

**Anacostia Restoration Partnership**

**Draft Communications Strategy**

**April, 19, 2009**



## Introduction

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According to the USEPA's useful guide for developing communications plans for watershed efforts, the key steps are:

- Identify the driving forces that create the need for the Communications Plan. These driving forces are used to determine the Plan's objectives.
- Understand the audience for the communications by conducting research
- Create a "message"
- Identify the best approaches for communicating the message
- Implement the Plan and evaluate the implementation.

This draft Communications Plan follows this outline. Because USEPA's reference work contains an almost encyclopedic review of all the possible communications strategies and how they should be implemented, this plan focuses on the specific actions that the Partnership has chosen to implement and why.

## Objectives of the Communications Plan

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It is important to identify the driving forces that create a need for communications. The Anacostia Watershed Restoration Partnership, which includes many government agencies and many key stakeholders, has many communications needs. Identifying every need may not be practical or beneficial. The Partnership's *MAIN* driving forces are the following communications needs:

1. Communicate with key public officials, starting with their staff, about the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Plan in support of gaining the policy, funding and political support needed to implement a long-term and expensive plan.
2. Help opinion leaders by providing clear information about the watershed's condition and needs.
3. Inform the general public about the condition of the watershed, why they should be interested in helping the watershed and what they can do to help.
4. Inform public officials, opinion leaders, and the general public about the Partnership so they have confidence that the Partnership can implement what is likely to be a massive restoration effort.

Because resources are presently and are expected to be very limited in the future, the Communications Plan focuses on the most cost effective approaches to achieving these objectives. Generally, the plan focuses on improving the Partnership's basic communication

tools, and supplementing relatively passive (and cheap) basic approaches with less passive approaches that insure that the basic communications tools “reach out” to a wider audience.

## Audience Research

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It is often said that communications planning must be based on an understanding of the audience. There was not time and resources to conduct detailed new research into Partnership audiences. Fortunately, in 2004, the Summit Fund of Washington and two other foundations conducted a study public knowledge and opinion by conducting eight focus groups and four in-depth interviews with stakeholders. These funders hired a very reputable public opinion research firm, Lake Research Partners, to conduct the study (found at <http://lakesnellperry.com/new/pdf/AnacostiaFG.pdf>). The study’s findings continue to be highly relevant, and the key findings are presented below.

### *Key Findings*

While each stakeholder group in the study is distinct, important themes emerged in just about every focus group. These general insights are helpful to consider when reaching out to a broad audience:

- Local Parks and Waterways Are Important to Area Residents

Most participants in the study said they value their neighborhood parks and waterways. They say that having access to natural resources is an important part of living in the Washington, DC metropolitan region. They say that they use their local parks, streams, creeks, and rivers for recreational activities on a regular basis, and they care about keeping these local resources clean.

- Most Are Unfamiliar with the Anacostia River

Except for those who live in neighborhoods that border the Anacostia, most citizens in this study know very little about the river. This is even true for Capitol Hill residents, many of whom live within two miles of the Anacostia. Citizens in Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties know the least about the river. For most, their main interaction with the Anacostia River is driving over it. Few have ever seen the river up close or used it for recreational purposes. The exception to this is residents who live in neighborhoods that border the river.

- The One Fact that Everyone Knows is that the Anacostia River is Polluted

All participants in this study seem to know the Anacostia River is polluted and no one is surprised to hear the water is neither swimmable nor fishable. Few, however, knew how bad the pollution is, or that the Anacostia ranks among the most polluted rivers in the country. Most find this information alarming. Most can locate the Anacostia River on a map (mainly

because they drive over it), but some participants confuse it later in the discussion with the Potomac River.

Few participants have ever heard of the Anacostia Watershed and virtually no one knew they lived within the watershed. Once explained, the concept of a watershed focused attention on the role participants play in the health of the river and is a key component to becoming engaged on this issue.

