

EPA's Community Engagement Flagship Benefits and Lessons Learned (FY2011 – 4th Quarter)



THEME: Expanding the Environmental Conversation with Communities

Flagship: Urban Waters (Completed)

Benefits and Lessons Learned:

- OneEPA: Bringing together the complementary statutes, authorities, and resources of the entire agency allow us to better execute our mission. We can do this by leveraging existing programs and measures.
- Work with other Federal Agencies: Engage and leverage ideas from other programs and Federal stakeholders early in the strategic planning process. For UW, early engagement with Federal Partners and existing EPA community grant programs that share a similar goal for environmental justice was extremely beneficial in documenting requirements for the 2011 UW Showcase in My Communities.
- Expand the conversation: Reach out to include historically underrepresented local stakeholders or stakeholders that may not have a history of working with EPA given capacity or other challenges.
- Strategically link local and national stakeholders: Making sure partnership agreements are made with local organizations as well as national organizations is important. The local organizations need to hear directly from EPA. This collaboration should start early for local organizations to provide their perspective in shaping collaborative efforts.

How will you continue to engage stakeholders?

- Expand our Web 2.0 presence as a means to engage and expand the UW conversation with the public and key stakeholder communities of interest.
- Amplify our non-digital public engagement efforts: Bring attention to the issues of urban waters through themed activities or events. Examples: Listening sessions, speeches, volunteer events.
- Develop and pilot a micro-site on Urban Waters to make information more engaging and accessible for specific audiences, and to encourage interaction and involvement of stakeholders.

What steps would you recommend to sustain this effort and build in improvements?

- Continue to strengthen Federal Partnerships and ensure a mechanism for long-term program coordination.
- Engage local or community government stakeholders early and often when planning outreach events in their respective jurisdictions. Make certain that they are engaged in the planning process from start to finish and ensure positive outcomes that help advance their local environmental programs and not just advance Federal initiatives.
- Leverage and highlight existing programs that similarly address urban waters and environmental justice concerns.

What other measures would be useful or would you recommend for a similar effort?

- Documenting your stakeholder needs and communication strategies is an extremely beneficial strategic planning tool when considering using Web 2.0 tools and technologies. Think through stakeholders and their relationships with program objectives prior to selecting technology platforms.

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Flagship: Improve Communication of Sampling and Testing Results (Ongoing)

Benefits and Lessons Learned:

- To date, data color coding was used successfully to explain lead sampling results to EPA HQ employees, during LibertyRadEx, and most recently to explain air, water and sediment data on the Agency's BP spill website. Additionally, Region 1 implemented color coding at a removal site where individual color charts were created for every affected residence to explain soil contamination levels and resulting actions. We have received positive feedback from NGOs involved in the BP spill and homeowners in Region 1 regarding the understandability of the data.

How will you continue to engage stakeholders?

- We are asking each region to nominate several remedial and removal sites where we can apply the color coding system to explain EPA's sampling data and results. Based on implementation and evaluation of these regional pilot sites, color coding systems will be considered for Agency-wide use, as appropriate. Lessons learned will be used to create a guidance document or case study handbook to institutionalize the use of color coding for communicating data and to help others easily implement this system at their own sites, as appropriate.

Flagship: Improve Delivery of Information to Communities (Ongoing)

How will you continue to engage stakeholders?

- We have developed a survey to solicit feedback from Agency community outreach experts and other internal stakeholders.
- We are holding a session during the Brownfields Conference in April to get input from both internal and external stakeholders.

Flagship: Faces of the Grassroots Video Contest (Completed)

Benefits and Lessons Learned:

- Environmental justice is often explained as a 'you know it when you see it' issue. The resulting videos from this contest allow EPA and external stakeholders to help increase awareness and education about environmental justice through visual media.
- In order to meet the important 508 compliance requirements, videos submitted to the contest need to be subtitled before posting them directly on the EPA website. Videos are currently hosted on YouTube and include an exit disclaimer. The resource needs associated with ensuring closed captioning of videos should be considered when developing video contest concepts and workplans.
- We moved the link to the video contest page to the right hand sidebar (versus featuring it as in a highlights banner), since it is no longer a new event. After this move, we saw a drop in hits to the Web page that links to the YouTube hosted videos.

How will you continue to engage stakeholders?

- We are working to launch a 'featured video' section on the Office of Environmental Justice Web page that will highlight videos submitted to the video contest (contingent on subtitling).

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What steps would you recommend to sustain this effort and build in improvements?

