

URBAN WATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP 2024 NATIONAL WORKSHOP REPORT



2024 National Urban Waters Federal Partnership Workshop Report

Executive Summary

This workshop report summarizes the sessions and key takeaways from the 2024 National Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) Workshop, held virtually on April 2-4, 2024, and hosted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. This year's theme was the *Power of Partnerships*. The goals of this workshop were to:

- Connect to, share with, and learn from Urban Waters Partners,
- Accelerate support for location priorities and cross-sector work on the ground, and
- Strengthen the Ambassador role.

Sessions on April 2 and 3 were open to all Urban Waters Partners. The second half of sessions on April 3 were geared toward Ambassadors and Urban Waters Federal Location Leads. On April 4, federal partners reflected on the insights shared on the preceding days and brainstormed next steps.

During the three-day workshop, more than 230 individuals representing different agencies across levels of government and non-governmental organizations participated. See *Figure 1.1* to view attendance by sector. Links to additional resources shared by workshop participants are available in the Appendix.

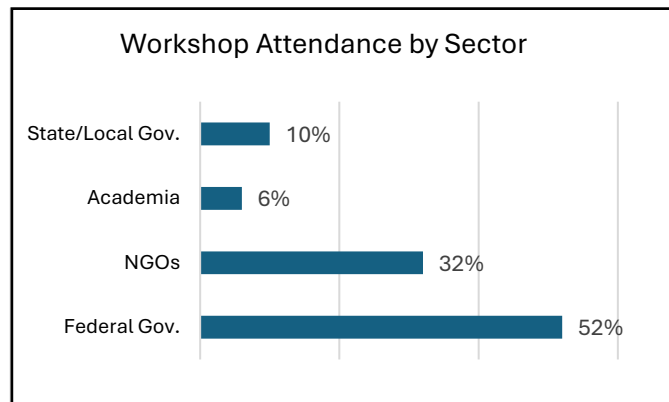


Figure 1.1 Workshop attendance by sector.

Background

The Urban Waters Federal Partnership Program was established in 2011 to strengthen underserved communities' connection to their local water resources and to improve the quality of those water resources. Through Urban Waters, a diverse range of partners work to advance economic, environmental and social benefits for their communities, and collaborate with federal, state and local government agencies, and academic and community-based organizations to achieve common goals at 21 locations.

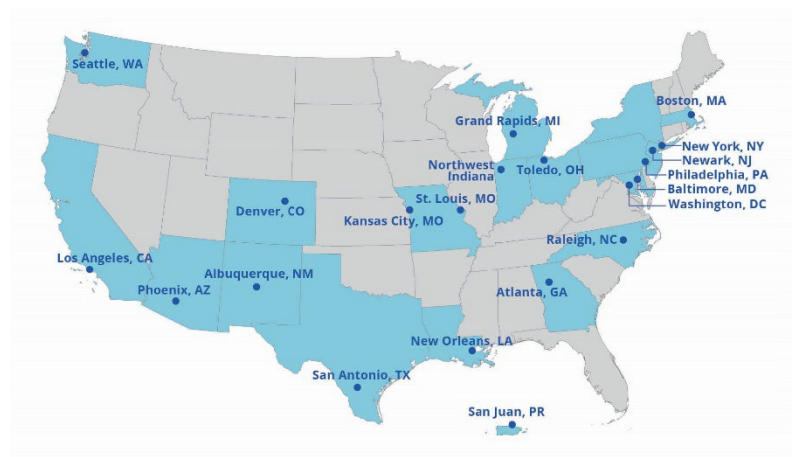


Figure 1.2 The Urban Waters Federal Partnership Program is in 21 locations across the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

Tuesday, April 2, 2024, 12:00 pm – 5:00 pm ET

Welcome

The 2024 National Urban Waters Federal Partnership Workshop opened with remarks from Zach Schafer, Director of Policy and Special Programs, EPA.

- Schafer discussed the Urban Water Federal Partnership’s focus on addressing the climate crisis by working with underserved communities. The UWFP is an important partnership that contributes to EPA’s commitment to addressing the crisis and supporting communities directly impacted.
- Schafer highlighted the impact of Urban Waters on communities through leveraging more than \$7.7 million in grants and collectively reaching over 200,000 community members.
- Schafer moderated a panel with federal agency and NGO partners and the Green-Duwamish Urban Waters Ambassador to exemplify the power of partnerships.
 - Urban Waters Ambassadors are integral to multi-agency coordination, developing materials that reflect different agencies’ opportunities and communities’ needs.
 - Federal partners support research that advances actionable science in Urban Waters Locations.
 - Connections across regions, fields and governmental levels provide opportunities to work with a diverse range of groups such as Indigenous and rural communities.

“Urban Waters has incredible accomplishments that have ripple effects far and wide, including on our climate.” – Zach Schafer, Director of Policy and Special Programs, Office of Water, EPA

Following the panel, Dr. Larissa Mark, EPA Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights, and Jasmine Davenport, EPA Office of Air and Radiation, presented on the *Community, Equity and Resiliency Hub* and its available resources.

