

Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership Engagement Strategy

Partner Engagement, Education & Outreach, & Communications

2020-2021

Created: December 2019



Table of Contents

Overview	2
Summary.....	2
Goals	2
Objectives	3
Target Audiences	3
Mission, Message, Branding, and Talking Points	3
Partner Engagement	4
Assessment of Partnership Priorities	5
Methods of Partner Engagement.....	5
Assessment of Levels of Partner Involvement:	7
Evaluation of Partner Engagement Efforts.....	7
Use of Tools to Assess Partner Engagement	7
Outreach, Education, and Community Engagement	8
Outreach Objectives:	8
Outreach Strategies:.....	8
Evaluation of Outreach Efforts:	9
Communications	9
Communications Objectives:.....	10
Communications Strategies:.....	10
Communication Tools.....	12
Evaluation of Communications Efforts.....	15
Appendix A: Assessment of APNEP Participation in Outreach and Education Events	16
Appendix B: Key Findings from K.A. Brogan’s “Using Social Network Analysis to Identify Communication Patterns Among Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership Partners” (2013)	18
Appendix C: Partner Engagement Strategies Table	19

Overview

This document outlines the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership (APNEP) Engagement Strategy for 2020-2021. The strategy outlines a multi-pronged approach to engagement, including partner engagement, education and outreach, and communications. It updates the 2018-2019 Engagement Strategy.

Summary

Engagement is one of the five core components of APNEP's Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP), which recognizes that partner engagement and collaboration are the overarching principles necessary for the achievement of suitable environmental outcomes. To accomplish program goals, the CCMP states that APNEP will work closely with its partners to ensure that activities and resources are focused on the most urgent and important problems. It is believed that many of the programs and laws now used to regulate or support activities in our watershed were established on a piecemeal basis to address significant individual problems. Improved coordination of planning for land use, water supply, ecosystem protection, transportation, and restoration will enable us to more effectively address problems at an ecosystem scale.

In general, APNEP is considered a boundary organization, or an organization that facilitates collaboration and information flow between diverse research disciplines and between the research and public policy community. As such, APNEP will engage its partnering organizations and the public to improve awareness and understanding of environmental issues facing the Albemarle-Pamlico region. Furthermore, APNEP will encourage individual and collective stewardship of the region's resources, including support for the planning, policies, and actions required to sustain the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem and its human communities. This includes the recognition throughout this document of the importance of considering issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) when developing and implementing engagement strategies. APNEP is committed to partner engagement, outreach, and communications tools that reflect and serve the diverse populations of the Albemarle-Pamlico region.

Goals

The goal(s) of this plan are:

- 1) To facilitate the implementation of APNEP's [Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan](#) (CCMP) in support of the Partnership's mission.
- 2) Increase the visibility of APNEP and its core partner's accomplishments towards implementing the mission and CCMP.
- 3) Raise awareness about the importance of the significant resources of the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system.
- 4) Identify opportunities to integrate and improve engagement efforts on a regional scale.
- 5) Increase support from decision and policy makers for present and future activities.

2018 – 2019 Engagement Strategy Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership

Objectives

Specific objectives will be discussed in each section. The overarching objective of this strategy is to further define engagement efforts outlined in the CCMP, and to ensure engagement efforts are aligned with CCMP objectives, actions, and associated environmental outcomes through the multi-pronged (direct partner engagement, outreach and education, and communications) approach outlined in this plan.

Target Audiences

APNEP's target audiences include both partners that can assist with CCMP implementation and specific audiences identified throughout the CCMP or recommended by the Management Conference. These include target audiences that are well positioned to most effectively support and implement the CCMP, including:

- Management Conference members;
- Decision and policy makers;
- Local government officials and community leaders;
- Resource managers;
- State and federal government officials;
- Universities and members of the science and research community;
- Educators, including K-12, adult/continuing, and non-formal/informal educators;
- Non-profit organizations, partners and funders;
- Landowners;
- Other National Estuary Programs, and
- NC & VA Citizens, members of the public, and visitors to the region.

When possible, APNEP seeks for its engagement to directly or indirectly (via its partners) reflect the demographics of the Albemarle-Pamlico region, as well as to explore possibilities for new relationships with non-traditional partners. Diverse perspectives strengthen the ability of APNEP's work to address the needs and concerns of the region's communities as well as ensure that the voices of all stakeholders are heard.

Mission, Message, Branding, and Talking Points

1. **Mission Statement**

The mission of Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership (APNEP) is to identify, protect, and restore the significant resources of the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system.

APNEP pursues this mission with guidance and support from its overarching CCMP, advisory bodies and [regional partners](#).

2. **Simplified Mission Statement for Communication Purposes**

The Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership brings together citizens, government agencies, non-profits, universities, and businesses to protect and restore the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system.

