
One Watershed, One Plan Program Evaluation

Board of Water and Soil Resources
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Executive Summary

Background

Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) asked Management Analysis and Development (MAD) to evaluate administration of the One Watershed, One Plan program to date. Specifically, MAD explored four evaluation questions:

- How well is the One Watershed, One Plan program achieving the vision of the Local Government Water Roundtable recommendations?
- What value do planning participants derive from the One Watershed, One Plan program?
- What are BWSR's contributions to the successes of the One Watershed, One Plan program?
- How can BWSR improve its support for the One Watershed, One Plan program?

To get answers to the evaluation questions, MAD administered a survey of One Watershed, One Plan participants from local government units (LGUs) and conducted interviews and focus groups with a wide group of stakeholders, including LGU staff and officials, BWSR staff and leadership, state agency staff, LGU association leadership, non-LGU staff who served on Advisory Committees, and consultants who have worked on One Watershed, One Plan projects. MAD collected data throughout fall 2021 and received input from over 350 participants.

Although the focus of the evaluation was BWSR's contributions and areas for improvement, it was difficult for evaluation participants to remain within that scope, resulting in some findings and recommendations that are beyond BWSR's programmatic control.

Findings

Although there was variability in evaluation participants' perspectives depending on which watershed effort(s) they participated in, MAD found that participants generally:

- Have positive perceptions of the One Watershed, One Plan program.
- Feel the program is achieving the Local Government Water Roundtable's vision.
- Appreciate and agree that watershed-level planning is the right thing to do and find value in their plans, despite challenges and the time-consuming planning process.
- Were driven to participate by the availability of planning grant funding and non-competitive implementation funding.
- Feel like the right stakeholders were present for planning efforts, but that plans would benefit from more public participation and involvement of parties beyond local government.
- Have been able to maintain local control over their plans.
- Gained value from building or strengthening relationships and having to prioritize across political boundaries and individual interests.
- Feel their plans are driving the actions of their organizations.

- Found BWSR staff support to be helpful and a key resource in their planning efforts, and mostly relied on BWSR staff, despite access to helpful guidance and planning resources provided by BWSR.
- Found support from other state agencies to be at least somewhat coordinated and useful, but opinions differed depending on the state agency in question.

When MAD asked how the One Watershed, One Plan program can be improved, participants generally want:

- Increased BWSR staff capacity.
- Increased consistency and clarity in the guidance from BWSR across staff and written resources.
- Increased alignment of support from other state agencies.
- To see more examples and hear about best practices from other watersheds.
- Help making the significant shift from planning to implementation.
- Additional or improved guidance, guidelines, and expectations.
- A reduction in the complexity and burden of the planning process.
- More funding for implementation and flexibility with implementation funding.
- Clear guidelines and expectations for the plan evaluation process and continued BWSR support with plan assessments and evaluation, including staff support and funding.

Recommendations

Based on the most common themes from the evaluation findings, MAD offers the following recommendations for ways that BWSR could make the One Watershed, One Plan program even more effective.

- **Build capacity of BWSR staff:** BWSR staff are an essential support for local planning partners. Their capacity and impact could be increased by hiring more staff, increasing consistency across staff and resources, and providing additional professional development.
- **Help decrease the burden on planning partners:** Participants find the planning process valuable, but said it takes significant time and effort. The planning process could be easier and simpler by providing more support and encouragement for pre-planning preparation; offering a menu of best practices based on existing plans; ensuring planning partners and consultants understand what is necessary and how to simplify plans; and helping reconcile the comprehensiveness of plans with the need to prioritize.
- **Support successful plan maintenance:** Participants want to know ahead of time what the guidance and expectations will be for assessing and evaluating approved plans. They would also benefit from support and resources to address capacity issues when it comes to these processes.

MAD also offers additional considerations that would address less-common themes, which are also more likely to be beyond the scope of the One Watershed, One Plan program. The additional considerations are related to:

- Helping manage expectations when it comes to anticipating positive improvements in water quality.
- Further aligning support from state agency staff.
- Helping planning partnership select and manage consultants.
- Encouraging more public engagement and diverse representation.
- Supporting the transition from planning to implementation.
- Increasing funding and offering additional funding flexibility.

Introduction

Background

At a summit in 2010, members of the Local Government Water Roundtable (which is made up of the Association of Minnesota Counties, Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts, and Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts) recommended a comprehensive, watershed-level method for planning and implementing water restoration and protection activities across the state. These recommendations led to legislation in 2012 authorizing the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) to allow for a new type of plan, called a comprehensive watershed management plan (CWMP), to fulfill planning requirements for multiple local government entities.

The Local Government Water Roundtable made additional recommendations in 2013 for how to implement the 2012 legislation through a One Watershed, One Plan approach. This approach brings together local government units (LGUs), including counties, Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and Watershed Districts (WDs), to plan and implement water management activities on a watershed basis, rather than based on political boundaries.

Additional legislation passed in 2015 established requirements for CWMPs and required BWSR to develop and adopt a plan to support the statewide transition to CWMPs by 2025.

State statute requires comprehensive watershed management plans address:

- Surface water and groundwater quality protection, restoration, and improvement, including prevention of erosion and soil transport into surface water systems.
- Restoration, protection, and preservation of drinking water sources and natural surface water and groundwater storage and retention systems.
- Promotion of groundwater recharge.
- Minimization of public capital expenditures needed to correct flooding and water quality problems.
- Wetland enhancement, restoration, and establishment.
- Identification of priority areas for riparian zone management and buffers.
- Protection and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat and water recreational facilities.

Participation in the One Watershed, One Plan program is voluntary. However, counties, SWCDs, and WDs outside the seven-county Twin Cities Metro Area are required to have a current CWMP to be eligible for BWSR's Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) for water management.

Through the One Watershed, One Plan program, BWSR provides resources, including planning grant funds and staff support, for local planning groups to develop CWMPs. The BWSR Board must approve plans developed through the One Watershed, One Plan program. Board conservationists (BCs) and clean water specialists (CWSs) who work for BWSR attend planning meetings and provide guidance and support to planning partnerships throughout the plan development process. BWSR also provides templates, checklists, and written guidance.

Most planning partnerships use their planning grant funds to hire consultants to coordinate and facilitate meetings, support development of the plan, and provide technical expertise, including data analysis and modeling.

Staff from other state agencies engaged in water management activities, including the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), and sometimes the Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities, also provide support to planning partnerships. State agencies provide data and technical assistance, and state agency staff review draft plans developed through One Watershed, One Plan, providing comments and feedback.

To date, 26 One Watershed, One Plan plans have been approved. There are 61 planning boundaries in BWSR's suggested boundary framework; the goal is statewide coverage by 2025.

As the One Watershed, One Plan program continues to support planning partnerships with developing CWMPs, and as BWSR begins to look forward to supporting plan maintenance over time, BWSR sought an external program evaluation to identify current successes and areas for improvement.

Evaluation questions

Management Analysis and Development (MAD) worked with BWSR staff responsible for programmatic operations of the One Watershed, One Plan program to identify what questions the evaluation should answer.

The questions explored through this evaluation are:

- How well is the One Watershed, One Plan program achieving the vision of the Local Government Water Roundtable recommendations?
- What value do planning participants derive from the One Watershed, One Plan program?
- What are BWSR's contributions to the successes of the One Watershed, One Plan program?
- How can BWSR improve its support for the One Watershed, One Plan program?

Methodology

MAD used several methods to answer the evaluation questions, including a survey, interviews, and focus groups. Between these three methods, MAD received input from over 350 participants. MAD staff aggregated the information provided through all methods and summarized their findings and recommendations.

Survey of planning participants

MAD conducted an online survey of people identified by BWSR staff as LGU or tribal participants in current or previous planning efforts through One Watershed, One Plan. The survey was administered for two weeks in October 2021. An email invitation to participate in the survey was sent to 672 people. Only participants involved in a watershed planning effort that had commenced at least a month before survey administration were included. A total of 261 people responded to the survey, for a response rate of 39 percent. Participants had to

answer at least one non-demographic question to count as a respondent. Detailed analysis of the survey results is provided in Appendix A, and the survey tool used is provided in Appendix B.

Focus groups and interviews

Using contact information provided by BWSR staff, MAD invited people from the groups identified below to express interest in participating in a focus group or interview. In cases where there was more interest in participating than could be accommodated within the scope of the evaluation, MAD first randomly selected from the list of interested people, and then made adjustments to ensure that there was a mix of perspectives and watershed representation within each participant group/category.

Throughout November 2021, MAD conducted 11 focus groups, in which 69 people participated. The focus groups were organized by role or perspective:

- BWSR Board Members
- BWSR Board Conservationists (BCs) and Clean Water Specialists (CWSs)
- State agency staff from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), and staff from the Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities, who have supported local planning efforts
- Local government staff and elected/appointed officials from counties, SWCDs, WDs, and municipal governments
- Non-local government staff who served on Advisory Committees (e.g., lake associations, citizens, nonprofit staff)

Throughout November and December 2021, MAD conducted 38 interviews with:

- Consultants who have worked on One Watershed, One Plan projects
- BWSR leadership and the One Watershed, One Plan program coordinator
- State agency leadership
- SWCD, WD, and county associations' leadership
- Local government staff and elected/appointed officials from counties, SWCDs, WDs, and municipal governments

Detailed analysis of the focus group and interview responses is provided in Appendix C, and the questions used for focus groups and interviews are provided in Appendix D.

Findings

This report uses the term *participants* to encompass all individuals who provided feedback as part of this evaluation through any participation method. The following findings are based on the input from evaluation participants, who are not a representative group of all people who have been involved in One Watershed, One Plan planning efforts.

Approximate values and percentages are included to aid in understanding the prevalence of comments and responses that are grouped together as themes within the findings. The words “a few” represent values from two to four, and “several” refers to values from five to 12.

Throughout the report, select statements from participants that help demonstrate the findings are included in ***bold italics***. The statements reflect the participants’ sentiment and content, but MAD may have edited them for spelling, clarity, and length. These statements represent evaluation participants’ perceptions and experiences.

Achievement of the Roundtable’s vision

Generally, participants have positive perceptions of the One Watershed, One Plan program, and evaluation data indicates that the program is achieving the Local Government Water Roundtable’s vision in the minds of most participants. Although some participants said the planning process was challenging, many indicated that they felt the resulting plan was worth the effort.

We had excellent professional guidance, a plentiful amount of research-based information, and a knowledgeable, articulate group of individuals working together to develop what is, in my opinion, a great plan. It was a privilege to participate.

Over 85 percent of survey respondents with approved plans agreed or strongly agreed that their CWMP provides a clear vision forward for the future of the watershed. When asked what they would change about their plan, 25 percent said they would not change anything.

Planning at a watershed level

Although participants encountered some challenges with approaching planning at a watershed level, they generally appreciate and agree that watershed-level planning is the right thing to do. While representatives from WDs indicated they are used to planning at a watershed level, it was a new approach for others, especially counties. Several comments from interviews and focus groups indicated that participants find value in the watershed-level approach.

It starts this dialogue focused on watersheds and the connectivity of them. You’ve got all these elected and appointed officials at the table representing political boundaries, but they are now discussing things on a watershed basis.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Local Government Water Roundtable’s vision includes all stakeholders in water being part of the planning process, and the majority of participants feel like the right stakeholders were present.

Seventy-eight percent of survey respondents with an approved plan agreed or strongly agreed that all key stakeholders took an active role in developing the plan. There were also over 100 comments in interviews and focus groups about stakeholder involvement, with more than half saying the right stakeholders were present.

However, nearly 20 percent of interview and focus group comments indicated that it depended on the watershed whether the correct parties were at the table.

What I hear often is that there is a lot of variability from one watershed to another. In some areas people are really involved, in others they might be dragging their feet and just trying to guard their own interests.

Where participants felt that some stakeholder involvement was missing, it was generally related to involvement of the public or parties beyond local government. This feedback is explored further below regarding what participants think BWSR could improve about its support and resources.

Maintaining local control

Participants generally feel that they have been able to maintain local control over their plans, which is an important part of the Local Government Water Roundtable's vision.

We've had great experience being able to maintain control. State agency people have been very supportive of what we're doing.

Seventy-eight percent of survey respondents with an approved plan agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to maintain local control over their decisions with the plan. Across over 100 comments from interviews and focus groups regarding the level of local control over plans, about 66 percent said that local governments were able to maintain control.

Like stakeholder involvement, perceptions of local control, while generally positive, did depend on the watershed and the parties involved.

The successful ones are those where state and local folks realize there are different cultures. State folks need to realize they are local plans with local decisions. Local folks need to realize state agencies add value. Successful ones have navigated and realized that.

As discussed further in this report, there is a tension for some participants between developing locally driven plans while including state agency review and requiring BWSR Board approval.

Service sharing and consolidation

One area where watersheds are not quite meeting the vision of the Local Government Water Roundtable is in service sharing or consolidation. Most participants indicated that they were not currently looking to consolidate or share services or had no plans to do so in the future; however, among comments from interviews and focus groups about not having service sharing or consolidation agreements, over 50 percent did indicate that their plans leave room for that potential in the future.

Among 60 comments from interviews and focus groups indicating local governments had service sharing or consolidation agreements, about 50 percent of those were about new service sharing agreements, while slightly less than half were about existing agreements

My shared service of water resources was prior to One Watershed, One Plan. We were already going in that direction, and this just reinforced that.

The most common example of service sharing was hiring education staff and agronomists.

Value for local planning participants

Relationship building

Strengthening or developing relationships among local planning partners is one of the main benefits participants garnered from participating in the One Watershed, One Plan program. Participants noted that the planning effort brought people to the table who may not ordinarily work together, and that they derived value from building new partnerships.

The benefit is, bringing people together, getting exposed to different perspectives, exposed to how peers are doing things in their region. There is a learning advantage there and working with folks who have been doing watershed management, so lots of experience. That's really helpful. It forces you to work outside of your area and is a tremendous learning experience.

Of 183 comments in interviews and focus groups regarding the value participants derived from their plans, nearly 50 comments were in reference to relationships build as part of the planning process. Of those 50 comments, 75 percent referred to new partnerships being developed.

Half of survey respondents rated the relationship among members of their committee or workgroup as excellent, with only four percent rating it unsatisfactory.

We already had a very strong connection among staff in [redacted]. We'd worked together on other planning efforts and regional programs. We had the trust of our policy committee to listen to staff input and trust our direction. We also had a solid working relationship and trust with our BWSR BC and Clean Water Specialist.

When asked what contributed, or could contribute, to more satisfactory relationships, survey respondents said things like:

- Existing or established working relationships among participants
- Trust
- Communication
- Having a shared goal or vision, as well as a shared understanding of the process

- Demonstrated engagement and investment among planning partners

Prioritization

Developing plans that are Prioritized, Targeted, and Measurable (PTM) is an important focus of the One Watershed, One Plan program. Prioritization was most often mentioned by participants as a value of the program, as local planning partners had to work together to develop common priorities, rather than focus on individual interests.

And a real-life example is, there was a project that came up that one elected official thought would be greatest project ever. The group went to drawing board, referenced their plan and said this isn't a priority and we don't want to spend money and held themselves accountable. They had a plan that was prioritized, targeted, with measurable outcomes and dictated where they are going to do these things and without that they wouldn't have the leg to stand on.

Seventy-five percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it is easy to explain the priorities of their plan to stakeholders.

In comments among focus group and interview participants regarding PTM, a majority said the focus on PTM was valuable. Among those who found it valuable, most focused their comments on the value of prioritization.

Usefulness of plans

Overall, participants find their plans useful and say they are driving the actions of their organizations. However, there are also some concerns about plans being too long and hard to understand.

The majority of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their plan:

- Provides a clear vision forward for the future of the watershed (86 percent).
- Is very influential in guiding their organization's action around the plan's priorities (81 percent).
- Has been influential in guiding implementation across partner organizations (71 percent).
- Is clear and easy to use (69 percent).

In comments from focus groups and interviews about the value participants derive from the program, over two-thirds indicated that their plan has influenced LGU actions. These comments attributed the implementation funding available, the relationships developed, and engagement of partners as factors in whether the plan was driving LGU actions.

I think we recognized early on that this is the tool to use to guide our work. So, it's very important that we work hard on it. And at the end of the process, there will be funding available to complete our work.

While 69 percent of survey respondents said their plan is clear and easy to use, 19 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. In the twenty comments from focus groups and interviews about plans' ease of use, about half of those comments said the plan was easy to use, while almost the same number said it was not easy, either because it was too long or too technical. Additional participant feedback about making plans simpler is provided further below.

BWSR's contributions to success of the program

Staff support

Participants generally found BWSR staff support to be helpful and a key resource in their planning efforts, and BWSR staff themselves were the resource most often used by participants during the planning process.

The majority of survey respondents (60 percent) said BWSR staff were very helpful, and 35 percent said they were somewhat helpful. Only two percent of respondents did not find BWSR staff helpful.

Forty-five percent of survey respondents said they very often used support from BWSR staff with the overall planning process, with 41 percent saying they sometimes used staff support. Among survey respondents who used staff support with the overall planning process, 60 percent found that support very helpful, and 34 percent said it was somewhat helpful.

Eighty-five survey respondents answered an open-ended question about any other feedback for BWSR on its support and resources, and 50 percent of those responses were positive opinions, mostly noting positive experiences with BWSR staff.

This planning effort was very complex. BWSR staff were helpful to keep the group on track with resources and advice about the plan requirements.

Over 100 comments in interviews and focus groups about BWSR contributions to the success of the program mentioned BWSR staff as a key resource. BWSR staff contributions were described as "critical" and "the glue" holding things together.

About 30 percent of the 100 comments about BWSR staff lauded BWSR staff's ability to help participants navigate the planning process. Comments said that staff helped planning partners stay on track and moving forward. These comments also included praise for BWSR staff for pushing some topics, offering different insights, and encouraging participants to think through the various angles of their plans.

The resource that I found most helpful was direct support from BWSR staff. Having them present at meetings for questions. We always had someone there who was saying, "Consider this," or "Check out this."

Over 25 percent of the 100 comments about BWSR staff were about the continuous involvement of BWSR staff in the planning process, including gratitude to BWSR staff for being present at every meeting, asking questions during meetings, and getting answers for planning partners in real time.

Again, participant perceptions were dependent somewhat on the watershed and who they worked with. More feedback about how some participants' experiences with BWSR staff were not consistent across different planning efforts is explored further below.

Guidance and resources

Many participants indicated that despite their access to written guidance and planning resources, they mostly relied on BWSR staff—with some participants saying they preferred to call or email their BC or CWS when they had questions, rather than refer to written guidance.

Among interview and focus group comments that were about particular resources, the website and guidebook were the most commonly cited. Other resources cited as valuable were the plan content requirements, frameworks, project snapshots, videos, and templates.

I look at the website more than others, especially now that I'm doing the day-to-day admin for the watershed plan. I go back to that stuff a lot.

Many interviews and focus group discussions included comments about guidance materials being large or difficult to navigate, which is why planning partners mostly relied on BWSR staff. Focus groups with BWSR staff themselves indicate that some staff also find it hard or time consuming to navigate the guidance materials posted on the website.

Other state agencies' contributions

Participants generally found the support from other state agencies to be at least somewhat coordinated and useful, although the feedback was mixed depending on the planning effort and the state agency in question.

Thirty-seven percent of survey respondents said that state agencies were very well coordinated, while the majority (58 percent) said they were somewhat coordinated, when it came to providing guidance or support for the planning process. Only 5 percent said state agencies were not coordinated at all.

Survey respondents who said more about state agency support mainly focused on reports, data, and modeling. Many of these comments were about the helpfulness of MPCA's WRAPS¹ reports. Many comments also referenced the helpfulness of having state agency staff attend planning meetings.

¹ WRAPS reports are one part of MPCA's process for restoring and protecting water quality. Per the MPCA's website (<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/watershed-approach-restoring-and-protecting-water-quality>), "water monitoring is conducted in each watershed every 10 years to show trends in water quality and the impact of any restoration or protection actions," and that together with total maximum daily load reports, "WRAPS reports provide details on water quality issues and identify what needs to be done to clean up streams and lakes that are impaired and protect those that are at risk of becoming impaired."

