

Communication Strategy for the Peconic Estuary Partnership



Photo credit: Luke Ormand

Protecting & Restoring Long Island's Peconic Bays



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Overview

The development of this Communication Strategy (“Strategy”) for the Peconic Estuary Partnership (PEP) was required as part of its Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) planning process and serves as a component document to PEP’s 2020 CCMP. The purpose of this Strategy is to help guide PEP staff in their day-to-day communications, outreach, and engagement (COE) efforts and provide recommendations on ways PEP can enhance its effectiveness in promoting more pro-estuary behaviors among the community and partners. Marstel-Day, a consulting firm, was hired in 2025 to develop this Strategy, as well as an accompanying COE Plan that will be used by PEP staff to enhance implementation of its future COE activities.

This Strategy outlines measurable objectives that can be taken by PEP staff, partners, and volunteers to help implement actions that support the four CCMP key goals. The objectives will ultimately improve awareness and understanding of PEP’s purpose and the activities it performs to protect and restore the Peconic Estuary, inspiring more people to take positive actions for the estuary. This Strategy is intended to be used as a guide for PEP staff, PEP’s working groups and committees, and partner organizations and agencies.



The CCMP guides the activities of PEP and its partners.

Introduction

In 1993, the Peconic Estuary became the 20th estuary in the United States to be designated as an “Estuary of National Significance” by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), becoming part of the EPA’s National Estuary Program (NEP). This designation led to the establishment of PEP in 1993. The EPA’s NEP supports PEP with funding, guidance, and technical assistance. Under Section 320 of the Federal Clean Water Act, EPA provides financial assistance, guidance and technical assistance to PEP as it develops and implements its Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). Specifically, Section 320(g)(2) authorizes the EPA to make grants to “pay for activities necessary for the development and implementation

Nestled between Long Island’s north and south forks, the Peconic Estuary is a network of over 100 bays, harbors, and streams. Water from nearly 180 square miles of farms, forests, and communities—from Brookhaven to Shelter Island—drain into the Peconic Estuary, which is designated as an “Estuary of National Significance.”

of a comprehensive conservation and management plan of which this communications strategy is a component to PEP’s 2020 CCMP. The PEP and EPA partnership is powered by a strong network—local governments, organizations, scientists, and residents all play a role. PEP’s management and advisory committees offer expertise, and policy and management leaders help guide decisions. Together, this partnership ensures the Peconic Estuary (also referred to as the “Estuary” in this Strategy) has the leadership, knowledge, and community support it needs to thrive.

As part of its participation in the NEP, PEP was tasked with developing a CCMP (originally written in 2001 and updated most recently in 2020). The mission, goals, and strategies within the CCMP guide the work of PEP and focus on protecting clean water, restoring natural habitats, and strengthening communities across Long Island’s East End. The 2020 CCMP is built around four key goals: Strong Partnerships, Resilient Communities, Clean Water, and a Healthy Ecosystem. Each goal in the CCMP is broken down into clear objectives and specific actions. This structure keeps everyone aligned and moving toward the same vision—a cleaner, healthier estuary.

A copy of the 2020 CCMP can be found here: <https://www.peconicestuary.org/ccmp2020>.
An up-to-date CCMP progress tracker is available here: <https://portal.gss.stonybrook.edu/ccmp>.

Strategy Vision and Elements

The following summarizes the six key elements of this Strategy that will drive the objectives, metrics, and targets for the next few years. The methodology for identifying these elements is described in PEP’s COE Plan, which was developed in conjunction with the Strategy.

Strategy Vision Statement

PEP’s Communication Strategy provides guidance and tools to enhance collaboration among and understanding across the many communities and organizations to support PEP’s mission—protecting and restoring Long Island’s Peconic Bays.

Strategy Purpose

The Strategy is a roadmap that PEP and its partners can use to guide its COE efforts related to CCMP implementation.

Strategy Elements

Element 1: Develop a **shared narrative and related tools** to help PEP and its partners effectively tell the story of why water quality and aquatic habitats are important and worth protecting.

Element 2: Shape a **clear public-facing identity for PEP** so that more communities and individuals on the East End want to participate in PEP’s efforts.

Element 3: Work with Suffolk County to broaden and increase **participation in its Septic Improvement Program (SIP)** to inspire pro-estuary behaviors and have a measurable positive impact on the Estuary’s water quality.

Element 4: Build **connections with agriculture and aquaculture communities on the East End** to showcase responsible practices that expand their use across the Estuary.

Element 5: Design meaningful approaches that invigorate **community engagement with special interest groups** that are not currently as involved with PEP as others within the Estuary.

Element 6: Sustain **long-term COE efforts** by tracking successes and challenges, addressing new opportunities and potential partners, and adapting activities to what may arise in the future.

Narratives of Strategy Elements

The six elements of this Strategy lay out a clear direction for PEP and its many partners. The elements define the desired results and outcomes for this Strategy. The following descriptions outline why each element is important. These elements were developed from conversations with PEP staff and partners, interviews with other estuary programs, materials examined during the literature review, and Marstel-Day’s knowledge and experience related to effective COE.

Element 1: Develop a shared narrative and related tools to help PEP and its partners effectively tell the story of why water quality and aquatic habitats are important and worth protecting.

Synopsis: Since 1993, PEP and its partners have made great progress toward protecting and improving water quality in the Estuary. Despite these positive impacts, members of the public are not always aware of the water quality and aquatic habitat improvements occurring in the watershed. As people develop a better understanding of how a healthier Estuary positively impacts their lives and communities, as well as how their actions can impact the Estuary, they are more likely to take personal actions and support collective efforts to protect and improve their watershed. The sharing of such scientific data and analysis with the public and stakeholders—in an easy to understand manner—fosters informed decision-making and encourages broader community engagement in efforts to protect and restore the Estuary.



Photo credit: Luke Ormand

In addition, inspiring more pro-estuary behaviors among the public can be challenging, requiring an understanding of the many social factors that influence people’s actions, such as an individual’s knowledge level, cultural values, perceived norms, and level of ownership. Individuals can also be influenced by community or group affiliations and the knowledge, values, and norms associated with those groups. Even when people know how to protect the environment and understand why it matters, they may still fail to take beneficial actions, due to time and level of effort, real or perceived costs, and their level of trust in conservation organizations like PEP.

Approach: PEP will work with its partners to better understand community members concerns, then use that information to develop materials that showcase the value of making choices that protect the Estuary. That will include removing barriers (cost, time constraints, steps in a process, etc.), whenever possible, to encourage pro-estuary behavior as part of someone’s daily routines. Some of that will be achieved by building new relationships with media outlets and social media influencers that can help transmit PEP’s story and inspire pro-estuary behaviors. Recommended tools for doing so—including means to foster feelings of responsibility, ownership, and pride in the health of the Estuary, as well as ways to remove or reduce barriers to participation—are included later within this Strategy.

Element 2: Shape a clear public-facing identity for PEP so that more communities and individuals on the East End want to participate in PEP’s efforts.

Synopsis: PEP does many things—from monitoring and improving water quality, to protecting wildlife habitats and species, to educating individuals and groups about building resilient communities. PEP staff also communicate with a variety of audiences—from homeowners and government officials to baymen and farmers and many more. All these actions and stakeholders are important to protecting and restoring the health of the Estuary. However, the organization’s breadth of work can make defining who the organization is, what it does,

and why people should care about it difficult. If people are unsure of where they would fit within an organization or how they could help, they might not even try.

Approach: PEP will focus a deliberate and sustained effort to tell an inspiring “story” of PEP, its mission, and projects that can be used consistently among all PEP staff, volunteers, and partners organizations. To do so, PEP will reflect on the overall purpose and clearly define the main focus areas of the organization. Once the PEP priority areas are defined, PEP will be better situated to determine which stakeholder groups they should focus on, given limited COE resources. Refining the PEP’s area of influence and continuing to build trust and leverage partner relationships will provide the information necessary to inspire people to make positive actions for the Estuary. Making COE a part of each of PEP’s priority projects and programs and ensuring that all PEP staff (and possibly volunteers too) have a basic understanding of COE best practices will also be important in ensuring that everyone is sharing consistent messaging in an effective way. Recommended tools to do so are included later within this Strategy, as well as in the associated COE Plan.



Element 3: Work with Suffolk County to broaden and increase participation in its Septic Improvement Program (SIP) to inspire pro-estuary behaviors and have a measurable positive impact on the Estuary’s water quality.

Synopsis: One of the main contributors to nitrogen pollution within the Peconic Estuary is from old, poorly maintained septic systems. When these systems are neglected, they can become clogged or leak untreated wastewater directly into the soil and groundwater, which ultimately flows into the Estuary. Nitrogen pollution can then lead to harmful algal blooms and low dissolved oxygen “dead zones,” and bacteria in the wastewater can contaminate shellfisheries and create public health risks.



Photo credit: Long Island Sound Partnership

Approach: Given the CCMP’s goals of “clean waters for healthy ecosystem health and safe recreation” and “healthy ecosystem with abundant, diverse wildlife,” PEP has a clear reason to encourage homeowners (including owners of second homes for vacation houses and/or rental properties) to participate in Suffolk County’s SIP, which can help to pay for septic system upgrades and replacements within priority zones of the Estuary. As more people upgrade their septic system or switch to municipal sewer systems, the Estuary’s water quality should improve. While SIP is not a program run by PEP, the organization can work with Suffolk County to promote enrollment in the program and provide data on water quality improvements in the Estuary that can be linked to SIP participation. Care should be taken, however, to keep clear lines of distinction between who supports and manages the program. Recommended tools for boosting participating in the SIP—including the development of infographics and social media post content—are included later within this Strategy as well as in the associated COE Plan.

Element 4: Build connections with agriculture and aquaculture communities on the East End to showcase responsible practices that expand their use across the Estuary.

Synopsis: Traditional agriculture practices, such as the application of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, contribute to the nitrogen pollution issue within the Peconic Estuary. However, many farmers on the East End are already using best management practices that reduce nitrogen runoff and incorporate more sustainable tools to protect wildlife habitats and boost native vegetation and animal species. In addition, aquaculture operations within the Estuary where seaweed or shellfish are grown can remove nitrogen and phosphorus from the water, improving overall water quality. PEP can work with partners and industry associations to highlight these operations and encourage the use of similar practices across the East End.

Approach: By promoting best management practices, PEP can share the benefit of those actions to other land and sea farmers, with the hope that they too will adopt those practices. However, learning about who is doing what, getting their involvement in promoting their actions, and then effectively engaging with others can be challenging. Building trust with these communities will be essential to success under Element 4. Listening to their concerns and challenges will be critical, as well as understanding their reasons for implementing certain practices. Once that rapport has been established, PEP can share information on best practices that will still address their concerns while protecting the Estuary (i.e., information on the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides). Recommended tools for doing so—including the use of short video spotlights and newsletter articles—are included later within this Strategy.



Photo credit: Long Island Wine Country

Element 5: Design meaningful approaches that invigorate community engagement with special interest groups that are not currently as involved with PEP as others within the Estuary.

Synopsis: The East End of Long Island is made up of myriad populations and communities of varying demographics and backgrounds. Some individuals live and work on Long Island year-round, while others visit for a week or a season. For instance, the population of the East End is estimated to nearly double over the summer due to an influx of tourists. The messaging and outreach methods that work with each group vary as widely as the number of stakeholder groups to reach. PEP will therefore need to tailor its COE efforts specifically for each one.

Approach: To effectively communicate and engage with all communities on the East End, PEP may need to meet people where they are, rather than expect them to modify their routine to go to PEP. PEP may also need to communicate in languages other than English to reach those who are less engaged with PEP. It also means challenging preconceived notions about what is aesthetically pleasing in a yard or landscape, what is expected of someone who owns a home, and what it means to live on the East End. The results will be worth it because PEP reaching out to and collaborating with additional groups will help to promote pro-estuary behaviors across a larger swath of the Estuary, which will lead to healthier water quality and habitats. Recommended tools for PEP to better engage with all communities across the Peconic Estuary—including the creation of unique messaging,



Photo credit: Jenna Schwerzmann

StoryMaps, posters, and tabling at community events—are included later within this Strategy as well as in the associated COE Plan.

Element 6: Sustain long-term COE efforts by tracking successes and challenges, addressing new opportunities and potential partners, adapting activities to what may arise in the future.

Synopsis: PEP staff, members of the PEP committees, and existing and new partner organizations will implement the elements and objectives outlined within this Strategy over the next few years (and beyond). Successful implementation of this Strategy will require being able to assess and evaluate progress toward meeting each of the element’s objectives and making changes as needed. Element 6 establishes the objectives needed to adaptively manage this Strategy to be sure that it remains relevant to and useful for the many organizations and communities within the Peconic Estuary over time.

Approach: PEP needs to be flexible in how it manages its COE efforts and be willing to adapt to changing demographics, new natural resource challenges, new partnership organizations, and other unforeseen events and actions. PEP also needs to ensure its capacity for COE efforts is adequate to engage with the many stakeholders it desires to reach. PEP staff and volunteers need to take the time to celebrate the organization’s successes and recognize that challenges can lead to opportunities for growth and learning. This Strategy is a living document, and as such, will require routine monitoring and updating, as needed. Recommended tools for PEP to accomplish this—including the implementation of regular reviews and adjustments of Strategy objectives—are included later within this Strategy to enhance the ability to achieve the CCMP’s vision, themes, and goals and improve overall COE program effectiveness.

Strategy Framework

Tables 1-6, which start on the next page, provide the Strategy Framework that aligns each element's objectives with recommended means to achieve those objectives to enhance and expand PEP's COE efforts. The Strategy Framework tables include the key information necessary to map out details related to each element objective to facilitate the successful implementation of key activities that support this strategy. **More specific detailed actions related to each of the objectives are included within PEP's COE Plan.** Provided below is a brief description of the different columns included in the Strategy Framework tables.

- **Objectives & Deliverables (Column 1)** identifies each objective and potential deliverables.
- **Impact (Column 2)** characterizes the projected impact (i.e., what is expected to happen once the objective is implemented).
- **CCMP Connection(s) (Column 3)** connects the objectives to one or more goals of the CCMP.
- **Target Audience(s) (Column 4)** identifies the specific targeted audiences.
- **Suggested Responsible Parties (Column 5)** identifies the suggested responsible parties (i.e., those individuals and/or organizations that could take ownership for implementing the action and/or delegating responsibility to others to ensure the action is taken).
- **Possible Metrics (Column 6)** lists suggested metrics (qualitative and quantitative) for measuring progress on the objective—some time bound, others more open-ended.
- **Timeframe (Column 7)** gives a sense of the timeframe over which an objective would be met. (Based on the timeframe outlined within the CCMP, where Short (S) is 1-2 years, Medium (M) is up to 5 years, and Long (L) is up to 10 years. Please note that some objectives are ongoing over that timeframe, whereas others would have discrete start and end dates.
- **Cost Range (Column 8)** includes an estimated cost range to implement each objective. (Based on cost ranges outlined within the CCMP, where \$ < \$25K, \$\$ = \$25K-\$100K, \$\$\$ = \$101K-\$500K, \$\$\$\$ = > \$500K.)

Table 1: Strategy Framework for Element 1—Provide a shared narrative and related tools to help PEP and its partners effectively tell the story of why water quality and aquatic habitats are important and worth protecting for and by everyone within the Estuary and beyond.

