

COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAM



CASE STUDY

Riverkeeper: Empowering Gowanus Canal and Newtown Creek Communities to Prevent Stormwater Pollution

Founded 50 years ago by a group of fishermen determined to reclaim the declining Hudson River from polluters, Riverkeeper has grown into the river's most effective advocate. Riverkeeper's vision is for clean, swimmable waters, a Hudson River teeming with life, and safe and abundant drinking water supplies. To reach their goals, Riverkeeper performs scientific research, enforces environmental laws, advocates for legal protections, and organizes and educates grassroots activists.

Challenge

As the most densely populated urban waterfront in the nation, New York City's waterways are plagued by toxics, sewage, garbage and debris. Each year, billions of gallons of polluted stormwater empty into waterways when it rains - carrying the oils, contaminants, and garbage from our streets, parking lots, and industrial sites. Communities have an important role to play "street level" in keeping their waterways clean by learning about wastewater systems and where their storm drains empty. Environmental justice communities are disproportionately impacted as they struggle for open space opportunities and recreational access to their waterways, as exemplified by communities along the polluted Gowanus Canal and Newtown Creek.

The National Marine Debris Monitoring Program found that 49% of debris nationally has origins from land based sources and most is preventable. Studies have shown that many people believe that once stormwater disappears down the drain, it goes somewhere to be treated. There is a clear need for strong community education initiatives on a "street level" to keep litter out of our waters.

Solution

Riverkeeper conducted a community-wide education effort through a storm drain stenciling initiative in the neighborhoods surrounding Gowanus Canal and Newtown Creek, working with four partners: the Gowanus Canal Conservancy (GCC), the Newtown Creek Alliance (NCA), the SWIM Coalition, and the New York City Soil and Water Conservation District. These longtime partners are well positioned to reach out to members of the communities -- families, homeowner associations, schools, youth clubs, and service organizations -- and engaged them in this project. Riverkeeper's plan included the development of an user-friendly Community Tool Kit for project replication that will empower local partners to host stenciling events on their own in the future and in other neighborhoods.

Results

During the project period, partners NCA and GCC assessed their neighborhoods and identified lists of locations to map and stencil. A total of 248 storm drains were mapped and listed by NCA (174 storm drains) and GCC (74). Out of the 248 mapped drains, NCA stenciled 138 storm drains, and GCC stenciled 74 storm drains. The stenciling occurred during six separate events with 72 volunteers.

CHALLENGE

- Raise awareness of the environmental issues related to the New York Harbor, call attention to the freshwater resources in the region and educate the public

SOLUTION

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RESULTS

- Partners NCA and GCC assessed their neighborhoods and identified lists of locations to map and stencil. A total of 248 storm drains were mapped and listed by NCA (174 storm drains) and GCC (74)
- Riverkeeper created an outreach pamphlet with information about sewer and stormwater systems, where storm drains flow and the need for stenciling
- Riverkeeper created and distributed a Storm Drain Manual in English and Spanish that can be utilized by other communities to conduct storm drain stenciling events across New York State
- A "how to" training webinar was developed by Riverkeeper



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TESTIMONIAL

"The funding we received from NYS2I enabled us to pilot an innovative stormwater education and marine debris reduction initiative in North Brooklyn with our partners Gowanus Canal Conservancy, Newtown Creek Alliance, the Stormwater Infrastructure Matters Coalition (SWIM), and the New York City Soil and Water Conservation District. Together we created an impactful and fun initiative to engage adults and youth alike about the infrastructure below their feet and how street litter ends up in our waterways."

– Jen Benson, Outreach Coordinator
Riverkeeper

Visual assessments of the drain, surrounding street, and the respective waterways were conducted by partners after all events were complete. A post- project digital survey was sent via e-mail to a total of 72 participating community groups and educators who participated in stenciling projects to assess the overall educational impact following their participation in a stenciling event. 71% of those that responded indicated they have a significantly better understanding of stormwater management as a result of their participation.



Riverkeeper volunteers complete stenciling effort in the Gowanus Canal area

Riverkeeper created an outreach pamphlet with information about sewer and stormwater systems, where storm drains flow and the need for stenciling. Over 200 pamphlets have been distributed within the community. Riverkeeper also created and distributed a Storm Drain Manual in English and Spanish that can be utilized by other communities to conduct storm drain stenciling events across New York State. To date, over 100 Manuals have been disseminated to those looking to replicate these pollution prevention efforts.

Riverkeeper developed a "how to" training webinar that includes an educational overview of New York storm sewer issues, how to organize a stenciling event, and how to conduct the stenciling itself, and uploaded it to Riverkeeper's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAQqFNyX9Wo&t=5s>



Resources

Website

<https://www.riverkeeper.org/>

Blog

<https://www.riverkeeper.org/blogs/>

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/HudsonRiverkeeper/>

LinkedIn

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/riverkeeper>

Twitter

<https://twitter.com/riverkeeper>

Instagram

<https://www.instagram.com/riverkeeper/>

Project Partners



NYSP2I PARTNERS



New York Manufacturing Extension Partnership

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