SURFACE WATER QUALITY STEWARDSHIP TOOLBOX

Water Data Reporting Guide

Choosing appropriate data reporting tools or products needs to occur as part of the water monitoring project planning process. This helps streamline data collection and ultimately engage different audiences based on their motivations, expertise, and interests. The format a report takes will depend on how specific audiences might best receive information (e.g., public meeting, brochure, technical report), what other processes the data support, and the specific goals of the monitoring plan.

Data Reporting Tools and Products

Technical Report: This is a scientific report that follows the project from start to finish, using technical language and covering all details of the study in full. The report is as long as it needs to be and covers a large amount of background information to ensure that the full scientific process is covered. Figures created for the technical report are often used in other reporting types, using similar captions to define the information being presented. This format is not ideal if the readers are not other scientists or technical people, since the length and detail, combined with the language of the report, make it more difficult for the general public to absorb. Other report formats should be used in addition if the public is the intended audience.

Memorandum/Briefing Note: Often used for communication within an organization. They are usually short and can be used to direct readers to more in-depth technical reports. They are easy to read and can carry a lot of information, but usually reserve longer analyses and discussion for other reporting formats.

Public Report: Usually a detailed report designed to cover most of a project, from data to discussion. They are prepared to be presented to internal and external readers, with less technical language and are more understandable for the public. They often contain figures and tables, and will usually be like technical reports but might exclude appendices or some of the specialized details relating to a project.

Annual Summary: An internal document used to communicate progress on projects and list upcoming projects. These often indicate changes to project documents, upcoming deadlines and project milestone, and progress on meeting project goals and objectives. Often these documents cover general, strategic aspects of the project, with details being covered in technical reports published later.

Audit Report: An audit involves an official third-party assessment of a project or report, with an official audit report being produced. These reports are often designed for authorities or stakeholders, so language used in these documents will be technical or legal and may be difficult or dense to work

through for some readers. These documents are often available to the public but are not specifically written for them.

Brochure/Fact Sheet: These are overview sheets that lay out the major objectives of a project or summarize waterbody health. These documents focus on why the study is taking place and the background information on the sites, presented in easily understandable language. These documents are important for education and transparency, keeping the public informed on the activities of stewardship groups and government.

Public Meeting: Public meetings are important to ensure citizens are aware of ongoing water monitoring studies and have an opportunity to ask questions. These meetings are targeted for a general audience, but often have technical notes, covering the important information relating to ongoing projects, and go more in depth with the technical nature of studies than brochures. Usually, information is presented with a combination of visual aids (e.g., presentation or display) and explanations, followed by discussion.

Community Presentation: Community presentations serve to inform more active members of stewardship groups about ongoing studies and projects. Often the water quality stewards are more informed about water quality issues than the general public, so these presentations can be more technical than public meetings. Presentations go further in-depth and show data in detail, as well as share plans for these projects. Presentations can be in person or virtual.

Local Press and Media: Projects that can have wider-reaching impacts on public areas may merit coverage by local media. Media coverage often helps bring public awareness to projects that are ongoing in local areas and can reach more people than public meetings. This can have the additional benefit of presenting the material in a more understandable way by writers or journalists.

Social Media: Many people get their news from social media. Sharing project updates through social media can potentially gain more interaction than other reporting tools. Social media posts should have a general overview of the project, be quick to catch the reader's attention, and should link back to more detailed information and reports pertaining to the project for those who are interested. Visuals or graphics explaining the project can be very effective in these posts.

Website: Websites can be a very effective way to communicate the parts of projects that are ongoing, such as a wider program the project is part of. A website can be as detailed as it needs to be or can link to other documents that go further in-depth on the project details. A website is more versatile than most other reporting tools and can itself house the reports you wish to share but can also take more work to set up and maintain.

Email Update: Email updates are good for keeping certain groups or people informed directly. They should only be sent to those that request updates on the project, as it can be disruptive to those who have not expressed an interest. Email updates should not be overly in-depth but should contain links to more detailed documents.

E-Newsletters: Like emails, newsletters should be distributed only to those who are interested. These can be more detailed than emails but should still hold references or link to other documents that go further in-depth into progress on projects. These can have visuals embedded to further illustrate the progress or planned outcome of the projects.

Events: Events (e.g., having a booth at a public event) to introduce or inform the public are a very good way to cultivate interest in projects that are ongoing or progressing. These should have less written information, and rather focus on dialogue as the main way to share information and to capture the interest of attendees. Brochures can be provided for those who want more information.

Displays: Displays have the benefit of visuals being most of the display content. They are often accompanied by a presentation of some sort that allows the limited text to be augmented by speaking. Text should be technical, but not in depth since space is limited. Interactive displays such as models can be very helpful to visualise the goal for those not involved with a project, but they are also time-consuming and expensive to produce, so their application should be used sparingly.

Posters: Posters are more streamlined than displays. Posters are largely made up of visuals and diagrams, with smaller bodies of text that are highly detailed and technical, but also very short and concise. Posters needs to be understandable without a presenter, though a poster could initially be part of a presentation.