Development Plan 2014

The Alliance is a non-profit in transition. The organization has a long history of dependence on government grant support and limited development of private funding potential. Recent years have seen Alliance leadership shift to the growth of more program independence and to innovation in planning for achieving its own strategic goals and priorities. From a fundraising standpoint, this evolution is positive but still in its infancy.

In 2014, the Alliance will grow its development activities on the firm foundation of expanded and enhanced Alliance marketing and program materials developed in 2013. Most important, our enhanced website, event growth, and electronic media provides the opportunity to engage potential donor and partner audiences with information about the organization’s Board and Staff, dynamic information about Alliance programs, Bay news and events, and a variety of giving opportunities.

In addition, we will continue to build on 2013 efforts that focused cultivating friends (future donors), securing sponsorship of Alliance events and programs, and expanding our contact network as a foundation for future major gifts and fund-raising campaigns. We will continue to market our portfolio of successful programs to expand these relationships.

1) COMMUNICATION:

Our goals in 2014 are to expand targeted communication, including regular messages to the staff, Board, members and corporate Sponsors, and to expand inbound communication, including an expanded Donor Page on our website and active social media postings. A protocol for building relationships with Alliance Sponsors through a year-round cycle of communication has been developed, and should be expanded beyond Taste Sponsors to include Program Sponsors, including Project Clean Stream and the Chesapeake Watershed Forum.

We have also spent considerable time in refining our mission and goals and tools for messaging these to the partners and supporters, to potential donors and to the public. We have worked with professionals in public relations to better understand how to deliver our message. In 2014, we will complete a communications package for Board and staff that will standardize messages and offer tools for increasing visibility and communicating the Alliance mission to others. To amplify our efforts, we will explore marketing opportunities in each state office and engage small committees to undertake and complete new marketing initiatives.

2) MEMBERSHIP:

The Alliance counts all donors (of $25 or more) and volunteers (of at least 3 hours) as Members. Our current membership count is 1,250 (representing a doubling of 2012 member numbers). In 2012, we had approximately 600 members in our database and had set a 2013 membership goal of 800. We continue to work to better capture volunteer data and contact information in order to register program volunteers as Members and expand our network of contacts. All members receive our monthly e-newsletter which is intended to continue our engagement with volunteers and to heighten their commitment to Bay stewardship and to the Alliance.
In the Summer of 2013, we held our first “Best of the Bay” Members Photo Contest. Although the response was light, the Contest was designed to promote Membership and to produce material for the Alliance 2014 Calendar, which has been used in the 4th Quarter to engage friends, partners, donors and members. One of the most important benefits of the calendar is that it can be used by all staff to promote the Alliance and our work. We plan to compile a 2015 Calendar in the 3rd Quarter of 2014.

Members receive a March and September Membership renewal notice (for those who have not contributed/renewed during the calendar year) as well as our mid-year (June) and year-end (December) fund-raising Appeals. Responses to renewal notices are encouraging.

In 2013, with the generous help of a volunteer team from Altria, we adopted the Salesforce CMR as an efficient, versatile data management system for our member/donor information. We will continue the transition from Exceed/Excel to Salesforce in 2014, placing special emphasis on culling our records as we convert to this more versatile and powerful cloud-based system. Training will be offered to all management team staff in 2014 to increase entry of new contacts in our database. We are also poised to consider using purchased/targeted mailing lists to expand the solicitation potential for our appeals and general outreach.

In 2014, we are also evaluating an electronic social media Membership Drive, highlighted on our website. This effort would employ a theme to drive membership towards a stated goal, using “incentives” to motivate participation.

3) APPEALS:

Over the last 2 years, the Alliance has greatly improved the quality of its fundraising solicitations. Where the Alliance relied only on quarterly membership letters we now implement a strategy of designing and distributing (both hard copy and electronic mailing) two fundraising Appeals per year (June and December). We have maintained a limited number of appeals for funds while many of our “competitors” solicit member mailing lists on a weekly or monthly basis. Funds raised from Appeals in 2013 have increased slightly to just over $22,000 and the number of Appeal responses are relatively constant at around 200 while average donation amount has increased slightly. One of our greatest challenges is a limited mailing list for distribution of appeals.

4) BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS:

The Alliance has begun to explore and identify businesses with which we can partner to produce additional exposure and funding for our organization and programs. The potential for this social marketing is being discussed with Roman Meal Bread and, in 2014, will be discussed with local breweries and other companies/products that want to underscore to their customers their commitment to local environmental needs/assets. This is an area of cause marketing in which Board input and direction might help to focus our efforts to produce results.