At nearly every advisory committee meeting, a representative from each of the four agencies was present. Specific state agency content experts attended or provided feedback at key points in the process. Agency staffers provided good "push-back" when warranted, resulting in a stronger, practical plan.

Information from MPCA was rated as the most useful by survey respondents, followed by DNR. In open-ended responses, MPCA was mentioned by the most number of respondents and was perceived positively. MDH and DNR were also mentioned by several respondents, with both perceived positively.

Across comments from interviews and focus groups, there was also generally positive feedback regarding support from other state agencies, with specific positive contributions including technical assistance, data, and modeling.

The least positive feedback about state agencies concerned MDA, with participants indicating that the agency was either not present or did not provide the same level of support as other agencies. It should be noted that the extent to which agencies have the ability to participate may vary depending on staffing and other capacity or resource issues.

Additional input regarding how state agency support and coordination could be improved is described further below.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improving BWSR's support

Staff capacity

Staffing levels

While planning participants said that BWSR staff, particularly BCs and CWSs, were very helpful in the development of their plans, all three of the focus groups with BWSR staff included comments about needing more staff or being spread thin, especially with so many meetings to attend.

Being available and being present comes down to workload management. There are a ton of meetings with these planning efforts. Average 60 meetings for an entire planning effort and that doesn't include emails and phone calls.

As noted above, BWSR staff attendance at planning meetings was mentioned by participants as important and helpful, and local planning participants rely more on BWSR staff than written guidance documents.

Staff development

During focus groups and interviews, a theme emerged regarding the need for more than just technical experts in the plan development and implementation process. Both local planning participants and BWSR staff noted that while many of the people involved in these planning efforts have hard science backgrounds, much of the One

Watershed, One Plan work requires “soft skills,” like managing interpersonal dynamics and walking people through a complex process. This was brought up particularly around implementing plans, as participants may lack the background knowledge or skills to change people’s behaviors.

I think a big gap—not just with One Watershed, One Plan, but across clean water—we are very biased toward the biophysical science. If you do this practice on the ground, what reduction will you get in sediment, pesticides, etc.? ... There is a huge gap when it comes to the social science. How do you talk to farmers about changing their practices? What are the social heuristics that go into decision making? How does innovation spread from one farmer to the next? We don’t use that in training SWCD staff. We don’t have measures about attitudes toward new practice or how to transfer knowledge. There is very little work being done in that area.

Opinions differed among participants regarding whether BWSR staff should develop their own capacity to support change management, build the capacity of local planning participants to do it themselves, or rely on others. These comments included requests directly from BWSR staff for more training.

Clarity and consistency

Clarity

While participants were generally satisfied with the resources and support provided by BWSR, among participants who had suggestions for improvement, a common theme was wanting more clarity.

Twenty-six of 45 comments from interviews and focus groups on what participants wish they had during the planning process were requests for additional clarity from BWSR within the guidance provided, including wanting more clarity across stakeholders of what PTM means.

One of things I love, but also frustrates me, [BWSR is] very broad in things. Guidance could be more clear. And being upfront about what's needed for an amendment. If we say we have a study, being very clear, if that study is going to be sufficient it needs to have x y z data. Some of those clear guidelines would be helpful.

Seven comments indicated that a few planning participants want BWSR’s stance on particular issues clarified, voiced more forcefully, or provided earlier in the process.

BWSR has the oversight of the planning process, but they don't want to be too heavy-handed. So, it's a balance—but sometimes we get the sense that BWSR could be giving direction a little more—and maybe kind of advocating stronger, again, for using the science to drive the process.

Similar and overlapping themes about participants wanting more input from BWSR and other state agency feedback earlier in the process are explored further below.

Consistency across BWSR staff and resources

Another theme for how to improve BWSR support and resources was a desire for consistency in the guidance provided by different BWSR staff members and across what staff say versus what is written down. Twenty-six comments from focus groups and interviews were requests for consistency in both verbal and written guidance from BWSR.

I wish that things were uniform across the board in terms of application process. When we're talking to neighbors, hearing the guidance they were given versus what we got, what we're told verbally versus what is in the RFP. I just wish it was uniform across the board.

While most comments in interviews and focus groups about BWSR's positive contributions centered on BWSR staff, 18 comments included the caveat that some participants' experience varied across BWSR staff members, across different watersheds, and even within the same watershed planning effort with two or more BWSR staff involved.

Consistency for the program itself

Some comments from interviews and focus groups were requests for consistency over time, to see if the program is working. These comments overlapped with concerns about how challenging the transition from planning to implementation has been for some watersheds, concerns about measuring impact, and concerns about the ability to see measurable change within five or ten years.

We need to give time as it goes around, maintaining that consistency while continuing to always improve, help folks to do better or strive better. I think the guidance and the documentation that's out there and the staff support are good... but maintaining consistency and not feeling like we always have to do continuous improvements that people feel like they're trying to keep up with the newest stuff.

Ten comments from interviews and focus groups said that substantial plan revisions in five or ten years will not be needed, either because change takes a long time or because the plans are durable over time, and the majority of survey respondents (79 percent) think their plan will only need minor changes in ten years.

When asked what BWSR could do to support plan revisions, six survey respondents urged BWSR to maintain a consistent path forward. Additional findings related to plan revisions are included further below.

Examples and best practices

Participants clearly appreciate knowing about what other watersheds are doing and some want even more sharing of examples and best practices from completed CWMPs.

Among survey respondents who said they wanted additional or improved guidance from BWSR, about 25 respondents wished that BWSR had told them more about what other watersheds were putting in their plans. Among survey respondents who want continued BWSR support for plan revisions and updates, participants also asked to know what is working in other watersheds.

I remember BWSR staff bringing other experiences from other watersheds they were familiar with learning from other's experiences is often helpful. After more plans are done this could be even more helpful when weighing alternatives.

There were also several comments in interviews and focus groups about wanting additional guidance from BWSR that focused explicitly on wanting examples or options from approved CWMPs. These comments were related to feedback on the plan development process being difficult and taking a long time.

It seems like a lot of the times at the meetings, we come up with goals, measurable outcomes, and quantifiable things. If we had a template of options—and not have to re-create these things. I know they want it to be organic—but if we want to measure groundwater supply, what are the top 5 measures for that? Take good things from the other plans and build on that.

Guidance, expectations, and resources

In addition to more clarity, participants generally requested additional or improved guidance, guidelines, and expectations.

The majority of survey respondents who had feedback on how BWSR can improve their support said additional or improved guidance. Specific things mentioned by these respondents included:

- What the plan should include or look like.
- Which organizational structure to choose for implementation.
- How to select or manage consulting firms.
- State priorities.
- Appropriateness of projects and likelihood of receiving WBIF.
- How to set targets or goals.

Almost 50 comments from interviews and focus groups also said BWSR can provide more or better guidance and support. Several of these comments said planning partners need more guidance and support getting ready for implementation and then starting to implement.

The jump from planning to implementation is huge, and it's bigger than BWSR realizes, or the LGUs can realize. And I think we put a ton of effort into the planning, and I don't think we provide them with enough support to get ready to implement.

Twenty-two comments focused on wanting more or improved guidance on models or technical tools, including comments regarding the following, not all of which are within BWSR's scope:

- Uniformity in modeling tools required.
- Flexibility to use modeling tools other than Prioritize, Target, and Measure Application (PTMApp) or improving PTMApp.²
- Needing ways to monitor surface water.
- Wanting tracking spreadsheets.
- Needing GIS expertise.
- Wanting new or updated geologic atlases.

Review and feedback process

Related to the finding above regarding clarity, some participants said they want clarity from BWSR staff earlier in the process so they can make changes to their plan as it is developed, rather than getting feedback at the end. However, this was not a common theme among most participants.

Seven comments in interviews and focus groups were requests to have BWSR share its opinions on the plan voiced more clearly and spread throughout the plan development. Fewer than ten survey respondents who said they wanted additional or improved guidance from BWSR said they wanted BWSR staff to be clearer earlier in the process about their stance or opinions. These participants generally acknowledged that BWSR wants the plans to be locally developed and that BWSR has said it is difficult to provide feedback on an incomplete plan.

Planning partner readiness

Most participants said their planning partners were at least somewhat ready at the start of the process, but they also provided recommendations for how to increase partner readiness.

Almost half (49 percent) of survey respondents said their local planning partners were very ready at the start of their planning effort and 44 percent said they were somewhat ready. Eight percent said they were not ready.

The majority of survey respondents who had suggestions for what would have helped them be more ready said that increased education and awareness would have helped, indicating that not all planning partners started with the same level of understanding about how the planning process would work, what the final product would look like, and especially how much work would be involved for local staff.

All LGUs did not seem ready for the workload that was required. No additional staff was hired, and the SWCD still had to do their normal workload and throw the One Watershed, One Plan process on top. It was overwhelming.

² While MAD heard from a few participants that they were required to use PTMApp, BWSR does not require the use of PTMApp as part of the One Watershed, One Plan program.

When asked on the survey what advice respondents would give someone considering participating in One Watershed, One Plan, 45 respondents said planning partners need to be adequately prepared before starting. Recommendations for how to prepare included:

- Preparing for the significant amount of time and staff involvement requirement.
- Clearly understanding the plan process and objectives.
- Reviewing example plans and learn from others who have gone through the process.
- Ensuring planning partners have enough or the right technical knowledge.
- Ensuring that planning partners are fully committed to the process.

Areas for improving the program overall

Plan and process complexity

While participants generally find their plans useful and appreciate One Watershed, One Plan, many reflected on the plan development process as being difficult and complex. Also discussed above, references to the overall planning process being complex overlap with some participants feeling like their resulting plans are complex, too long, and suited only for technical audiences. Several participants feel the process and plan would be simpler if it was either more locally driven or focused on a smaller number of priorities.

It's complex. All of this is very complex to begin with. I only have three full-time staff and four seasonal. I've had to go to four meetings a month for six months. I have days and half days of work I have to make up for that I'm not getting reimbursed for.

Forty comments from interviews and focus groups regarding how BWSR can improve its support or resources were about making the planning process easier, simpler, or less burdensome to LGUs. The planning process was described as complex and requiring a significant amount of staff time. This was especially true for staff from counties that cover multiple watersheds.

Some survey respondents also talked about the planning process being hard. These comments included references to the process taking too much time (or more time than participants expected), having too many meetings, or the process being hard to understand and explain. Many of these comments noted that BWSR staff were appreciated for helping participants through the complex process or referenced how much participants relied on BWSR staff because of the complexity.

This planning effort was very complex. BWSR staff were helpful to keep the group on track with resources and advice about the plan requirements.

As discussed previously, survey respondents' advice to others embarking on One Watershed, One Plan efforts included making sure planning partners were prepared for the amount of work involved.

Public participation

Fifty comments from interviews and focus groups regarding stakeholder presence noted parties were missing from the process. Of those comments, about 65 percent talked about specific parties that were missing from the process. Those missing parties mentioned included tribal nations, farmers, younger people, community members, representatives from drinking water or groundwater concerns, local public health, and municipalities.

In response to the question of how BWSR can improve its support or resources, there were 16 comments in interviews and focus groups about wanting help making sure the right people are “at the table” for local planning efforts, including members of the public. This was not a common theme among survey respondents, with fewer than five respondents wishing BWSR had provided help getting more public involvement.

Other

Equity and inclusion

Although issues of equity and inclusion were not mentioned across the majority of comments from participants in focus groups and interviews, it is important to note that a few comments about equity and inclusion did come out of conversations about improving the One Watershed, One Plan program.

I didn't feel welcome despite the work I did. It's hard for BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and people of color] communities to be involved, there is some amount of gatekeeping. I wonder if there is something in the process that needs to be built in.

Fifteen comments from interviews and focus groups regarding participants who were missing from the process explicitly talked about focusing on equity and including more diversity in the perspectives and backgrounds of people involved, beyond government representatives. Five of these comments directly addressed the fact that there were not many, if any, people of color or American Indians involved, with a few noting that they did not see tribal government involvement in watersheds that cover tribal nations.

Climate change

There were 12 comments from interviews and focus groups that mentioned climate change in response to how BWSR can improve its support and resources. These comments mostly focused on the need for watershed management plans to focus on addressing climate change, and several recommended that plans should be required to include efforts to mitigate the impact of climate change, rather than have it as an optional component.

Areas for improving support from other state agencies

As discussed above, participants generally found support from other state agencies to be helpful. However, 11 survey respondents said they wanted more or better coordination between state agencies, and between BWSR and other state agencies. Similarly, nine comments from interviews and focus groups reflected a need for state agency staff to be more coordinated in their approach, a few particularly about disputes over using BWSR's

PTMApp versus MPCA's Hydrological Simulation Program FORTRAN with Scenario Application Manager (HSPF-SAM) for modeling.

Consultant involvement in plan development

Perceptions of consultants

Although participants were not asked directly about consultants, feedback provided through this evaluation resulted in some findings regarding consultant involvement in One Watershed, One Plan planning efforts.

When asked what advice they would give to someone who is considering participating in One Watershed, One Plan, 11 survey respondents had advice about consultants, but that advice was mixed. Some advice was to work closely with the consultant, while another respondent recommended being prepared to push back against consultant advice and timeline, if needed. One respondent recommended not hiring a consultant, while four respondents advised taking the time to find a consulting firm that is the right fit.

Select a quality, well known consultant that has written many plans for other planning areas because they likely have experienced enough BWSR guidance over many different BWSR Board Conservationist staff areas to get a real feel for what BWSR is actually looking for in an acceptable plan.

Thirteen comments across interviews and focus groups expressed concern about the amount of funding going to consultants, uncertainty of the value received in return for the investment, and concern about consultants putting activities into watershed plans that will require additional contracts with that consulting firm to carry out. Five comments across interviews and focus groups expressed concerns that consultants do not know the local context, do not have required expertise, or are simply “copying and pasting” content into plans from one watershed to another. Some of these comments overlapped with concerns about the amount of money spent on consulting services.

Selection and management

There were a few comments in interviews and focus groups regarding the challenges with LGUs developing an RFP for consulting services before more is known about how many stakeholders will be involved or how the planning process will work.

There is also inconsistency in some consulting firms billing hourly versus others billing by deliverable. On the survey, a respondent recommended to others to choose billing by deliverable, so that the consultant could not add meetings and thus charge more. At the same time, one consultant said in an interview that charging by deliverable resulted in losing money, because the scope of work ended up being much bigger than expected.

Funding issues

Although there were findings from this evaluation related to funding, it should be noted that WBIF and other funds that planning partnerships may use for implementing projects in their CWMPs is beyond the scope of the

One Watershed, One Plan program. Also, WBIF is not the only funding source available to support implementation.

Importance of funding for plan implementation

The availability of planning grant funding, and the availability of noncompetitive Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) once a plan is finished, is an important factor driving participation in the One Watershed, One Plan program.

When asked on the survey what advice respondents would give someone else regarding One Watershed, One Plan, 20 respondents simply encouraged participation, with almost half of those comments referencing the funding available.

The One Watershed, One Plan process is well-worth the effort. The watershed-based, non-competitive funding has been extremely important for getting projects completed.

Several comments in focus groups and interviews about BWSR's contributions to the success of the program were expressions of gratitude for the funding provided for planning and implementation. The funding availability was referenced by participants as an important point of leverage to get LGUs to the table.

Funding concerns

Participants expressed concerns about funding, in terms of both wanting more funding, especially for implementation, but also concerns about whether funding will remain available, how LGUs will pay for projects in their plans that are not fully funded by WBIF, and whether funding will be provided to support plan revision processes.

Among comments from interviews and focus groups about funding, 26 called for additional funding. Concerns included whether, as more plans are developed and more watersheds move into implementation, more funding will be authorized—or whether more watersheds will just be splitting the same pot. A few comments about the need for additional funding said that LGUs cannot accomplish the activities in their plans with the current level of WBIF.

If they can convince the legislature to fund the program in a ramped-up fashion like they continue to tell us, I question [whether BWSR can do that]. [Legislators] have deferred maintenance or projects because they don't want to raise taxes. As more of these plans are approved and, theoretically, more money available to get the work, is the legislature going to follow through?

Along with feedback that the planning process is time consuming, some comments from interviews and focus groups concerned the ability of local staff, especially in counties with multiple plans, to keep up with all of the implementation and revision work without additional capacity.

Conflict between funding requirements and prioritization

As mentioned previously, some participants named a tension between having a prioritized, streamlined plan while also being comprehensive. Participants' feelings about the complexity of the process and the plan itself overlapped with comments about the tension between developing a local plan with a limited number of priorities, while also being comprehensive, and while under the impression that anything that LGUs would want to fund in the future should be included.

I would argue a significant reduction in the plan's scope is needed, with much greater focus and prioritization. But to achieve that would require underlying changes to state policy. Currently, a project must be in the plan to be eligible for state grant funds.

Moreover, BWSR asks that this plan is for all priorities, not just those that will use state grant funds. These policies drive the plan to include everything possible ('kitchen sink' plans) for which we have no reasonable expectation of enough funding. The result is a massive plan with everyone's priorities, instead of just the highest mutual priorities.

Instead, it would be preferable to take a harder line toward including only mutual priorities and recognize that this mostly is a plan for how to use WBIF. An end goal would be a plan that is smaller, has reasonable 10-year accomplishments, and is easier to articulate to stakeholders.

Implementation funding flexibility

Twenty-two comments from interviews and focus groups requested flexibility for the use of WBIF, especially for monitoring. A few survey respondents also wanted flexibility for implementation funding, specifically for modeling. As these activities are part of CWMPs, participants worry about their ability to fund them without using WBIF. At least one comment referenced inequity across different areas of the state in terms of funding or capacity for monitoring.

BWSR doesn't fund monitoring work...If BWSR could allow funding for basic research and funding for areas that don't have a lot of funding that would be good.

Approaching plan revisions

Expectations for revisions needed

Survey respondents were asked how much revision they expected their plans would need after ten years, and the majority (79 percent) think they will only need minor revisions to keep their plan relevant and useful.

Fewer survey respondents (21 percent) said they think they will need to rewrite their plan after ten years. Many of these respondents indicated that they think substantial revisions will be needed in the future because a lot can change in ten years.

A few comments from interviews and focus groups related to this issue questioned whether revisions will be necessary at five or ten years or indicated the level of revision needed may depend on the landscape where projects are taking place.

Requested BWSR support for revision process

Generally, participants want assistance from BWSR to keep their plans relevant and useful. There were over 100 comments in interviews and focus groups about guidance and expectations that planning partners need for revisions, and 82 respondents answered a question of how BWSR can help keep plans relevant and useful, the majority of whom requested some type of assistance from BWSR.

Types of assistance that are desired when it comes to revisions include:

- Clear guidance and expectations before embarking on the revision process.
- Continued support from BWSR staff.
- Help with data, tools, and modeling.
- Sharing of best practices from other watersheds.
- Help evaluating impact and holding planning partners accountable.

Generally, participants want to know well ahead of time if there are policies or expectations from BWSR regarding plan revisions.

What is the five-year review was going to look like? Questions like—will there be public input again? Public meetings? Do we re-write the whole plan or parts of it? Is it a separate document?

Participants are also concerned about the amount of work and staff capacity that will be required for plan revisions, and there is a question of whether BWSR will be providing similar funding, resources, and support for revisions as for the initial plan development.

I think all these local organizations have staff capacity issues. It's hard to be thinking long term about what they need to get ready for the update.

There are some concerns among counties who are involved in multiple CWMPs that are in different stages. This was described by one participant as a “planning churn,” with concern that overlapping plan development, implementation, and revision calendars resulting in some LGU staff with limited capacity constantly involved in some level of One Watershed, One Plan planning.

Recommendations

Based on the most common themes from the evaluation findings, MAD offers the following recommendations for ways that BWSR could improve the One Watershed, One Plan program.

MAD attempted to indicate below if improvements requested by evaluation participants are already available, or if BWSR is currently working on something related to a suggestion for improvement. MAD may recommend development of a strategy, document, policy, or guidance that already exists, in which case, BWSR may consider how to increase people's awareness and effective use of them.

