

Green Infrastructure Communications Strategy

Background

This Green Infrastructure Communications Strategy provides a strategy for the Huron River Watershed Council (HRWC) and other community stakeholders to plan education and outreach efforts around the topic of Green Infrastructure (GI). Communications initiatives should follow a strategic plan in which the following are specifically identified: (1) Goals; (2) Objectives (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-limited); (3) Target Audience; (3) Specific Message(s) (for the Target Audience); (4) Tools and tactics (including resource requirements); and (4) Evaluation Mechanisms.

This strategy focuses on identifying target audiences and suggests for each the general goals, possible messages, tools and tactics. Also, a number of specific target audiences are identified, and general plans are established for educating and informing them directly. These plans need to be prioritized and developed out further by Middle Huron Partners to include responsible parties and funding mechanisms. Development of specific, measurable, achievable, realistic time-based objectives and mechanisms for evaluating results are left for development by the Partners, as they are clearly dependent upon timing and available resources.

HRWC can start this process by convening interested stakeholders from the Middle Huron Partners (i.e. those who are already implementing GI projects or programs) to narrow priorities, define audiences, establish implementation details, and secure funding. This “Education Implementation Group” should identify the following:

- What are the interim objectives of the educational strategy?
- How will progress be measured?
- What level of effort is needed for the suite of activities and who will lead each?
- Where will the resources come from to carry out the strategy?
- What is the targeted timeline for implementation?

Once these questions are answered, a complete strategy will be ready for implementation with the selected target audience. This will likely be an iterative process. HRWC and partners should periodically return to this overall strategy to adjust it based on lessons learned from implementing strategies with individual target audiences.

The following strategy is designed to be brief and simple to allow for easy reference in planning and specific strategy development.

Overall Communications Goal: *To build community awareness of and support for Green Infrastructure projects and initiatives that result in widespread implementation of GI practices and projects.*

Target Audiences

Potential target audiences for educational efforts regarding Green Infrastructure include:

- Municipal decision-makers
 - Supervisors and staff
 - Boards and commissions (i.e. planning boards)
- Environmental leaders at other environmental non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)
- Owners of large or high-visibility buildings (use the GI Opportunities Map to identify)
- Developers
- General public or residents of specific neighborhoods (use the GI Opportunities Map to identify)
- Public schools and universities, especially grounds and buildings managers and campus sustainability leaders
- Engineering and environmental consultants, designers and other professionals
- Landscaping or maintenance contractors
- Regional , state and federal policy makers

Communications Tools

Educational topics or messages can be effectively delivered through a variety of methods. Some are more effective at reaching broad audiences, while others are better for smaller, target audiences. The range of tools include:

- One-on-one meetings
- Group presentations
- Workshops/demonstrations
- GI maps and assessment tools
- Detailed reports or guides
- Direct mailings
- Website pages
- Social media
- Email campaigns
- Public relations or press coverage
- Pamphlets/booklets
- Swag (stickers, posters, pins, clothing)
- Networking – Peer-to-peer exchange, lessons learned

Topics or Messages

There are a broad number of educational topics related to GI. Some apply to all audiences, but others should be directed at key target audiences. Following is a list of potential topics for education.

- GI project types, design specifications and performance
- How GI construction is different from conventional stormwater
- Strategies for funding GI projects*

- Grants
- Public/Private partnerships
- Asset management and capital improvement planning
- Cross-departmental funding
- Cost-effectiveness*
 - Project costs
 - Life-cycle costs compared to conventional stormwater
- Broad benefits of GI*
- Operations and maintenance*
 - How maintenance differs from conventional stormwater
 - Strategies for conducting maintenance
 - Examples from neighboring communities
- Identifying priority opportunities (target areas on GI Opportunities Map)*
- GI programs and policies
 - Stormwater utility credits
 - Washtenaw County rain garden program
 - Green Streets policies
 - Stormwater ordinance requirements

* Denotes topics that were addressed in the GI Forum series, but may need to be targeted at other groups or individuals who did not attend those forums.

