



1. Introduction - challenges with community involvement on the Passaic

The Lower Passaic River Urban Waters Federal Partnership is a network of federal and state agencies, as well as non-profit organizations and community groups, working to advance sustainable, equitable development on the Lower Passaic River. In accordance with the Urban Waters Federal Partnership national principles, a core belief and value of the Lower Passaic River UWFP is that authentic community engagement—resident participation in the environmental governance that affects their daily lives—will advance better decision-making for the health of the waterway and the communities that depend on it.

The Lower Passaic River watershed faces a series of interconnected historic and ongoing land-use issues which impact the ecological and human health, as well as public enjoyment of the river. These issues include legacy sediment contamination, degraded habitats, ongoing nutrient and pathogen loading from combined sewers outfalls and stormwater runoff, floatable waste, a highway which restricts public access for communities along the western banks, and industrial and residential development that is repeatedly flooded during storm events. Numerous federal, state, and municipal agencies each have authority over different aspects of remediation, water quality, ecosystem resources, and flood risk management.

For local residents, who may have concerns about a particular local site with multiple environmental challenges, the responsibilities of these different agencies are not always clear. Furthermore, federal agencies advancing different projects in the same geography do not always coordinate their efforts to engage a similar set of communities and stakeholders. Both the complexity of the region's environmental challenges, and the tendency to advance projects in silos, limits community members' abilities to participate in environmental governance.

2. Urban Waters Federal Partnership process for improving community involvement

Over the fall of 2017, the Lower Passaic River worked to enhance both formal public participation, processes outlined by the agencies fulfilling their regulatory requirements, as well as informal engagement facilitated by community groups and NGOs.

Focused on formal opportunities

Workshops at 9 environmental commissions and stewardship groups

Focused on informal participation

Stewardship survey to list of over 40 local organizations

Stewardship map and Community Involvement Guide

Figure 1. Process for creating the Stewardship Map and Community Involvement Guide

On the formal side, the Lower Passaic River UWFP conducted a series of nine workshops with local community organizations and environmental commissions. These workshops consisted of a presentation from the Urban Waters Federal Partnership Ambassador about the history of local environmental challenges and ongoing federal projects, as well as a facilitated conversation about local communication tools and means of enhancing civic engagement with the river. The notes taken at these workshops drive the content of this guide.

On the informal side, the Lower Passaic River UWFP circulated a survey to civic organizations across the watershed. This survey, which collected information about how groups reach their memberships, as well as their organizational partners, was used to create a publicly accessible Stewardship Map that local groups can use to engage new audiences. More details about the stewardship map are included in Section 5 of this guide.

3. Scope of this guide

The purpose of this guide, which is focused on the formal modes of public input outlined by the National Environmental Protection Act, is to help agencies advancing flood-risk management and ecological restoration projects develop robust Community Involvement Plans for their projects. This document is not a comprehensive guide to civic organizations and local communication tools in the Lower Passaic River Watershed. Rather, this guide consists of time-specific reflections from conversations held at the workshops, called “Community Snapshots”, with guidance for how this information can be used within existing planning frameworks for federal projects.

Specifically, in the 2017 Community Involvement Plan for the Lower Passaic River Superfund, EPA outlines a series of communications tools that agencies can use for a variety of purposes, ranging from collecting and conveying information, to soliciting assistance in decision-making (Appendix 1). The Community Snapshots can help agencies determine which local communication tools are appropriate for their involvement goals, within the framework of their environmental planning processes.

The Community Snapshots were created from the notes taken at the workshops the Lower Passaic River UWFP Ambassador held with local groups. The groups engaged in the workshops reflected the Urban Waters Federal Partnership’s initial outreach, drawing from groups engaged through the Superfund Community Advisory Group, Newark Doing Infrastructure Green, as well as the Association of

New Jersey Environmental Commissions, and others. More may be added as opportunities to offer workshops with other organizations arise.

4. Using the Community Snapshots

The Community Snapshots contained within this guide can be used to inform the “purpose”, or how agencies broadly understand and frame the goals of a project, as well as the “practice” of effectively engaging the public.

