

## **Building Capital RC&D Capacity by Supporting our Communications Goals and Participation in the South Mountain Collaborative**

### **1. What is the organizational capacity building need that you are proposing to meet with this funding?**

Capital Resource Conservation and Development Area Council, Inc. (Capital RC&D) is a not-for-profit regional organization that serves seven counties in south central Pennsylvania including the four counties of the South Mountain Partnership. We work with landowners and many partner groups at the local, county and state level to reduce pollution and conserve our region's natural resource wealth as well as link citizens to local agriculture. To do this we help farmers, landowners and citizen groups who want to improve the soil, water and natural habitat they control through grants and training. We also provide help to farmers wishing to sell their food, fiber and wood products locally through services such as individual consultations and trainings. In addition, we work with newly formed organizations with complementary missions or services by supporting their administration and development. In 2015, we assisted more than 120 landowners and natural resource-based businesses and two fledgling organizations.

Because we have a large and varied set of programs and partners we seek to improve our ability to communicate about them more succinctly and clearly both to an internal and external audience. We believe that strengthening our communications capacity will strengthen our operational capacity by helping our board, staff and partners better understand and contribute to our programs and operations. This improvement will lead to stronger fundraising and support of Capital RC&D that will strengthen our capacity to support the South Mountain Initiative.

During 2015, Capital RC&D developed a new five year strategic plan reflecting input from our board and partners; our plan can be seen on our website - [capitalrcd.org](http://capitalrcd.org). The goals our board identified to develop organizational capacity are intended to address a significant need to improve internal and external communication. This ambitious strategic plan provides us with an excellent road map for prioritizing and improving our communications strategies and addresses the communications needs identified repeatedly during interviews with board members and stakeholders.

Our communications limitations are also clearly tied to the operational limitations identified by the capacity assessment tool distributed by the Chesapeake Bay Trust. The positive perception and commitment of our volunteer board and the improvement of our internal communications are strongly tied together. The commitment of the board and other partners is also critical for communications and outreach for a small nonprofit like Capital RC&D in that the board and partners can amplify and target communications about our programs and mission. Improving board and partner perception and commitment will also support other components of our operational capacity by helping to identify and fill operational gaps.

Some of the 2016 communications action steps identified in our strategic plan have been accomplished, however, due to limited staff time many steps have not been completed. This proposal, in part, seeks funds for staff time to help Capital RC&D implement the communications elements of our strategic plan,

staff time to participate in the South Mountain Partnership capacity building initiative and staff time to improve tracking of our program outcomes. Our request is broken down into three activities.

**Activity 1** - The implementation of Capital RC&D's strategic plan communications goals and action steps requires significant manpower to develop communications tools that will better inform our board, staff, partners and stakeholders about the programs and services of our organization. Our initial timetable for implementation has proved to be too optimistic given the limited staff time we are able to devote to plan implementation and as a result implementation of the first year actions steps has fallen behind.

Capital RC&D's small staff is primarily supported by project work which leaves very little time to implement the action steps identified in our plan. We would like to use organizational capacity building funds to enable Capital RC&D to hire a part time staff person, freeing Capital's Executive Director and Program and Outreach Manager to move the remaining 2016 and 2017 strategic plan communication strategies forward.

**Activity 2** - In addition to implementation of the communications components of Capital RC&D's strategic plan, we are also requesting funds for staff time to attend and constructively participate in the further development of the South Mountain capacity building initiative. Seven meetings are planned for 2017 requested funds will enable Capital RC&D staff to be an active collaborator throughout 2017 and provide enough funds to support work plan implementation outside of the meetings as well.

**Activity 3** – An additional need strongly tied to communication is tracking of our program impact. Currently, we rely on individual project reporting to track our impact but do not compile the aggregate impact of our many funded projects. We are requesting funding for staff time to develop a stronger reporting system that will be used by all program staff to report and aggregate project impact.

## **2. How does meeting this need make your organization a stronger partner and allow you to fulfill the role identified for you in the collaborative work plan?**

**Activity 1** - Implementation of Capital RC&D's communications goals is an important next step to strengthen Capital RC&D's partnership capabilities in three ways. First, improved communications will strengthen our operational and management capacity by giving better understanding of our many programs to our board of directors helping them better govern and support the operations of our organization. Second, our board members are appointed by the county commissioners and county conservation district boards in each of our counties, as such, having a better understanding of the organization and its programs will help our board members better communicate with the entities who appointed them as well as with various stakeholder groups throughout our region, strengthening and amplifying our communications and building partnerships. Communication about the South Mountain initiative and our role will be supported by the development of board communications. Finally, better communications to board, staff and partners will enhance Capital RC&D's fundraising capacity by building strong projects based on better knowledge of community need and regional partnerships including those identified by the CBI.

The South Mountain Partnership is an important partner for Capital RC&D. We share very similar missions but employ different implementation methods. Although we share many partners the organizations we work with most are focused on agriculture and private land stewardship including the implementation of Farm Bill programs and programs and partnerships that tie together local agriculture

and food security/healthy eating concerns. With this funding we will be able to bring that focus to implementation of the South Mountain Initiative work plan.

**Activity 2** – Funding for staff time to continue to collaborate with the capacity building team will help Capital RC&D to continue to support current programs and partnerships without draining valuable administrative funds away from our current work, including development of programs that will ultimately benefit the South Mountain work plan.

**Activity 3** – Tracking of program impact is critical to our communications strategy and will help us know how well we are doing in support of our mission, the most important element to communicate to all stakeholders. Improved program reporting will also improve Capital RC&D capacity to evaluate our programming and improve our programs. This reporting will also be shared with appropriate members of the partnership to inform members about the success of strategies as well as communicate identified needs.

### **3. Please list the specific tasks/activities you plan to undertake to accomplish your objective.**

Capital RC&D will implement the following tasks/activities during 2017 with support from this grant program.

#### **Activity 1 - Capital RC&D Communications Activities/Products**

- Evaluation of current message and distribution systems
- Development of internal communications tools including the adoption of language for an elevator speech and training of the board for delivery of the elevator speech
- Work with board and partners to develop a list of stakeholder groups with which to develop regular communications
- Begin development of regular communications vehicles including e-newsletter
- Update of logo and branding language
- Development of a general audience brochure using new logo and language
- Update of website using new logo, colors and language
- Development of a fiscal agent outreach materials as well as fiscal agent approval process, to help us better support fledgling organizations

#### **Activity 2 - South Mountain Capacity Building**

- Participate in seven collaborative meetings including preparation and follow-up
- Support activities for the collaborative work plan. The current work plan includes several possible roles. Such as supporting goal B strategy 8, “communicating the importance of agriculture and forestry as an economic driver; strategies under goal C “Further public health” strategies C1, C2 and C4 that relate to issues of “healthy food” distribution including waste food gleaning and other strategies to link local food to low income citizens. Additionally, Capital RC&D has worked extensively promoting agricultural best management practices a strategy identified under goal D “improve water quality.”

#### **Activity 3 – Program Impact Tracking**

- Develop excel-based database to track program impact
- Compile impact data for 2015 and 2016
- Share impact data with stakeholders and funders