Chesapeake Bay Funders Network Agriculture Initiative Guidance

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Preface

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In 2005, the Chesapeake Bay Funders Network (CBFN) organized an agricultural initiative to help farmers adopt environmentally sound practices that would protect and improve the Bay. With the goal of creating measurable results on the ground, <u>and</u> generating knowledge and understanding that could be compiled and ultimately transferred to future projects, CBFN developed an innovative process for organizing and conducting projects.

Rather than rely on the conventional method of using a Request for Proposals (RFP), CBFN staff (Connie Musgrove of the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science and Larry Elworth of the Center for Agricultural Partnerships) conducted field interviews over a period of three months with people and organizations active in the Bay. The goal of these interviews was to identify possible project opportunities; once the interviews were completed, the various possibilities were reviewed by an expert panel and the most promising projects were approved by the funders.

Once a project has been approved using the RFP model, project staff must generally fend for themselves; this is true whether or not they have the necessary management and organizational tools to run a successful project. In the CBFN project, Connie and Larry worked with the project team—the people who would carry out the project—to develop the work plan and budget and to identify the deliverables. Once the project was up and running, they remained involved as both consultants and supervisors.

The Guidance is divided into two sections. Part I describes the process by which project opportunities are identified and organized for use by CBFN staff, Funders and prospective project partners. The basic information in the section has been used to explain to potential project partners in the field how we go about working with them to develop a project, since it is very different from most application processes. Part II provides a user's manual for the process used in supporting and overseeing projects. It documents our work with project and provides a guide for others who may work as "supervising consultants" with CBFN projects.

Part I. Identifying, Assessing and Organizing Projects

Introduction The objective of our work is to facilitate the development of highly effective projects that engage partners at the community level in creating sustainable solutions to the problems that face agriculture in the Chesapeake Bay. Our immediate purpose is to identify and establish innovative community partnerships focused on market-based opportunities that address excess livestock waste and create more sustainable farm systems.

The process we use is based on our knowledge of innovative changes take place and our extensive experience in organizing and supporting collaborative efforts. In particular, we rely on close cooperation and interaction with project participants, supporter and partners in developing these projects.

Our approach involves three steps that are described in this document:
Step One – Identifying project opportunities
Step Two – Assessing project opportunities
Step Three- Developing a project work plan

Step One

In Step One we meet with potential project partners to determine what opportunities are available. In our discussions we focus on answering four key questions (below) about the project opportunity. Once the questions are answered we assess the potential of the project based on the Selection Criteria listed below.

Four Questions
1. What is the critical watershed problem of importance to the Chesapeake Bay that needs to be addressed by your project?

2. How is the project opportunity important and viable enough that it can be implemented in the near term (next year or so)?

3. What is the action that you and others in the region are willing to undertake in the near term? Who are the others that are willing to be involved and what is their incentive to participate?

4. What is the intended change that you hope to bring about?

Criteria

Framing criteria
- Focuses in geographic areas where agriculture is a significant contributor of nutrient loading or where significant improvements can be made
- Consistent with Chesapeake Bay State Tributary Strategies
- Sustainable strategies linked to managing excess manure and poultry litter are significant elements in addressing a water quality problem linked to agriculture

Selection criteria
- There is a pressing critical watershed problem recognized at the local level that needs to be resolved
- There is sufficient awareness and buy–in on the part of local or regional interests to implement a solution
- There is a feasible solution that engages market forces and community resources and can be self- sustaining

Guiding Principles
- Promotes public/private partnerships
- Transferable to other areas of the Chesapeake Bay watershed and the partners in the project are will develop plans to make such transfer possible and effective
- Leverages other resources, including public and private sources of funding and technical assistance in a targeted watershed
- Results in development or expansion of a viable market for products or services that serve to reduce environmental impacts of animal manure
- New technologies or practices are at a sufficient stage of development for implementation and demonstration
- Recognizes and addresses obstacles to achieving or sustaining changes
- Improves animal manure management and conservation practices through market incentives or opportunities that can be sustained by small and medium-sized farmers and their communities
- Provides greater accountability of animal manure reductions that can be used in determining water quality improvements

Step Two

Introduction: This is the format we use for assessing the project opportunity once its potential deemed promising according to our selection criteria. While this is a different sort of process from what is commonly used by grant-makers, you will find that it is very straight forward and logical. The main advantage of this approach is that once this step is completed the basic reasoning and structure for your project have been developed.

