

# Sustainable Severn Sound

## Communications and Engagement Strategy

January 2012



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SEVERN SOUND

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# SUSTAINABLE SEVERN SOUND

## COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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This *Communications and Engagement Strategy* lays out the approach Sustainable Severn Sound will take towards communication and how it will involve the partners, organizations and residents of local communities. This strategy supports, facilitates, and promotes:

- Implementation of the Severn Sound Sustainability Plan
- A knowledgeable, informed, and motivated community
- Responsible and effective decision-making
- Understanding, trust, and confidence in the project

Good communication and engagement practice must also extend to communications between Sustainable Severn Sound and its partner organizations. This strategy should integrate with other strategies, primarily the Strategic Plans of the partner municipalities and supporting strategies and plans as they emerge. As such, this strategy is a living and evolving document that strives to ensure good communication and engagement practices throughout the journey of Sustainable Severn Sound.

This document aims to advance these goals by providing a clearly-structured plan for effective communication and engagement. It will outline key messages and methods of communication and engagement that Sustainable Severn Sound will use when interacting with its strategic partners and the general public. It is meant to be used in tandem with the *Monitoring and Reporting Framework*<sup>1</sup> in order to document and share results of progress made from an established baseline and to support organizational change as sustainability-driven efforts and decisions become embedded in municipal structures.

## 2.0 PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

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Sustainable Severn Sound is managed by a Steering Committee (SC) that is comprised of representatives from the nine (9) municipalities in the Severn Sound watershed, as well as other partner organizations. The SC will be responsible for this Communications and Engagement Strategy.

### 2.1 OBJECTIVES

The principal objectives of the Communications and Engagement Strategy are:

- To promote and enable effective communication between the Sustainable Severn Sound partners and the residents of the Severn Sound watershed

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<sup>1</sup> This report is forthcoming

- To help Sustainable Severn Sound (SSS) act as a catalyst for innovation, creativity, and intelligent use of the watershed’s resources in order to advance the Vision of the Sustainability Plan
- To create a high level of public awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the work of SSS
- To aid SSS in attracting and maintaining public and/or private sector involvement and investment in projects and programs

## **2.2 REPUTATION**

The reputation of Sustainable Severn Sound is critical in ensuring that our residents have awareness of and confidence in the Plan. We need to anticipate, understand, and respond to issues raised in the public. We also need to build understanding and support among our partners and stakeholders in order to keep moving toward the vision.

### *Priorities:*

1. Keep partners and community residents informed regarding activities related to the implementation of the Sustainability Plan.
2. Ensure feedback and involvement from the public is encouraged in all relevant decision-making processes, and response is provided.
3. Proactively manage relationships with partners, stakeholders, and local media outlets.

## **2.3 BRANDING**

To build a reputation for Sustainable Severn Sound, branding will be essential. Ongoing brand management is also part of this strategy, as programs and activities recognized under the Sustainable Severn Sound program will be delivered by a diverse range of stakeholders operating under the Sustainable Severn Sound brand.

### *Priorities:*

1. Ensure the partners and stakeholders adopt and use the Sustainable Severn Sound style and logo.
2. Act as the local steward of the Sustainable Severn Sound brand, overseeing how partners and stakeholders use it.
3. Produce and publish accurate and comprehensive information about the various activities and programs as part of the Sustainable Severn Sound program.

## **2.4 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

Public engagement is about empowering community residents to get involved in the decisions and activities related to the Sustainable Severn Sound initiative, in order to encourage them contribute to projects that will lead to social, environmental, and economic benefits in the region.

### ***Priorities:***

1. Raise awareness and understanding of sustainability among partner staff, stakeholders, and community residents.
2. Empower and encourage residents to become engaged in shaping the program and activities of Sustainable Severn Sound.
3. Develop tools and expertise to incorporate comments and feedback into the management of the program, which can and will have a meaningful influence annual priorities and activities.

## **2.5 LANGUAGE OF COMMUNICATION**

Sustainable Severn Sound will endeavour to produce communications materials in both English and French, where practical and feasible. Annual reports will be prepared in both languages, and communications with various collaborating organization will be done in whichever language is most practical.

## **2.6 AUDIENCE**

Sustainable Severn Sound will endeavour to engage all sectors of the community, and will specific emphasis being paid to youth, aboriginal, and francophone audiences. Communications regarding certain specific issues would target specific groups or subpopulations of particular relevance, such as communications on agricultural issues being directed at farmers.

