

WREN OCTOBER 2014 WATER POLICY NEWS FEATURE

LESSONS LEARNED 2014:

Pollution Prevention Projects Turn Doers Into Leaders

By Lynda Ginsparg

Each summer, project leaders old and new come together at WREN's Grantee Orientation/Wrap-Up Meeting to gather new and up-to-the-minute information, share ideas and learn how to do community water education projects from each other.

What did project leaders learn working through their WREN-funded programs over the past year? Plenty, judging from their final reports. In the words of one project leader, "I did not know what to expect when the Borough was awarded a grant through WREN and I did not know until I arrived at the conference that WREN was going to turn me into a leader..." – Courtney Hayden, State College Borough

WREN awarded grants to 12 community partnerships in May 2013 to work with boroughs and townships throughout the state to conduct Watershed Education projects. A great deal of work was accomplished by the 2013-2014 projects, such as installing community rain gardens, creating educational signage along streamside buffers and trails, holding educational workshops for residents on the use and installation of rain barrels, educating municipal officials and residents about the benefits of green infrastructure, conducting a backyard makeover demonstration to encourage streamside planting, organizing a local sustainability festival to educate residents and local officials on ways to reduce polluted runoff, and beginning a Pennsylvania Master Watershed Steward program that is now expanding beyond its original pilot area in the Lehigh Valley. All successfully wrapped up projects this past June.



Volunteers gather for a group photo before getting to work for the Spring Creek Chapter of Trout Unlimited's project, 'Return the Roots' backyard makeover project. Pictured in the back row center, in the white cap, is project leader Judi Sittler.

In several cases, the people heading up these efforts had never led projects of this size before. Two projects were led by municipal staff (Borough of Etna and Borough of Mount Joy) who were new to leading community water education efforts for residents. Several project leaders spearheaded efforts to educate their community about the importance of protecting the community's drinking water supply.

On July 1, 2013 the group of WREN project leaders started the year as ‘doers,’ new project leaders hopeful of making a positive impact in their communities. This past June, in the words of one project leader, they emerged as leaders of successful WREN-funded projects that went a long way toward raising awareness of the importance of taking steps now to prevent water pollution to help protect families and future generations in their townships and boroughs.

We asked our group of 2013-2014 project leaders to share their comments – their ‘Lessons Learned’ – with **Water Policy News** readers to educate and inspire future champions of water resource protection. Our **2014 Lessons Learned** spotlights four areas to highlight the successes and challenges and help frame the ‘nuts and bolts’ of a successful WREN project:

- How to Promote a Project;
- Working with Municipal Officials;
- Dealing with Unexpected Challenges and
- How to Evaluate your WREN Project.

Read on to discover what worked - and what didn’t – and what lessons can be learned from the experiences of our 2013-2014 group of project leaders.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY: PROMOTING YOUR PROJECT

Let’s face it: you could have the greatest idea in the world for your project to help combat polluted runoff. But if no one hears about it, your message will not get very far. WREN projects used many avenues to spread the message depending on the needs of their audiences, from traditional print to online sites and social media. Brochures, signs, articles, websites and videos were all part of the materials and tools developed and distributed by project leaders.

Each project began with a group of community partners that committed to pitch in, including municipal partners (a must-have for a WREN-funded project.) Partners can help spread the word about a project with newsletters and websites, welcome residents to events, offer special expertise and provide in-kind donations of time and services, such as promoting the project in a township newsletter and through its website.

Project leaders learned to apply the training they received during WREN’s *Grantee Orientation/Wrap-Up Meeting* about the importance of communication. Following Eric Eckl’s examples in his popular *Water Words That Work* sessions and with some help from WREN, project leaders worked to create or adapt community materials that were concise, easy to understand, and spoke to the needs of the audience. Eckl stressed the importance of using great photos of smiling people doing the desired environmental behavior to show a positive example. He offered guidance about how to craft environmental messages suitable for everyday citizens, and avoid environmental



One lucky streamside homeowner won a backyard makeover with the help of volunteers from the Spring Creek Chapter of Trout Unlimited. The project, ‘Return the Roots,’ demonstrated the value of healthy streamside plantings, and encouraged property owners to plant native trees and shrubs along the stream bank. Pictured are, l to r: Dave Sittler, son of project leader Judi Sittler, who provided his truck and trailer to pick-up the trees and shrubs for the project; Jay Aubuchon, recruited by the Clearwater Conservancy to help with planting; and John Dawyot, a student at Penn State University who heard about the need for volunteers through a notice to his fraternity.

jargon and tools to use to make sure messages didn't go over the audiences' heads. No wonder his sessions are consistently top rated by project leaders!

