

Ramsey-Washington Metro



Citizen Involvement Summary 2009

Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District citizen involvement program development basis was created in 1997 as "The Seven Keys to Sustainable Public Involvement and Education." The hope was to focus on long range community evolution in values and actions that are practiced and promoted by those people who become involved in our District programs. Rather than creating a stepwise process, we created a list of principles to guide program development in an "adaptive management" style rather than a "recruitment and retention" style.

Seven Guiding Program Principles:

1. Introduce our agency, ourselves and our purpose in very clear and concise "sound bites," logos, program descriptions or publications.
2. Create multiple program aspects allowing many different ways for citizens to get involved.
3. Create technical information sharing and education opportunities.
4. Stay relevant: Understand where people are coming from, recognize their achievements and their issues/needs/problems. Start there to synchronize their values and activities with ours.
5. Create opportunities for adults to progress in their skill levels and for youth to build self-confidence in their abilities to help achieve community goals in watershed stewardship in their neighborhoods.
6. Provide opportunities for "learners" to teach others.
7. Ultimately we want each individual to be moved to change institutions that affect their lives and communities, i.e.:
 - a. Schools are in every neighborhood; the teachers, administrators and parents can all contribute policy and program suggestions to their schools.
 - b. Similarly churches are in every neighborhood
 - c. Businesses use BMPs to meet requirements as well as get cost share funds and demonstration sites status.
 - d. City employees are watershed residents; as they gain stormwater management expertise, they can influence their programs, budgets, policies and programs.

Track Progress by Target Audience

Identify target audiences and understand what incentives are most likely valued by that group. Learn about their current state of knowledge and skill, and about their "culture"—how they "operate." Determine the right balance of incentives for each target audience and determine if you have the answers to their questions; take their questions seriously.

Target audiences are also distinctive in their extended networks. Value the fact that your target audiences will lead you to others.

Utilize Adaptive Management and Expertise of Your Staff

The RWMWD citizen advisory process is an open door process. We have a core group of dedicated individuals interested in program and policy development; they are often stormwater professionals themselves, or have an interest in watershed stewardship leadership be they teachers, Master Gardeners, or property owners who have been recognized by the District as exemplary in their watershed-friendly landscaping.

Staff share public involvement responsibilities, therefore more time and attention can be provided to each program element and activity. Different staff are currently engaged in developing or leading the following public involvement programs:

- Art in Public Places
- BMP Cost Share Program
- Construction Site Education

- eNewsletter monthly publication (feature articles are written by various staff)
- K-12 Program
- Landscape Ecology Award Program (LEAP)
- Media Outreach
- Office Site Education and Tours
- Public Hearings, Meetings and Notices
- Public Works Forum
- Rain Garden Education Program
- Ramsey-Washington Public Works Forum
- Watershed Advisory Commission
- Website Interaction

The Watershed Advisory Commission (WAC) is the coordinating or synthesizing mechanism for various Teams. WAC members self-select which team(s) to join, depending on their interests, skills and available time:

1. BMP Cost Share Program Team
2. Building Site Education Team
3. Environmental Forum Team
4. K-12 Team
5. LEAP Team
6. Local Government Unit Education Coordination Team (NEMO, StormwaterU, WAC outreach to their respective cities)
7. Rain Garden Education Team
8. WaterFest Team
9. Cleanups Team
10. Community Outreach Team
11. Environmental Arts Team
12. Managed District Sites Tours Team
13. Managed District Sites Volunteers Team
14. Volunteer Recognition Team

Some Teams are more active than others depending on various factors. Each Team has a lead staff person who coordinates activities and reports on Team efforts at the bi-monthly WAC meeting. Each Team report may get valuable feedback from WAC members: teacher, DNR staff, Master Gardener, Master Naturalist, a business leader, District Board member, various District staff, and some past winners of LEAP awards who enjoy having their properties serve as neighborhood demonstration sites. Such a diverse group provides valuable feedback to each other informally at the WAC meetings. RWMWD involves citizens in so many ways in so many programs, that we get feedback as we go.

Each WAC meeting is either a special event (tours or hands on activity), or a meeting in which staff or guests make an educational presentation and Teams report their projects to get valuable feedback and “cross pollination.” Meetings are planned as more of a celebration of volunteer support rather than as formal policy-making meetings. Each year the WAC spends an evening on a restoration site; planting in muck or prairie; it is always a fun event. WAC members help the District stay highly visible to the public, resulting in a constant flow of new contacts and participation.

District Website and GIS Utilization

Every chance we get staff refer the public to our website. Our eNewsletter subscriber list of nearly 500 helps us stay in touch regularly; conversations ensue via our “contact us” link. We hope to continue website enhancements to increase the ease with which we can communicate with many people. We use GIS to track involved citizen’s localities in order to prepare relevant involvement opportunities.

Watershed Management Plan Citizen Involvement

Lastly, every ten years development and approval of our Watershed Management Plan occurs. It is a lengthy process. Two major formal feedback loops for our latest plan included the Planning Advisory Group and the other was public input from public meetings, the Watershed Advisory Commission and discussions with city representatives.