

Minutes

Meeting Attendees: Haley Burns (PDE), Elizabeth Butler (EPA2), Karen Forst (PDE), Dorina Frizzera (STAC), Mike Hoffman (EPA3), Kathy Klein (PDE), Danielle Kreeger (PDE), Lynette Lurig (NJDEP), Megan Mackey (EPA3), Martha Maxwell-Doyle (PDE), Rachael Phillos (DNREC), Chad Pindar (DRBC), Irene Purdy (EPA2), Sue Weaver (PADEP) Will Whalon (PWD)

Status Updates

- EPA approved our Equity Strategy and 5-year BIL Strategic Plan, which allows us to now prepare and submit the Year 3/FY24 BIL funding proposal.
- We received minimal comments from EPA on the FY24 base funding work plan and will be responding to keep the contracting process moving forward.
- EPA headquarters confirmed they will provide \$70k in funding for the Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) ambassador, (a \$20k increase from prior years). We are very grateful for this support.
- PDE purchased the multisizer for mussel research, one of the items funded through BIL Years 1&2.

Fall Steering Committee (SC) Meeting

- At the last Steering Committee meeting, there was discussion about possibly continuing the SRF conversation via the Funding Subcommittee of the Water Table Project. There has not yet been a chance to bring this up as those subcommittee meetings are just getting ready to begin.
- We need to identify some actionable items for the fall meeting.
- Kathy said that lately she has been thinking about how the estuary program can rein things in a bit rather than trying to do everything, so there may be potential for SC discussion around some of these ideas.
 - For some background, the William Penn Foundation (WPF) is going through a strategic planning process (which is currently on hold) to look at where they have been first 10 years of the watershed initiative and how they want to think about investment in the watershed going forward. Stuart Clarke, head of the Watershed Program at the WPF, presented at a Delaware River Watershed gathering last month, and some of the points he made resonated with Kathy based on this line of thinking (we will share video of remarks):
 - Philanthropic prerogative: there has been a movement in foundations to take a more top down approach, essentially telling the nonprofit sector what they wanted to fund. The WPF is revisiting this approach with the realization that a more collaborative effort is needed to identify what and where the needs are.
 - To realize next big improvements in water quality will take more than they originally thought, with the low hanging fruit already been tackled; more time and money are needed to address new challenges on top of existing ones.
 - They are also thinking about the geography of where they fund work, as historically it has not aligned with how the foundation does funding in their two other programmatic areas (arts and culture and education) that are focused in the Philadelphia region.
 - There is also an increased awareness that the foundation needs to do more around environmental justice and support work in underserved communities, which was not a focus when the foundation began their watershed initiative.

- All of this resonated with Kathy's thinking about the CCMP, which, while a great document, has had ongoing struggles related to tracking. We may want to think about honing in and prioritizing certain areas. There is a lot of work being done, but it is not necessarily connected to estuary program. We also have a new targeted focus with our involvement with the UWFP and the directive through the BIL funding to help realize environmental improvements in disadvantaged communities.
- Martha noted that we will have to update the CCMP in 2025, and may be able to look at that process as a way to become more strategic and streamlined based on current changes and trends. Megan agreed that this process lends itself to this type of strategic prioritization. Prioritizing towards tracking in particular would likely make things easier for partners and result in better reporting.
- Other opportunities to engage the SC include the Program Evaluation next spring and the 2025 Science Summit.
- Chad brought up the Geographic Program concept – it has been paused but Kathy will connect with Steve Tambini.
- There has been some movement on the DELEP Agreement/LOU in PA – the EIC is hopeful that PA can sign in time for it to be finalized by the fall SC meeting. Kathy will pass along this request.

Partner Priorities Report Out

- Report outs were received from some but not all of the DELEP partners prior to this meeting. This was a pilot exercise to see how this type of priority update sharing would go, and the EIC shared the following feedback about the process:
 - The CCMP is so broad, and many agencies touch everything in it to some level, so keeping track of everything being done would be a daunting, heavy lift.
 - There are so many different types of things happening at all different levels, and people have interactions that don't necessarily fit a database report out. Depending on the nature or stage of certain work, there may not be a specific/identified project, and folks may not feel comfortable reporting on something less defined in a spreadsheet/database like this.
 - Staff turnover has resulted in the loss of some people that used to hone in on major initiatives/programs that have an impact on the estuary.
 - It is impossible to attach a monetary amount to some things because of factors like staff time.
- We should think about this in relationship to the CCMP update and revision process: it is good to have measurable goals to help tell the story. We aren't telling the collective story the way we should but it can't be done if we do not have information on keystone projects.

Partner Updates

- DNREC is working on NOAA specific reporting and looking at numerous funding opportunities all due at the same time (habitat restoration through the BIL, potential CBR4 projects in DE, etc.)
- DRBC had their eye on [low flows and dry spells](#) most of June. They published a steward [study](#) related to storage options in the Delaware River Basin. Chad also noted that NYC delayed their [aqueduct shutdown](#)
- From PDE:
 - Planning is underway for the Delaware River Festival. PDE also recently launched a Trash Free Waters Art Contest with funding from EPA and additional support from PA CZM, and PWD. Submitted artwork will be on display at the festival and attendees will have the chance to vote on the artwork. The winning piece(s) will be used in an ad campaign to promote trash-free waters. We hope to make this an annual or biannual event.

- There is currently a \$2.5M funding gap for the hatchery, which is a moving target. We submitted a change order to PennVest to get the design phase started.
- Danielle and Ellie recently went to Florida for a DARPA project that might inform things in our watershed. The military has interest in coastal resilience and using nature to fortify bases.

Action Items

- PDE will share video of Stuart Clarke's presentation/remarks.
- PDE will send info about CDRW fall forum.

Upcoming/Important Dates:

- Next EIC Meeting: Thursday, August 3, 10am-12pm
- Delaware River Festival: Saturday, September 9, in Philadelphia and Camden
- Experience the Estuary Celebration: Thursday, October 12, 5-8:30pm, Switch House by Cescaphe
- DELEP Steering Committee Meeting; Tuesday, October 24, 10am-12pm, at Bartram's Garden (with hybrid option)