WREN encourages project leaders to use a variety of avenues for promotion including municipal newsletters, websites, and local television access channels; and inviting local reporters to attend events. Social media tools can be especially important to attract younger audiences. Signage at event sites, such as inexpensive yard signs can help promote excitement around an upcoming event ("Watch this Spot - New Community Rain Garden Coming Soon!"), and are effective ways to gain the public's attention.

KEEP IT LOCAL and USE MULTIPLE TOOLS

In working to promote your project, WREN suggests starting with a project press release and distributing it to local media connections in town. News organizations often look for local human interest stories that tie in with themes about important topics like water. Explore connections through your team's partners. Local outlets, such as a local access television channel, may help publicize your events if you provide them an attractive event slide. This ad can also run in your township or borough-wide newsletter. One way municipalities can show the "active partnership" that WREN looks for in successful projects, is to use their communication channels - newsletters, website, Facebook page, etc. to carry the local project message and event information. Many project leaders reported success working with their local municipalities who listed their events and publications.



A young streamside visitor checks out the new brochures and sign at Curly Hurd Park, located in LaJose (Newburg Borough) part of the Chest Creek Community Engagement Project. Chest Creek is pictured in the background.

Don't forget to notify the civic groups in town - Fire Department, PTO, senior club, faith organizations, etc. Local radio stations may also pitch in with public service announcements - just ask them. One project was able to get radio interview to promote their project. Don't forget that posters, flyers and brochures can be distributed at community centers, libraries, and through civic clubs, schools or businesses - anywhere your target audience might frequent. The key word here is *local*. Residents are often ready to lend a hand for clean water, but don't know what they can do at their home or business. Projects that share the right message through the right channels can create a springboard to keeping the momentum going. Empower residents with a message of hope that they can indeed be part of the clean water solution and have fun doing it!

Direct mail pieces like postcards or simple doorhangers can help reach residents in a particular area. They can be effective to reach audiences that may not go online. Project leaders of the Spring Creek Chapter of Trout Unlimited (SCCTU) designed a new logo for their campaign called "Return the Roots, Runoff Pollutes" and sent postcards to raise awareness among streamside property owners along Spring Creek in Centre County. Residents were invited to win a fabulous prize - a backyard makeover with native plants. Although SCCTU received only a small number of responses, the responding homeowners participated in site visits to explore moving forward with a planting plan for their properties. Spring Creek TU also created an opportunity during a Pennsylvania State University Arbor Day event to spread the word, distributing 'Return the Roots' brochures to 500 fourth graders who attended the event.



"Our project was just a 'kick off' event that needs to be followed yearly by more contact with the streamside owners, articles in the small local newsletters and our logo posted in a variety of venues. The SCCTU participates in many

community events and at those events we will continue to get the word out with our tri-fold brochure,” said Judi Sittler, chapter president of the Spring Creek Chapter of Trout Unlimited and project leader for the “Return the Roots – A Backyard Makeover for Streamside Owners” campaign.

While websites were used by many projects to promote their events, the field of social media is still emerging. “If the watershed group/project doesn’t have a website or social media outlet, focus on this area first as it seems to be the best way to increase awareness and participation without spending a lot of money,” said Rachel Kester, project leader of the Chest Creek Community Engagement Project for the Trout Unlimited Chest Creek chapter (Clearfield and Cambria counties.) “The new Chest Creek website, <http://chestcreekwatershed.weebly.com/> and the Facebook page were created using free web services and have garnered the most attention for the watershed. Also, establishing and maintaining a good working relationship with your local media outlets is key to getting good press coverage. The numerous newspaper articles covering this project were due to established relationships with local reporters,” Kester noted.

Project leaders did not report using social media sites as promotional outlets, although several tallied Facebook ‘likes’ to gauge their projects’ success and posted project photos on their pages. The topic of effective use of social media was explored during a session at the 2014 WREN Grantee Meeting. WREN plans to expand on this topic during the 2015 Meeting next June.