Because they have so little contact with the river, most say their impressions are formed through media stories, which tend to be negative. They cite the crime along the river and the poverty of the neighborhoods that border it. Others say there is no easy access to the river. Most perceive the areas along the Anacostia to be neglected, dirty, and unsafe. The one significant departure from these negative impressions is the primarily positive images held by residents who live in communities adjacent to the river. These people tend to take a nostalgic view and tell about fishing and swimming or simply sitting in chairs looking at the river. Even with the pollution and crime – which they acknowledge – they still think of it as “their neighborhood river” and value it. Maryland residents also have positive feelings about their own local creeks (e.g., Sligo and Paint Branch) similar to those of DC residents who live near the Anacostia.

- Few Know Who Is Responsible for the Pollution or for Cleaning Up the River

A sticking point for many citizens is their lack of knowledge about the causes of the pollution in the Anacostia. Since they do not know the major contributors to the river’s pollution, they do not know who is at fault. Some citizens wrongly assume that much of the pollution comes from large industries along the river, but cannot name any of these industries or know where they are located. None of the citizens knew about the combined sewer system in Washington, DC and how, during heavy rainstorms, it discharges raw sewage into the Anacostia. Many believe that people in and around Washington, DC throw trash into the river, and that is part of the reason the river is so dirty. Some believe cleaning up the Anacostia is the responsibility of the DC government since they must own the river.

An important insight from the focus groups is that citizens see that the job of restoring the Anacostia is much bigger than they are. Many initially do not see a role in this task –they assume that a large government agency must handle it because there is nothing individual citizens can do. However, when they learn that they live in the Anacostia Watershed– and that what they do in their own homes and neighborhoods can affect the river – some are willing to see a role for themselves. Some are also willing to take responsibility for restoring the river. Yet they are not willing to act alone – many citizens in this study first want to know there are others acting to restore the river before they are willing to participate.

Finally, citizens see a role for schools and children in raising awareness about this issue. They feel it is appropriate for their local schools to study the river and watershed to inform their children about pollution and the challenges facing the Anacostia. Likewise, many say they

would like to receive information from the school (through their children) about what they can do to help restoration efforts.

- Many are Willing to Take Specific Kinds of Actions

Once many learn they are in the Anacostia Watershed, they begin to make new connections to the river. Many participants in this research say they would support and become involved in efforts (both through direct action and by supporting policies) that would help restore the watershed. These action steps vary by audience and by their perceived connection to the river. The most likely actions they identify are signing a petition; attending events in their neighborhood or along the river to learn more; visiting a Web site about restoring the Anacostia; joining an e-mail action list of activists; and participating in a community clean-up day along the river or their local tributary. As previously mentioned, citizens believe it is appropriate for their local schools to study the river and watershed to inform their children about pollution and the challenges facing the Anacostia. Likewise, many say they would like to receive information from the school (through their children) about what they can do to help restoration efforts.

- Building Support for Restoring the Anacostia River and Watershed

Residents of Montgomery and Prince George's Counties know less about the Anacostia River and hold negative associations with it. They focus on the crime, the pollution, and the poverty of the surrounding areas. They only know where the river is because they drive over it and describe it as dirty-looking. They feel much more connected to the Potomac River, the Chesapeake Bay, and to their local streams and creeks. However, once they learn that their local streams and creeks feed into the Anacostia River, they begin to make connections. Indeed, if Montgomery and Prince George's County residents are convinced to support the restoration of the Anacostia it will be, in part, because they understand they are part of the watershed.

### *Recommendations of the 2004 Study*

- All audiences seem inspired by the river's potential.

Information showing the potential of a restored Anacostia River – with water that is swimmable and fishable – interests all audiences in this study. Many participants consider the river to be a neglected and underutilized resource and quickly see the benefits of restoring it. Even participants who are disconnected from the river say they would be likely to spend some recreational time along the river once it is restored. Most need to know (or be reminded of) the benefits of a restored river for themselves and others in their community.

- Explain or show through images the Anacostia watershed to Maryland residents.