Step Two can be broken down into three parts: A) *The Overview,* B) *The situation analysis,* and C) *The resources.*

A) The Overview: Review the answers to the questions in our first step, which was to reach agreement on the project problem and solution, to make sure they are accurate and still make sense. This is particularly important because the **intended action** is a key part of our analysis.

B) *The situation analysis:* The idea here is to think through what is needed to carry out the intended action and achieve the hoped-for results that have already been outlined. In virtually every project, people will need to learn something or do something new that leads to the intended results. For something new to succeed, certain conditions need to be in place. When those conditions exist, the change is adopted more readily than when they are lacking. We've listed five criteria***** for creating a strategy and for helping to determine the most promising opportunity. Undoubtedly you will recognize most of these intuitively from your experiences in the field, but we will be looking at them from the perspective of the participant.

No opportunity will fully meet all five criteria at this stage—if all of the criteria were met, the change would already have been adopted—but it is essential that we describe precisely both how the opportunity meets these criteria and how it doesn't. Critical thinking is needed here, as this part of the session usually involves considering an opportunity and action from a new angle.

For the purposes of analyzing what farmers might need in adopting a change, we ask a set of five questions to help us describe the intended action from the perspective of their perspective:

- *From the point of view of the person who would need to make a change,* how would that change be an improvement?
- How easy will it be for that person to make the change? In other words, will he need to master any new technologies or practices?
- How easily can the changes your organization is proposing be "folded into" existing technologies and practices? For example, can adopters use any of their current equipment or methods as part of adopting the necessary changes? Or does the proposed change require a radical departure from previous practices and technologies?
- Will adopters be able to try the change on a limited basis at first?
- Will adopters be able to see and assess the results of the change in the near term?

Then, considering each of these conditions, we determine what is needed to make the change more likely to be adopted.

- What needs to be done to increase the relative advantage of the change?

- What needs to be done to reduce the complexity of the change?
- What needs to be done to make the change more compatible with existing operations?
- What needs to be done so that people can use the change on a trial basis?
- What needs to be done so that people can more effectively see the results of the change?

C) *The resources* The final portion of developing the strategy is determining what resources are currently available for your project, and what additional resources you might need. That requires answering the next set of questions.
- What organizational resources are available for your project? Will any organization provide leadership? Will any serve as partners? Will any communicate about the change to the rest of the industry?
- Who is the point person to guide and coordinate the effort? Does he/she have sufficient time and support to see the project through to the end? Are additional human resources necessary?
- Would this project go forward without outside resources?
  Estimate the likely funding that will be needed for the project – we will complete a more detailed budget with the work plan.

"Finally, how would you determine at the end of the project, if it was successful?"
What factors would you consider? From whose perspective?

Once we have agreed upon the answers to these questions we have all the information to complete the situation analysis. The document is drafted and then circulated for review among the people involved in putting the document together to ensure that it is accurate and complete.

When the situation analysis is complete it is referred to a review panel for technical review and then, if accepted, is submitted to the Funders for review.   If the project opportunity is approved by the Funders a work plan is then completed

* Note: We intuitively know that change is adopted more rapidly in some situations than others. The likelihood that an innovation will be adopted depends not only on the innovation itself, but also on the circumstances under which the adoption is attempted. Everett Rogers in his book, <u>Diffusion of Innovations</u>, identified the five criteria that influence the likelihood and pace at which change is adopted. The format for the situation analysis is based on those criteria

- **Relative Advantage.** How *exactly* is the proposed change an improvement over the current situation? It is especially important to consider this question from the point of view of the person who must make the change. What's in it for him? For example, if reducing nitrogen applications on a farm improves a nearby river basin, but does nothing to improve the farmer's yield or profit, why should he bother?
- **Minimal Complexity.** How easy will it be to adopt the change? Will the new practice or technology be simpler to use than current ones, or more complex? In what way? Again, this question must be considered from the point of view of the person who must adopt the change.
- **Compatibility.** How easily can the change be "folded into" existing practices? If existing practices and technologies can be used, how specifically will they need to be modified for the new practice? (For example, might the existing sprayers need to be cleaned more often?)
- **Trialability.** Will the person who must adopt the change be able to try it out on a limited basis at first? How?
- **Observability.** Will the person who must adopt the change be able to see and assess the results of that change in the fairly short term? Advantages that only become obvious after several years don't provide much motivation.