Objectives & Deliverables	Impact	CCMP Connection(s)	Target Audience(s)	Suggested Responsible Parties ¹	Possible Progress Metrics ²	Timeframe	Cost Range and possible funding
<p>1.1 Continue to refine key messaging for PEP’s various audiences and COE methods.</p> <p><u>Potential deliverables:</u> new messaging and stories tailored toward different audiences, messaging triangles, and other COE materials.</p>	<p>PEP has many projects that involve numerous stakeholder groups, organizations, and individuals. Conveying the importance and impact of those efforts and continuing to build on successes is dependent on clear, compelling messages that tell people what PEP does, why the work matters, and how others can participate. Breaking down scientific information into messages that are easy to understand will foster informed decision-making.</p>	<p>Strong Partnerships and Engagement</p> <p>Resilient Communities Prepared for Climate Change</p> <p>Clean Waters for Ecosystem Health and Safe Recreation</p> <p>Healthy Ecosystems with Abundant, Diverse Wildlife</p>	<p>Public</p> <p>Government</p> <p>Policymakers</p> <p>Non-profits</p> <p>Academia</p> <p>Businesses</p> <p>Residents</p>	<p>Lead: Outreach and Communication Manager</p> <p>Support: Other PEP staff</p>	<p># of new messages developed quarterly and annually</p> <p># of new human-interest stories developed quarterly and annually</p> <p># of new organizations partnering with PEP on its work</p> <p>% increase in engagement from last year (overall and/or among certain stakeholder groups)</p>	S	<p>\$</p> <p>CWA</p> <p>320 or IJA or Staff time</p>
<p>1.2 Create a broad set of engaging materials based on messaging from 1.1 above.</p> <p><u>Potential deliverables:</u> new COE materials, a new signature initiative and associated materials, and an online document sharing repository.</p>	<p>The development of new COE materials tailored for specific audiences will expand people’s understanding of PEP and its mission. Making these materials readily accessible to partner organizations to use and share can efficiently broaden PEP’s impact. Care will need to be taken to ensure the materials are being used correctly and with the right audiences.</p>	<p>Strong Partnerships and Engagement</p> <p>Resilient Communities Prepared for Climate Change</p> <p>Clean Waters for Ecosystem Health and Safe Recreation</p> <p>Healthy Ecosystems with Abundant, Diverse Wildlife</p>	<p>Public</p> <p>Government</p> <p>Non-profits</p> <p>Academia</p> <p>Businesses</p> <p>Residents</p>	<p>Lead: Outreach and Communication Manager</p> <p>Support: Other PEP staff</p>	<p># of new COE materials developed quarterly and annually</p> <p>% increase in awareness of PEP and its work among those on the East End</p> <p># of new partners working with PEP on its work and using the COE tools developed</p>	S – M	<p>\$</p> <p>Staff Time</p>
<p>1.3 Work with traditional and social media outlets.</p> <p><u>Potential deliverables:</u> modifications to the stakeholder matrix, a media toolkit, and advertisement copy.</p>	<p>Monthly media monitoring performed on PEP and its work did not result in many “hits” on the search terms. Making direct personal connections to journalists and social media influencers, educating them on how and why PEP’s work is newsworthy, is an effective way to broaden PEP’s reach.</p>	<p>Strong Partnerships and Engagement</p>	<p>Journalists and editors</p> <p>Social media influencers</p> <p>Public</p>	<p>Lead: Water Quality Outreach Specialist (short-term) or New Online Media Coordinator (longer-term)</p> <p>Support: Outreach and Communication Manager</p>	<p># of new media contacts added to the engagement matrix</p> <p># of meetings/calls with traditional media contacts and social media influences that lead to new articles/posts</p> <p># of new items developed for the media toolkit</p> <p># of click-ons/click-throughs from paid social media ads</p>	S – M	<p>\$</p> <p>Staff Time</p>

¹ While many of these actions are a group effort, one or more suggested parties have been identified here to manage the action and evaluate progress over time, bringing in others as needed.

² This is not a list that PEP should implement in its entirety. These are suggested metrics from which PEP can choose to use or not, and this can evolve over time.

Table 2: Strategy Framework for Element 2—Shape a clear public-facing identity for PEP so that more communities and individuals on the East End want to participate in PEP’s efforts.

Objectives & Deliverables	Impact	CCMP Connection(s)	Target Audience(s)	Suggested Responsible Parties	Possible Progress Metrics	Timeframe	Cost Range and possible funding
<p>2.1 Make COE a routine part of all staff’s roles.</p> <p><u>Potential deliverables:</u> development of training modules, annual COE Work Plans, agendas and meeting minutes, and new COE materials.</p>	PEP has a small staff who are dedicated to and excellent at protecting the Estuary. However, sharing information about their work and how it relates to PEP’s mission could be better integrated into day-to-day tasks to improve COE efforts.	<p>Strong Partnerships and Engagement</p> <p>Resilient Communities Prepared for Climate Change</p> <p>Clean Waters for Ecosystem Health and Safe Recreation</p> <p>Healthy Ecosystems with Abundant, Diverse Wildlife</p>	<p>PEP staff</p> <p>All stakeholder groups would ultimately benefit</p>	<p>Lead: Outreach and Communication Manager</p> <p>Support: Executive Director and other PEP staff</p>	<p># of COE-related trainings conducted annually</p> <p># of staff (and volunteers) completing those trainings</p> <p>% increase in number and frequency of COE materials being developed and disseminated from each staff member</p>	S – M	<p>\$</p> <p>Staff Time</p>
<p>2.2. Increase committee member participation in COE efforts.</p> <p><u>Potential deliverables:</u> development of training modules, annual COE Work Plans, agendas and meeting minutes, and new COE materials.</p>	PEP’s committees consist of many stakeholder groups and partners across the Estuary, so they represent an already organized resource capable of amplifying PEP’s COE efforts.	<p>Strong Partnerships and Engagement</p> <p>Resilient Communities Prepared for Climate Change</p> <p>Clean Waters for Ecosystem Health and Safe Recreation</p> <p>Healthy Ecosystems with Abundant, Diverse Wildlife</p>	PEP committees	<p>Lead: Executive Director</p> <p>Support: Outreach and Communication Manager</p>	<p># of meetings with committees to discuss COE efforts</p> <p># of committee members participating in COE efforts</p> <p># of PEP COE materials shared by members</p> <p># of hours contributed by members to COE efforts per month/year</p>	S	<p>\$</p> <p>Staff Time</p>
<p>2.3 Narrow and better define the organization’s focus.</p> <p><u>Possible deliverables:</u> more streamlined COE effort for the organization that includes more focused audiences, messages, and tools.</p>	It would be beneficial to think about the desired future direction of PEP to help refine what is communicated about it and to whom. This refinement will increase positive outcomes while being cognizant of time, monetary resources, and PEP’s small staff size.	<p>Strong Partnerships and Engagement</p> <p>Resilient Communities Prepared for Climate Change</p> <p>Clean Waters for Ecosystem Health and Safe Recreation</p> <p>Healthy Ecosystems with Abundant, Diverse Wildlife</p>	All	<p>Lead: Executive Director</p> <p>Support: All PEP staff and committee members</p>	<p>Difference between staff hours spent on COE efforts and engagement rates now, one year, and 3 years later</p> <p>% increase in public understanding of what PEP does one year and 3 years later</p>	S – M	<p>\$</p> <p>Staff Time</p>
<p>2.4 Refine PEP’s website.</p> <p><u>Potential deliverables:</u> brand new website and/or one that is updated more regularly, and links to social media posts with more frequent visitor “click-throughs.”</p>	Some of the content on the PEP website is old, and PEP has difficulty getting content updated. When website content is outdated, it discourages people from returning to the site for information. Linking social media content to a regularly updated website builds engagement and creates opportunities for partner collaboration.	Strong Partnerships and Engagement	All, with particular emphasis on younger audiences	<p>Lead: Water Quality Outreach Specialist (short-term) or New Online Media Coordinator (longer-term)</p> <p>Support: Website contractor and other PEP staff</p>	<p>% increase in website visitation</p> <p># of click-throughs per month</p>	S	<p>\$ - \$\$</p> <p>EPA 320 Funds</p> <p>Staff Time</p>

Objectives & Deliverables	Impact	CCMP Connection(s)	Target Audience(s)	Suggested Responsible Parties	Possible Progress Metrics	Timeframe	Cost Range and possible funding
<p>2.5 Enhance PEP’s social media content.</p> <p><u>Potential deliverables:</u> social media post templates, new short videos, an enhanced content calendar, and an updated social media strategy.</p>	<p>Social media is one of the most useful tools to engage specific audiences. Social media accounts, however, need to be managed and updated regularly to avoid becoming stale, thus losing followers. Posting vibrant images along with unique and personal stories would make PEP and its mission more visible.</p>	<p>Strong Partnerships and Engagement</p>	<p>All, with particular emphasis on younger audiences</p>	<p>Lead: Water Quality Outreach Specialist (short-term) or New Online Media Coordinator (longer-term)</p> <p>Support: All PEP staff and committee members</p>	<p>% increase in social media channel followers</p> <p>% increase in likes, shares, and other engagement on social media channels</p> <p>% increase in click-throughs to website</p> <p># of posts per week, month, and year per channel</p> <p># of likes, shares, and comments done by PEP for others’ content</p> <p># of videos created per year</p>	<p>S – M</p>	<p>\$ - \$\$</p> <p>Staff Time</p>
<p>2.6 Use other forms of media (radio, TV, newspaper, etc.) to boost reach.</p> <p><u>Potential deliverables:</u> radio and newspaper ad templates, short video segments, “traditional” media strategy</p>	<p>While social media should be the main focus to boost reach, targeted efforts to one or more “traditional” media outlets could have the benefit of reaching certain target audiences that do not regularly use social media. Building relationships with journalists and editors of these outlets can build earned media success.</p>	<p>Strong Partnerships and Engagement</p>	<p>All, with particular emphasis on mature audiences and business owners</p>	<p>Lead: Water Quality Outreach Specialist</p> <p>Support: All PEP staff and committee members</p>	<p># of mentions in newspapers and on TV and radio per month and year</p> <p># of video segments created and shared per year</p> <p>% increase in participation for PEP events and volunteer opportunities publicized via traditional media outlets</p>	<p>M</p>	<p>\$ - \$\$</p> <p>Staff Time</p>

Table 3: Strategy Framework for Element 3—Work with Suffolk County to broaden and increase participation in its Septic Improvement Program (SIP) to inspire pro-estuary behaviors and have a measurable positive impact on the Estuary’s water quality.

Objectives & Deliverables	Impact	CCMP Connection(s)	Target Audience(s)	Suggested Responsible Parties	Possible Progress Metrics	Timeframe	Cost Range and possible funding
<p>3.1 Enhance coordination with Suffolk County.</p> <p><u>Potential deliverables:</u> scheduling a standing meeting with Suffolk County with an agenda and/or action items for SIP-related outreach, workshop materials, as well as SIP messaging and informational materials for email or social media use.</p>	Because Suffolk County manages the SIP, it is important to ensure any supporting messaging from PEP is aligned with the County’s efforts. Coordinating with the County can ensure that messages to the community are consistent, clear, and not redundant—allowing the same level of effort to reach a broader audience.	<p>Strong Partnerships and Engagement</p> <p>Clean Waters for Ecosystem Health and Safe Recreation</p> <p>Healthy Ecosystems with Abundant, Diverse Wildlife</p>	<p>Suffolk County staff</p> <p>Full-time homeowners</p> <p>Part-time and/or second homeowners</p> <p>Rental property owners</p>	<p>Lead: Water Quality Outreach Specialist</p> <p>Support: Outreach and Communication Manager</p>	<p># of SIP applications/participants in priority areas and/or % increase in participation from one year to the next</p> <p># of meetings with the Suffolk County SIP point of contact quarterly and annually</p> <p># of action items (determined during recurring meetings) completed by PEP and/or Suffolk County</p>	S	\$ Staff Time
<p>3.2 Work with homeowners’ associations, civic associations, and other organizations to disseminate SIP information.</p> <p><u>Potential deliverables:</u> presentation- or workshop-format meeting to provide information about the SIP and how to apply, as well as digital SIP-related messaging content, and printable flyers or door hangers that could be sent to specific communities/recent homebuyers or shared with partner organizations and local businesses. PEP may also want to explore tabling at partner organization’s events to provide information about the SIP.</p>	Homeowners’ associations, civic associations, and other organizations may be interested in sharing SIP-related information to their many members, as it relates to their specific cause. To ensure effective outreach to these organizations at minimal to no cost to them, it is important to provide SIP messaging materials that can easily be disseminated through email or other digital platforms.	<p>Strong Partnerships and Engagement</p> <p>Clean Waters for Ecosystem Health and Safe Recreation</p> <p>Healthy Ecosystems with Abundant, Diverse Wildlife</p>	<p>Full-time homeowners</p> <p>Part-time and/or second homeowners</p> <p>Rental property owners</p> <p>HOAs</p> <p>Civic associations</p>	<p>Lead: Water Quality Outreach Specialist</p> <p>Support: Outreach and Communication Manager</p>	<p># of SIP applicants/participants from a specific community and/or % increase in participation from one year to the next</p> <p># of workshops or presentations given to homeowners’ or civic associations annually</p> <p># of other events (e.g. tabling) annually where PEP attended to provide SIP-related information</p>	S – M	\$ IJA Staff Time, Local Gov Funds
<p>3.3. Refine the PEP website’s content related to SIP to provide an easy-to-use resource for homeowners.</p> <p><u>Potential deliverables:</u> restructured SIP webpage on the PEP website, one or more success stories/testimonials from a past SIP participant(s), social media posts reminding readers where to find information about the SIP, and added links/cross-references between various PEP webpages to increase traffic to the SIP page.</p>	PEP’s website provides a wealth of information, but it is challenging for website visitors to find the information they are looking for. It is important to ensure that key information, such as PEP’s SIP webpage, is easy to find, understand, and is detailed enough to address readers’ questions.	<p>Strong Partnerships and Engagement</p> <p>Clean Waters for Ecosystem Health and Safe Recreation</p> <p>Healthy Ecosystems with Abundant, Diverse Wildlife</p>	<p>Full-time homeowners</p> <p>Part-time and/or second homeowners</p> <p>Rental property owners</p>	<p>Lead: Water Quality Outreach Specialist (short-term) or New Online Media Coordinator (longer-term)</p> <p>Support: Outreach and Communication Manager</p>	<p>% increase in visitation to/clicks on PEP’s SIP webpage quarterly and annually</p> <p>% increase in the number of searches on PEP’s website containing the word “septic” or “SIP” quarterly and annually</p> <p>% increase in the number of views/likes/comments on social media posts sharing PEP’s SIP webpage or related messaging quarterly and annually</p>	S	\$ Staff Time, Local Gov Funds

Table 4: Strategy Framework for Element 4—Build connections with agriculture and aquaculture communities on the East End to showcase responsible practices that expand their use across the Estuary.

