Virginia’s Targeted Outreach Initiative: How to facilitate more effective and successful NPS implementation projects

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Background – prior to 2012

- No projects were selected through RFA
- All projects received a minimum funding commitment of 5 years if continued progress was made
- Program supported 10-15 projects annually (generally 5-6 from one grant year)
- Most projects exceeded 5 years, only a few ended earlier
- Most active projects met deliverables and did not require mid-project modifications
Background – Post 2011

- Starting 2012 all new projects selected through RFA
- 2012-2014: Many new and existing projects struggled to meet BMP and financial targets
  - 8 new projects started in 2012
    - 5 classified as “failed”
    - 3 classified as “struggling”
  - 7 new projects started in 2013
    - 6 projects classified as “struggling”
Traits of Failed or Struggling Projects

- Did not meet BMP, program or funding objectives
- No-cost extensions were requested
- Total amount of technical assistance funding exceeded on-the-ground BMP funding
- Documented failure of BMPs (property owners not meeting O&M obligations).
- Documented failure of grantees to appropriately administer and manage the projects
- Funds were removed from project budgets or scope of projects reduced
Impacts to VA NPS Program

- VA returned ~$880,000 incremental funds to EPA
- High level of incremental project funds needed to be reprogrammed or reissued ($400-500k)
- Increase VA staff time to administer program
- Difficulty meeting NPS program goals
  - Pollution reductions
  - Success stories
2014 VA NPS Program “Self Assessment”

- **Internal Factors Identified**
  - Staff capacity to manage projects and staff turnover
  - Anticipate probability of success for project selection

- **External Factors Identified**
  - Grantee capacity to administer projects
  - Unprepared or under-prepared grantees
  - Financial issues impacting property owners

- **Internal & External Factors Identified:**
  - Access to updated and appropriate training materials and resources
  - Issues related to utilizing or reviewing RFPs
Outcomes of “self-assessment”

- Build capacity to administer and manage implementation projects
  - Development and execution of “2015 Internal Training Strategy”
  - Development and execution of “2015 External Training Strategy”
- Increase access to appropriate training materials
  - Update and redevelop 319 Grant Project Management Manual resources
- Request for Proposal
  - Revamped request for proposals process
Internal Training Strategy

- Established a *NPS Program Monthly Call*
- Re-established *Annual NPS Program Meeting*
- Developed a series of workshops, trainings and webinars on “How to...”
  - ...review a proposal and create a scope of work
  - ...review and approve project reports
  - ...develop and review BMP operation and maintenance plans and landowner agreements
  - ...develop, review and report on Quality Assurance Project Plans (QAPP)
  - ...improve grantee communication
External Training Strategy

Developed comprehensive “2015 Training Schedule”

- 2 Statewide day-long *Project Partners Meeting*
- Day-long training/meeting for new project partners
- Developed a series of trainings webinars on
  - ...”Develop and submit a Quality Assurance Project Plans (QAPP)”
  - ...Reporting Requirements
  - ...”Now What? Next Steps for Securing Implementation Funding”
  - ...General Project Administration
- Developed a “Residential Septic Specifications Technical Advisory Committee”
Training Materials/outcomes

- 34 new training documents drafted
- 2 new comprehensive resource documents
- 11 presentations available
- Grant Project Management Manual- in development
- 1 Grantee/Program advisory committee developed
- Approximately 80 individuals/organizations participated in one or more training event in 2015.
Have things gotten better?

- Access to materials and resource better
- Projects identified as struggling had some improvements...
  - Processed 9 extensions
  - Modified agreements to remove $400,000 from active projects
  - Reprogrammed funding of nearly $800,000 in 2016
- 2015 RFA:
  - 12 applicants, 6 projects funded.
  - 1 success story and 75% meeting or exceeding expectations
- 2016 RFA results:
  - 19 applications received in 2 rounds
  - New partners continued to submit poor quality
- July 2016 Partners Meeting
  - More engaged dialog from those attending
  - Facilitated dialog on three problem areas and developed “next steps” that both DEQ staff and project partners can jointly address
What Did We Learn?

- Bridge the “gap” between IP completion and proposal submissions
- Better engaged and educated staff results in better managed projects
- User buy-in produces more results
- Time spent on guidelines, manuals and materials does help create more successful projects
- Better project and partner selection may have larger influence on project success than project administration