Explain the concept of a watershed or show through maps and pictures where Maryland residents fit into the watershed. This information is essential for Maryland residents who live

far from the river. They feel disconnected currently and wonder why they should care. Importantly, also talk about how their local creek and stream feeds into the Anacostia River and eventually into the Chesapeake Bay. Watershed information may need to be supplemented by an explanation of the general scope of the problem: who is responsible (in a shared context); what steps are being taken; what steps they can take to help; and how their efforts fit into the overall restoration planning. Without some explanation of the problem and the solution, many citizens are less likely to become involved placing the onus of responsibility on others they view as larger violators (e.g., big industry, Maryland residents upstream, DC residents downstream, etc).

- Focus on economic opportunity, balanced development, and affordable housing issues for DC residents, local foundations, and community development organizations.

Most DC residents, foundations, and community development organizations in the study found information about new economic investments and development in their communities of great interest. This is where most of their concerns lay with restoring the Anacostia. Without addressing their concerns, the perceived loss of affordable housing and the increased threat of gentrification become serious barriers to involvement in this effort. Most want to see these concerns addressed upfront as restoration efforts continue and not to be left solely as an afterthought.

### *Conclusions on Audience Research*

While it is important to understand the audience that will be receiving the message, it can seem overwhelming to consider reaching everyone in the Anacostia watershed. It is important to remember that experts in the field of communication do NOT believe that everyone must be reached before an idea is accepted and acted on. They note that there are several types of people within each group:

- Innovators are often seen as venturesome. They frequently have high education levels, high social status, and upward social mobility. They are usually better able than others to cope with uncertainty and high risk.
- Early adopters are second only to innovators in the speed with which they adopt a new behavior. Others often view them as decisive and influential.
- The early majority is the segment of the audience that is more deliberate than the innovators or early adopters when making decisions. People in this category tend to be cautious and seek a lot of information on an issue before they make a decision.
- The late majority is the largest of the five categories. These people are conservative, often set in their ways, and skeptical about trying new things and adopting new behaviors.

- Laggards are the most resistant to change. They are the least likely to adopt a new behavior no matter how hard you try to educate and motivate them.

Many outreach campaigns fail because organizers believe they need to focus heavily on targeting the late majority and laggards segments since they encompass the greatest number of people. However, the late majority and laggards are the hardest people to reach with information and the hardest to convince that they should change their behavior. It is much easier to reach and convince innovators or early adopters. Once they've been "reached," their peers will be more likely to understand the issue or change their behavior. While it may seem counterintuitive, when a new idea or behavior is adopted by roughly 15 to 20 percent of the audience, it will then have the critical mass it needs to permeate the rest of the audience, by word of mouth and observation. Communicators should focus their efforts on the easiest people to reach, who will then spread the message into their own spheres of influence. In this case, "preaching to the choir" is not a bad idea, as the choir can be relied on to sing. Therefore, it is important for any of our audiences to try to reach opinion leaders.

Based on this research, this plan proposes that the Partnership continue its focus on a couple of groups that it has already begun to try to influence, as well as to begin implementing outreach to some others:

### **Continuing efforts**

1. The leadership and members of existing subwatershed stewardship groups (the choir) implement some beginning steps for communicating with some additional discreet groups:
2. The Anacostia Congressional delegation

### **Begin to expand to new target audiences**

3. Parents, teachers, and leaders of children's and youth groups who are concerned about "nature deficit disorder" issue (a new group to help that they understand that they live in the Anacostia watershed and it is a valuable resource for their children, and therefore, worth restoring.)
4. Architects and engineers (who may provide thought leadership with builders and developers on the issue of green building)
5. Key personnel in federal, state and local highway and road departments. (key to green streets efforts).
6. Local elected officials (who will likely be asked to fund a large portion of the implementation of the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Plan)

7. Local amateur nature photographers (who already know the Anacostia as a valuable resource, and who can provide a resource that may be critical in the effort to restore the watershed—beautiful and poignant photos)<sup>1</sup>

The Partnership probably cannot conduct major, full scale communications campaigns with all these groups, but this plan proposes what it is hoped is a logical first steps.

