



Final Report Virginia Environmental Excellence Program

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**VEEP Integration Project
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Submitted by:

Booz | Allen | Hamilton

8283 Greensboro Drive, McLean, VA 22102-3838

1.0 BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

In 2007, the DEQ received a state innovations grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to strengthen the capacity within its core regulatory programs to better integrate VEEP. This 2-year project, which ran from 2007 to 2009, aimed at fully integrating VEEP within the policies, procedures, and activities of the various components of DEQ. This effort required an increase in the knowledge and understanding of the programs on the part of DEQ staff, particularly those most frequently interacting with facilities in order to achieve a more “innovation friendly” organizational culture and system. This is the final report for that project and summarizes the primary activities that were conducted, the documents produced, and the recommendations made.

In addition to further integrating VEEP within the agency, the project considered individuals and organizations outside of DEQ who may also have an interest in VEEP. Booz Allen conducted focused interviews and facilitated forums including one conducted at the annual Environment Virginia conference held in Lexington.

The project relied on a strategic approach to integrating the principles of a voluntary performance-based program within a state environmental agency whose traditional charter is regulatory. Therefore, the project focused on building capacity among the core regulatory programs within DEQ to better integrate VEEP in terms of policies, procedures, and the delivery of incentives. The ultimate result of this integration is expected to be an overall improvement in environmental quality within the Commonwealth and a significant step towards the long-term goal of sustainability.

It must be noted that this contract was affected by the EPA's decision to cancel the National Environmental Performance Track Program (Performance Track). Due to the impact on the operations of VEEP from the loss of that program, as well as the continued uncertainty as to the full impact, some of the tasks originally identified for this project have been changed.

The following sections discuss the scopes, approaches, and outcomes of the tasks that were conducted in support of this project.

2.0 THE PHASE I REPORT

The Phase I Report (Appendix A) is an evaluation of the current status of development and implementation of VEEP policies and procedures. It was based on research of relevant DEQ policies and procedures, including compliance review procedures, and any connections between program goals and DEQ strategic priorities. There are portions of this document that describe the EPA's Performance Track program, its policies and procedures as well as its past relationship with VEEP and the integration of VEEP and Performance Track policies and procedures. However, due to the closure of Performance Track by EPA, the focus of the document, particularly the recommendations, is on the future of VEEP in the absence of Performance Track.

Within each section of the document, a baseline of the existing policies and procedures that have been developed by DEQ for VEEP program activities is first established. Building on this foundation, an assessment of the level of implementation of the policies and procedures across DEQ, including an assessment of implementation consistency and variability is presented.

The current state of DEQ information management systems is established to identify opportunities to make the VEEP program information more readily accessible to DEQ program and regulatory staff. The weakness of VEEP's information management system is considered a vulnerability of the program and one that makes efficient use of data difficult.

Using the policy and process research, a gap analysis is included to identify potential areas for improvement including improving the consistency and thoroughness of information flows to fulfill VEEP's objectives. The report presents recommendations to improve the VEEP processes.

The recommendations initially generated by this report have been used to generate the Recommendations Summary (Appendix B). The Recommendations Summary and the Recruitment Plan together provide a tangible roadmap for DEQ to continually improve VEEP through ongoing program development and implementation. Understanding that this is a time with limited budgets and resources, we have tried to focus on actions that can be taken to increase the efficient use of current staff and resources.

3.0 THE MANAGERS' SURVEYS

This project focused to a large extent on the integration of VEEP into the program and regional offices. The managers' survey initially provided a baseline of managers' understanding, awareness, and attitudes towards VEEP. The end-of-project survey provides a measure of how DEQ managers' knowledge and attitudes have changed during the course of the project.

The survey questions and the process for delivering it were consistent between the two surveys to control for differences in responses that may be related to how the questions are phrased or the time or method through which the survey was deployed. The survey was given through Survey Monkey and managers were given two weeks to respond. The 24 questions were written to determine:

- Knowledge of VEEP,
- Knowledge of EMS,
- Understanding of their role in VEEP,
- Attitudes toward the value or importance of VEEP,
- Willingness to promote the program, and
- Ability to promote the program.

The key observations from the final survey are:

- Managers feel significantly more prepared with the materials and information they need to promote VEEP to potential participants,
- Managers displayed more knowledge about VEEP, and
- Many managers feel more comfortable explaining the incentives and rewards available to VEEP participants.

The managers' surveys indicated that the great majority of managers believe that VEEP is important, that they have a role in it, that they have the materials to promote the program, and

that they are interested in promoting VEEP. For the detailed results of the surveys, see Appendix C.

4.0 STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT

A stakeholder analysis was conducted at the outset of the project which included interviews with both internal and external stakeholders, current customers, and key supporters. The results of this data gathering were used to develop a stakeholder engagement plan as documented in The Stakeholder Relationship Management Report (Appendix D). This document was written to identify stakeholder segmentation, planned outreach, messaging, and data gathering. Several key results were:

- VEEP participants exhibited deep affection for their strengthened relationship with DEQ and attributed this strength to VEEP,
- External stakeholders see DEQ's institutional knowledge about VEEP as low, causing an inconsistent application of VEEP across the commonwealth,
- A majority of stakeholders have a moderate level of understanding, and
- Commercial stakeholders expressed that quantifiable cost savings and efficiencies are not clear.

The results and data that were obtained through the stakeholder engagement informed the work and recommendations of the subsequent tasks. Please see the full report for further details.

5.0 RECRUITMENT PLAN

The VEEP Recruitment Plan (Appendix E) outlines the recruitment strategy to be used by the DEQ to support the success of VEEP. It lists the VEEP's mission, the program objectives that the plan supports, and describes the recruitment objectives, tools, and activities aimed at the continued improvement of VEEP and its support of DEQ's overall mission.

It is recommended that the Recruitment Plan be reviewed and revised annually in order to develop priorities for the program. The plan includes a worksheet for documenting annual objectives, metrics to track and report progress, and priority actions needed to meet the objectives. Since the Recruitment Plan includes many of the elements of an overall program strategy document, DEQ may choose to revise it into a more comprehensive VEEP Strategic Plan as the details get defined over the next few months.

6.0 TRAINING AND OUTREACH TOOLS

Several tasks during this project were aimed at increasing internal and external stakeholder awareness and understanding of the program. Training materials were developed and trainings conducted at Central Office and DEQ regions (Appendix F). These training materials can continue to be used in ongoing individual trainings and briefings as well as integrated into other DEQ trainings as appropriate.

Outreach materials were developed both for external stakeholders (Appendix G) and for internal DEQ staff (Appendix H). These materials are now available for posting on the website as well as distribution during recruitment and outreach events.

7.0 SUMMARY

VEEP is a leader of state voluntary recognition and incentive programs and deservedly so. However, the goal of this project was to identify opportunities to strengthen the program. Such efforts are especially critical during this time when all voluntary programs are under careful scrutiny and in light of the recent demise of the Performance Track Program. The tasks, documents, and recommendations that came out of this project are aimed at more clearly defining the program, strengthening its brand, integrating it more fully within DEQ, and increasing both its credibility and its ability to demonstrate success.

VEEP's long term viability will be determined by the value that it can demonstrate in supporting DEQ's central mission. The path that has been set allows for the setting and tracking of measurable performance-based objectives that align with DEQ's mission and directly link to environmental performance. It is expected that the outcomes of this project will increase the strength, effectiveness, and sustainability of this remarkable program.