

THE SERVICE PROVIDERS' TOOLKIT FOR VOLUNTEER MONITORING

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ABSTRACT

As environmental concerns become more prevalent in our country, we are witnessing a burgeoning interest among communities to assess and understand their environmental context. This trend is especially true in Pennsylvania. During the last fifteen years, over four hundred community-based watershed organizations have formed, half of whom are using scientific tools to determine their local water quality.

As volunteers embark upon the monitoring process it is essential that they have the guidance to think through their monitoring programs before they begin. They need to consider key factors such as matching their concerns with appropriate monitoring parameters and ensuring that their data objectives match their anticipated end use. To facilitate this process, a team of technical and scientific organizations in Pennsylvania have taken on a service provider, advisory role to make sure that volunteer monitoring organizations are equipped with the key tools to think through the monitoring process and to collect the best possible data.

In order to provide capacity building technical assistance to volunteer monitoring organizations, it is essential that service providers maintain a big picture focus and are able to commit to long-term assistance, in order to be an effective resource for the group at every stage of the monitoring process. The Alliance for Aquatic Resource Monitoring (ALLARM) has provided technical assistance to watershed organizations in central Pennsylvania for twelve years. I will discuss ALLARM's collaborative approach to working with volunteer monitoring organizations that has resulted in a number of successful case studies in the volunteer monitoring field. Specifically I will review the tools we use to assist groups, including: monitoring plan design and development, data collection and management, data interpretation, and data communication.

KEYWORDS

Technical assistance, service provider, volunteer monitoring, ALLARM