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explore, enjoy, and protect the planet.

NARP STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES

Activating and engaging the public requires an intentional approach to build support through literacy and strategic outreach. Water can be a complicated resource to engage the public about considering its direct impacts on human health and wellbeing. The Sierra Club Clean Water Team understands the challenges faced when creating communication campaigns and content for various audiences. NARPS are highly technical documents with information that can be confusing. Those who are new to water work and unfamiliar with nutrients, policy or wastewater operations will require background and context for them to provide competent and useful feedback. Listening sessions on Zoom versus in person for example require different methods for keeping the audience engaged.

Finding the right stakeholders to engage with is also a priority requiring relationship building and reaching out to non traditional organizations and professionals working on water issues. This document is meant to provide guidance on best practices for NARP stakeholder engagement. The goal is for the users of this guide to confidently consider diverse stakeholder engagement using the insight of Sierra Club organizing tools and practices as they have been successful in building our network of engaged volunteers and mobilizing solutions informed by a diversity of voices from ethnic backgrounds, industries and levels of government.

Who are we?

We are the Sierra Club IL Chapter and are committed to protecting the diversity of our state's natural resources through campaigns on conservation, energy issues, clean water, and transportation. The Clean Water Campaign in Illinois is focused on protecting rivers, lakes, streams and wetlands throughout the state and improving water quality. We care about NARPs because they are a tool to assist in decision making that will reduce the loading of phosphorus into Illinois rivers and waterways. The planning tool is also a valuable opportunity to collaborate with municipalities, private environmental consulting firms, farmers and the public to create solutions for the sanitation sector. NARPs advances the reduction of nutrient loading into critical waterways like the Mississippi River and is a model for how water permits, state policy and additional funding resources can be used to upgrade systems and educate the public.

What is this document? How do I use it?

Building successful stakeholder engagement requires thoughtfulness and a plan. Use the following guidelines to ensure you are practicing engaging the public in the most inclusive and effective way possible. Remember, the best stakeholder engagement is timely, inclusive, purposeful and respectful. Applying best practices can help you reach more of the right people. This document is designed to support inclusive listening and sharing to ensure the most diverse stakeholder engagement your facility can develop to satisfy the NARP conditions. Stakeholder

engagement is best defined as focused communication with audiences to educate or invite feedback on goals, plans or strategies. Stakeholder engagement methods can vary depending upon the audience and should result in an exchange that is mutually beneficial.

NARP reminder for engagement

It is a legal requirement of your NARP to conduct meaningful stakeholder engagement. NARP holders each have different perceptions of what that translates to. There are many ways to engage as well as many different audiences.

- Developed and submitted by December 31, 2023 (or 2024)
- Supported by data and sound scientific rationale
- Must cooperate with and work with other stakeholders in the watershed

Equity in water outreach

The Sierra Club adopted [Jimenez Principles for Democratic Organizing](#) in 2014 to build community partnerships with integrity. We strongly suggest reading, reviewing and applying these principles when inviting diverse stakeholder engagement.

Planning the outreach strategy

Before planning it is important to identify the roles and responsibilities of team members working on engagement. After determining who will be assisting with the planning. IEPA did not establish rules for the way engagement had to happen. Yet we recommend evaluating the capacity of your team and reasonable expectations of engagement at various stages of NARP development. What audience you engage and how you engage them may very well differ. For example we outline below a diverse set of stakeholders, when you would engage them and why.

Target Audience

- **How to identify your audience**

Stakeholder	Timeline	What is the goal of outreach?	Who would take the lead?
Other WWTF's with NARPs			
Local elected officials			
Environmentalists			

Modes of communication

This section is broken into two parts. First there is an invitation that is created and your team must decide on how that looks. You have already identified the audience and what the intention of communicating with them would be. Second there is the experience you are inviting them to engage in. What listening and sharing looks like depends on capacity, time, expertise and expense.

Novel ways of communicating the invitation

- Attending local City Council meetings and speaking in the public comments section of the agenda
- Using local water utilities to partner with and send mailers to every home
- Contributing fliers, information to local cities for them to add onto their websites
- Working with the local decision maker for moving information through their social media accounts
- Postings at local libraries
- Invest in local media and purchase ads
- Compose press releases and send to media outlets
- Place in newsletters of environmental groups

The invite

Emails are the most effective and popular way for connecting with people. If it is a cold invitation and there is no connection it is important to have a clear subject header and transparent, non technical language for non expert stakeholders. The body of the email should have all the information regarding registration. It would be wise to follow up with a phone call especially if it is a small population of stakeholders. We have suggested some basic NARP language to use below.

Dear (insert name),

My name is (insert name, title and name of company).

1. Why are you reaching out to them?
2. Why they were chosen
3. Explain where your facility is located and what body of water you discharge into
4. Communicate what a NARP is (maybe add language for them to use here)
5. Event details or repeat what you are asking them to do

The experience

Make sure you communicate clearly what the experience will be, the time commitment and any requirements for pre-registration. No matter which method you choose, you will need an agenda, a facilitator and a process for running the outreach experience. You have to care about the people coming and what they have to say. Engaging in a way that absorbs the feedback and infusing it into the next steps are the foundations of meaningful stakeholder engagement.

There are numerous ways to engage the stakeholders, depending on the timing and audience one or multiple methods will be most impactful

- Zoom, In person, Pre- recorded , Survey, Public comment
- If selecting in person, consider incentives such as providing lunch or light snacks
- Consider joining another groups agenda (ie., attend a local city council meeting to communicate and invite or update)

What makes the experience valuable?

Equity in listening and sharing, information is appropriate for the audience, how comments will be solicited and implemented, it happens in a timely manner

What makes the experience not good?

- Limited conversation with attendees (under 5 minutes of conversation)
- Over technical information that does not match the knowledge of the participants

The content, the message

Before engaging the public on NARPS we strongly suggest providing information and context on nutrients and the basic operations of WWTF's. Use clear language, photos and include relatable content to the audience. For example if it is a population of homeowners or policy makers adapt the relatable content for the stakeholders to grasp. Use our [NARP 101 powerpoint](#) as a template or reach out to the Clean Water Team to support the curation of content for your engagement.

Reporting to IEPA in NARP document

[Use the following reporting form](#) to explain your stakeholder engagement to include in your NARP. The [Simple NARP Tool](#) can be used to format your NARP document.

How and when to reach out to us

We are here for you! The CWT invites you to reach out with any questions or opportunities to partner in the execution of your stakeholder engagement planning or spreading the word. Our expertise allows us to make recommendations on language, invitations, and identifying stakeholders to listen and share with. Please feel free to email Mila Marshall, Clean Water Advocate at mila.marshall@sierraclub.org.