In terms of “purpose”, most Community Snapshots contain a description of either pertinent local environmental issues, or challenges related to community involvement locally on environmental issues. While neither comprehensive nor rigorously qualitative research, agencies can consider the contextual information included here when choosing how to frame and approach the goals of a particular project. **Research(need to find this citation)** has shown that residents are more likely to participate in an agency-lead community development project if the project is presented in terms of how it impacts their day-to-day priorities, with the understanding that those day-to-day concerns will be seriously taken into account. For instance, most environmental projects tend to have multiple impacts and potential co-benefits: a river cleanup can involve job development and opportunities to educate about local economic history, a floodwall can serve as a public parks enhancement, and green infrastructure can reduce asthma rates. Though many of the goals and metrics of federal environmental projects are baked in to their planning processes (for a Superfund cleanup, for example, “Protecting Human Health and the Environment” or for a flood risk management project, achieving the appropriate benefit-cost ratio) these related environmental issues can serve as compelling “hooks” for engaging important audiences who might otherwise not contribute their input.

With regards to the “practice” of public participation, the Community Snapshots provide specific information about appropriate venues, regular community events, and key local civic organizations. These can be mobilized for an outreach effort using the methods that EPA describes in the Superfund Community Involvement Plan. The following section provides examples for how to apply these tools and methods in hypothetical local ecological restoration and flood risk management projects, given the formal frame of the National Environmental Protection Act requirements for public engagement, and consideration of impacts to social and cultural resources.

Using the Community Involvement Snapshots – for an Ecological Restoration Project

Notes from Clifton Environmental Commission Meeting – December 6th, 2017

Challenges with Community outreach

- Timeframe of federal projects -- e.g. it was difficult to maintain attention and interest around the flood tunnel

Passaic River issues in general

- Staffing -- need assistance accessing funds for relevant projects.
Dundee Island Park is on contaminated sediment, and it is difficult to turn it into parkland
- Route 21 - major constraint in terms of public access opportunities
- Homeless encampments at the public access sites

Civic organizations and events

- Botany village association - has regular cleanups
- PVSC holds cleanups
- Watershed Ambassador
- High School conservation club
- City of Clifton Garden Club
- Passaic County Master Gardeners
- Mormon Helping Hands
- Key Club
- Boy Scouts
- Botany Village Historic District

Venues for public events

- Senior Center
- Garden Club

Can use this information to highlight clearly on materials the timeframe at different stages of the project.

Can use this fact to frame the importance of a local habitat restoration project.

If the cleanup is near the site of a habitat restoration project, can distribute fact sheets about the proposed project, as well as collect email addresses for a listserv about the life of the project. Can do this at any phase of the project, while communicating clearly the project's status.

This is a regular AmeriCorps position at NJDEP. The Watershed Ambassador engages local environmental educators, students, as well as homeowners, about rain barrels, rain gardens, and water quality testing.

Can connect with the Watershed Ambassador to circulate a notice to partner groups in the watershed, and their network could potentially form a "Friends of..." group.

High School conservation clubs could be interested in learning how USACE determines which sites are ecologically important, and what is promising about local sites. Can connect with their faculty adviser to offer a presentation, or invite them to a public meeting.

Consider whether there are data collected from the restoration project that could be useful to share with gardeners, or related Citizen Science activities that might be interesting or relevant for the gardeners.

Could send a notification ahead of the group's regular meeting time to ensure that a notification about a meeting is on their agenda.

Can offer presentations about the project to these groups. Along with the presentation, can offer to continue to keep them informed through an email list.

Can ask other civic organizations more directly involved in environmental projects what these groups are actively working on, and whether their memberships utilize the site. This information can inform a determination of whether it is appropriate to engage them during the design phase, or ahead of construction-related activities.

Can reach out to the Urban Waters Federal Partnership Ambassador who can connect you to the groups who suggested these venues.

Using the Community Involvement Snapshots – for a Flood Risk Management Project

Notes from Newark DIG - September 25th, 2017

Major challenges

- Large percentage of renters -- only about 30% of Newarkers own their own homes
- Need to explain why they should care - there are many public meetings in Newark, especially with the Obama administration
- Agencies often work with the city, who contracts out with a consultant who puts on a meeting at city hall during dinnertime

Effective approaches

- Connecting environmental issues issue to public health
- Newark's Riverfront Park was a good example of community input

Online Information sources

- Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions newsletter
- MyNewark smartphone application
- City of Newark social media
- Councilmembers have social media accounts
- Mayor's twitter
- NextDoor

Civic groups active on environmental issues

- United Vailsburg Services Organization
- Ironbound Community Corporation
- Greenfaith

Relevant for framing buyouts versus structural alternatives, and may influence who turns out to a public meeting.

