

CREWS Convening 2024

Unconferencing Notes

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Building a New Vision & Broad Coalition for Water

Why a vision for water nationally?

- Sectional siloing
- Funding need
- Policy alignment
- Reduce lack of govt accountability
- Increase visibility
- Reduce privatization risk
- Increase awareness of water's common good benefits
- Highlight aging infrastructure and other threats
- Strengthen water laws and enforcement
- Reduce water service risks
- Recalibrate understanding and evaluation of the value of water and its economic/social/environmental contributions
- Rebuild distrust in water
- A frame for water that resonates broadly and provides broad basis for understanding and support for water investment and action
- Address lack of widely embraced holistic water approach
- National security
- Overcome degradation of water law
- 2 million + people without reliable services (and the number is growing)
- Overcome understanding of water as a commodity and not as a common good

Developing a Vision + Messaging the Vision

- What's your campaign brand?
 - E.g. Day Zero, Love is Love
- x- sector x- interest branding + campaign exercise
 - An alignment exercise around an affirmative message is a priority
 - Culture makes this needed
 - Plus, alignment of water and other communications
- Navigate the dynamic between the cultural/communications effort and the concrete constitutional/legal/regulatory/ financial goal setting
- Set the table w/ knowledge of lessons learned (in and out of the water sector) and networks + their efforts
- Coalition build and break down silos w/

- o Just transition sector
- o Democracy
- o Within water (alliance needs to ramp up)

Core Actions to Initiate Effort

- Information on the need/problem
- Data on how water is funded
- Education at early ages
- Engage the workforce
- Greater enforcement of regulations (need legal partners)

How to Decolonize the Workspace

- **Notes and Ideas:**
 - Our conversation took a decolonized path. Time? What is that?
 - Discussion of our cultural backgrounds
 - This discussion triggers a need for healing conversation
- **Questions and Inspiration:**
 - Can we even decolonize workspaces within this culture – so rooted in capitalism and competition?
- **Next Steps and Takeaways:**
 - Live in your truth, advocate for what you need

UBUNTU - Unconferencing: Culture Change / Economic Transformation / De-Commodification

- **Notes and Ideas:**
 - Simple living- how to cut through the noise
 - Which comes first – disconnection from: connection, relationship, nature?
 - How do we practice- embody
 - Buzz- memes
 - Youth friendships/ intergenerational
 - Recognizing water as animate
 - How to invoke deep respect and reverence for nature
 - Food- crawfish – to unpolluted spaces
 - Healing trauma of nature/trees
 - People don't feel a sense of ownership, especially in land
 - Give people something to steward
 - Culture change – acknowledgement
 - Intergenerational storytelling
 - Memory and imagination
 - Libraries! We've been stewards from the beginning
 - Mini-grants – block parties + stewardship
 - Proposals for culture change philanthropy (not “community engagement/ results based”)
 - Joyful expression

- o Pay youth influencers
- o Water cisterns
- o Rain harvesting/collection- why is this illegal in some states?
- o Localized, distributed water – resilience
- o Does someone need to come clean our water for us?
 - Assumptions
- o Producer responsibility + accountability
- o Community managed water
- o Water municipality as intermediary is a part of the problem
- o Framework: map of cultural arts engagement on water
- o River festivals- culturally
- o Joy + fun focused
- **Questions and Inspiration:**
 - o Pairing youth and elders for memory and imagination
 - Intergenerational mentoring
 - Opportunity agenda
 - o Artists in utility departments

Books as Resources for Water Professionals

- **Notes and Ideas:**
 - o Island Press: books for people working in the field, applicable to their work
 - o Books lend credibility. What would be helpful?
 - o Non-fiction focus
 - Urban planning books are bestsellers
 - Forestry
 - o Climate Action for Busy People - Cate Mingoya
 - o Inclusive Transportation - Veronica Davis
 - o Arbitrary Lines (on zoning)
 - o One coming out on PFAS next year (2 authors)
 - o Brave the Wild River – Ann
 - It was compelling!
- **Questions and Inspiration:**
 - o Who should be writing?
 - Monica and Jill on water affordability
 - o Who's the audience? Professionals in the field?