Build capacity of BWSR staff

Hire additional staff

Based on participant input, BWSR BCs, CWSs, and other staff are clearly the most important resources that BWSR provides to local planning partners. They are generally perceived as helpful, and participants rely more on staff than on written guidance.

It is important to participants that staff attend meetings and that they are available for quick answers. However, BWSR staff are currently stretched thin. Just as some planning partners find the process to be time consuming, with many meetings to attend, BWSR staff feel this way, too. With limited capacity, staff may not have the time necessary to provide the support that each watershed needs, and with the general stress of the pandemic, social unrest, and international crises, it can be hard for overworked staff to show up as their best selves for planning partners.

BWSR staff may also need additional capacity to effectively support new planning efforts while providing help to areas with existing plans. As noted below, participants want more help with implementation, and BWSR staff also acknowledged the need to support planning partnerships who have moved into implementing their plans.

Establish consistency across BWSR staff and guidance

Some participants noted that they received conflicting responses, advice, or guidance from different BWSR staff members or from BWSR staff versus written guidance. While each watershed and planning partnership will have different needs, planning partners should expect similar guidance or advice regardless of who they talk to or what written documents they use. BWSR staff could generate an internal FAQ document that provides standardized answers to common questions.

Provide additional professional development

Both planning participants and BWSR staff noted that most people at the planning table, including BWSR staff, are technical science experts. There is a need for knowledge and skills in change management, because this new way of planning is a change for some participants, and also because success of implementation hinges on changing people's behavior. Professional development should be provided to support BWSR staff with coming to the planning table with both technical expertise and also skills in moving a change process forward and dealing with the conflict that is bound to arise when trying something new.

Another way to support the development of staff and establish more consistency is to continue providing peer-driven, job-embedded professional development, such as a Community of Practice or Peer/Professional Learning

Community. It would be ideal for a high-performing BWSR staff member to be elevated to a role of peer coaching to lead such a Community of Practice and could also support development of BWSR staff outside of administrative performance management practices.

BWSR could also ask planning partners to evaluate the support from BWSR staff during and following the planning process. This feedback should go to the program coordinator, who can aggregate the information and ensure none of the information could be used to identify the responders, before it is shared back with BWSR staff in a safe and constructive way. Such feedback could be used to identify both areas for improvement and areas where successful BWSR staff can pass on their best practices to colleagues.

Before establishing new professional development opportunities or expectations, current staff capacity and workload must be considered. Lack of time to engage in professional development would be another sign that more staff are needed.

Help decrease the burden on planning partners

Support and encourage pre-planning preparation

Participants who had existing, trusting relationships with other planning partners had better experiences. Especially for watersheds where planning partners do not have existing or trusting working relationships, efforts should be made to strengthen those relationships before the planning efforts start in earnest. There is written guidance for how to start the planning process and get ready, but people may need more direct “hand-holding” to really be prepared. It is MAD’s understanding that in 2016 and 2017, BWSR had a program to help get partnerships ready for planning, but that partners pushed back, saying they wanted to get right into the plan development without that pre-work. However, based on the evaluation findings, BWSR should consider refreshing and reinvigorating that program, or at least encourage new partnerships to include such group development activities in the scope of work for a consulting firm.

Survey respondents offered many good suggestions for anyone considering participating in the One Watershed, One Plan program, and much of that advice was about getting participants prepared, with an emphasis on ensuring planning partners understand how much effort and time will be required, and why their engagement is essential. This advice should be passed on to new planning partners when—or before—they apply for planning grant funding, including adding it to the written guidance about getting ready. Sharing this input may also help make the case for why pre-planning relationship development is essential for success.

For example, to increase readiness and success, survey respondents recommended ensuring:

- That all planning partners have shared education and awareness of how the planning process will work, what the final product will look like, and how much staff capacity is needed.
- There is a shared commitment and engagement level among planning partners, demonstrated through things like showing up to meetings and allocating enough staff time to support the effort.
- There is a shared common goal among planning partners, and everyone is “on the same page.”
- There is good communication among planning partners, which increases trust.

Additional advice for how planning partners themselves can help make the plan development process successful are included in Appendix A: Survey results.

Offer a menu of best practices or options from existing plans

Without changing the process or plan requirements, one way to make plan development easier would be to explicitly offer best practices from existing plans as examples or options to new planning participants, especially when it comes to goal setting and measurement. This practice seems to be happening informally, as BWSR staff or consultants share what they know and have learned from previous planning efforts when working with new watersheds, but it could be consistently applied in future planning efforts with a “best practice menu” for new planning groups, so that they do not feel like they are starting from scratch. As long as local planning partners are still in charge of decision-making and can choose not to use the offered examples, it should not interfere with local control.

Ensure planning partners and consultants understand what is truly necessary and how to simplify plans

Many participants believe that, while helpful to technical staff, their CWMPs are generally too long and difficult to read, with references to four-hundred-page documents. This is despite the fact that content required by BWSR is limited to what is statutorily required and described in the Plan Content Requirements guidance. Based on BWSR’s review of completed CWMPs, planning partnerships may be structuring their plans or including more content than required in ways that make such plans long and difficult to read.

BWSR should ensure that planning partners, and especially the consulting firms who support plan development and often write content for the plans, understand what is truly necessary to include in the submitted plan, versus what may be helpful supporting documentation for LGUs to use during implementation. BWSR could use the previous recommendation, offering a menu of best practices, as an opportunity to help future planning partnerships learn how to simplify their plans.

Reconcile comprehensiveness with prioritization

Participants identified a tension between being asked for comprehensive plans that include projects for which they need WBIF, as well as other projects that may require other funding sources, while also narrowing down their plans to a limited set of priorities. However, participants also understand that their plans should be considered living documents that they are expected to review and revise in the future.

There may be an opportunity for BWSR to reconcile the desire for comprehensiveness with the emphasis on prioritization. As living documents, it may be possible for initial plans to focus on a smaller number of priorities, thus limiting the complexity and length of plans. Planning partners also need clarity on the amendment and revision process. If amendments or revisions are opportunities to change priorities or shift to new projects that need funding in the future, there may be less pressure on planning partners to develop such complex, lengthy initial plans.

Support successful plan maintenance

BWSR intends for CWMPs to be a tool for adaptive management, which should be periodically revisited and maintained. Plans must contain a commitment to tracking and evaluating implementation, and in October 2021 BWSR released guidance on how to conduct locally driven plan assessments.³

BWSR conducts plan implementation assessments through the Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP)⁴ every ten years and will base its assessments of CWMPs on the October 2021 guidance.

Approved plans can be amended at any time through a structured amendment process.

Ensure clear communication and understanding of expectations

BWSR should ensure that the October 2021 assessment guidance is clearly communicated and understood by planning partners. BWSR may need to work with planning partners to develop additional guidance or resources needed for planning partnerships to successfully assess CWMP implementation.

At the mid-point of plan implementation, around five years after plan approval, BWSR encourages⁵ planning partnerships to conduct an evaluation and determine if any amendments are needed. BWSR should ensure that expectations for the evaluation process are communicated in advance. Requirements for BWSR-led (via PRAP) plan assessments should also be developed and communicated far in advance of when planning partners would need to begin.

Acknowledge or address the capacity needs

There are also concerns that local planning partners will not have the staff capacity to engage in an assessment or evaluation process without additional funding, if it requires the same amount of effort as developing the plan.

Expectations for how long the evaluation and potential amendment process take or what level of effort is needed should be tempered if funding is not provided as it was for initial plan development.

Additional considerations

In addition to the recommendations above, MAD offers the following considerations as additional actions that would address less-common themes from the evaluation findings. MAD acknowledges that some of these additional actions are within the scope of BWSR's current authority and responsibility for the program, while

³ "Guidance for Assessment the Implementation of Comprehensive Watershed Management Plans" (https://bwsr.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/2021-11/Guidance_for_Assessing_Implementation_of_CWMPs.pdf).

⁴ For more information on the PRAP, please refer to the program's website: <http://bwsr.state.mn.us/prap>.

⁵ While the mid-point evaluation is not required, BWSR believes that completing a mid-point evaluation will help position planning partnerships to move through the PRAP process more easily.

others may be outside the scope of the One Watershed, One Plan program or further outside of BWSR's influence.

Remain committed over time.

Many participants hoped BWSR will keep in mind that watershed planning is a marathon, not a sprint. Several participants speculated there will not be much, if any, measurable change in resource conditions by the time ten-year plan updates occur. State leaders and policy makers should keep that slow, incremental change in mind when assessing the effectiveness of the One Watershed, One Plan program.

Improve alignment of support for planning partners.

While participants found state agency support to be helpful and at least somewhat coordinated, there were also a few participants who felt like state agency staff were not always on the same page. There are written expectations for the roles and responsibilities of BWSR and other state agency staff who support planning partnerships, but this input from evaluation participants may indicate that more is needed to ensure that support is aligned. Although other state agency staff work is beyond BWSR's control, it could be helpful to share the findings from this evaluation with other state agency leadership and consider discussing how to improve the coordination of support.

Some participants also indicated that they wanted more clarity on how state agency programs related to water quality intersect with one another and with the development of CWMPs. BWSR and state agencies currently provide this information to planning partnerships, so it may be helpful to gather more input from planning partners before considering how this communication could be improved.

Help planning partnerships select and manage consultants.

In addition to BWSR staff, consultants are a key support for planning partners. Some evaluation participants had mixed reviews of the support they received from consultants. This may be a result of the way that planning partnerships currently approach selection and management of consultants. Future planning partnerships may benefit from BWSR sharing key learnings and best practices from previous planning efforts to support successful engagement of consultants.

Encourage more public engagement and diverse representation.

While participants generally feel that the right stakeholders have been involved in CWMP development, there are some who felt as though governmental interests were overly represented, while diverse public input was lacking. Success stories from watersheds that have been able to engage more diverse public participants should be shared as best practices.

Support the transition from planning to implementation.

Participants described a difficult transition from planning to implementation. Planning partners may need support with taking their plan and using it to create annual work plans, or help developing systems for monitoring implementation progress. BWSR could help ensure that local planning participants go through the planning process with an eye on implementation and encourage local officials to set reasonable expectations for what they will need for funding and staffing their implementation efforts.

Increase funding and flexibility.

Many participants would like more funding for implementing the projects in their plans. There are also concerns, noted above, about not having the funding or staff capacity needed for plan evaluation processes in the future. Many participants said they need additional funding for monitoring, which is a necessary component of the implementation process, and many expressed frustrations regarding limitations of using WBIF for monitoring. While BWSR may not be able to provide additional funding or change funding rules for WBIF, it could possibly act as an advocate on the behalf of watershed partnerships, where possible, to assist them in addressing these issues.

Conclusion

Generally, the One Watershed, One Plan program is achieving the original goals of the Local Government Water Roundtable. Participants overall value and understand the importance of planning at a watershed level, and a common benefit of the program noted by local government staff and officials was the development or strengthening of relationships at the local level. Participants whose plans are at the implementation stage generally agree that their plan is influential in guiding the actions of their organizations.

The support and resources provided by BWSR staff is the most helpful contribution from BWSR to the success of local planning efforts, but steps could be taken to increase the consistency and coordination of that support to make it even better. BWSR may also be able to improve the One Watershed, One Plan program through programmatic or policy actions, and should continue to serve as an advocate for giving local governments the time and resources they need to implement and monitor their plans to achieve lasting change in water management practices.

Appendix A: Survey results

Methodology

Management Analysis and Development (MAD) conducted an online survey of people identified by Board of Water and Soil Conservation (BWSR) staff as participants in current or previous local planning efforts through the One Watershed, One Plan program. The survey was administered for two weeks in October 2021. An email invitation to participate in the survey was sent to 672 people.

Only participants involved in a watershed planning effort that had commenced at least a month before survey administration were included. A total of 261 people responded to the survey, for a response rate of 39 percent. Participants had to answer at least one non-demographic question to count as a respondent.

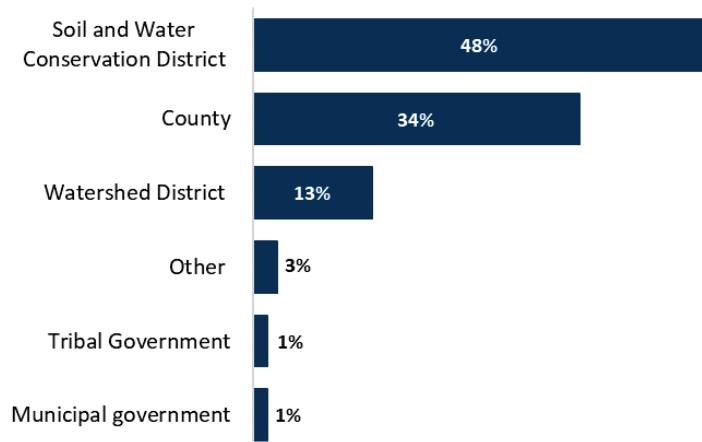
It should be noted that the survey respondents are not a representative sample of all planning partners who have been involved in the One Watershed, One Plan program. The analysis here represents the perspectives of only those planning participants who took the survey.

Throughout this summary analysis, quotes from open-ended responses are included as bulleted lists and *emphasized in italics*. These statements reflect the participants' sentiment and content, but MAD may have edited them for spelling, clarity, and length. These statements represent evaluation participants' perceptions and experiences.

Respondents

The majority of respondents (48 percent) identified themselves as representing a Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD).

Figure 1. Which of the following best describes the organization you represent?



Fifty-five percent of respondents identified themselves as staff, while 44 percent identified themselves as an elected or appointed official.

There was at least one respondent from every watershed included in the survey administration.

Respondents were asked to answer the questions about planning based on the watershed they had worked on most recently. The watersheds with the most representation among survey respondents included:

1. North Fork Crow River (part of the pilot of One Watershed, One Plan)
2. Rum River
3. Pomme de Terre River
4. Lower Minnesota River West
5. Mustinka/Bois de Sioux

Respondents who had worked on a plan that has been approved by BWSR were asked additional survey questions about implementation and were asked to answer those questions based on the watershed they had worked on most recently that had an approved plan.

Table 1 below summarizes:

- the number of survey respondents who participated in each of the included watershed planning efforts,
- the number of respondents who were thinking about each watershed when answering questions about planning and BWSR support, and
- the number of respondents who were thinking about each watershed when answering questions about implementing a BWSR-approved plan.

Table 1. Number of participants by watershed

Watershed	Participated in*	Answered planning-related questions about	Answered implementation-related questions about
Buffalo—Red River	8	1	3
Cannon River	11	6	10
Cedar—Wapsipinicon River	7	4	5
Clearwater River	12	11	2
Des Moines River	8	6	N/A
Greater Zumbro River	11	6	N/A
Hawk Creek MM	10	6	N/A
Lac qui Parle - Yellow Bank	5	5	1
Lake of the Woods	4	3	3
Lake Superior North	2	2	2
Le Sueur River	9	7	N/A
Leech Lake River	10	3	7
Long Prairie River	8	6	N/A
Lower Minnesota River West	17	14	N/A
Lower St. Croix River	14	10	12
Middle-Snake-Tamarac Rivers	7	7	1

Watershed	Participated in*	Answered planning-related questions about	implementation-related questions about	Answered
Mississippi River Headwaters	7	6		2
Missouri River Basin	13	9		10
Mustinka/Bois de Sioux	15	11		10
Nemadji	5	1		4
North Fork Crow River	23	18		18
Otter Tail	13	11		N/A
Pine River	6	3		3
Pomme de Terre River	20	9		5
Red Lake River	12	2		2
Redeye River	11	3		6
Root River	10	5		8
Rum River	21	15		N/A
Sauk River	13	7		7
Shell Rock River/Winnebago	5	4		N/A
Snake River	8	4		N/A
St. Louis River	8	7		N/A
Thief River	9	4		7
Two Rivers Plus	7	5		4
Watowan River	10	8		8
Wild Rice-Marsh River	11	7		9
Winona La Crescent	12	9		N/A
Yellow Medicine River	8	2		4
Other	6	12		N/A
Total	396	259		153

* Respondents could select more than one watershed when asked which they had participated in

Respondents who selected “Other” in response to the question of which planning effort(s) they’ve participated in were asked to name the “other” watersheds not listed. Responses were:

- A 2021 planning effort
- Big Sandy Lake Watershed
- Chippewa River Watershed
- High Island and Buffalo Creek
- Lower Minnesota East
- Middle Minnesota – Rush River/High Island

Sixty-five percent of respondents identified themselves as having served on an Advisory Committee (which includes members of a Steering Team or Planning Work Group) as part of the most recent watershed planning effort they selected, while 43 percent identified themselves as having served on a Policy Committee.

Feedback on BWSR support for planning efforts

Respondents were asked questions about the support BWSR provided for their planning efforts. Again, they were asked to think about the watershed they had worked on most recently when answering these questions.

The majority of respondents (60 percent) said BWSR staff were very helpful.

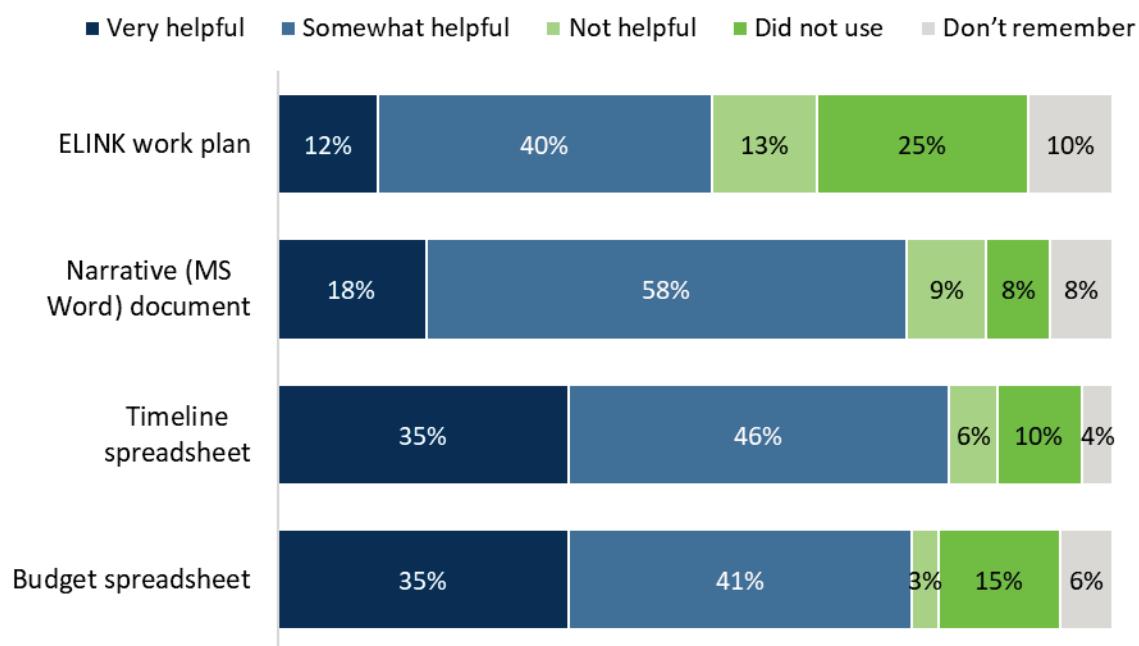
Figure 2. Overall, how helpful are/were BWSR staff to your local planning effort under the One Watershed, One Plan program?



Respondents who identified themselves as having served on an Advisory Committee for their most recent planning effort were asked additional questions about specific items, resources, and support provided by BWSR.

