# U.S. CORAL REEF TASK FORCE

# WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

## SUSTAINABILITY PLAN TEMPLATE

## Purpose and Background

This Sustainability Plan Template supplements guidance found in the *US Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) Watershed Partnership Initiative Strategy[1] (Strategy)*, adopted September 2016 and revised September 2019. The Strategy provides guidelines for the management, implementation and graduation of USCRTF priority watersheds. A Watershed Sustainability Plan is required for each priority watershed and may be a useful planning and tracking tool for all Watershed Coordinators and jurisdictions.

Protecting water quality around coral reefs from land-based sources of pollution is critical to the ability of coral reefs to resist impacts from other stressors such as increasing ocean temperature, changes in ocean chemistry and uncertainty in future environmental conditions. Watershed protection and restoration can take years, even decades, and should ensure that climate change be taken into account. Sustainable governance ensures local long-term ownership of watershed management activities, including ongoing maintenance of best management practices (BMPs), monitoring programs and reliable financing.

Operational expenses are those expenses that are ongoing, regardless of any discrete watershed project, and are expected to continue to be incurred after graduation (graduation is also described in the Strategy). These expenses may include support for a watershed coordinator, water quality/coral reef monitoring, efforts to ensure watershed restoration projects are appropriately maintained and remain viable in the face of changing climate and sea level rise, and periodic assessments/evaluations to determine progress toward desired results as articulated in watershed management plan goals and objectives.

The Strategy calls for the institutionalization of the watershed coordinator position and ongoing regular monitoring of ecosystem indicators. Institutionalization (a permanent host organization) could include, but is not limited to, a local government, university, or non-profit organization. The long-term success of the Watershed Partnership Initiative depends on local government and community-based support and participation.

## How to Use This Template

Jurisdictions face unique challenges and consequently, no single template will be exactly what all jurisdictions need for planning, tracking and establishment of governance. Jurisdictions should develop a Sustainability Plan that meets their unique needs. The USCRTF has some minimum components that all priority watersheds should address.

At a minimum, the Sustainability Plan developed by each jurisdiction for priority watersheds should address the key components listed in the Strategy, section 3., "Strategy for Implementing, Graduating, Discontinuing, and Initiating New USCRTF Priority Watersheds," subsection C. "Sustainability of Work and Funding" (see bullets below). Each component should include funding options and a timeline of key

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[1] [US Coral Reef Task Force Watershed Partnership Initiative Strategy (2019)](#)
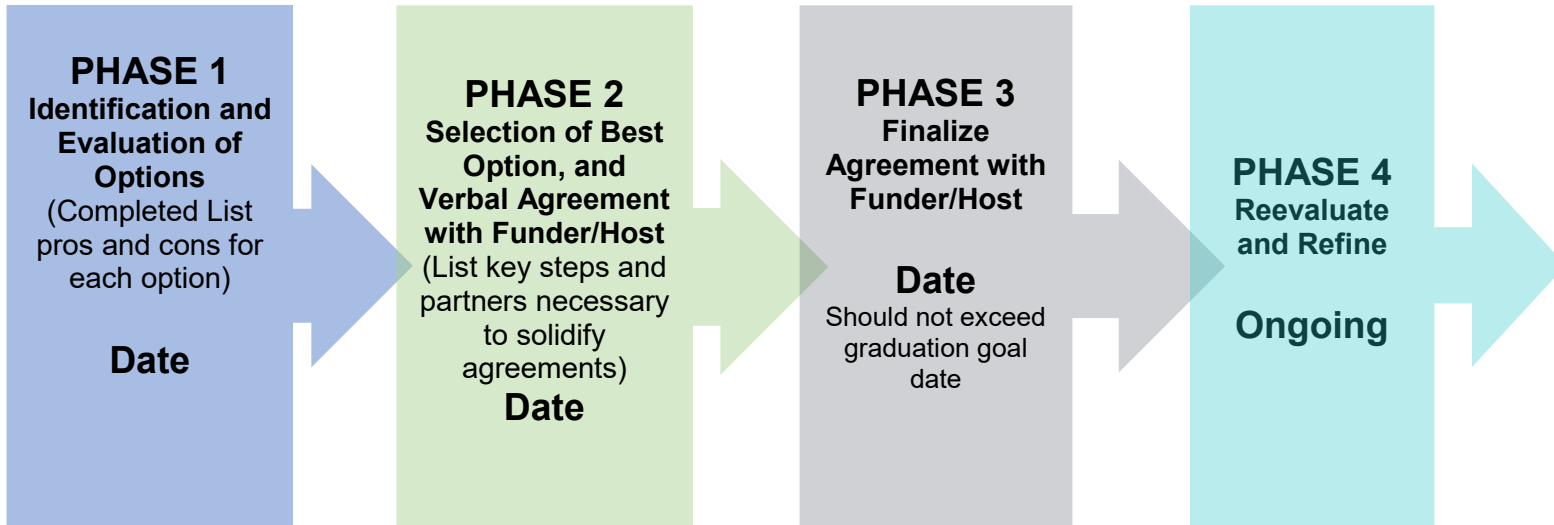
milestones toward securing reliable, long-term funding and plans for permanently hosting key staff and programs. Other operational expenses, unique to the watershed, such as operation and maintenance of stormwater management systems, changes in BMPs to address climate change and sea level rise, and/or installation of BMPs may need to be included.

