

## **Summary of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network Needs Assessment: A Report on the Survey Feedback from Gateway Members**

### **Background:**

In late 2001, the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network Working Group asked that an assessment of the needs of designated Chesapeake Bay Gateways be conducted. This document concisely summarizes the findings of that needs assessment, conducted in March and April 2002 through the Gateways Network website. A full comprehensive report is available as a separate document.<sup>1</sup>

The needs assessment is intended to help guide development of strategies to build and enhance the Gateways Network, including on-going consideration of the potential for “support organization” to assist the Gateways Network. Discussions of this concept occurred at a series of five workshops held with Gateway Network member organizations in December 2001. These discussions provided additional information about Gateways Network member views and needs.<sup>2</sup> Two specific points consistently agreed in those workshops that also correspond to survey findings are: (1) an expectation that Gateway status will help sites deliver a better visitor experience and contribute to conservation, and (2) a preference for maintaining the current relationship with the National Park Service and the Chesapeake Bay Program/CBGN Working Group.

### **Survey Findings:**

*Key survey findings support the conservation emphasis that characterized support for the Chesapeake Bay Program and particularly its conservation goals.* Throughout the survey, Gateways seek help with their conservation and access goals:

- ✓ Hands-on conservation and clean-ups rank just below guided walks and talks for staff- and volunteer-led interpretation.
- ✓ Gateways seek conservation management assistance, ranging from wetlands to lake management
- ✓ 37 Gateways provide 172 canoe/kayak launch/landing sites
- ✓ 25+ Gateways not currently classified as water trails are interested in learning about water trails development in a “Water Trails 101” course.

*Providing a consistently high-quality experience for visitors came up in all workshops and was clearly echoed in the survey answers.* Self-reported visitation by 65 Gateways numbered 9.5 million visitors, equal to two-thirds of the total population of the watershed. The Gateways Network reported visitation numbers, combined with the emphasis on interpretive and educational

---

<sup>1</sup> See: “Needs Assessment, Survey of Gateways Members”, May 14 2002, available as a pdf at [www.baygateways.net](http://www.baygateways.net).

<sup>2</sup> For a full summary of the workshop discussions, see a separate document titled “Summary of Gateways Network Workshop Discussions – Feedback to Gateways Network Members,” available as a pdf at [www.baygateways.net](http://www.baygateways.net).

programming, offer unique opportunities to reach a very large audience. Key survey findings:

- ✓ Interpretation is a key focus point for Network-wide action.
- ✓ While the survey did not ask Gateways to evaluate their interpretive programs, Gateways indicated a very strong interest in improving interpretive programs.
- ✓ Interpretive technical assistance consistently outranked other training needs.
- ✓ Survey answers suggest that interpretive planning and evaluation would benefit many Gateways and could tie to the many strategic planning efforts now underway.

Gateways are ready to enhance their interpretive programs:

- ✓ Half the reporting Gateways rely on fairly basic interpretive methods
- ✓ Assessing, planning and evaluating interpretive programming is the top training need
- ✓ Over 2/3rds of Gateways seek to improve their media and exhibit development
- ✓ Interpretive planning could be melded into strategic planning

Educational programming offers additional opportunities to deliver key CBGN messages regarding the watershed:

- ✓ 60% of Gateways offer on-site children's programs.
- ✓ 40% offer environmental education.
- ✓ 35% have dedicated educational facilities.
- ✓ K-12 bay-wide educational materials rank #1 in the needs listed for educational programming.

In both the survey and December 2001 workshops, Gateways addressed their participation in Gateways Network management. *Member sites seek more information, feedback opportunities and networking, but do not want to replace the current Working Group management structure.*

The survey provided validation and Gateways' preferences for participation and meeting formats. Gateways rank communication of Working Group information and opportunities for input first and participation in CBGN Working Group meetings as lower in importance.

Top choices:

- ✓ Small group meetings with the NPS & Working Group members
- ✓ Surveys of members on key decisions
- ✓ Posted agendas and minutes

Further, Gateways want the Network to provide opportunities to meet together around critical content needs. Survey choices in order of priority include:

- ✓ Day-long theme meetings
- ✓ Small group networking

- ✓ Single topic meetings
- ✓ Network-wide conferences

Throughout the 2001 workshops, participants listed many value-added efforts for a potential Gateways Network support organization, but generally were cautious about any decision until a much more specific definition of needs, roles, timing and a business plan could be discussed. *In the needs assessment survey, Gateways demonstrated preferences for a strong Network-wide visibility program, and for communications and fundraising training.*

- ✓ The top one half of Network-wide tools create a 'visibility' package of signs, publications and TV and radio.
- ✓ 'Using promotional tools effectively' and 'Communicating with the Public' are in the top 5 training needs.
- ✓ At January 2002, only 5 Gateways had an easy link to baygateways.net and 2 Gateways web sites carried the logo.

Gateways appear to be heavily dependent upon appropriations, grants from governmental units and foundations, and membership programs.

- ✓ 60% of Gateways receive one-half or more funding through appropriations.
- ✓ Government and foundation grants and membership and small donor gifts account for most contributions.
- ✓ Grant-seeking training is very highly ranked.
- ✓ Funding needs are a steady theme through all 'other' answers.

***Taken together, the workshops and the needs assessment survey replies suggest general conclusions.***

**Conclusion 1: Gateways demonstrate many opportunities for meeting the three CBGN goals of enhancing interpretation, access and conservation.**

- ✓ High visitation
- ✓ Focus on interpretation and visitor experience
- ✓ Eagerness for improvement in interpretive programming and educational offerings
- ✓ Interest in being more than a just a grant program
- ✓ Commitment to creating and promoting the Network as a whole

**Conclusion 2: Gateways see opportunities and needs that should be addressed as soon as possible, rather than waiting on a possible future support organization.**

- ✓ There is a thirst for opportunities to work together to build the Network into a recognized and sought after 'stamp'.
- ✓ Gateways want the opportunity to improve their programming and offer a high quality visitor experience.
- ✓ While the conversation about a support group progresses, the Network should expand its visibility program as rapidly as resources allow.

**Conclusion 3: Gateways are ready to continue the dialogue about a Network-wide support organization and recognized some added values associated with the idea.**

- ✓ Gateways don't want to lose the NPS and CBP / CBGN Working group structure.
- ✓ Gateways want to see a solid business plan that spells out the concept for any support organization, as well as its relationships to the NPS and Network members, and the financial architecture.
- ✓ Gateways want to use the Network commitment to create promotional and funding opportunities they cannot each create alone.