3. **Tagline**

From stream to sound since 1987 / Identifying, protecting, and restoring the resources of the Albemarle-Pamlico region

2018 – 2019 Engagement Strategy

Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership

4. **Branding and Program Image**

APNEP will maintain a current and professional look across various media including its logo, website, newsletter, apparel, signage, and business cards. This objective cuts across all other aspects of this engagement strategy by increasing program awareness and encouraging positive impressions of the program and its mission. Initiatives and projects led or funded by APNEP will include the APNEP logo on appropriate documents, signage, and other materials.

5. **Message:**

APNEP will strive to ensure our messages are aligned with and compliment the US Environmental Protection Agency's National Estuary Program and the Association of National Estuary Programs. New fact sheets and templates developed for the ANEP website will be shared with partners to ensure consistent messaging at local, regional, and national levels.

Key Messages

- The Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership's mission is to identify, restore, and protect the significant resources of North Carolina and Virginia's Albemarle-Pamlico region, including North Carolina's major sounds.
- As an independent, science-based organization, APNEP brings together diverse groups to identify how we can act together to create a healthy Albemarle-Pamlico region.
- A healthy Albemarle-Pamlico region means a thriving natural world, a high quality of life for its people, and a vibrant economy.

Partner Engagement

As noted in the 2012-2022 CCMP, APNEP is well positioned to coordinate stewardship, environmental education, and management efforts across state lines, between all levels of government, and with a broad array of stakeholder groups in the region. APNEP's advisory committee structure ensures strong community ties throughout the region, and APNEP's partners consistently undertake engagement activities throughout the region. With its mission to protect the entire estuarine ecosystem, APNEP can identify opportunities to integrate and improve engagement efforts on a regional scale.

APNEP will primarily implement this strategy through engagement with our broad network of [partners](#) throughout the region in both states.

APNEP engages with partners directly through:

- Its Management Conference;
- Collaboration on projects and research;
- Financial and logistical support for projects;
- Sponsorship of initiatives that support CCMP implementation;
- Participation in external workgroups and committees;
- Facilitating collaborations among partners, and;
- Providing support for partner's work that is complimentary to APNEP's mission.

Assessment of Partnership Priorities

APNEP conducted a Needs Assessment in 2016 which included a number of questions related to partner engagement and communications. Consideration of the results has been incorporated into the development of this plan.

APNEP proposes to work through the Management Conference on an ongoing basis to identify priority CCMP Actions that include engagement and outreach components, then develop targeted engagement strategies that will be incorporated into each team's Action Plan and APNEP's workplan as appropriate. Budgetary needs and resources will be assessed and incorporated into the annual APNEP workplan. The methods of partner engagement described below will be prioritized as determined by the Management Conference.

Methods of Partner Engagement

1. **Staff Networking:** All program staff members will work to develop and maintain relationships with partner organizations throughout the region, particularly those relating to specific job responsibilities, ongoing projects and action team assignments.
2. **Management Conference:** Overarching partner engagement occurs through the underlying set up and structure of the Management Conference, which consists of the Leadership Council, Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC), Implementation Action Teams, Monitoring and Assessment Teams. An Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC) is expected to be formed during 2020.
3. **Full Membership and Participation by Committee Members:** APNEP staff will seek to maintain full membership on APNEP committees and encourage active participation by advisory committee members in APNEP outreach and engagement activities as relevant. APNEP will also encourage committee members to serve as ambassadors for APNEP in their other professional roles. APNEP staff will share program materials that facilitate this role.
4. **Action Teams and Monitoring and Assessment Teams:** Partner engagement largely occurs through the Implementation Action Teams and Monitoring and Assessment Teams. Team members will identify needs, priorities, and ideas to implement CCMP actions assigned to each team. Some of this will occur by sponsoring relevant partner initiatives, discussed below. Initial Team members will be selected by staff by identifying organizations and people with expertise or perspective relevant to the CCMP Actions of each Team. Additional members will be identified as needed based on the needs and priorities of each Action Team.
5. **Participation in external (non-APNEP) workgroups or committees:** APNEP staff regularly participate in external workgroups and committees to expand our reach, facilitate regional collaboration, and reciprocate volunteer involvement. Some workgroups align with core responsibilities and are outlined in position descriptions. Where possible, APNEP will prioritize projects that align with the complimentary missions of these external workgroups. Staff will actively seek opportunities to integrate external workgroup projects with APNEP Action Teams projects.

2018 – 2019 Engagement Strategy

Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership

6. **Collaboration on projects and research:** These include technical support, in-kind services, and logistical assistance for specific projects, as well as direct engagement with partners as needed.
7. **Cooperation:** APNEP will facilitate inter- and intra-agency cooperation to achieve CCMP objectives and goals. Examples of this include the development of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), Executive Orders (EOs), and the coordination of meetings and workshops.
8. **Engagement with targeted audiences:** Certain CCMP actions are geared towards the public or specifically identify targeted audiences (e.g. landowners, teachers, decision and policy makers). This form of engagement will be identified through the relevant action team.
9. **Sponsorship of partner initiatives, projects, and events:** APNEP will participate in or sponsor partner initiatives, projects, and events as relevant. Sponsorship and/or participation will be evaluated using the Evaluation Criteria in Appendix A.
10. **Grants and contracts:** APNEP directly provides financial support to partners for various initiatives through grants and contracts.
11. **Grant collaboration:** APNEP can also collaborate with partners to apply for external funding sources. APNEP is eligible to be a government partner applicant and can administer funds to its partners. However, we prefer some involvement in the funded project, rather than just serve as “pass-through” or grant administrator.
12. **Letters of Support:** APNEP provides letters of support to partners applying for grants. Support letters are tracked and staff will follow up to see if assistance is needed, help promote the effort, and include results towards evaluating progress towards CCMP implementation as appropriate.
13. **Promotion of partner sponsored initiatives** [as requested]. APNEP will actively promote partner activities that support CCMP implementation.

