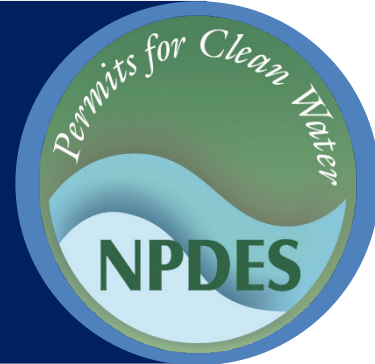




Stormwater Best Management Practice

Creating Inclusive Outreach Programs



Minimum Measure: Public Education and Outreach on Stormwater Impacts
Subcategory: Promoting the Stormwater Message

Description

It is important for a municipality to ensure its public education and outreach strategies are accessible and meaningful for all community members, regardless of race, culture, national origin, English language proficiency, dis/abilities, socioeconomic status, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, faith or any other identity. A municipality should aim to create an environment in which all community members and partners feel welcomed, listened to and able to participate.

Creating such an environment can increase community understanding and support for stormwater programs—encouraging more residents to engage with messaging, adopt stormwater-friendly habits and provide constructive feedback.

Considerations

Understand Your Audiences

The municipality may want to understand the composition of its community across all identities and circumstances. Online resources—such as census data; [EJScreen](#); and lists of civic, neighborhood, affinity, faith and interest groups—can offer useful information on the full diversity of the community.

Next, the municipality can work to understand the needs, concerns and perspectives of people with different identities and circumstances. Approaches include viewing community group websites and social media, conducting surveys, hosting listening sessions, tabling at community events, and attending community group meetings (with permission) to get to know each other. The purpose of these efforts is to learn about each group:

- Needs, concerns and perspectives as residents.
- Actual and desired ways of receiving municipal information.



Municipalities can offer captions or sign language or other language interpreters at public meetings to ensure their message reaches all attendees.

- Barriers to accessing information or communications.
- Knowledge about stormwater topics.
- Motivators for engagement.

For example, different people might be motivated to support projects that will improve public health and safety, save the municipality (or themselves) money, improve access to community information and resources, or beautify public areas or provide recreational spaces. Knowing this can help the municipality decide whether and how to tailor its messaging for different community groups.

Understanding how different community groups receive (or want to receive) local news and information is also important. For example, do they prefer to listen to a local radio station, read the newspaper, browse social media, visit the library or local gathering places, or attend certain community events? Municipalities can use this information to optimize how they disseminate their media and outreach products. The Community Tool Box is a helpful resource, with tips on [assessing local needs and resources](#).

Determine Goals and Objectives

A municipality's goals will depend on planned or current stormwater projects or key stormwater threats in the community. The municipality can identify the message it wants to convey and aim to maximize the impact of that message. This includes ensuring that its outreach strategy extends to disproportionately impacted groups or individuals who:

- Live near or work in areas of concern (e.g., neighborhoods with flooding).
- Work in industries with common potential pollutants (e.g., mechanics at local auto shops).
- Frequent public spaces with stormwater programming (e.g., pet owners on walking trails, families visiting stormwater parks, people who are unhoused).

Create a Public Outreach Plan

A municipality can summarize its goals, objectives, community profile and outreach strategies into a public outreach plan that it can publish on its website and distribute in public locations. For the public, this plan can improve transparency; for the municipality itself, it can serve as a roadmap for an outreach strategy. A municipality can create a general outreach plan for its whole stormwater program or project-specific plans that explain how the municipality will educate, inform and involve the public. (Note that the municipality should give the public an opportunity to review and provide feedback on a public outreach plan before releasing a final version.)

Visit EPA's [public participation guide](#) for more information. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources also has a helpful resource, [Creating a Public Outreach Plan](#).

The City of Escondido, California, published a [Draft Community Outreach and Engagement Plan](#) for its 2022 General Plan Amendment that clearly communicates project details (e.g., project milestones, community impacts, intended outcomes) and how the municipality aims to engage a diverse group of stakeholders.

Seattle's Shape Our Water campaign published a [Community Vision](#) that describes how Seattle plans to secure water resiliency for all its residents through community-centered water investments.

Use Inclusive Language

Confirm that language in public communications is inclusive to all people. For example, when developing outreach materials on how community members can employ good stormwater management techniques at home, consider using the term "people" to refer to the audience, rather than "homeowners" or "citizens," as not all members of the audience own homes or hold citizenship.

There are a variety of verified, informed resources, such as the [18F Content Guide](#), to use for up-to-date, accepted, inclusive language.

Partner with Community Groups

Partnering with community groups is a good way to engage with diverse audiences. These organizations (e.g., houses of worship, civic organizations) understand their communities' perspectives and motivators and have established trust and communication channels.

Municipalities can collaborate with organization leaders to announce or publish information about upcoming events, coordinate an educational presentation for the group, or seek advice or help. Some municipalities offer compensation to people who contribute their time for tasks such as translation/interpretation, cultural competency reviews and the like. Municipalities can also invite community groups to establish representatives to engage in regular stormwater outreach meetings. In any of these activities, it is important to be respectful in (1) learning and discussing how stormwater pollution prevention affects a given community and (2) demonstrating that you are listening to the community's feedback.

Strategies for Specific Outreach Approaches

Public Meetings and Events

Schedule public meetings and events to maximize attendance for the intended audience. Avoid holidays, school days off and weekly events. If the meeting is in person, ensure the location has essential accessibility features that allow participants to easily access the meeting space and restrooms. The event invitations should identify the accessibility measures being offered and give potential participants a way to identify and request other accommodations they need. If possible,

livestream the event or post the recording online, with a transcription, to reach people who cannot attend in person.