## **2.7 KEY MESSAGES**

We will tailor our message to the needs of different stakeholders throughout the implementation of the Sustainability Plan. However, the overarching message that forms the core script for the Sustainable Severn Sound program, includes:

1. Sustainable Severn Sound is a primary local driver of sustainability, empowering the municipal partners and stakeholders to improve the environment, community well-being, and economic prosperity.
2. Our mandate is to coordinate the implementation of the Severn Sound Sustainability Plan; the long-range plan for the region endorsed by the Councils of all of the local governments in 2009
3. We are a community-based program that listens to, and involves the residents of the local communities.
4. We are funded by local governments and have to make the best use of a set budget. Decision-making will require difficult choices and priority selection, which will be done in an open and transparent manner that ensures we remain accountable.

5. The benefits of improving the sustainability of the Severn Sound watershed extend well beyond the communities in the area to the rest of Ontario and the world.

## **3.0 COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT METHODS**

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The communications and engagement methods for the Sustainable Severn Sound program are divided into two categories: online and offline. The online methods refer to the program's website and online social networks. The offline methods refer to the following:

- Partnerships and leadership
- Printed materials and media relations
- Events and Community Outreach

### **3.1 ONLINE PRESENCE**

The program will make extensive use of a variety of online tools to provide as much information to a broad audience.

#### **Website**

- Sustainable Severn Sound website ([www.sustainablesevernsound.ca](http://www.sustainablesevernsound.ca)) will act as the first point of contact for information on sustainability for the Severn Sound watershed
- Content of the website may include the following:
  - Definition of 'sustainability'
  - Overview of the watershed, and the development of the Sustainability Plan
  - Description of the Sustainability Plan's content (Vision, Pillars, Goals, Strategic Directions)
  - Monitoring and reporting on progress
  - Highlights of projects
  - Resources and tips
  - Google Maps to showcase things that are happening in the area (i.e. icons appear where projects are happening and links to report, if applicable) to
  - Online tours of interesting initiatives (i.e. community gardens, retrofitted buildings)
  - Video/photography competitions (including PSAs)
  - Photo gallery (tagged on Flickr, Facebook, Twitter)
  - Online polls and surveys
  - Events calendar
- Links to the SSS website will be provided from the an easily visible section of websites of partner organizations and municipalities, and vice versa

## **Social Media**

- Social media presence will provide increased awareness of the Sustainable Severn Sound, and ensure an additional level of interaction and engagement, especially among youth
- Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, and others can be used to provide up-to-date news as well as an avenue for feedback and information sharing

## **3.2 PARTNERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP**

Partnership and Leadership speaks to collaboration with the various partners, formal or otherwise, that have a stake in the implementation of the Sustainability Plan.

### **Steering Committee Members**

Partner members of the Sustainable Severn Sound Steering Committee are responsible for ensuring that their organizations are “walking the talk” with respect to the integration of sustainability and their respective actions as laid out in the Sustainability Plan. Sustainable Severn Sound will provide assistance to support this action in the form of research, training, synthesis of best-practices, and sharing of success among other partners, as resources permit.

### **Elected Officials and Staff**

Staff and elected municipal officials are ultimately the ones that will decide how the Sustainability Plan will be implemented and how it will integrate with other policies and procedures (official plans, strategic plans, and departmental plans and budgets). Staff will have the opportunity to participate in regular meetings to provide feedback on the integration of the Sustainability Plan. Meeting minutes from Sustainable Severn Sound’s steering committee meetings will be made available to all partners, and they will be encouraged to include them with council agendas, or wherever they deem most appropriate. Municipalities will have the resources of Sustainable Severn Sound at their disposal to support any and all initiatives they choose to investigate.

### **Businesses, Organizations, and Academic Institutions**

Partnership will be required in all forms to assist in implementing strategic directions and actions that are beyond the scope of municipalities or other steering committee partners. Sustainable Severn Sound will provide assistance to various local organizations pursuing sustainability initiatives to the extent that resources permit.

### **3.3 PRINTED MATERIAL AND MEDIA RELATIONS**

Printed materials and media outlets will serve to better inform the residents about the Sustainable Severn Sound program.

