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METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON PUBLIC OFFICIALS WATER ACADEMY

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ABSTRACT: Many DC area water and wastewater utilities and agencies have new public officials in key decision making roles, including appointed water and sewer board officials at DC Water and Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission; new elected officials in DC City Council and Mayor's Office and other communities in the Metropolitan Area, with new appointed staff supporting those elected officials. While water education programs often focus on school-aged children, universities, or a "general public" audience, the development of effective water education programs for public officials - outside of the context of supporters or detractors of specific policies and projects - is not widely addressed. As new public officials step into leadership roles on water-related decisions, there is a need to communicate and build an understanding of current physical, natural, and political "infrastructure" and organizational cultures that govern how water is managed and protected; emerging issues and potential ways to address those issues. Particularly as water utilities, water agencies and other municipal, regional, and federal agencies are encouraged to work in a more collaborative manner, it is critical to provide public officials with an opportunity to gain a common understanding of water issues facing the region, and to network with each other and work together to explore these issues before being faced with decisions in the context of a public hearing.

The Metropolitan Washington Public Officials Water Academy (MWPOWA) has been developed as a pilot program to provide elected and appointed leadership at DC area water and wastewater service providers and government agencies with background on water-related issues in the region such as:

- replacement of aging and failing water infrastructure, and associated financing issues;
- new technologies and new requirements for water and wastewater treatment
- regulatory requirements such as the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for the Chesapeake Bay
- development of rain gardens, infiltration basins, and other green building techniques, and associated regulations;
- management of water resources for recreation and habitat, and associated educational opportunities.

This paper describes the development of this pilot program and initial findings.

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