STEP TWO OUTLINE

1. **Problem Statement (One sentence only)**

2. **Intended Action (One sentence only)**

3. **Result that will be achieved in terms of pesticide risk reduction (One sentence only)**

4. **Describe the conditions for the intended change? What is needed to improve those conditions?**

- **Relative Advantage**
Characteristics
Needs

- **Complexity**
Characteristics
Needs

- **Compatibility**
Characteristics
Needs

- **Trialability**
Characteristics
Needs

- **Observability**
Characteristics
Needs

5) **What human resources are available for the project?**

6) **What organizational resources are available for the project?**

7) **Approximately what financial resources will be required for this project?**

8) **How will you know if the project has succeeded?**

Step Three - Developing a Work Plan

Introduction – What good is a work plan?

We are all familiar with work plans in various forms – often they are simply paper exercises that we include in a funding request or that we draft at the beginning of an effort and then to refer to at the end in the final report.   For the Funders' Network projects, the work plans serve far more central and useful purposes as:

- An opportunity for project participants to articulate their shared commitment
- A means for carefully thinking through what really needs to be done and how to best accomplish it,
- A clear description of the project expectations
- A mechanism for project leaders, participants and facilitators to track progress

Once the Funders have determined that a project deserves funding, the work plan is a tool that we use at the beginning and throughout the life of the project. It must be useful to the project leaders in carrying out the project elements. It will also be incorporated into the contract that is executed between the funders and the sponsoring organization so it matters that the plan be accurate, comprehensive, and workable.

Developing the work plan

Much of the basic information for developing the project and the work plan has, by now, already been outlined in the situation analysis that we completed in Step Two.

Process

We plan on roughly a 3 - 4 hour meeting to draft a work plan. The work session should include the people who will be directly involved in working on the project - the idea being that we don't need a large representative group but, rather, the key people who will be doing the work in the project.   (The outline for developing the work plan is included at the end of this section.)

The first two items in the work plan are included to review the purpose and intended action for the project. Even though most of the information has been covered before, it is important to make sure that there is a clear and shared understanding of what the project will accomplish.

Objectives   Each objective should be drafted as a single sentence that says, as specifically and quantitatively as possible, what will be done and when, to achieve what result. The objective, defines the action to be taken in terms of what needs to be accomplished, quantifies the scope of the accomplishments and identifies the time frame in which they will be completed. The key is to be precise and specific and to articulate each objective in one sentence.

Since these projects are intended to serve as innovative models that other groups can apply, it is important to deliberately include an objective that provides for documentation, communication and active interaction with the people and organizations outside the immediate project.

Tasks Once the objectives have been developed, listing the tasks necessary to achieve those objectives is a fairly straightforward job. This is the point at which you list what actually needs to be done. Once all the tasks are listed it is useful to identify the person or organization that will

have lead responsibility for the task. Also, identify the time frame in which each task will be completed. This process should be completed for each of the objectives.

Results   Given that you are hoping to engender a change on the part of a particular group of people, the adoption of that change is a key indicator of results. In order to measure progress, make sure that you have a baseline or that you include establishing a baseline in your planning. All changes do not necessarily lead to a direct and immediate environmental impact. For example, increasing knowledge among growers so that they can use a new technology is a critical first step in the eventual adoption that does not necessarily yield direct impacts in the short term. However, increased knowledge can and should be measured. In addition to identifying the results you will also want to identify the means by which it will be measured

Resources   This is the place where the budget is developed. It generally helps to go through each of the tasks under the objectives and determine how much will be needed for each year of the project – since we are thinking of these as multi-year efforts. We use the following categories for organizing the budget information:
- Personnel
- Contractual
- Supplies/Materials
- Travel

After we assemble the budget numbers we will draft a brief description of the activities under each budget category which will serve as a Budget Narrative. We will also want to list any other resources being brought to the project by participating people or organizations.

Review and Final Draft
Since we are on a tight schedule for review and circulation it will be important that the planning meeting is as complete as possible. After the work plan session, we will prepare the draft of the work plan and send it to you for your review and for you to circulate to others for their review, comments and/or approval, as appropriate to your situation. Once the final work plan is developed it will be submitted to the Funders for their review and final approval.

Once the project funding is formally approved, the work plan will be included as part of the contract and it will be used as the tool for tracking and reporting on progress. Our goal in all of this is to create a work plan that results in a superior and effective project for everyone involved.