Objectives & Deliverables	Impact	CCMP Connection(s)	Target Audience(s)	Suggested Responsible Parties	Possible Progress Metrics	Timeframe	Cost Range and possible funding
<p>4.1 Strengthen outreach efforts with local farming organizations and farmers.</p> <p><u>Potential deliverables:</u> digital or printed agriculture-related communication materials, talking points for tabling at events, and funding resource lists and information (to include potential mini-grant program focus).</p>	Creating opportunities for more frequent interactions with local farming organizations will strengthen PEP’s relationship with these organizations and will expand their involvement. It is essential that these organizations are aware of PEP and why PEP supports estuary-friendly farming practices.	Strong Partnerships and Engagement	Farm and vineyard owners or points of contact Agriculture-related organizations	Lead: Outreach and Communication Manager Support: Water Quality Outreach Specialist and/or new hire (Community Engagement Specialist)	# of agriculture festivals/tabling events attended quarterly and annually # of attendees engaged during these events # of small group introductory meetings hosted with agriculture organizations quarterly and annually	S	\$-\$\$ Staff Time
<p>4.2 Strengthen outreach efforts with local aquaculturists (and Baymen, fisherman, etc.).</p> <p><u>Potential deliverables:</u> digital or printed aquaculture and fishing best practices, talking points for tabling at events, scannable handout cards or flyers for display at local fishing/shellfish-related businesses, and introductory meetings with leaders of local aquaculture organizations.</p>	It is important for the aquaculture and fishing communities to understand who PEP is and why fishing best practices are important for a healthy estuary. Starting with simple introductions and awareness, along with consistent communication over time, can help foster a long-term relationship with aquaculturists.	Strong Partnerships and Engagement	Aquaculture and commercial fishing/shellfishing company owners and points of contact Aquaculture and commercial fishing/shellfishing organizations	Lead: Outreach and Communication Manager Support: Water Quality Outreach Specialist and/or new hire (Community Engagement Specialist)	# of aquaculture or seafood festivals/tabling events attended quarterly and annually # of attendees engaged during these events # of small group introductory meetings hosted with aquaculture/fishing industry organizations quarterly and annually # of visits to the aquaculture best practices webpage quarterly and annually	S – M	\$-\$\$ Staff Time
<p>4.3 Raise awareness of agriculture and aquaculture best practices.</p> <p><u>Potential deliverables:</u> social media/newsletter blurbs about “Farm Stars,” an infographic about the range of best practices than can be implemented, and materials with information about the benefits to farmers and aquaculturists when the practices are implemented.</p>	There can be many real and perceived barriers for farmers and aquaculturists to implement estuary-friendly practices. PEP can help address some of these barriers by raising awareness of the best practices, particularly those that are relatively simple and affordable, and by strengthening messaging about the benefits to the farms or aquaculturists who implement those changes.	Strong Partnerships and Engagement Clean Waters for Ecosystem Health and Safe Recreation Healthy Ecosystem with Abundant, Diverse Wildlife	Agriculture/aquaculture/commercial fishing company owners or points of contact Agriculture/aquaculture/commercial fishing-related organizations Public	Lead: Outreach and Communication Manager Support: Water Quality Outreach Specialist and/or new hire (Community Engagement Specialist)	# of “Farm Star” highlights shared quarterly and annually # of individuals engaging with Farm Star-related social media or website posts quarterly and annually	S – M	\$ Staff Time
<p>4.4 Explore a “Peconic Estuary Friendly Farm” badge program for agriculture and aquaculture farms/companies to display on their website/signage.</p> <p><u>Potential deliverables:</u> list of stakeholder organizations to involve in determining the scoring metrics, an application or review process for farms and companies, flyers or other print and digital media to raise awareness about the program, a PEP webpage dedicated to the program, and a social media template for recognizing recent recipients.</p>	A badge program will elevate the awareness and appreciation for farms and companies that have made estuary-friendly choices and inspire others to do the same. It is essential to have a fair, transparent, and well-communicated system for awarding the badge. It will also be important to spread awareness of the badge program to the agriculture and aquaculture communities.	Strong Partnerships and Engagement	Agriculture/aquaculture/commercial fishing company owners or points of contact Agriculture/aquaculture/commercial fishing-related organizations Public Restaurant owners and chefs	Lead: Outreach and Communication Manager Support: Water Quality Outreach Specialist and/or new hire (Community Engagement Specialist)	# of applications and awarded badges quarterly and annually # of views/clicks/visits to the Peconic Estuary Friendly Farm webpage quarterly and annually	M – L	\$-\$\$ Staff Time

Table 5: Strategy Framework for Element 5—Design meaningful approaches that invigorate community engagement with special interest groups that are not currently as involved with PEP as others within the Estuary.

Objectives & Deliverables	Impact	CCMP Connection(s)	Target Audience(s)	Suggested Responsible Parties	Possible Progress Metrics	Timeframe	Cost Range and possible funding
<p>5.1 Find ways to reach and engage with part-time homeowners and seasonal residents.</p> <p><u>Potential deliverables:</u> new COE materials (factsheets, infographics, ads), suggested HOA bylaw changes, and new partnerships with tourism bureaus and related groups.</p>	Part-time homeowners and seasonal residents (and the lawncare companies they hire) can also contribute to impacts on the Estuary, such as water pollution from lawn chemicals or poorly maintained septic systems. Given their part-time status, however, these residents may have less personal connection to the Estuary. But it is possible and important for PEP to engage with them and increase awareness.	<p>Strong Partnerships and Engagement</p> <p>Clean Waters for Ecosystem Health and Safe Recreation</p> <p>Healthy Ecosystems with Abundant, Diverse Wildlife</p>	<p>Individual homeowners</p> <p>Homeowner associations</p> <p>Civic associations</p> <p>Tourism bureaus</p> <p>Lawncare / landscape companies</p>	<p>Lead: Coastal Resilience & Communities Coordinator and/or new hire (Community Engagement Specialist)</p> <p>Support: Outreach and Communication Manager</p>	<p># of meetings with HOAs and other organizations quarterly and annually</p> <p># of Estuary-friendly HOA bylaws changes enacted quarterly and annually</p> <p># of new part-time (i.e., 2nd homeowners) homeowners participating in the SIP quarterly and annually</p> <p># of new part-time homeowners participating in the Homeowner Rewards Program quarterly and annually</p> <p># of landscape companies newly incorporating lawncare BMPs quarterly and annually</p>	M	\$ Staff Time
<p>5.2. Enhance youth programs and opportunities for engagement.</p> <p><u>Potential deliverables:</u> new curriculum and classroom materials, volunteer opportunities, and partnerships.</p>	PEP already has some existing youth programs and opportunities. However, much more can be done to enhance these programs and to build a group of youth volunteers willing to advance PEP’s mission.	<p>Strong Partnerships and Engagement</p> <p>Clean Waters for Ecosystem Health and Safe Recreation</p> <p>Healthy Ecosystems with Abundant, Diverse Wildlife</p>	<p>Youth groups</p> <p>Schools</p> <p>Homeschool children</p> <p>Educators</p>	<p>Lead: Coastal Resilience & Communities Coordinator and/or new hire (Community Engagement Specialist)</p> <p>Support: Outreach and Communication Manager</p>	<p># of students/youth participating in PEP activities quarterly and annually</p> <p># of schools, youth, groups and home schoolers engaged quarterly and annually</p> <p># of education projects, programs, meetings, and events held quarterly and annually</p>	M – L	\$ Staff Time
<p>5.3 Expand representation across all East End communities.</p> <p><u>Potential deliverables:</u> new COE materials tailored toward specific community audiences, including in languages other than English, an updated stakeholder engagement matrix, and new mini grantees.</p>	Building new relationships that lead to estuary-friendly behavior change can mean having to go where those individuals and organizations are located, rather than expecting them to show up to PEP-related activities. Meeting individuals in their space can help build trust and allow PEP staff to learn more about the needs and concerns of all East End community members. PEP can then help share those stories and amplify all voices.	<p>Strong Partnerships and Engagement</p>	<p>Faith based groups</p> <p>Youth groups</p> <p>Part-time / seasonal residents</p> <p>Tourists</p> <p>Tourism bureaus</p> <p>Commercial businesses with large lawns/landscapes</p>	<p>Lead: Coastal Resilience & Communities Coordinator and/or new hire (Community Engagement Specialist)</p> <p>Support: Outreach and Communication Manager</p>	<p># of meetings with new community organizations quarterly and annually</p> <p># of community events PEP participates in quarterly and annually</p> <p># of new community organizations that participate in PEP-organized events quarterly and annually</p> <p>% of invited community organizations that participate in PEP-organized events quarterly and annually</p> <p># of new tailored COE materials developed quarterly and annually</p> <p># of organizations on the stakeholder engagement matrix that move up one or more spots, signifying improved engagement</p>	S - L	\$ Staff Time

Table 6: Strategy Framework for Element 6—Sustain long-term COE efforts by tracking successes and challenges, addressing new opportunities and potential partners, and adapting activities to what may arise in the future.

Objectives & Deliverables	Impact	CCMP Connection(s)	Target Audience(s)	Suggested Responsible Parties	Possible Progress Metrics	Timeframe	Cost Range and possible funding
<p>6.1 Prioritize COE in the annual budget and identify additional funding sources.</p> <p>Potential deliverables: revised annual budgets, new grant applications and reports, and new COE materials.</p>	Having adequate staffing to execute the actions within this Strategy and the elements within the COE Plan will better ensure the success of CCMP goals.	Strong Partnerships and Engagement	PEP staff PEP volunteers Grantors and other funders	Lead: Executive Director Support: Grants Coordinator and other PEP staff	New FTEs (staff or contractors added to meet COE needs) Amount of new grant funding for capacity building efforts \$ amount spent on COE efforts	S - M	\$\$ - \$\$\$ Staff Time
<p>6.2 Review and adapt the Strategy (and COE Plan).</p> <p>Potential deliverables: updated Strategy and COE Plan versions, agendas and meeting minutes, and new COE materials.</p>	Reviewing progress toward Strategy achievements helps identify potential areas of improvement that can be made to improve overall COE outcomes.	Strong Partnerships and Engagement	PEP staff PEP volunteers PEP committee members PEP partners	Lead: Outreach and Communication Manager Support: Other PEP staff	# of Strategy and COE Plan review meetings held quarterly and annually # of Strategy and Plan adjustments made quarterly and annually New Strategy and Plan developed	S - M	\$ Staff Time
<p>6.3 Perform periodic research.</p> <p>Potential deliverables: individual stakeholder interviews, NEP lessons learned summaries, and new COE materials.</p>	Understanding the current state of public perceptions about the Estuary and PEP will help the organization tailor COE materials that will more effectively reach these stakeholders and cultivate estuary-friendly behaviors.	Strong Partnerships and Engagement Resilient Communities Prepared for Climate Change Clean Waters for Ecosystem Health and Safe Recreation Healthy Ecosystems with Abundant, Diverse Wildlife	General public Other NEPs PEP staff and volunteers PEP partners	Lead: Outreach and Communication Manager Support: Other PEP staff and volunteers	% change in public perception on PEP and its work now and in the future # of COE campaigns developed or adapted based on this research % increase in PEP brand recognition in years 3 and 5 of this Strategy # of calls/meetings with other NEPs quarterly and annually	S - M	\$ - \$\$ Staff Time
<p>6.4 Maintain and build upon stakeholder contacts.</p> <p>Potential deliverables: new tab on the matrix for media outlet contacts, a regularly updated matrix, and a written procedure for maintaining the matrix.</p>	Ensuring that PEP's contacts are current and relevant is essential for improving COE efforts. It is vital to maintain this contact list as people leave an organization, come onboard, and as new stakeholder groups are identified.	Strong Partnerships and Engagement	PEP staff	Lead: Outreach and Communication Manager Support: Water Quality Outreach Specialist and/or new hire (Community Engagement Specialist)	# of times the matrix is updated quarterly and annually # of new stakeholders added to the matrix quarterly and annually # of media contacts added to the matrix quarterly and annually % of all listed stakeholders actively engaged % increase in PEP stories shared among listed stakeholders	S - M	\$ Staff Time

Implementation: Program Recommendations and Suggested Tools

This section includes program recommendations and suggested tools needed to enhance PEP's COE work over the next few years. These recommendations and tools can be used to achieve the objectives outlined within the Strategy Framework. However, the list below is not exhaustive and further research into and development of additional COE tools is recommended, particularly as the years pass and new technologies and methods are developed that can improve PEP's COE work even further. Additional tools and recommended actions can be found within the associated COE Plan developed concurrently to this Strategy.

PEP COE Capacity Considerations

Based on the objectives within the Strategy Framework, this section outlines a set of recommended resources (skills, functions, and expertise) and capacity (personnel and time) needed to effectively accomplish the activities identified under all six elements.

Currently, the Outreach and Communication Manager is the primary staff member responsible for PEP's COE activities. PEP's Coastal Resilience & Communities Coordinator and Water Quality Outreach Specialist are two other staff members that assist with COE activities. However, they also perform additional tasks outside of the traditional COE realm. PEP, therefore, has less than three full-time equivalent (FTE) staff dedicated to COE efforts. PEP's COE work is periodically supplemented through contracts with a web developer and graphic designer/videographer. Thus, PEP needs additional capacity, skills, and expertise to accomplish the expanded COE framework outlined in this Strategy, which could be acquired through new full- or part-time hires, contractors, and/or shared resources with partner organizations, such as leveraging existing resources within Stony Brook University.

To implement Elements 1 and 2, PEP would need at least one new FTE to manage their traditional and social media communications and engagement (to include tracking overall analytics) and update and/or create a new PEP website. Figure 1 shows where this new FTE (proposed name is the Online Media Coordinator) would fit into PEP's organizational structure. While the Water Quality Outreach Specialist is currently managing the social media accounts, it is low on their list of priorities and is therefore not done as frequently or consistently as is ideal. Hiring someone with video production skills (or the willingness to learn) would be beneficial to this position, as would web developer skills or experience with WordPress. Should a new hire not be feasible in the short- or long-term, PEP could work with Stony Brook University to involve students in these tasks. In addition, Element 2 requires additional time from all PEP staff and workgroup/committee members to focus on COE tasks. It is essential that PEP leadership help staff and volunteers find ways to incorporate COE efforts into their day-to-day tasks and prioritize it when it makes sense.

To implement Element 3, PEP would not need new hires, aside from any changes to the PEP website that would tie in with the hiring noted above. However, PEP should consider how it frames its work related to Suffolk County's SIP. While the link between failing septic systems and water quality is undeniable and therefore important for PEP to highlight, the public might be confused and not know whether to contact PEP or the County for more information on how to participate in the rebate program. PEP should work with the County to determine how to mitigate confusion and balance the time the Water Quality Outreach Specialist focuses on SIP-related outreach versus other PEP-created projects and messaging, such as enhanced outreach to lesser-engaged communities.

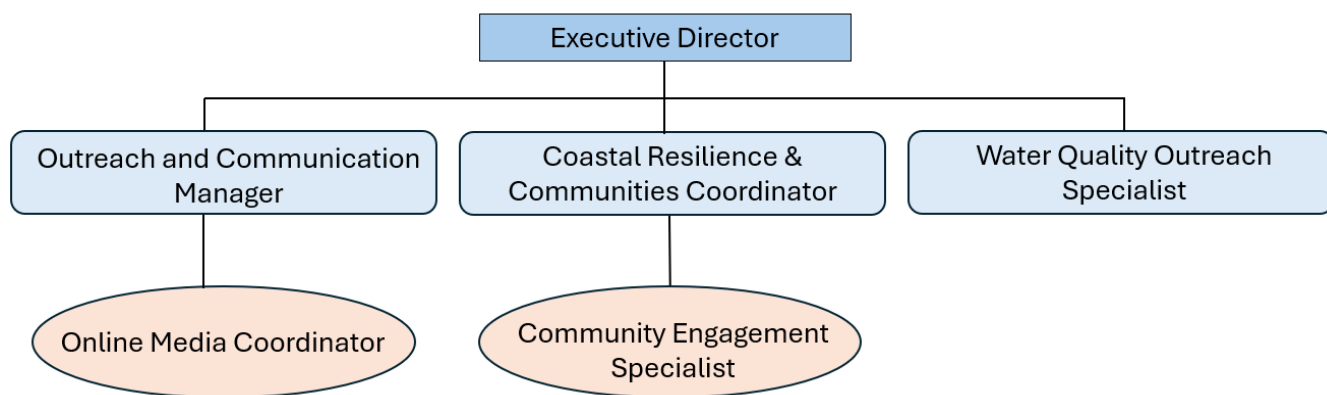
To implement Elements 4 and 5, one additional FTE is needed. PEP's current outreach capacity is maxed out. Should PEP wish to better engage with the agriculture and aquaculture communities, in addition to expanding

outreach to other groups like tourists, vacation homeowners, and faith-based groups, etc., either other efforts will need to be phased down or out, or additional capacity will need to be brought onboard. The ideal new hire to implement Elements 4 and 5 should have a background in COE, whether from a communications degree or previous employment experience. If PEP could hire someone who has a community organizing background or similar skills related to meeting and working with people where they are, that would be ideal but not required. Hiring someone who is originally from the East End would also be preferred, since they will have a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the Estuary. Language skills other than English would also be a plus. Figure 1 shows where this new FTE (proposed name is the Community Engagement Specialist) would fit into PEP’s organizational structure. Should a new hire not be feasible in the short- or long-term, PEP could work on leveraging existing and new partnerships with ag-focused and tourism-focused organizations such as Cornell Cooperative Extension, USDA, NRCS, and Discover Long Island to support PEP in this work. Even with a new FTE, these partnerships will be essential to maximize PEP’s outreach to and engagement with these stakeholder groups.

