



Section 8: Troubleshooting

“It is not a single leader that moves the organization to success—it is the shared information distributed throughout the group and the community that can bring order to everything” (Wheatley 1999:101).

Watershed group leaders and members must expect challenges and a little chaos to occur on a regular basis. Some crises will be small and easily resolved. Others will take purposive and consistent efforts to overcome. In this section, potential problems the group may encounter are identified and alternative solutions are offered. Some problems can be avoided or fixed by implementing good organization and community development practices. Some problems will happen despite best efforts to avoid them. Understanding the cause and source of the problem will help the group as they search for solutions.

The first step in troubleshooting problems is to clearly identify the problem. Is it a conflict between one or two group members? Are confusion, information overload, and unfocused discussions preventing the group from doing anything meaningful? Has a project been undertaken that really does not support the mission and objectives of the group? Do elected officials or government agencies seem not to trust the group? Are rumors about the group circulating that are not true? Are fewer and fewer people showing up at regular meetings?

The troubleshooting tables in the next few pages are organized by different group development stages (pre-watershed group formation; group formation; and sustaining the group). Symptoms, problems, and possible causes are first identified. Then, alternative actions and pages in the manual that refer to that stage of group development are offered. The alternative actions column suggests only a few remedies. Discussions with several trusted members of the watershed group and/or outside advisors can lead to additional suggestions that better fit the exact nature of the group problem. Following the troubleshooting table is an Iowa State University bulletin: Purposeful Partnerships in the Community Interest. Page 4 of this section contains a diagnostic tool developed by the University of Wisconsin for evaluating group functioning. If you think the problem is the organization and practices of the group, make copies of this form and ask each member in your group to complete it. Summarize their responses, then use your findings to discuss with the group each item and what actions are needed.

Table 8.1. Pre-watershed Group Formation.

Symptom	Possible Causes	Alternative Solutions	Refer to Section / Page
Lack of attendance by watershed residents at community meetings	Not enough public notice	There is a process to letting people know in advance about an upcoming public meeting. Start about 4 weeks in advance. Target your audience. Send press releases to all newspapers and radio stations. Mail notices to those you want to attend. Put brochures in places where your target audience might go, such as banks, elevators, grocery stores, and city hall.	Section 2 Section 4 Section 5 2-6; 5-2, 5-3
	Inadequate recruitment	Each resident should hear about the upcoming public meeting and participation opportunities 4-5 times – via personal letter, media coverage, and face-to-face invitations.	Section 2 2-6
	Issue is not perceived as being important by local residents	Participation is almost entirely dependent upon the problem or issue’s importance. The issue may be important to a specific organization or government agency, but not the community. A solution is to revisit the issue, rank its importance, and then decide whether or not it is worth pursuing. If it is important, you need to find a way to convey that to the community. Some projects have had success with activities that include a “pay-off” to residents, like free water testing of rural wells, combined with on-farm visits by person representing project or agency inviting their participation.	Section 2 2-2, 2-8–2-12 Section 6 6-14–6-17
Lack of participation during the community meeting	Agenda does not allow time for residents to voice their concerns. Citizens aren’t convinced they will be listened to or can make a difference.	Formulating the agenda of the community meeting is critical to achieving good citizen participation. Are the presentations kept short, and to the point? Is the number of presenters kept to a minimum (nothing is worse than listening to a third speaker who is saying basically what the first and second speakers have said)? Is there enough opportunity for the residents to speak? Small group discussions allow the quiet participants to speak and everyone to voice what they are thinking. It also is a learning opportunity as people listen to each other and their concerns.	Section 4 4-5, 4-6 Section 3 3-2

Table 8.1. Pre-watershed Group Formation, continued.

Symptom	Possible Causes	Alternative Solutions	Refer to Section / Page
People don't volunteer to form a watershed group	Purpose of the group needs to be better articulated.	People usually are quick to volunteer for something if (1) they find the issue to be critically important, and (2) they believe that they can make a difference. The planning team needs to offer compelling reasons for others to get involved. If people haven't volunteered for a long-term commitment to forming a watershed group, consider offering a study circle that will meet 3 or 4 times to discuss watershed issues.	2-2 Section 5
	Paid staff is perceived as being able to do "it all." Citizens don't perceive their input is needed or wanted.	Staff needs to share responsibilities and decision-making with residents. If residents perceive that their participation will not make a difference, they will not volunteer. Agency staff can encourage citizens to work with them to learn about the watershed and help plan appropriate actions.	Section 5 Section 1 1-1
	There may not be widespread public interest or concern.	Re-emphasize community awareness education; highlight scientific problems connecting to local quality of life. The community may not be ready to form a citizen group. Community organizing may need to wait for a crisis or increased interest.	2-2
Lack of participation in watershed group formation in support of a specific water management project	Bringing people in after a project is started; citizens don't see their contribution as meaningful.	Hold public meetings before a watershed group is established and before a project is delineated, and before proposals/preproposals are written. Build ownership and get buy-in at front end. This will eliminate the need for "selling" to residents later. However, it is never too late to ask citizens to participate in an ongoing project. The project team will need to spend time helping citizens learn and understand projects in progress. Citizens will also need a meaningful role in the project.	Section 2 Section 4
Community denies they have watershed problems	Community does not understand their watershed and the symptoms that signal water problems	Need to share information about the watershed more widely. Tours of the watershed and credible technical experts can be used to share knowledge and extend communication among community members. Public meetings, news articles, one-to-one conversations among neighbors and acquaintances will help identify current and potential issues.	1-9 Section 6 6-14

Table 8.2. Watershed Group Formation.

