

COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAM



CASE STUDY

Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper Trains Volunteer Ambassadors on Water Pollution Prevention

Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper (BNW) is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and restoring the region's most valuable natural asset: water. Over the past 29 years, they've tackled some of the region's biggest freshwater challenges such as cleaning up toxic sediment, eliminating sewage overflows, restoring critical habitat, and advocating for the long-term health of the Great Lakes. Their actions protect drinking water, connect people to waterways and contribute to a thriving water-based economy. In 2016, BNW was recognized for their proven track record of effectively managing Federal, State, and local grants and working in partnership across diverse disciplines, earning them the prestigious Thies International Riverprize from the International River Foundation.

Challenge

The Buffalo and Niagara Rivers have been impaired by more than a century of heavy industrial pollution. Their toxic sediment, containing PCBs, PAH, industrial organics and heavy metals from industrial sources, resulted in the EPA designating the rivers as Areas of Concern (AOC) in 1987. In addition to legacy contaminants, Buffalo's waterways are severely degraded by polluted runoff from urban point and nonpoint sources flowing through combined and separated sewer overflows. The resulting bacterial levels, trash, and odors make local waterways un-swimmable, unattractive and dangerous to recreational users, fish, and wildlife alike.

Solution

BNW developed a Volunteer Ambassador Program to train dedicated volunteers to represent the organization within the Niagara River Watershed to increase capacity and raise awareness of water pollution issues while educating citizens on direct actions leading to reductions in water pollution. The program resulted in pollution prevention through both education and direct action. Ambassadors were trained to lead groups of volunteers in direct pollution prevention actions in three existing BNW Programs: Shoreline Cleanups, where volunteers directly remove harmful trash from shorelines; The Riverwatch Volunteer Monitoring Program, where citizens collect data from local streams, which is published in an annual report raising awareness of water quality issues; and the RestoreCorps Program, where volunteers plant trees and shrubs along urban waterways to reduce pollution from stormwater runoff.

Long term, the goal of the BNW Volunteer Ambassador Program is to continue expansion and become self-sustaining with Veteran Ambassadors intended to recruit and train future Ambassadors, creating a self-perpetuating model to sustain and increase the number of stewards that will help protect local waterways, prevent pollution, and improve the health of local communities. BNW intends for the program to be used as a model volunteer program for other organizations.

CHALLENGE

- Raise awareness of water pollution issues while educating citizens on direct actions leading to reductions in water pollution

SOLUTION

- BNW developed a Volunteer Ambassador Program, training dedicated volunteers to represent the organization, therefore raising its capacity to foster awareness while educating citizens on direct actions leading to reductions in water pollution
- Ambassadors were trained to lead groups of volunteers in direct pollution prevention actions including shoreline cleanups, collecting water quality data, and planting riparian buffers

RESULTS

- BNW developed a Volunteer Ambassador training program including an introduction video, PowerPoint, direct outreach training, and handbook
- Fourteen Ambassadors completed the program and an additional four will join them this year
- The Ambassadors attended 44 community events, engaged in 28 shoreline cleanups, and 5 restoration plantings. They engaged a total of 546 cleanup volunteers, 170 restoration volunteers, and held 11 trainings for BNW programs

CONTACT INFO

WENDY PATERSON
Sr. Community Engagement Coordinator
(716)852-7483 Ext. 26
bnwaterkeeper.org/programs/ambassador/

Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper
721 Main Street
Buffalo, New York 14203

TESTIMONIAL

Results

BNW created a Volunteer Ambassador Program Training Program that can be used to train newly recruited Ambassadors. The training focuses on BNW's history and mission, their various projects and programs, types of pollution in the watershed, and how to conduct community outreach. Structurally it consisted of a Volunteer Ambassador Program Introduction Video, a 30 minute PowerPoint, a direct outreach skit and training, and a handbook reviewed by Ambassadors. BNW successfully recruited 15 highly qualified Volunteer Ambassadors, which surpassed the expected outcome of 10, and was completed by 14/15 Ambassadors. The organization created a pre-training Ambassador survey regarding the BNR mission and program taken by 14 of the Ambassadors and their average score increased from 83.6% to 88% post program.

From there, the Ambassadors attended 44 community events, engaged in 28 Shoreline Cleanups, and 5 Gill Creek Restoration Planting events. Through these events, Ambassadors engaged a total of 546 cleanup volunteers (out of the expected 180-200) and 170 restoration volunteers (out of the expected 90-100). They also participated and helped to recruit volunteers for several habitat restoration events.

Overall, BNW offered more trainings than expected including 2 Riverwatch trainings, attended by 67 people; 4 Shoreline Cleanup Site captain Trainings, attended by 39 people; and 5 Shoreline Restoration Trainings, attended by 17 people.

In addition, BNW designed, printed and distributed 300 of about 3,000 Rain Barrel Brochures; ordered specialized t-shirts for the BNW Ambassadors; and created an online registration tool for Volunteer Ambassadors. Overall, the Ambassadors engaged in 2,935 conversations at community and educational program events and donated 348 hours of the time conducting direct outreach. They also spent at least 195 hours volunteering at the Cleanups, Plantings, and Riverwatch programs.

Online Media:

- [Website](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Instagram](#)

BNW Volunteers plant trees as part of RestoreCorps Program



"I knew I would enjoy the outdoor activities but was surprised to find out how enjoyable the indoor tabling events could be. Especially the ones involving discussions with young people such as the UB Sustainability Fair. We talked to so many environmentally aware and motivated college kids that it gave me hope that our environmental efforts might be more within reach than they sometimes seem."

- Michelle Johnson, Volunteer Ambassador

"Working this past year as a Volunteer Ambassador for Buffalo Niagara WATERKEEPER has been fun and rewarding. It was very enjoyable to meet members of the community at tabling events and to share the goals and programs of Buffalo Niagara WATERKEEPER with them. The program allowed me to get back my "roots" as an environmental scientist. I look forward to being part of the program for years to come and to help continue the good and important work of Buffalo Niagara WATERKEEPER."

- Lex Maccubbin, BNW Volunteer Ambassador

NYSP2I PARTNERS



New York Manufacturing Extension Partnership

Funding provided by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

© 2018 Rochester Institute of Technology
Any opinions, results, findings, and/or interpretations of data contained herein are the responsibility of Rochester Institute of Technology and its NYS Pollution Prevention Institute and do not represent the opinions, interpretation or policy of the State.

For more information please contact us:

111 Lomb Memorial Drive, Bldg. 78
Rochester, NY 14623

Tel: 585-475-2512

Web: nysp2i.rit.edu

E-mail: nysp2i@rit.edu