- This effort could be conducted annually with adequate FTE and funding. The effort could be improved by working to formalize a partnership with YouTube. That partnership would include YouTube subtitling software, additional video contest promotion, and allow users to vote for their favorite videos (which would likely increase the virality of contest videos).

What other measures would be useful or would you recommend for a similar effort?

- Ideally, we would like to develop outcome measures for this effort. It would likely require sampling those who have accessed the videos online or been shown the videos at trainings or events and a random sample of those who have not seen the videos to survey for knowledge of environmental justice. At this point, developing outcome measures is likely cost prohibitive and would potentially be subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act requirements.

THEME: Expanding Public Awareness & Involvement in Developing Rules and Regulations

Flagship: Healthy Waters (Ongoing)

Benefits and Lessons Learned:

- Ongoing flagship; to be captured.

Flagship: Chesapeake TMDL Webinar Series (Completed)

Benefits and Lessons Learned:

- The project has clearly met the goals of transparency, participation and collaboration by opening up the doors to this major initiative to an unlimited online audience. When these webinars were conducted as part of live public meetings in 2009, one New York environmental group wrote, "The webinar was excellent. What a great way to save time, money, mileage and the environment." After another webinar, a participant e-mailed, "this venue is a perfect vehicle for disseminating information so that many can participate and hear firsthand from the experts." Following a webinar broadcast of a 2010 public meeting, the managing editor of the Moorefield Examiner in West Virginia, wrote: "...instead of navigating twisty, mountainous West Virginia roads in the dark and rain, I could 'attend' the meeting from the comfort of my living room. I could see the PowerPoint presentation and hear the contributors as if I was in the same room. Thanks for a great experience..."

Flagship: NPDES Pre-proposal Involvement (Completed)

Benefits and Lessons Learned:

- The NPDES Electronic Rule website allows stakeholder engagement early in the rule development process.
- It is valuable for stakeholders to obtain information on the rule development process this includes; what EPA plans are for this rule, obtain access to rule support documentation and schedules and register for important meeting events.
- By using a discussion forum for stakeholders to comment on the merits of the rule in advance of the formal rule process; EPA is better positioned to inform its senior management on critical areas of stakeholder disagreement and areas where EPA is able to build consensus amongst stakeholders.

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- Stakeholders perceive that the use of the term “regulation” implies that EPA is initiating another compliance initiative as such this has negatively affected stakeholder’s willingness to engage EPA on the development of the NPDES Electronic Reporting Rule via the regulations.gov website.
- Stakeholders are apprehensive in using the discussion forum to provide informal comments despite EPA’s best efforts to articulate that the discussion forum comments are intended for informal use.
- The NPDES Electronic Rule website has garnered significant web hits since its deployment in July 2010 but this has yielded very little substantive comment.

Flagship: Rulemaking Gateway (Completed)

Benefits and Lessons Learned:

- One benefit of the Rulemaking Gateway website is earlier information about rulemakings. Numerous stakeholders have requested information on rulemakings well before EPA publishes a proposed rule for public comment. As soon as EPA begins working on a rule, the Gateway offers an overview of the rulemaking and EPA's progress. This can be months, or sometimes years, before the proposed rule is published.
- The Gateway meets stakeholder requests for more regular updates. We update information about rulemakings on a monthly basis, and more time-sensitive information is updated daily. Prior to the Gateway, EPA published updates every six months in the *Regulatory Agenda*.
- The Gateway allows the public to find in one place all the rules related to certain areas of interest. For example, the Gateway's filters help users focus on rules likely to affect children’s health, environmental justice, state and tribal governments, and small businesses.
- Each rule has a "profile page" on the Gateway, which provides an abstract, tracking numbers, and a brief timeline of major milestones. This standardized profile serves as a useful first look at a rulemaking; equally important are the direct links to more detailed information on Regulations.gov and EPA web pages.
- As with most IT projects, when launching and maintaining the Gateway, we've spent more time on making sure we have quality data than we have on actually developing the technology. It's important to:
 - Establish policies and procedures for staff who will contribute information to the website and for those who will review the information.
 - Create user guides to help staff know how to enter their information.

THEME: EPA Mobile Apps to Empower Citizen’s Environmental Decisions (Ongoing)

Benefits and Lessons Learned:

- Apps for the Environment Challenge: Benefits and lessons learned being captured.
- Other Mobile Apps Flagship activities: Evolving and ongoing with benefits and lessons learned to be captured.