

How to Sponsor an Urban Waters Ambassador Project in Your Community

Urban Waters Federal Partnership and Ambassador Project Background

In 2011, the Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) was launched to reimagine how federal agencies engage with local entities in the reclamation and restoration of urban watersheds. The focus of this effort is on reconnecting urban communities, particularly those that are overburdened or economically distressed, with their waterways to become stewards for clean urban waters. Between 2011 and 2014, the UWFP designated 19 locations representing diverse geographies across the country. Each location is working to revitalize urban waterways and their surrounding communities, transforming overlooked watersheds into community assets. The UWFP is supported by 15 federal agencies and 28 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

An Ambassador project refers to coordinated efforts led by one or several organizations to streamline the work of federal agencies in partnership with local governments, community leaders and businesses. The Ambassador project coordinates and navigates resources and facilitates and leads stakeholders to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. ***Through these roles, the project creates a bridge between the community and federal partners to prioritize on-the-ground projects to improve water quality, restore outdoor spaces and foster community stewardship in urban watersheds.***

Supporting and implementing an Ambassador Project can lead to better coordination among all stakeholders and accelerate ongoing watershed improvement and project completion.

Benefits of Sponsoring an Urban Waters Ambassador Project

For the first UWFP locations, federal resources were used as seed money to start the Ambassador Project. For years, Ambassadors have established and maintained relationships with local stakeholders and built capacity among partners to restore their watersheds. For certain locations, Ambassadors have term limits for their position. To ensure continuity of the local partnership, *a range of stakeholders are being called upon to sponsor an Ambassador project.*

An Ambassador Project sponsor can be any entity, organization or agency interested in making a difference in urban watershed communities. We define urban watershed very broadly by including all waters that impact an urban location, both upstream and downstream of an Urban Waters location. Sponsors benefit from a variety of gains through investing in an Ambassador Project. As an example, sponsors benefit from an enhanced ability to:

- **Track outcomes and success through data and performance metrics** – The UWFP tracks quantitative and qualitative measures to assess environmental restoration, economic advances, and engagement of organizations. Through these metrics, sponsors benefit from an improved ability to evaluate and monitor their own progress, and success. This information can help sponsors leverage support from decision-makers and other funding sources.
- **Improve social capital, relationship building and trust**—The UWFP supports streamlined communication with federal, state and local partners across the country, promoting exchanges of ideas, best practices and resources. This enables sponsors to gain networking access to Urban Waters Partnership locations and grant recipients.

- **Leverage, or align, public investment**—The UWFP supports opportunities to exchange ideas and engage with decision-makers at 15 federal agencies. Through these channels, sponsors also gain access to technical assistance and resources from federal agencies.
- **Weave networks of practitioners to facilitate peer learning and cross-pollination of initiatives**—The UWFP provides access and visibility to over 28 national NGOs, including private sector organizations and foundations. Active UWFP forums include The Urban Waters Learning Network, newsletters and conference calls. Through facilitating learning and connecting practitioners, these forums allow sponsors to take their own projects to the next level.
- **Align workplan priorities with a community’s plan or vision**—The Ambassador and the sponsor organization work together to create a workplan to maximize collective impact and achieve a win-win for all partners. By aligning workplan priorities, sponsors are better positioned to achieve their own goals, and gain credibility, neutrality and objectivity.

Sponsorship Recommendations

Localities (e.g., cities and/or counties) and sponsor organizations interested in sponsoring an Urban Waters Ambassador project should consider funding a three-year Ambassador project. Three years will ensure that critical benchmarks towards Urban Waters Partnership success are achieved. Below are examples of essential functions the Ambassador project aims to complete in a three-year period:

- **YEAR 1**—Builds and navigates network and enhances access to UWFP resources
- **YEAR 2**—Updates and implements workplan
- **YEAR 3**—Finds partners to sustain projects and goals, identifies future priorities and builds a sustainable leadership model

To facilitate a shift in sponsorship, collaboration between the current Ambassador and the interested sponsor should occur through a series of planning meetings to ensure continuity of projects and achievement of partnership goals.

Approaches to Sponsor an Ambassador Project

The Ambassador Project has brought invaluable leadership to UWFP locations. If you are interested in becoming an Ambassador Project sponsor, the image below depicts shifting mechanisms of sponsorship.



How Do Ambassadors Have an Impact? Quotes from the Field

“You can think of our position as kind of a catalyst to get work going that community leaders, organizations, the state has started, but they keep running into barriers, and they just need that extra push. We are here to connect them to those resources; to catalyze the process; and to get that work going on the ground.” – [Natalie Johnson, Former Ambassador for the Northwest Indiana Area Partnership](#)

“[An element] of the partnership's secret sauce is its own dedicated infrastructure for managing [its] efforts ... The Urban Waters Federal Partnership's solution is something called "ambassadors," who are typically local employees of a nongovernmental organization or nearby federal agency assigned to work on a project at one of the 19 partnership locations for one to two years at anywhere from one-third to full-time.” – [Steve Kelman, Harvard University](#)

“[An Ambassador’s] work includes partnerships with local, state and federal agencies, businesses, nonprofits, and philanthropies to clean up pollution; spur redevelopment of abandoned properties; promote new businesses; and provide parks and access for boating, swimming, fishing, and community gatherings.” – [Service to America Medal finalist nomination](#)

“For us, the benefit in bringing an Ambassador on was capacity. All of our friends or partners had full time jobs already, so having somebody who was dedicated to convening and advancing the partnership was really important to making progress.” – [Michael Galvin, Ambassador for the Patapsco Watershed/Baltimore Partnership](#)

“Without an Ambassador in a coordinating role, it would be very difficult to have continued momentum.” – [Michael Leff, Former Ambassador for the Delaware River Partnership](#)

“I, Eric Garcetti, as Mayor of the City of Los Angeles, do hereby commend and offer appreciation to Pauline Louie and the Urban Waters Federal Partnership for the exceptional service to the City of Los Angeles in bringing new life to our Los Angeles River.” – [Eric Garcetti, mayor of the City of Los Angeles](#)



Other Resources about the UWFP and Ambassador Project

- The Urban Waters Ambassador: Guide to Sustaining the Position
- Urban Waters PowerPoint slide template
- Ambassador Position Description Template
- [Service to America Medal nomination](#)

For additional information, visit <https://www.urbanwaters.gov> and/or contact urbanwaters@epa.gov.

