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Lessons From Green Bay: How to Make a RAP Work

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It would be nice to think that a well-written RAP could take care of itself after printing. So many of us in Great Lakes United have devoted years to meetings, hearings and information-gathering, in hopes of finally writing the "clean-up plan to end all plans" a plan so clear and compelling that industries, agencies and government officials would rush to comply with the plan recommendations, while thanking environmentalists for their leadership and vision. It would be nice.

Unfortunately, a RAP simply sets the ground rules for future meetings, hearings and information-gathering in the ongoing effort to put the RAP into actual practice. We have to be realistic and plan to maintain continual pressure during RAP implementation, ready to jump into the process, when necessary, to keep the plan on track.

Most of the 42 Areas of Concern on the Great Lakes have not finished their RAPs yet. Therefore, many of you still have an opportunity to push for specific recommendations in the RAP to make the implementation move more smoothly. Valuable lessons can be learned from other Areas of Concern where implementation is already underway.

In Green Bay, Wisconsin, our RAP was approved and signed over a year ago, after a difficult two years of monthly Citizen Advisory and Technical Com-

mittee meetings. We were reasonably pleased with the result, though it wasn't perfect, and we were hopeful about the new Implementation Committee.

But, we've had some problems. In hindsight, we should have given more attention to the implementation structure outlined in the RAP, to anticipate possible conflicts and inefficiencies. If we had it to do over again, we would try to change the following factors and would urge you to do the same:

1) *Choose the Implementation Committee Carefully.* While it is important to have representation from community and industry interests, we can't forget that the majority of the committee must be supporters of the RAP.

Insist on having input on committee selection. At least three outspoken, hard-headed environmental advocates should be appointed and should plan to work closely together; otherwise, a strong potential exists for isolating and discrediting single environmental representatives. The industry, business and agency reps will "gang up" on them. Other interest groups should also be represented by strong RAP supporters, such as sportsmen and recreationists. But look out for hostile business leaders who also belong to the local duck or yacht club. They might be appointed to represent otherwise supportive groups but team up with industry representatives against RAP implementation. If this sounds like struggle, it's because it is. Sometimes it feels like guerilla war-

fare.

It also helps to get appointees who have actually read the RAP and understand the issues. This may seem obvious, but it's not automatic.

2) *Clearly Define the Role of the Implementation Committee.* The purpose of the Implementation Committee should be to implement the RAP, not redefine or rewrite the RAP in a multitude of ways. If the original document is written in the proper format, the committee's work should be clear; however, it doesn't hurt to ensure this clear understanding by describing it in detail in the RAP.

In Green Bay, we've gotten into lengthy debates over the purpose of the committee. Do we simply discuss broad policies and advise the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) on long-range programs? Or do we get into specifics, and have input on how the RAP will be applied to real circumstances, right now? (We've been

repeatedly discouraged from commenting on current DNR actions and policies on controversial issues which are critically important to the RAP.)

The committee should get definite instructions on its role at the very first meeting. Don't allow for a muddy start, with members confused about the work they're expected to do this could drag on for months and years. Try to anticipate and design against potential conflicts by putting guidelines in the final RAP itself. You'll be grateful later that you did this.

3) *Educate the Implementation Committee.* A concerted educational program, consisting of intensive, specific explanations of the RAP recommendations, should be required with enough time to allow thorough coverage of the issues. Those organizing the committee must strive to make this as informative and entertaining as possible. The invest

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A Primer on Making a RAP Work

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ment in time and money at this point will pay later.

Once the Committee has been fully informed, individual members should be asked again if they intend to support implementation. If not, they should be asked to resign.

4) *Write the RAP in Workplan Format.* In Green Bay, our current RAP document is organized by subject matter, which is logical when trying to define our goals as a community. However, for the purpose of implementation, it creates an awkward document for defining the responsibilities of the various levels of government. Our plan has over 135 different recommendations cutting across many issues and levels of government. It becomes too easy for an agency or department to miss important recommendations, or to assume their responsibilities are actually someone else's. Some agencies might actually hope their responsibilities would be overlooked by others trying to implement the RAP, simply because they disagree with or don't want those responsibilities. It's unrealistic to expect every department head to read the entire plan and assume new responsibilities without encouragement. The process needs to be simplified for them.