Reuse of materials produced by other organizations is always encouraged – no need to reinvent the wheel. Factsheets, brochures, pamphlets, guidebooks and maps, plus dozens of examples of signage are available on the [WREN website](#) and can be adapted for reuse by your project. WREN staff can also help you network with other project leaders who can share their ideas and successful project materials with you.

MUNICIPAL PARTNERS ARE KEY TO THE SUCCESS OF A WREN PROJECT

Grant guidelines call for at least one municipal partner that will be actively engaged in the project. A key goal of WREN projects is to improve the capacity of local officials to act as environmental stewards of local water resources and to encourage water-friendly land use decisions. It is often these municipal partners who will help champion future water quality projects because they participated in the low risk "seed project" led by WREN grantees. In preparation for your project, WREN Director Julie Kollar suggests “focusing on lining up your municipal partners . . . don't focus on the quantity of partners, but on the quality of what each will bring to the table and contribute to the project - we call this ‘active participation’.” While this can seem intimidating to project leaders who have never worked with municipal officials, it is do-able.

In a WREN first, two 2013-2014 Projects were led by municipal staff: one a borough manager, the other led by a zoning code enforcement official and a borough inspector. Borough Manager Mary Ellen Ramage led the charge in Etna, (Allegheny County) where the installation of a rain garden adjacent to the borough’s municipal pool building has now blossomed into a lush reminder of the benefits of this runoff retention project.

“The Mayor of Etna attended the workshop and rain garden installation, along with some of the council members. They were all champions of the project, talking it up to residents, advertising it on their website and public access



Etna Borough’s lush rain garden was installed in September 2013. Located behind the borough’s community pool building, it features a colorful sign describing the beauty and benefits of a rain garden.

channel,” said Ramage, who spearheaded the borough’s project, ‘Workshop on the Design and Maintenance of Rain Gardens for Landscape Professionals.’



Mount Joy Borough Council President Chris Metzler lends his personal touch, adding some plants to the Mount Joy Borough rain garden. Photo courtesy of Scott Hershey.

Stacie Gibbs, Zoning Code Officer for Mount Joy Borough, was the co-project leader along with Borough inspector Ken Barto for the ‘Mount Joy Borough Community Rain Garden – A Blooming Good Idea!’ Project. Stacie commented, *“Municipal officials played a key role in the project by attending the rain garden workshops, being a part of interviews for the local newspaper and participating actively in the construction of the rain garden. Because municipal officials participated (in) and supported this project, they played a key role in leading by example for the community.”*

In most cases, the first step in recruiting municipal partners is simple: just ask. Attend a council meeting and ask for a couple of minutes during the public comment period to summarize your project idea and ask members to come on board. Let them know the benefits the project will have on their community and the impact that their participation can have.

Municipal officials can be champions of a project, enlisting help from borough or township officials and workers and making sure to get the word out through official websites, public access channels and media. Elected officials, Borough and township managers, planners and public works staff members can be your cheerleaders once they’re on board. They can use listserves to help publicize events to their constituents to help draw community members to workshops, public meetings and

events. WREN suggests being very clear about the role the municipality is to play (for example, give the welcome at two events, allow public works staff to be trained in rain gardens, help with tools/trucks, provide mulch, and use municipal channels to publicize events). Stay away from key crunch times like the budget cycle in the fall when requesting help from local officials.



Adele and Nick Weremeychik, in photo at left, shared their expertise and working rain barrel display during the 2014 WREN Meeting. The Weremeychiks are members of the Warrington Township (Bucks County) Environmental Advisory Council and participated in the township’s ‘Green Infrastructure Outdoor Classroom Trail & Homeowner Linkages’ Project.

“As a result of the project we have formed a stronger relationship with the Municipal Authority by creating a forum for open discussion to problem solve and create a conservatory partnership. The Conservation District and the Shamokin Creek Association have eagerly volunteered to offer their knowledge, time and expertise for future projects,” said Natalie Wertman, president of the Sunbury Hill Neighborhood (Northumberland county) and project leader for “Storm Water Runoff Management: From Education to Implementation.”