- o Solution oriented!
- o What needs a “book treatment”?
 - Drive media attention, tool for policy change too
- o Indigenous culture related to water and climate adaptation
- o Areas of concern
- o GSI and flooding? What's working?

Creating a Kresge CREWS Data Commons

Data sources:

- Storytelling (quantitative)
- Experience – observation
- Value to whom?
- Boundary worker
 - o 1.) BAU existing
 - o 2.) LIT review
 - o 3) Nurse/ Health

Data Needs/ Gaps:

- Health
 - o County and city
 - o 100 people
 - o 3-6 months
 - o Study design

New Era of Leadership and Balancing Growth

- **Notes and Ideas:**
 - o Lots of growth, especially as new funding comes in
 - o Virtual work adds to the time crunch
 - o Developed working agreements about:
 - When to have meetings?

- How long?
- Do they serve the mission?
- Do they contribute to burnout?
 - But sometimes you need unstructured time with colleagues
- o Groups agreements are reviewed frequently, but did not support operations, developed new agreements that support operations (River Network)
- o Competing values and cultures regarding work/ time management/ self-care:
 - When making changes and integrating different values, be thoughtful about what should stay and what should go
- o There must be reciprocal accountability
- o What can leadership bring to staff: profit sharing, health care, appropriate compensation (this may take time)
- o How can leadership and staff cooperate on longevity in the organization/ best practices for career advancement?
- o Push back against funders that don't include COL, etc.
- o The whole team's mental and emotional health needs to be considered alongside individuals
- **Questions and Inspiration:**
 - o How do we grow w/o burnout?
 - o Do your workplaces discuss workplace culture and norms?
 - o External facilitators to develop norms
 - o How do you track capacity?
 - Must say no, must speak to funders about needs
 - More money does not necessarily equal more capacity

Urban Biodiversity: Building GSI for Urban Nature & People

- **Notes and Ideas:**
 - o UK national requirements
 - o Concern re: pests attracted by pockets of nature
 - Snakes, mice, mosquitos

- o Community support can start with other benefits: play spaces, beautification, birding
- o Native plants can look “weedy”
- o Ongoing maintenance is a challenge
- o GSI could be opportunities to connect larger patches of habitat
- o Partner with institutions that own real estate that can be transformed and have presence in the community
- o Landscape maintenance companies don't have knowledge or experience to work with native plants. Also, plant material is difficult to source. And soil conditions in urban spaces are subpar.
- **Questions and Inspiration:**
 - o How do we address biodiversity in GSI?
 - o How do we engage private landowners?
 - o How can we better protect existing landscapes, rather than reintroducing natives in small increments?
- **Next Steps and Takeaways:**
 - o Hummingbirds at the Pentagon!
 - o If we didn't drive as much and had roads everywhere, biodiversity, water and air quality would be better off!
 - o Tucson and Milwaukee are great examples!
 - o We are making progress

Human Centered Workforce Development - For People Not Widgets

- **Notes and Ideas:**
 - o Getting creative/flexible with payment and other needs to get folks stable before transitioning into jobs beyond the programs
 - o Expect mistakes
 - o Need funders to recognize the real need and complexities (govt and philanthropy)
 - o Structured apprenticeships with realistic timeline (3-4 years)
 - o Seek EPA grants, based on environmental outcomes and not job numbers
 - o Design programs in partnership with agencies from the beginning and have HR people at the table

- o Promote many transferable skills in every project
- **Questions and Inspiration:**
 - o How to find the money for maintenance?
 - Federal grants increasingly include \$ for O/M
- **Next Steps and Takeaways:**
 - o So helpful to listen and learn
 - o Need deep connections to community, project, skills, knowledge, and capacity to work w/ employers
 - o Partnerships are key! Cross-sector

Community Solutions to Water Affordability & Shut-Offs

Why?