A. **Mechanism(s) for sustainable funding and finance** for the continuation of the watershed coordinator position and other key operational expenses. The general amount of funding needed for described types of work, and ownership of products should be included.

B. **Commitment to support or institutionalization of the watershed coordinator,** through a variety of potential organizations and funding sources including non-governmental organizations or the jurisdictional government;

C. **Commitment to support ongoing regular monitoring of ecosystem indicators** with local natural resource and water quality agencies or local college/university.

D. **Support from local government and community leadership and involvement in,** through a variety of potential organizations and funding sources including non-governmental organizations or the jurisdictional government;

  i. **Water quality actions** (e.g., stormwater management, rain barrels, ponding basin, bio sacks, irrigation, inspection of construction sites, rules for new development, enforcement of existing rules on fisheries). These should have a monitoring strategy and be linked to performance measures tied to coral reef health.

  ii. **Resource-related action** (e.g., Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), community-based fishery management, conservation easements on land, buffer zones around streams/shorelines, beach and stream cleanups).

E. **Identify post-graduation support needs,** including timeframe, which could require additional support from the USCRTF partners after graduation.

## Timeline of Key Milestones and Options Analysis Toward Sustainability

Key milestones are helpful for tracking progress and in the case of priority watersheds, help both the Coordinator and the Watershed Working Group estimate if sustainability goals will be reached by the expected graduation date. Sustainability goals are the options you select for funding and hosting operational requirements. The most appropriate key milestones must be determined by the jurisdiction and Watershed Coordinator. An example table is provided below.

## Identify Key Milestone and Dates

**PHASE 1**
**Identification and Evaluation of Options**
(Completed List pros and cons for each option)

**Date**

**PHASE 2**
**Selection of Best Option, and Verbal Agreement with Funder/Host**
(List key steps and partners necessary to solidify agreements)
**Date**

**PHASE 3**
**Finalize Agreement with Funder/Host**

**Date**
Should not exceed graduation goal date

**PHASE 4**
**Reevaluate and Refine**

**Ongoing**

*To be completed for each component of sustainability. Jurisdictions/Coordinator to provide milestone dates. Funding and institutionalization of ongoing work, a.k.a. components of sustainability, must be in place for graduation. The difference between Phase 2 and 3 can be clarified by the Coordinator in collaboration with others in the jurisdiction. This recognizes that there may be a difference between reaching an agreement and the steps necessary to have all pieces in place for the final agreement. Priority watershed jurisdictions will be expected to report on each milestone during at Bi-Annual meetings of the USCRTF.*

