



Overcoming Obstacles

Every project faces its share of problems on the path to completion. Projects incorporating unfamiliar practices and concepts, like those integral to sustainable stormwater management, may provoke a different set of challenges than those with a more conventional approach. These obstacles typically stem from a lack of familiarity with the practices, a rigid or restrictive regulatory structure or a general resistance to change. Your approach to the project and to issues raised during development affects your ability to prevent or overcome barriers and to meet project goals and expectations.

Barriers to development can come from a variety of sources

- **Restrictive regulations or regulatory processes** – Municipalities with limited understanding of or familiarity with sustainable stormwater best management practices (BMPs) may limit the use of “unconventional” or new practices or approaches or delay project development.
- **Resistance from internal or organizational sources** – Organizations often develop standard processes and procedures for developing and implementing projects. The addition of new, less familiar practices or development approaches may be met with resistance initially as they may be seen as an extra hassle or a diversion from the “status quo.”
- **Resistance from the community** – Members of the local community often have opinions on projects or initiatives that may change the look or function of the local area. They may balk at projects they do not perceive as a good fit or those that do not provide an obvious benefit.
- **Lack of technical knowledge** – Designers and engineers may be resistant to incorporate practices they are unfamiliar with or practices that may have failed in the past due to poor design or construction.
- **Lack of resources** – The need for funding, staff, expertise and equipment is common to all projects and is often a limiting factor in development and implementation. Sustainable stormwater projects are no exception – they require a certain level of expertise in design, review, installation, and maintenance that may not be available in all areas.
- **Environmental complications** – Some projects or practices are made more difficult by environmental factors such as the hydrology, geology or climate of a site. These issues, while not insurmountable, may pose special challenges to sustainable stormwater projects.

Overcoming Obstacles: Prevent, Accommodate, Confront

Careful planning and a strategic approach to development can eliminate many obstacles before they occur. Prevent issues from becoming obstacles by:

- Dealing with small issues before they become large ones.
- Anticipating resistance and taking steps to address issues before they become problems.
- Taking a proactive approach to development and addressing potential and actual complications as soon as they are brought to your attention.
- Working with technical experts in BMP design, particularly if you are experimenting with a new technique.

- Maintaining open lines of communication with stakeholders and team members.
- Making allowances for the learning curve – plan budgets and schedules to accommodate the need for additional education or support staff to learn how to properly plan and implement your design.
- Understanding the regulatory environment in which you are working.
- Being creative in your approach to securing necessary resources. Including sustainable stormwater practices opens the door to a host of alternate funding sources that are not available for traditional stormwater management approaches.

Not all problems can be avoided. Issues that arise despite your best planning can either be accommodated or confronted. No matter how you decide to address the situation, be sure that your approach is in line with the goals and objectives of the overall project. As you consider the best way to proceed, consider the following:

- **Know when compromise is acceptable** – Determine which elements or resources you can do without and which are critical to the success of the project.
- **Pick your battles** – It is not necessary to fight every obstacle in your path. If you maintain a flexible approach while keeping your sights on the ultimate goals of the project, it is often possible to sidestep potential issues without extra delay or hassle.
- **Use the current project as a stepping stone for future projects** – The transition to sustainable stormwater management is often accomplished by a series of small steps rather than by giant leaps. The success of smaller-scale projects can pave the way for larger and more involved efforts.

If you decide that confrontation is your best option:

- Be sure to take your concerns to the appropriate person or group.
- Do your homework and support your arguments or rational with sufficient data and information.
- Enter the discussion knowing where you can make concessions or be willing to compromise. Have some alternatives in mind and be prepared to bargain and address concerns. Try to understand the concerns of the other group and start to identify possible solutions that satisfy all parties.
- Tailor your discussion to the group you are addressing. Focus on the concerns specific to that group and frame the issue in language they can easily understand.
- Draw on past successes (and the successes of others) to promote your current project or idea.
- Bring a strong belief in what you are doing.
- Don't burn any bridges (regardless of whether you are successful or not) because the success of future projects may be jeopardized.

Remember: this is a learning process and, while it is important to do your homework and take a proactive approach, it is ok to make mistakes.

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