



Water Table Funding Subcommittee Meeting
Wednesday, July 12th, 2023
Meeting Summary

Recap of Water Table Phase I

The Water Table project began with the goal of bringing together representatives from nonprofit conservation organizations, the water-user community, and government to build relationships and identify collaborative initiatives, new projects, and new funding sources to work toward improved water quality. With funding from the William Penn Foundation, Phase 1 kicked off several years ago under the leadership of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC). In addition to DVRPC, other members of the core leadership include the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary (PDE), Philadelphia Water Department, and the Water Resources Association of the Delaware River Basin. Through interviews and stakeholder conversations, participants expressed a shared interest for stronger cross-sectoral relationships and a diverse, resourceful collaborative initiative. Together stakeholders identified ten shared priorities, which ultimately were narrowed down to the top 4: Branding, Climate Change, Funding, and Workforce Development.

Phase 2 of the Water Table project is being led by PDE and is again funded by the William Penn Foundation, with additional support through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). After reaffirming the top 4 priorities earlier this year, subcommittees were established for each of these to leverage the multi-sectoral approach and create work plans with actionable items to help move the needle in these priority areas.

Introduction to the Delaware Estuary Program (DELEP)/Connection to the CCMP

Congress authorized the National Estuary Program (NEP) under the Clean Water Act, and in 1988 the Delaware Estuary was nominated for and accepted to the NEP. Of 28 National Estuary Programs, DELEP is the only tristate estuary, covering ground in 25 counties across PA, NJ, and DE. All NEPs receive the same amount of federal funding regardless of factors like the geographic footprint of the estuary.

Like all other NEPs, DELEP has a Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plan (CCMP). PDE was created through an action item in DELEP's original CCMP, and became host of DELEP in 2004. DELEP's

2019 revised CCMP is divided into three main themes: Clean Waters, Healthy Habitats, and Strong Communities, though the overarching priorities of climate change and environmental justice are driving the work in each of these areas. All activities within the Water Table Project can be found under one or more of the CCMP themes, and branding falls under the strong communities section. Many of PDE's biggest challenges are similar to those facing others engaged in the Water Table Project: funding, limited capacity, a complex political and stakeholder landscape across a large geography with varying priorities, and a general lack of branding for the Delaware River and Bay.

Subcommittee Purpose & Discussion

The overarching goal of the Funding Subcommittee is to elevate existing and/or new sources of funding to increase and improve impact on water quality projects and communities in need throughout the Delaware Watershed. The subcommittee can achieve this through information sharing, relationship building, and by creating a funding work plan that represents the interests of all stakeholders throughout the region. Ideally, this work will lead to increased capacity to address water quality issues that plague under-resourced communities in the region, bolster local capacity to pursue this work, and make meaningful and lasting infrastructure improvements.

The subcommittee had a discussion around some of the guiding questions sent out in advance of the meeting, particularly around technical assistance providers, the newly established circuit rider program ([The Funding Navigator](#)), and new funding sources and strategic ways of applying for funding.

- The Delaware Resilient and Sustainable Communities League ([RASCL](#)) Program was discussed as a good local model for providing technical assistance for project funding applications.
- The Philadelphia Office of Transportation, Infrastructure, and Sustainability has vocalized a need to amass local, state and federal funding mechanisms into a central repository.
- EPA has a suite of funding opportunities for disadvantaged communities that are both big and small - which would address the concern that underserved communities in Philadelphia are being overlooked or falling through the cracks given their large city affiliation.
- Funding to address [Emerging Contaminants](#) is being underutilized and presents an opportunity to help communities create projects that could tap into this funding pool.

Next Steps

We will gather the shared information and continue to research programs that were discussed throughout the call. We will also look into holding the September Funding Subcommittee meeting in person, and will send out an updated calendar invitation shortly.

Attachments

- 1. Slides from the Water Table Overview Presentation**
- 2. Slides from the DELEP Presentation**