#### **Brochures and Flyers**

Print materials will be used to provide information and education relevant to the Sustainability Plan. They will be distributed by the partner organizations, at community outreach events, and also available on the website. A citizen's brochure may be produced to describe how residents can contribute to the region's sustainability goals and actions. Copies of the Sustainability Plan may also be available in the local libraries.

#### **Newsletters and Progress Reports**

Quarterly newsletters will be available at community outreach events, as well as on the website. An annual report will be publicly available on the website.

#### **External Media**

Local media outlets will be encouraged to inform residents via newspaper articles, radio interviews, and TV Spots. Press releases will be issued regarding major stories and events. Other opportunities such as a column in local newspapers will also be used as appropriate.

### **3.4 EVENTS AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

#### **Presentations**

Presentations will occur to both partner organizations and their staff, as well as to the community at large. Presentations to council will be made on an annual basis, in order to ensure members of council are aware of the actions and successes of Sustainable Severn Sound. Sustainability training will be offered for staff at the partner organizations to assist them in integrating the Sustainability Plan within their organization's operations. Presentations will also be made to other organizations, including service clubs, school groups, etc.

#### **Community Events**

Sustainable Severn Sound will attempt to attend various community events in order to provide education and advance the Severn Sound Sustainability Plan's vision and strategic priorities. Sustainable Severn Sound will develop an event toolkit to be used at various events, including a ready-to-go presentation board, brochures, and other resources as appropriate.

#### **Annual Sustainability Summit**

Sustainable Severn Sound will organize an Annual Sustainability Summit each year to coincide with the release of the annual progress report. The Sustainability Summit will share best practices, provide speakers, engage leaders and the public, and celebrate successes. The Summit may rotate locations each year throughout the

watershed, but will seek to bring the communities together to share ideas and build relationships that support advancing the sustainability vision. The Summit will be open to the public and will provide speakers and workshops to better educate and inform on ways to make positive change. It will also review progress to date, and perhaps most importantly, the event will provide an opportunity to recognize sustainability leaders and distribute awards for successful initiatives taken on by businesses, organizations, and individuals. The first summit will be held in fall 2012.

## **4.0 EVALUATION**

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### **4.1 MEASURING ENGAGEMENT**

The evaluation of Sustainable Severn Sound's engagement will rely on several objective and subjective measures which, taken together, will give a general picture of the organization's engagement with its strategic partners and the general public. These measures will include:

- Website traffic statistics (number of visits, frequency, duration, etc.)
- Dialogue generated (comments, discussion on Sustainable Severn Sound website and externally)
- Number of events staff attend
- Number of presentations or workshops provided
- Number of funding applications made for specific projects and total financial value received
- Number of volunteers participating
- Number of inquiries received
- Number of brochures/flyers distributed
- Number of subscribers to website and/or newsletter
- Number of articles/columns in local newspapers
- Number and strength of partnerships with local organizations

These statistics will be tabulated and presented in the Annual Report along with other indicators.

## **CONCLUSION**

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### **5.1 IMMEDIATE DELIVERABLES**

Sustainable Severn Sound will work to implement the actions outlined in this strategy document as soon as is practical, and to adapt all future communications to conform to the details of this plan. Some of the immediate actions to be taken will include:

- *Promote Sustainable Severn Sound with municipal councils.* This will involve making presentations to promote to help familiarize councils with, it's members, and the Sustainability Plan (scheduled for Jan/Feb, 2012) as well as communications by indirect methods, such as inclusion of SSS minutes in council agendas, invitation to SSS events, and all of the SSS general communications (newsletters, annual reports, social media, etc.). The target will be 100% brand recognition by the end of the year.
- *Website improvements:* The content of the website will be expanded upon in order to create a more engaging user experience, and more useable and frequently-updated information.
- *Develop a regular social media schedule, and broaden the current subscriber base.* Twitter and Facebook updates will be released on a regular basis, and hence time will be devoted to developing content.
- *Develop a series of quarterly newsletters, starting in spring 2012.*
- *Develop and proactively pitch news stories showcasing relevant projects to local media.*

## 5.2 SUMMARY

This Communications and Engagement Strategy sets out the coordinated and strategic approach that Sustainable Severn Sound will take towards engaging organizations, municipalities, and citizens of the region during the implementation of the Sustainability Plan. This will ensure effective communication and interaction, promoting understanding, trust and confidence in the project, thereby maximizing the probability of achieving its objectives.