Work Plan Outline

1. Purpose   *from Solution statement in Step Two*

2. Intended Action   *from Step Two? Is this complete and accurate*

3. Objectives: *One sentence statements that state who will do what, when and to what purpose.*

4. Tasks: (Identify the specific tasks that need to be accomplished for each objective)

5. Results: How will you know you have succeeded???
What will be measured and how from the user's perspective?

6. Resources:
- Budget Format–
    - Personnel
    - Contractual
    - Supplies/Materials
    - Travel

- Budget Narrative

Partnerships

Part II. Supporting and Overseeing Projects

Introduction:

Charged with project oversight, we knew that we could be most helpful to team managers/project managers—the people in charge of all the day to day operations—if we thought of ourselves not merely as supervisors, but also as consultants. On the one hand, we were ultimately responsible for the project: we were the link between the team manager/project manager and the funders and had the authority to alter the budget as necessary. On the other, we knew that projects work best when they adopt a bottom-up approach. Just as project participants—farmers, crop consultants, extension agents and technical advisors—know best what they will need in the field in order to change a particular farming method, team managers/project managers, faced with the daily challenges of running a large scale project in addition to their own job responsibilities, know best what they will need in order to work effectively with their team. The purpose of this guide, then, is to help <u>supervising consultants</u> support team managers/project managers in their efforts on the ground.

Why is support necessary? Large-scale partnership projects are naturally complex. To begin with, a successful project brings together highly skilled people from various companies and organizations to work together towards a common goal. Most of these people have other responsibilities and are not in a position to focus exclusively on the project at all times. While team managers/project managers face the same challenge—they, too, have other jobs—they have the additional responsibility of keeping everyone on track.

*Moreover, we have found over time that what determines success is the **process** by which a project is run. Setting numeric goals does not ensure results; well-run projects do. Briefly stated, a good project: 1) focuses on solving a specific problem; 2)increases people's capacity for change so that they can keep implementing a new system or practice after the project ends; and 3) generates expertise that is transferable to other agricultural projects around the country. The process used to accomplish these goals requires considerable management, as well as a*

variety of skills, including good communication and the ability to conduct meaningful evaluations.

A supervising consultant's job, then, is to provide support to the project manager—especially the first-time project manager—in several ways. First, s/he is able to offer the benefit of extensive experience working on other projects and is in the unique position of simultaneously representing the interests of the funders and understanding the challenges of running a project. Equipped with an understanding of the agricultural practices in question, as well as the project's goals and work plan, s/he can work with the team to make sure pitfalls are avoided and goals are accomplished. When CBFN projects were slow in getting off the ground, for example, the supervising consultant, aware that this was not an unusual situation, was able to help the project revise its timeline and budget. On the other hand, when a project's vision and purpose devolve over time—a project intended to create a mentoring network for farmers might, for example, turn into a series of field demonstrations—the supervising consultant can use his/her experience and position to guide the project back to its original mission and activities. Finally, because even the best-laid plans cannot anticipate every eventuality, the supervising consultant is available to help with unexpected developments as they arise.

The supervising consultant creates occasions for the project manager and members of the management team to stop for a moment and come together to focus on the project as a whole and gauge its progress. S/he provides both tools and assistance, such as survey templates or access to media experts, to help project managers/team managers deal with various management, communication and evaluation tasks. Last but not least, s/he provides critical assistance by serving as a sounding board for the project manager/team manager throughout the life of the project.

Organization of the Guide

It's useful to divide the kinds of support the consultant will provide into four categories:
    I. Management
   II. Communication
  III. Evaluation
  IV. The creation of a Process Summary & Guide for future projects

These four categories overlap and are interdependent; however, it's easier to organize and attend to each task if we consider the categories one at a time. (Note that because the categories overlap, there will be some repetition in our discussion of the various tasks.)

I. Management: *The goal of providing management support is to facilitate the effective operation of a project by: 1) creating opportunities for members of the management team to come together to focus on the project and correct its course as necessary; 2) helping the team coordinate efforts; and 3) providing tools to chart the progress of the project.* To this end, the supervising consultant schedules three on-site visits during the project's first year in order to meet with the project manager/team manager and as many members of the management team as possible. (During subsequent years, two such meetings are generally sufficient.) In preparation for these meetings, everyone has a chance to pull together what they've been doing and note the progress they've made. Work plans and financial forms are reviewed at each meeting, and there is always an opportunity for members of the team to compare notes on the successes and challenges they have experienced so far. While the work plan is the yardstick by which progress is measured, the group discussion helps everyone see the project as a whole, share experiences, agree on changes that might be necessary and come up with solutions to any problems that have arisen.

    A) **First Meeting/Site Visit:** This is an organizational meeting for the purpose of going over procedures and helping to get the project on a good footing. It takes place as soon as possible after the project has been initiated. This meeting should include:
        1. **An introduction**: The supervising consultant describes the project's importance, the funders' interest in the project, and the project's unique process. S/he also explains his/her role and the ways in which s/he'll help with management, communication, evaluation and the creation of a Process Summary & Guide that can be used to help other projects.
        2. **A review of Work Plans**: The supervising consultant clarifies how these will be used to generate a continuous log of activities and results based on the tasks identified in the work plan, or <u>Cumulative Reports</u>.
        3.