Ten Lessons Learned from a Rain Garden Project, Ambler, PA

1. Understanding how to do a task is not the same as knowing how long it will take.
2. Volunteer sources may restrict schedule flexibility.
3. Do not design a single project in a way that it will consume all the attention and energy of your EAC members.
4. Being ready with all the logistical arrangements is no match for bad weather.
5. Find ways to simplify and reduce the number of communications needed. (In other words, consolidate your supply chain.)
6. The average cost of materials for a 150-square-foot rain garden = \$700 (however, ordering in bulk can save an average of \$200 per garden.)
7. Renting power tools greatly simplifies the manpower needed to accomplish tasks.
8. Garden tours and expert presenters are alluring.
9. Hold homeowners to the guidance given in the Homeowner Agreements.
10. It is better to build wide and shallow, than narrow and deep.

Comments by Susan Curry, co-project leader with Susan Johnsson of the Borough of Ambler project, 'Public Awareness + Incentives = 10 Rain Gardens in Ambler, PA'

Below, a flowering rain garden on Walker Road in Ambler.



MAKE IT PERSONAL

Municipal partners can be an important conduit to connect project leaders with local business partners and other community groups. How to keep local officials engaged? Personal follow-ups are best, according to project leaders.

Prior to the first of four tours of their watershed area in the Tookany/Tacony-Frankford Watershed Julie Slavet, executive director and co-project leader of "Managing Rainfall in the Tookany/Tacony-Frankford Watershed: Stormwater Project Tour," (Montgomery and Philadelphia Counties) attended meetings of the Jenkintown Borough Council, Cheltenham Board of Commissioners and Abington Board of Commissioners to present information and personally invite officials from these communities to the stormwater tours.

"State Representative Stephen McCarter (154th District, D-Montgomery and Philadelphia counties) promoted the first tour through an email to his subscribers. At the tours, we recognized those elected officials (who) were present. We were pleased that two Cheltenham Commissioners, one Jenkintown Borough Council member and the Mayor of Ambler participated," Slavet said.

"This project strengthened our relationship with Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) Cheltenham and Abington Township, and Jenkintown Borough. . . our relationship with Abington, Cheltenham, and Jenkintown was strengthened because municipal officials were impressed by our knowledge of sites and practices, as well as the strength of our relationships with project specialists. These municipalities were also impressed with our personal invitation approach as well as the high quality of the tour and guidebook. The challenge is always participation, but the attendance of key leaders who shared the word that the tours were useful was a success," Slavet added.

Slavet is not alone in stressing the importance of the personal approach to municipal recruitment. For these projects, and many others, a personal visit and invitation helped to bring municipal partners on board.

"A majority of communication with West Lampeter Township officials occurred in person. An open and direct line of communication enabled the Trust to offer assistance and answer questions and concerns related to the topic. The Trust evaluated change in thinking/behavior through personal interaction with the board of supervisors, the township manager and the township engineer," offered Stephanie Smith, of the Lancaster Farmland Trust (Lancaster County) and project leader for the "Agricultural Best Management Practices – A New 'Greening' Model for Municipalities."

This sentiment was also echoed by project leader and chapter president Judi Sittler of the Spring Creek Chapter of Trout Unlimited (Centre County.)

“What seemed to solidify a sense of true cooperation was the multiple times we visited their respective council meetings. Just quick updates on what we were doing, during the public comment periods, seemed to build familiarity with us personally, and our well-intentioned project. Some of the council members attended our community outreach events and later, when we came back to a meeting for an update, they were quick to thank us for the free hot dogs and shrubbery we provided at those outreach events,” Sittler said.

Money can sometimes be a deciding factor in how much cooperation projects receive from municipal officials.

“It was easy to get agreement from our original partners (two townships and a sewage treatment plant) to participate in this project if it was not going to cost them anything,” Sittler said.

BUILDING LASTING BONDS WITH PARTNERS

Etna Borough reported a stronger bond among many of the partner organizations as a result of their 2013 rain garden project. In fact, some of their partners have continued their partnership with a school grounds project for 2014-2015. Borough Manager Mary Ellen Ramage reported that though many of the groups had worked together in the past, the WREN project brought them together in more of a collaborative manner.

“There were challenges with getting items done on time, particularly the video and interpretive sign design, mostly due to the volunteer nature of the people working on those two items, but the project leaders pushed through and remained vigilant to get the work done prior to the end of the grant cycle,” said Ramage.

“The benefits of collaborative partnerships cannot be overstated. Overall, our partnerships in the Lehigh Valley and Montgomery County have been extremely effective in leveraging resources and working together, since all parties recognize the need for the Master Watershed Steward Program. The only challenge has been with one partner that has been reluctant to contribute time and energy on the program, since they are not the project leader,” said Erin Frederick, **project leader for the ‘Master Watershed Steward Program’ in Lehigh and Northampton counties.**

Coordinating a project with municipal leaders doesn’t just involve working with elected officials, as one project leader found out.