Partners

HRWC can implement many of the educational tools and tactics, but assistance can be provided by others. In some cases, partner organizations may be more effective at delivering messages to target audiences. Following is a list of possible partners (with some examples) that could be helpful.

- Representatives from Green Industry such as pervious material suppliers and native plant nurseries
- Michigan Municipal League (MML) and Michigan Townships Association (MTA)
- Washtenaw County Water Resources Commissioner
- County or regional municipalities who have implemented successful programs
- Engineering and environmental consultants
- Professional Associations
 - Water Environment Federation
 - Drain Commissioner Association
 - Michigan Water Environment Association
- Environmental Groups
 - American Rivers
 - Center for Neighborhood Technology
 - Center for Watershed Protection
 - Ecology Center

Strategies for Target Audiences

Following is a set of proposed strategies and tactics to facilitate education toward/between target audiences from top (decision-makers) to middle (municipal staff, planners, consultants) to bottom (property owners, homeowners). For each of the target audiences, a strategy is outlined with an educational or action goal, objectives and evaluation measures (to be identified later; see Implementation section), educational topics, recommended format (i.e. tools and tactics), and the topical approach to use with the target group.

Not all target audiences will respond to the same approach. Some passive tactics work for ready adopters, while other indirect or multifaceted approaches need to be taken with resisters. The strategies for the below target audiences seek to apply tactics that will work for the majority in the target group.

Municipal Boards and Commissions

- Goal: audience will view GI as both preferred and feasible over gray infrastructure and will actively look to require GI approaches in projects and policies
- Topics:
 - Costs and benefits of GI (project and life-cycle costs)
 - Funding
 - Opportunities (target priority areas on GI Opportunities Map)
- Format:
 - 30 min. presentation to group at monthly meeting or at partner association meeting (e.g. MML)
 - Distribute GI Opportunity Maps
- Approach:
 - “Conclusion” to Washtenaw GI project: responsibility to share lessons
 - Gather further information/questions
 - Establish working meetings with municipal leaders
- Approach decision-makers directly
 - Frame meetings as information gathering “interviews”
 - Gain understanding of barriers to implementation (see Barriers Report)
 - Follow-up with specific information to address barriers

Municipal Supervisors and Staff

- Goal: audience will promote or champion GI within their municipalities to public, boards, commissions, and staff and will seek opportunities to implement it and ways to fund it
- Topic:
 - Costs and benefits of GI (project and life-cycle costs)
 - Asset management tools and planning for GI
 - Development and use of stormwater utilities
- Format:

- GI workshops/webinars
- GI print articles
- Work with Michigan Municipal league to offer workshops/webinars, presentations at annual convention or print and digital newsletter articles, then follow-up with individual municipalities
- Target key municipalities for one-on-one meetings
- Develop a certification program (like WaterSense)
 - Evaluate municipal GI or stormwater programs for effectiveness
 - Call out exemplary programs with certification or awards
 - Publicize efforts of exemplary programs
- Approach:
 - Focus on case studies and positive results success stories
 - Offer how-to implementation examples and local and national resources for funding and implementation
 - Gather information on barriers and address with tailored information

Engineering and Environmental Consultants

- Goal: Create and promote a network of knowledgeable, experienced GI professionals who can facilitate local learning and community adoption of GI
- Topic:
 - What is happening around the county (demonstrate that peers are successfully using GI)
 - What is being learned (networking)
 - Provide experienced and new resources
 - Business development opportunities (converting or renovating gray to green in both commercial and residential applications)
- Format:
 - Online network formation (focus group to determine online collaborative feature)
 - Electronic mailing list (listserv)
 - LinkedIn group
 - Discussion group via HRWC or Washtenaw County WRC
 - GI certification program
- Approach:
 - Focusing GI efforts throughout the county
 - Opportunities for networking and business development
 - Identify and address barriers
 - Become a preferred provider (publicly identifies expertise, offers additional common resources for business development, opportunities to network, active marketing)

