

June 2-3, 2010 OWEB Board Meeting Executive Director Update #C-8: Communications Strategy

Background

At the September 2009 Board Meeting, Board approved the communications strategy as a working draft and directed staff to continue work on refinement and development of plan elements. The potential for an initiative to reauthorize the dedicated Lottery funds in 2010 creates unique circumstances for OWEB to implement items under its communications plan. While some strategies and tactics under the draft plan were well-suited for OWEB to move forward with in the near term, others have been delayed until the reauthorization effort is completed. This is an update on the products that are being implemented.

Healthywatersheds.org

The www.healthywatersheds.org web site is essentially an electronic brochure. The high-level content of this newly launched web site is intended for those who are not currently involved in the watershed enhancement program, but who are curious about the agency and the work that has been done through OWEB investments to protect and restore our state's clean water and healthy habitats.

Web Communications

Evaluating, improving upon, and adding to OWEB's electronic communications is a priority action item. With two different live web sites, an interest in social networking's ability to reach the broadest audience and other forms of electronic communications, it is imperative to find a way to integrate these various communications channels in a way that makes business sense for the agency while achieving goals for good customer service.

In January, staff described efforts to update OWEB's current web site to eliminate redundancies and improve content delivery. Staff also reported that once the initial clean up of OWEB's web site was complete; we planned to launch a second phase of improvements by engaging an outside contractor to evaluate both of OWEB's web sites from a user's perspective to improve the delivery of information and content and integration of sites.

To that end, OWEB contracted with OakTree Digital Resources to assist staff in implementing a usability study request for proposal and identifying short term web improvements. OakTree is meeting with OWEB staff on Monday 17, 2010 to present recommendations to improve both sites between now and July. Their work will also inform the statement of work for a longer term usability contract that includes the development of a "combination" web site to serve as the primary welcome page to OWEB from which users would more easily find information based on their needs. Staff will update the Board on the usability contract at the June and September meetings.

Communications Training

OWEB staff participated in training on April 23, 2010, to improve both our external and internal communications. This summer, staff who serve as agency spokespersons will participate in a more intensive training on effective communications with members of the media.

OWEB Quick Reference

In conjunction with the communications training, staff have developed a short, one-page reference document, which uses the messages developed in the communications strategy, to help staff answer some of the most frequently asked questions about the agency.

Co-messaging

An important part of OWEB's mission is to build public awareness of and involvement in watershed restoration efforts around the state. The breadth and diversity of OWEB's partners and grant recipients provides extensive opportunities for grass roots communications. These are communications that must be initiated by others—watershed councils, volunteers, local officials—at the local level. The first step is for staff to share the messaging refined in the communications strategy with these groups.

Staff, assisted by the Network of Oregon Watershed Councils and its board, are planning meetings this summer with local partners around the state to share and receive feedback on the messaging language. The discussions will also explore how OWEB can best help local groups with outreach goals to build community awareness and involvement in their work. The goal is to bring value to all – local groups help OWEB to be accountable to Oregonians, which in turn may build additional awareness and involvement in local watershed enhancement programs, including more resources to those doing the on-the-ground work.

Staff Contact

If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Carolyn Devine at carolyn.devine@state.or.us or 503-986-0195.