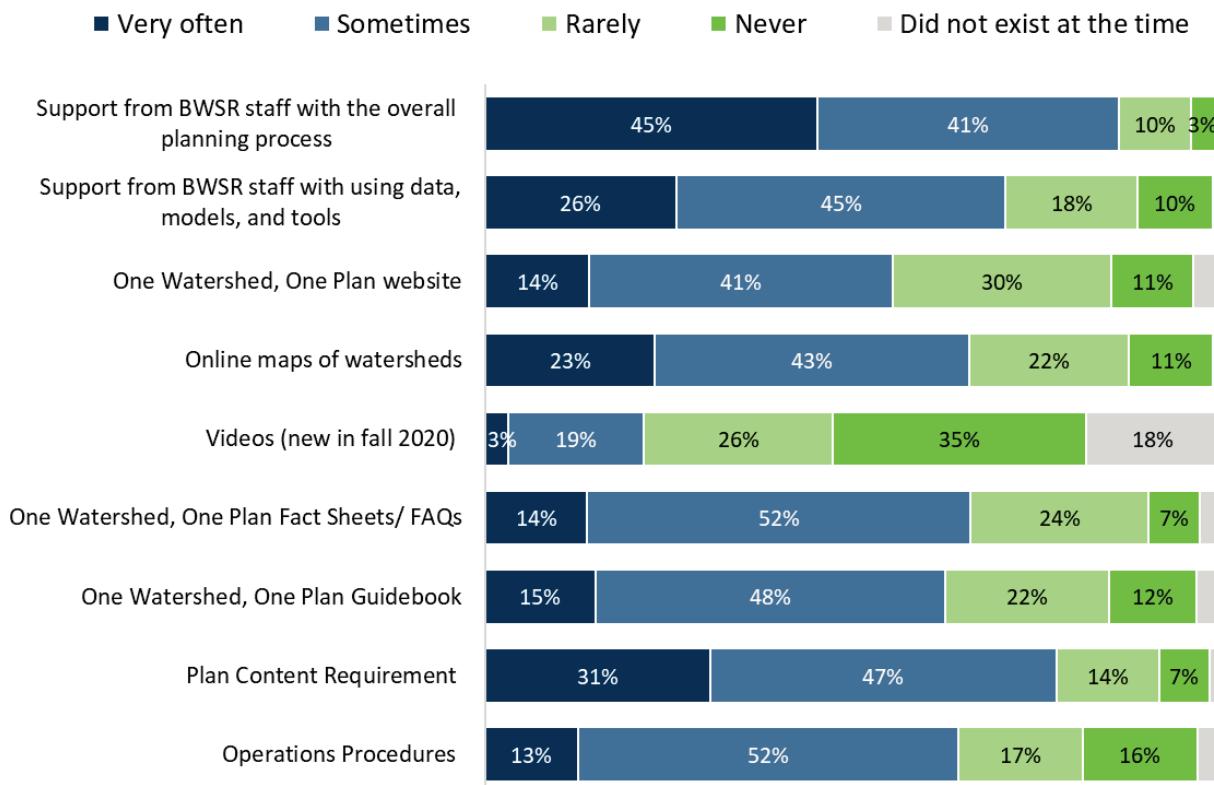
Among Advisory Committee members, respondents indicated that they found the timeline spreadsheet the most helpful item in the work plan for keeping their planning effort on track, followed by the narrative document and the budget spreadsheet. The eLINK work plan was identified as the least helpful work plan item for keeping their planning efforts on track.

Figure 3. How helpful are/were the following work plan items to keeping your local planning efforts on track?



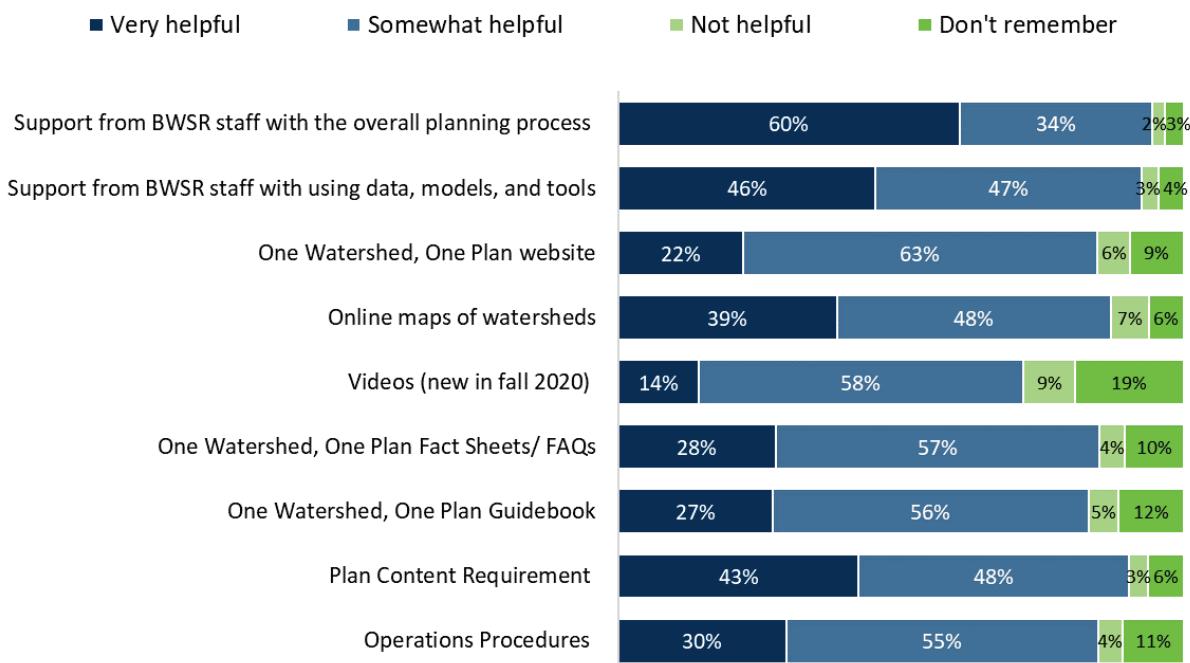
Among Advisory Committee members, respondents most often used support from BWSR staff with the overall planning process, followed by the plan content requirements.

Figure 4. How often did you/do you use or refer to the following resources provided by BWSR to guide and support your planning effort?



Among Advisory Committee members, respondents found support from BWSR staff with the overall planning process, and support from BWSR staff with using data, models, and tools the most helpful. All of the support and resources were identified by most respondents as at least somewhat helpful, if not very helpful. This question was not asked of respondents who said they never used the resource, or it was not available to them.

Figure 5. Of the resources used, how helpful did/do you find each of the following resources provided by BWSR to guide and support your local planning effort?



Additional support needed

Respondents were asked what other resources or support they wish BWSR would have provided. One hundred three respondents provided an answer to this question. However, 26 said they did not require any additional resources or support, with most of them indicating that this was because the BWSR support and resources provided were adequate. Several responses indicated a positive opinion of the support and resources BWSR provided.

- *Overall, the assistance provided by BWSR staff was extremely helpful in the overall planning process. Their depth of knowledge was invaluable.*

A few respondents indicated that they did not use or were not aware of the BWSR support, and several others did not have suggestions because they had not been involved enough in the process.

Additional guidance, guidelines, and expectations

About 25 percent of respondents who answered this question indicated that they wanted additional or improved guidance from BWSR. Nine wished BWSR had provided more guidance on what other watersheds were putting in their plans, while another nine wanted BWSR staff to be clearer earlier on in the process about their stance or opinions.

- *If BWSR wants to have a deep-rooted stance within the content of the plan it would be nice to have this done while the plan is early in the development process or have said content provided up front to the consultant prior to planning. It seems to be a trend when speaking with others who have completed plans that necessary information is required to be incorporated late in the process when it could have been incorporated up front and expedited the planning process.*
- *To speak up more often when it looks like we might be overlooking something. It's a really difficult process and since BWSR staff are sitting on the outside looking in it should be easier to see where mistakes or regretful decisions are being made.*

A few other respondents wished BWSR had provided additional or improved guidance on what the plan should include or look like; which organizational structure to choose for implementation; how to select or manage consulting firms; and information on state priorities and goals from other agencies.

Nine respondents wished that BWSR had provided additional guidelines or expectations, including on what projects are appropriate to include in their plan; what can be funded or included in the budget⁶; and how to set targets or goals.

- *Better guidelines on appropriate projects that fit within the Clean Water guidelines. This would allow us to quickly assess if a concern/project is appropriate without staff spending too much time on it.*

Other support needed

Each of the following needs were mentioned by five or fewer respondents:

- Technical support for things like modeling, data, or implementation planning.
- Templates and examples.
- Training for planning partners, especially on understanding the planning process.
- A more streamlined or easier process.
- More equitable funding or funding flexibility.
- More consistency in responses or support from BWSR staff.
- Better coordination, including between state agencies.
- Flexibility with who participates.
- Help getting more public involvement.
- More local control over the process.

⁶ For planning, BWSR encourages planning partnerships to think about what the natural resource needs are, not what is eligible for funding. There are guidelines available for what can be funded via the Clean Water fund.

Other feedback regarding BWSR support and resources

Respondents were asked to provide any other feedback regarding the support and resources provided by BWSR for the One Watershed, One Plan program. Eighty-five respondents answered this question. Of them, over 50 percent expressed a positive opinion of the support and resources provided by BWSR, with most noting positive experiences with BWSR staff.

- *This planning effort was very complex. BWSR staff were helpful to keep the group on track with resources and advice about the plan requirements.*
- *The staff has been patient and did not offend board members, which helped move process along when a member would try to block or slow down the effort.*

Fourteen respondents who answered this question talked about the planning process being difficult. Most of these comments included references to the process taking too much time, or more time than participants expected, having too many meetings, or the process being hard to understand and explain.

- *During our planning process, we really struggled to create a plan that prioritizes our local watershed goals and needs within the framework developed by BWSR. What initially seemed like it could be a simple process of summarizing existing resources, conducting a gaps analysis, and then prioritizing how to use future funding, instead became an arduous, drawn-out, and bureaucratic slog. Because some of the entities were adopting the plan as their county water plan and other local partners would continue to seek grant funding, we were encouraged to put EVERYTHING into the plan. However, doing so ran counter to the goal of prioritizing a few tangible efforts that we could work on as a group.*

Nine respondents talked about the tension between the expectation that the plan is developed locally, while still needing state approval of the plan. A few of these respondents indicated that they did not feel like they had control over the plan or process. A few respondents also said they wanted more or better communication from BWSR. These comments echoed responses to the previous question regarding some participants' desire for earlier, clearer communication from BWSR.

- *Again, better up-front prior communication should be provided. It seemed like BWSR was steering the planning effort, and very heavy participation from state agencies made this process not feel at all like a local plan but made it feel like a forced, top-down plan. One example is that BWSR stated if we go with our traditional planning process they would not fund any of it, however if we decided to do a 1W1P they would fund all of the costs. Why?*

Feedback on other parts of the planning process

Readiness

Almost half (49 percent) of respondents said their local planning partners were very ready at the start of their planning effort. Eight percent of respondents said that their local planning partners were not ready.

Table 2. How would you rate the readiness of your local planning partners at the start of the One Watershed, One Plan effort?

Readiness level	Number	Percent
Very ready	109	49%
Somewhat ready	98	44%
Not ready	17	8%

Respondents were asked what would have helped them be more ready at the start of the One Watershed, One Plan effort.

Seventy-three respondents answered this question, with over 30 percent noting that more education and awareness would have helped increase readiness of planning partners. These respondents wished there had been more shared education and awareness among planning partners of how the planning process would work, what the final product would look like, and how much work would be involved for local staff.

- *The major players were very ready (the SWCDs with the most land area). The Counties were much harder to get ready. SWCDs have more at stake AND have been talking about 1W1P for a long time, I'm not sure if Counties have been. So, more trainings and information to them would be helpful.*
- *Better communication from BWSR with the Boards and Staff of each entity on the "how, what, when, & why" of the process.*
- *All LGUs did not seem ready for the workload that was required. No additional staff was hired and the SWCD still had to do their normal workload and throw the 1W1P process on top of it was overwhelming.*

Ten respondents said they needed more investment and buy-in from planning partners, demonstrated through things like a shared commitment, showing up to meetings, and allocating enough staff time to support the effort. A few of these respondents indicated that there was at least one planning partner who actively attempted to sabotage the process.

- *Direct conversations about the importance of the plan, and the goals of the planning process. There has been a consistent message of SWCD staff being "too busy" to engage in the process and attend meetings regularly. This plan should be dictating the work we will all be doing for water quality for the next 10 years, and with that in mind, I have struggled to understand how partners could afford to be too busy determine which work they should actually be spending time on.*
- *Not including the WD, who was a major player in deciding what was in the plan and then didn't adopt the plan after BWSR approved the final version. The WD didn't really want to participate in the first place.*

Each of the following factors that could have improved partner readiness were mentioned by five or fewer respondents:

- Better relationships among planning partners.
- Simplifying the process.
- Additional staff support or resources.
- Examples of other plans.
- More or better data or modeling prior to starting.

Twelve respondents indicated that they did not know what would have increased readiness or that for work of this kind participants cannot be expected to ever be fully ready, especially for pilot participants.

- *I don't think anyone is ever really ready to start. It's something we need to do and figure out, we better just get it over with!*

Planning partner relationships

Half of respondents (50 percent) rated the relationship among members of their committee or workgroup as excellent. Four percent of respondents said the relationship was unsatisfactory.

Table 3. Which of the following best characterizes the relationships among members of the committee or workgroup you are working on or have worked on?

Relationship characterization	Number	Percent
Excellent: We have strong trust, we are productive, and we're all working toward the same goals.	112	50%
Satisfactory: There is some trust, we are generally productive, and the majority are working toward the same goal.	104	46%
Unsatisfactory: There is a lack of trust, and we are not productive and mostly aren't working toward the same goal.	8	4%

Respondents were asked what led to the relationships among committee or workgroup members being more or less satisfactory. One hundred twenty-eight respondents answered this question, with the majority identifying positive factors that led to higher relationship satisfaction.

Among those who answered this question, 44 respondents said that having existing or established working relationships, through One Watershed, One Plan or other efforts, led to higher relationship satisfaction.

- *Most members have been involved in previous 1W1P groups so are familiar with the process and what needs to be done to accomplish to our goals.*
- *We already had a very strong connection among staff in [redacted]. We'd worked together on other planning efforts and regional programs. We had the trust of our policy committee to listen to staff input and trust our direction. We also had a solid working relationship and trust with our BWSR BC and Clean Water Specialist.*

Twenty-four respondents indicated that trust was an important factor in relationship satisfaction, whether it was established trust leading to satisfaction or mistrust leading to relationships being unsatisfying. Some of these comments referenced having or needing good communication to build trust, and communication was separately mentioned by some respondents as a factor related to relationship satisfaction.

- *We speak honestly and openly with each other, which is the only way to foster trust and productivity. We don't have hidden agendas. We speak *to* each other, not *about* each other.*
- *Policy Committee has stated they do not trust the LGUs working on the process, contractors working on the plan and just think that there is too much government involvement in everything, even items besides 1W1P.*

- *We have an implementation committee that is meeting monthly. We discuss the grant work plan and overall goals. I think this open communication will help us maintain trust... I've noticed that partner staff that are not participating in these implementation committee meetings have a different perspective on how the money is being spent, and who is putting in the request. Their lack of knowledge has created skepticism and lack of trust. Communication on a regular basis is going to be key to maintaining trust.*

Twenty-one respondents said having a shared common goal, or “being on the same page,” was an important factor for relationship satisfaction. Six of these respondents indicated that perceived selfishness of planning partners led to less satisfaction.

- *Common interest in conservation and water quality and the process and efficiency in accomplishing defined goals.*
- *They are there because they want to participate and be a part of the solution to the water issues.*
- *Everyone wanted the money for themselves and their county being selfish.*

As with readiness, 18 respondents mentioned partner investment as a factor in relationship satisfaction.

Seventeen respondents also mentioned a shared understanding of the process and goals, or a lack thereof, as a factor in relationship satisfaction.

- *Differing opinions on how to interpret Prioritized/Targeted/Measurable (PTM), and differing opinions on what is a "good" project and what it means to spend public dollars effectively.*
- *Lack of understanding of purpose of plan versus a grant/workplan. Lack of understanding of what prioritized, targeted, and measurable means in a watershed planning context.*

Among respondents who had less relationship satisfaction, 12 referenced planning partners who were perceived to be problematic or not participatory within the process.

- *One partner organization did not participate in the planning process; but instead issued complaints without solutions at the 11th hour. All other partners worked well to identify issues, explore solutions and move the plan forward.*

Each of the following factors related to relationship satisfaction were mentioned by fewer than ten respondents:

- Having enough staff, the right staff, or staff turnover.
- Respect for one another as agencies and individuals.
- Perceptions of funding inequity across different types of organizations.
- Having consultants who are unfamiliar with the area they are working with.

Support from other state agencies

Respondents who identified themselves as having served on an Advisory Committee for their most recent planning effort were asked additional questions about support from state agencies.

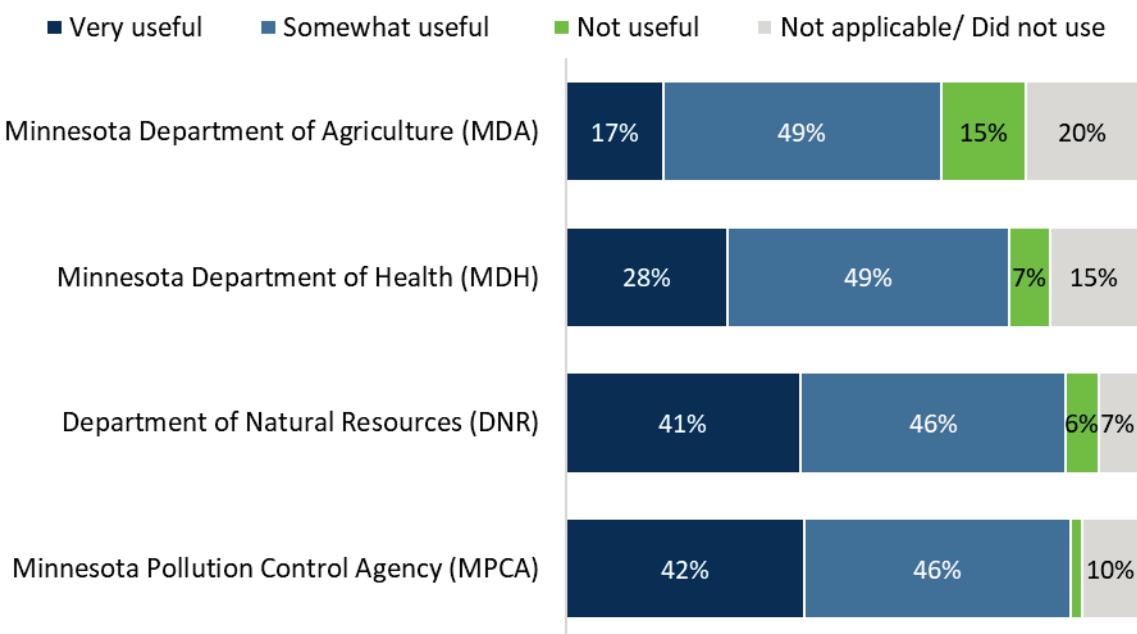
Among Advisory Committee members, the majority of respondents (58 percent) said state agencies were somewhat coordinated when it came to providing guidance or support for the planning process.

Table 4. Rate how well coordinate state agencies were when it came to providing guidance or support for the planning process

Coordination rating	Number	Percent
Very well coordinated	51	37%
Somewhat coordinated	81	58%
Not coordinated at all	7	5%

The majority of Advisory Committee member respondents rated the technical information provided by the four state agencies as at least somewhat useful. The information from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) was rated the most useful, followed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Figure 6. Rate how useful the technical information provided by each state agency was throughout the planning process



Respondents were asked what feedback was most useful from the above state agencies, and what about state agencies' feedback could be improved. Seventy respondents answered this question, with most expressing mixed perceptions of state agency helpfulness.

Among specific agencies, MPCA was mentioned by the most respondents (22) and was perceived positively, especially regarding Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS) reports.