Maintenance Managers and Contractors

- Goal: audience will have an (improved) plan for GI operations and maintenance, will understand strategies for engaging the community, and will utilize new resources (either people or products)
- Topic:
 - Operations and maintenance
 - Community engagement
- Format:
 - Workshops or seminars: come with list of GI features to manage and leave with tools and a strategy
 - Presentations through Green Industry forums/trade shows
 - Informational meetings offered at supplier locations (fertilizer, plant materials equipment)
 - Guest speakers or webcasts (other maintenance managers with successful programs from Portland, Philadelphia, etc.)
 - Sharing and presentation of tools and resources
- Approach:
 - We know there are challenges; we want to facilitate solutions

Target Neighborhood Residents

- Goal: Use the GI Opportunities Map to identify target neighborhoods to increase GI in the smartest locations throughout the county through individual actions on private property
- Topic:
 - Programs (stormwater credits, rain garden program)
 - GI benefits
 - Resources in the form of DIY materials and professional assistance
- Format:
 - Introductory letters and brochures
 - Talks at homeowner association meetings or block parties
 - Signage and participation recognition as reward for a rain garden
 - Host a party when a target number of rain gardens are installed in the neighborhood
 - Host neighborhood rain garden walk and talk tours
 - Use signage to build neighborhood identity around GI features
 - Tell success stories of how GI has improved other street/neighborhoods
 - Produce and distribute micro-documentary success story getting neighborhood involvement
- Approach:
 - Increase sense of community/neighborhood identity
 - Improve neighborhood aesthetics and perceived value by showing increase individual property values

- Show specific examples of neighborhood turnarounds due to GI

Neighborhoods with Existing GI Features

- Goal: Increase community care of and support for GI features as one part of a GI maintenance strategy
- Topic:
 - Helping with maintenance of right-of-way rain gardens and bioswales
 - Benefits of GI
- Format:
 - Introductory letters and brochures
 - Small group presentations (identify a neighborhood champion)
 - Neighborhood tour and instruction
 - Certificates for Green Stewards
 - Provide training for DIY efforts
 - Website
 - Pamphlets/booklets
 - Bumper stickers, window clings or other signage
- Approach:
 - Gathering information about neighborhood questions/concerns – “eyes and ears”
 - Providing information on value of GI features
 - Improving neighborhood maintenance and communication with municipal staff
 - Establishing a resource link (to HRWC, WRC)

High-visibility Property Owners

- Goal: Use the GI Opportunities Map to establish several high-profile GI features throughout the county via Public-Private Partnerships
- Objective and Measure of Evaluation (see intro):
- Topic:
 - Costs of GI (project and life-cycle costs) vs. conventional approach
 - GI benefits (including community engagement and marketing)
 - GI Project Funding
- Format:
 - One-on-one meetings
 - Partner with existing programs like Waste Knot or Community Partners for Clean Streams or local Chambers of Commerce or Downtown Development Authorities to approach and leverage incentives
 - Identify local business spokesperson/champion
- Approach:
 - Identify key properties in the county as a model for the rest of the community
 - Pursue grant or other funding
 - Facilitate press coverage and other marketing

- Prepare case study for use at peer events and with the public (Chamber of Commerce, DDA, Main Street Associations)

General Public

- Goal: Gain broad understanding and acceptance of the GI approach to stormwater capture and treatment
- Topic:
 - What is Green Infrastructure
 - GI benefits (including community engagement and marketing)
 - GI examples and homeowner opportunities
- Format:
 - Establish a community or county-wide initiative (like “Save the Rain”)
 - Broad-based information distribution over various media
 - Facilitate press coverage and other marketing
- Approach:
 - Use (treat) the rain where it falls
 - The power of green vs gray
 - Tap into River Hero branding
 - Follow-up with decision makers to identify what they hear from constituents and what they plan to do

Implementing the Strategy

HRWC has recommended a set of strategies to use with a range of target audiences. In order to successfully educate the key audiences who can establish and enhance a successful Green Infrastructure Program across the county, HRWC will need to work with other leaders and partners within the county to establish and implement details within each target audience strategy. These strategies will need to be tailored to the particular targets and objectives identified and the funding that is available. HRWC should bring the group of partners together regularly to evaluate success, adapt the plan and identify new targets and strategies.