Example of cumulative report:

Objective 2) Implement pilot program with farmers and landowners in Rockingham and Augusta counties **(7/07-12/07)**
Tasks:
Implement and install practices/structures **(ongoing): (8/23/07):** None installed to date. **(4/3/08):** Initial farm is completed; 7 additional ongoing, expected completion dates vary between June and fall 2008; **(11/19/08):** currently we have three completed projects and all the equipment money allocated through year three, tentatively. Will revisit each contract and farmer by the end

of the calendar year, Dec. 31, 2008, to ensure each project is moving forward or we will need to reallocate to a different project. With current contracts we expect to exclude 60,433 feet of streambank and 851 livestock are expected to be excluded through this project.

Follow–up to ensure sustained use of livestock exclusion **(ongoing); (4/3/07):** In the process of developing a monitoring protocol – very simple. **(11/19/08):** Monitoring protocol established, see attached monitoring sheet.

 3. **A review of financial forms** and how they will be used.

 B) **Second Meeting/Site Visit (Mid-year):** The purpose of this meeting is to review progress, see if anything on the work plan needs changing, and hear about interesting or challenging developments since the last meeting. This meeting should include:
 1. A review of mid-year Cumulative Reports.
 2. A mid-year Budget Review (Depending on the funders' fiscal accounting procedures, this may trigger an installment payment.)
 3. A discussion of what managers have learned so far, what challenges they've faced, what successes they've had. Although this information should be included in the Cumulative Report, it's important to have a group discussion with the whole management team about these things as well.

 C) **Third Meeting/Site Visit (End of year):** The purpose of this meeting is to review the end-of-year report, look at progress and results so far, and plan for the coming year. This meeting should include:
 1. A review of year-end Cumulative Reports.
 2. A year-end Budget Review (The year-end budget may trigger another installment payment.)
 3. A discussion of changes to the work plan. (e.g., is the order of activities realistic?)
 4. A discussion of changes to the budget for the coming year. (e.g., were budget categories such as personnel and equipment allocations based on practical experiences?)
 5. A discussion of what managers have learned, what challenges they've faced, what successes they've had.

At least once a year, supervising consultants schedule a field visit as part of a site visit. In addition, consultants might attend events such as conferences, press events and educational meetings, which may or may not coincide with a scheduled site visit. Note that field visits provide an opportunity for understanding the complexity of a project and getting to know its people more fully—they're also the most fun part of the job.

Useful information for Supervising Consultants:
 ✓ *In addition to the 3 site visit meetings, you should plan on keeping in touch with team managers/project managers via phone calls and emails.*

- ✓ *Although you should ask everyone to bring their work plans to the first meeting, don't be surprised if people forget them. It's a good idea to bring extra copies for team members to use.*
- ✓ *Ask the project manager/team manager to send you the Cumulative Reports **in advance** of the mid-year and end-of-year visits*
- ✓ *Keep in mind that while the Cumulative Report is a useful management tool for the project manager, it's also a useful tool for the consultant and the project manager to use together, as it provides them a way of discussing the project.*
- ✓ *People are sometimes surprised by the amount of documentation required of them and may wonder why it's necessary. It's helpful to point out that in many other projects the planning and reporting are unrelated; in ours, the plan and the report form one integrated document. This document is a yardstick, a way of keeping track of what's been done and what needs to be done. It's designed to be simple, to fit in with the actual operation of the project, and it makes the job of reporting much simpler and more direct. It also makes it much easier to produce a guide at the end.*
- ✓ *At the meetings, when you're asking people to report on things that were especially interesting, challenging, satisfying or surprising, the goal is to generate **discussion** by asking open-ended questions.*
- ✓ *The meetings should be interesting—a chance for everyone to share experiences—so it's important that they not feel like inquisitions.*
- ✓ *Work with the project manager/team manager to schedule the meetings well ahead of time so that as many people as possible can attend—the more members of the management team who can attend, the better!*
- ✓ *Occasionally, it may become clear that a project is not on the right track, and that it is not going to produce the results the funders expected. Be willing to insist on changes if a project is not fulfilling expectations. It's **extremely** rare for a project to be shut down, but it is a last resort option.*

II. COMMUNICATIONS: *This includes both external communications and internal ones, and as such its purpose is much more than mere publicity. Clear, simple communication is a tool for accomplishing the project's goals. The supervising consultant can help the project manager/team manager with communications by helping him/her consider who the important audiences are, and how best to communicate with each group. S/he can also help in the drafting of certain key communications.* It's useful for the consultant and project manager to think of the target audiences in terms of the following groups:

A) INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS:
1. **The project management team:** Early on, the project manager/team manager should develop a one-paragraph description of the project for the members of the team. This paragraph helps ensure that everyone is thinking about the project in the same way, and is a useful document whenever members of the team are communicating with others about the project. The supervising consultant can serve as a sounding board/editor/reviewer for the project manager as s/he develops this paragraph.