“I learned that when coordinating a project with a municipality, it is important to get the Public Works department involved from the beginning. Even though Borough officials may approve of a planting project and sign on as a partner, it is the Public Works crew that actually knows all of the physical aspects of the properties,”

said Jennifer Hine, project leader for the Manada Conservancy’s (Dauphin County) project, “The Swatara Greenway: Restoring Our Riparian Buffers, A Community Planting Project.”



This sign sits near the streamside buffer planted along the Swatara Creek by the Manada Conservancy as part of its WREN project. It describes the important role buffers play in helping to reduce polluted runoff from reaching the creek.

Hine added that the Conservancy's partnership with its municipal partner, Hummelstown Borough, was made successful by the participation of the Borough Manager and a member of the Borough Council who is also a Conservancy board member, who promoted the partnership and project throughout the process.

Courtney Hayden, who assisted project leader Alan Sam in State College Borough's "Light Step Right Step Festival" said the borough's partnership with the Clearwater Conservancy was indispensable to the project's success.

"Without the help of Clearwater Conservancy, the Borough would not have been able to pull off this project. Clearwater was the sole mechanism for advertising our workshop and attended the Light Step Right Step Festival to teach and to provide information after the workshop. Their backgrounds in projects like this were valuable. The partnership with Clearwater was strengthened through the project, as new Borough staff had the opportunity to work directly with Conservancy staff," Hayden said.

"What surprised many of our workshop partners was the attendance of the owner of one of the biggest landscape architect firms in the area. They didn't think this person had any interest in rain gardens and green stormwater BMPs. His attendance at the workshop signaled something to us... that the concepts we presented at the workshop were gaining mainstream traction and that people are taking the stormwater issues more seriously. This person was interviewed for the video and he glowed about how much he learned during the event, why the topic was important to the community and his work, and how he planned to take what he learned and put it into action . . . We reached new audiences and expanded the mindsets of more than just those who are already interested in green infrastructure and the environment."
- Mary Ellen Ramage, Etna Borough Manager.



Volunteers dig in to install a rain garden on Mattison Avenue in Ambler as part of the Borough's project, 'Public Awareness + Incentives = 10 Rain Gardens in Ambler, PA.'

MANAGING CHALLENGES:

Completing tasks on time is one of the primary issues raised by several project leaders, particularly when using volunteers. *Often, volunteers, though well-intentioned, are restricted in the amount of time they can donate to WREN projects due to outside commitments that cause a shift in priorities and a change in participation.*

"Elected officials are busy volunteers. It was hard to find an ideal time to present the tour that worked for them in light of their many meetings, events, and work commitments. We addressed this challenge by making personal phone calls, and asking local volunteers to invite their elected officials. In the future, we would start by asking for a commitment from elected officials to participate at a time of their choosing."
-TTF's Julie Slavet.

"Timetables have to be fluid, especially when working with volunteers and free labor. If we had paid someone to design the rain garden sign it would have been done in a much quicker manner, and the responsiveness of the designer would have been more reliable, and the same goes for the video production," said Etna Borough's Ramage. *"Beware when something is 'free.' If you are on a tight schedule, I wouldn't necessarily use unpaid labor for such projects in the future. But we were able to accomplish more given these free products, so you have to take the not so good with the great,"* she said.

"We could have used an expert that was committed to a certain amount of hours in developing the backyard make over plan," echoed Spring Creek TU's Sittler, referring to one aspect of her project. *She added that asking for 'free' assistance*

can also be problematic during busy times of the year for some partners or suppliers, which can affect a project's timetable.

In some cases, a community's unique target audience can present challenges and may dictate the way a project is approached. In the case of Lancaster Farmland Trust, one of the stakeholder groups included Old Order Amish and Mennonite farmers. Methods of communication may have to be tailored to meet the needs of these groups, such as a letter of introduction, followed by individual visits with stakeholders.

"Since many of the farmers engaged through this project were Old Order Amish and Mennonite, Lancaster Farmland Trust employed traditional methods of communication to connect with this audience. An initial letter of introduction requesting an assessment visit was sent via mail. All invitations to workshops were mailed to landowners. Additionally, newsletter articles and project updates were all mailed," explained LFT's Stephanie Smith.

