

## **Urban Waters Partner and Stakeholder Workshop (April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017) – Overview**

### Background of the Problem

The local Urban Waters Federal Partnership in San Antonio regularly hosts public meetings, with the support of Region 6 EPA, hoping to diversifying stakeholders, which are largely federal and or city agencies. This workshop was focused on environmental education, allowing us to reach out to a new community of advocates that could benefit and support our ongoing efforts to improve and protect the quality of water in San Antonio. We also intentionally spent time within underserved neighborhoods in San Antonio, visiting local school, community centers, libraries, and neighborhood association meetings, sharing information about the workshop and how improving environmental factors in their communities can help alleviate problems they face on a day to day basis (flooding, finances, health). We crafted a plain language message that gave residents the option to attain information in order to take small collective steps within their communities to face these issues confidently.

Several agencies active in the partnership have also expressed interest in finding new and innovative ways to reach an audience that may not normally understand the importance of becoming an environmental steward.

The local Urban Waters Federal Partnership then decided to invite local agencies, organizations and educators involved in environmental education to encourage attendees to become environmental stewards and provide them with different ways to become involved in the eco-restoration process. Current Urban Waters project leads gave overviews on projects at their respective agencies that are supported by the partnership as well as educational and stewardship opportunities available within their agencies. The gathering was also intended to serve as a networking opportunity for all those in attendance and provide an opportunity for everyone to develop partnerships focused on improving water quality and connecting local communities to their urban waterways.

### Methods

#### *Recruitment and Outreach*

As previously mentioned, we intentionally spent time within underserved neighborhoods in San Antonio, specifically neighborhoods that San Antonio Metropolitan Health Department has developed relationships with. Event flyers were dispersed during neighborhood events, school, and libraries, and time was also spent speaking with individual residents at each specific location.

Suggestions of interested educators were provided by partners already affiliated with the partnership. The group also spoke with many of these educators personally, visiting them at their home campuses or speaking with them over the phone. This also included sending follow-up e-mails to educators, partners and stakeholders, encouraging them to invite their colleagues. We also provided educators with the opportunity to bring educational materials and models with them to share at display at the workshop.

## *Agenda*

Introduction to Urban Waters Federal Partnership: Region 6 EPA manager Adele Cardenas gave a short introduction to the role she plays federally, as well as a short introduction to the Urban Waters Federal Partnership

Environmental Stewardship and Education: Urban Waters Ambassador and Vicente Escobedo, part of San Antonio Metropolitan Health District, gave a holistic view to the eco-restoration process. As some residents in underserved communities focus on juggling multiple jobs, feeding their families, and struggling to meet ends meet, eco-restoration may be the last thing on your minds. But if the concept of eco-restoration and preservation is connected to matters that influence their already challenged lives, they may be more willing to consider environmental stewardship.

Local Urban Waters Projects: Education and outreach specialists from agencies and organizations supported by the partnership gave an overview of the volunteer and educational opportunities available with the agencies they represent

Network and Resource Sharing: Opportunities for attendees to engage amongst each other

## *Presentations*

In order to keep most of the time available and open for networking purposes, we asked all presents to keep their presentations anywhere between 5-7minutes ahead of time. All scheduled presentations were intended to interest residents, students, and educators who may be interested in becoming a part of the eco-restoration process

## Results

Despite widespread outreach in different schools, neighborhoods, and community centers, no residents *not affiliated* with any particular organization were in attendance.

Many of the educators that were invited to the workshop were able to attend. The workshop did accomplish one of its intended goals: to bring educators and activists together in order to build new or expand existing collaborations and more efficiently accomplish common objectives among the group

Although the information presented by project leads was insightful, it far exceeded the 5-7 minute time frame that was proposed, minimizing time for networking

## Recommendations for Improvement

Community outreach will always be a difficult process. It is always best to slowly develop relationships with community members and groups, introducing our wellness message throughout this relationship building process. As the Urban Waters Ambassador, I plan to return to this smaller scale outreach model, connecting with Community Health Workers at San Antonio Metropolitan Health District and supporting work within their communities with resources available through the local Urban Waters Partnership.

Future workshops will also have a facilitator, responsible for managing time and keeping the proper flow of the event.

The coalition building aspect of the event was more successful, and a new field in the environmental restoration field was introduced into the partnership that was not previously engaged. All fields' (education, health, urban planning) are connected and we must learn to work together to best maximize our resources.