- *MPCA had the most useful feedback. MPCA did a great job of covering most landscapes in the watershed and what pollution issues/protections they felt are valuable.*
- *MPCA staff spent a lot of time ensuring the WRAPS technical information was incorporated and addressed in our Plan, they also were well engaged and informed throughout the process and gave very thorough review to plan content and spatial priorities.*

MDH was mentioned by 12 respondents, and DNR was mentioned by ten respondents, each almost exclusively perceived positively. Turnover in MDH staff was mentioned as an issue by a few respondents, who felt that a particular MDH staff person was helpful but then left their position and was not replaced.

MDA was mentioned by ten respondents, with all comments having negative perceptions of the support, or lack of support, provided by the agency. Comments specifically about MDA generally either said the agency was absent or provided generic feedback on plans.

Respondents to this question mainly focused on reports, data, and modeling provided by other state agencies, with twenty such comments. Most of the comments were about the helpfulness of MPCA's WRAPS reports. Two respondents mentioned the helpfulness of MDH's Groundwater Restoration and Protection Strategies (GRAPS) reports.

Thirteen comments also referenced the helpfulness of having state agency staff attend planning meetings.

- *At nearly every advisory committee meeting, a representative from each of the four agencies was present. Specific state agency content experts attended or provided feedback at key points in the process. Agency staffers provided good "push-back" when warranted, resulting in a stronger, practical plan.*

In terms of improving support from state agencies, 11 respondents said they wanted more or better coordination between state agencies, and between BWSR and other state agencies. One respondent talked about perceiving tension between MPCA and BWSR staff.

Several respondents said they wanted more involvement from state agencies, including more information about state priorities to align with their plans, or more specific comments on their plans. At the same time, another five respondents expressed discontent at the level of state agency involvement already and want more local control.

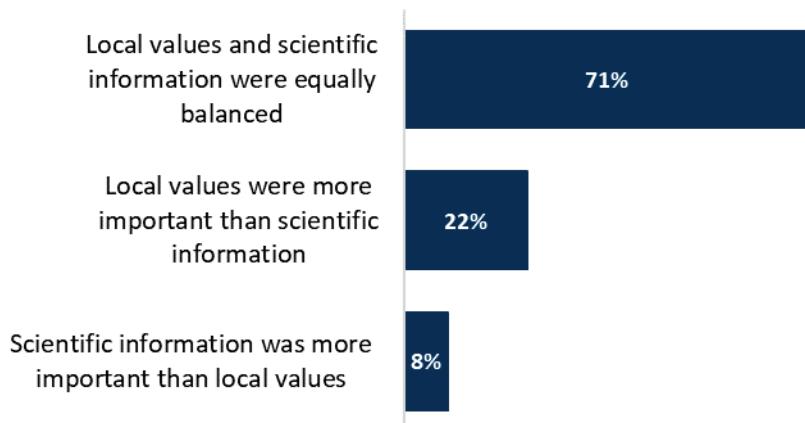
Six respondents specifically appreciated information from MDH about groundwater. One respondent wished there had been more specific information provided about groundwater.

Balance of local values and scientific information

Respondents who identified themselves as having served on a Policy Committee for their most recent planning effort were asked a question about the balance between local values and scientific information when it came to setting priorities, actions, and goals in their plan.

The majority of Policy Committee members who responded (71 percent) said local values and scientific information were equally balanced.

Figure 7. How would you characterize the balance between local values and scientific information when it came to setting priorities, actions, and goals in the comprehensive plan?



Feedback on the implementation process

Only respondents who indicated that they had worked on a plan that had been approved by BWSR were asked questions about the implementation process, which included 153 respondents. These respondents were asked to think about the planning effort with a BWSR-approved plan they worked on most recently when answering these questions.

Implementation structure

The majority of respondents with an approved plan (57 percent) said they have a Joint Powers Collaboration or Memorandum of Agreement for their plan's implementation organizational structure. Twenty percent said they were unsure or did not know what organizational structure was in place for their plan.

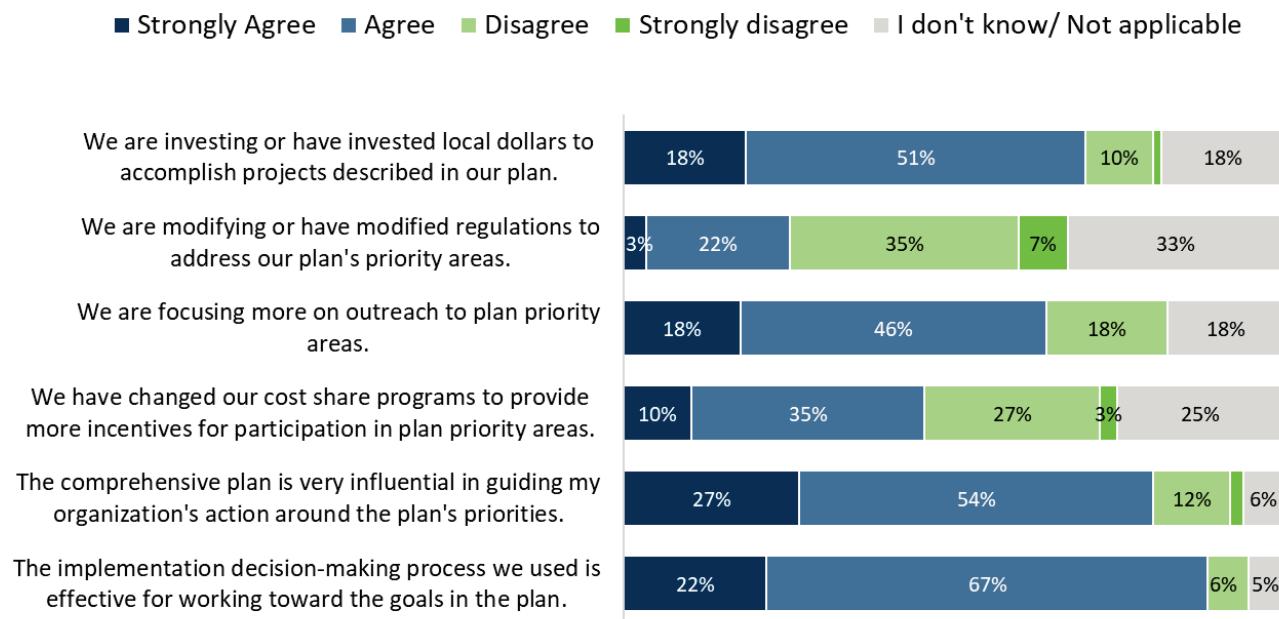
Table 5. What type of implementation organizational structure did your watershed choose?

Organizational structure	Number	Percent
Joint Powers Collaboration (may also be called a Memorandum of Agreement)	87	57%
Unsure/Don't know	31	20%
New Joint Powers Entity	18	12%
Existing Joint Powers Entity	11	7%
Other	5	3%

When asked about what has happened or resulted now that the plan is approved and being implemented, respondents were most likely to agree that the decision-making process they have used is effective for working toward the goals in the plan, followed by agreeing that the plan is very influential in guiding their organizations'

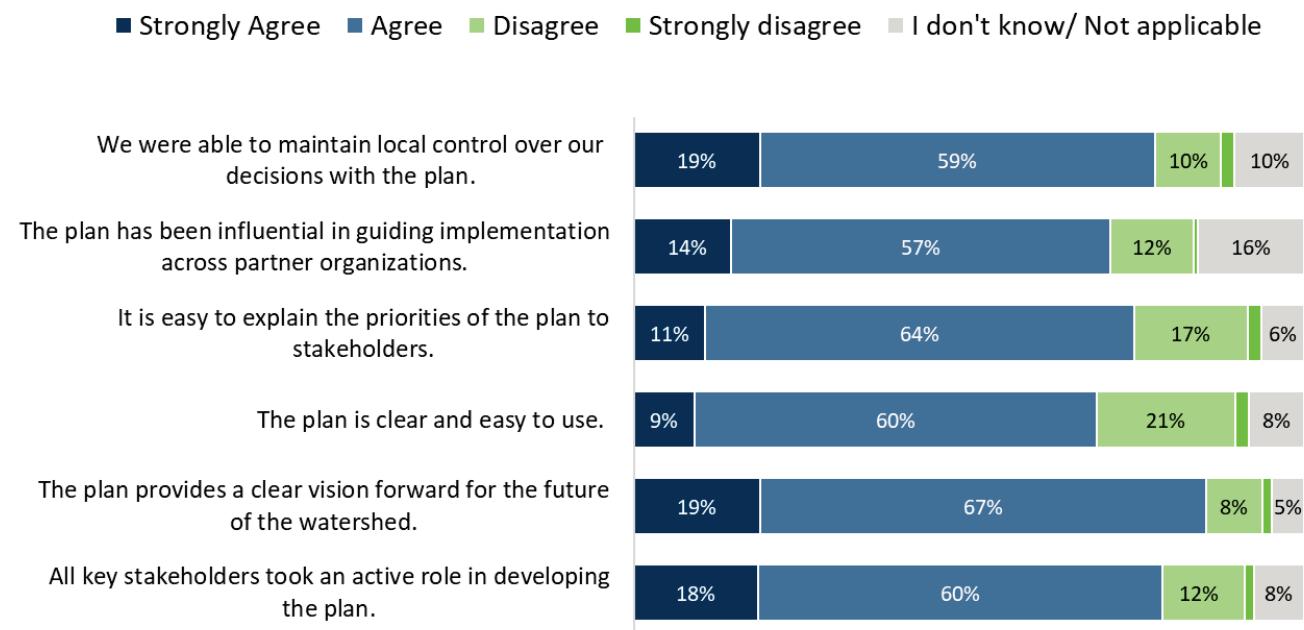
actions around the plan priorities. Respondents were most likely to disagree or not know if they are modifying or have modified regulations to address the plan priorities, or have changed cost sharing programs to provide more incentives for participation in plan priorities.

Figure 8. Indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements regarding the implementation process and what is happening now that the plan is complete



When asked questions about their plan, the majority of respondents agreed with each statement. They were most likely to agree that the plan provides a clear vision forward for the future of the watershed, and most likely to disagree that their plan is clear and easy to use.

Figure 9. Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the comprehensive watershed management plan you've helped develop through One Watershed, One Plan



Changes participants wish they could go back and make

Respondents were asked what, if anything, they wish they could go back and change about their plan. Eighty respondents answered this question, with about 25 percent saying they did not want to change anything about their plan.

- *I think the plan gave us an excellent framework to move forward.*
- *I'm really happy with this plan. It's still early in implementation, but I wouldn't change anything yet.*

Fourteen respondents indicated that they wish the plan was shorter or easier to understand, including focusing on fewer priorities, or requiring less staff time to implement. Ten respondents also wished they had fewer priorities in their plans or wish they could go back and change the priorities.

- *I would argue a significant reduction in the plan's scope is needed, with much greater focus and prioritization. But to achieve that would require underlying changes to state policy. Currently, a project must be in the plan to be eligible for state grant funds. Moreover, BWSR asks that this plan is for all priorities, not just those that will use state grant funds. These policies drive the plan to include everything possible ('kitchen sink' plans) for which we have no reasonable expectation of enough funding. The result*

is a massive plan with everyone's priorities instead of just the highest mutual priorities. Instead, it would be preferable to take a harder line toward including only mutual priorities and recognize that this mostly is a plan for how to use WBIF. An end goal would be a plan that is smaller, has reasonable 10-year accomplishments, and is easier to articulate to stakeholders.

Nine respondents wish they had established a better shared understanding of the purpose of the plan, the vision, or goals.

Seven respondents wish they had different or better data or modeling, or modeling that covered more of the watershed, at the time of writing the plan. A few of these respondents expressed concern about being able to measure progress toward their goals.

Each of the following issues were mentioned by six or fewer respondents:

- Having different or more partners at the table during the plan development.
- Streamlining the process or making it easier, including limiting the number of plans any one county is involved in.
- Issues about amount or flexibility of funding.
- Selecting an implementation organizational structure.
- Working with consultants.
- Preparing ahead of time for implementation.
- Maintaining local control.

Keeping the plan relevant and useful

When asked what approach or approaches they think their planning group should take to keep their plan relevant and useful, respondents were about equally as likely to say they think their group should review the plan every five years and amend it as needed; review the plan and fine-tune it annually or bi-annually; and amend the plan when new data becomes available that changes the priorities. Only 6 percent said they think their group should amend the plan whenever new data becomes available. Respondents were asked to select all responses that applied.

Table 6. What approach or approaches do you think your planning group should take to keep the plan useful and relevant?

Approach	Number	Percent
Amend the plan whenever new data becomes available.	12	6%
Amend the plan when new data becomes available that changes our priorities.	74	35%
Review the plan and fine-tune it annually or bi-annually.	58	27%
Review the plan every five years and amend it as needed.	69	32%

The majority of respondents (79 percent) think that in ten years their comprehensive plan will need minor changes to keep it relevant and useful, while 21 percent said they think in ten years their plan will need to be rewritten.

Feedback on revising and updating plans

Respondents who said they think in ten years their comprehensive plan would need to be rewritten were then asked why they thought so. Twenty-six respondents answered this question, most of whom indicated that a lot can change in ten years, so they anticipate needing to revise their plans based on that alone.

- *Planning ten years out is not much more than guessing and hoping. It is good to set a long-term goal and to have vision, but it takes a lot of effort and tweaking to get there. We may look back in ten years and be amused by what we thought we knew, while at the same time being very appreciative of the foresight and effort that went into the plan.*

Each of the following other reasons for believing they will need to rewrite their plans in ten years were mentioned by three or fewer respondents:

- Anticipate having a better understanding in ten years.
- Want to get more participation in the process.
- The plan is seen as inadequate, or no impact is expected.
- Anticipate being successful within ten years and having new priorities to address.

BWSR support for plan maintenance

Respondents were asked what BWSR could do to help keep their comprehensive plan relevant and useful. Eighty-two respondents answered this question, with the majority requesting some type of assistance from BWSR to keep their plans relevant and useful. Types of assistance requested from these respondents included continued BWSR staff support, help with data and modeling, sharing of best practices from other watersheds, and other technical assistance.

- *Be prepared to answer questions that may come up from board members. BWSR being in attendance has been great.*
- *Provide on-going feedback on how other 1W1P efforts are going, the good and the not-so-good activities/results. Provide continued feedback on the direction we are going with our efforts. Showcase our successful efforts to other 1W1P operations. Guide us on how to align our project funding requests to obtain appropriate funds to be successful with our projects. Provide us insight into projects being considered by nearby 1W1P operations where we may be able to piggy-back one of our projects onto to enable us to jointly leverage resources.*

Seventeen respondents directly asked for continued communication and feedback from BWSR.

Fifteen respondents requested support with funding, whether it was continued, additional, or more flexible funding, including WBIF, to help keep their plan relevant and useful.

Fifteen respondents referred to wanting or needing BWSR to provide accountability and evaluation of the effectiveness of the plans, both holding planning partners accountable and keeping them on track, and also looking at overall impact of the program.

- *I think BWSR can help by continuing to pull in county and city partners because this is their plan also. If there are things that should be done at the county or city level, BWSR (not SWCDs) should be the ones to push that issue.*
- *Help hold the partners accountable to the plan. Help diagnosis where plan content could be revised to improve implementation.*

Each of the following issues were mentioned by fewer than ten respondents as ways BWSR can help keep plans relevant and useful:

- Provide specific guidance on the amendment process before it starts.
- Maintain a consistent path going forward; do not make changes mid-stream.
- Allow local governments to move forward without interference.
- Act as an advocate for the program and local planning partners.
- Make the process simpler or easier.

Advice for others

Respondents were asked what advice they would give someone who is considering participating in the One Watershed, One Plan program. One hundred thirty-one respondents answered this question.

Twenty respondents answered this question by simply encouraging participation or saying, “do it,” while six respondents recommended not participating. Three of the respondents who discouraged participation said the process was too time consuming.

Forty-five respondents advised that planning partners need to be adequately prepared before starting. These respondents recommended that potential participants do the following before embarking on the planning process:

- Prepare for the significant amount of time and staff involvement required.
- Clearly understand the plan process and objectives.
- Review examples of One Watershed, One Plan and learn from watersheds who have gone through the process.
- Ensure that planning partners have enough/the right technical knowledge.
- Ensure that planning partners are fully committed to the process.

Along with encouraging potential participants to ensure planning partners are fully committed, 22 respondents also encouraged potential participants to be closely engaged in the process themselves.

- *Read, listen, stay informed and don't be afraid of the process.*
- *Be supportive of its goals, even if a proposed project is not your priority.*
- *Attend the meetings to stay engaged.*

Eleven respondents advised that potential participants spend time selecting the right participants for committees, staffing the committees appropriately, coordinating across committees, and/or engaging as a participant of a committee.

Eleven respondents had advice about consultants, but the advice was mixed. Some advice was to work closely with the consultant, while another respondent recommended being prepared to push back against consultant advice and timeline, if needed. One respondent recommended not hiring a consultant, while four respondents advised taking the time to find a consulting firm that is the right fit.

Ten respondents had advice about staffing, including ensuring the right staff are involved and being prepared for the amount of staff time required for both planning and implementation. Two respondents recommended having legal staff involved in the process.

Ten respondents advised potential participants to approach the process with an open mind, focusing on the larger picture of watershed management and protection, rather than individual planning partner priorities or funding needs.

Each of the following pieces of advice were mentioned by fewer than ten respondents:

- Communicate effectively within and beyond planning partners.
- Ask a lot of questions.
- Work hard to engage public participants.
- Start preparing for implementation before you finish the planning process.
- Simplify the process.
- Meet in person, if you can.
- Build relationships with partners.

Other comments

Finally, respondents were asked at the end of the survey if there was anything else about the One Watershed, One Plan program that wasn't captured elsewhere in the survey.

Seventy-six respondents answered this question, but 29 of them said there was nothing else they wanted to share.

Of the less than 50 respondents who provided additional comments, most were feedback for BWSR that was captured elsewhere in the survey, including recommendations to make the planning process simpler, easier, or less time consuming for local planning staff.

Thirteen respondents took the opportunity to say they had a positive experience with the planning process.

- *We were able to partner with local entities and complete a very large project addressing tremendous erosion. Without the plan and the collaboration with the local groups it would have gotten worse and worse. The One Watershed, One Plan seems to be able to fill a void for projects of a size that were problematic in the past.*
- *I believe in the program. More now than ever, water resource professionals have to come together to collaborate in order to continue to restore and protect our States' most valued natural resource. The successes have proven that not only in data, but in relationships that people, together, can make a change.*

- *The One Watershed, One Plan Program is a fantastic means to break down political boundaries to enable our constituents to be better serviced.*
- *We had excellent professional guidance, a plentiful amount of research-based information, and a knowledgeable, articulate group of individuals working together to develop what is, in my opinion, a great plan. It was a privilege to participate.*

Each of the following themes were mentioned by six or fewer respondents:

- Funding issues, including needing more funding to implement and wanting flexibility for implementation funding, specifically for monitoring.
- Not having enough local control and BWSR or state agencies being too involved.
- Issues or recommendations on consultants, including references to needing quality consulting firms who know local issues, and the expense involved.
- Issue with unnecessary duplication between WRAPS and One Watershed, One Plan plans.

Appendix B: Survey tool

Survey introduction page

What is this survey?

As a participant in local planning efforts to develop a comprehensive watershed management plan through the One Watershed, One Plan program, you are invited to take this survey to share your perspective and help inform future improvements.

The survey should take about 15 – 20 minutes to complete.

If you can't complete the survey at one time, you can select "Save" at the bottom of any page and return to the survey later using the link in your email invitation.

Who can see my answers?

The Board of Water and Soil resources (BWSR) has hired Management Analysis and Development (MAD) to conduct an evaluation of the One Watershed, One Plan program. MAD provides consulting services for state agencies. MAD is administering this survey and will analyze the results. Information that could reasonably be used to identify an individual from their response is considered private data under the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (Minnesota Statutes §13.64). MAD will not share it with others except as provided by law.

