Evaluating Volunteer Monitoring Program Success

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Why Evaluate?

- To inform you about the state and effectiveness of your program or initiative
- To provide information that can be used to evolve, refine or improve your efforts
- To collect evidence or progress towards intended outcomes to communicate your impact
What to Evaluate?

• Program improvement
  – Is the program reaching those it intends to serve?
  – To what degree is the program successful in achieving its goals?
  – Is the program cost-effective?

• Program impacts
  – What are desired outcomes and to what degree have they been achieved?
Examples of Desired Outcomes

• To identify unimpaired stream segments (those which fully support aquatic life)
• To ensure boats and trailers have mussel prevention stickers
• To describe baseline conditions of a lake
• To simplify the data submission process so more data are entered
• To engage citizens in water quality monitoring
• To provide credible data to decision-makers
• To report information to interested parties on a regular basis
• To provide information to beach users about swimming/surfing safety as related to bacteria
• To assist volunteers in putting their data to action
Outcomes Related to Learning:
Changes in Awareness, Knowledge, or Understanding

- Citizens have a better understanding of local water quality issues
- Citizens have more information about the safety of their beaches available to them
Outcomes Related to Learning:
Changes in Behavior, Skill or Capacity

• Boaters will change habits so that no new mussel species will be introduced to Clear Lake
Outcomes Related to Conditions: Environmental Impacts

• Local beach pollution issues are resolved
Outcomes Related to Conditions: Impacts on Policy

• More waterbodies are given protected status by state or federal statutes
• Policies are implemented that help minimize water quality declines in currently “clean” waters
Outcomes Related to Conditions: Financial Impacts

- The state Department of Environmental Quality saved $17,712 in one year when 100 sites were monitored for phosphorus six times during the year by volunteers
  - Cost savings included staff wages and mileage costs
Outcomes Related to Conditions:
Organizational Impacts

• A public works committee was established to study why more than 50% of volunteer-collected bacteria samples from the local beach were above health standards
Five Steps for Successful Evaluation

1. Engage stakeholders
2. Develop questions
3. Identify direct and indirect indicators
4. Develop a plan for collecting data and assign roles
5. Summarize and utilize findings