## The Message(s)

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For a complicated undertaking like restoring a watershed, probably no single message will suffice, and yet there is a need to provide an overall message from the Partnership. While one might think that they know it, the Lake study pointed to one central and important fact, residents in the Maryland portion of the watershed (and probably many residents of the District of Columbia) do not know that they live in the Anacostia watershed and that their development and their behavior need to be modified to not only restore the river, but its tributary branches and streams. Therefore, an appropriate overall message for the Partnership is that the the Anacostia watershed is our home. A potential message that the watershed’s innovators might adopt is: “the Anacostia Watershed starts in my backyard.” This emphasizes that the watershed matters to residents, and that what they do in their own neighborhoods and even yards, makes a big difference.

The message for various subgroups would focus on the value to that group of having a restored Anacostia in their backyards—for example, for their kids to experience nature. In addition, the messages should articulate what actions the audiences should take. Messages that are vague or that don’t contain specific calls to action won’t result in action. So the specific messages tailored to the groups should all follow as similar format:

1. It’s your watershed
2. Your watershed provides a specific benefit to you, or could provide a specific benefit to you if it were restored.
3. Here is the specific action that you should take.

So, for example, to a parent the message might be: 1. This is your watershed, 2. Your child could benefit from increased opportunities to be outside if the water weren’t so polluted so please get involved with your local subwatershed group to advocate for more LID projects. This message benefits by saying “what’s in it for them,” and what we would specifically like them to do. Each of the new targeted audiences would have a similar message developed for them.

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<sup>1</sup> This plan is not specifically addressing litterers because of the ongoing work of the Alice Ferguson Foundation to study litterers and conduct a communications campaign to reduce litter.

While the Executive Director has proposed these messages, it should be noted that Anacostia green groups continue to work on developing a communications message and hope to engage a public relations firm to help them do so. It seems wise to continue to coordinate with them in hopes that the messages can be coordinated and consistent.

## **Packaging and Delivering the Message**

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Because resources are presently and are expected to be very limited in the future, this Communications Plan focuses on the most cost effective approaches to achieving these objectives. Generally, the plan focuses on improving the Partnership's basic communication tools, and supplementing relatively passive (and cheap) basic approaches with less passive approaches that insure that the basic communications tools "reach out." This Plan proposes the following specific communications projects, while recognizing that every member of the Partnership must rise to the occasion when ad hoc opportunities for "earned media" and other communications arise:

- Create a professionally designed logo that incorporates a brief "message" (and consistent fonts and color scheme) for the Partnership's publications and use them consistently so that the Partnership's publications have a similar "look and feel" and message.
- Update the Partnership's Web site with a professional design, incorporating the Partnership logo and design (additional recommendations for the Web site are included below)
  - Update the existing two page brochure with the new logo and color scheme
  - Annually update the Action Agenda, reporting on Accomplishments, new Actions, and the condition of the watershed.
- Continue regular briefings to Congressional staff and explore the possibility of providing similar briefings for local elected officials in support of the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Plan.

These projects are relatively inexpensive, but with the exception of the briefings for elected officials, also relatively passive. For example, the public must come to the Web site before they get the information from it. It is recommended that the Partnership also engage in a couple of other strategies to bring additional people to the Web site:

- Bring people to the Web site by the improvement and disciplined use of the calendar function. Anacostia.net's calendar should be THE place where the Partners and other stakeholders post and get their information about Anacostia dates and events, including information about events where Partnership information can be distributed.

- Bring the public to the Web site by including a “what you can do” section for citizens focusing on trash, rain barrels, rain gardens, e.g. projects specific to them.
- Aggressively use the Anacostia.net listserv to alert people when there are important new items and features of the Web site.
- Obtain training for Partnership members in the use of “earned media”—taking advantage of news media outlets to get its message out, through:
  - Op-eds
  - Letters to the Editor
  - Media coverage of Partnership events
  - Courting smaller news outlets such as the Gazette newspapers.

Some additional rationales for using earned media follow.

- Conduct advocacy training for Anacostia Watershed Citizens’ Advisory Council and members of the subwatershed groups

Finally, this plan proposes that the Partnership implement some specific projects that target some of the new key audiences.