Element 6 does not require additional staff capacity. However, for effective long-term COE success, every PEP staff member and volunteer should be tasked with assisting in periodic monitoring, maintenance, and updating of this Strategy and PEP’s COE efforts.

The proposed organizational chart below (Figure 1) shows existing PEP staff that have primary COE responsibilities and the additional positions needed to achieve each of the six Strategy Framework elements. As noted in the element paragraphs above, however, should one or both these new FTEs not be feasible for PEP to achieve in the coming years, leveraging existing resources at Stony Brook University and through new and existing partner organizations can help expand PEP’s reach and effectiveness.

Figure 1: Proposed PEP Organizational Chart



Blue boxes are existing staff; those in orange are the two proposed FTE hires. Whether they report to those existing staff shown here, or report directly to the Executive Director would work. Either way, it is important that these new hires interact with all PEP staff (including those not shown in the organizational chart above) and volunteers for a cohesive and comprehensive COE program.

Multi-Year Digital and Print Messaging Plan

This section of the Strategy includes recommendations for digital and print messaging (and related tools) that PEP can use over the next few years to strengthen its COE efforts. This section is divided into four focused areas:

- (1) Peconic Estuary Partnership's Social Media Strategy
- (2) Focused Effort for Suffolk County's Septic Improvement Program (SIP)
- (3) Focused Effort on Agriculture and Aquaculture Communities
- (4) Focused Effort on Community Members

Peconic Estuary Partnership's Social Media Strategy

Purpose

The purpose of this Social Media Strategy is to assess the strengths of PEP's current social media efforts and identify opportunities to enhance PEP's reach through the implementation of best practices that will boost engagement and tell a cohesive and compelling story about the Estuary. This is a living document that will need to be reviewed and updated periodically based on data and PEP priorities to be most effective at creating online action for the Estuary.

Goals

PEP's Social Media Strategy aims to:

1. Increase overall awareness of PEP and its work across the Estuary.
2. Increase the number of PEP's social media followers, especially individuals who will be active and engaged through liking, commenting on, and sharing PEP's content.
3. Increase the number of individuals and organizations who participate in PEP's projects and activities through engaging in pro-estuary actions at home, through volunteering, and/or by spreading PEP's messaging.

Current Effort Analysis

PEP's current social media efforts include the following:

- PEP currently has a Facebook page (with ~2k followers as of 10/30/25), an Instagram account (with ~2k followers as of 10/30/25), and a X/Twitter page (with 561 followers as of 10/30/25), although X is not used as much as the others.
- One staff member, the Water Quality Outreach Specialist, currently manages PEP's social media effort. This specialist would like to post and comment multiple times per week, but given other duties, they are not always able to post as frequently as desired.
- The Water Quality Outreach Specialist also coordinates with other PEP staff to get content to share on social media but is not always able to do so given people's work schedules and other priorities; thus, this specialist posts more often about their own projects/the projects of which they are more aware.
- Much of the current social media content focuses on upcoming PEP and partner events, photos from recent events, on-the-ground projects, PEP in the news, and informational/education posts about species.
- There is a weekly PEP staff meeting that could present an opportunity for more cross-staff collaboration on what social media content to post and when to post it, but there is usually not enough time to address it during those meetings.

- The Water Quality Outreach Specialist uses Canva to create visuals for social media posts but recognizes that there are limitations to what this tool can do graphically.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis

Table 7 below shows the SWOT Analysis for PEP’s social media efforts. A SWOT analysis helps an organization assess and understand the internal and external forces that may create opportunities or risks. Strengths and weaknesses are internal factors that can give an organization an advantage or disadvantage over its “competition.” Opportunities and threats are external factors that can be used to improve an organization’s performance (i.e., grant growth or better government funding) or may endanger an organization’s ability to operate (i.e., regulatory issues or technical difficulties). This SWOT analysis can help PEP visualize some of the organization’s primary advantages and disadvantages to better understand where and how PEP should allocate social media resources.

Table 7. SWOT Analysis

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEP’s Water Quality Outreach Specialist is interested in building the level of engagement and learning new tools (like graphics and video editing software) to enhance PEP’s posts • PEP’s work can be visually appealing and charismatic, telling important stories that resonate with people • PEP’s history in the East End means that many people know who they are, what they do, and why the work is important • While having a small number of staff, they are dedicated to the mission, are engaged in numerous projects, and are hard working 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring the many committee members, and partner organizations onboard to generate and share content • Enhance community partnerships and engagement by liking, sharing, and commenting on individuals’ and organizations’ posts with a clear link to PEP’s mission and CCMP goals • Use social media and the PEP website to create the go-to place in the East End for up-to-date, compelling information about the Estuary and how people can protect it • Incorporating COE deliverables into project contracts and sub awards
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time spent on social media content development and engagement is very limited • Competing projects and priorities add to the challenges of finding time to post and respond • PEP is involved in a wide variety of projects and activities, so it can be difficult to find ways to share them all and to develop messaging that covers it all 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are many organizations doing work similar to PEP (both on Long Island, in NY, and nationally), so there is competition for viewers and followers • Shifting priorities at the federal and state government levels add a level of uncertainty to the messaging PEP can and should put out there and how it will be received • Funding uncertainties can make it difficult to focus staff time and effort on things like social media engagement, which can be seen as less important than on-the-ground work

Social Media Program Recommendations

It can be difficult for a small organization with limited staff time to make social media management a high priority. Without one person solely dedicated to social media management as their primary role, other projects and tasks may take precedence. One recommendation is to hire someone to fill this role (either part-time or full-time) or to give social media tasks to one or more committee members; however, this is more of a long-term recommendation since it would require funding. Leveraging existing relationships with organizations like Stony Brook University and their social media staff can also help maximize PEP's social media successes and amplify messaging.

In the short term, here are some other recommendations—based on interviews with other estuary programs, internet research, and Marstel-Day's experience supporting other small businesses' and nonprofits' social media campaigns—that could make PEP's social media engagement more impactful:

1. Since staff time for social media work is limited, PEP could focus on the social media platform(s) that work best for the audiences you want to attract. Facebook and Instagram have the largest following and best return on investment for PEP at this time, so consider closing the X/Twitter account. It is better to not have a presence on a social media network than to have one that is infrequently used. Plus, an account that is not closely monitored can be taken over by internet trolls and/or hacked and used for nefarious purposes. Should staff capacity for social media management be expanded in the future, especially the ability to make short video content, consider creating a TikTok account to better engage with younger generations.
2. When determining what types of content will work best for which social media platforms and with specific audiences, the following posting protocols may help PEP amplify the impacts of a post:
 - First, determine your goals for posting certain content. What do you want the audience to understand and take away from the content? Is it a call to action? Is it for a general understanding of PEP or an event being held? Are you just trying to gain new followers? Having a clear goal in mind will help you tailor the content accordingly.
 - Next, determine which audience(s) you want to reach with the post. Is it a broad message that is intended for anyone who lives, works, or is visiting the Estuary? Is it a message that should be targeted to a particular stakeholder group like baymen or homeowners with septic systems? Once you know how broad or narrow the audience is for a post, you can refine your content based on works best for that audience and select which social media platform (and/or traditional media outlet) is preferred by that audience.
 - One way to know which types of content and messaging work best is to examine PEP's past posts to see what resonates most with your audiences. More likes and shares will inform you on what people are interested in, helping you craft future post content. You can also check other organizations' pages to see what is popular there. For example, checking posts on the Association of Marine Industries Facebook page can show what types of posts and messages resonate with those interested in boating (both personally and professionally) in the Estuary.
 - Posts that provide simple, helpful tips about what people can do in their own lives to benefit themselves and the Estuary will be of more value than general informational posts, but those hold value as well. It is essential to mix up the types of posts you make to keep things fresh and engaging. Use polls and other interactive tools to increase engagement and education, where possible. Also, consider posting funny memes with PEP-related content, followed by a brief explanation and a link to where more information on the topic can be found. For example, the Long Island Sound Partnership posted a meme on their "story" that included different spidermen pointing at each

other, each with different labels (agricultural runoff, wastewater discharge, and stormwater). The next post was a brief explanation of the meme and a link for more information. If you post something that contains general information about PEP, the next post could be a more direct call to action, followed by sharing content from a partner organization. The key to effective social media is to be interesting, engaging, and useful to viewers/followers.

- Whenever possible, it is better to post videos as opposed to static pictures because videos are more captivating, engaging, and attractive to audiences of all ages but particularly younger generations. Be sure to add subtitles/captioning to the videos to increase accessibility. If static pictures must be used, add titles and/or brief captions to the image itself, with a more detailed description below. Keep the amount of text directly on the image to a minimum, so as not to overwhelm the viewer, and use interesting fonts and colors to maximize views.
- On Facebook, you have the option to do a “post” or a “story.” Posts stay on the PEP’s Facebook page permanently (unless actively removed by a social media administrator) and can be seen by anyone on Facebook, while stories remain on the page only for 24 hours and are typically only visible to your followers. Generally, PEP should use regular posts for important updates, announcements, upcoming events, and information that will be relevant for the foreseeable future. Stories should be used more sparingly for quick engagement with followers. Polls, quizzes, and brief questionnaires (in accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act) lend themselves to stories, as do short updates about a project or event going on in real time. Stories are considered a more personal way to engage with the people who already are aware of and like what PEP does, so keep stories fun and informal.
- While there is no ideal character count for social media posts, you must find the balance between sharing enough information while retaining the person’s attention. On Facebook, higher engagement rates are usually associated with posts of 40 to 80 characters. Longer posts (100-250 characters) can be used to share more detailed educational information, such as article summaries, but engagement rates will likely be lower than shorter posts. Thus, stick with shorter posts whenever possible. If posting something longer, use a captivating image (with a brief title and/or summary text directly on the image) or clear call to action to draw people in. Instagram is all about visuals, so words should be added only to help tell the story of what is in the imagery. Captions of less than 150 characters are ideal for quick engagement, while longer captions (150-300 characters) can be used to tell a brief interesting story about PEP or its projects. Anything longer than 300 characters and someone will have to click the “See More” link, so you will need to have a very compelling message up front to inspire most people to read more.
- Create a branding style for your posts, to include PEP’s logo and colors at a minimum, to help people recognize your information every time they see it. See the sample templates included later in this document.
- In posts, link back to your PEP website, when possible, to share more information about the given topic and boost traffic to your website. Don’t do this for every post or it could wear out its effectiveness, but when it makes sense to do so, go for it.
- Many social media experts (in this case, Sprout Social social media marketing) say that the best time to post on social media is mid-week (Wed & Thurs) from 7-9 am, 1-3 pm, and 7-9 pm to get the best engagement. For other weekdays, mornings (9-12) are best, and if you need to post something on a weekend, 7-8 pm on Saturday and 11 am or 4 pm on Sunday is most effective.
- As for how often PEP should post, most social media experts recommend starting with one to two posts per day on Facebook (3-5 times per week on Instagram), but that is unrealistic given where PEP’s posting frequency is currently. Perhaps in the future, if there is one person whose main role is

social media engagement that would be doable, but for now we recommend posting a minimum of three times per week on both Facebook and Instagram, then working up to once per day. While being consistent in how frequently you post is important to build a dedicated followership, posting fewer posts that are of higher quality is better than posting more posts just to meet a posting frequency requirement.

3. Proofread your posts for grammatical errors and inaccurate content before posting or scheduling. Make sure any links and QR codes work, and direct people to the correct website. PEP should also proofread and check links before sharing other individual's or organization's posts, since you cannot be sure that they doublechecked everything before they posted. The last thing you want to do is send one of your followers to a spam site or worse.
4. Use customized hashtags to target specific audiences that PEP wants to reach. Hashtags have been shown to increase engagement and can lead to more people finding and sharing your content. However, while platforms like Instagram allow for up to 30 hashtags per post, using so many hashtags can make your post look like spam. Also, a large number of hashtags usually signifies a post with too broad a focus and potential audience. Being selective about the type and number of hashtags for each post is important. Hootsuite, a popular social media management tool, recommends 1-2 tailored hashtags per post, but a few others would not be excessive if they serve a purpose. Searching for hashtags that are trending among the user groups you want to engage with can be one effective way to narrow down the number of hashtags needed. Another way is to really think about the audience you want to reach and think about what words best resonate with them. Doing a Google search or asking ChatGPT (or other AI model) for good hashtags related to a proposed post could be helpful. For example, if you do a post about the Septic Improvement Program, the following hashtags could help boost views: #WaterQuality and #SepticSystem with #SepticProblems.
5. Although PEP is already doing this consistently, do not forget to include location tags on posts that mention a specific project or event so that people know where it is taking place and can potentially visit at another time.
6. Use your board and committee members, as well as people from partner organizations like Stony Brook University, to help PEP generate ideas and content for social media posts as well as to amplify social media posts. Provide them with one of the post templates (included later in this document) and these posting guidelines to help them generate content you could use now or add to your social media content calendar for later use.
7. Use a tool to help schedule out social media posts weeks, or even months, ahead of time. This allows staff to work on social media content when they have the time and let the tool do the rest. This is especially valuable when staff know busy times are coming; scheduling tools can help them accomplish more. There are many options—free and fee-based—available. Here are just a few:
 - [Canva Pro](#) has a social media tool that allows you to create, plan, and schedule posts across multiple social media platforms. Since PEP already uses Canva to create some of its social media posts, this could be a great way to streamline the process using one tool that staff is already comfortable with.
 - [Adobe Express](#) is a free social media content scheduler that allows the creation planning and scheduling of content across multiple social media platforms. Adobe Express is available on desktops and via a mobile app. Since PEP already has an Adobe account, this could work seamlessly with other staff's efforts and seems user-friendly. Plus, this is one of the top-rated free social media tools available.
 - In addition, Instagram allows for automatic reposting of content to a Facebook account if the accounts are linked properly. Setting this up could streamline the process, as PEP would only need to make one

post. However, the disadvantage of this automatic reposting is that both platforms would receive the same content at the same time, so this option should not be used every time.

8. Building community is essential to the work of PEP. One way to do that on social media is to actively engage with your stakeholders, rather than just pushing messaging out in one direction. While it can be time-intensive, responding to comments and liking and sharing partners' and individuals' posts shows that PEP is paying attention and grateful for people's engagement. Set aside even just an hour or two per week (more if possible) to review comments on PEP posts, thank people for following your account, and sharing and commenting on others' posts to boost engagement and build an online community.