Indicates importance of coordinating with the municipality's existing calendar of public outreach events.

Suggests that exclusively relying on the city to conduct outreach may result in limited turnout in the neighborhood of interest.

Relevant to framing the importance of a flood-risk project to community members, but important to also explain clearly on what basis key decisions will be made.

While the goals in designing city parks are not as pre-determined as those of projects advanced by federal agencies, it may be worth referring to this project when discussing outreach goals with the municipality.

Especially if the project spans multiple municipalities, ANJEC can help send notice of meetings or comment periods.

The public-facing tools, such as the MyNewark app, can be used by the agency to get a first look at other events where there may be opportunities to "piggyback" outreach activities, and inform the scheduling of standalone events.

In order to use these to publicize events, the agency would need to coordinate with the municipality/relevant electeds in order to advertise public input opportunities.

Depending on the project geography, could partner with a local community-based organization to host the meeting, contractors hired by the city often rely on local groups to inform their outreach.

Using the Community Involvement Snapshots – for a Flood Risk Management Project (cont'd)

Notes from Newark DIG - September 25th, 2017

Schools with environmental clubs

- East Side environmental club
- Science High
- Phillips Academy - has a green- roof
- University High School

If the agency has staff with the capacity to conduct outreach outside of any particular project, this staff person could connect with these high schools about their science curricula, state standards, and general focus of environmental clubs. This would enable the creation of teacher/student-oriented fact sheets, that explain how the project connects to curriculum topics and/or state standards, that could be used to encourage teachers to send their students to public scoping meetings.

Regular events and means of distributing information

- Flyers at schools, parent teacher days
- Summer sustainability series

Can offer to table at events put on by the Sustainability Office.

Best ways to report back after a meeting

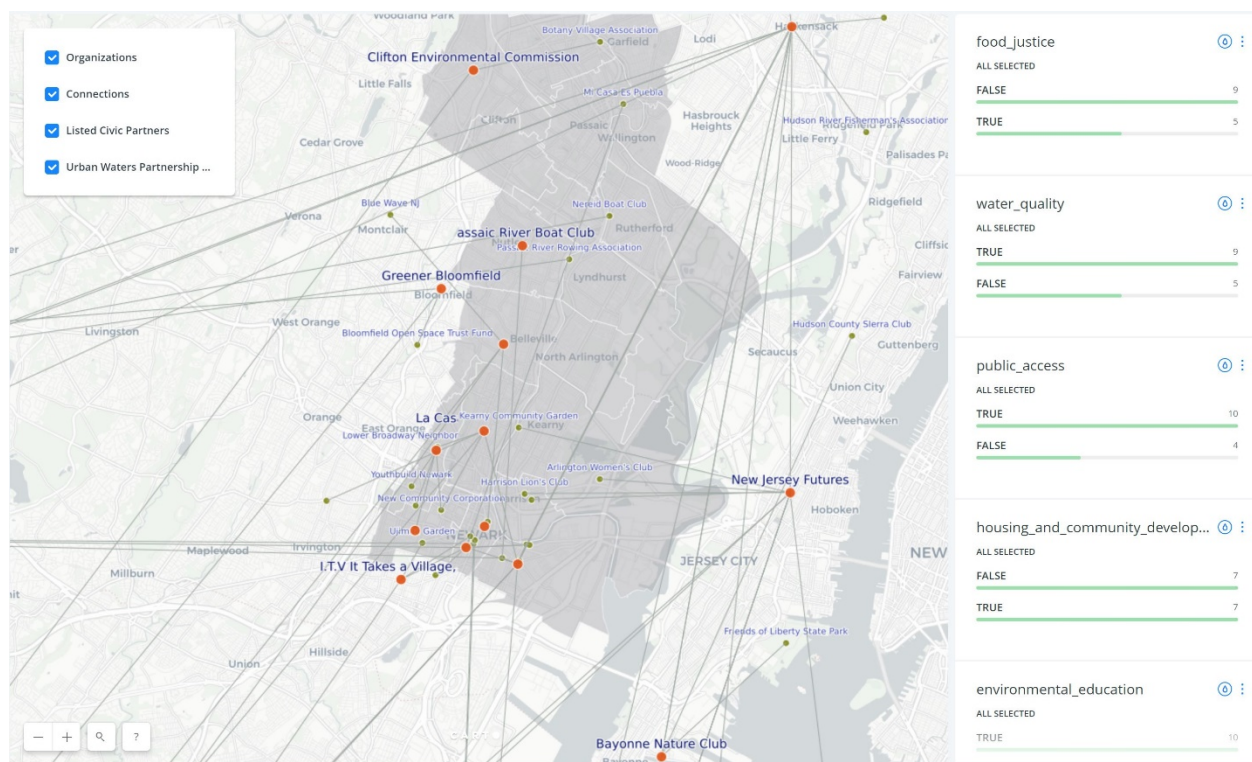
- "3 times, 3 ways" calling, email, and a follow-up paper survey
- Postcard with survey after the meeting