Symptom	Possible Causes	Alternative Solutions	Refer to Section / Page
Lack of support and participation by citizens once the group has formed or a project is undertaken.	Public participation in approved projects doesn't have flexibility to incorporate citizen's suggestions.	Let residents have ample opportunity for input on projects before they are begun. Build their ownership and commitment to the project. Project must meet needs of residents. Having residents participate in a project design increases likelihood that residents will be willing to participate and will adopt practices they identified to address needs they defined.	Section 5 Section 6
	Broad based participation not established from the start	Be sure discussions about the mission and activities of the group are inclusive. If the group focuses on only one project or a single sector's interest (e.g., ag practices or development policies) it will be much more difficult to broaden and include other community sectors. Find common concerns that affect several sectors and involve them in planning activities that address those issues.	5-1 6-5
Lack of participation in watershed group meetings	Poor agenda	Formulate the agenda so that it creates an efficient meeting. People value their time. Meetings must respect time people commit. Does the agenda allow the group to accomplish what they need to accomplish? Does the agenda allow group members to interact and offer suggestions? Does the agenda allow time for team building, such as coffee and cookies before or after a meeting? Are citizen group members participating in the construction of the agenda?	Section 5 5-3
	Poor facilitation	The steering committee meets with the facilitator and sets ground rules for democratic participation. The facilitator may not be a good match with the group. Get another one.	Section 3
	Dominating individual or dominating clique	Ask facilitator to set ground rules for broad-based participation and be responsible for enforcing mutual respect.	Section 3 6-8
	Too many "experts"	Ask experts not to speak unless asked a question. Facilitator needs to moderate expert participation so citizens are not intimidated or view their contribution as meaningless.	Section 3

Table 8.2. Watershed Group Formation, continued.

Symptom	Possible Causes	Alternative Solutions	Refer to Section / Page
Group gets sidetracked on conversations that lead nowhere; meetings end without anything being accomplished	Leader isn't facilitating the meeting effectively.	Set an agenda that supports the group's mission and goals and stick to it. The group needs a facilitator/leader that is sanctioned by the group to cut off discussions that don't pertain to the agenda. Members of the group need to agree to limit their comments to the work they plan to accomplish.	Use <i>Diagnostic Tool for Evaluation of Group Process</i> , p. 3 of "Purposeful Partnerships" 8-11
	Group's mission and objectives aren't clear.	If the mission and objectives of the group aren't clear, take time to clarify them so everyone knows where the group is going. It may be time to revisit the mission, objectives and activities, and change them to better reflect the group's expectations.	5-1, 6-5
A project fails. It does not solve the problem expected	<p>The group moves to action without adequate knowledge of the ecology of their watershed and how known practices can be applied.</p> <p>Group has inadequate resources to solve the problem.</p>	<p>Ask a technical expert to be present on a regular basis to offer guidance and advice when the group needs information.</p> <p>The group needs to continuously learn more about their watershed. Plan meetings where experts share their information (county sanitarian, district conservationist, naturalists, water resource specialists, fisheries and forestries scientists, water resource scientists). Plan activities that connect the group to the watershed: headwaters tour, river trash pickup days, farm tours, land use and development tours.</p> <p>Find partners who will collaborate on the project. Remind members that changes to the watershed may be long-term rather than short-run.</p>	<p>Section 7</p> <p>Section 5 Section 6 6-14</p> <p>Section 7</p>

Table 8.3. Sustaining the Group.