5) EVENTS:

At this point in time, hosting events remains a highly dynamic way to raise awareness about the Alliance and to build an expanded network of supporters.
Our hallmark fundraising event is The Taste of the Chesapeake. We have not finalized a date or location for 2014; however, Thursday, September 18, would be consistent with past dates. We have discussed moving the Taste from Annapolis to Washington, DC, which is an exciting prospect in many ways if we can form a strong Event Committee, including Board members with strong contacts in the city. The other option is to remain in Annapolis for one more year to capitalize on the local visibility we have gained and begin by first hosting a smaller event in DC. The Development Committee will be discussing this option early in 2014.

The goals of the Taste should be to host a sold-out event, to showcase our successes/programs, to recognize environmental leadership (award winner(s)), and to raise $120,000 (exceeding our 2013 goal of $100,000). We have received our first Sponsor commitment for the Taste 2014 from Dominion Resources for $10,000 (a generous increase over its $7,500 sponsorship in 2013.) I would like to focus particular attention on professional corporations (accounting firms, law firms and consulting firms) as we work to expand our base of substantial Taste Sponsors.

The Watershed Forum is the other major recognized Alliance event. It is a 3-day sold-out environmental conference that will be held on September 25-27, 2014. The Alliance has worked to raise the visibility of the Alliance at this event through branding of materials, participation as speakers and through expanded management presence. Alliance membership was included in Forum registration for the first time in 2013. Laura will work with Lou Etgen to maximize the marketing and sponsorship potential of the Forum. We realize that the audience is not expected to be a significant donor block.

Other Alliance events provide opportunities to raise visibility and expand our network of friends. Programs that are staffed by volunteers, like Project Clean Stream, River Wise, and 10,000 Trees provide opportunities to collect contact information for our database. In 2014, we will work with staff to propose a standardized format for introducing the Alliance at volunteer events and capturing their contact information to engage them as Alliance members.

We are also working to expand partnering opportunities that increase our visibility/name recognition and that showcase our programs. In 2014, these partnering opportunities will include supporting the environmental showcase of the Annapolis Film Festival and hosting an evening of Annapolis and Richmond Green Drinks. Laura will work with state directors to identify additional new opportunities in the watershed.

In the spring of 2014, the Alliance will host its first Chesapeake Business Forum (an event that will kick-off a rebirth of the “Businesses for the Bay” program) in Richmond VA. This event will open the door to broader engagement with the business community. Additional forums will be planned in the MD/DC/Southern PA regions as follow-up to the VA Forum.

Lastly, we have provided in the 2014 budget for the conduct of at least 2 membership or donor recruiting events in each of the Field Offices in 2014. Laura will be working with State Directors and regional Board Members to assist in hosting these events, which will be uniquely tailored to the locale and the audience. Valuable events might include short river sojourns, Board-sponsored gatherings (similar to the St. Mary’s College event in 2013), speaker’s series, or teaming up with an outdoor fair or musical event.
6) THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE BAY:

A major fundraising campaign remains our ultimate development goal. After an assessment of our readiness for this endeavor in 2012, we believed that more work remained to build the foundation for a successful Campaign. We believe the launch of such a significant campaign may still be several years away.

Alliance development efforts have been underway now for almost 2 years to build the development groundwork for such a Campaign. The reconstruction of web resources, design of membership and annual appeal strategies, expansion of electronic communications, updating of donor database to Salesforce, hiring of Development staff expertise, rebuilding Board Membership, creation of Honorary Directors, and development of marketing materials are all actions needed to move us toward this goal. Our donor database remains relatively small but the use of Salesforce is expected to give us better access to important donor characteristics that we did not have before. We will begin to investigate access to wealth analysis tools to further refine our approach.

As we now consider the future of a major gifts Campaign, we encourage the Alliance to think creatively and not to be constrained by traditional frameworks for this important undertaking. We currently have limited development resources and in 2014 we must continue to cultivate new friends, sponsors, and donors and expand our visibility and communications.

7) CONCLUSION:

We feel that we have a compelling mission and message. Even though we have many partners who share our ultimate goals, the Alliance itself still plays a unique and vital role in Bay restoration. We do not litigate or lobby but, through grassroots community programs, we create motivated Bay stewards throughout the watershed. We are also uniquely capable of bringing together diverse interests to bring about local action and ensure progress toward Bay restoration goals. Facilitating negotiations on the updated Bay Agreement is an important example of our unique role in the environmental community.

The mission, vision and programs of the Alliance provide ample opportunities to grow our development and marketing efforts. The challenge remains to be how to grow our development initiatives with the limited manpower available. We have only 1 half-time staff committed to development activities. With only 1 half-time staff committed to development and communication activities, we will be bringing a proposal to the Board later this year to hire an entry level development assistant to help Laura and the staff accelerate the momentum of our development and marketing activities. The prospects for 2014 are exciting!

Submitted by
Laura T. Ricciardelli, JD, MBA
Director of Development

“Together, we can get the job done.”
www.allianceforthebay.org