1. Parents, teachers, and leaders of children’s and youth groups: Create a web-based map of the watershed (that helps convey that the watershed is in our backyard) which shows recreational amenities near the river and the streams. Depict on the map the hiking and biking trails, the canoe and rowing facilities, and the facilities nearby that would be “kid friendly” (e.g. the Arboretum, Brookside Gardens, the College Park Aviation Museum) with web links to the web based information about these facilities. As a means of engaging the National Park Service and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, ask them to help with this project. Not only would such a map hopefully bring an additional group to the Web site, but would encourage the view that the Anacostia watershed has many amenities that will help parents and other adults get children outside.

2. Architects and engineers: conduct a workshop in the spring of 2009 for members of these professions to help them provide leadership in the building and development industry on providing more green building.

3. Key personnel in federal, state and local highway and road departments: Likewise, conduct a workshop on “green street” initiatives both locally and nationwide, to engage these officials in the effort to apply the principles of environmental site design to highways and streets.

4. Local elected officials: work with the staff of key environmental leaders on the County Councils and Washington, DC Council to give regular briefings to interested Council people on the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Plan and on other Anacostia initiatives, such as toxics remediation, at appropriate junctures. The Executive Director should work with the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Plan Project Development Team to identify the key times where these briefings should occur.

5. Local amateur nature photographers: Amateur photographers may be key overlooked resource within the Anacostia watershed. Solicit their best work for a showing and use it to produce a beautiful calendar that can be used to promote the Partnership.

The Partnership will also develop a database of people with whom it will periodically distribute written information, with press people on the list.

Because it is unlikely that the Partnership will have the resources to pay for advertising, it must engage in an effort to “earn” media coverage of its issues and events. Where possible, the Partnership must try to get coverage in the news media: newspapers, TV, magazines, radio. Opportunities to place a message in the media include informational news stories, people features, issue analyses, PSAs, interview programs, call-in shows, editorial columns, and feature items related to sports, recreation, or outdoor living. The future meetings of the Leadership Council will be great opportunities for earned media.

Because the opportunities for earned media arise on a pretty ad hoc basis, and the Partnership will need to take advantage of them as the opportunities arise. No one Partner will be aware of or be able to take advantage of the opportunities to get earned media. And the more Partners who have their relationships with members of the media the more opportunities can be tapped. This Plan proposes that the Partnership contract with an expert on earned media (or seek a volunteer expert from an organization like American Rivers) for the purpose of conducting training for the members of the Partnership on earned media.

### *The Partnership’s Web site*

The Partnership’s Web site, Anacostia.net, has been improved greatly over the past few months, but still could use a professional design. The following are specific recommendations regarding the Web site:

- The Web site should be designed to be easy to use for the general public and targeted audiences. To the extent that the Web site must also serve the needs of Partnership members and staff consideration should be given to creating separate parts of the Web site for the public and to support the internal work of the Partnership.

- The front page of the Web site should give a newcomer to it a clear idea of what it is about in a matter of seconds.
- The front page of the Web site should be clean and simple and not contain any unnecessary elements.
- The Web site should be user tested.
- The navigation of the Web site should be clear with tabbed sections that allow various targeted audiences to navigate easily to information they need.
- Dated material needs to be in a section that is clearly marked as an archive resource.
- The site should enable the Partnership to understand the number of visitors that enter it and what elements of the Web site they use and don't use.
- The design of the Web site should incorporate the Partnership's logo and be consistent with the design of its other outreach materials.
- The site should judiciously make use of links but should promote not only the Partnership by including appropriate links to our Partners' Web sites.
- The Web site should be beautiful, appropriately incorporating photos of the river.

It is anticipated that the Partnership will seek grant funding for updating the Web site.

### **Addendum: Schedule, including Important Upcoming Communications Opportunities**

The following is a schedule of upcoming communications opportunities and tasks (as well as just a few of the opportunities that the Partnership has taken in the past) and specific actions the Partnership will take to take advantage of the opportunities.