Here are some general guidelines for liking and sharing posts:

- Remember the 30/30/30 rule to social media: use 30% of your effort to promote PEP, 30% of your effort to share other people's/organizations' content, and 30% to engage with others' content via liking, sharing, and commenting on it.
 - When considering whether to like or share a post, think about how relatable it is to PEP's mission and CCMP goals. If it is closely aligned, consider sharing it. However, if it seems like a lot of effort went in to creating the post, and you want to acknowledge the poster for their time, consider just commenting on it.
 - Remember that when you like and share others' posts, it encourages them to do the same for PEP's posts. This reciprocity helps you build your brand while also building and strengthening potential partnerships.
 - Do not go overboard with liking posts, especially from one source, or the action will lose its meaning and may seem like you are spamming the account.
9. Use paid advertising on social media platforms to boost attendance at events, reach specific audiences (especially ones that are new to or under-engaged with PEP) with targeted messaging, or to announce important news that is essential for many people to see. When deciding how much to invest in ads, think about your audience(s) and decide which 1-2 platforms will best reach that audience to help minimize cost. Set a goal for the number of people you want to reach and the maximum per person dollar amount you are willing to spend. That will be your budget cap, although you may be able to cut off the ads early if you reach your engagement goal. If there are any social media influencers in the region (Instagram account examples: @travellongisland, @sow.to.stove, @luckytolivehere, and @verasweeney) who could be approached to share a message for free, that could be a way to reduce advertising costs while still increasing post views and engagement.
 10. There are many online tutorial videos on YouTube, as well as free and paid online courses, providing instructions on video editing. These tutorials and courses provide a good overview of how to take a video filmed on a cell phone and make it more captivating with captions/chyrons, music, etc. However, video editing software is needed to take videos to the next level with animation, added graphics, and other enhanced features. One effective tool for video editing is Adobe Premiere Pro. Since staff already use other Adobe products, this could be a simple add-on tool to learn. There is a free trial available and then plans start at \$22.99 per month. This would be an advisable cost only if PEP plans to make and post multiple videos per month on social media and/or the website. Thus, take some time to think about what you want to accomplish by making videos and editing them to look more professional and whether there is staff capacity to dedicate time to learning and regularly using these skills.

Sample Social Media Messaging

Not every message will resonate with all stakeholder groups. Individual tailoring of messaging will be needed to effectively reach different audiences. The COE Plan that was developed for PEP provides more detailed insights and additional messaging related to the CCMP and PEP's overall work (geared toward a broader audience). The sample messaging that is included below was developed to be used in the social media context, recognizing that social media messaging should be concise and provide a call to action. Additional potentially relevant messaging for social media posts can be found in the associated COE Plan.

Target audience 1 – People with septic systems:

- What you flush down the drain may eventually end up in the Peconic Estuary. Upgrading your septic system is an important step we can take together. Learn more here. *(include link to County SIP page or specific PEP page)*
- Nitrogen pollution is a problem in the Peconic Estuary, but individual actions can make a big difference. Through Suffolk County rebates, you can upgrade your septic system with ease and affordability while reducing nitrogen pollution. Learn more here. *(include link to County SIP page or specific PEP page)*
- Healthier estuaries mean better fishing, beaches, and quality of life. When many individuals take actions like upgrading septic systems this can make a big difference in creating a healthier estuary. Learn more here. *(include link to County SIP page or specific PEP page)*

Target audience 2 – Farm and aquaculture owners/operators:

- Our East End farmers and the Peconic Estuary have a lot in common—both feed families and economies, from aquaculture to agritourism. There are many ways to support our local farmers while protecting and restoring the Peconic Estuary. Learn more about the connections here. *(include link to a call to action page/BMPs page)*
- Our East End farmers have worked hard to grow produce that has fed our community for generations. They are also doing incredible things to protect the Peconic Estuary while improving their bountiful harvest. Come join the conversation on ways farming practices save time and money while enhancing water quality. *(include link to a call to action/BMPs page)*

Target audience 3 – Baymen/fishermen:

- If you live here, you know life flows with the tides. Whether you are fishing, crabbing, or simply sitting on your boat listening to the wind, the Peconic Estuary is part of the rhythm. Get involved with the Peconic Estuary Partnership to keep those clean, healthy tides flowing. *(include link to volunteer opportunities page or similar call to action page)*
- The Peconic Estuary isn't just part of the landscape—it's part of our legacy. Help the Peconic Estuary Partnership protect that legacy by getting involved here. *(include link to volunteer opportunities page or similar call to action page)*
- Shellfish, boatyards, and bait shops—our traditions and small businesses depend on a clean, healthy Peconic Estuary to thrive. Learn how you can get involved here. *(include link to volunteer opportunities page or similar call to action page)*

Target audience 4 – Tourists:

- Whether you are casting a line, paddling a kayak, or just watching the tide roll in, the Peconic Estuary is your place to connect with nature. Find other ways to connect and engage here. *(include link to volunteer opportunities page or similar call to action page... recommend developing a webpage specifically geared toward tourists to which local tourism bureaus can point people)*
- The smell of salt in the air, the sound of gulls, the feel of sand under your feet. It all comes from a living and thriving Peconic Estuary. Whether you are here for a day, a week, or a summer, there are ways for you to get involved in protecting this essential natural resource. Learn more here. *(include link to volunteer opportunities page or similar call to action page)*
- The Peconic Estuary is full of little mysteries. Every visit is a chance to discover something new without going far from home. In the comment section below, tell us in words, video, and/or photos what mysteries you have uncovered.
- The Peconic Estuary is not just a creek or a wetland. It is full of stories, science, and surprises. The more you explore, the more you will find. In the comment section below, tell us in words, video, and/or photos what mysteries you have uncovered, then discover even more here. *(include link to volunteer opportunities page or similar call to action page)*

Target audience 5 – Individuals who are unfamiliar with PEP and its work:

- The Peconic Estuary doesn't have a voice, but we do. Join the Peconic Estuary Partnership as we speak up for the estuary and work together to restore its health. Learn more here. *(include link to PEP homepage or volunteering/call to action page)*
- The Peconic Estuary is part of who we are. Taking care of it is a shared responsibility and something to be proud of. The Peconic Estuary Partnership has several volunteer opportunities you can participate in to support estuary health. *(include link to volunteer opportunities page or similar call to action page)*
- The Peconic Estuary Partnership is supporting cutting-edge monitoring like aerial surveys, scallop counts, and horseshoe crab tagging so we can see what is working and focus help where it is needed most. Want to learn more and get involved? Check us out here. *(include link to PEP homepage or volunteering/call to action page)*
- The Peconic Estuary Partnership is made up of individuals, communities, nonprofits, and businesses—showing what is possible when we work together. We would love to have YOU get involved! Learn how here. *(include link to volunteer opportunities page or similar call to action page)*
- The Peconic Estuary Partnership acts as the “backbone” for the Peconic Estuary: we bring together and support scientists, government agencies, nonprofits, and communities to protect and restore the Estuary. Learn why this is important and how you can involved here. *(include link to Committees and Advisory Groups or similar page)*

Sample Post Templates

Having a consistent branded look for social media posts helps people recognize the information coming from PEP, which will build trust in the messaging over time. Having colorful graphics and photos along with brief text content and a link for more information will ensure that more people see, read, and share the content. The following are a few social media post templates that were created as part of this strategic COE effort. PEP can use and adapt these for various topics and across different social media channels to maximize the impact. *Please note that the nonsensical text is used as a placeholder only and would be replaced with relevant text before sharing on social media.*

Figure 2: Instagram Post Template Examples



Figure 3: Facebook Post Template Examples





Txt here... maybe an event date

Txt here... Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed



Tracking Social Media Success

How do you know if a post has reached its intended audience? How will you know if your social media strategy is effective? There are a variety of analytics and tools that can measure and track the effectiveness of your social media efforts, which will in turn inform the adaptation of your social media strategy to reach the desired effectiveness. Here are some recommendations for tracking social media:

- Use a spreadsheet or online social media tool to track engagement rate, which includes likes, comments, shares, video views, and website click-throughs. Highlight which types of posts and/or messages best resonate with stakeholders and which ones do not. Base future posting strategies on those that generate a better than average engagement rate. For those posts that are important to PEP but generated a less than average engagement rate, PEP could consider boosting engagement through paid ads.
- Use a social media platform-specific built-in analytics tool, such as Meta BusinessSuite for Facebook and Instagram, as well as Google Analytics, to support the tracking of your engagement rate on social media and how social media may or may not be driving traffic to the PEP website.
- Set a goal for the number of new followers desired per social media page every six months or a year. Track how close you came to the goal and revisit what had higher rates of engagement (via likes, shares, and comments) among new followers. Tracking this will help PEP determine what could be adjusted to increase the number of followers and overall engagement rate over the next six months to a year.
- Track social media platforms (as well as traditional media outlets) for any mention of “Peconic Estuary Partnership,” “PEP,” and other topics of interest to PEP through a Google Alert or similar media monitoring tool. These brand mentions are another way to see what others are saying about PEP and which projects and activities are being discussed and in what ways (good, bad, neutral) so that new content of similar style and/or topics can be created and posted to build on that momentum. Responding to those individuals/organizations that posted the content is another way to keep the content trending.

Social Media Content Calendar

The table on the next page shows a proposed calendar for PEP’s social media content for 2026. Content calendars help streamline the posting process for an organization, can help to ensure content aligns with organizational goals and activities, and can keep everyone in the know about what is coming up.

Key benefits of using a content calendar include:

- **Strategic Planning:** They allow you to visualize the overall social media content plan for the whole year and ensure that it is aligned with PEP’s goals, activities, and events (as well as those of PEP partners that are worth highlighting).
- **Improved Engagement:** Posting regular, consistent content keeps your current and potential stakeholders engaged and helps build brand recognition.
- **Efficiency:** Content calendars streamline the content creation process, reducing last-minute scrambling and freeing up time for more project-related work.
- **Collaboration:** A centralized content calendar keeps everyone on the COE team on the same page, ensuring consistent messaging and easy handover if someone is out.
- **Prevent Gaps & Omissions:** By planning in advance, you can ensure all relevant topics are included and avoid missing out on important topics and events.
- **Resource Management:** Content calendars help plan and allocate resources, such as budget and staff time, more efficiently.
- **Flexibility:** While providing structure, content calendars also allow for flexibility, as nothing is set in stone. This enables you to adjust plans to incorporate seasonal themes or unexpected opportunities.

Table 8: 2026 Social Media Content Calendar

Month	Topic 1	Topic 2	Topic 3	Topic 4
January	Examples of first day hikes being organized by partner groups and how to join	New year message from Joyce (and/or other PEP staff) with her goals/hopes for PEP for the year	January 15 is Bagel Day: NY is well known for bagel. Why is good water quality important for these tasty treats?	Make a new year’s resolution for the Estuary. What can you do to help protect this valuable natural resource? <i>(Provide examples/ideas)</i>
February	World Wetlands Day is February 2: Share wetland facts, how wetlands are important for habitat, water quality, etc., note where wetlands can be visited in the Estuary	With the passing of Groundhog Day (February 2) the Estuary is getting ready for the start of spring: What are your favorite memories of spring in the Estuary? Please share your photos	Black History Month: Focus on one or more individuals or organizations in the Estuary who are doing great things to protect and restore it	Valentine’s Day: What do you love about the Estuary? You can show your love by volunteering with PEP or doing simple steps to protect the Estuary
March	Women’s History Month: Focus on one or more women in the Estuary who are doing great things to protect and restore it	World Wildlife Day is March 3: Focus on one or more unique species in the Estuary and what PEP and/or its partners are doing to protect it	International Day of Forests is March 21: How do trees enhance/restore water quality and what can people do to help? (plant trees, etc.)	World Water Day is March 22: Provide an update on water quality measurements in the Estuary and highlight one or more volunteers/groups helping to improve water quality
April	Getting ready for horseshoe crab spawning season and how people can help	Earth Day is April 22: Focus on one or more volunteer opportunities that anyone could get involved in and how they can join	Getting ready for alewife spawning season: Share facts and events	Spring planting/yard preparation: Pollinator-friendly and native species, lawn alternatives, rain gardens, and rain barrels, etc.
May	Building excitement for PEP’s annual symposium with info on how to register	Endangered Species Day is May 15 (the 3 rd Friday in May): What endangered species can be found in the Estuary, and what is PEP and/or its partners doing to conserve the species?	World Migratory Bird Day is May 9: Highlight what special species can be seen in the Estuary and why a healthy bird population is important for all of us	May is National Bike Month: Highlight some great viewpoints of the Estuary people can easily and safely reach by bike and/or talk about how commuting by bike helps the environment/estuary
June	June is National Rivers Month: Highlight the Peconic River and how its water quality has changed over time and what people can do to help it improve further	World Environment Day is June 5: Focus on the mission of PEP and highlight opportunities for people to protect the Estuary	Nature Photography Day is June 15: Ask people to share their favorite nature photos of the Estuary; perhaps offering a prize for the one with the most likes/shares	Go Fishing Day is June 18: Highlight great places to fish within the Estuary and/or highlight one or more baymen who are protecting the Estuary while making a living

July	Update on horseshoe crab spawning numbers with photos from the year	Parks and Recreation Professionals Day is the 3 rd Friday in July: Focus on one or more recreation partners and their environmental education efforts that protect the Estuary	Capture the Sunset Week is the 3 rd week in July: Ask people to share their favorite photo of a sunset over the Estuary; perhaps offer a prize for the one with the most likes/shares	Ask people what their favorite summer activity is in the Estuary that has a connection to clean water and healthy ecosystems
August	National Water Quality Month: Showcase PEP efforts to improve water quality in the Estuary and discuss why it is important	National Honeybee Day is August 15: Focus on one or more farms that actively seek to protect and enhance pollinators and how they do it	National Eat Outside Day is August 31: Ask people to share their favorite picnic spots in the Estuary and/or their favorite places to get takeout to enjoy al fresco	Grape harvest season is August through October. Highlight wineries that make a positive impact to the Estuary through sustainability practices, etc.
September	National Hispanic Heritage Month is September 15-October 15: Focus on one or more individuals or groups in the Estuary doing great things to protect it	Focus on one or more volunteer opportunities that anyone could get involved in and how they can join	For the first day of fall, encourage people to share images of the colors of the season in the Estuary	National Public Lands Day is September 26: Have people share their favorite public spaces within the Estuary and why they think it is important to protect them
October	World Habitat Day is October 5: Post about protection habitat and/or restoration activities in the Estuary and discuss why it is important	Bat Appreciation Week is October 24-31: Talk about the great role bats play in the environment and how people can help	Focus on yard cleanup practices to support pollinators (e.g., allowing leaves and old plant stems to overwinter)	Highlight apple orchards, pumpkin patches, and other farms that benefit the Estuary through greener best management practices
November	Take a Hike Day is November 17: Ask people to share their favorite place to hike in the Estuary (include a photo too)	The day or two before Thanksgiving, ask people why they are thankful for the Estuary	Opt Outside is the day after Thanksgiving: Encourage people to do something outside in the Estuary, like volunteering, rather than go shopping	Getting ready for Giving Tuesday: Provide thoughts on gifts that would benefit (or at least not harm) the Estuary such as locally sourced items, etc.
December	Giving Tuesday is December 1 (the Tuesday following Thanksgiving): Encourage people to give their time and/or money to local organizations helping improve the Estuary (with or without specific examples)	Share creative ways to get outside and enjoy the Estuary in the winter	The start of winter is December 21: Encourage people to share their favorite photos of winter in the Estuary; perhaps offer a prize for the one with the most likes/shares	Annual recap of PEP's top 5 or 10 highlights and accomplishments from the year

Focused Effort for Suffolk County’s Septic Improvement Program (SIP)

One of this Strategy’s task items is to focus on ways to encourage more engagement with Suffolk County’s SIP. This included the development of a survey or questionnaire to gauge people’s awareness of the SIP and discern any hesitations or concerns they might have in participating. The questionnaire below was not distributed during the Strategy development period, but it is included here as something that could be shared in the future. Since PEP receives federal funding and that funding is subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act and the U.S. Office of Management and Budget’s (OMB) Information Collection Request (ICR) requirements recommended that PEP coordinates with the County so that the County distributes the survey/questionnaire. This has several added benefits. The County has an extensive homeowner mailing list already. Since the County runs the SIP, they have a strong vested interest in increasing participation in the program. PEP needs to be clear that this is a County-run program that they are helping to promote because it helps to improve water quality within the Estuary. Any communication materials that PEP shares should be vetted and distributed by the County. Below is a draft of the Suffolk County SIP Questionnaire.