Implementation Committees need documents which establish direct accountability, where it becomes a simple matter to pinpoint problems which need more intensive work.

If the RAP was written as a series of *Guidebooks*, each designed for a specific agency or level of government, it would streamline the education effort of the Implementation Committee. If these *Guidebooks* were further divided into fact sheets designed for individual departments in agencies, they would be even more effective. Each fact sheet could begin with a general explanation of the RAP's purpose, then quickly move to the items pertinent to that depart-

ment. It could explain why the recommendations were made, how they might be implemented, the timetable for completion, who to turn to for assistance if problems are encountered, requesting their advice for improving the plan, and requesting an annual progress report.

This re-organization would simplify the task of manager, since they wouldn't need to read the entire RAP. It would also simplify the task of the Implementation Committee and watchful citizens, because the responsibilities would be much clearer.

5) *Productive Activities for the Implementation Committee.* Generally, it's important to have high-powered, influential community leaders on the committee. They have the clout and contacts to make the plan work. However, these are busy people with little time for unproductive debates and pointless meetings. Their time needs to be structured to make best use of their talents. They will also be more enthusiastic about a well-organized project with clear goals.

Therefore, special care should be taken at the outset to define the role and workplan for the committee, and assign each member specific responsibilities. This should be charted even before the committee first meets.

One effective activity would be to form teams, made up of committee members, technical experts and/or knowledgeable volunteers, to deliver and personally explain the RAP recommendations to responsible agencies and government leaders. Personal contacts are more effective than letters. Ideally, each committee member should participate on any team visiting his or her own constituency, for example: county executives would be most effective in carrying the recommendations to their own department heads.

When visiting government officials:

a) Ask them to implement the recommendations as soon as possible, aiming to meet the deadlines in the RAP.

b) Ask them to report their progress at the end of the year, prior to the development of the RAP annual report, for inclusion in the report.

c) Problems are bound to arise. If they feel there are immediate obstacles or difficulties with the recommendations, they should report these in detail immediately to the Implementation and Technical Committees for their remediation. The parties should be asked their professional advice and to research means of solving these problems.

d) If they find difficulties which develop later in the implementation, they should report these as well.

e) They should attempt to refine the recommendations and provide more detailed information, as it becomes available. This feedback would be valuable in producing a more complete RAP in the future.

In addition, each committee member should regularly check back with their contacts and constituency to check on their progress and problems. This added watchfulness would aid in focusing the committee's trouble-shooting efforts. It would also maintain the pressure and momentum for implementation.

6) *Streamline Committee Meetings.* Any Implementation Committee will have a lot of issues to cover, with little staff time and money invested. Therefore, the decision-making processes should be streamlined. In Green Bay, we have a cumbersome process with a large Implementation Committee, a smaller Steering Committee and seven separate Technical Advisory Committees, each working on different categories of problems. After a slow start, it has become clear that issues have been shunted from one committee level to another, resulting in a lack of final decision-making, especially when the issues are controversial. The natural outcome of this process has been a lack of timely decisions and missed opportunities for promoting the plan.

Therefore, a committee procedure must be developed to move decisions smoothly from one committee to another on major issues, while allowing some autonomy for the Technical Committees to take minor actions without the Implementation Committee's expressed approval. Each Advisory Committee wishing a major decision or approval of reports should submit a written, detailed description prior to meetings, so that entire reports can be approved as a block with little discussion. Only disputed items should be discussed. This presumes that regular meetings, or even emergency meetings, of all groups will be held to allow timely action.

The Implementation Committee's main focus should be to promote the plan and solve problems which require the talents and influence of its members, not to waste time overseeing every recommendation and action of the Technical Committee.

7) *Public Accountability is Important.* Every RAP should require annual progress reports and public hearings, to allow public input on the Implementation process. High visibility is crucial to RAP success, and public accountability helps to maintain pressure for the Implementation Committee to make progress each year.

In addition to the official reports, it's the responsibility of environmental advocates to develop publicity for *separate* analysis of the implementation, if the official version is inaccurate.

Summary

Even if all the above factors are written into your RAP, there will still be conflicts and setbacks to work around. This is discouraging. Nevertheless, it's important to keep participating and building awareness of the RAP plan, because the issues of public and ecosystem health are too important to give up on. It helps to remember that old-fashioned persistence often wins...eventually. □