Levels of Partner Involvement

APNEP lists a large number of partners on its website. However, a great deal of variation exists in level of involvement. APNEP categorizes its partners as either “active,” “historic,” or “potential” partners, and seeks to tailor its partner engagement efforts accordingly.

1. **Active partners:** APNEP has many current active partners who volunteer their time by participating in the Management Conference while others actively participate in projects and actions to support CCMP implementation. Every effort will be made to foster, cultivate, and sustain these relationships and active involvement.

However, not all “active” partners are engaged at the same level, as outlined below.

- a. **Highly engaged:** Some are highly engaged, regularly participate, actively engaged in discussions, respond to requests, and actively seek opportunities to collaborate with and promote APNEP outside of meetings.
 - b. **Moderate Participant:** participate and attend meetings, not regularly engaged in discussions, little to no outside participation or interest.
 - c. **On the roster:** infrequent meeting participant, little to no participation outside of meetings, rarely attend meetings, little feedback during discussion.
2. **Historic partners:** Some partners have not been recently active in the Management Conference but are still engaged in the region. APNEP will seek to identify these groups and reach out to them to discuss partnership opportunities. In general, these discussions should be tied to needs identified through the Management Conference or APNEP staff due to programmatic needs and considerations.
 3. **Potential partners:** This category includes partners where APNEP staff have had interactions with the partner organization, but have not yet identified specific partnership opportunities, although there is interest from both parties. New partners will be identified as needed via direction from APNEP’s Management Conference or to support specific initiatives identified in the annual workplan.

Evaluation of Partner Engagement Efforts

APNEP will track its partner engagement efforts internally. It will assess the effectiveness of these efforts and develop metrics to determine whether or not engagement efforts are successful (e.g., increased participation from moderately active partners, participation from new partners, coordination results in collaboration on a specific project, etc.). APNEP will evaluate its engagement efforts and associated strategies annually to identify areas of strength and weakness.

Tools to Assess Partner Engagement

1. **Duke Client Based Master’s Program:** APNEP has taken advantage of the Duke University Client based master’s project program, where students conduct projects in collaboration with a real-world client. APNEP has a pending proposal entitled “Public Perceptions of Environmental Issues in the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine System to inform APNEP Management Prioritization.” and similar previous studies designed to evaluate public

2018 – 2019 Engagement Strategy Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership

attitudes and stakeholder perceptions of environmental issues and values in the region. One study included the Social Network Analysis study mentioned below.

2. **Social Network Analysis:** Pending available resources, APNEP will incorporate social network analysis tools into its ecosystem-based management toolkit to provide information on the structure and function of the conservation community in the Albemarle-Pamlico region. In 2013 a study was conducted by K.A. Brogan, titled "[Using Social Network Analysis to Identify Communication Patterns among Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership Partners.](#)" Key recommendations from this analysis are included in Appendix B.

Outreach, Education, and Community Engagement

Outreach Objectives

APNEP's outreach, education, and community engagement efforts are coordinated with communications and partner engagement in order to implement APNEP's CCMP, increase the visibility of the Partnership, strengthen core partnerships, and provide information and opportunities to the people of the Albemarle-Pamlico region. APNEP's outreach priorities are guided by the CCMP framework, with additional input from its Management Conference and the needs of its Action Teams. As Action Teams and the Management Conference identify priorities for outreach, APNEP's focus and goals may change over time.

In 2018, APNEP developed evaluation criteria which serve as the basis for APNEP's policy regarding participation or sponsorship of events. The APNEP Outreach Calendar (internal document) includes a calendar for APNEP's involvement in outreach, particularly for recurring events that APNEP consistently participates in. Guiding questions to evaluate APNEP's participation or commitment level for potential outreach events are available in Appendix A.

APNEP recognizes the importance of outreach and community engagement efforts that connect with the diverse communities of the region, including underrepresented and underserved groups. To this end, APNEP will seek to consider and address relevant barriers, such as language, literacy, transportation, and finances, when developing engagement efforts. In addition, APNEP will seek to ensure that there are opportunities for all stakeholders, regardless of education level, economic status, or job classification, to have a voice in APNEP's decision-making.

Outreach Strategies

APNEP is both directly and indirectly involved with outreach activities throughout the region. APNEP seeks to, when possible, participate and assist with outreach associated with funded projects and event sponsorships. While APNEP will participate in environmental education programming, its focus in terms of direct outreach is strategic tabling events that reach targeted audiences.