Smith continued: *"Over its 26 year history, Lancaster Farmland Trust has established strong, trusting relationships with the Plain Sect (Old Order Amish and Mennonite) farming community in Lancaster County. Nearly 85 percent of farm families who preserve their farms through the Trust are Amish. This unique relationship has allowed the Trust exclusive access to a community where mainstream agricultural education is limited and where landowners are often slow to change. This community characteristic may not classify as a "barrier" to further implementation, but can sometimes increase the amount of time it takes to implement an initiative and affect change,"* she said.

WORKING WITH VOLUNTEERS REQUIRES PLANNING AND FLEXIBILITY

It is often a juggling trick to work within everyone's schedules in order to complete tasks on time. Knowing this up front can prevent a plan from getting derailed and can lead to creative solutions that will benefit everyone. *Several project leaders weighed-in on this topic:*

"It was a challenge working with (our municipal officials) on prioritizing. This project was our top priority but as officials they had many hats to wear and projects to complete that we felt that we needed to remind them the dates as they approached," said Sunbury's Natalie Wertman.

"We were pleased that we were able to attend a public meeting to invite them (municipal officials) to the tours. We expected that we would need to be persistent and that it would be difficult to get commissioners and employees to attend," said TTF's Julie Slavet. *"We were disappointed that elected and employee attendance was not better. Those that did attend (however) were engaged and eager to share the positive experience with others and advocate for the use of BMPs in their municipalities. We are pleased that one township expressed interest in having us organize a tour specifically for them."*

This sentiment was echoed by State College Borough's Courtney Hayden: *"The only challenge staff experienced with officials, was getting them to come to this special event. These officials attend a large number of meetings with no pay. It is difficult to ask them to attend additional events. In the future we will make a greater effort to recruit elected officials one-on-one rather than through an invitation,"* she said.

"In the 'lessons learned' category, we realize that working collaboratively, in a partnership, is not a skill that many of our Master Watershed Stewards, who have had careers in other fields, are used to. So we could have used a resource to teach collaborative decision making," said Erin Frederick, project leader for the Watershed Coalition of the Lehigh Valley's project 'Master Watershed Steward Program.'



Volunteers plant a riparian buffer near the historic Kreidersville Covered Bridge in Northampton County, part of the 'Master Watershed Steward Program' led by the Watershed Coalition of the Lehigh Valley.

IF WE HAD MORE TIME

In looking back at their project timelines several project leaders expressed a desire to include additional time for workshops.

“If we had to choose something that we would have done differently, we would have allowed more time for the workshops,” said Mount Joy Borough’s Stacie Gibbs. *“There were many questions to answer during the workshops, and it appeared that there was not enough time. We would also have changed the number of workshops from two to four. We feel that we had an overwhelming response, and by holding an additional two workshops, it would have allowed us to reach more people.”*

SMALLER CAN BE BETTER . . .

Bigger isn’t always better, as project leaders and staff in State College Borough (Centre County) learned in holding a rain barrel workshop in fall 2013 as part of the second sustainability festival, called *Light Step, Right Step Festival*.

“The rain barrel workshop was one of the most attended events at the Light Step Right Step Festival in the two years that we have conducted the event. We believe that this project helped to bring people to the Festival to learn about what community organizations are doing to improve water quality in State College. What we learned is that target smaller events will be the most successful,” said the project’s Courtney Hayden.



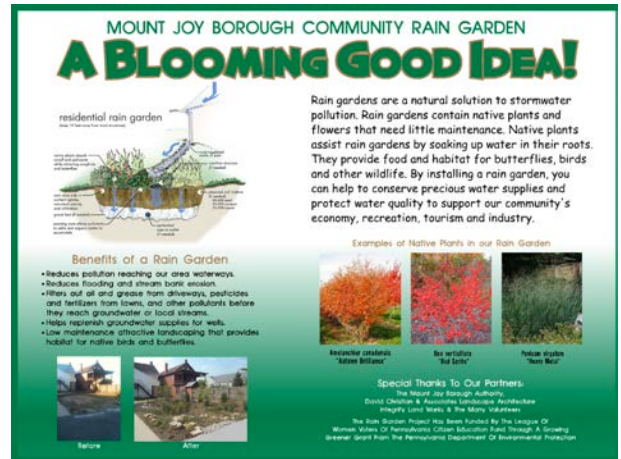
Rain Barrel workshop at the ‘Light Step, Right Step Festival.’

