stormwater funding decisions.

### Additional Information

Additional information on related practices and the Phase II MS4 program can be found at EPA’s National Menu of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Stormwater website

### Disclaimer

*This fact sheet is intended to be used for informational purposes only. These examples and references are not intended to be comprehensive and do not preclude the use of other technically sound practices. State or local requirements may apply.*