



Title: MCWD Outreach Strategy – Discussion

Prepared by: Name: James Wisker
Phone: 952.641.4509
Jwisker@minnehahacreek.org

Purpose:

To provide background information to support the Board’s ongoing discussion of the District’s Outreach strategy.

Background:

The Minnehaha Creek Watershed District is engaged in the process of rebuilding its outreach program from the ground up, to support the District’s strategic approach and priorities – detailed in *A Balanced Urban Ecology*. This has involved methodically working through the following process.

1. Discovery – review and synthesis of all relevant past information related to MCWD outreach
2. Research – completing qualitative research for MCWD’s audiences, and the effectiveness of past programming
3. Insights – developing a deeper understanding of how the research informs MCWD’s future outreach needs
4. *Strategy – cultivating outreach options and direction that support the District’s mission and strategic priorities
5. Implementation – confronting tradeoffs, setting priorities and developing operational plans to execute

*The District is currently developing and discussing strategic options for the future of its outreach.

During the December outreach strategy discussion, the Committee established consensus regarding the major strategic shift for MCWD’s outreach – the goals, key audiences, key channels, and the primary focus of the program.

As part of that discussion, the Board asked staff to continue working with the Citizen Advisory Committee to explore the implications of the proposed outreach realignment as it relates to the District’s existing relationship with the broader residential community.

At the January CAC meeting, advisory committee members discussed:

- The need to directly engage residents in a focused manner around key MCWD initiatives (e.g. projects)
- The need for the website to serve as a useful hub of information, that connects residents to resources and third parties that supplement services offered by the District.
- Whether to sustain, shift, or suspend the District’s historic contracted engagement programming

As the January 23, 2020 PPC, staff will summarize the discussion to date and seek additional feedback from the committee on how the Districts strategic shift in outreach may affect its historic engagement programming targeted at the residential audience.

Supporting documents (list attachments):

DRAFT Executive Summary – MCWD Outreach Strategy



MCWD Outreach Strategy
DRAFT Executive Summary
January 21, 2020

Introduction:

MCWD is in the midst of a 2-to-3 year process to systematically reorient and align its programming around its *Balanced Urban Ecology* approach. One significant component of this effort is the restructuring of the District's Outreach program, formerly known as Education and Communications.

This document summarizes the key insights and consensus thus far. These insights are a result of an intensive research process that included input from key stakeholders, residents, Board of Managers, CAC, and staff, as well as an analysis of program history and effectiveness.

The key shift: From broad awareness building to targeted context-specific partnership

MCWD's *Balanced Urban Ecology* philosophy recognizes that decisions about land use drive changes in the amount and quality of water that the District is charged with stewarding. However, MCWD has very little control or ownership over the land. Therefore, to carry out its mission most effectively, and deliver value to the public, in the form of clean water and healthy natural systems that underpin vibrant communities, the District must work in close partnership with entities whose direct land use control intersects with key District initiatives. These people are decision makers at cities, counties and other units of government, landowners and developers, and residents engaged in the changing landscape of their city. These land use influencers are the most important audiences for the District to reach and engage

Research and insights from the planning process highlight that, even when maximally successful, broad-based messaging and general awareness do not measurably contribute the MCWD's ability to carry out its mission and serve its residents. General awareness of MCWD, even among key audiences, does not translate into integrated project opportunities, and broad favorable views of the District have not always mitigated conflict on charged issues.

Instead, insights show that the most impactful tactics for achieving meaningful engagement and partnership among key audiences are narrow, customized, and context-specific. In particular, the most effective tactics are interpersonal and relationship-based communication: meetings, presentations, phone calls, and tailored written correspondence.

These highest-impact outreach products are delivered by MCWD staff in the course of pursuing their strategic goals: project managers, policy analysts, permitting representatives, researchers, and Board Managers. These "relationship managers" can be thought of as the District's most important outreach channel.

Outreach Alignment Principles:

With this clarity the District must realign and optimize its outreach emphasis, away from its current focus on building general brand awareness and affinity through broad-based messaging and diffuse programming, to a more focused model that engages prospective partners in a targeted manner with rich and context-specific information that advances the District's key strategic policy and project priorities. The following principles will guide the realignment of the District's outreach.

1. The District's priority audiences are those that directly control land use planning and decisions that directly intersect with MCWD's strategic priorities.
 - a. Outreach must emphasize the effective engagement of priority audiences.
2. "Relationship managers," tasked with advancing the strategic priorities of the District, are the most effective channels for engaging priority audiences.
 - a. The Outreach program can deliver the most value by guiding, supporting, and evaluating outreach carried out by relationship managers in the course of advancing the District's key strategic initiatives.
3. Focused, rich, and context-specific outreach is the most effective.
 - a. Outreach must directly support the District's relationship managers, through the development of focused, custom-tailored tactical plans that fit the unique strategic context of MCWD's priority initiatives.
 - b. Programming emphasis must shift away from diffuse engagement of self-selected water volunteers, delivered through annual contracts with non-profit partners, to geographically-focused and custom-tailored engagement of residents needed to advance MCWD's priority initiatives.
4. MCWD must effectively focus and balance its finite resources while operating at a challenging nexus within Minnesota's complex water governance framework – where extreme weather is elevating public concern over water conflicts with the built environment, and increasing interest in taking local action.
 - a. Outreach must work closely with the District's Responsive program to continually scan for issues and opportunities, and then judiciously deploy its resources through partnerships to address the emerging needs and interest of communities.
 - b. Outreach must track and evaluate public perception to maintain situational awareness, and adjust and improve the program on an ongoing basis to maintain MCWD effectiveness.
 - c. The District must position its website as a hub for useful information that easily connects users to tools, resources and third parties that can supplement services offered by the District.
5. Some baseline broad-based messaging is appropriate.
 - a. To complement the focused, deep and tailored outreach supporting MCWD's key initiatives, broad based communications will be delivered (e.g. mass media) to maintain general awareness of MCWD, and favorable perceptions of its mission, and value.

Table 1 below provides an overview of the strategic shift in MCWD’s outreach programming:

<i>TABLE 1</i>	Before	After
Goal	Build brand awareness and affinity among general public	Directly support the success of the District’s key strategic initiatives
Key audience	General public and residents engaged in taking local action on water	Those with direct influence over land use decisions that intersect with the District’s key strategic initiatives
Key product	Stream of general interest content about MCWD accomplishments and residential best practices	Interpersonal communications and custom-tailored tactical content, aligned around the District’s key strategic initiatives
Key channel	Newsletters, trainings, news media, social media, website, volunteer programs	MCWD relationship managers
Primary focus of program	Create and distribute content	Guide, support and evaluate outreach carried out by relationship managers in the course of advancing the District’s key strategic initiatives
Planning approach	Fixed suite of channels and tactics, then content sought to populate channels	Custom outreach plan for each key strategic initiative dictates which tactics are used and in what proportion to support relationship managers as primary channel
Engagement Programming	Diffuse, self-selected water focused volunteers, through annual contracts with non-profit partners to promote implementation of local best management practices	Geographically focused engagement of key publics through custom tailored tactics that support the success of MCWD’s key strategic initiatives
Website	Broad and deep archive of information without clear audience focus, or content strategy.	Hub of easily navigable tools and services that provide value to the principal users of the website.