	<b>Date</b>	<b>Opportunity or Task</b>	<b>Work Needed to take Advantage of Opportunity or to Complete Task</b>
1.	September 2007	Congressional Boat Tour	Press release, event with news coverage
2.	April 2008	Partnership is a sponsors of the Anacostia Watershed Society Annual Cleanup	Logo included in Society's website, event announcements, event T-Shirts, Partnership has display at event
3.	September	Release of the First Action Agenda,	Press release, event with news

	2008	Governor's Visit to the Anacostia	coverage, Partnership mails Action Agenda to all elected officials in the watershed
4.	December 2008	Washington Times Article	Published letter to the editor
5.	January 2009	No Child Left Inside Inaugural Event	Partnership sponsors highlighted aspect of the event (planting of a grove of trees) and is included in event announcements, banners, and has tables at the event.
6.	March 2009	AWCAC Advocacy Workshop	Well attended workshop draws many local activists
7.	April 2009	Partnership sponsors workshop on redevelopment LID	Partnership organizes workshop for nearly 100 people including some in the business, engineering and architecture community that have not been involved before
8.	April 2009	Partnership is a sponsor of the Anacostia Watershed Society Annual Cleanup	Partnership logo and website included in event promotions, reusable bag given to thousands of participants. Partnership also has display of Anacostia fish which attracts many people to its displays.
9.	May 2009	Meet with Earth Conservation Corps, Living Classrooms, and Anacostia Watershed Society	Explore ways in which the Partnership can be helpful to their work with parents, teachers, and children
10.	May 2009	Identify "earned media" expert to give mini-workshop at June Steering Committee meeting	
11.	June 2009	University of Maryland Engineers without Borders (EWB) Event in Conjunction with Town of Edmonston	Tasks: Work with EWB to generate press interest, particularly by local Gazette newspapers and work to bring local elected officials (Representative Chris Van Hollen) to event.
12.	June 13, 2009	Follow up AWCAC Advocacy workshop	
13.	June 25, 2009	Miniworkshop on "earned media" in conjunction with Steering Committee Meeting	
14.	May, June, July,	Tasks: Preparation of Action Agenda with new Partnership logo	Expand coverage of Action Agenda beyond Partnership so that it

	September 2009		becomes an Anacostia “community” Action Agenda, delivers information about the condition of the watershed and solidifies the message described above
15.	June-July 2009	Tasks: Extensive elected official and editorial board briefings on Anacostia Watershed Restoration Plan	Congress, local elected officials, etc., Washington Post, Washington Times, Gazette newspapers (work with MWCOG communications staff to develop full list.
16.	June-July – September 2009	Tasks: Build data base for mailing written documents to elected officials and other interested parties. Proposed timeframe makes the list for use to announce events 17, 18, and 20	
17.	September 2009	Public meeting on draft Anacostia Watershed Restoration Plan	Tasks: Work with US Army Corps of Engineers to develop press announcements and interest in the public meeting. Insure that local elected officials are aware of and encouraged to participate in the event. Mail invite to all elected officials.
18.	October 2009	Major Event—Work with Capital Riverfront Business Improvement District to focus their annual meeting on Anacostia restoration, including approximately 400 business and community leaders. Release Action Agenda at this time.	Tasks: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Work with BID to schedule top level speakers</li> <li>2. Work with BID to insure attendance of key elected officials</li> <li>3. Work with BID to create press attention for event</li> <li>4. Work with BID to insure speakers and other aspects of meeting address key Anacostia issues.</li> </ol>
19.	October 2009	Green Street Workshop	Tasks: Work to insure that as many transportation officials participate as possible
20.	November 2009	Release of the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Plan	Tasks: <p>Work with US Army Corps of Engineers to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Insure attendance of key</li> </ol>

			<p>elected officials</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>2. Try to insure press attention through editorial board visit 3 weeks before hand</li><li>3. Plan innovative release events where local elected officials highlight elements of the plan that are important and relevant to their constituents.</li></ol>
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