At each milestone, can include information summarizing the discussion at the meeting, with information about how to submit public comments, on the postcard.

5. Other outreach tools from the Urban Waters Federal Partnership

5.1 Stewardship Map

The Lower Passaic River Stewardship Map helps community and stewardship organizations connect with new organizational partners, reach new memberships, and collaborate on issues related to the Partnership’s mission. The survey used to create the map asked organizational representatives about their missions, how they reach their membership, as well as the generally where they have ongoing projects. For government agencies, the map can be used to identify community “hub” organizations active within a specific geography. These “hub” organizations who provided data can act as portals to reaching other local stakeholders, as well as their memberships.



Large **orange points** represent the office locations of organizations who provided data for the map. These points also reveal information about an organization’s mission, communication tools, and partners. The **filter** on the right can sort these groups by their area of focus.

Smaller **green points** connected by **lines** represent collaborators and partners named by the organizations who provided data. To get connected to one of these listed partners, use the contact

information for one of their networked partners, and mention the Lower Passaic River Stewardship Map.

The **polygons** reveal a list of groups that have active projects in that area. The polygons themselves represent ZIP codes in riverfront municipalities that fall within the Lower Passaic River Watershed, and together make up the Urban Waters Federal Partnership core area.

5.2 Grants and news bulletin

The Urban Waters Federal Partnership maintains a monthly news and grants bulletin distributed to over 150 local stakeholders, including representatives from over 40 unique NGOs. Agency representatives are encouraged to use the news bulletin to share information with the public, including project updates, notices of public participation opportunities, and funding announcements.

5.3 Workshop materials

The slide deck assembled for the Passaic River Workshops consisted of two sections: environmental issues and related agency projects, and public participation in federal projects through the NEPA process, focusing on the Corps of Engineers' feasibility study process. The environmental topics covered include the geography of the river (rural Upper Passaic versus industrial Lower Passaic), public access and parks, sediment contamination and cleanups, water quality and stormwater management, floatable waste management, flooding and climate resiliency, and navigation and dredging. The public participation slides introduced the role of the National Environmental Protection Act, and went into detail about how public participation is structured for USACE civil works projects. Specifically, the content about the USACE feasibility process outlines the type of public participation sought at each internal decision milestone, as well as highlights the key agency decision-makers reviewing the input. The majority of presentations given did not include the extra content focusing on USACE, and ended with a review of the general NEPA process.

5.4 Datasheets and references

All of the data and figures presented in the workshops are organized into a reference sheet with appropriate up-to-date agency contacts. This is available on the Urban Waters Federal Partnership website.

6. Appendix

Appendix 1. EPA Community Involvement Tools from 2017 Superfund Community Involvement Plan