Only MAD, and not BWSR, will know whether you took the survey and how you responded. MAD will remove identifying information from the survey responses. Only summary results and non-identifying open-ended responses will be shared back with BWSR. Results may be summarized according to watershed planning boundaries. When summarizing quantitative results for survey respondents, MAD will use proportions to describe how many respondents answered a question in a certain way (100%, 33%, 0%, etc.). When summarizing written comments, MAD will use qualitative descriptions such as saying that "all" respondents mentioned a topic (or "many," "a few," "none," etc.), but MAD will not connect your comments with your name or any other unique information about you.

How will my answers be used?

This survey will help us gather feedback that will be used in a larger evaluation of the One Watershed, One Plan program. Your input is essential to help us understand how the One Watershed, One Plan program has impacted local planning participants and will inform BWSR's future decisions about potential improvements to the One Watershed, One Plan program.

This survey is completely optional. There is no penalty if you decide not to participate; however, if you do not participate, we will not benefit from your perspective.

Do you need accommodations to participate?

If you would prefer a text-based version of the survey, select the “Text Only” link on the top of the screen.

If you need other accommodations in order to complete the survey, please contact Lizzie McNamara at Lizzie.McNamara@state.mn.us or 651-600-1484.

Questions?

If you have questions about this survey, please contact Lizzie McNamara at Lizzie.McNamara@state.mn.us.

If you have any questions for BWSR, please reach out to Julie Westerlund at Julie.Westerlund@state.mn.us.

Thank you for your time!

Survey questions

1. Which of the following best describes the organization you represent?
 - County
 - Municipal government
 - Soil and Water Conservation District
 - Tribal government
 - Watershed District
 - Other

2. Which of the following best describes your role within your organization?
 - Elected or appointed official
 - Staff
 - Other

3. Which One Watershed, One Plan planning efforts have you participated in?
(select all boundary names that apply; boundaries within plans that started in 2021 are not included)
 - Buffalo—Red River
 - Cannon River
 - Cedar—Wapsipinicon River
 - Clearwater River
 - Des Moines River
 - Greater Zumbro River
 - Hawk Creek MM
 - Lac qui Parle—Yellow Bank
 - Lake of the Woods
 - Lake Superior North
 - La Sueur River
 - Leech Lake River

- Long Praire River
- Lower Minnesota River West
- Lower St. Croix River
- Middle-Snake-Tamarac Rivers
- Mississippi River Headwaters
- Missouri River Basin
- Mustinka/Bois de Sioux
- Namadji
- North Fork Crow River
- Otter Tail
- Pine River
- Pomme de Terre River
- Red Lake River
- Redeye River
- Root River
- Rum River
- Sauk River
- Shell Rock River/Winnebago Watershed
- Snake River
- St. Louis River
- Theif River
- Two Rivers Plus
- Watonwan River
- Wild Rice-Marsh River
- Winona La Crescent
- Yellow Medicine River
- Other

You'll answer the following questions based on the MOST RECENT planning effort you've been involved in.

4. Which planning effort did you work on most recently?
[list populated from answer(s) to question 3]

You'll think about ONLY the one you selected above when answering the following questions.

5. Which committee or workgroup do you serve on, or have you served on with the {Q4} plan? (select all that apply)
- Policy Committee
 - Advisory Committee (includes members of the Steering Teams/Planning Work groups)

6. Overall, how helpful are/were BWSR staff to your local planning effort under the One Watershed, One Plan program?
 - Very helpful
 - Somewhat helpful
 - Not helpful
 - I don't remember or was unaware of BWSR staff support
7. How helpful are/were the following work plan items to keeping your planning effort on-track?
 - Budget spreadsheet
 - Timeline spreadsheet
 - Narrative (MS Word) document
 - eLINK work plan
8. Please rate how often you use(d) or refer(red) to the following resources provided by BWSR to guide and support your planning effort:
 - Operations Procedures
 - Plan Content Requirements
 - One Watershed, One Plan guidebook
 - One Watershed, One Plan Fact Sheets/FAQs
 - Videos (new in fall 2020)
 - Online map of watersheds
 - One Watershed, One Plan website
 - Support from BWSR staff with using data, models, and tools
 - Support from BWSR staff with the overall planning process
9. Please rate how helpful you find/found each of the following resources provided by BWSR to guide and support your local planning effort:
 - Operations Procedures
 - Plan Content Requirements
 - One Watershed, One Plan guidebook
 - One Watershed, One Plan Fact Sheets/FAQs
 - Videos (new in fall 2020)
 - Online map of watersheds
 - One Watershed, One Plan website
 - Support from BWSR staff with using data, models, and tools
 - Support from BWSR staff with the overall planning process
10. What other resources or support do you wish BWSR would have provided to support your local planning effort(s)?
11. Please provide any other feedback regarding the support and resources provided by BWSR for the One Watershed, One Plan program.

12. How would you rate the readiness of your local planning partners at the start of the One Watershed, One Plan effort?

- Very ready
- Somewhat ready
- Not ready

13. What would have helped you be more ready?

14. Which of the following best characterizes the relationships among members of the committee or workgroup you are working on or have worked on?

- Excellent: We have strong trust, we are productive, and we're all working towards the same goal.
- Satisfactory: There is some trust, we are generally productive, and the majority are working toward the same goal.
- Unsatisfactory: There is lack of trust, and we are not productive and mostly aren't working toward the same goal.

15. What do you think led to the relationships among members being more or less satisfactory?

16. Please rate how well coordinated state agencies were when it came to providing guidance or support for the planning process:

- Very well coordinated
- Somewhat coordinated
- Not coordinated at all

17. Please rate how useful the technical information provided by each state agency was throughout the planning process:

- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)
- Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)
- Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA)

18. What feedback was most useful from the above state agencies? What about state agencies' feedback could be improved?

19. How would you characterize the balance between local values and scientific information when it came to setting priorities, actions, and goals in the comprehensive plan?

- Local values were more important than scientific information
- Local values and scientific information were equally balanced
- Scientific information was more important than local values

You'll answer the following questions based on the most recent planning effort you've been involved in that has a BWSR-APPROVED PLAN.

20. Which planning effort that has a BWSR-approved plan did you work on most recently?
[list populated from answer(s) to question 3]

You'll think about ONLY the one you selected above when answering the following questions.

21. What type of implementation organizational structure did your watershed choose?
- Joint Powers Collaboration (may also be called a Memorandum of Agreement)
 - New Joint Powers Entity
 - Existing Joint Powers Entity
 - Unsure/Don't know
 - Other
22. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements regarding the implementation process and what is happening now that the plan is complete:
- The implementation decision-making process we used is effective for working toward the goals in the plan.
 - The comprehensive plan is very influential in guiding my organization's action around the plan's priorities.
 - We have changed our cost share programs to provide more incentives for participation in plan priority areas.
 - We are focusing more on outreach to plan priority areas.
 - We are modifying or have modified regulations to address our plans' priority areas.
 - We are investing in or have invested local dollars to accomplish projects described in our plan.
23. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the comprehensive watershed management plan you've helped develop through One Watershed, One Plan:
- All key stakeholders took an active role in developing the plan.
 - The plan provides a clear vision forward for the future of the watershed.
 - The plan is clear and easy to use.
 - The plan has been influential in guiding implementation across partner organizations.
 - We were able to maintain local control over our decisions with the plan.
24. What, if anything, do you wish you could go back and change about the plan?
25. What approach do you think your planning group should take to keep the plan relevant and useful?
(select all that apply)
- Amend the plan whenever new data becomes available.
 - Amend the plan when new data becomes available that changes our priorities.
 - Review and fine-tune it annually or bi-annually.
 - Review the plan every five years and amend it as needed.

26. Finish this sentence: In ten years, I think...

- The comprehensive plan will need minor changes to keep it relevant and useful.
- The comprehensive plan will need to be re-written.

27. Why do you think the plan will need to be re-written in ten years?

28. How can BWSR help you keep your comprehensive plan relevant and useful?

29. What advice would you give someone who is considering participating in the One Watershed, One Plan program?

30. Is there anything else you wanted to share about the One Watershed, One Plan program that wasn't captured elsewhere in this survey?

Appendix C: Summary of focus groups and interviews

Methodology

MAD conducted 11 focus groups, with a total of 69 participants, and 38 interviews, for a total of 107 participants.

Interviews and focus groups gauged participants' impressions of whether the One Watershed, One Plan program is achieving the vision of the Local Government Roundtable, how BWSR has contributed to the success of the program, and how BWSR can improve that support, especially as local planning partners approach revising their plans in the future. Appendix D provides the interview and focus group questions that were asked.

Focus group and interview participants included:

- BWSR Board Members
- BWSR leadership and the One Watershed, One Plan program coordinator
- BWSR staff: Board Conservationists (BCs) and Clean Water Specialists (CWSs)
- Association leadership for counties, SWCDs, and WDs
- Consultants who have worked on One Watershed, One Plan programs
- State agency staff from DNR, MPCA, MDH, and staff from the Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities
- Local government staff and elected/appointed officials from counties, SWCDs, WDs, and municipal governments
- Non-local government staff who served on Advisory Committees (e.g., lake associations, citizens, non-profit staff)

To maintain confidentiality, notes from focus groups did not include which participant said what. Therefore, this analysis focuses on the number of comments across all interviews and focus groups that support the themes, rather than number of individuals.

Where relevant, this summary includes information about the proportion of similar comments. Select comments are included as bulleted lists and *emphasized in italics* as representative of the themes. These statements reflect the participants' sentiment and content, but MAD may have edited them for spelling, clarity, and length. These statements represent evaluation participants' perceptions and experiences.

Findings

The program is achieving the vision of the Local Government Water Roundtable

Participants in focus groups and interviews generally agreed that One Watershed, One Plan is achieving the vision of the Local Government Water Roundtable. The correct stakeholders are present in many watersheds, but several comments expressed a desire for more public participation. Local governments have been able to maintain control over their plans, for the most part, according to comments from interviews and focus groups.

One area where watersheds are not quite meeting the vision of the Local Government Water Roundtable is in service sharing or consolidation. While several watersheds had agreements in place or hired shared positions, more said they were not currently looking to consolidate or share services or had no plans to do so in the future.

Most planning efforts involve the right stakeholders

There were 119 comments on the presence of stakeholders at the table in the watershed planning process. Of those comments, more than half (63 comments) indicated the correct stakeholders were present for the planning process.

About 30 percent of comments about having the right stakeholders noted the broad spectrum of stakeholders present for the planning process, including local planning staff and officials, state agencies, community members, farmers, landowners, and others. The same number of comments generally noted that they felt the correct stakeholders were at the table, without much additional commentary. Nearly 20 percent of the comments said whether or not the correct parties were at the table really depended on the watershed.

- *There are multiple benefits. Just upfront acknowledgment there is an issue that we need to collectively work together...The second piece, it connects people together, creating partnerships, introduced to people we haven't worked together. Opening up that sphere that we are able to connect. And third is, having united front around a plan that everybody can implement. And we're no longer arguing about competing with each other for small amount of money, and we can prioritize and having that vision so that people can see where their priorities are.*

Desire for more public participation

Fifty comments regarding stakeholder presence noted parties were missing from the process. Of those comments, about 65 percent talked about specific parties that were missing from the process. Those parties included tribal nations, farmers, younger people, community members, representatives from drinking water or groundwater concerns, local public health, and municipalities.

- *Who are the people who have time to show up? It's retired people or those who have an axe to grind. We don't get a lot of young people or people working 2–3 jobs, we don't get their perspective.*

- *Pretty traditional government led process. Nothing done to do anything transformational to bring in farmers, residents. [Redacted] had a farmer-led group, I don't know that it's supposed to last the life of the plan, haven't seen funding for farmer- or citizen-led groups. It's just government groups.*

Several comments were more general, saying the only stakeholders present were the “usual suspects,” such as parties who had an axe to grind, or were looking for funding for pet projects. About 25 percent of the comments said stakeholders may have been physically present for the process, but they were not fully engaged. Parties may have only spoken up when something affected their interests or the interests they represent.

A few comments pointed to turnover in local planning staff or elected officials and the accompanying loss of knowledge led to a feeling of missing stakeholders.

Generally, local governments have maintained control over their plans

There were more than 100 comments about the level of control local governments had over their plans. About 65 percent of those comments indicated local government did maintain control over their plans.

Of the comments regarding local control, there were 70 that indicated local governments did maintain control over their plans. Just more than 50 percent of those comments expressed general agreement. About 30 percent pointed to a balance in control or input on plans, with input from a variety of local stakeholders and state agencies.

Several comments said their answer depended on the watershed—some had local control, some wanted more input, and one comment said the local government had too much control.

- *The successful ones are those where state and local folks realize there are different cultures. State folks need to realize they are local plans with local decisions. Local folks need to realize state agencies add value. Successful ones have navigated and realized that. Some level of trust.*
- *For the most part, state didn't push anything. In the first plan, I think there were a couple of state agency people who were adamant on a couple of things, but the local units and landowners didn't feel that was in the best interest.*

About 30 percent of the comments (33 comments) on the level of local control were about local governments needing or wanting more control over their plans. Several of these comments described what some participants perceived as requirements from BWSR or other state agencies that local governments had to include in their plans if they wanted them to be approved. A few of these comments specifically called out “St. Paul” as the entity trying to exert control over their plans.

As with those who saw the appropriate level of local control, about 15 percent of the comments were some variation on “it depends” on the watershed, local governments, or BWSR staff as to whether local governments felt they had the appropriate amount of control over their plans.

- *It really depended on the BWSR staff... Some [BWSR] staff are a little more active and steering you to word things [a certain way] or how it should be laid out in the plan. But maybe another [BWSR staff] is saying, “Here's what you need in the plan: a,b,c and d. And how you lay it out is up to you.” It depends on which staff you had.*

Five comments mentioned they would like to see more input from BWSR and other state agencies, that they were too hands-off, or swung too far in the direction of local control.

- *In our experience, the five state agencies were involved, but very hands-off. We actually had to push them to be more involved and give guidance.*

Two comments described what they saw as BWSR and consultants working together and excluding local governments.

There are not many examples of plans leading to new service sharing or consolidation

Part of the vision of the Local Government Water Roundtable was that local governments would be motivated to share or consolidate water management activities. Participants in interviews and focus groups offered 131 comments about service sharing or consolidation.

There were 60 comments indicating local governments had service sharing or consolidation agreements. About 50 percent of those were about new service sharing agreements, while slightly less than 50 percent were about existing agreements.

Participants in focus groups and interviews made 35 comments about their plans not having service sharing or consolidation agreements, with nearly 60 percent of those indicating their plans left room for potential service sharing or consolidation in the future.

The comments offering examples of shared services or consolidation agreements covered six specific CWMPs, with other comments speaking more generally about examples of agreements.

- *Formally or informally, yes it's happening in the ones I'm aware of. [Redacted] is hiring an agronomist jointly. [Redacted] is continuing collaboration across boundaries. Even at that, the administration is done by one but benefits all.*
- *In the [redacted], two SWCDs have partnered to bolster the technical assistance in one of the counties, they have an agreement together. Also, the partnership agreed to hire a coordinator. In this case it's a consulting coordinator. Those are two examples.*

Planning participants are deriving value from the program

Across interviews and focus groups, there were 183 comments about the value participants see in the plans, including:

- The plan's influence on LGU actions (47 comments).
- The relationships built or strengthened through the planning process (45 comments).
- The value of PTM (41 comments).
- The availability of implementation funding (15 comments).
- The plan's ease of use (10 comments).
- The whole watershed approach (5 comments).

Process is leading to new or improved relationships between LGUs

Nearly 25 percent of comments about value for participants were in reference to relationships built as part of the planning process. In general, participants said that it brought people to the table that do not ordinarily work together. They have had to build partnerships and work with each other in ways they had not previously done. Participants also talked specifically about LGU participation, having tough conversations, and the value of in-person meetings.

Seventy-five percent of these comments regarding relationships referred to the building of new partnerships. Participants commented that various groups had to develop partnerships to complete the plan and that the partnerships themselves are assets.

- *The benefit is, bringing people together, getting exposed to different perspectives, exposed to how peers are doing things in their region, there is a learning advantage there, and working with folks who have been doing watershed management so lots of experience. That's really helpful. It forces you to work outside of your area, and tremendous learning experience.*

Another 20 percent of these comments referred directly to the value of LGU participation across different watersheds.

- *Having the upstream/downstream conversation. Learn from each other, strategize with each other, think about how water moves across the landscape.*

Several of these comments also discussed the importance of having tough conversations, with a few comments expressing the value of in-person conversations for relationship building.

- *...just from my own experience, especially when we were able to meet in person, it was really exciting to watch these relationships forming, just watching them learn a new thing about the other and watching those connections form, that was one of the major benefits, building relationships.*

Plans are useful for technicians, but could be less complicated for communicating to others

Twenty comments regarding the value to participants were about the plans' ease of use. Of those, ten comments said the plan was easy to use, while slightly fewer said it was not easy.

Most of the comments about the plan being easy to use indicated that familiarity with the plan made it easy.

- *If you know what you're looking for, it can be very easy.*
- *I came in late in the game and I was able to pick it up and digest it and have good understanding of what it would take. If it was someone who wasn't part of the process, I think the size of it could be overwhelming.*

A few others said the plan was easy because they now had one document to refer to.

- *We have all our scientific, information feasibility studies and it's compiled in one document, and everything is there. Yes, it's 400 pages. So, from our decision making and project planning you have one document driving that work. That a huge benefit of the process.*

Six comments about the plan not being easy to use referred to the plan being too long. A few others said the plan was not easy to use because it was too technical.

- *They are just not easy to use. They are cumbersome. Part of it plan content requirements. The information you have to show in the plan. I just don't want to look at it because it's so long.*
- *It is clear and concise, but you can be intimidated by several-hundred-page docs. But with help from staff and advisors, the clarity will be apparent to almost anyone.*

A few comments expressed reservations about their ability to execute the plan.

- *We're still in the early stages of getting, as each of these plans come on board, we're all continuing to learn (across all stakeholders), we're still learning, and getting the execution done—but that one, I'm—we're all trying to grasp the execution components.*

Plans have helped local governments focus on priority areas

Over 70 comments discussed the value of PTM. Over 50 percent of these comments expressed value in PTM, while just under 40 percent said PTM was not valuable. Several comments also cited reservations about PTM.

Of the comments expressing value for PTM, 33 focused on prioritization being a valuable part.

- *The plan is good because it demanded prioritization, which was the objective of the plan...You know, there are priorities in each part of the watershed, and I think that shook out well.*
- *I was going to say that prioritizing work was a great outcome of this work. There was great discussion about where we should focus, and those led to great results.*
- *I think that they have been successful in identifying priority areas. It's a great conversation and a great thing to engage local stakeholders in.*

Another 15 comments of these comments stated that PTM helped them better target resources.

- *The way the program has set up funding, directing this large chunk of money in a programmatic way. It's more effective.*
- *Targeting is far better than what used to be educational guessing.*

Ten comments said the PTM process drove accountability to the plan.

Fourteen comments that said PTM was not helpful cited problems with the "Prioritization" part of PTM.

- *Not always clear how priorities are ranked and if they get included or not.*

Fifteen other comments that said PTM was not helpful cited problems with measurability.

- *Depending on tool or model, you might have a different outcome. I think if we make sure we're comparing apples to apples instead of the whole gamut of things. If we can all kind of agree on the measurement system, it would help down the road.*
- *The only weak part is the measurability piece, especially the link to actions. Actions to move the needle.*

Several comments expressed reservations about PTM, with a few comments indicating participants were concerned about tracking and measurement, and questioned their ability to implement the plan.

- *And I want to know more about monitoring—is the mechanism of MPCA and BWSR, are we going to get the monitoring to know if these projects are worthwhile?*
- *But at the same time, some of the analysis they required—the measurable—is really naively inaccurate. They've put way too much emphasis on numerical modeling of what one might do and what the effects might be and what the costs might be, to the point that none of it is defensible in a literal sense. These are just a bunch of giant guesses that are being spread over a broad landscape. The escalation of the margins of error are laughable. Got us in the ballpark, but when we're trying to say in this planning process that BMP is going to save us X pounds of phosphorous, and that will save us \$2,000, that's no longer believable. Could be loosened up on precision. Datasets you use are not accurate enough to yield precise results.*

Plans are influencing the actions of LGUs

Over 33 percent of comments about value to participants were about the ways the plan has influenced LGU actions. Of those, 47 comments indicated that the plan has influenced LGU action, while a few comments said it had not. Over 60 percent of the comments about LGU action explained scenarios where the plan influenced LGU action.