Suffolk County’s Septic Improvement Program—Draft Questionnaire

Suffolk County offers the Septic Improvement Program (SIP), which is a grant program designed to support homeowners with upgrading their septic systems to protect the County’s water quality, drinking water, and wildlife habitat. This questionnaire will be used to understand the community’s awareness of the SIP and how participation in the program can be improved.

1. Have you heard of the Suffolk County Septic Improvement Program (SIP)?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

2. If you answered “no” or “unsure” to question 1, please skip to question 3. If you answered “yes” to question 1, how did you hear about the SIP? (*Select all that apply.*)

- Online/websites (e.g., the Peconic Estuary Partnership website, the Suffolk County website, etc.)
 - Social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, etc.)
 - Traditional media (e.g., TV, newspaper, radio, etc.)
 - Workshops, conferences, or public meetings/events
 - Word of mouth (e.g., friends, family, coworkers, etc.)
 - Other (Please specify.)
-

3. How would you prefer to learn about the SIP? (*Select all that apply.*)

- Online resources (e.g., websites, online factsheets, etc.)
 - Social media (e.g., photos, videos, blog posts, etc.)
 - In-person presentation or workshop
 - Virtual or recorded presentation or workshop
 - Email newsletters
 - Information mailed to you
 - Hear from other homeowners who have participated in the SIP
 - I don’t want to learn about the SIP
 - Other (Please specify.)
-

4. Do you own a home with a septic system located in Suffolk County?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

5. If you answered “no” or “prefer not to say” to question 4, please skip to question 7. If you answered “yes” to question 4, what are your hesitations about participating in the SIP? (*Select all that apply.*)

- I was unaware of the SIP.
 - I do not know where to get information about the SIP.
 - I am concerned about the cost of replacing my septic system.
 - I do not understand how the SIP application process works.
 - I do not see the value in upgrading the system, or the upgrade seems unnecessary.
 - I would prefer to work with a different vendor who is not on the approved vendors list.
 - I have heard negative stories about the septic system replacement process or the SIP.
 - I do not want to damage my lawn/landscaping for the replacement.
 - I am planning to sell the home soon/will not be living here much longer.
 - My property/my septic system is not eligible for the SIP.
 - Not applicable; I am interested, or already participating, in the SIP.
 - Other (Please specify.)
-

6. What would it take to get you involved in the SIP? (*Select all that apply.*)

- Little to no out-of-pocket expenses for my septic system replacement
 - More information about how the SIP works
 - More information on why it is important to upgrade my septic system
 - More options for eligible or approved replacement systems
 - Examples of successful projects or success stories from past SIP participants
 - Support with the application process
 - I would like to participate, but my property/my septic system is not eligible.
 - Not applicable; I am interested, or already participating, in the SIP.
 - Nothing; I do not want to participate.
 - Other (Please specify.)
-

7. What questions do you have about the SIP? (*Please write your questions below.*)

8. If you would like to receive more information about the SIP, please write your name and email address below.

Figure 4: Suffolk County Septic Improvement Program (SIP) Factsheet and Infographic

Protect the Estuary, Participate in the Septic Improvement Program!

If you are a homeowner in Suffolk County who has an aging and potentially leaking septic system, please consider participating in the County's Septic Improvement Program (SIP). Learn more about the program and how it can help you and the Peconic Estuary below.

What is the Suffolk County SIP?


The SIP is a grant program that supports homeowners with the cost of replacing their existing septic system with an approved Innovative Alternative (I/A) Onsite Wastewater Treatment System. The grant aims to cover most of the out-of-pocket costs of the replacement, as well as the first several years of maintenance costs. Additional grant and incentive programs are available for residents in the Town of East Hampton, Shelter Island, and the Town of Southampton, as well as the New York State Septic System Replacement Program.

What expenses does the SIP cover?

The SIP covers most of the cost of the system installation, which is typically \$28,500 to \$34,000, minimizing out-of-pocket costs for the property owner. Yearly maintenance costs begin after installation, but the first 3 to 8 years are covered by grant funding. Engineering and site restoration costs are not covered by the grant. These costs vary depending on the conditions of your property.

What are the eligibility requirements?

The Suffolk County SIP grant must be received before the system is installed. The SIP is not a reimbursement program (although some town programs offer rebates). The applicant must own a property with an existing septic system. It cannot be located in a sewer district or a proposed sewer district, and the property cannot have any foreclosures or tax liens. New construction projects are not eligible. For the Suffolk County SIP, vendors/installers must be selected from an approved list. (This requirement is waived for the New York State program only). Applications are prioritized according to the level of septic system failure and whether the project is located within surface and groundwater priority areas.



Peconic Estuary Partnership

Replace Your Septic System to Protect the Peconic Estuary

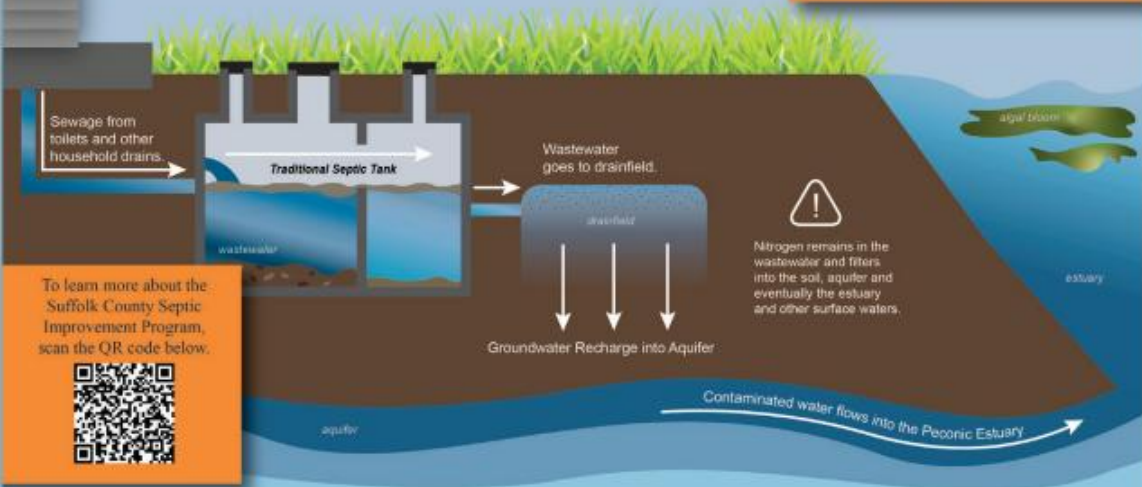
If you have a septic tank consider replacing it with an Innovative Alternative (I/A) Onsite Wastewater Treatment System (OWTS).

These systems effectively treat wastewater, removing around 70% of total nitrogen, unlike traditional septic systems.


A grant from the Suffolk County Septic Improvement Program could cover most of the costs of a new system and the first few years of maintenance.

Nitrogen from septic systems pollutes our groundwater, the sole source aquifer, and the Peconic Estuary. This has led to:

- fish kills;
- algal blooms;
- harm to the shellfish industry;
- health risks;
- loss of habitat like eelgrass beds;
- and impacts to recreation such as beach closures.



To learn more about the Suffolk County Septic Improvement Program, scan the QR code below:



Protect the Estuary, Participate in the Septic Improvement Program!

Why should I participate in the SIP?

The SIP provides an opportunity to upgrade your septic system for little out-of-pocket costs while protecting the County's groundwater and surface water resources. Traditional septic systems do not treat wastewater before it leaches into the ground. The untreated wastewater contains high levels of nitrogen, which pollutes groundwater, the sole source aquifer, and surface waters. The sole source aquifer, which is fed by groundwater, provides Long Island's drinking water, but it can become polluted when wastewater pollutes the groundwater. High nitrogen also causes harmful algal blooms, fish kills, and beach closures.

A catastrophic septic system failure requires immediate and costly intervention from the property owner, and future regulations could make upgrading to an I/A system mandatory. With the grant programs currently available, now is the time to upgrade to avoid catastrophic system failure and changing regulations.

How can I participate in the SIP?

Both the Suffolk County SIP and the New York State program are combined into one application for convenience. Before applying, you will want to (a) confirm eligibility, (b) research and seek quotes from engineers, vendors/installers, and maintenance providers (which are often the same as the vendor), and (c) gather required documentation. Then, visit the Suffolk County Septic Improvement Program webpage to complete the application. A user guide for the application portal is also available on the webpage. Your application will be reviewed, prioritized, and approved. Once approved, you will have 30 days to sign and return the agreement. After your agreement is complete, design, permitting, installation, and payment take place.

Where can I get more information about the SIP?

You can learn more by visiting Suffolk County's SIP website at: <https://suffolk-countyny.gov/Departments/Public-Works/Septic-Improvement-Program>

You can learn more by visiting PEP's website on improving your septic system at: <https://www.peconicestuary.org/what-you-can-do/improve-your-septic-system/>



▼ Approved Replacement Systems

Fuji Clean



Hydro-Action



Orenco Advantex



SeptiTech STAAR



Suffolk County's SIP Sample Social Media Post Content

Below is an example of a social media post that PEP could share on Suffolk County's SIP:

PEP is excited to see many community members taking advantage of Suffolk County's Septic Improvement Program (SIP) to upgrade their septic systems with little to no out-of-pocket expenses. These upgrades help improve the water quality of the Peconic Estuary, which has direct benefits to human and wildlife health and our drinking water. Check out Suffolk County's SIP website to learn more and apply at: <https://suffolkcountyny.gov/Departments/Public-Works/Septic-Improvement-Program>.

Focused Effort on Agriculture and Aquaculture Communities

PEP recognizes that many agriculture and aquaculture farmers on the East End are implementing innovative and responsible practices on their farms that help protect and enhance water quality within the Peconic Estuary. PEP would like to celebrate their proactive approaches and encourage others in the industries to implement similar practices. There are a variety of ways that PEP can outreach to and engage with members of the agriculture and aquaculture communities, some of which are described below, with example tools, where possible. PEP staff and volunteers can use these samples as starting points to develop a robust COE effort pertaining to these stakeholders.

General Guidance

Engaging with agriculture and aquaculture farmers will require a more in-person focus than for other stakeholder groups within the watershed. This means that PEP staff and volunteers will need to build personal relationships with individual farmers who can then be partners in spreading the word to others about mutually beneficial topics. PEP will also need to be aware and considerate of the specific challenges farmers face on a suburban island like Long Island, where there are many development pressures and high land costs but also opportunities surrounding agritourism and a strong local food movement.

How can PEP build personal relationships and trust with these farmers? The first step is to do some background research on the farm: what is the size and location of the farm, how long has it been around, what is grown or raised there, how does it benefit the economy and community, etc. The next step is to find some time, ideally outside of the growing season, to meet in person with the farmer at a place of their choosing and listen. Ask them about their business challenges and successes. Ask them about their thoughts on what makes the East End and the Peconic Estuary special. Listening more than speaking will show you respect their expertise and want to learn as much as you want to help.

PEP should also engage with farmers at local markets, industry days, and through trade and educational organizations such as the Long Island Farm Bureau, Long Island Oyster Growers Association, and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County, among others. Going to them, rather than expecting them to come to PEP-organized events, is an effective way to meet them in a place where they feel comfortable and are more likely to share their thoughts with PEP. Bring educational resources (like those described on the next few pages) to share with those who are open to it and encourage follow-up conversations to build stronger relationships that may lead to new partnerships for PEP.

Infographics

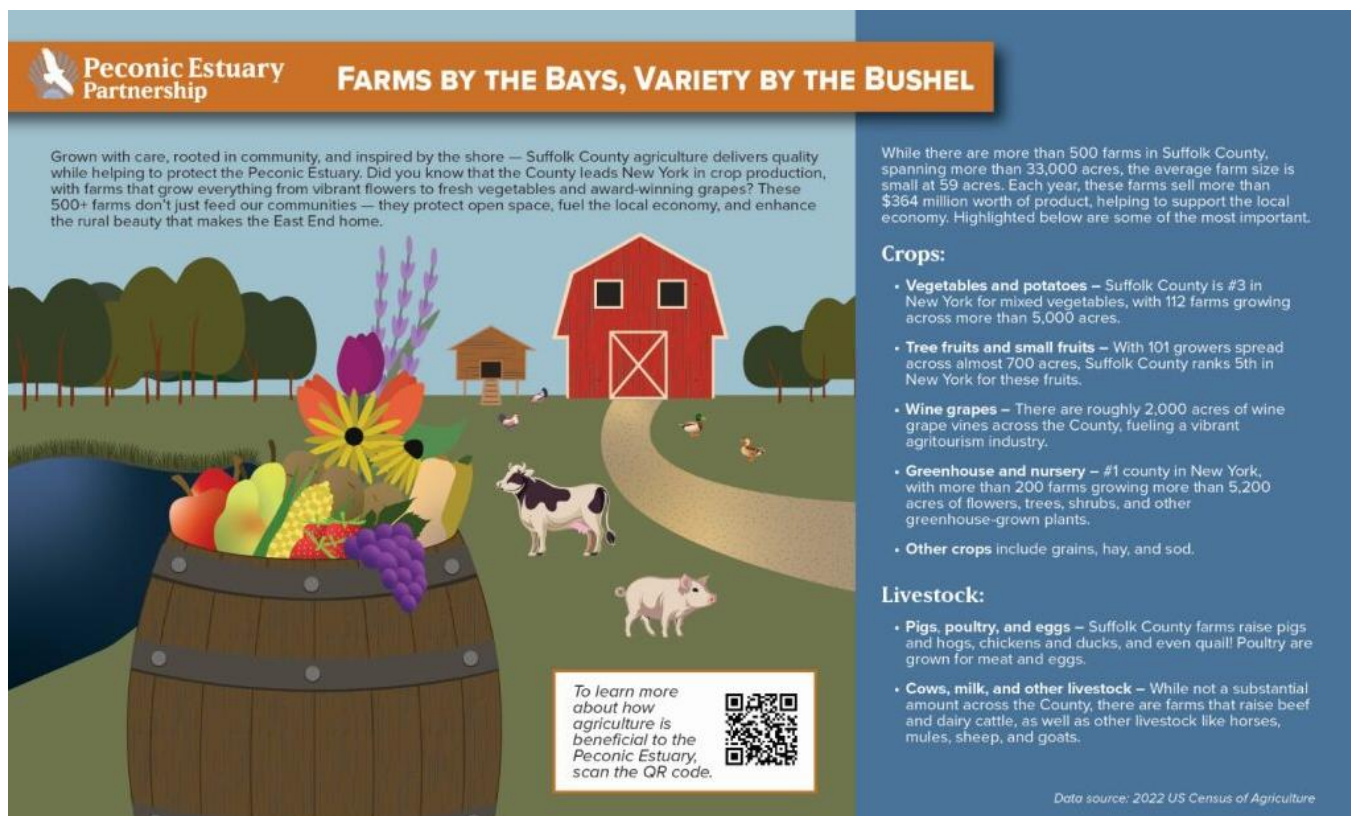
Infographics are best used to simplify complex data (such as water quality monitoring results) and enhance information retention through engaging visuals and simple storytelling. They can be used to convey a message

across a broad audience or be tailored toward a specific stakeholder group. As a general rule, you should use infographics when:

- Explaining complex concepts: Infographics can visually simplify complicated ideas, making them easier for a broad audience to understand and remember.
- Presenting data and statistics: They provide a clear and engaging way to display numbers and statistical information, making it more understandable and persuasive.
- Comparing and contrasting items: Infographics are ideal for showcasing the pros, cons, similarities, and differences between multiple concepts.
- Detailing processes: They can effectively illustrate how a sequence of events unfolds, such as the way a septic system works or how lawn care chemicals can contaminate groundwater.
- Enhancing engagement and sharing: The visual nature of infographics attracts attention, encourages further exploration of the content, and increases the likelihood of being shared on social media.
- Improving information retention: Visual content, like infographics, has been shown to significantly increase learning and memory compared to text-only information.