“Our biggest concern is that we did not obtain the contact information necessary to confirm that the rain barrels constructed at the event were installed. As always, follow-up is key. Because we were conducting the festival and the workshop, we were not prepared to manage both successfully. For example, some participants left without filling out all the paper work. Instead, we are going to try to arrange smaller events and host them more often,” she said.

“We have seen great success in setting up programs at our many parks and in hosting short volunteer experiences. The volunteers that helped the Borough prep the rain barrels expressed to us that it was a worthwhile experience and that they would do it again. In the future, we will try to work directly with neighborhood associations to market our program and provide community block leadership/social norming to and increase the number of BMPs installed,” Hayden added.

MONEY MATTERS

Money issues can also present challenges to moving things along. In addition to WREN funding, grant guidelines call for projects to provide in-kind match donations of goods and services or 15 percent cash; this match can be in the form of volunteer time, staff time, materials or other non-cash contributions. Our 2013-2014 projects far exceeded this nominal requirement with generous contributions of volunteer services, some materials and a small amount from other funding sources valued at more than \$100,000. A successful working relationship with municipal officials can have a far-reaching effect, far beyond the scope of the original project. In the case of Lancaster



This interpretive sign is installed near the rain garden at the Mount Joy Borough Hall.

Farmland Trust, a positive working relationship with township officials resulted in a financial commitment that could result in extending the partnership in future years. *“The township was completely engaged in the project and has expressed their commitment to extending the life of the project. Officials have also agreed to let Lancaster Farmland Trust use the project to demonstrate effectiveness and potential to other municipalities in Lancaster County,”* said LFT’s Stephanie Smith. *“West Lampeter Township was fully engaged and has demonstrated their ongoing commitment to the project through a financial commitment of \$40,000 in 2014 for BMP implementation on farms identified during assessments. We believe the Township will have an interest in extending this partnership over the next few years,”* Smith added.



This brochure was created by Warrington Township for its project, ‘Green Infrastructure Outdoor Class Room Trail and Home Owner Linkages.’ The brochure highlights interpretive signage along the Igoe Porter Wellings Lower Nike Trail in Warrington Township, transforming the trail into an outdoor learning experience for visitors.

“Money is always the biggest issue to get municipalities on-board. Rain gardens aren’t necessarily cheap, so helping the municipalities find sources of funding and loans for rain garden installation is very important. They also need to be able to find engineers or others educated on the design and installation techniques to ensure that the garden is installed correctly. Workshops like this have helped educate new people about these techniques, and raised awareness of the importance of these gardens, so we’ve done a lot, but there’s more work yet to be done,” added Etna Borough’s Ramage.

KEEP MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS ENGAGED

The Manada Conservancy’s Jennifer Hine said she believes the main challenge was to engage municipal officials in the project so that they understood the reason why the project was proposed and the benefits of the project’s goals.

“I addressed this concern by presenting details about the project to the council during one of their workshop meetings,” Hine said.

Rachel Kester, project leader for the Trout Unlimited Chest Creek project, “Chest Creek Community Engagement Project,” said that as a result of the project officials have begun communicating more regularly with the watershed group and are now investigating issues they have been made aware of, such as illegal dumping and malfunctioning on-lot sewage systems. A bonus: they are also talking more about source water protection planning.

Evaluating Your Project and the WREN Experience: Measuring Success

Project materials produced and distributed tell only part of the story in evaluating the effectiveness of a project. WREN Director Julie Kollar explains that project evaluation is crucial to project leaders' overall understanding of what went right with their project and what could be improved in order to continue the work started beyond the end of the grant period.

“It was somewhat difficult to get the various municipalities to start thinking of themselves as part of a larger watershed community instead of their own discreet entities, but through persistent communication the walls started to break down and they began to think of themselves as part of the watershed whole.”
- Rachel Kester, Trout Unlimited Chest Creek, (Clearfield and Cambria Counties)

Many funders consider project evaluation to be a best management practice. With limited budgets and many applicants, funders want to know what were the outcomes of the project; what was accomplished with their

investment? They may ask, success is being measured "how?"