Below are examples of comments that affirmed the plan was influencing LGU action.

- *And it lined up—it did, in some locations, lined up ordinances. Like particularly, drainage. They had different requirements of when you could do tiling. You go to one city and it's one set of rules v. another city. They did try where they could to make those similar.*
- *It's part of their annual work planning, working together with all the partners in the watershed and tackling priorities from one year to the next and where to allocate their resources.*

Below are examples of comments that said the plan was not influencing LGU action.

- *It was such a small piece of our county, we don't necessarily use it.*
- *We don't have any access to watershed-based funding. It's not really guiding a lot of what we do. Just because our area isn't a high priority.*

Over 60 percent of the comments about LGU action explained scenarios where the plan influenced LGU action. Of those, over 33 percent attributed LGU action to the funding available.

- *It's definitely shifted how we think about our work more so than in the past. Because we have the resources to back the plan that is written.*
- *Reliable implementation dollars were a game changer. Afraid to commit to programs and staff because they worry about funding. Just have to worry about staff now.*

Eleven comments referred to the idea that LGUs need to be bought into the plan in order for the plan to influence LGU action, and ten comments said LGUs were compelled to act because of the collaboration that occurred. A few comments also indicated that whether there is action depends on the LGU.

Twenty of the 182 comments outlined other ways participants derived value from the plan, including references to:

- the implementation funding available,
- the comprehensive watershed approach, and
- the annual planning structure.

Planning participants find BWSR support helpful

Participants offered 200 comments about ways they found BWSR support helpful. Over 100 of those comments were regarding ways BWSR staff provided support. Thirty-four comments described the usefulness of written materials, while 16 comments referenced the planning grant or implementation funding.

BCs and CWSs are helpful to planning partners

Over 100 of the comments regarding BWSR contributions to success mentioned BWSR staff as a key resource to planning efforts. Descriptions of BWSR staff contributions included terms and phrases such as “critical [to success]” “the glue,” “bridge,” “shepherd,” and “referee.”

- *BWSR staff were the most helpful in planning process. They are the ones that know the content requirements and can keep us on track. They can rein us back in and make sure we're on track. And they have the technical knowledge to help with the models and tools.*
- *I don't think it could happen in the manner it has without their support.*
- *BWSR staff is involved at a high level of integrity, transparency, and fairness necessary to get everyone to buy into the plan.*
- *BWSR folks are the glue. Provide structure, know rules make sure they're followed, herd the cats, make sure we're all going to the same end goal line.*
- *If it wasn't for the staff, this wouldn't get done.*

Over 25 percent of comments about staff were regarding the continuous involvement and engagement of BWSR staff throughout the planning process. In several discussions, participants expressed gratitude to BWSR staff for being present at every meeting—with one respondent adding that when the staff member was unavailable, they found a replacement. Other participants communicated the value of asking questions during meetings and getting answers in real time.

Nearly 33 percent of comments about staff lauded BWSR staff’s ability to help participants navigate the planning process. Participants said staff adeptly guided groups through the process and ensured they stayed on task and made forward progress. For example, participants said BWSR staff would schedule meetings and help bring participants to the table. Participants also praised BWSR staff for pushing some topics, offering different insights, and encouraging the group to think through the various angles of their plans.

- *...they are in a position to be that central part to help a group reach consensus on different topics.*
- *[BWSR staff] provide structure, know rules make sure they're followed, herd the cats, make sure we're all going to the same end goal line.*

Planning partners appreciate guidance and other resources, but mostly rely on staff

Thirty-four comments about BWSR contributions cited written materials they found valuable, but comments were disparate in the particular materials they found valuable. The website and guidebook were the most commonly cited. Other resources cited as valuable were plan content requirements, frameworks, project snapshots, videos, and templates.

- *Just the website is really useful as far as up-to-date and what watersheds are coming up and the schedule.*
- *They have really good guidance that is pretty helpful if you take the time to read it.*

Fifty comments about BWSR staff said they were particularly helpful in providing or clarifying guidance, answering questions, and giving feedback. Though guidance materials were available, many discussions described guidance materials as large and difficult to navigate and that BWSR staff were qualified and willing to help planners find and understand the guidance. Participants cited the following types of guidance and information BSWR staff provided:

- Expectations around PTM
- Feedback on plan content
- Explanations of rules and regulations
- Answers to questions about the process
- Clarification of “grey areas”
- Technical expertise
- General knowledge

A few comments also praised BSWR staff for being responsive and promptly following up, rather than guessing, about questions they could not immediately answer.

Other contributions

Sixteen comments about BWSR contributions expressed gratitude for the funding provided for planning and implementation. They said it helped bring LGUs to the table and was a “total game changer” in terms of their ability to plan.

- *Have heard for so long that people do all this planning, then waste time on grant writing, and then don't even get the money. 1W1P really gets away from that, and it's a significant amount of money. It provides the incentive to do the planning. And it's just making implementation happen a lot more. Rather than wasting time applying for money. That, I think, is really great.*

Participants also offered several intangible contributions from BWSR, including building support at the state level, assisting and educating LGUs, facilitating and encouraging partnerships, and balancing supporting the LGUs with allowing for their autonomy in plan development.

- *BWSR has the relationships with the SWCDs, who are key players.*

- *Staff for these agencies, especially BWSR, is really important to get the word out and then form these coalitions around county, local, and watershed level.*

Planning partners' recommendations for improving BWSR's support

In focus groups and interviews, participants were asked how BWSR can improve its support or resources to help local planning partners. Overall, 278 comments were provided on this topic.

Additional or improved guidance and support

Forty-seven comments regarding the question of how BWSR can improve its support and resources asked for improved or additional guidance and support, described in more detail below.

Help preparing for and supporting implementation and preparing for the future

Nine comments indicated that planning partners need more guidance and support around planning for implementation or additional support once implementation begins.

- *The jump from planning to implementation is huge, and it's bigger than BWSR realizes, or the LGUs can realize. And I think we put a ton of effort into the planning, and I don't think we provide them with enough support to get ready to implement.*

Five comments about additional guidance or support requested guidance on what is coming in the future, or more future-forward planning on the part of BWSR.

- *It would be good for BWSR to do some long-term policy planning solidification...We need consistency. It takes a lot to get consensus amongst all the [local planning partner] entities. That would be one of the things. Make sure cycles are in sync.*

Timeliness of feedback

Seven comments indicated that despite the desire to have locally driven plans, some planning participants want BWSR's stance on particular issues either voiced more forcefully or provided earlier in the process. A few of these comments indicated that planning participants want more feedback from BWSR spread out throughout the process, rather than provided at the end.

- *[BWSR staff] need to get more engaged at the beginning and provide more direction...They don't micromanage, but they should have some more effective or official check in at each milestone to say if it's approvable.*

Clarity

Twenty-six of 45 comments on what participants wish they had during the planning process were requests for additional clarity from BWSR within the guidance provided, including wanting more clarity across stakeholders of what PTM means.

- *If there is going to be guidelines, that they be clear. One of things I love, but also frustrates me, they are very broad in things. Guidance could be more clear. And being upfront about what's needed for an amendment. If we say we have a study, being very clear, if that study is going to be sufficient it needs to have x y z data. Some of those clear guidelines would be helpful.*
- *On the planning side, more definition of PTM means. There was wide interpretation on that. Sounds good, but in practice people are using it very differently.*
- *Clarifying and defining measurability.*

Provide examples and options

Five comments about wanting additional guidance focused on wanting templates, examples, or options based on what other watersheds have developed.

- *It seems like a lot of the times at the meetings, we come up with goals, measurable outcomes, and quantifiable things. If we had a template of options—and not have to re-create these things. I know they want it to be organic—but if we want to measure groundwater supply, what are the top 5 measures for that? Take good things from the other plans and build on that.*

Guidance for and on consultants

Five comments in this area were about wanting more guidance for consultants or more guidance for LGUs on working with consultants. These suggestions included not establishing a budget for the planning grant before a consultant is selected and more is known about how many stakeholders will be involved, as well as having BWSR pay consultants directly.

Other feedback on wanting improved or more guidance and support

Additionally, each of the following themes was found in fewer than five comments regarding wanting additional or improved guidance and support from BWSR:

- BWSR should provide more legal guidance during the plan development process, because some LGUs that have waited until the end to get their own legal counsel have had issues that resulted in changes to the plan at a very late stage in the process.
- BWSR should provide more leadership and guidance on how planning participants work together, especially when there is conflict.
- BWSR should provide more training and technical assistance.

Consistency

While most comments about BWSR's positive contributions centered on BWSR staff, 18 of those comments included the caveat that their experience varied across BWSR staff members, across different watersheds, and even within the same watershed planning effort.

- *One thing would be a uniform voice from BWSR. It depends on which BWSR staff you had, what you were getting from them was a little different at different watersheds. Some were more active, and some sat back and let you go. So, unifying that BWSR voice at a local level would help.*

- *Throughout the planning process, BWSR had two people involved. I know it wasn't intentional, but they weren't on the same page or didn't give the same feedback, which gives a lot of confusion—they are both from the same agency. Those lines were often blurry, so when their feedback didn't match, it made it very confusing.*

This theme was echoed in comments about how BWSR can improve its support or resources. Twenty-six comments in response to the question of how to improve were about wanting consistency from BWSR, including both verbal and written guidance, requirements, and data.

- *Not all are created equal or consistent in what they say. Sometimes plan content requirements are actually not. You challenge them and they are not happy about that. Wish there was consistency between board conservationists and what they're telling people.*

These comments were not just about wanting consistency across different BWSR staff or across different resources, but also requesting consistency in time to see if the program is working and not burdening people with switching things too quickly.

- *We need to give time as it goes around, maintaining that consistency while continuing to always improve, help folks to do better or strive better. I think the guidance and the documentation that's out there and the staff support are good. This sounds like I'm talking out both sides of my mouth, but maintaining consistency and not feeling like we always have to do continuous improvements that people feel like they're trying to keep up with the newest stuff.*

One respondent even expressed concern about this evaluation and whether more changes would come from the findings:

- *Stop changing stuff. Seems like we're fine-tuning policies over and over... We have three different policy changes in the first two-to-three years. Do we do this every biennium? We're going through this evaluation right now. What changes are going to come from this? That frightens me. When will these changes occur?*

Simplification of the process and resulting plan

Forty comments about how BWSR can improve its support or resources were about making the planning process easier, simpler, or less burdensome to LGUs.

These comments noted that the planning process is complex and requires a significant amount of staff time for local planning partners, including many meetings. Comments also referenced plans that are considered difficult to understand, include “unnecessary” content, and are hard to communicate beyond technical audiences.

- *I thought the vision was to have a more abbreviated, shorter, simpler plan. What programs are you working on? Merge things together and prioritize. And these plans are still coming out as like 400- page plans, and I don't think that was necessary. We've lost the focus of keeping things simple—focusing on a limited number of goals and objects.*

A few of these comments also requested a streamlined, simpler review and approval process.

New or improved technical tools and flexibility with technical tools

Twenty-two comments were about models or technical tools, including comments regarding:

- Uniformity in modeling tools required.
- Flexibility with modeling tools or improved modeling tools.
- Needing ways to monitor surface water.
- Wanting tracking spreadsheets.
- Needing GIS expertise.
- Wanting new or updated geologic atlases.

Change management

Across interviews and focus groups, there were 18 comments regarding the need for more than just technical experts involved in the plan development and implementation process. Some of these were references to the difficulty of changing behavior, difficulty of working through interpersonal dynamics, and grounding in social science. There were different opinions among these comments regarding whether BWSR staff should develop their own capacity to support change management, build the capacity of local planning participants to do it themselves, or rely on others. These comments included requests directly from BWSR staff for more training.

- *Expertise and cultural piece knowing locals and how to relate to the state agency folks. That interpersonal skill more than just technical skill.*
- *If you're going to bring farmers to the table and get them to change, you have to understand the social science. That is where public health could really help.*
- *I think a big gap, not just with One Watershed, One Plan, but across clean water—we are very biased toward the biophysical science. If you do this practice on the ground, what reduction will you get in sediment, pesticides, etc.? ... There is a huge gap when it comes to the social science. How do you talk to farmers about changing their practices? What are the social heuristics that go into decision making? How does innovation spread from one farmer to the next? We don't use that in training SWCD staff. We don't have measures about attitudes toward new practice or how to transfer knowledge. There is very little work being done in that area.*
- *If I had a degree in marriage counseling, I think that would be very helpful. We're all from science backgrounds. We all pretty much have bachelor's degrees in science, and so when we start to get into this working together and collaborating, this is a skillset we don't have. It can be somewhat of an awkward thing, trying to plan together, but implementing is much harder, and for me, I have two of these planning efforts that are in the implementation phase, and I think that is much different, and that relationship is different, implementing and money as opposed to non-risk planning. I think maybe more training of staff on how we can, and having leadership really support us learning more about interpersonal communications and skillsets that we maybe didn't get with our BS/MS in science.*

Increase participation

In response to the question of how BWSR can improve its support or resources, there were 16 comments about wanting help to make sure the right people are “at the table” for local planning efforts, including other state

agency staff, but especially members of the public. This theme about public engagement was explored in a previous section.

- *In general, the civic engagement or community outreach. They do a good job with the government partners and many of the NGOs, but I think that the public could be a little more informed or involved, or the process could be explained a bit better.*

Addressing climate change

Out of the 278 comments provided in response to the question of how BWSR can improve its support, 12 comments mentioned climate change in response to how BWSR can improve its support and resources. These comments mostly focused on the need for watershed management plans to focus on addressing climate change, with a few recommending that plans should be required to include efforts to mitigate the impact of climate change, rather than have it as an optional component.

One comment referenced the fact that planners are encouraged to say something about “extreme precipitation events,” but that participants were not aware of guidance on how to do that in practice, nor guidance about looking forward to future impacts of climate change. One comment referred to the politically charged nature of conversations about climate change, wondering whether there needs to be political advocacy of some kind before climate change can be a required part of plans.

- *Right now, it's that the plan content requirements suggest strongly that maybe you should say something about extreme precipitation events in your plan. We don't have clear guidance about what should these plans really be looking like as future looking plan, as we know we're going to have some real challenges with climate change. How do we really plan for that?*

Improving consultant support and process

Thirteen comments across interviews and focus groups expressed concern about the amount of funding going to consultants, uncertainty of the value received in return for the investment, and concern about consultants putting activities into watershed plans that will require additional contracts with that consulting firm to carry out.

- *Still some issues where the consultant had the guidance on how they want to do some of the modeling. We'd already done some of it, and they went forward with what they wanted anyway. Seemed like a money grab at that point. Not sure if it's a function of growing pains or how consultant wants to operate.*
- *They were more interested in promoting their tool or software to come up with the numbers. Initially they made a comment, “Well, we'll give you the numbers using our tools.” Until they had the job.*

A few of these comments were concerns from consultants themselves about having to provide services beyond the scope and budget.

- *From a consultant viewpoint, we lost a ton of money on that project. I know others also lost money. It took so much to get everything done for the money that was allocated.*

There were also concerns in these comments, related to money and otherwise, regarding consistency across different consulting firms.

- *One of the firms was more open to seeking input from all participants versus the other firm... It almost seemed like their firm's staff generating the bulk or direction of the plan, more than the people involved.*

There were five comments across interviews and focus groups about concerns that consultants do not know the local context, do not have required expertise, or are simply “copying and pasting” content into plans from one watershed to another. Some of these comments overlapped with concerns about the amount of money spent on consulting services.

- *When BWSR has these plans—they give a grant, and often the group hires a consultant. There is a small group of consultants who write these plans. It just so happens that they don't have expertise in groundwater. And we find that they develop this boilerplate language about groundwater—they always write “We should seal wells that aren't being used.” That is just standard. That is important—but there is so much more that needs to be done. We see that exact same language in plan after plan that the consultant develops. It isn't targeted to the specific watershed they are addressing.*
- *I don't know how much BWSR had to do with this, but the thing I wondered about was, we needed to hire a consultant to put together the plan—and it appeared to me that it was a stencil that they filled in the name of the watershed...It was very expensive, and if someone had just sent us the file, we could have done some of it ourselves.*

A few comments from consultants themselves expressed concern about their working relationships with BWSR staff, including concern of BWSR staff “working around” consultants or not working well with consultants, including feeling frustrated by perceived rules about consultants not being able to work directly with BWSR staff.

- *In the [redacted] the board conservationist reached out directly to them and asked a bunch of questions. What are you doing? You turned my whole process upside down. You're asking them questions about my approach to assessing priorities. They hired me for a reason. I don't think that's right.*
- *I tried so hard to talk with the BWSR staff, I was told I was not allowed to speak with anyone directly unless it was with the steering team. Kept getting told it wasn't an appropriate technique, but I needed to talk to them and didn't think the steering team needed to be involved.*

Feedback on other state agency support

Across focus groups and interviews, 43 comments provided feedback on the involvement of, and support provided by, other state agencies, outside of BWSR.

Eleven comments provided general, positive feedback regarding other state agencies’ support, with eight comments on specific contributions, including technical assistance, data, and modeling.

- *We've had great experience being able to maintain control. State agency people have been very supportive of what we're doing.*
- *I feel like at least for the [redacted], the local government entities did a great job of involving state agencies, almost relying on them for the technical capacity of some of that work. Some of the cities, they*

don't have the staffing capacity or the engineering or the tech folks to address the more challenging aspect of watershed management.

Nine comments reflected a need for state agency staff to be more coordinated in their approach. A few comments were explicitly about conflict around using PTMApp or HSPF-SAM for modeling.

- *Inside their own agency and across agencies, we've come a long way, but we're still not on the same page.*

Echoing the feedback on whether planning partners have been able to maintain local control, comments regarding other state agencies also varied between wanting less state involvement and wanting more up-front sharing of priorities and plans from state agencies.

- *The state agencies were well represented. Maybe too much sometimes. It really did shift the air in the room. When really, people bring different expertise and feel like they can't speak up—like "I'm just president of a lake association, not a scientist." Having more local presence would have made the process richer.*
- *The state was there to see if we were doing what they wanted, but I think a powerful role as the state, they could, the state has plans—like the nitrogen reduction plan. Here is how we could get that plan integrated. It was like they were hovering or eavesdropping, rather than working to incorporate the state plans. In my experience, I didn't see that happen. I think a lot of the locals still don't know what the state plans are. I think that would have made them a more equal or respected partner if they came in with "I have a plan, too." That would have made them more equal.*

Approaching plan maintenance

There were 145 comments across interviews and focus groups regarding how BWSR can help keep plans relevant and useful. Nearly 50 percent of these comments outlined what planning partners need in order to assess and potential revise their plans. About 25 percent of comments were regarding data, tools, and models needed for revisions, and another quarter reflected participant thoughts on the revision process. The few remaining comments described how revisions may not be necessary.

Planning partners want clear guidance and expectations

Forty-six comments were about the guidance and expectations planning partners need to keep their plans relevant. Of those, over 33 percent alluded to tracking, measuring, and evaluating progress. Participants described several needs in regard to tracking and measurement, including guidance, data, and capacity to evaluate. Participants also mentioned outputs would be a primary focus of a mid-point evaluation because time and external factors could limit the number of observable outcomes.

- *What I've heard is—because some of these local government partners are involved in multiple plans, they have been in a planning churn for several years. And that has challenged their ability to actually implement. So, what I think they will struggle with is—what did we get implemented, and how do we know if it worked, and how do we adjust?*

- *Some of that won't be really scientific—not outcomes, but outputs. How much did we do? And continuing to call for more positive action.*
- *It almost feels like, at five years, the best we can do is kind-of have an honest assessment of—what has happened? What has been done? It probably won't show up yet in the water quality data.*

Nine comments were requesting clarity on what changes meet the threshold for an amendment, for which there is guidance from BWSR.