The following infographic was developed as an example of one concept PEP could convey to the agriculture community to promote estuary-friendly practices.

Figure 5: Suffolk County Agriculture Infographic



Other potential topics to use to create an infographic include:

- how buying locally grown produce benefits the estuary;
- the mutual benefits of water conservation on small farms and the Estuary; and
- the ecological benefits of shellfish aquaculture on water quality and the importance of supporting local shellfish farming.

Newsletter Articles

PEP's monthly newsletter is an easy and effective way of conveying the important work of the organization and its partners in protecting and restoring the Peconic Estuary. One recommendation is to include stories about agriculture and aquaculture farmers within the newsletter at least quarterly, linking the newsletter to social media posts that summarize the content and point people to where they can learn more. One example article about Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County is included below. Other potential areas to focus include a feature on Long Island Sustainable Winegrowing, profiles of different business members of the Long Island Oyster Growers Association, and highlights of local farms that use estuary-friendly agricultural practices such as no- or low-till farming, no synthetic fertilizers or pesticides, and use of cover crops. Some initial research into farms located on the East End that use such practices are listed in the table below. This list is not comprehensive, but it can be used as a starting point for PEP to identify and reach out to potential farmers to highlight in PEP's newsletter (and elsewhere).

Table 9: Sample East End Farms that Use Estuary-Friendly Practices

Sang Lee Farms	
https://www.sangleefarms.com/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Certified organic by NOFA-NY for 15 years ● No synthetic fertilizers, fungicides, or pesticides ● Naturally occurring applications for pest controls <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Uses beneficial insects (ladybugs and praying mantis) ○ Weeding by hand ● Recognized by Leopold Conservation award (2020) for sustainability in the environment as a farm due to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Complex diversified cover cropping ○ Water conservation ○ Limited till practices
25180 County Road 48 Peconic NY 11958	
Deep Roots Farm	
https://deeproofsfarmnofo.com/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Raise pigs and chicken in unison with fruits, vegetable, flowers, and herbs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rotate different species of animals through fields to get a varied diet and help with pest control, soil health, and fertility ○ Livestock rotation cuts down on feed costs and helps fertilize fields for next year’s crops ○ Livestock raised without antibiotics and diet is supplemented with organic grain, ○ Livestock also fed veg and fruit scraps from this farm and other local farms, restaurants, and business to minimize waste ● Not certified organic due to effort required for certification process, but uses organic practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Minimal organic fertilizer used for areas not fertilized by livestock ○ No synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, fungicides, pesticides
57685 NY-25 Southold, NY 11971	
Sand and Soil Farm	
https://sandandsoilfarm.com/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Certified organic ● Regenerative agriculture ● Prioritizes soil health ● Grows biodiverse array of crops ● Intensive spacing and low/no till methods
22 Farm House Ln, East Hampton, NY 11937	
Garden of Eve Organic Farm	
https://gardenofevefarm.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Certified Organic ● AgroEcosystem & Permaculture Practices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cover crops ○ Natural pest control / ecological solutions to solve pest problems ○ No pesticides or herbicides ○ No synthetic fertilizers <p>Founders offer consulting service for agriculture & sustainable development, farmer outreach, local food systems, etc.</p>
4558 Sound Avenue Riverhead, New York 11901	

Quail Hill Farm (a Peconic Land Trust stewardship project)	
https://www.peconiclandtrust.org/our-work/stewardship/quail-hill-farm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A central part of their mission is to educate the public on issues such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Soil health ○ Sustainable, organic farming practices ● Supplies produce to the Bridgehampton Child Care and Recreational Cetner Food Pantry (Farm to Food Pantry program)
Amagansett, NY	

Video Interview Posts

Longer term, PEP should consider undertaking a video spotlight effort, where land and sea farms across the East End that are using best practices are highlighted in short video interviews that can then be tied to newsletter articles, social media posts, and other engagement methods to share across a wide spectrum of the watershed. These videos could be taken by a contractor, one of PEP’s staff (who could be trained in taking and editing videos for online use), or a combination of the two. There could be several objectives behind these videos, but the overall goal should be for PEP to celebrate practitioners who are advancing the mission of PEP, whether they were aware of that connection or not.

Some example videos that could be used as inspiration when planning video spotlights include:

- Rotational Grazing and Regenerative Agriculture at Clagett Farm (Chesapeake Bay Foundation): <https://www.cbf.org/news-media/multimedia/video/rotational-grazing-and-regenerative-agriculture-at-clagett-farm-how-to-make-farms-bay-friendly.html>
- Michael Heller on Growing a Regenerative Farm (Chesapeake Bay Foundation): <https://www.cbf.org/news-media/multimedia/video/michael-heller-on-growing-a-regenerative-farm.html>
- Rotational Grazing: Green Grass, Healthy Cattle, Clean Streams (Chesapeake Bay Foundation): <https://www.cbf.org/news-media/multimedia/video/rotational-grazing-green-grass-healthy-cattle.html>
- Oysters (Chesapeake Bay Program): <https://www.chesapeakebay.net/issues/whats-at-risk/oysters>
- Farming Oysters with an Adjustable Longline (Chesapeake Oyster Alliance): https://youtu.be/FLgW_FZ47Lg

Before starting the process, PEP needs to consider where these videos will be shown so that they are optimized for the specific social media platform or webpage on which it will be posted. Many social media apps have limits to the length of the video, the ideal dimensions of the video, and other features that can boost or detract from effective engagement. For shorter videos, Instagram and Facebook work well – see Table 10 below for Instagram video tips. For longer-format videos, YouTube and PEP’s website would be better. Because Instagram is one of PEP’s most effective social media channels currently, that will be the focus of the following recommendations. Facebook and YouTube are less restrictive in the length and dimension requirements, so less guidance is needed for those. Should PEP ever get a TikTok channel, or if new platforms arise in the future, the proposed PEP Online Media Coordinator should stay informed of the most effective optimization tips and implement them accordingly.

Table 10. Instagram Video Tips

	Requirements	Reasoning
Length	60 seconds	Maximum allowed on Instagram
Ideal concepts	Getting a quote from a farmer about why they love farming on the East End, highlighting a couple specific best management practices, or doing a quick montage site visit of the farm	Fits within the 60 second length requirement
Format	MP4	This is the current industry standard.
Audio	Advanced Audio Coding (AAC)	Digital audio compression format that provides better sound quality and smaller file sizes than MP3 format
Quality	3,500 kilobits per second (kbps) bitrate with a frame rate of 30 frames per second (fps)	Will balance good video clarity without needing super-fast internet
Dimension	1,080 pixels (px) wide by 1,920 px tall	Fits platform the best

Next, PEP should develop a short list of interview questions that can be used consistently across the video subjects. The following are some potential questions to be used in part or in whole depending on the total length of the interview, and PEP is encouraged to develop additional questions based on the overall objective and goals of the videos.

- Please tell us about your farm. How long has your farm been operating? What kinds of products do you grow or raise? What do you think is unique about your farm?
- What do you believe makes farming/aquaculture on the East End unique or special?
- What are some challenges you face in your day-to-day operations that people should know about?
- How does the health of the Peconic Estuary affect the way you do business?
- What is one recommendation you can give to other farmers/aquaculture operators to help protect the Peconic Estuary?

While developing/refining the list of questions, PEP should also start to identify potential agriculture/aquaculture operators to interview. Contacting trade groups like Long Island Sustainable Winegrowing and Long Island Oyster Growers Association can help in identifying possible interview subjects. Visiting local farmers markets and seafood markets could be another opportunity to find willing participants.

When approaching a potential interviewee:

1. Introduce yourself and provide a quick overview of what PEP is and does. Provide a one-page handout about PEP and its mission, if possible.
2. Let potential interviewees know the reason for the video and outline the process: that interviews will be no more than 15 minutes in length, that they can take place at a time and place of the interviewees choosing (although on the farm/at their business is best), where the videos will be shown (i.e., social media, website, etc.), that they will be provided a short list of questions ahead of time so they can prepare their answers, and that they can stop or cancel the interview at any time during the process.
3. If an interviewee will allow it, ask if a farm visit can be done ahead of time to scope out one or more potential visually appealing locations for the video backdrop and to shoot some B-roll material (or

supplementary footage including images of the crops, farm animals, equipment, etc.). This time may also be used to do a test run / practice session.

4. If that is not possible, ask them to select a site with a scenic yet not too busy backdrop and with minimal to no background noise for effective filming.
5. Let them know that they may have the opportunity to view and provide suggested comments on the draft video before it is shared publicly. Knowing they have some control of the content may make them more willing to participate.

Other interview considerations include:

- the amount and direction of sunlight (you don't want your interviewee squinting into direct sunlight or too much in shadow), which can be balanced best by filming in the hour or two before sunset;
- having a boom mic or lapel mic (ideally with a wind screen) to better capture the interviewee's audio;
- and being prepared for weather variability.

Once you have coordinated with the prospective interviewee and taken the video footage, then it is time for editing. See the Social Media Strategy beginning on page 18 for some tips on video editing and posting guidelines.

Focused Effort on Community Members

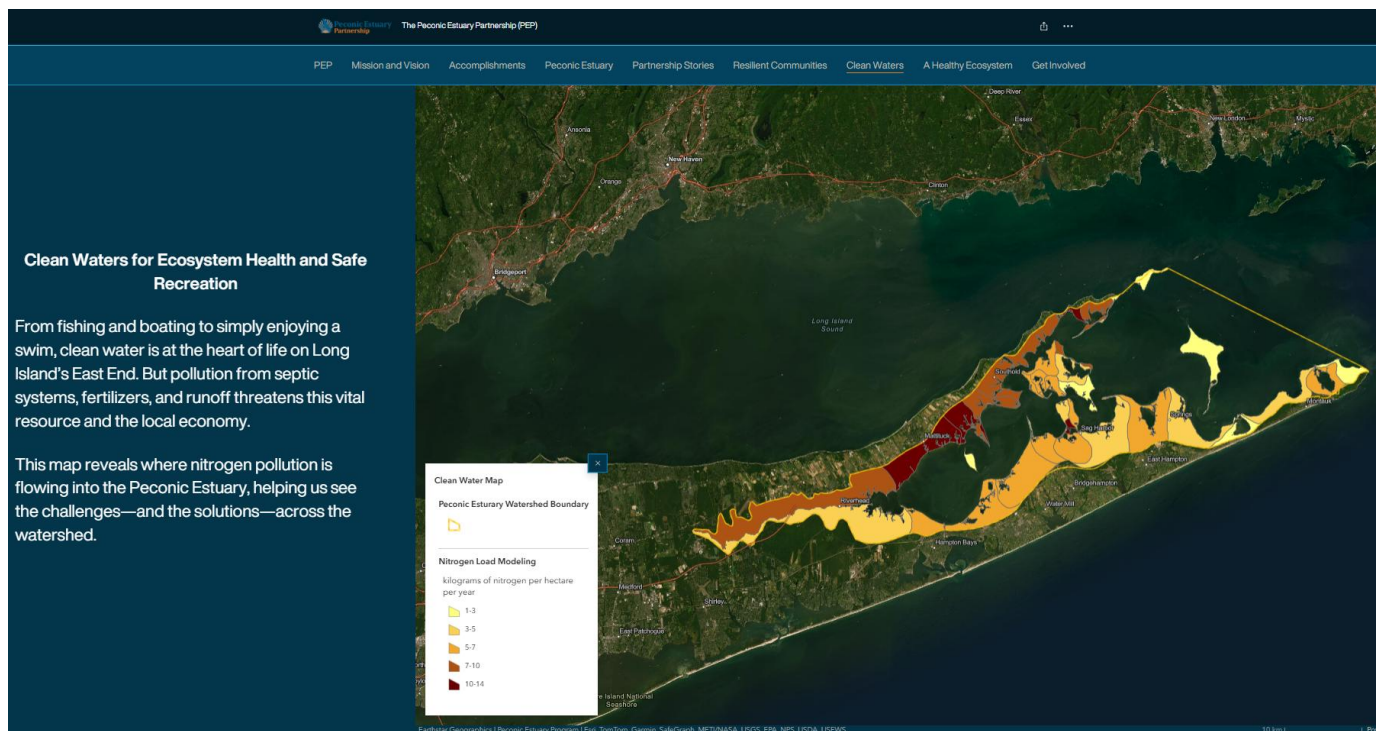
PEP recognizes that while they have done a great job engaging with a wide swath of individuals and organizations on the East End, there are certain communities that are not as aware of or involved with PEP. These communities include tourists, part-time/seasonal homeowners, faith-based groups, youth groups, English as a Second Language (ESL) communities, and others that might arise in the future as PEP’s projects and focus change. There are a variety of tools, materials, and activities that PEP can use to better engage these groups, some of which are described below. PEP staff and volunteers can use these samples as starting points to develop a robust COE effort pertaining to these stakeholders.

StoryMap

As part of this Strategy development, a StoryMap was created to highlight the current work of PEP and its partners, particularly as it pertains to the CCMP. The StoryMap can be used to showcase specific projects and their progress and to encourage everyone within the Estuary’s watershed to become involved in the work of PEP and its partners. The StoryMap can be accessed [here](#).

A screenshot showcasing one of the interactive maps within the StoryMap is included in Figure 4 below.

Figure 6: Sample Page from the StoryMap



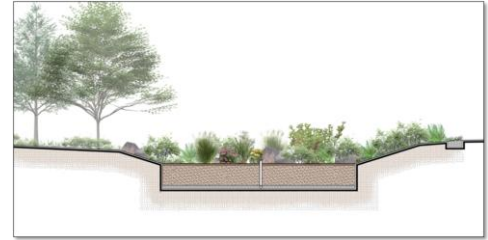
Social Media Content for a General Audience

The following are some examples of potential social media posts related to existing PEP programs for a general audience that could encourage pro-estuary behavior and involvement in PEP’s activities. Images below were taken from the PEP website. See the sample social media messaging that begins on page 25 for additional post content and recommendations related to social media content for specific groups within the Estuary.

Rain Garden Program

Rain gardens can enhance the aesthetics of residential settings while treating stormwater runoff that could otherwise pollute the Peconic Estuary. For a low cost and with easy maintenance, rain gardens can offer you a beautiful, long-lasting wildlife and pollinator habitat. To learn more about rain gardens visit

<https://www.peconicestuary.org/pep-reduction-bmp/surface-runoff/rain-gardens/>.



Monofilament Recycling

To help combat marine plastic debris, which can kill aquatic wildlife, PEP has installed monofilament fishing line receptacles at various locations around the Peconic Estuary. The next time you are out fishing find a monofilament recycling site near you at <https://www.peconicestuary.org/news-and-events/maps-gis/maps-land-use/>.



Water Quality Monitoring Program

Clean water is essential for life. That is why PEP works with partners to monitor the water quality of the Peconic Estuary year-round. To learn more about our water quality monitoring program and to find out how you can get involved, visit

<https://www.peconicestuary.org/projects/monitoring-programs/#WaterQuality>.



In-Person Events

PEP's participation in tabling events would be an effective way to promote awareness of PEP's mission, build connections with potential supporters by meeting them where they are, educate the community about the Peconic Estuary, and collect direct community feedback on the issues and opportunities they care about.

To most effectively engage the community at tabling events, PEP should ensure that:

- The tabling event will have high-traffic participation. Events that occur regularly (holiday events, festivals, farmers markets, etc.) and have a good following are a good place to start.
- The informational materials, banners, and/or poster displays are vibrant and visible from afar to draw people in.
- The information on display and on the take-home materials is clear, concise, and focuses on specific actions, next steps, and/or volunteering opportunities that community members can engage in to support PEP's mission and programs.
- Opportunities like quick voting activities ("the jar") and short questionnaires are provided to allow event participants to share their ideas, concerns, and thoughts.
- Event participants are encouraged to sign up for PEP newsletters and follow PEP social media channels at the event and/or are provided with a small postcard with a QR code so they can sign up at home.