Project Evaluation is a requirement for WREN Projects. WREN recognizes its funding may be small relative to much larger grants. And it can be very difficult to assess greater awareness or see evidence of environmental behavior change during the course of one project. But developing a practical evaluation approach will serve project leaders well with much larger scale projects. Thinking about the evaluation tools you will use from the start of your project (surveys, follow-up phone calls to a few local officials, etc.) will allow you to observe what happened at the end as the result of all the energy, time and funding invested, Kollar said. Project evaluation is also a helpful way for others to learn from your experiences, both the successes as well as the shortfalls.



Project evaluation includes both **quantitative and qualitative** indicators of project accomplishments. For instance, how will you capture the number of people that attended, how many rain barrels were installed, how many door hangers got distributed, or stories in the press? WREN projects summarize the countables or "the beans" using a chart called a Results Tracker. One of your major target audiences is your local municipal partner. On the qualitative side: how will you gather feedback from your municipal officials? Document your interactions with municipal officials relative to your project? Anything learned along the way that you would do differently? How will you gather anecdotes from residents? Beginning on day one, start by keeping track of what you and your team are learning throughout your project, especially at the major milestones of the project.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

Whatever evaluation tool you choose, WREN suggests that it be practical, reflect the scope of your project and measure your desired outcomes. If success means having a well-attended community event, your evaluation tool will not likely involve follow-up phone calls to attendees. Instead, you may want to use a sign-in sheet to focus on how many people attended and assess whether you used all possible publicity avenues prior to the event to boost attendance.

"WREN was helpful from the beginning, starting at the 2013 conference by providing the basic vocabulary for communicating about water. . . The successes and challenges of previous tours, as well as the materials they produced, helped guide us in our project. The Interim Report and correspondence was an opportunity to check in and ask for suggestions for improving our project." ~Julie Slavet, executive director of the Tookany/Tacony-Frankford Watershed Partnership and co-project leader for "Managing Rainfall in the Tookany/Tacony-Frankford Watershed: Stormwater Project Tour."

"Review of the documents was very helpful, and using the rain garden sign examples on the WREN website helped us immensely in designing our sign." ~ Mary Ellen Ramage, Etna Borough Manager and project leader for 'Workshop on the Design and Maintenance of Rain Gardens for Landscape Professionals.'

Remember, we often learn more from what went wrong than from what went right. WREN relies on project leaders to summarize the *Lessons they Learned* about the impact of local projects. To replicate successful community watershed education projects in Pennsylvania, project leader feedback is invaluable to help others avoid pitfalls and use what works.

WHAT'S THE TAKE-AWAY MESSAGE FROM THIS YEAR'S WREN PROJECTS?

WREN project leaders estimate that nearly 46,000 people - comprised of targeted audiences, municipal officials and the greater communities -

have received their messages of the importance of stemming the tide of polluted runoff that can endanger the watershed. But it takes work to get the word out, promote events and follow-through with creating an interesting and informative program that will encourage community participation. You can read more about WREN projects at

the Projects page at our website, <http://www.waterwisepa.org/our-projects> and get inspired to become a WREN project leader! Final project reports from 2013-2014 will be available on our site soon.

QUICK TIPS FOR ENSURING A SUCCESSFUL WREN PROJECT:

- ✓ Scheduling that works for everyone – when scheduling an event, be sure to look at local calendars to make sure your event date does not conflict with other important events in your community, such as a graduation or fair.
- ✓ Make sure you have promoted your project to your target audience. Flyers, door hangers, direct-mail pieces that can be included in municipal mailings or newsletters all help ensure that your message gets delivered to the right people.
- ✓ Engage local groups that might already be in step with your message, such as Environmental Advisory Councils that are already organized in your township or borough.

Consider applying for a WREN grant! The 2015 WREN Community Watershed Education and Source Water Protection Collaborative grants are coming soon. The next grant round will open in January, with grant applications due March 20, 2015 for projects running from July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016. WREN will offer two different Clean Water Grant Tracks for 2015: **Watershed Protection Education Grants**, to raise awareness and encourage local action to prevent polluted runoff (nonpoint source pollution) and **Source Water Protection (SWP) Education Grants** - projects designed to educate to prevent pollution to public drinking water before it starts, ways to protect water supply recharge areas for aquifers and intakes, educate citizens and municipal officials on steps to protect drinking water sources by creating and implementing Source Water Protection Plans. Grant instructions and application forms will be posted at the [WREN website](#) in late December.