**Option analysis:** Once the milestones and timeline have been developed, focus on developing options for funding and institutionalizing the Coordinator's position and other operational expenses. Identify all potential operational expenses and include estimated ongoing costs (the coordinator's position, monitoring, maintenance, rental space and other fixed overhead expenses, etc.). For each operational expense, develop relevant evaluation criteria and identified funding or hosting options. An example table is provided below to assist in evaluating options.

## Phase 1: Sustainable Funding Options Analysis, Pros and Cons

| Options Evaluation Criteria Watershed Coordinator's position | Option 1 Local government position | Option 2 Form an NGO | Option 3 Join an existing NGO | Option 4 XYZ foundation/ university | Option 5 Create project that generates ongoing funding stream |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Opportunities | Agriculture program willing to manage a grant to fund this | Other examples on-island that could serve as a model | | May be willing to provide space and management oversight | Funding through sale of plants from nursery |
| Degree of Feasibility | | | | | |
| Potential longevity | Variable-dependent on grants | Could take time but then long-term | Long-term | Long-term | Vulnerable to storms, sea level rise, and other threats |
| Existing partners | Local gov. active partner | | XYZ NGO may be good fit and is active partner | Already supporting the watershed work | |
| Other criteria | | | Would support other operational needs of watershed work | | |

*Select the most relevant evaluation criteria and options for your watershed. This table should be updated as new ideas are developed. Create a table for each operational expense and each function or work that is to be institutionalized.*

### Options Evaluation Criteria: Potential Consideration

- Is a decision-making individual already engaged and supportive to your mission? If not, how difficult would it be to get the right people engaged?
- How stable/reliable would this potential funding source/host be over the long-term?
- How would the support organization benefit from supporting your work (what's in it for them)?
- Do you need to partner with someone else first, before approaching the decision maker for the option? For example, are you working closely with a community leader who has close connections with the private company you want to approach?
- Is there a link between the mission of your work and the mission of the organization(s) that might make a partnership mutually beneficial?

- What additional costs, if any, might be required to launch this option (for example would a university have to buy equipment to fund a monitoring program)? Would a creative fund-raising option require seed money?
- Would the option generate enough money to fully fund the need or would other money be required?
- Would the option generate benefits other than funding the need (e.g., a creative funding option that also raises community interest, a university program that allow students to get credit and training)?
- Is it reasonable to expect that funds will be available for several years?
- Would the effort necessary to secure the funds at least match the benefit (for example, would the time it takes to put a creative funding option in place generate enough revenue to be worth the effort)?
- If you are considering joining an existing NGO, would that NGO remain committed to your work or eventually move you or your resources to different organizational priorities?
- Can the hosting organization manage federal grants for discrete projects?
- If you are considering joining an existing NGO, does that organization have the right connections, expertise and stability to advance your work?
- Most NGOs apply an indirect fee to process grants through their organization to cover general and operational expenses.  It is important to know what percent the organization will require from your funding sources to cover these expenses.
- Are their key members of the NGO's Board of Directors that can advance your work?
- How engaged and supportive are the Board of Directors?
- Is the option you are considering vulnerable to changes in the political leadership at the local or state level?

**Creative fund raising options are those that generate a long-term funding stream but require more planning, time, and local commitment to develop. For example:**
- Work with local hotels or other local private entities such as dive shops and others interest in tourism, to develop a program supporting replanting corals that will bring in new customers to the businesses and generate fees that will support the replanting project.
- Work with the local government and university to create a research hub that attracts scientists to the jurisdiction and hosts a monitoring program.