1. **Outreach associated with APNEP-funded projects or sponsorships.**
 - a. **Indirect Support:** As resources allow, APNEP will host or sponsor conferences or workshops that further CCMP implementation or promote its general mission. In addition, APNEP funds many projects that have outreach components. As of APNEP's 2017 Scope of Work, APNEP incentivized the incorporation of an outreach and/or communications component into APNEP funded projects. These activities should emphasize APNEP as a *sponsor* or *partner*.

2018 – 2019 Engagement Strategy

Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership

- b. **Direct Support:** When possible, APNEP will attempt to participate in events to which it has contributed funds as a sponsor or funder. Participation via tabling, leading or assisting with activities, or assisting with running an event helps raise awareness of the Partnership, provides opportunities to interact with existing and potential partners, and allows staff to take photo/video/notes for communications purposes. APNEP will also assist with logistical support for events, such as driving vehicles, assisting with set up or break down, or event promotion, as needed. Where possible these activities should emphasize APNEP as a *partner*.
 2. **Outreach at partner events throughout the Albemarle-Pamlico region:** While APNEP's priority is participation in events to which it has provided funding, the Partnership also participates in outreach and education events throughout the watershed. APNEP's participation in these events is guided by an evaluation of the event's relevance to the CCMP, Action Team guidance, participating partners, location, audience, and other criteria (Appendix A).
 - a. **Tabling Events:** At events where APNEP has a table, booth or display, the Partnership's goal is to use printed materials, images, resources, and activities to assist in CCMP implementation. Priority audiences include potential partner organizations, general public (volunteerism and land stewardship), farmers and agricultural communities, educators, policy and decision makers, state government officials and legislators, and outdoor recreation audiences such as boaters, fishermen, hikers, and paddlers.
 - b. **Environmental Education Events:** At events where APNEP staff are leading or assisting with educational or field activities, staff will focus on topics that dovetail with CCMP implementation. Priority topics are: ecosystem and human health, aquatic habitats, water quality, citizen science opportunities, and invasive species.
 3. **Coordinated outreach via Action Teams and associated action plans:** As Action Teams develop their action plans for implemented their assigned CCMP Actions, APNEP will as needed coordinate and/or facilitate communications or outreach campaigns that involve partners. Activities may require assistance from the Engagement and Stewardship Action Team, which has its own targeted set of actions but is also available to provide overarching support for the other teams.

Evaluation of Outreach Efforts

APNEP's goal is to develop a core set of outreach materials and activities and recurring participation in a set of events throughout the region that allow the Partnership to reach target audiences connect with core partners. APNEP will develop and utilize a simple set of metrics to evaluate its outreach, which will be analyzed annually and APNEP's outreach priorities changed accordingly.

Communications

The overall goal of APNEP's communications strategy is to increase the visibility of APNEP and our partners, as well as to communicate the value and role of the Partnership, in order to facilitate implementation of APNEP's mission and CCMP.

2018 – 2019 Engagement Strategy Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership

Communications Objectives

1. Increase partner engagement in implementing the CCMP by communicating the value of working with APNEP, as well as showcasing APNEP and partner accomplishments.
2. Increase awareness of APNEP through a consistent and recognizable face, message, logo, brand, etc.
3. Report CCMP implementation progress and maintain a transparent decision-making process.
4. Create, disseminate, and update print and online materials to target audiences, as well as maintain a current website.
5. Provide partners with opportunities to connect with one another and keep groups informed of what is happening in the wider APNEP network.
6. Employ communication strategies that consider the language, literacy, and abilities of target audiences.
7. Regularly collect data about reach, impact, and success of communications tools.
8. As needed, focus communications efforts on targeted groups in order to address specific CCMP Actions.

APNEP's communications strategy will vary by audience and project or specific purpose and are tied to the levels of partner engagement described earlier. Communication strategies for each of APNEP's target audiences are shown in Appendix C.

Communications Strategies:

1. **Communicate value of APNEP and partners**
 - a. Identify key messages that showcase the value APNEP brings to the Albemarle-Pamlico region, as well as the value of participation from partner organizations. Ways that partners can benefit from APNEP involvement beyond meeting participation will be emphasized. These messages will be incorporated into existing APNEP communications platforms as well as communicated to new or potential partners as a part of their introduction to APNEP.
 - b. Evaluate need for printed or online communications materials that can be given to partners or potential partners, which demonstrate the value and importance of being a part of APNEP.
 - c. Highlight APNEP-sponsored projects and programs. Feature work and progress of APNEP committees, teams, and advisory boards.
 - d. Feature the work of partners that supports CCMP implementation, even if APNEP is not directly involved. Share information regarding STAC and action team members.
2. **Consistent and recognizable branding**
 - a. Create and maintain consistent written and graphics materials for distribution (e.g., logo, colors, font, tagline, PowerPoint template, email signature, letterhead)
 - b. Maintain outreach and display materials consistent with branding and message. Maintain "What is APNEP" PowerPoint(s) and talking points for staff use.