2. **Funders:** Early on, the project manager/team manager should write up a one-page description of the project, including how it benefits the Bay, who's involved, and how additional resources are being leveraged. Because the supervising consultant knows the funders and what they need, s/he can be especially helpful in drafting this description.

3. **Stakeholders** (people and organizations close to the project who are not involved in the daily operations): The project manager/team manager communicates with this group through briefings to A) keep them updated; B) get their support; C) forestall any potential problems they might have with the project. These briefings are especially important during the first few months of the project, and, again, the consultant can serve as a useful sounding board/editor for these communications.

4. **Project Participants, and potential participants** (Farmers, Extension agents, Crop Consultants and others working in the field.) There are two types of communications with participants, the first of which is involves a transaction, and the second of which is as much an evaluation tool as a communications task:
    1) The transaction: This is the initial communication with farmers to generate and determine interest in the project, which states what will be expected of farmers and what they will get in exchange. This document should be clear, specific and brief (approximately one page) and all potential farmer participants should receive a copy of it.
    2) The evaluation tool: This is the means that we provide for farmers to communicate both their requirements for adoption of the new practices and the results they intend to achieve. It consists of the pre-season questions which the field people will ask of farmers (*What do you need in order to use the new method? How will you tell if it worked?)* as well as the post-season questions *(Did the project provide what you needed? Did the new method work in the terms you set out?)* Although these questions form the basis for a significant part of the final evaluation, we include them in this section because getting clear and useful answers is very much a communications task. Here—and,

indeed, in all communications with farmers—the need for clarity, brevity and follow-through can not be overstated. It's essential that field people (agents and technicians) write down the farmers' answers—no evaluation will be possible otherwise—but excessive paperwork will make the project untenable for field people and farmers alike. The supervising consultant's experience with previous projects is extremely useful at this stage because s/he has had the opportunity to see exactly what works and doesn't work—what must be written down, and what would create too much paperwork. In addition, the supervising consultant can help the project manager make sure that field people are keeping track of the farmers' responses to the questions.

B) EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS:

1. The larger agricultural community: Information about the project that would be of interest to the larger agricultural community helps to generate and reinforce support for the project. The supervising consultant should encourage the project manager/team manager to communicate this information through existing venues such as trade publications and meetings, as these are both credible and cost-effective.

2. The General Public: Communicating with local reporters provides participants with the opportunity to share basic information about the project. The supervising consultant can help by providing access to media people.

Useful information for supervising consultants:
- ✓ *It's helpful to suggest that the paragraph for the management team—the "elevator paragraph"—be based on information collected during the development of the project, that is, the Problem, Solution and Intended Change.*
- ✓ *Because farmers are busy running their field operations, taking the time to write answers to the questions that form the basis of the project (what do the farmers need in order to try the new practice/method? How will they determine if the new practice/method worked?) can feel like an "extra" or, worse, burdensome—**unless the reporting forms are extremely simple, clear, brief and to the point.** You might suggest that the project manager/team manager develop a standard form for the field people to use when writing down the farmers' answers.*
- ✓ *Because field people, too, are busy with the technical aspects of the project, it's important, especially early on, to **remind them to collect, write down, and keep track** of the farmers' answers. If the business of writing and keeping track of answers is left to the farmers, it won't get done. At the same time, it's important to emphasize that both the farmer and the field person should have copies of the farmer's answers.*
- ✓ *Project often have a kick-off event, when the project is announced to the agricultural community (and sometimes to the public at large.) The nature of this event will vary widely, depending on the project. It might consist of an announcement at a meeting, or it might be a public event, with TV coverage. The timing of this event will vary, too. It might take place once the contract is signed, or much later, when field activities are already in place.*

III. EVALUATION: *Evaluation can not be tacked on at the end of a project—it must be built into the project from the beginning, and is, in fact, the natural **outcome** of a well-run project. Everything we have discussed in the previous sections lays the foundation for a meaningful evaluation, which will answer three basic questions: 1) Did we do the tasks we intended to do on schedule and within budget? 2) What did we accomplish in terms of the intended change stated in the work plan? 3) What did we learn that others can use?*

The answer to the first question comes from the deliverables and tasks identified in the work plan; the **ability** to answer the second comes from having established very clear communication with farmers from the beginning; the answer to the third includes information gathered during the facilitated group discussions.

