2011 Innovations Awards Application

DEADLINE: MARCH 28, 2011

ID # (assigned by CSG): 2011-____________________

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: South Carolina

Assign Program Category (applicant): Government Operations and Technology – Public Information (Use list at end of application)

1. Program Name: Office of the Community Liaison, Environmental Quality Control
2. Administering Agency: South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SC DHEC)
3. Contact Person (Name and Title): Bob King, Deputy Commissioner
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9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program. This is our Public Participation Initiative. We are striving to change the culture within the Office of Environmental Quality Control (EQC), S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control, while providing more meaningful community involvement with our stakeholders.

10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 28, 2011 to be considered. The original initiative began in 2003; however, the renewed initiative began around 2006. The public participation initiative began when a committee was formed to address public participation issues. It became the Public Participation Task Force (“Task Force”), which consists of approximately 25 persons from all three program areas (air, water, land and waste management) as well as region and EQC Administration staff; there is a good cross between upper management, mid-level, and administrative staff on the Task Force. The renewed emphasis came about when additional public participation staff was hired in 2006.

11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address? This initiative first began to address plain language issues; however, once the Task Force members began to discuss the various issues they quickly realized it was much greater than just plain language that needed to be addressed. Our agency was having a difficult time when the Task Force was formed; it appeared that everyone was frustrated. Citizens were not having their needs addressed in a timely manner. DHEC staff were frustrated as well because there was the mentality that “this is the way we have always done it” versus those who believed there had to be a better method for working with citizens. Our upper management believed it was more appropriate for staff to be working in a more proactive process rather than a reactive process in issues that impact our stakeholders.
12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

DHEC has an EQC Community Liaison who serves as the State Environmental Justice Coordinator as well. After years of working with staff and citizens, environmental groups, etc., she started to see some areas that needed improvement. She asked upper management for support to form a group to discuss how we could improve our plain language efforts. As stated before, it grew and the Task Force was formed. The Task Force began to discuss the public participation efforts and how those could be improved upon as a whole. In March 2004, eleven of the 25 Task Force members participated in a weeklong training that was conducted by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2); this training was funded by monies from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Office of Civil Rights. The courses taught were “Planning for Effective Public Participation” and “Effective Communication for Public Participation.” It was provided at a critical time as it provided guidance and direction to those working to enhance SC DHEC’s public participation initiative.

The Task Force developed a good outline for their initiative. They had: 1) Defined public participation; 2) Developed a Position and Mission Statement; 3) Determined the core values of public participation for EQC; 4) Provided management directives; and, 5) Established goals. One of the recommendations was to establish a work group for each program area. A Public Participation Program Work Group Retreat was held. At the retreat, individuals who had been chosen to serve on their public participation program work group learned what the task force had done thus far and were given a charge by the Deputy and Assistance Deputy Commissioners. The charge was to look at how public participation was currently being conducted, how it could be improved, and what training was necessary to improve our public participation efforts. During the retreat, they were also showed a video, “Introduction to Public Participation,” that task force members had written and produced. The video was developed as a tool for public participation staff to use to assist with introducing the initiative to other staff. It was received very favorably.

After another meeting with the Work Groups, three main items stood out where work needed to be enhanced. Those three items were: 1) Continue to change the culture within EQC; 2) Provide training to EQC staff on public participation; and, 3) Develop evaluation tools. In recent years, EQC has added additional public participation positions.

One way to really impact change was to hire additional public participation staff. Before, it had been the EQC Community Liaison and her assistant whose title was a Community Program Coordinator. An Upstate Community Liaison position had been temporarily held, but was vacated. In order to make these positions successful, individuals would need to be selected with less technical expertise and more people skills. We began by filling the Upstate Community Liaison position. Once it was filled, we added a Coastal Community Liaison position. These staff worked in all program medias (air, water, and land). The liaisons’ primary roles are to assist with addressing citizens’ complaints, facilitate/mediate meetings (internal and external) that they have coordinated so as to bring together various stakeholders to discuss an issue, and work towards building better relations among the parties. These liaisons often have to bring various program areas together to discuss an issue as these areas normally do not communicate with each other. Also, two additional Public Participation Liaison positions were added. One of those was added in the Bureau of Air Quality and the other was added in the Bureau of Land and Waste Management. They are available to assist internal staff with their public participation issues. We did have a third position within the Bureau of Water, but due to budget cuts, that position was eliminated; we hope to add...
this position again in the future. Once these positions were established, we began to see changes
and an increase in discussions with citizens on issues of concern.