2018 – 2019 Engagement Strategy
Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership

- c. Pursue media/marketing campaign(s) (e.g. social marketing) with specific behavior change message(s) related to CCMP priority issue(s) as appropriate.
 - d. Align message with the National Estuary Program and Association of National Estuary Programs when possible. APNEP will share fact sheets and other content from ANEP and NEP as relevant.
 - e. Participate in nationally-coordinated campaigns to promote the work of the NEP and federally funded programs, including National Estuaries Week, and I Heart Estuaries.
3. **Maintain transparent decision-making process and report CCMP implementation**
 - a. Explore ways for APNEP to better communicate its process for decision-making and project funding in order to ensure a view of the Partnership as transparent and equitable in its funding mechanisms, priorities, and opportunities for collaboration.
 - b. Annually report programmatic results to the public and stakeholders, describing progress linked towards annual workplan goals and milestones.
 - c. Create and update a multi-year, strategic communication plan that includes needs, target audience(s), objectives, project descriptions, deliverables, and deadlines. Review/revise annually.
4. **Update print and online materials, maintain website**
 - a. Efforts to create new materials or update existing materials will be tied to priorities identified by the Action Teams and other Management Conference members, in addition to needs evaluated by program staff.
 - b. Maintain and update printed materials for targeted outreach and communications purposes (CCMP, APNEP fact sheets, informational handouts, annual workplan, etc.)
 - c. Maintain and update APNEP website and other online materials (GIS maps, Storymaps, blog, e-newsletter, etc.).
 - d. Maintain social media platforms, utilizing new platforms and retiring outdated ones as relevant. Organize social media campaigns for events such as National Estuaries Week and APNEP events/symposia.
 - e. Generate press releases and facilitate publication of APNEP events and projects in local/regional media outlets as appropriate. Solicit opinion/editorial pieces from APNEP board members as appropriate.
 - f. Utilize photography and videography as appropriate for communications and outreach.
 - g. Coordinate with DEQ Creative Services to create and maintain printed and graphics materials, such as banners, posters, flyers, signs, and booklets.
5. **Facilitate partner networking and information-sharing**
 - a. Coordinate with NC DEQ & DNCR and VA DEQ Public Affairs to facilitate information-sharing and synergize APNEP and DEQ communications efforts.
 - b. Publicize and promote partner initiatives.
6. **Consider language, literacy, and abilities**
 - a. As needed, produce written materials in multiple languages and/or at appropriate literacy levels in order to reach target audience(s). Consider audience(s) when determined what type of communications materials would be most effective.
7. **Monitor effectiveness**

2018 – 2019 Engagement Strategy Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership

- a. Assess communications effectiveness and reach annually; modify strategy/workplan as needed.
 - b. Monitor socioeconomic indicators in order to report on impact of outreach and public involvement activities. Consider efforts to achieve and document behavior change.
8. **Address CCMP Actions via targeted communications initiatives**
- a. APNEP will develop targeted materials and outputs as outlined in the CCMP. Needs and details will be identified by the action teams, Leadership Council, and STAC and outlined in APNEP’s strategic communications and outreach plan on an annual basis.

APNEP will employ targeted communications strategies using the various tools described below. A strategic communications and outreach plan will be created annually based on newly-identified priorities and opportunities.

Communication Tools

1. **Print Materials**

APNEP maintains a core set of printed materials that provide an overview of APNEP, its mission, and the Albemarle-Pamlico estuary that are made available to stakeholders and used at outreach and education events including conferences. These materials include case statements, tabletop displays, banners, program presentations, and other program documents. These materials are available both online and in paper form.

Many of the outputs listed in the CCMP are tied to communications materials. APNEP regularly supports partners by providing financial support for educational resources such as the River Basin Booklets, Placemats, and informational brochures. The Engagement and Stewardship Action Team is considering current needs and priorities, and may incorporate development of new materials, or assisting partners with updating existing materials, into its action plan.

2. **Signs**

Where feasible, APNEP-supported restoration and demonstration projects will include the APNEP logo on any signage. APNEP has also participated in the development of educational signage and supported partners by providing financial support for signs.

3. **Traditional Media**

APNEP will coordinate with traditional print, television, and radio outlets to further program strategies contained within its CCMP. Traditional media offers the opportunity to enhance public awareness of regional conservation efforts and the program.

- a. **Press releases.** Press releases will publicize APNEP activities, initiatives and news. This may include but is not limited to publicizing requests for proposals, completion of joint initiatives between APNEP and its partners, and other newsworthy items. Press releases will be coordinated with designated NCDEQ and NCDNCR staff and staff of partner organizations when appropriate.
- b. **Media relations.** APNEP’s staff will develop and maintain relationships with news reporters in the region that cover environmental issues. APNEP will also work through

2018 – 2019 Engagement Strategy

Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership

DEQ's Communications Office to achieve this aim. As the opportunity arises, local media outlets will be invited to cover newsworthy events.