Potential Tabling Opportunities on the East End of Long Island

- Annual Greenport Maritime Festival, Sept. 20-21, 2025, in Greenport, NY. For more information visit <https://www.eastendseaport.org/2025maritime> and <https://www.eastendseaport.org/about-the-festival>.
- Annual Honey Festival, August 23-24, 2025, Manorville, NY. For more information visit <https://form.jotform.com/240938777105161> and <https://eastendfestivals.com/>.
- Lavender Festival & French Market, June 7-8, 2025, Manorville, NY. For more information visit <https://www.water-drinker.com/2024festivalapplications>.
- East Hampton Farmers Market. For more information visit <https://www.ehvf.org/farmers-market>.
- East End Farmers Markets, Sag Harbor. Visit <https://eastendfarmersmarkets.com/>.

Sample Talking Points

Talking points are a set of clear, easily remembered messages that present an idea or topic. These talking points can be used to keep a speaker on point when speaking with someone who has little knowledge of the subject matter. They can also be adapted into messaging for social media posts, photo captions, and other print media. The sample talking points listed below are organized by the Element(s) in which they apply. These can be used by PEP and its partners at tabling events, presentations, and one-on-one meetings with partners and stakeholders to advance the goals, objectives, and actions of this Strategy. These talking points are only a starting point for PEP; speakers should adapt them as they wish to fit their personality, speaking style, and audience.

The talking points developed for this Strategy drew significantly from information gained from discussions with PEP committees and workgroups, interviews with other estuary programs, questionnaire results, and public meeting input. These talking points are provided to PEP for further message testing and implementation. They can be used as a standalone message or in concert with the messaging triangles developed as part of the recently developed COE Plan. **In addition, a messaging matrix that includes additional talking points and highlights which messages would resonate with the various stakeholder groups can be found in the [Communications folder here](#).**

Element 1: Provide a shared narrative and related tools to help PEP’s partners effectively tell the story of why water quality and aquatic habitats are important and worth protecting.

- The Peconic Estuary is more than water. It is a nursery for life—a sanctuary for birds, fish, and people.
- The way we care for our land and water shapes the future of the Peconic Estuary’s health.
- The smell of salt in the air, the sound of gulls, the feel of sand under your feet. It all comes from a living and thriving Peconic Estuary.
- Clean water is essential for human health and quality of life. Since becoming a National Estuary in 1993, the Peconic Estuary Partnership has worked to protect and restore the Peconic Estuary so that everyone has access to clean, healthy drinking water and safe places to recreate.

- The Peconic Estuary Partnership helps bring habitats back to life by enhancing wetlands, repairing coastal marshes and shorelines, and restoring shellfish beds and eelgrass meadows. This work is important for wildlife and everyone who calls the East End home.

Element 2: Shape a clear public-facing identity for PEP so that more communities and individuals on the East End want to participate in PEP’s efforts.

- The Peconic Estuary Partnership is made up of individuals, communities, nonprofits, and businesses. We believe that by working together we can solve the Estuary’s complex problems.
- The Peconic Estuary Partnership advocates for smarter land uses and policies that help people and the Estuary. We believe that smart policy turns good ideas into lasting solutions.
- From nature walks to water quality sampling, the Peconic Estuary Partnership is focused on making the Estuary something everyone can see, touch, enjoy, and contribute to its protection and restoration.
- We believe that taking care of the Peconic Estuary is a shared responsibility and that volunteering can instill pride when positive results are seen. The Peconic Estuary Partnership has several volunteer opportunities you can participate in to help protect and restore the Estuary’s health.

Element 3: Work with Suffolk County to broaden and increase participation in its Septic Improvement Program (SIP) to inspire pro-estuary behaviors and have a measurable positive impact on the Estuary’s water quality.

- What we flush down the drain may eventually end up in the Peconic Estuary. Being mindful of how our actions at home impact the Estuary is the first step in protecting it.
- Healthier estuaries mean better fishing, beaches, and quality of life. From replacing septic systems to installing native plants, small individual choices make a big difference across our community.
- Everyone that lives, works, or plays within the Peconic Estuary can help in protecting and restoring the Estuary. Every action—including upgrading or replacing your septic system—protects the Estuary.

Element 4: Build connections with agriculture and aquaculture communities on the East End to showcase responsible practices that expand their use across the Estuary.

- The way we care for our land and water shapes the future of the Peconic Estuary’s health.
- The Peconic Estuary is part of our shared story—one of sustenance, stewardship, and resilience.
- The Peconic Estuary isn’t just part of our landscape; it’s part of our legacy.
- The Peconic Estuary has fed our families for generations. Let’s make sure it can keep doing that.

Element 5: Design meaningful approaches that invigorate community engagement with special interest groups that are not currently as involved with PEP as others within the Estuary.

- The Peconic Estuary is not just a river or a marsh. It is full of stories, science, and surprises. The more you explore, the more you will find!
- The Peconic Estuary is full of little mysteries. Every visit is a chance to discover something new without going far from home.

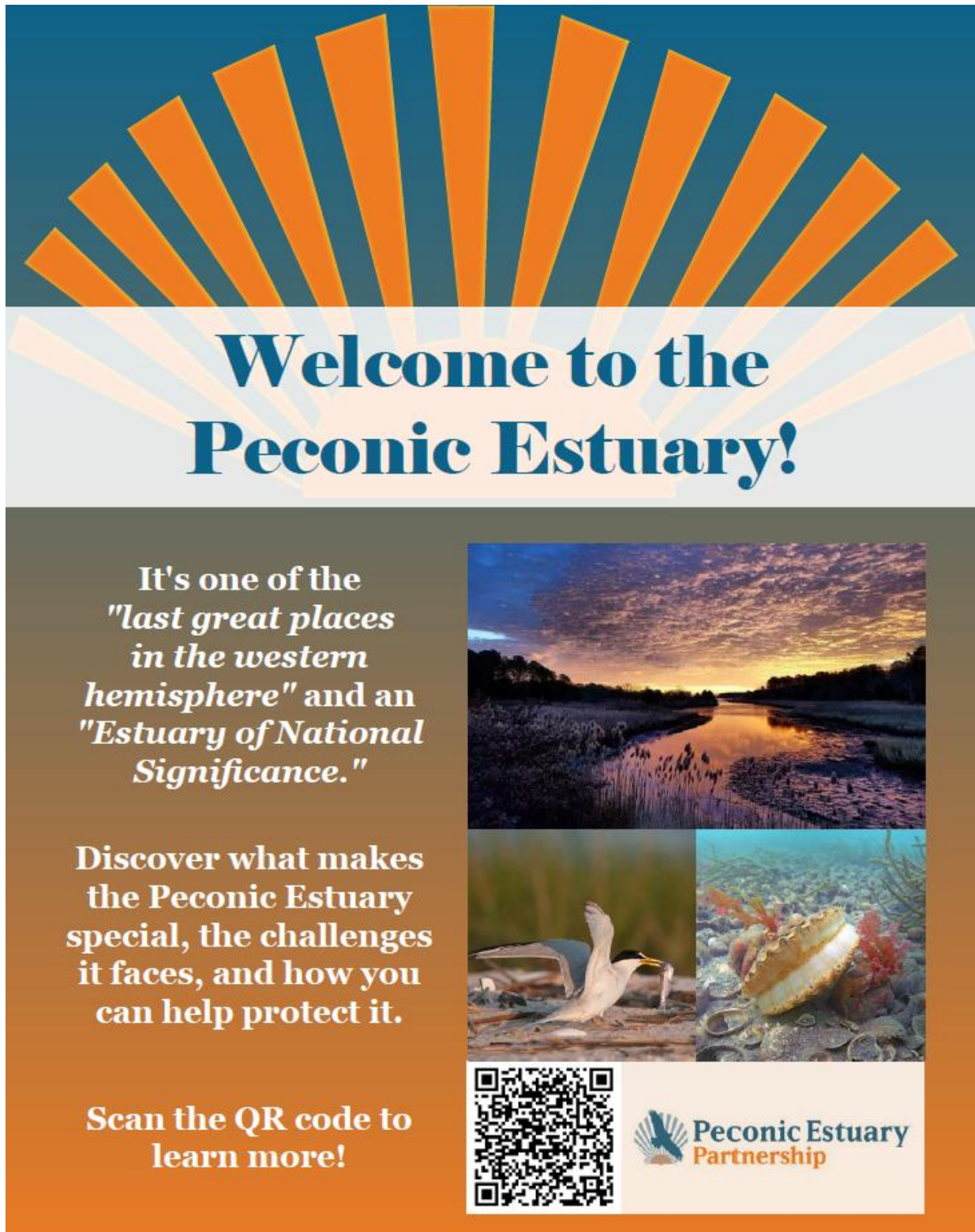
- The Peconic Estuary provides many nature-based activities for tourists—from birdwatching to boating, swimming, and fishing. There is so much to explore and learn!
- The Peconic Estuary is central to residents’ identity, livelihood, and quality of life. It supports recreation, provides peace and reflection, and connects families through culture, traditions, and generational ties.
- The Peconic Estuary connects generations through shared stories and lifelong bonds with the water.
- The Peconic Estuary is a peaceful and inspirational place in nature. It is full of quiet and serene spaces where you can reflect and connect with nature.
- Engaging youth directly with the Peconic Estuary through tagging crabs, testing water, and restoring shorelines can allow these individuals to build lifelong connections with people and nature.

Signage

The placement of eye-catching signage in areas of high foot traffic can provide numerous benefits to PEP, including increased brand visibility and recognition, attracting new volunteers and partners, promoting events, conveying important information about PEP and the Estuary, and establishing a consistent image. If more temporary in nature, these signs can be printed in the office or via a local print shop and hung at locations such as coffee shops, libraries, schools, grocery stores, churches, bait and tackle shops, marinas, and other places where the stakeholders that PEP would like to better engage with can be found. For a more durable sign that may be used multiple times or remain in place at a location long-term, consider printing on plastic or vinyl via an experienced sign shop. If EPA federal funding is used for such signage it should be reviewed by EPA beforehand to ensure it conforms with the Terms and Conditions of the federal award, including elements such as funding acknowledgments, disclaimers, photo credits, and use of logos.

The following are a few examples of signs that could be used to build interest in PEP and its work. The talking points listed on the previous page could be adapted into slogans and calls to action for these posters too. The use of a QR code is essential to send interested viewers to the PEP website or social media channel for more information.

Figure 7: General PEP Sign



Welcome to the Peconic Estuary!

**It's one of the
*"last great places
in the western
hemisphere"* and an
*"Estuary of National
Significance."***

**Discover what makes
the Peconic Estuary
special, the challenges
it faces, and how you
can help protect it.**

**Scan the QR code to
learn more!**









Figure 8: What Is an Estuary? Sign

Do you live, work, or play in the Peconic Estuary Watershed?



Peconic Estuary Watershed Facts

- 450 miles of shoreline
- 158,000 surface water acres and 112,500 land acres
- Year-round population of approximately 100,000, which nearly triples in the warmer months

Protect the Peconic Estuary—It Starts with You!

The health of the Peconic Estuary depends on all of us. Join the **Peconic Estuary Partnership (PEP)** and make a difference today!

Get Involved:

- **Learn & Explore:** Join community science projects, guided walks, and local events.
- **Become a Voice for the Estuary:** Join the Citizens Advisory Committee.
- **Take Action at Home:** Upgrade your septic system, plant native species, and earn rewards through the Homeowner Rewards Program.
- **Help Track Wildlife:** Join the Wildlife Monitoring Network to report sightings and support conservation.
- **Leave No Trace:** Carry out your trash and pet waste to keep our waters clean.

Every action counts—small steps lead to a cleaner, healthier Peconic Estuary.

Scan the QR code to learn more or get started!





Figure 9: Beach Visitors Sign

You came for the beauty...
...help keep it that way!

DISPOSE OF YOUR LITTER

PICK UP AFTER FIDO

DON'T FEED THE WILDLIFE

RECYCLE YOUR FISHING LINE

Scan for more information on the estuary 

 **Peconic Estuary Partnership**
www.peconicestuary.org

 Scan for locations to recycle your fishing line

Conclusion

This Communication Strategy is based on approximately seven months of review and analysis of PEP's COE efforts, which included conversations with PEP staff and members of the CAC, interviews with other NEPs, online research, monthly media monitoring, results from an online questionnaire, and feedback gathered during four public meetings. Using all the information gathered during the research phase, Marstel-Day, with significant input and feedback from PEP staff, prepared a Strategy (and associated COE Plan) capable of achieving the following stated goals within the Statement of Work:

- Enhance PEP's ability to communicate with its partners.
- Assist PEP in continued growth of their COE efforts.
- Provide continuing brand activation, development, and communication services.

Effectively reaching out to, communicating with, and engaging the diverse populations of the East End can be challenging, but the effort is well worth the time. This Strategy will help PEP build upon its proven and respected work, enhancing and expanding their efforts. The Strategy is grounded in the understanding that influencing individual behaviors and encouraging communities to support and prioritize the protection and restoration of the Peconic Estuary will require a more targeted approach.

To that end, this Strategy's vision, elements, objectives, and actions are designed to support all of PEP's staff, committee members, and partner organizations in successfully implementing the Strategy and using the provided COE tools and recommendations. As these steps are taken, the Strategy will significantly contribute to the advancement of the CCMP goals and PEP's mission of "Protecting & Restoring Long Island's Peconic Bays."

Glossary

Behavior change – Altering an individual’s or group’s habits for the long term.

COE – Stands for communication, outreach, and engagement

Collaboration – The act of working with an individual or group to identify or create something that neither could do as well on their own. An example of collaboration is working with community organizers at the earliest, and on every stage of development (conceptual plan, funding, identification of program lead(s), materials, date(s) and location(s), follow-up) for an interactive program that inspires community members in taking individual and/or community actions that benefit the Estuary.

Communications – The one-way (generally) act of transferring information from one individual or group to another. An example of communications is a weekly or monthly newsletter sent to email recipients that includes short articles, photos, upcoming events, and other pieces of information.

Community / Community-based – This can have one of two meanings. The first relates to a municipality (town, city, township, etc.) or neighborhood/housing development. The second relates to a group of people of a certain race, ethnicity, or other identifying feature.

Element – An overarching aim for the Strategy that involves achieving specific objectives.

Engagement – The two-way act of both listening and speaking with another individual or group to build connection and trust that will (hopefully) lead to collaboration and/or partnership. An example is meeting one-on-one with industry leaders (e.g., anglers, aquaculturists, charter boat operators, etc.) to hear their concerns and potential needs from PEP to become better stewards of the estuary and then working with them to develop mutually supportable projects, programs, events, or policies.

Environmental stewards/stewardship – One who practices / the responsible use and protection of the natural environment through conservation and sustainable practices to enhance ecosystem resilience and human well-being. [source: NOAA]

Estuary – An ecosystem, comprising both the biological and physical environment, that has developed in a region where rivers meet the sea and fresh-flowing river water mingles with tidal salt water to become brackish, or partly salty [source: NOAA]

Metrics – Ways in which the progress of meeting the Strategy elements and objectives will be measured.

Objectives – The measurable steps needed to achieve each of the six Strategy elements.

Outreach – The act (one-way generally) of initially connecting an individual’s or group’s ideas or practices to the efforts of – i.e., reaching out to – other individuals, groups, or communities in a targeted manner.

Partners – An individual, organization, or community who works with PEP to protect and restore the Peconic Estuary.

Pathways – Means and methods used to communicate, outreach, and/or engage with an individual, group, or community, such as a social media platform or influencer.

Stakeholder – An individual, organization, or community with an interest or concern in the ongoing efforts of PEP.