We have strived to improve all of our public participation processes by working to change the
culture within the Office of Environmental Quality Control. Below are a few of the items we have
done to begin to change the culture:
• Coordinated and conducted 3 Public Participation Listening Sessions across State with
  various stakeholders to receive their input on our public participation processes.
• Created tools to be utilized by staff to conduct more meaningful public participation (ex.
• Conducted Public Participation Benchmark Survey for SC DHEC EQC staff
• Created 2 subcommittees (Public Education & Interaction and Early, Consistent &
  Effective Notification) to address some of the major concerns heard from the statewide
  listening sessions
• Updated Core Values for Public Participation
• Developed a Strategy for Task Force
• Implemented a Public Participation campaign and revised Community Involvement
  webpage (www.scdhec.gov/communityinvolvement)

The most recent way to work towards changing the culture has been to provide “Fundamentals of
Public Participation” training for all environmental staff. This is training that the public
participation staff developed with a training guide manual. Beginning in July 2010 thru March 28,
2011, we have trained approximately 1028 staff and have held over 48 classes; we still have 2
additional classes that will be taught in the very near future. Each 3½ hour class had
approximately 25 participants. The course was designed to be interactive, using techniques that
could be used to engage a stakeholder during a process. Overall, the course has received very
favorable reviews and public participation staff has begun to see an increased request for
assistance.

Our philosophy is simple. We believe that if we are conducting meaningful public
involvement, we are addressing the needs of those who reside within environmental justice
communities.

Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of
race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and
enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. EPA has this goal for all
communities and persons across this Nation. It will be achieved when everyone enjoys the same
degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision-
making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.

One attribute that has contributed towards the success of our initiative has been our partnership
with Cynthia Peurifoy, who is the Program Manager for the Office of Environmental Justice, U. S.
EPA – Region 4 Office. She has worked with us to address issues and enhance our environmental
justice program within our State.

We are also very fortunate to have a State House of Representative who is very much an
environmental justice advocate. S. C. Representative Harold Mitchell was an environmental
community activist before becoming a Representative. One of the first things he did was to
introduce legislation that passed and became Act 171 in June 2007. He modeled this legislation
after the formation of the Federal Interagency Work Group on Environmental Justice (IWG-EJ);
this is comprised of 15 federal agencies and several White House offices. The Act passed by the S. C. General Assembly formed the S. C. Environmental Justice Advisory Committee. It consisted of 13 state agencies and 3 academia. DHEC chaired and staffed the Advisory Committee which was charged with studying environmental justice as it relates to revitalization and redevelopment within SC. The following are some of the activities that the Advisory Committee conducted:

- 4 EJ Listening Sessions held around the State
- 4 Subcommittees – Health, Revitalization & Reuse, Policy, Education & Awareness
- State Agency Survey
- Final Report which was submitted to Governor/General Assembly in Jan. 2010
- Rep. Mitchell introduced and will be reintroducing legislation that addresses the main recommendation of the report. The recommendation was two-part – 1) Establish the “Equitable Redevelopment Commission”; and, 2) Maintain the Advisory Committee under the name of the “South Carolina Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice”. When introduced last year, this legislation did not pass.

The IWG-EJ had offered grants to 15 communities across the nation that allowed these communities to build capacity as these agencies brought about their resources to bring about change within these communities. South Carolina did not have the monies available to offer such a grant to communities across South Carolina. However, the U. S. EPA recognized they had additional monies that needed to be used in 2009, so they put out a Request for Proposals so that state environmental agencies could apply for an Environmental Justice Cooperative Agreement. SC DHEC was 1 of 5 state agencies across the nation awarded a Cooperative Agreement. The Cooperative Agreement consists of the following:

- $160,000 for 3 years (began October 2009)
- The following 4 applicants were selected to receive $25,000 each from SC DHEC – approximately $8,000 a year. These pilot communities are working to build capacity using a collaborative, problem-solving approach as they identify environmental and social justice issues. As partners, DHEC and the EPA are identifying potential resources that have services and/or programs that can be used by the pilots to assist with revitalizing their communities.
- 4 pilot communities within South Carolina are:
  - A Place For Hope
  - Blackmon Road community (York County)
  - Community Development & Improvement Corporation
  - Graniteville, Vaucluse, and Warreenville communities (Aiken County)
  - The Imani Group, Inc.
  - Central Savannah River Region Area/Savannah River Site outline
  - Lowcountry Alliance for Model Communities
  - North Charleston, SC

In December 2010, SC DHEC and the U. S. EPA-Region 4 Office hosted the, “Environmental, Economic, and Social Sustainability Summit.” During this summit, the four pilot communities had one-hour each to introduce themselves to other Federal agencies and other organizations that have resources and tell them about their needs in hopes to obtain future partnerships with various attendees of the Summit. The pilots are presently following up with the Summit and planning meetings with those Federal agencies to begin discussions about possible partnerships.

One additional note, SC DHEC was awarded the EPA National Environmental Achievement Award in 2008. This award recognizes organizations for their distinguished accomplishments in
addressing environmental justice issues; we were awarded our due to our public participation initiative.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method? This approach is new and creative in many ways. First, our approach is going above and beyond what is required by our regulations and/or laws. Second, we believe that if we are conducting meaningful community involvement then we are also meeting the needs of those who are in environmental justice communities as well.