- c. **Opinion pieces.** APNEP staff will offer program support for Leadership Council or advisory committee members who wish to publish opinion pieces regarding environmental issues substantially related to APNEP's mission. All opinion pieces must conform to Leadership Council or advisory committee bylaws regarding representation of APNEP its Board or Committees.
 - d. **Photography and videography.** APNEP staff will take photos of outreach events, committee meetings, and other initiatives. Staff will also develop videos highlighting APNEP and key initiatives to reach target audiences and communicate key messages, working with Creative Services and other outside partners as needed.
 - e. **Other print and online media outlets.** When feasible, APNEP staff will work to publicize impactful and relevant APNEP initiatives through media outlets such as online/print magazines, news sites, and blogs. Publicizing APNEP's work through these channels will help increase local/regional recognition and understanding of the work APNEP does.
4. **Digital media:** Digital media offers an excellent opportunity for APNEP to directly and inexpensively connect with interested members of the public. APNEP engages its audiences by providing a variety of online media content. Trends, services, and capabilities within this medium change at a rapid rate, and APNEP will remain abreast of changing trends and best practices.
- a. **Website:** Where feasible, all program materials should be accessible or viewable at this source. The site should provide an overview of the estuarine system, provide information about the program, detail APNEP's current initiatives, and offer resources of interest to APNEP's target audiences. The website also serves as a clearinghouse for important APNEP documents such as the annual work plan and budget. APNEP's website structure and content were revamped in early 2019. Evaluation and updates to the new site occur as needed.
 - b. **GIS Visualization Products:** In summer 2018, APNEP developed an ArcGIS Online interactive map of 2012-2018 APNEP-funded initiatives. APNEP staff will add pre-2012 projects to the map and continue adding new projects on a semiannual basis. An APNEP Storymap is being developed, and further Storymaps will be created to accomplish specific communications objectives as needed.
 - c. **Social Media:** APNEP will maintain a social media presence on platforms that effectively reach its target audiences. APNEP will maintain an engaging and intelligent tone in its online communications. Currently the program maintains an active presence on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, but other forms of social media will continually be evaluated for inclusion in APNEP's communication strategy. Generally, content that highlights APNEP or partner sponsored initiatives will be shared on all three sites.

All social media relations will be conducted according to "Best Practices for Social Media Usage in North Carolina." Content on the sites should be posted in grammatically correct English. While social media will be used primarily to promote projects and initiatives

2018 – 2019 Engagement Strategy

Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership

that APNEP is directly involved in, it will also be utilized to share information about the region and used to highlight accomplishments of partners that are relevant to the APNEP region. The intent of content posted or shared on social media should be to inform, rather than to advocate. APNEP should not, directly or indirectly, ask followers to advocate for specific outcomes on its behalf or on the behalf of another organization.

Social media sites should be regularly monitored for spam or negative commentary. Entries including spam or profane commentary may be deleted, but a record of the entry should be kept in accordance with NC's open records act. Negative but non-profane commentary is uncommon but should remain posted. Comments of this nature should be addressed in concert with the program director, with consultation from NCDEQ's Communications Office if necessary.

- i. **Twitter.** All of APNEP's content should be posted to Twitter, but the service's 280-character limit requires brevity. APNEP staff will provide regular program updates and communicate directly with other Twitter users.
- ii. **Facebook.** Most Facebook users that subscribe to APNEP's content are members of the public with an interest in conservation issues, and they view content on their personal time. Posts should consider this audience and provide content that is regular but carefully curated. Posts that contain information appropriate for a Twitter post can be expanded to provide more detail for Facebook posts. A major concern of many users is that programmatic content might become overwhelming, and APNEP will aim to post no more than 3 Facebook updates per week, except unless extraordinary developments occur.
- iii. **LinkedIn.** LinkedIn users are mostly professionals working or seeking work in the field of conservation. APNEP utilizes a company page to reach a professional audience, communicate directly with other LinkedIn users, and potentially reach its targeted partner audience. As with Facebook or Twitter, anyone can follow a company page. If there are no program updates, a suggested schedule for LinkedIn Company posts should sync with what is posted on Facebook, with the caveat that content on LinkedIn should be professional in tone and content.
- iv. **YouTube.** APNEP hosts program videos on its YouTube channel. Most content was created by former interns. The videos will be shared and distributed as appropriate, but there is not a need to update content regularly on YouTube.
- v. **Inactive Social Media Platforms**
 - **Flickr.** Although APNEP is no longer actively maintaining its Flickr page, it is still online and available to the public.
 - **Instagram.** APNEP suspended use of its Instagram account in 2016 due to recommendations from former staff.
 - **Pinterest.** In 2016, APNEP created an account on Pinterest, an online platform that allows users to share and save content to virtual collections called pinboards (also referred to as simply "boards").
 - **iNaturalist.** APNEP has an iNaturalist account, an online social network that allows users to share photos of plants and animals they find in the natural world. iNaturalist is a crowdsourced species identification

2018 – 2019 Engagement Strategy

Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership

system and organism occurrence recording tool. Currently, the account is not actively maintained.