Tool	Method
Coordination with Local Government and Other Agencies	Coordinate with local government and other state and federal agencies to keep them informed about project activities and will schedule briefing meetings as needed to discuss the progress of cleanup.
Community Advisory Group	Provide information to the CAG.
Community Events	Attend community events such as fairs, festivals, boating regattas and races, and cultural festivities to distribute information and answer questions.
Community Involvement Coordinator	Return calls or respond to email in a timely manner.
Email	Continue to maintain an email group list to quickly provide the public with timely information on project developments and news.
Fact Sheets	Produce fact sheets throughout the life of the project to keep the public informed and educated on it and the decision-making process. Dissemination to the public through direct mailings, Web postings and at public forums will continue
Fish and Crab Consumption Advisories	Work with NJDEP to educate communities about the potential dangers of eating contaminated fish and crab.
Health and Safety Information	Share information pertaining to health and safety with the community during scheduled public meetings and in informational materials created for the site. Anticipated topics of interest include, but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trucking and transportation routes • Work hours • Worker protection • Community safeguards • Environmental monitoring • Emergency response • River use restrictions
Health and Safety Information	Update information repositories with copies (either electronic or paper) of major site documents, fact sheets, and other relevant items as they become available.
Maps and Visual Aids	Include maps, photographs, and other visual aids in documents and fact sheets, at public sessions, and on the website.
Media Notification/ Media Events	Provide presentations on site-related topics such as the design and cleanup process and monitoring and sampling techniques.

Presentations	Provide presentations on site-related topics such as the design and cleanup process and monitoring and sampling techniques.
Press Releases	Disseminate press releases to local area media.
Project Website www.ourpassaic.gov	Post relevant project documents to the website, including new fact sheets, final technical documents, meeting announcements, etc.
Public Comment Period	Solicit public comment at key milestones and as required by law.
Public Input	Public Input Accept informal public input throughout the cleanup process.
Public Meetings	EPA will announce public meetings via a variety of methods such as: newspapers, the project website, town websites and the email list.
Public Notices	Announce public comment periods and public meetings via formal public notices in local publications and via the project website.
School/Education Outreach	Provide project information to local schools and academic institutions and will work with existing educational programs to “piggyback” project information and identify additional opportunities for environmental education.
Social Media	Post public announcements, meeting reminders and other relevant information to the EPA’s social media accounts such as Twitter and Facebook.
Technical Assistance Services	Respond to community requests for technical assistance to understand the cleanup.

Community Snapshot

Bloomfield Environmental Commission - Notes from Lower Passaic River Urban Waters Federal Partnership Presentation on February 21st

Environmental/Passaic River issues in Bloomfield

- Watsessing - the second river regularly floods
- Nutley's Hazmat Coordinator helps investigate local algal blooms, is very responsive

Community Organizations Active on Environmental Issues

- Greener Bloomfield has multiple active committees, holds a community cleanup on Earth Day
- Middle and high schools have environmental clubs
- Boy Scouts and Key Club
- Friends of Watsessing Park - has a facebook group where people post their observations about the river
- Bloomfield Environmental Commission is fairly new - only a year old

Local Communications Tools

- Bloomfield Buzz - electronic monthly newsletter, hard copy twice a year.
Around 19,500 households
- Bloomfield Pulse - good for town-wide events. It is a privately-run Facebook with a reach of 9,000 and was recognized by the city.

Venues for public meetings

- Municipal meeting - mayor's office Committee room.
- Civic Center - Greener Bloomfield

Garfield Rotary Club - Notes from Meeting 12/13

About Passaic River issues in Garfield

- Dundee Dam - had been in conversations about a fish ladder, was not installed
- City Hall - had a public meeting around green acres sites and public access expansion
- City received DEP funds to expand their riverfront park

Local communication tools

- Bergen Record newspaper
- Website - regularly updates
- Social media

Key civic organizations

- High school has regular river cleanups
- Boys and Girls Club
- PVSC does a cleanup in Elmwood park
- Garfield Women's Club
- Garfield YMCA
- Rotary Club
- Recreation department and health department have active volunteers

Community Snapshot

Friends of Newark Riverfront Park - Notes from Meeting November 30th

Venues

- Riverfront fieldhouse

Engaged local groups

- Girls Live Love and Laugh
- Grassroots Community Foundation

Regular local events

- Newark Riverfront Revival events each summer
- NJPAC - free outdoor programs
- Sounds of the City
- Jazz Community Festival
- Dodge Poetry Festival
- Open Doors - citywide art festival

Community Snapshot

UVSO - Notes from Meeting November 1st, 2017

Major challenges:

With Activities on the Passaic River

- Bad smells at the riverfront, not interested in it
- Would like boat tours to be more publicized - more people would know about the river

