

A Recipe for Reaching Out

The Challenge

Citizen participants in urban and community forestry activities, forums and issue discussions rarely reflect the diverse population of the communities where they live. Natural resource professionals commonly perceive the lack of participation by under-represented groups as a lack of interest in natural resource issues. Urban forestry researchers at Michigan State University and the USDA Forest Service have found this perception to be incorrect. Citizen participation is directly related to access and opportunity. By utilizing an effective outreach model, natural resource professionals can create more effective opportunities for public involvement and encourage greater participation by under-represented groups.

The Solution

To identify methods for increasing public participation, eleven "Dialogue on Diversity" outreach meetings were held across the country. People previously uninvolved with urban and community forestry were invited to participate. Facilitated discussions helped determine why they were not involved, what they wanted from urban and community forestry, and how they wanted to be involved. Local forestry professionals were also brought in to gain additional insight from their reactions to the comments shared by citizen participants. From these meetings, a "Recipe for Reaching Out" emerged as a model that foresters and other natural resource professionals might use to engage different segments of society.

Resulting Benefits

The meetings were eye-opening. Researchers found that many non-engaged groups are very interested in trees and urban forests. However, most people did not know what urban forestry meant. They were excited to learn that

Unless we reach and involve more diverse groups and citizens in our efforts, urban and community forestry programs will cease to be relevant to most Americans even though they live in urban and metropolitan areas.

A Recipe for Reaching Out

Foresters and other natural resource professionals with agencies and nonprofit groups can use this recipe to create an opportunity for people who traditionally have not been involved in urban and community forestry. The information on this card is taken from the following publication: McDonough, Maureen; Russell, Casey; Nancarrow, Lee; Burban, Lisa. 2003. Dialogue on Diversity: Broadening the voice in urban and community forestry. SA-18-03-03. Saint Paul, MN: USDA Forest Service, Northeastern Area, State and Private Forestry and Michigan State University.

INGREDIENTS

- Local partner and/or trusted community member
- Specific meeting, event, or activity
- Intense outreach, phone calls and personal contacts
- Diverse community members
- Good contact records
- Diverse foresters/natural resource professionals (when available)
- Convenient, neutral location
- Trained facilitators
- Refreshments (if budget allows)

SPECIAL TOOLS NEEDED

- Lots of time
- Energy
- Patience
- Enthusiasm
- Commitment
- Creative ideas
- Two-way communication
- Willingness to nurture and compromise
- Ability to expand beyond comfort zone



- 1) Have a goal in mind. Before you start, spend some time thinking about the type of activity in which you want to diversify involvement. For example, does your grant program accurately reflect all constituents? Are your workshops always attended by the same people?
- 2) Find a local partner and identify community leaders. Talk to church leaders, community groups, neighborhood associations, school system administrators, chambers of commerce, garden clubs, and youth organizations. Churches and chambers of commerce may not have a direct role in urban forestry, but their members are organized, representative of their community, and are often active and concerned. Once given access to natural resources information and ideas for natural resources projects, these groups can serve as effective partners in spreading the word on natural resources management.
- 3) Identify a specific meeting, event, or activity. It is very important to involve community leaders in actual event or meeting planning. This will ensure that you don't organize something no one is interested in.
- 4) Identify and work in locations that are comfortable, convenient, and neutral for the community. Make sure the dates and times are also convenient. Work with your community contact because they will often be the best source of advice on these special considerations.



"A Recipe for Success" is a user-friendly approach to providing natural resource managers with the tools necessary to broaden citizen participation in urban forestry programs.

foresters and arborists were willing to assist them with community projects.

- Citizens generally trust foresters and want to be informed and learn technical information from them. This demonstrates a high level of trust in foresters by the public. However, the citizens do not want to be 'talked at.' Citizens valued the opportunity to have open, two-way communication with natural resources professionals.
- Foresters learned that the public generally does not understand who they are or what they do and often don't know who to contact for tree-related questions. Foresters learned that they need to increase their level of outreach to citizens.

Sharing Success

- The Missouri Department of Conservation found the model brought non-traditional groups together for their "Community Forestry Leader Workshop", and plans to use the model again at other training sessions.
- The Maryland Department of Natural Resources used the model to reach out to "underserved communities". A number of first-time grants have been given to these communities and one has become a "Tree City USA" as a result.



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