- d. **Mailing list and Newsletter:** APNEP maintains a mailing list currently hosted by Mailchimp. Only APNEP staff can send email through this service, and the service gives subscribers the option to instantly subscribe or unsubscribe without the investment of staff resources. Because most environmental professionals communicate primarily through email, this medium enables consistent contact with that target audience. APNEP's monthly newsletter is sent through the email list, as well as other important announcements as needed. APNEP's email newsletter, "Sound Stories" is published using Mailchimp.
- e. **Soundings Blog:** APNEP's Soundings Blog is used to highlight current projects, partners, and committee initiatives. Blog posts may be written by APNEP staff, solicited from outside groups, or republished from other publications with permission. The blog is distributed online via our various social media outlets and the newsletter, and is highly visible on APNEP's home page. Please view the Blog's Editorial Guidelines (internal document) for details.

Evaluation of Communications Efforts

APNEP will periodically evaluate its communications plan and associated strategies to identify areas of strength and weakness.

1. **Performance Metrics.** APNEP has developed and will continue monitoring metrics of communications performance, such as social media followers/reach, website traffic, and newsletter subscriptions/opens. These metrics are available through Google Analytics and integrated social media monitoring tools. Also, APNEP will evaluate communications efforts according to indicators developed to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of CCMP efforts. Results will be reported annually.
2. **Needs Assessment and other Feedback.** APNEP will periodically solicit feedback from its membership and the public regarding its communication efforts. In 2016, APNEP conducted a needs assessment which included questions regarding current communication strategies. A future strategy may be to conduct a survey to determine how stakeholders and the public in the region perceive the efforts of APNEP and partners or how stakeholders receive information. These could be conducted via the Duke Client Based Master's Program mentioned above, or in partnership with research partners.

Appendix A: Assessment of APNEP Participation in Outreach and Education Events

Staff will use the following questions as a guideline to determine the value or benefit of participating in or providing financial support for (sponsoring) an event. APNEP participation versus sponsorship of an event will be determined based on the level of need for direct outreach (participation) versus funding (sponsorship), as well as APNEP staff time/availability, available funds, and the partners involved in the event. Every question may not be relevant to each request. Flexibility is inherent, as new opportunities and activities present themselves from time to time, and as we engage new partners throughout the region. Questions are listed in order of importance.

Participation: Participation is defined as the attendance of APNEP staff at an event, festival, conference, workshop, or other outreach event. While APNEP's participation may involve indirect costs in terms of staff time, travel costs, and supply costs, there is no direct funding of the organizing partner(s).

Sponsorship: APNEP may provide funds to sponsor an organization's event. To qualify for sponsorship, an event must be one that APNEP staff could participate in, as either facilitators or attendees, as time and staff availability allows. Examples of sponsored events include conferences, workshops, festivals/community events, and collaborative environmental education or outreach events involving many partners. Sponsorship requests above \$2,500 (the current cap for invoices vs. contract) will be referred to the appropriate Management Conference entity for consideration.

Evaluation Criteria: Questions for participating in education and outreach events and/or sponsoring conferences & workshops:

Criteria must be fulfilled for APNEP **participation and/or sponsorship:**

1. Does the event or sponsorship address CCMP actions, and which one(s)? Events addressing CCMP Actions that haven't been implemented or which have been identified as Partnership priorities take precedence over other requests.
2. Would the event or sponsorship support APNEP's brand / image as a neutral, science-based organization? APNEP will not attend or sponsor advocacy-focused events that may undermine its credibility.

At least one of the following criteria must be fulfilled for APNEP **sponsorship:**

1. Is the request targeting an audience that APNEP's Management Conference has identified as a strategic need for the Partnership? (Ex: local governments), or would help APNEP to build (or rebuild) a relationship with the potential partner organization?
2. Does the person/organization making the request participate significantly in the Management Conference via the Leadership Council, STAC, IAC, Action Teams, or other workgroups?
3. Does the sponsored event benefit a large number of partners, directly or indirectly? Examples: conferences, workshops, etc.

2018 – 2019 Engagement Strategy
Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership

Other criteria to take into account when deciding whether to **participate in or sponsor** an event. At least one target audience must be reached.

1. Who are the target audience(s) for the event?
 - a. Does the event reach an under-targeted or underserved population? Examples include: Tier 1 counties, Title IX schools, counties targeted by the Hometown Strong/Governor's Rural Initiative)
 - b. Does the event reach groups across regional, watershed, or geopolitical boundaries? (Virginia partners, bringing new groups together for collaboration)
 - c. Does the event allow APNEP to reach one of its target audiences for outreach (see Outreach table)?
 - i. General public (volunteerism, land stewardship), Agricultural communities, Educators, Policy and decision makers at multiple levels and from all branches of federal, state, and local government, outdoor recreation audiences (boaters, fishermen, hikers, paddlers)
2. How much of a time commitment / staff logistics is needed?
3. How much leverage can be obtained from participating? Examples of leverage include financial contributions, relationship building opportunities, and registration/attendance cost waivers for APNEP staff.