- Avoiding water shutoff guide – River Network
- Ending practice of water shutoffs
- Water affordability platform- National
- Legislation in Michigan on water affordability
 - o No shutoffs
 - o Tiered billing
 - o Tenant relief/ rights
 - o Debt forgiveness- liens on houses

Framing of the Problem

- Shutoffs cause water system problems
- Admin of off/on
- Shift in water solutions in being open to solution
- System wide affordability in face of:
 - o LSL
 - o PFAs
 - o Aging infrastructure
 - o Climate change
 - o GSI maintenance
 - o Open ati (??) budget
 - o Capital budget
- Are all water system users truly contributing based on use- all regional users?
- Shutoffs continuing disinvestment
- Small systems vs. large systems

- Push for consolidation – is that good for community? Can efficiencies be gained through other means?
- Loss of local governance
- Right- sizing water systems
 - What is too big?
 - What is too small?
- SRF is for capital costs, not operations
- System costs – capital vs operations
- Low-income household water affordability program (LIHWAP)
- Water assistance vs. Water affordability
- Statewide coalition – 27 members- state level (LIHWAP)
 - 200% poverty threshold
 - Funding source- \$2 on rates
 - \$158-188m Need
 - \$65m – proposed; Detroit needs \$40m annually
- Residential shutoffs vs. corporate shutoffs
 - And consequences differ
- Acknowledge impacts of decades of disinvestment
- Water systems building skills are community engagement
- Getting community members as allies
- Communities have years of distrust for systems
- Water utility leaders being with community, listening to community
- State vs National
 - Funder support shifting
 - Losing community voice and how policy actually works
- Fitting LIHWAP programs into community
- Permanent funding source for LIHWAP
- Power grabs and land grabs on the back of water policy and water consolidation

Leveraging Media to Achieve Your Organization's Goals – Island Press

- **Notes and Ideas:**
 - Island Press- available via grant support
 - Short form writing support

- Ghost writers
 - Op-eds
 - Reporting style pieces
- o Organizations need help communicating successes, shaping narratives, and case studies
- o Solutions stores/ journalism
- o Trust is vital and community led
- o Media landscape in flux
- o Island Press is building a pipeline of stories
 - Climate
 - Water, etc.
- **Questions and Inspiration:**
 - o What is an issue you're working on that could use more media exposure?
 - o What is your long-term goal?
 - o What needs to happen to advance that goal?
 - o Who can make it happen?
 - o How can you reach them? Who has their ear?
 - o Is there a story that illustrates the problem or the solution?
- **Next Steps and Takeaways:**
 - o For more information or to collaborate, contact Kyler Geoffroy (kgeoffroy@islandpress.org)

Dark Green: Economic Development & Reparations at the Intersection of GSI/EJ/Floodplain Restoration/Buy-Outs

- **Notes and Ideas:**
 - o Maintenance of GSI is important. Particularly in working with landscape architects, which contributes to the revitalization of the community, supporting economic development
 - o Need to focus on how to get the government to provide funding for this work, to build transferable skills with the community
 - o Funding could come from the Justice 40 Initiative funded projects

- o Organizations/businesses/teams from the community who are in charge of building, maintaining, connecting/piecing together projects in the community for a collection of GSI projects
 - Community ownership of neighborhood resilience, self-determination, tying in the theme of de-commodification
- o Innovative tax revenue could be an alternative funding method for community infrastructure projects
 - Ex. Marijuana sales, portion of sales tax, etc.
- o Raising funds through getting those who trained to implement projects to train others, a model that will radiate widely and get a lot of folks trained
 - Folks will pay for these trainings
 - Workforce development and transferable skills
- o Upstream flood prevention projects to prevent downstream flooding in the watershed
- o Water capture credits (like carbon capture)?
 - There are some tax incentives for projects like rain gardens
 - Often driven by local utilities
 - Make it a large-scale policy
- o Relevant parks and rec programs/project funding?
- o Formerly incarcerated workforce, job trainings, maintenance, developing next generation of black engineers, GSI in schools
 - But how do we ensure there is job placement?
- o Special Service Areas (SSA) + Safe Haven
 - Example policies and organizations to replicate (Chicago)
 - Certificate programs
- **Questions and Inspiration:**
 - o Are there ways to use green infrastructure to spur economic development in communities? Models? Systems?
 - o Intersection of buy outs for those who cannot stay ... inequitable
 - Another model instead that will spur intergenerational wealth?
 - o Where is the source of funding? Source of economic opportunity?
 - o What are the ways to fund people ethically who have to move? How to move communities together?
 - o How do we set up a system of creating enabling conditions for black and brown community members to train and hire workers in their own communities? Limiting extractive firms from outside of the communities.
 - Cycle of trust and community ownership
- **Next Steps and Takeaways:**