With outreach in general

- No follow up after the meeting
- Frustrating to have to explain concern from the beginning. Community has an accountability document - tracks calling from 311,
- Residents won't come out to a meeting unless they feel there is some sort of threat
- Good to go through community organizations, but be clear they don't represent everyone

Venus and groups:

- Boyland Recreational center
- Newark Urban League
- School parent meetings
- Block association - heart of Vailsburg Block Association

Local communication tools:

- Local talk newspaper
- Positive community magazine
- Nextdoor App
- Eventbrite
- WVG0, Channel 78
- Outreach at the Bodegas

Events:

- Back to school at Vailsburg park
- Newark public schools - parents conference
- Westside park events

Essex County Environmental Commission - Notes from Meeting 11/6/2017

Major Challenges

- Eastern and Western parts of the county have different environmental issues
- Hard to get good attendance at meetings related to river issues
- There was historically a lot of participation around the Ringwood Superfund Site -- but hard to draw people out when issues are not perceived as a calamity

Venues

- Millburn library

Regular local events

- Annual Cancer Walk
- Lincoln Park - events put on by the city CEDC
- Cherry Blossom festival at Branch Brook Park
- Nutley - farmers markets june-november, Colombus Day events

Local partners

- Master gardeners meetings
- Bloomfield - Green Team and environmental commission
- Belleville - "It's a party" in September
- Nereid Boat House
- Brookdale Park Conservancy, newsletter
- Anderson Park Group
- Wattussing Bloomfield
- William Paterson environmental school
- ANJEC

Community Snapshot

Newark Environmental Commission - Post-meeting survey

Filled out by Commissioners Wynnie-Fred Hinds and Christopher Watson

Major challenges:

With river programming in general

- Not enough means of involving communities with the advocacy associated with cleanup
- Help community programs take advantage of the park space, and champion the river at those events
- Lots of environmental and quality of life work done in Newark - should tie the river into that as a means of bringing in more voices to river work

With community participation

- There are lots of opportunities for civic engagement always in Newark - hard to get to all of them
- People hosting events should be aware of other relevant events happening when picking a date
- Importance to have community involved as partners in the project, especially because they (we) are the end-users

Venues and groups:

- Venues: depends a lot on the target audience - local churches and City Hall are common, but don't draw everyone
- Groups: leverage the networks of United Vailsburg Service Organization, the Newark Environmental Commission, Ironbound Community Corporation, and Newark's Sustainability Office
- Can pass out information through Newark Public Schools

Key local communication tools:

- Donna Kirkland sends out a great amount of information to the community.
- Generally television, social media, newspapers, etc.

Community Snapshot

Newark Environmental Commission - Post-meeting survey
Filled out by Commissioners Wynnne-Fred Hinds and Christopher Watson

Examples of successful community outreach:

"When I was with the Newark Water Group, we got a lot of participation from the public because it was such an important topic for people. We went out and educated the community and stakeholders about the issues and spoke out at practically every community event or meeting we could. We always made sure to bring educational materials with us and put the information in a language people could relate to."

Community Snapshot

Passaic River Superfund Community Advisory Group - Notes from pilot activity 11/10/2016

Public Meeting Locations

- Library science center
- Libraries
- Cultural clubs
- Harrison elk lounge
- East side high
- Sport club Portuguese
- Newark City hall
- NJIT Rutgers + Essex
- Dodge Foundation at Morristown
- Clifton Senior Center

Existing meetings

- Newark Environmental Commission
- Essex County Environmental Commission
- Hudson Country EC
- Newark D.I.G monthly meeting
- Passaic River CAG
- Paterson SMART
- Supplemental CSO committee for PVSC
- Friends of Riverfront Park + SPARK
- United Parks as One
- Ironbound Superneighborhood council
- City Councils and green team
- UVSO general membership meeting
- UVSO Coalition of Vailsberg block associations

Community Snapshot

Passaic River Superfund Community Advisory Group - Notes from pilot activity 11/10/2016

Local Newspapers

- Luso Americano
- El Nuevo Coqui

Online media

- Newark Environmental Commission website
- Nextdoor app
- MyNewark app
- Donna Kirikland's listerv

Community events

- Open house at schools
- Newark Walks to the Water
- Newark Riverfront Revival events
- Passaic Regatta
- Music and Art in the Park
- Great Falls National Park events

Other

- Text blast
- Info repositories in library