- *If we're just updating for new information, attaching it as an appendix will be a lot easier. For example, in our watershed, or impaired waters of Minnesota, that gets updated in a yearly basis, and we had a blanket statement that we will be using the most updated impaired waters that gives it open ended to change it.*

Eight comments indicated the need for funding to undergo plan revisions, and five comments stated planners desired the same level of support from BWSR as they received for the initial planning process.

- *I would say we need the same support as when we developed the plan. Like guidance on what we can/can't do and should or shouldn't.*

Comments expressed several other areas where planners may need assistance. Those listed below were stated less than five times:

- Staff capacity
- Public engagement
- Compilation and documentation of lessons learned
- Specialized expertise

Data, tools, and modeling

Over 25 percent of comments (29) on plan maintenance were related to data, tools, and modeling. Of those, eight identified specific data needs or changes, six identified funding needs related to data and modeling, and another six called for integration with other state databases.

- *Bringing in some of that newer data—precipitation and discharge information—which people were asking for, but we didn't have it. And now we could bring that information into 1W1P—and it might make them pick different strategies or priorities.*
- *I believe that they're likely going to need some additional financial resources to have the possibility of redoing their modeling. To see if their progress is actually meeting goals from a water quality perspective.*
- *I think having updated water quality data would be helpful. But the tricky thing is when MPCA is doing monitoring and when they need the data.*
- *[DNR has] been doing an evaluation of hydrologic change analysis. All of that work has been done on most of the watersheds after the plans have been written. That's an example of information that can be brought into the revision stage. Just being aware of new information and bringing it in.*

The following data and modeling topics appeared in fewer than five comments:

- Technological advances could change or hinder tracking and measurement capabilities.
- Planners need more timely data for tracking and measurement.
- There should be unified systems across watershed districts.
- Planners need updated models.

Suggestions for revision process

Thirty comments were participant viewpoints on the assessment or evaluation process. Seven comments were specific things participants wanted to add or change, eight comments were regarding workload and balancing revision work and implementation work, and six comments asserted the need to view plans as living documents.

Seven comments about the assessment or evaluation process provided examples of specific things participants wanted to add or change within their own plans, including providing walk-in access, including more groundwater input, eliminating water level measurement, and applying more science to prioritization.

Managing expectations

Eight comments about revisions expressed concern over what plan revisions will do to staff workloads, how to balance revision planning with implementation, and how turnover in staff at the local level may impact the ability to maintain plans over time.

- *Now they feel they're in perpetual planning as opposed to plan development, just review and reporting and amending, changing course sort of process.*

Six comments referred to the need to view the plan as a living document, subject to continual change as new information arises.

- *Also, just keeping in mind that going forward, the plan is a living document that can be changed moving forward. When people know that, it takes away some of the angst of thinking that's the way it will always be.*

There were also a few comments regarding the need to clarify and streamline processes and public involvement.

In some cases, revisions may not be necessary

Less than one-tenth of comments regarding plan maintenance (8) asserted that the pace of change in watersheds is so slow that plans may not need to be revised in five—or possibly even ten—years.

- *I think these plans will be more durable than people think. I don't see a lot that will have changed in 5 years. These circumstances, especially with non-point sources, these are things that have been a challenge for decades, maybe a century.*
- *We have these made up 5- and 10-year intervals, which I think we should have different intervals for different parts of landscapes. Not everything changes at the same rate. It should be more frequent where things changing, less where there's not a lot changing on the land.*

Funding and capacity issues

Many focus group and interview participants talked about funding and capacity issues with One Watershed, One Plan. Some of the issues mentioned in the 62 comments are out of BWSR's sphere of influence, while others may be things BWSR can address. Comments called for more funding, flexibility of using their plan funds, and addressing the burden of using the funds in a limited amount of time.

Flexibility

About 35 percent of comments regarding funding and capacity issues (22 comments) talked about the flexibility of funding, with six comments specifically about the inability to use WBIF for activities such as monitoring, modeling, and measurement.

- *Thinking of the total watershed, the resources in the northern half aren't there as it is in the south. BWSR doesn't fund monitoring work. Southern half has lot of monitoring. If BWSR could allow funding for basic research and funding for areas that don't have a lot of funding that would be good.*

Another six comments discussed leveraging plan funds with other funding sources to get the money they need to do the work in their watersheds.

- *I look at financial capacity—how much can be done? In [redacted], we have taxing authority, so we can take a little money and leverage it—like in [redacted], we brought money from the state, local, and created millions of dollars for projects. In outstate, it doesn't appear to be much leveraging—but maybe the federal ag bills or other federal funding could be leveraged more. I first give deference to outstate about what they can do. But almost everything goes back to money. Most can usually fund their first priority—but only the 2nd or 3rd if they can money magically from somewhere else.*

Five comments concerned the size or number of projects in each watershed, and the lack of funding, staff, or time to get them completed.

- *Now, as more people come in to join the program—more watersheds—the legislature is going to have to continue to fund it, at increasing amounts. When we look at the formula on how we determine, aside from the base funding, what is going to be allocated to each watershed—it uses public waters, public and private properties.*

Need for additional funding

More than 40 percent of the comments on funding issues (26) called for additional funding. Of those comments, ten expressed concern about the future funding pool for One Watershed, One Plan. These concerns include questions about whether the funding pool will grow with additional plans, how participants will pay for future plan revisions, and how local governments will pay for projects that cost much more than the funds they are getting from BWSR.

- *Most of this money, it was grant money that people were applying for. There was small amount that was dedicated... What concerns me is, it's going to be the same as last time, if it continues to go forward.*

They get frozen at dollar level, and eventually you won't get as much work done. That will be the time frame and hopefully there's more money for programs 1W1P.

- *The fact that it encompasses projects that vastly cost more than the dollars we're getting. And at some point, it has to get whittled down.*

Five comments addressed additional sources of funding, such as federal funds or other local funds, outside of plan funds.

- *Lot of hills and flooding and well head protection erosion control, they are going to be the same things in the plan. It's a question of how you go about doing that? There was a lot of federal dollars in that. Someone talked about getting federal dollars collected, and this plan helps you.*
- *There is a lot of money coming in with this new infrastructure bill. I wonder if people are thinking about how that money could go into the plans that are in place for projects that would do a lot of good.*

Four comments indicated local governments cannot accomplish the activities in their plans with the WBIF they've received to date⁷.

A few comments also wondered what would happen to funding as more plans are approved, whether the same "pot" will just be divided among more watersheds.

Burden on local staff

Six comments talked about the ability of local staff to get the work done in the plans and to spend their funds in the time allotted. There are also local governments that are a part of multiple plans, and those staff may struggle to keep up with all of the plan-related work. Even watersheds with ample staff may struggle to complete large-scale projects in a short time frame, according to one comment.

- *It matters how much staff you have on hand, because we're trying to get others to do some of the projects, some of the counties, and the reluctance to do it, they don't have the staff to help follow through. I don't know what the answer is for that. That is a problem. And following through on the process of the plan.*
- *There's a lot on their plates already, boards need to embrace plans and how they're going to do business; needs to be a watershed coordinator in some of these districts. I don't want to duplicate efforts, but sometimes folks are getting really stretched thin. Especially as the money keeps flowing. Are we going to be able to spend the money for one, and keep track of things and keep coordinating the implementation team. Can we pull this off? BWSR set the table really well, just a matter of getting it done locally.*
- *What I found going into 2nd round of funding of [redacted] and [redacted], everyone has participated very well in the development of the plan, what seems to be very obvious in some areas, some of the partners are not used to working on such large projects or so many. Designate tasks to LGUs, at the end of the day sometimes, it's hard to spend the money. Easy to ask, but hard to spend. Everyone isn't on the same page to get the project off the ground and get started. Have various cases at the 11th hour where an LGU said they can't spend the money, can the watershed district do it?*

⁷ As mentioned elsewhere in this report, WBIF is not the only source available to fund projects in CWMPS.

Equity and inclusion

Although issues of equity and inclusion were not mentioned across the majority of comments from participants in focus groups and interviews, it is important to note that these comments did come out of conversations about improving the One Watershed, One Plan program.

As noted above, there were over 50 comments about stakeholders missing from the planning process, and 15 explicitly talked about focusing on equity and including more diversity in the perspectives and backgrounds of people involved, beyond government representatives.

- *We don't get a lot of young people or people working 2–3 jobs, we don't get their perspective.*
- *I do think, in my experience, the folks in the room were the same cast of characters that we see a lot. WD, agency folks, SWCDs.*
- *I felt like they maybe didn't take advantage of the expertise that was around. It seemed like a lot of the same folks that I see around for PCA meetings, or same. I was concerned about inviting our members [from a nonprofit organization] in, because I didn't understand what value they would get for their time, or how they would use the information. I went to a lot of meetings that took place during the day, but I couldn't always see the value for me. A lot of people couldn't come because they were during the workday. I don't know how it was advertised.*

Five of these comments directly addressed the fact that there were not many, if any, people of color or American Indians involved.

- *I didn't feel welcome despite the work I did. It's hard for BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and people of color] communities to be involved, there is some amount of gatekeeping. I wonder if there is something in the process that needs to be built in.*
- *I would agree somewhat that older, white men are the primary constituents.*

Of these five comments, a few noted that there was not tribal government involvement in watersheds that cover tribal land.

- *It seemed like there was minimal effort to reach out to Prairie Island Indian Community. One person came once, but when you look at the website, they list all of these partners in the Joint Powers Agreement. What was the threshold to be listed as a partner? What is that saying? I feel like that list is a little, um, disingenuous. It felt like box ticking, rather than sustained, actual deep relationship building.*
- *I will say this, my contact with some of the Band members feel left out. It's been difficult to get their participation, but it's important to reach out and make sure that's there in the future. Some of the Band members feel like they were out of it from the get-go.*

Appendix D: Focus group and interview questions

MAD interviewers and focus group facilitators used the following questions and were instructed to use probes to further explore topic areas.

BWSR Board

1. Please share your name, agency or organization, and tell us on a scale from 1–10 how much you feel like you know about the One Watershed, One Plan program.
2. The original vision of the Local Government Roundtable was a watershed framework where all stakeholders in water take an active role in creating healthy watersheds. How well would you say the One Watershed, One Plan program is doing with making progress toward that vision?
3. Do you think that local governments have been able to maintain enough local control through One Watershed, One Plan?
4. What do you think have been the successes of the One Watershed, One Plan program?
5. What would you say are BWSR's most important contributions to the success of the One Watershed, One Plan program?
6. How do you think BWSR can improve its support for One Watershed, One Plan?
7. If you had a magic wand, what one thing would you do to improve the One Watershed, One Plan program?

BWSR leadership, state agency leadership, and Association leadership

1. Can you tell me a little about your role, and how you're involved in or work alongside the One Watershed, One Plan program?
2. The original vision of the Local Government Roundtable was a watershed framework where all stakeholders in water take an active role in creating healthy watersheds. How well would you say the One Watershed, One Plan program is doing with making progress toward that vision?
3. Do you think that local governments have been able to maintain enough local control through One Watershed, One Plan?
4. The Local Government Roundtable hoped that One Watershed, One Plan would lead to local governmental entities sharing services or consolidating their water management activities. How true do you think that has been in practice?
5. What do you think have been the successes of the One Watershed, One Plan program?
6. What would you say are BWSR's most important contributions to the success of the One Watershed, One Plan program?
7. How do you think BWSR can improve its support for One Watershed, One Plan?

8. What do you think local planning participants will need as they approach revising their plans after 5 or 10 years?
9. If you had a magic wand, what one thing would you do to improve the One Watershed, One Plan program?

BWSR staff

1. What is one word or phrase you'd use to describe your work with the One Watershed, One Plan program?
2. The original vision of the Local Government Roundtable was a watershed framework where all stakeholders in water take an active role in creating healthy watersheds. How well would you say the One Watershed, One Plan program is doing with making progress toward that vision?
3. How much decision-making power do you think local governments have had in the plan development process? Do you think that it is enough, too much, or too little?
4. The Local Government Roundtable hoped that One Watershed, One Plan would lead to local governmental entities sharing services or consolidating their water management activities. Can you share an example of when you've seen this happen?
5. What do you think have been the biggest benefits of One Watershed, One Plan to the participants in local planning efforts?
6. Are there some local planning participants who seem to get more value from the program than others? In what ways?
7. How much do you think the One Watershed, One Plan is making sure that local planning participants end up with a specific plan that will be successfully implemented? Why?
8. What would you say are BWSR's most important contributions to the success of the One Watershed, One Plan program?
9. What resources or support provided by BWSR do you think local planning participants find most helpful? Why?
10. How do you think BWSR can improve its support for One Watershed, One Plan?
11. Are there specific resources or tools that you wish local planning participants had access to, or that they need for implementation?
12. What do you think local planning participants will need as they approach revising their plans after 5 or 10 years?
13. If you had a magic wand, what one thing would you do to improve the One Watershed, One Plan program?

State agency staff

1. What agency are you from, and how have you been involved with One Watershed, One Plan local planning efforts?
2. The original vision of the Local Government Roundtable was a watershed framework where all stakeholders in water take an active role in creating healthy watersheds. How have the local planning efforts you've been involved in lived up to, or fell short of, that vision?

3. How much decision-making power have local governments maintained in the planning efforts you've been involved in? Do you think that it was enough, too much, or too little?
4. The Local Government Roundtable hoped that One Watershed, One Plan would lead to local governmental entities sharing services or consolidating their water management activities. How true was this for the planning efforts you've been involved in?
5. What do you think have been the biggest benefits of One Watershed, One Plan?
6. What do you think made the planning efforts you've been involved in more or less successful?
7. How much do you think One Watershed, One Plan helped make sure that the local participants you've worked with ended up with a specific plan that will be successfully implemented? Why?
8. What would you say are BWSR's most important contributions to the success of the One Watershed, One Plan program?
9. What resources or support provided by BWSR did the local planning participants you worked with find most helpful? Why?
10. How do you think BWSR can improve its support for One Watershed, One Plan?
11. Are there specific resources or tools that you wish local planning participants had access to, or that they need for implementation?
12. What do you think local planning participants will need as they approach revising their plans after 5 or 10 years?
13. If you had a magic wand, what one thing would you do to improve the One Watershed, One Plan program?

Other Advisory Committee members

1. Where are you from and how have you been involved with One Watershed, One Plan local planning efforts?
2. The original vision of the Local Government Roundtable was a watershed framework where all stakeholders in water take an active role in creating healthy watersheds. How have the local planning efforts you've been involved in lived up to, or fell short of, that vision?
3. How much decision-making power have local governments maintained in the planning efforts you've been involved in? Do you think that it was enough, too much, or too little?
4. The Local Government Roundtable hoped that One Watershed, One Plan would lead to local governmental entities sharing services or consolidating their water management activities. How true was this for the planning efforts you've been involved in?
5. What did you personally get out of being part of a local planning effort under One Watershed, One Plan?
6. What do you think made the planning efforts you've been involved in more or less successful?
7. How much do you think One Watershed, One Plan helped make sure that your watersheds ended up with a specific plan that will be successfully implemented? Why?
8. What resources or support provided by BWSR staff were the most helpful in your planning efforts? Why?
9. How do you think BWSR can improve its support for One Watershed, One Plan?
10. Are there specific resources or tools that you wish you had access to during the planning process? What are those?

11. If you were going to be involved in revising a comprehensive watershed management plan after 5 or 10 years, what would you need to do that successfully?
12. If you had a magic wand, what one thing would you do to improve the One Watershed, One Plan program?

Consultants

1. Can you tell me about your firm and how you've been involved with One Watershed, One Plan local planning efforts?
2. The original vision of the Local Government Roundtable was a watershed framework where all stakeholders in water take an active role in creating healthy watersheds. How have the local planning efforts you've supported lived up to, or fell short of, that vision?
3. How much decision-making power have local governments maintained in the planning efforts you've supported? Do you think that it was enough, too much, or too little?
4. The Local Government Roundtable hoped that One Watershed, One Plan would lead to local governmental entities sharing services or consolidating their water management activities. How true was this for the planning efforts you've supported?
5. What do you think have been the biggest benefits of One Watershed, One Plan to local planning participants?
6. What do you think made the planning efforts you've supported more or less successful?
7. How much do you think One Watershed, One Plan helped make sure that the local participants you've worked with ended up with a specific plan that will be successfully implemented? Why?
8. What would you say are BWSR's most important contributions to the success of the One Watershed, One Plan program?
9. What resources or support provided by BWSR did the local planning participants you worked with find most helpful? Why?
10. How do you think BWSR can improve its support for One Watershed, One Plan?
11. Are there specific resources or tools that you wish local planning participants had access to, or that they need for implementation?
12. What do you think local planning participants will need as they approach revising their plans after 5 or 10 years?
13. If you had a magic wand, what one thing would you do to improve the One Watershed, One Plan program?

Local planning officials

1. Where are you from, and how have you been involved with One Watershed, One Plan local planning efforts?
2. On the survey, most respondents agreed that all key stakeholders took an active role in developing their plan and that their plan provides a clear vision forward for the future of their watershed. What about the One Watershed, One Plan program has made that possible?

3. On the survey, most respondents agreed that they were able to maintain local control over decisions with their plan. Has that been your experience? Why or why not?
4. The Local Government Roundtable hoped that One Watershed, One Plan would lead to local governmental entities sharing services or consolidating their water management activities. Can you share an example of when you've seen this happen?
5. Do you think the program has adequately set partnerships up to do this?
6. What could BWSR do more/less of to foster this?
7. What do you think have been the biggest benefits of the One Watershed, One Plan program for local government planning participants?
8. On the survey, over 80% of respondents said that their plan is very influential in guiding their organization's actions around the plan's priorities. Do you agree with that? What about your plan or process has helped facilitate that?
9. What would you say are BWSR's most important contribution to the success of the One Watershed, One Plan program?
10. How do you think BWSR can improve its support for One Watershed, One Plan?
11. While the majority of survey participants agreed that their plan is clear and easy to use, over 20% disagreed. Do you find your own plan or plans to be easy to use? Why or why not?
12. Almost 80% of survey respondents said that in ten years, they think their plan will just need minor changes. Do you think that's true for your plans? What do you think would help you in that future revision process?
13. If you had a magic wand, what one thing would you do to improve the One Watershed, One Plan program?

Local planning staff

1. Where are you from, and how have you been involved with One Watershed, One Plan local planning efforts?
2. On the survey, most respondents agreed that all key stakeholders took an active role in developing their plan and that their plan provides a clear vision forward for the future of their watershed. What about the One Watershed, One Plan program has made that possible?
3. On the survey, most respondents agreed that they were able to maintain local control over decisions with their plan. Has that been your experience? Why or why not?
4. The Local Government Roundtable hoped that One Watershed, One Plan would lead to local governmental entities sharing services or consolidating their water management activities. Can you share an example of when you've seen this happen?
5. Do you think the program has adequately set partnerships up to do this?
6. What could BWSR do more/less of to foster this?
7. What do you think have been the biggest benefits of the One Watershed, One Plan program for local government planning participants?
8. On the survey, over 80% of respondents said that their plan is very influential in guiding their organization's actions around the plan's priorities. Do you agree with that? What about your plan or process has helped facilitate that?

9. On the survey, the majority of participants indicated they found the following resources provided by BWSR to be helpful: particular support from BSWR staff with the overall planning process, support from BWSR staff with using data, models, and tools, and the Plan Content Requirements. What about these resources did you find most helpful?
10. What other resources or support provided by BWSR were the most helpful in your planning efforts? Why?
11. On the survey, about a third of respondents indicated they rarely or never used the One Watershed, One Plan Guidebook, or the One Watershed, One Plan website, and over half indicated they rarely or never used the videos. How can BWSR improve or strengthen these resources?
12. What are some other resources or tools that you wish you had access to or could be strengthened during the planning process?
13. On the survey, about a third of respondents indicated that to keep their plan relevant and useful, they would like to amend it when new data becomes available. What resources or supports from BWSR would be helpful to do that?
14. If you had a magic wand, what one thing would you do to improve the One Watershed, One Plan program?