Appendix B: Key Findings from K.A. Brogan’s “Using Social Network Analysis to Identify Communication Patterns Among Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership Partners” (2013)

- APNEP should work to facilitate collaboration on interstate (NC/VA) environmental initiatives.
- Particularly in North Carolina, there is a lack of connections between state agencies and NGOs. APNEP can play a role in matching state agencies and NGOs that have similar objectives and/or projects.
- Academic and educational institutions are relatively isolated from the larger network, with limited connections to professionals working in other sectors. APNEP should work to connect the financial resources of their university affiliates with their monitoring, research, and management data needs. one of the largest estuary systems in the country. Additionally, ensuring that educational institutions are aware of current conservation and restoration projects in the region, and working with the institutions to communicate effectively about Albemarle-Pamlico watershed issues, can increase volunteer participation in APNEP projects and public support for APNEP and its partners.
- APNEP should work to integrate isolated organizations and individuals (as identified by the social network analysis) into the larger regional network. However, prior to devoting time and resources to developing stronger relationships with isolated organizations, APNEP should evaluate whether partnerships or involvement would be relevant or useful, and adjust the strength of involvement (communication vs active collaboration) accordingly.
- Highly connected, and therefore presumably influential, individuals in the network could also be considered for inclusion on APNEP’s advisory committees and Leadership Council to provide a broadly-connected perspective of regional environmental issues.
- APNEP should focus on delivering relevant policy and project information to key players, and ask them to pass along the information to their professional networks to increase the efficiency and range of APNEP communications’ distribution. By leveraging the connectedness of key players, APNEP will be able to reach larger portions of the network through direct contact.
- APNEP should seek to involve people with strong inter-state connections in regional planning and outreach initiatives. In addition, holding meetings and workshops in areas convenient for both coastal Virginia and North Carolina stakeholders, and publicizing these events through outreach in both states, should bring a variety of interested parties together and foster collaboration between attendees from different areas and organizations.
- APNEP should identify and communicate with areas that are currently left out of wider regional activity. Areas in northwest Virginia and North Carolina were relatively under-represented in the geographic analysis, and could be important areas of outreach for APNEP given the watershed dynamics and the impacts of upstream activities on estuary health.

2018 – 2019 Engagement Strategy
Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership

Appendix C: Partner Engagement Strategies *Table Note: This table was developed using the Morro Bay National Estuary Program Strategic Communications Plan 2013-2016*

Communication Tool	Audience												Communication Goal(s)
	Public/visitors	Partners	Media	Educators (Formal/informal)	Policy-makers	NEPs and EPA	Federal/state/local government	Universities and Researchers	Community leaders	Non-profits	Landowners/Residents	Business	
Website	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Information hub for resources, news, data, related to APNEP/partners.
Soundings Blog	X	X						X	X		X		Showcase APNEP/partner projects, research, progress.
Social Media	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	Keep public/partners informed and share info.
Newsletter		X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X	Showcase APNEP/partner efforts and upcoming opportunities. Demonstrate APNEP's value.
Email	X	X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X	Provide info about important and time-sensitive announcements.
Brochures and Public Outreach Publications	X	X		X					X		X	X	Tell APNEP story and showcase APNEP value. Provide steps for engagement, w/APNEP/partners.
News Releases and Published Articles	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	Provide updates about important APNEP/partner accomplishments. Increase APNEP visibility.
Video	X	X	X										Tell APNEP story and showcase why APNEP is important/relevant.
Workshops		X		X	X		X	X	X		X		Engage targeted audiences, provide information and build partnerships.
K-12 Lesson Plans				X									Provide resources for educators, increase APNEP visibility.
Outreach Events	X								X		X	X	Engage targeted groups to provide info, increase APNEP visibility, and accomplish CCMP Actions.
Public Talks and Presentations	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X		Provide information, engage/educate targeted groups, increase APNEP visibility.
Planned or Potential Future Communication Tools													

2018 – 2019 Engagement Strategy
Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership

AGOL Storymap/Interactive Project Map	X	X					X		X	X	X	X	Showcase APNEP accomplishments, tell the APNEP story.
Fact Sheets		X	X		X		X	X		X	X		Showcase APNEP accomplishments, demonstrate value of partnering with APNEP.
Media Kits			X										Facilitate relationships with media outlets, increase APNEP visibility and showcase accomplishments.
State of the Sound Report	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Provide information about AP region to partners and public, serve as trusted source for holistic ecosystem assessment.
Annual Report		X				X							Showcase APNEP accomplishments/progress. Demonstrate program value and keep partners informed.
Monitoring Data Summary Reports		X			X	X	X	X		X			Provide information about AP region to partners and public, serve as hub for partner data/analysis.
Radio Announcements	X										X		Provide information and increase APNEP visibility.
Print Advertising	X										X		Provide information and increase APNEP visibility.
Stakeholder Briefings	X		X								X	X	Provide information and increase APNEP visibility.