Symptom	Possible Causes	Alternative Solutions	Refer to Section / Page
Group's activities and projects don't support mission and goals the group set out	Group meetings are dominated by economic interests, well-intentioned government employees, or residents with a personal agenda that is not supported by the whole group	<p>Technical advisors to the group offer good science of land use practices and measurements to track issues to gather the right information. They can help keep the group in balance.</p> <p>The group needs to understand their watershed better, identify sound land and water solutions, and have data to support themselves. If data on the watershed are not available, make plans to gather it. Data can help the group conduct informed dialogues and set priorities.</p> <p>Pre-meeting discussions with influential leaders and watershed leadership can calm fears and identify points of conflict. The group may have to respectfully disagree with a dominant individual and make it clear that the group as a whole doesn't support projects that don't accomplish the mission.</p>	<p>Section 7</p> <p>Section 7 Section 9</p> <p>Section 6</p>
	The mission and goals may not match the group membership interests.	The whole group should revisit the mission and goals they set out to determine if those are still the group's intent.	5-1; 6-5
Conflicting or misinformation about the watershed	Poor communication	<p>Outside credible experts are needed to provide technical expertise and advice. The group needs to understand their watershed better, sound land and water solutions, and have data to support themselves. If data on the watershed are not available, make plans to gather it.</p> <p>Be sure everyone in the group understands the mission and goals. Extend information the group is learning to the whole community.</p> <p>Consider a regular newspaper column, radio show, and/or monthly newsletter.</p>	<p>Section 7</p> <p>5-1; 6-5</p>
People don't know what to do next; lack of clarity of group intent	The group mission isn't clear. Objectives need to be more specific to guide activities.	<p>Refocus on the vision for the watershed and the relationship of the watershed group mission to the community vision.</p> <p>Examine the group processes used to accomplish the group intent. Are they inadequate? How should they be changed? This should be a group discussion.</p>	<p>Use <i>Diagnostic Tool for Evaluation of Group Process</i>, p. 3 of "Purposeful Partnerships"</p> <p>8-11; 6-5; 5-1, 5-16</p>

Table 8.3. Sustaining the Group, continued.

Symptom	Possible Causes	Alternative Solutions	Refer to Section / Page
Interest and participation lags; people stop coming to meetings	Meetings' agendas aren't accomplished; meetings run too long and are unfocused; activities and decisions are made by a few rather than everyone.	Organizational process needs to be strengthened. Use <i>Diagnostic Tool for Evaluation of Group Process</i> , p. 3 of "Purposeful Partnerships" Discuss with group how to respond to key problems.	Section 3
	People don't feel the group is doing something meaningful.	Plan and execute greater variety of visible projects, events – examples might include tours of land and agriculture management practices. Get involved in activities like IOWATER and nature mapping. Find students who have interests in community service projects and team up with them on a watershed project. Cultivate on-going media coverage – at least monthly articles in local newspapers or better yet, a column.	Section 7 6-14
		Partner with other groups and their activities, like Trees Forever, Ducks Unlimited, etc. Build realistic expectations from the beginning of a project with clear and open communication and inclusive processes.	Section 7
Only one sector regularly attends; non-farmers or town residents don't participate	Not included from the very beginning; discussions too narrowly focused	Build their participation from the start – if possible. Include representation in formation and planning stages, community meeting, watershed group, and in planning maintenance activities.	Section 2 2-5; 5-10
		Create subcommittees with specific focus that would be relevant to farmers and non-farmers (e.g., agriculture land use management) and have them develop recommendations for the larger group.	5-13
		Subcommittees and activities that are relevant to non-farmers might include demonstrations of practices in home and lawn care and disposal, septic systems, water monitoring, and nature mapping. Find activities and interests that are common to farm and non-farm sectors. Allow both perspectives to be voiced on a regular basis.	6-14

Table 8.3. Sustaining the Group, continued.

Symptom	Possible Causes	Alternative Solutions	Refer to Section / Page
Farmers and rural landowners don't participate	<p>Feeling threatened by downstream urban demands</p> <p>Meetings are always held in urban areas</p>	<p>Create subcommittees of special interest such as urban development and agriculture practices. Ask them to report back to whole group. The group needs to find common mission and objectives between rural and urban residents. Engage in activities that encourage interaction and learning from each other.</p> <p>Watershed groups that span rural and urban interests should alternate meeting between urban and rural sites.</p>	5-13
Conflicts arise	<p>People don't like each other's opinions/ideas; lack of trust among members.</p> <p>There is a legitimate conflict in perspective.</p>	<p>Rules of mutual respect need to be discussed and enforced in group discussions.</p> <p>Address conflicts with solid fact-based information when possible. Use participatory data gathering processes – let residents be part of data gathering and discussion of interpretations.</p> <p>Facilitator or coordinator(s) seek strategies that allow conflicting parties to work together.</p> <p>Minority perspectives need to be acknowledged, and mutual respect given so they can continue to participate.</p> <p>Sometimes consensus is impossible.</p>	<p>6-8</p> <p>Section 6</p> <p>6-2, 6-13</p>
Elected officials afraid/unwilling to cooperate with the group	Lack of trust; lack of information; prior activities didn't go well; officials do not see political benefits but do see political risks.	The watershed group needs to undertake an activity or two that builds their reputation with the community. Individual members need to use their personal relationships to talk with elected officials to clarify the mission and objectives of the group and defuse perceptions that the group is a threat to elected officials. Invite them to attend regular meetings and encourage them to dialogue with the group about their concerns.	6-14
Nothing seems to be happening; the group's efforts don't seem to make a difference.	Short-term expectations from actions that will take longer to show results	<p>Patience. Changes in the watershed will occur when people begin to see how their personal behaviors contribute to the whole system.</p> <p>Chose a balance of activities that will have visible short-term results and long-run impact.</p> <p>Undertake coalitions that bridge the interests of different organizations so the group has more resources to attack the problem.</p>	<p>Section 7</p> <p>6-10</p>