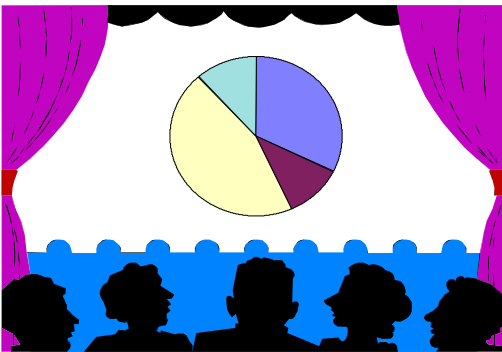


## Chapter 1 Show time!

- The world's a stage...
- Planning goals
- How to use this manual
- Before you begin
- Data to action process

### The world's a stage...



Data presentation is something of an art. It's like preparing for the opening night of a performance: you have assembled a cast of characters (volunteers and others in your organization), written a play (study design), everyone has rehearsed (worked diligently to gather data and create awareness), and now you are ready for the show (communicate your results). The story that you tell (your message) is filled with intrigue, mystery, life and death drama—and hopefully a happy ending. After the curtain falls, what will be the reviews? Will your performance lead to positive action, or will it fall flat and be forgotten by the morning? Will your organization be recognized as having brought enlightenment to the world, or will your work fade into obscurity?

A satisfactory answer to these questions requires both a good story—your data, and a good production—your communication skills. Watershed groups are no strangers to outreach, getting the word out via a variety of media—print, posters, PowerPoint software, public appearances. But too often, *data* is a missing ingredient in their message. Conversely, many monitoring program specialists have good data to share, but limit their presentation strategies to a few tried and traditional methods such as a written report or a press release. Or they fail to discuss their data in the context of issues that people care about, such as recreation, health, or economics. In many cases, it seems as though data presentation is conducted as an afterthought—a minor adjunct to the more important work of running a strong, scientific sampling program. As a result, many programs fail to reach their *true* goal: to affect the way we treat our water resources.

You can avoid this disconnect by thinking about how your data fits into your organization—its mission and its message. This is the first step towards creating a **data presentation plan** that will maximize your influence on policies and practices that affect your watershed. Now you might be thinking “Another *plan*? We’ve spent enough time planning

already! Sometimes it seems as if all we ever do is plan. If we did all the planning that experts advocate, we might never actually do any *work*." But judicious planning can help you spread the news of your sampling program *and* your results; it can improve the quality of your data presentation; and it can also help you circumvent mistakes and save time.

### Planning Goals

In an age of information overload, it's not enough to simply produce data. Distilling a message and presenting it in a clear and concise format will greatly increase the chances that your message will be heard, will be understood, and will be used by people making decisions on the issues that concern you. Planning for data presentation focuses on the following goals:

Being on time	If a meeting to vote on a sewer upgrade is scheduled for November 14th, don't wait until the 15th to get nutrient loading data ready for the event.
Flexibility	Plan ahead so that nutrient data can be presented to the media, at town meeting, or to school groups, with little or no modification.
Readiness	When an algae bloom suddenly fouls a lake, promptly reported data can help decision makers deal with the problem in a timely manner.
A better product	Instead of working past midnight with glue, scissors, and crayons, utilize the expertise and skills within your organization and elsewhere—ask for help well in advance of the task's due date.
Successful action	Data that is well presented is more likely to be accepted and used to educate and motivate decision makers to act on your study's recommendations.

**How to use  
this manual**

This manual has been written both to encourage volunteer monitors to place a bigger emphasis on *communicating* the data they've worked so hard to collect, and to offer some suggestions on how to do so. The manual is organized to be used in three ways:

- As a soup-to-nuts introduction to *concepts* of data presentation. For this, read the entire manual. Chapter 2 is a guide to developing a data presentation plan for your organization. It covers topics such as identifying and approaching target audiences, how different audiences like to receive information, and using data to achieve *information, education, or persuasion* objectives. For those in a hurry, a two-page condensed version of Chapter 2 can be found in Chapter 9.
- As a discussion of different presentation formats: which work best for your target audiences and situations, and some tips on how to make or use them. Chapters 3-7 cover graphics, printed materials, exhibits, public presentations, and the media.
- As a reference guide to ready-made data presentation products. Examples of innovative and effective products are displayed and discussed throughout the manual, and especially in Chapter 8. By and large, these are “real” examples; monitoring groups have created and used these in their outreach efforts. To find something that you might wish to replicate, check the “Data Presentation Examples” list, which follows the Table of Contents. The Appendix contains technical tips on how to prepare or construct some of the examples presented in the text. If you would like additional information about how to produce these products yourself (e.g. time, expertise and expense required, materials needed, etc.) contact the Massachusetts Water Watch Partnership. We will be happy to share details with you.

**Before you begin**

Before developing your plan, let's take a step back and consider data presentation in the larger context of a monitoring program. The next page offers a quick overview of the data to action process—things that you should do before, during, and after the data presentation stage. Take a look at this before going too far into development of your own data presentation plan.

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## The Data to Action Process

Here's a brief summary of the process of stimulating community action with a monitoring program. A more detailed discussion of this topic can be found in the *Program Organizing Guide* published by River Watch Network (see the Reference section in the Appendix).

- 1. Monitoring** begins with defining study questions and ends with completed field and lab sheets. It includes everything in between, from training volunteers to collecting and analyzing samples. The result is a set of data that contain the numbers or values that help answer study questions and can be applied to working on issues raised in the study. Some consideration of data presentation is warranted here, particularly as program goals are developed. Because audiences and decision-making forums are identified, it is important to start thinking about how best to communicate with these audiences.
- 2. Data Management and Summarization** involves transferring data from field and lab sheets to a reliable filing system—electronic or manual. The two objectives are to check the accuracy of the values entered on field sheets and in the computer files, and to ensure that data aren't lost through lapses in handling and filing. Preparations for interpretation are begun by calculating seasonal averages, building tables and charts, organizing your data set into a summary form that helps you get a meaningful view of the numbers.
- 3. Data Interpretation** is the process of turning data into information. Study design questions are answered during this phase. Data take on real-life significance—as you compare results to water quality standards, “normal” values, or other sites and studies. A technical advisory committee that includes agency staff, academics, or other knowledgeable and interested parties is a great resource for answering questions such as, “What do the data tell us, and why are conditions the way they are?” Findings are developed, conclusions are drawn, and recommendations are drafted for additional monitoring or actions to maintain or improve water quality.
- 4. Data Presentation** is the process of getting out your information, message, and recommendations. This is where this manual comes in. Once your message on a particular issue has been formed, you decide what to say, to whom to say it, and how and where best to communicate with these audiences. Products are also created to facilitate presentations and make recommendations. This manual addresses this part of the process and tools for successful data presentation.
- 5. Taking Action** begins when your data and message have been successfully delivered. The next step is to work with the community to clean up a section of river, advocate for policy, or collaborate with towns, cities, and other government agencies to implement recommendations.

**In conclusion** You've worked hard to collect and analyze your data and now it's time to tell your story. Make sure that you devote the same attention to its presentation as you did to its collection and analysis. Study this manual, review your data, and build a custom toolkit to present your data for rave reviews—and positive action.

Break a leg!