**Potential Evaluation Considerations for Creative Fund-Raising Projects**
- How would the project benefit other priorities of the jurisdiction?
- What level of expertise is necessary to complete the project and is that expertise available and affordable?
- Are there business, universities or non-profit organizations that would support the project?
- How much money would the fund-raising project generate annually and how much of that would be available to support your operational expenses?
- Who would own/control the project and how likely is that entity would share the funds generated?
- How much time might be invested into this long-term task before it benefits the economy/environment?

**Reporting and Tracking:** In addition to the milestone table and the options analysis, Priority Watershed Coordinators should be prepared to provide updates on progress made to secure funding and hosts for the Coordinator's position and key work.  An example a reporting table is below:

## Phase 2: Status of Options Analysis
For each Component and at each Phase, provide an update at USCRTF Bi-Annual Meeting

| Component | Status/ Funding | Status/ Institutionalization |
|---|---|---|
| **Watershed Coordinator** | | |
| • Local University | | Considering hosting but must have reliable funding from another source |
| • Create NGO | Exploring legal requirements | |
| • Local Government | In discussions, they are considering funding the position but not sure about duration of commitment | |
| **Water Monitoring for Ecological Indicators** | | |
| • Private partnership | Considering a partnership between a local hotel and the university where the hotel would promote citizen science to collect data and university would analyze the data | |
| • Local government | Considering funding plus assuring that reporting requirements are met. | |
| • Existing NGO | | In discussions with XYZ NGO to host the work. This option would require a separate funding |
| **Periodic Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Quality Plan** | | |
| • Local government | Committed funding for biennial climate change impacts and adaptation assessment | |
| • Local university | | Partnership agreement to coordinate vulnerability and impacts research |
| • National NGO | | Partnership agreement for methods and training to support climate-smart design |
| **Ongoing Operation and Maintenance of Green Infrastructure** | | |
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*This is to be updated for each Bi-Annual meeting*

The Watershed Partnership Initiative Strategy recommends Coordinators have the Sustainability Plan developed within 5 years of the USCRTF priority watershed designation and implemented within 10 years of the designation. Not all components of the Plan will have the same schedule. For example, funding and hosting requirements for projects that require long-term operation and maintenance should be planned before work begins.

## Sustainability Plan Evaluation

Working through this process can help jurisdictions isolate specific challenges to sustainability. The USCRTF will evaluate progress made toward key milestones and where progress is stalled, work with jurisdictions to help resolve those challenges. If sustainability cannot be reached, the USCRTF may elect to discontinue priority watershed status as described in the Strategy.

## Graduation

USCRTF priority watersheds have specific expectations for graduating. Those expectations are outlined in the Strategy, section 3., "Strategy for Implementing, Graduating, Discontinuing, and Initiating New USCRTF Priority Watersheds," section D, "Graduation." Established local capacity and governance systems, which will ensure local long-term ownership of watershed management activities is a component of graduation. Sustainability planning, with key milestones tied to an expected graduation date will help jurisdictions demonstrate governance.

*Photograph complements of Charles "Buddy" Lobue*

## Appendix

These blank templates can be altered to meet the needs of the jurisdiction.

### Phase 1: Sustainable Funding Options Analysis, Pros and Cons

| Options Evaluation Criteria | Option 1 | Option 2 | Option 3 | Option 4 | Option 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Opportunities | | | | | |
| Degree of Feasibility | | | | | |
| Potential longevity | | | | | |
| Existing partners | | | | | |
| Other criteria | | | | | |

## Phase 2: Status of Options Analysis

For each Component and at each Phase, provide an update at USCRTF Bi-Annual Meeting

| Component | Status/ Funding | Status/ Institutionalization |
|---|---|---|
| **Watershed Coordinator** | | |
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| **Water Monitoring for Ecological Indicators** | | |
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| **Periodic Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Quality Plan** | | |
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| | | |
| **Ongoing Operation and Maintenance of Green Infrastructure** | | |
| | | |
| | | |

*This is to be updated for each Bi-Annual meeting*