

The Urban Waters Ambassador: Guide to Sustaining the Position

Purpose: *This document discusses transition approaches to help ensure continuity of the Ambassador position. This guidance seeks to help local partnerships find staffing or funding for the Ambassador role. The diverse approaches to sustain the Ambassador position are explained below. To support the longevity of the Urban Waters Ambassador position over many years, local governments and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are encouraged to be actively engaged and/or support a leadership role.*



[See accompanying PowerPoint template for transition meetings.]

101 on the Ambassador Position

Ambassadors at Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) locations serve as local coordinators, facilitators, navigators and leaders. They work with and connect communities, federal and state agencies, local municipalities, NGOs and businesses to accelerate and prioritize on-the-ground projects to improve water quality, restore outdoor spaces and foster community stewardship in urban-related watersheds. Ambassadors are also responsible for strategic planning, workplan development and funding identification. A long-term Ambassador can lead to better coordination among all stakeholders and accelerate project completion. *At various UWFP locations, the Ambassador position is filled by co-leads from federal agencies, local government, local NGOs or a blend.*

It is preferred, though not required, that the Ambassador is from the UWFP location and has experience working in the region. The ideal candidate(s) should have a holistic understanding of diverse disciplines, extending beyond water resource management, such as community organizing, public health, environmental justice, health impacts, education, city planning and economic development. Further, the Ambassador should have experience with and/or in-depth understanding of multiple sectors, including public, private, nonprofit and community-based.

Background on Ambassador Funding

When the Urban Waters Federal Partnership was founded, federal partners provided seed money to establish a network of Ambassadors at UWFP locations. The current leadership model for an Urban Waters Partnership location can take several forms, ranging from federal support for a single Ambassador position to several co-leads sharing the responsibilities of the Ambassador position. This network allowed Ambassadors to build relationships and capacity to further engage state and local agencies and other organizations in the partnership.

Currently, the majority of Ambassador positions are funded by a federal agency partner with specific term limits applied to this funding. Transitions may occur for a variety of reasons but are most often driven by a change in funding sources or the departure of an Ambassador. Funding term limits necessitate the development of a transition plan to either maintain the Ambassador position or delegate their roles to other partners. . Overall, leadership or funding transitions should seek to maintain the partnership's quality, an active Ambassador and local partner involvement.

Ensuring Continuity – Sustaining Ambassador Responsibilities

Transitioning leadership or Ambassador funding to local agencies and/or other organizations can increase ownership of and involvement in UWFP projects. As new members become involved in leadership roles, engage other members, and bring new parties to the table, an increased number of individuals will have a stake in seeing Ambassador functions performed successfully, thus facilitating a greater impact (e.g. foundations may align their missions with Partnership Workplans).

To transition leadership, partners should follow a thorough planning process. Partners in the transition planning process can include state or local agencies, NGOs, community organizations, academia, and businesses. Transitioning to a new leadership model may take up to one year, at a minimum the partnership should plan six months in advance of the transition to negotiate a transition process. This helps ensure that in the instance an Ambassador position is not funded the key functions are picked up by other partners until funding becomes available. Identifying clear goals for the partnership and selecting partners to fulfill those goals will ensure that the Ambassador's functions are sustained. Check-in meetings on leadership transitions should occur regularly, since unforeseen shifts in funding and staffing can happen over a short timeframe. Examples are shared below.

During the transition planning process, one organization or agency may take responsibility for all the Ambassador's functions. It is possible that multiple partners can assume the Ambassador's functions, in a shared model where partners agree on certain functions and work together to ensure continuity of the partnership's initiatives.

Documentation of the transition process is recommended. Creation of a transition plan, which outlines objectives and goals from transition meetings, responsible stakeholders and priorities, will be a useful reference document for those involved with leadership duties.

Various Models of Ambassador Leadership

As UWFP locations plan for transition, they can look to other UWFP locations that have successfully transferred Ambassador responsibilities to new partners. Several UWFP locations that have successfully made this transition include the Los Angeles River Watershed (CA), the Lake Pontchartrain Area/New Orleans (LA), and Bronx and Harlem River Watersheds (NY). Details on how these locations transitioned to a new funding model are below.

Local Partners Fund and Support the Ambassador Position (Los Angeles River Watershed)—The Los Angeles River Partnership, made up of over 40 government and community partner organizations, welcomed their first Urban Waters Ambassador in the summer of 2012. The Los Angeles River Ambassador was an employee of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and, after four years, returned to their responsibilities at HUD. Due to the notable success of the Los Angeles River Partnership under an Ambassador's leadership, local partners stepped in to fund and sustain the Urban Waters Ambassador position. A new Ambassador was identified, and the position is currently funded by local field offices of the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) National Park Service and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service, with support from The Nature Conservancy. The new Ambassador worked with the original Ambassador for several months prior to starting, ensuring a smooth transition. The City of Los Angeles and local partners are extremely supportive of the new and continued leadership of the Los Angeles River Ambassador, noting how the role enhances the region's ability to convene stakeholders and execute projects to revitalize the watershed.

Partnership Sustained by Multiple Local Leads (Lake Pontchartrain/New Orleans)—From 2011 through 2015, the partnership in New Orleans was led by a federal Ambassador through an interagency agreement between EPA and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers. In 2016, a steering committee of 43 members participated in a series of transition planning meetings to identify a strategy to sustain the partnership under local leadership. During this transition period, it was determined that the Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans (SWBNO) and City of New Orleans Office of Resilience would co-lead the partnership with support from the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation and the Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development. The City of New Orleans and SWBNO committed to provide staff resources to the New Orleans Urban Waters Partnership. This example illustrates how the community can step in to sustain the Ambassador's responsibilities and ensure the quality of the partnership is maintained.

Transition from Co-Leads to an Ambassador (Bronx & Harlem River Watersheds)—Since the partnership's inception in 2011, this location was co-led by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), EPA, and DOI. In January 2017, the first full-time Ambassador was hired to serve the Bronx & Harlem River Watershed. EPA Region 2 provided funds to the NY-NJ Harbor & Estuary Program (HEP) for the Ambassador position, and USGS also contributes

funding to the Ambassador position. The Ambassador is an employee of the Natural Areas Conservancy, a NYC Department of Parks and Recreation-affiliated nonprofit.

Lessons Learned/Recommendations

An Ambassador acts as the linchpin for Urban Waters partnerships by building and maintaining relationships and capacity for long-term collaborative successes on projects. Strong relationships are key to the partnership’s success, helping leverage resources, increase capacity and build trust.

Collaboration between Ambassadors and localities (e.g., cities, counties and multi-municipality watersheds) is essential to determine and meet on-the-ground goals. Working with localities during the transition process will allow the partnership to reach a sustainable leadership model.

The Trending Models for Ambassador Support diagram, below, highlights the diverse and shifting mechanisms that support the Ambassador position.