Provide interpretation services at meetings as needed. Ensure that interpreters are familiar with and able to use the local/regional accent of the language they will be interpreting. Also provide interpreters with a list of names, specialized terms or other important words that they will use during the session. For virtual meetings, ensure that auto-generated closed captions are enabled.

The City of San Antonio, Texas, offers ASL and Spanish interpreters upon request at its City Committee meetings. The city posts language services information prominently on its [website](#).

Food can be a great way to welcome and encourage attendance from community members who might otherwise miss a public outreach meeting. However, when providing food, consider the audience's preferences and restrictions. At a minimum, it is good practice to include vegan, heart- and diabetes-friendly, and allergen-free options. Depending on the composition of the community, it might also be important to provide halal, kosher or other options. Some participants might be fasting for religious or other reasons, so municipalities should check the calendar before scheduling a meeting where they will serve food.

Signs, Placards and Print Materials

Keep text brief, direct and clear (using good [plain language practices](#)), and supplement it with graphics to better convey the message. Clearly define important and frequently used terms, like “stormwater” and “runoff” and communicate their importance to the audience. Avoid other, unnecessary scientific jargon, which can confuse or exclude people. If the reading level of the audience (especially children) is unknown, use a lower reading level or pre-test messages with representatives of the community. Consider printing materials in multiple languages. See the [Outreach Products and Program Promotion](#) fact sheet for more information.

Websites and Online Resources (Including Social Media)

Create resources that all community members can use. Publish in multiple languages, reflecting the community's demographics. Ensure that all text is selectable so it can be read by a screen reader. For images, include alt-text and ample color contrast for people with visual impairment. If a municipality is unsure whether the contrast between its text and background is sufficient, it can use a [color contrast checking tool](#) for verification. Use closed captions software for videos or livestreams. Share content across several digital platforms, as generations tend to prefer different social media platforms. Design websites with accessibility features that are easy to locate. For example, the website for the City of Durham, North Carolina, has a [header menu](#) that prominently displays the option to switch to the Spanish website, provides accessibility information, and offers ways to submit feedback to improve accessibility.

Public Comment, Surveys and Soliciting Feedback

Monitor feedback received from public comments, surveys and other feedback channels. If the responding population is not representative of municipality demographics, strategize how to improve feedback solicitation efforts. Employ inclusion methods discussed in previous sections, like partnering with community groups and publishing written material that is accessible and in various languages.

Media

Take advantage of the news media to communicate messages to both targeted and broad audiences. When a campaign begins, contact a range of newspapers, magazines, and television and radio stations in the area to help spread the messages. Provide content in the right format—English, another language, or both.

Considerations by Identity or Circumstance

The table on the following page provides examples of good practices for inclusive outreach across a variety of identities and circumstances.

Circumstance	Considerations
Physical Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ For meetings, use venues with accessibility features (e.g., accessible ramps, doors, bathrooms, level terrain). ■ Provide wide and clear pathways through doorways, halls and aisles. ■ Ensure tables, resources, food, and other materials are at a reachable height (28-34 inches). ■ Ensure bathrooms are close to meeting space. ■ Offer virtual and in-person meetings.
Blindness or Visual Impairment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure text in online resources is selectable so a screen reader will read it. ■ Use an 11-point (or larger) sans serif font with high-contrast background colors. ■ Describe visual elements during presentations. Add captions where possible. ■ Consider signage and other print materials with large type and pictures.
Deafness or Hardness of Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide assistive listening devices. ■ Add captions to online video or audio publications. ■ During meetings, provide captions or sign language interpretation. ■ Ask people to say their name before speaking to help attendees with caption writing.
Socioeconomic Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ For meetings, provide a dial-in option for people with varying internet speeds. ■ Offer hybrid meetings to accommodate availability and reliable transportation. ■ Create outreach products that people can access without internet, such as signs and printed materials.
Education and Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Create materials with the literacy level of the audience in mind. ■ Vary communication styles across learning types (e.g., visual, auditory, reading).
Dietary Restriction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Offer food for people with all types of diets, allergies and sensitivities.
Age (Children)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Install signs and other educational materials at a lower height. ■ Consider activities that require participation and introduce concepts using storytelling.
Age (Older Adults)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Distribute materials at senior centers and hold meetings in senior living facilities (or provide shuttle buses) to reduce burden of transportation. ■ Provide ample seating. ■ Use good accessibility practices (see first three rows in this table).
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use gender-neutral language when addressing audiences. ■ Provide all-gender facilities (e.g., bathrooms) at events.
Language and Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use culturally sensitive translations. ■ Provide language interpreters at in-person events and provide translated written communications whenever possible. ■ Avoid scheduling meetings and events that conflict with religious or secular observances.

Evaluate and Refine the Strategy

Municipalities may find that they need to implement and assess a variety of different inclusive outreach strategies to determine an approach that works for their community and program needs. Municipalities can gauge the effectiveness of their outreach programs by:

- Monitoring participation in engagement activities (e.g., public meetings, volunteer programs) and community feedback.
- Surveying residents about changes in behavior prompted by outreach efforts (see the [Soliciting Public Opinion](#) fact sheet).

- Analyzing environmental conditions (evidence of stormwater pollution, such as trash or motor oil spills) in or downstream from impacted communities.

Additional Resources

- The Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative published an [Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Guide](#) as a resource for city staff.
- The American Psychological Association's [Inclusive Language Guidelines](#) explain and promote the use of culturally sensitive terms and phrases.

Additional Information

Additional information on related practices and the Phase II MS4 program can be found at EPA's National Menu of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Stormwater website

Disclaimer

This fact sheet is intended to be used for informational purposes only. These examples and references are not intended to be comprehensive and do not preclude the use of other technically sound practices. State or local requirements may apply.