14. What were the program’s start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.) The original start-up costs covered salaries for the Community Liaison. Throughout the years, additional positions have been added. Approximately four years ago, the Community Liaison’s Office received an operating budget.

15. What are the program’s annual operational costs? The current operational budget for Public Participation consists of approximately $52,138.00 per year.

16. How is the program funded? The Task Force efforts are in-kind as they are serving on a subcommittee. The public participation team staff is paid by state and federal monies from various programs and fees across the medias (air, water, land and waste management).

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number. In order to enhance the environmental justice component of our public participation initiative, Representative Harold Mitchell fully supports our initiative. Upon being elected in the House, during a special election, Rep. Mitchell introduced H.B. 3933. It passed and became Act 171 in 2007. This legislation created the, “South Carolina Environmental Justice Advisory Committee.” The Committee was charged with studying existing practices with state agencies as it related to environmental justice and determining if these agencies had existing programs/services in place that could assist with economic development and revitalization of these environmental justice communities. DHEC staff chaired and staffed the Advisory Committee. Passage of this legislation was very important as it mandated that thirteen state agencies and three academia be active participants of the advisory committee.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program? Basis equipment, technology, and software.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator’s name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address. Nancy Whittle is our EQC Community Liaison. She was the visionary, coordinator, and leader on this initially. She can be contacted at: EQC Administration, SC DHEC, 2600 Bull Street, Columbia, SC 29201; (803) 896-8967; whittlnc@dhec.sc.gov.

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ? No, we are not aware of a similar program. Although other state regulatory agencies across the region may have an Office/staff that work specifically on public participation issues, we are not aware of any state regulatory agencies that have established a board/task force and have staff dedicated to the initiative. In February 2011, the Deputy Commissioner and the EQC Community Liaison were asked by the Regional Director for the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency – Region 4 Office to come and speak to the other State Regional Directors on our Community Involvement/Public Participation/Environmental Justice Initiative. Since then, a few of the states have asked for further discussions about the initiative.

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken? Yes. The Public Participation Task Force and the Public Participation staff continue to work towards enhancing the initiative as this is not a cookie cutter approach, it is a process. However, although we believe the program
is sustaining, we still need to fill positions that have been vacated due to dire budget restraints in certain program areas. When we obtain additional monies, we also would like to create a regional community liaison for the central part of the state. We want to create this position because we have the EQC Community Liaison who works on more controversial sites/complaints across the entire state as well as complaints within the central part of the state, which consists of 22 counties. Also, the Community Program Coordinator under her direct supervision and the only staff housed within her office also works on special projects, such as overseeing the U. S. EPA Environmental Justice Cooperative Agreement and other projects related to environmental justice issues.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program’s effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

Best Practices:
1. Must have top management support in order to conduct and maintain meaningful community involvement.
2. Very fortunate to have forged strong partnerships. One is with Rep. Mitchell who fully understands environmental justice issues and the importance of having the state regulatory agency as a close partner, and is willing to advocate for either and/or both when needed. Another strong partnership is between DHEC and the EPA.
3. Having budgeted for appropriate staff whose job it is to work with communities to assist them with their environmental and social justice concerns.

Challenges:
1. Changing the culture in a large bureaucratic organization takes time, especially when they hide behind the regulations.
2. Need additional funding to hire additional community involvement staff to cover more regions across state and to also fill position currently vacant in the Bureau of Water.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception? Since the beginning of the initiative in 2003, EQC has grown and developed so much towards conducting meaningful community involvement. We have very recently transferred a Bureau and its staff from the health side of our agency to the environmental side of our agency. Public Participation staff has recognized the difficulty this staff has identifying with this initiative. However, it is upper management that continues to remind us to give it time because just like our staff was apprehensive in the beginning, now they support the initiative, so will this staff.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

a). Changing the culture in a large bureaucratic organization takes time and is very hard work. Although the U. S. EPA has an initiative, it is not a model for others to replicate. Therefore, states are left on their own to develop what is best for each of their agencies. Staffs in environmental regulatory agencies rely heavily on the science and the regulations. Doing meaningful public participation often requires going above and beyond the regulations and/or laws. At SC DHEC, we recognize that not all EQC staff will adopt this initiative wholeheartedly. It is our intent to reach those 80% within the bell curve early in the process so they can learn the techniques and begin to make change, changing our public participation outcomes. In order to sustain public participation, other states will have to have upper management support throughout the entire process. Because otherwise, staff will just think it is a buzz-word that is going to go away when the present management changes. State regulatory agencies need to do a better job of communicating with their stakeholders, and in order to do that our processes have to change. Putting time, money, and support into an community involvement initiative, will in the long-term help citizens make better decisions and will help them to better understand why we have made the decisions we have in the process.
b). With state agencies struggling to meet their current budgets, to begin and obtain support for a new program and/or initiative may be difficult at this time. Because to succeed and sustain, additional funding will be needed to either hire and/or add community involvement staff to begin or enhance the initiative across the state; having staff in local communities helps to build relationships with these individuals and groups.

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