- US DOE Community Benefits Plan Map
 - Map of projects funded when benefits agreements have been signed

Community Voices in Federal Policy Making

- **Notes and Ideas:**
 - Money does not equal time
 - Learning a topic = time
 - Be clear in what we are asking community members
 - Which community/ group are you accountable to?
 - What are the geographic boundaries?
 - Nothing beats knocking on the door
 - Local intermediary orgs- how representative?
- **Questions and Inspiration:**
 - Reps- do they represent the community?
 - Compensation is necessary
 - Goals clearly stated up front
- **Next Steps and Takeaways:**
 - Stormwater Justice Center
 - Develop framework and reach out
 - Do due diligence

Adaptation Effectiveness: How will we know what we're doing is working to reduce vulnerability?

- **Notes and Ideas:**
 - Define "effectiveness"
 - After action, vulnerability is reduced
 - Challenges: long time to see the results (nature can be slow)
 - Few control points, replicability, many interrelated variables
 - Solutions are complex, work on different timelines
 - Rely on passive data as key indicators, meta-analyses
 - It's complicated but necessary

- o Community perception of success
 - Survey
- o How to capture qualitative data?
- o How do we track compounding impacts of a multitude of small-scale interventions?
 - It's hard to keep people engaged long term
- **Questions and Inspiration:**
 - o How do we know adaptation efforts are effective?
 - o Existing resources:
 - Urban Nature Atlas
 - Climate Adaptation Knowledge Exchange
 - NOAA's Climate Toolkit
 - Restor
 - o How do small projects have a collective impact?
- **Next Steps and Takeaways:**
 - o Compile results from CREWS projects
 - o We need to continue to try
 - o Monitor, evaluate, learn

How Do We Simplify Federal Infrastructure Funding?

- **Notes and Ideas:**
 - o EPA Community Grant
 - Administrative burden to apply
 - LOE to manage the funds
 - EPA CGP (size is large for small CBOs)
 - o CDR2
 - Theory vs. Practice of Intent
 - Confusing nomenclature/definitions
 - Data subsets at agency level mismatch with reality
 - o General
 - Audit paralysis
 - E.g. lens at risk of politics shift
 - Matching
 - TA has limitations
- **Questions and Inspiration:**
 - o Can maintenance be considered as a match?

- These convos are happening inside government as well
 - How do we capitalize on this?
- Scale of authority for transformational change?
 - State agency or leg level- what can happen at ??? level?
 - Interpretation of law
- **Next Steps and Takeaways:**
 - Partnerships are critical for policy advocacy
 - Is there a CREWS effort that can form around this?
 - Centralized database of CREWS wins
 - Stay in touch/continue sharing insights

Climate Anxiety + Remote Work + Neurodivergence = AHHHH!

Remote Work –

- Want it but it's hard
- Imposter syndrome / fake it til you make it
 - Guilt!
- Am I using my time well?
- I miss people
- Time zones / geographic isolation
- Connection is necessary for good storytelling; hard to do well remotely
- Work/life boundary
 - Boundaries / time off don't align with workload!
- Being many steps removed from “the work”
 - Virtual work doesn't feel ‘real’

Late in life diagnoses for women!!!

Self-bashing: Why does everyone else ‘have it together’ and I don't?

** Transaction cost of switching tasks **

- Remote work is pro/con
 - Simplifies domestic life responsibilities
 - Feedback: hard to receive in general, worse in ‘impersonal’ formats
 - Boundaries are hard to see and KEEP
 - We lose stories

Strategies –

1. Over-communicate rather than under-communicate
2. Offering suggestions to coworkers & managers about supporting neurodivergence (ND)
3. Stimulating your environment
4. Remind you: We are doing.
5. Move with the sun!
6. Schedule time to be distracted
7. Camera off!
8. Small routines / rituals
9. Body double / parallel players

Climate Anxiety –

- Not being close to people exacerbates anxiety
 - Feeling of authenticity
- Big and overwhelming but WE MUST HAVE JOY (channel the Dada)
- Discouraging to see kids be apathetic / giving up / not having hope

‘Before you ask us to clean up the park, invite us to it’ (let us enjoy it first)