At each stage of the project, the supervising consultant can help project managers/team managers by clarifying the *way* in which evaluation is built into the project from the beginning. In other words, assisting with management and communications IS assisting with evaluation. In addition, the supervising consultant can offer specific tools for evaluation. Specifically, the consultant can help:

1. Make sure that there is a way for farmers to measure whether or not the project has worked for their farms. As discussed under Communications, above, field people ask farmers two key questions at the beginning of the project. When the field person asks, "How will you tell if the new practice/method worked?" s/he must also ask **how** the farmer will collect the information in order to make his/her determination. In other words, the field person must make sure that the farmer has a **viable way** to measure his/her results. Finally, the field person should ask **two follow-up questions** at the end of the project: 1)Did the project provide what you needed? 2) Did the new practice/method work in the terms you laid out? **The answers to the second set of questions should be written down just as the answers to the first set were.**

2. Explain how individual farmer's results should be combined into aggregate results. While each farmer's answers to the follow-up questions serve as an evaluation of the project at the individual level, evaluating the project as a whole in terms of the original, intended change requires compiling the farmers' answers into a set of aggregate results.

3. Make sure that a baseline for tracking changes over the course of a project has already been established on the work plan. Like the answers to the farmers' questions, a baseline is necessary in order to evaluate the project in terms of the intended change. The work plan should include basic information (e.g., the number of acres on which new practices are being used) so that the project can track changes **as they're being made.** Clarify, too, that the way a baseline is established depends on what is being measured. For example, if a project is tracking the use of a new practice or method, the baseline is often (though not necessarily) zero. But if a project is tracking industry awareness of a particular method or practice, it will be necessary to conduct a survey at the beginning of a project to determine the level of awareness, and another survey at the end to gauge how the level has changed.

4. Facilitate a group discussion at the end of each year, so that everyone can come together, view the aggregate results, share their own experiences and talk about whether or not the

project should be continued, and what, if any, modifications should be made during the next season. Two types of discussion are important at this meeting: 1) a simple update on results, and 2) a more complex consideration of whether or not the project is going about things in the right way.

Useful information for supervising consultants:
- ✓ *If a small project is tracking industry awareness, individual interviews are more effective than surveys.*
- ✓ *If surveys are to be used, a note of caution is helpful: lengthy surveys should be discouraged at all costs, as they rarely generate meaningful information, create unnecessary work for participants, and are skewed towards those who like to fill out surveys. They generally have very low response rates. Ideally, surveys should be no longer than one page and presented at a meeting; door prizes might be offered to generate interest and response.*
- ✓ *Note that none of the evaluation tools are complex or difficult. They are effective <u>because</u> they are simple, and because they are inseparable from the project itself. For example, the farmers' answers to the questions are used both to modify the work plan and to measure the project's success.*
- ✓ *During the end-of-year facilitated discussion, it's important to distinguish clearly between the simple update on results and the more complex part of the conversation, which requires the ability to step back, synthesize ideas, and analyze whether or not the project is on track. Allowing plenty of time for this part of the discussion—which depends on open-ended questions—is essential to this process.*

IV. CREATING A PROCESS SUMMARY & GUIDE:

The answer to the third Evaluation question—what did we learn that others can use?—forms the basis for the Process Summary & Guide. Rather than a manual describing particular implementation techniques or an argument for any particular practice, the guide should be a general blueprint which can be adapted to different projects: its purpose is to help other practitioners who want to carry out a similar project. The supervising consultant can help the project manager/team manager conceptualize the guide, review drafts, and offer suggestions for revision. Specifically, s/he can:

1. Help the project manager/team manager define his/her audience. Who is likely to want to carry out a similar project? Another conservation district or RC&D? A state agency?
2. Help the project manager/team manager clarify his/her message**.** How to *organize and carry out* this type of project. Again, it's important to avoid technical information such as the specifications for a particular type of fencing; this is a blueprint for *organizing and carrying out* a project.
3. Help the project manager/team manager tell the story clearly and simply.
4. Review the Guide format/Provide an outline, for example (included below is the guide developed for the CBFN projects in 2009):

Strong Communities, Healthy Waters

"Blueprint" Publications

The Product   We want to create a set of three short publications to help organizations and agencies interested in launching projects similar to yours. These publications are among the deliverables for your CBFN grants and will help all of us to encourage similar projects in other locations. Each of the final publications will:

- Focus on one of the programs in the CBFN Agriculture Initiative

- Contain **general advice** on planning, resources, outreach, and lessons learned

- Fill about 8 to 10 pages of text and photographs

The Process   As the experts, you will develop the core content for these publications by answering the questions attached to this document. Lara Lutz, a professional writer/editor, will edit and organize your text into a form that is readable for a general audience. After Lara receives your initial copy, she will contact you with follow-up questions and then send a draft of the revised text for your review.

The Audience   These publications are meant for your colleagues in other places, to provide them with a general "blueprint" for approaching projects like yours. We assume that the readers share your challenges; they are seriously considering a similar effort or have just begun the process. The publications will focus on planning and process tips, management strategies, and outreach tips. They will not take the form of case studies or success stories. We won't need to argue the benefits of a particular practice or explain the technical details of particular practices.

Your Role   You are the experts, so we need your help. Please respond in writing to the questions in this document. Your answers will shape our content. We ask that you:

1. **Relax.** The answers you provide will serve as resource materials, not final text. We are interested in your insight, not perfect paragraphs.

2. **Think "big picture."** You have already provided lots of detailed information about the evolution of your program. As the grant period wraps up, we would like you to reflect on things that worked well, things that surprised you, and things you might do differently if you were starting the process from scratch.

3. **Be candid.** We want these publications to provide useful advice.

4. **Tell us what we ought to know.** If there is a question we should have asked but didn't, add it. If a question doesn't seem relevant to your experience, make that note and move on to the next.

Quotes, photographs, and vignettes/stories are welcome.

We need thoughtful responses, but no specific length.

1. Context

    A. What local challenge(s) did you want to address with this project?

    B. What factors made the challenges(s) hard to tackle?

    C. How did this particular project get started? How did the "seed" get planted?

    D. To what extent did this project accomplish what you hoped?

    E. Did it accomplish anything that you didn't originally expect? If so, what?

2. Partnerships with Other Organizations

    A. What types of partnerships did you have? What were their roles?

    B. At what stage did the partners become involved? (Who do you need at the earliest stage, and who comes in later? Or do you need everyone from the start?)

    C. How did you recruit your partners?

    D. How did your partners work together and/or communicate?

    E. In retrospect, what worked best?

    F. What approaches, if any, did you change along the way? Why?

    G. Would you recommend doing anything differently?

3. Partnerships with Farmers

    A. What role did farmers play in your project?

    B. At what stage did they become involved? Did they help plan your project, or were they participants after plans were in place?

    C. How did you reach out to them?

    D. How did you support their work?

    E. In retrospect, what worked best?

    F. What approaches, if any, did you change along the way? Why?

    G. Would you recommend doing anything differently?

4. The Work Plan

    A. How did you develop your work plan?

    B. What kind of timeline is most useful, and most realistic?

    C. If there were ten (or fewer) broad steps for creating and managing this kind of project, what would they be?

5. Resources

    A. What kind of funding does this kind of project require? How/where did you find it?

    B. What kind of staff commitment is needed from the lead organizations/agencies?

    C. What kind of technical resources are needed? How/where did you find them?

D. In retrospect, would you have done anything differently in pursuing your resources?

6. Measuring Success

    A. What specific goals and/or general expectations did you have for the project?
    B. How did you track whether or not you met them?
    C. How did you document your work and its outcomes?
    D. What kind of feedback did you get from the partners and participants that would make this a better project?
    E. In retrospect, would you do anything differently? Why?

7. Key Messages

(Your answers may repeat some of the content above, but they will help us understand which points to emphasize.)

    A. What were the major accomplishments of this project? Were any of them unexpected?
    B. What elements are "must-haves," as the foundation of your accomplishments?
    C. What did you learn? What surprises (good or bad) did you encounter along the way? What do you wish you had known when you started?
    D. What cautions or potential pitfalls would you point out?
    E. What will you do next – or what would you like to do next – with regard to this project?

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Once a good draft of the Guide has been completed, the project manager/team manager should run it by 1) project participants to see if the document is complete and captures the most important points; 2) a couple of people who might want to try such a project and see if they have additional questions.

Useful information for Supervising Consultants:
    ✓ *Regular documentation throughout the project— the cumulative reports, the farmers' answers to questions, the aggregate results—as well as the regular, facilitated group discussions, make it possible to create a summary & guide at the end of a project. Without regular documentation and discussions, a project manager/team manager will have to rely on memory and will be forced to scramble for data.*