Equitable Development and the Role of Arts & Culture

Maria Brodine, Groundwork USA, and two speakers from the National Endowment for the Arts, Katherine Bray-Simons and Jennifer Hughes, discussed strategies for equitable development.

- Solutions for equitable development involve uplifting community voices and making sure improvements prioritize the existing community.
- Equitable development can incorporate Arts into all sustainability initiatives and community building efforts, as art has a unique way of illuminating issues and conveying ideas.

The EPA established an Artist-in-Residence Pilot Initiative to engage with communities around critical work on water restoration and climate resilience. In 2024, EPA will support artists and culture bearers in six long-standing National Estuary Program and Urban Waters Partnership Locations over an 18-month period and develop lessons learned.

U.S. Geological Survey – UWFP Cooperative Matching Funds Projects

Joel Galloway, U.S. Geological Survey, presented on projects funded by USGS Cooperative Matching Funds across Urban Waters Locations. These projects include, but are not limited to:

- Microbial source tracking in the Lower Passaic River Basin (New Jersey).
- Novel bacterial monitoring in an urbanized area of the Delaware River basin in support of recreational water quality criteria.
- Monitoring and predictive modeling of bacteria concentration hazards to support recreational use of the Lower Anacostia River (Washington, D.C.).

Climate Resilience Planning with the Equitable Resilience Builder Tool

In this interactive session, Emily Eisenhauer, EPA, introduced participants to the Equitable Resilience Builder Tool, which is a tool to support community resilience planning. It provides resources and guides for participatory activities such as storytelling, mapping, indicator assessment and action planning. The Equitable Resilience Builder Tool follows guiding principles such as building community relationships and trust, using local data and knowledge, recognizing trauma, facilitating action, providing accessibility for under-resourced communities, adapting to different users and planning contexts. The session focused on:

- The importance of inclusivity and acknowledging vulnerabilities in planning and decision-making processes for successful climate resilience planning.
- The necessity of providing accessible opportunities for community members of all backgrounds to share their stories related to the environment and climate impacts.

Ambassador Panel: Power of Partnerships

Magali Rojas, Blue River Watershed Ambassador (Kansas City, MO), moderated a panel about the role of the Urban Waters Ambassador and the importance of connecting with communities at the local level. Key takeaways from the discussion included:

- The Ambassador supports partners by helping to move projects from development to implementation by providing resources, identifying funding opportunities, capacity building, fostering new partnerships, etc.
- Successful community outreach requires building a relationship through consistent and authentic interaction and outreach at the local level.

Urban Waters Partners World Café

Urban Waters Partners enjoyed small-group breakout room discussions on shared interests and priorities.

- Urban Waters Partners exchanged lessons learned, ideas and questions about green infrastructure, workforce development, equitable development, trash prevention and cleanup, and bridging federal resources to the local level.

Wednesday, April 3, 2024, 12:00 pm – 5:00 pm ET

USDA Forest Service and Urban Waters Panel

The second day of the 2024 National Urban Waters Federal Partnership Workshop began with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service Panel, which featured speakers from the USDA Forest Service, the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality and the Green-Duwamish Urban Waters Ambassador (Seattle, WA). Discussion focused on:

- The value of the UWFP in achieving programmatic goals of the Forest Service, such as implementing watershed forestry projects, providing funding for heat mitigation projects, conducting ecological and social science research on urban ecosystems, leading stewardship mapping projects and engaging communities in urban natural resources stewardship including public education, job training and volunteer action, and revitalizing communities in economically distressed areas.
- The importance of involving community members in planning and implementation discussions to prioritize local issues. For example, tree planting efforts in Northwest Indiana are made possible by engaging thousands of volunteers and coordinating with partners.
- The necessity of flexible and innovative planning for community engagement and funding strategies to push project development.

Federal Agency World Café

Representatives from seven federal partner agencies hosted small group breakout discussions about their initiatives that are of interest to Urban Waters partners. View the [full agenda](#) for a list of participating agencies and their initiatives highlighted during the 2024 National UWFP Workshop.

“Ambassadors are the very heart of every Urban Waters Partnership, acting as the nexus of information and connecting resources and tools to match local needs.” – Mindy Eisenberg, Associate Director of the Oceans, Wetlands and Communities Division, EPA

Coordinating Collaborative Proposals

Diana Toledo, River Network, led a discussion for Urban Waters Ambassadors and Federal Location Leads to exchange best practices for facilitating connections between partners that lead to collaborative proposals. Best practices included:

- Assess partners’ capabilities and workplan priorities to identify potential collaborative funding opportunities and project roles.
- Identify barriers (e.g., grant writing capacity) and opportunities (e.g., expanding existing projects with strong partner support) for pursuing funding collaboratively.

Increasing Partnership Impacts

Liz Madison, Senior Fellow of Partnership and Community Collaboration Academy, moderated this interactive session and Ambassador panel about strategies to strengthen collaboration and track accomplishments. Key strategies included:

- A stronger understanding of the value of partnership work can increase collaboration and strengthen relationships among partners. It is also vital to communicating successes of a program.
- A deep dive into partnership impact frameworks allowed Urban Waters Ambassadors to understand how to engage and gain consensus with partners on the type of collaboration to pursue.

Next Steps

During her welcome and closing remarks for the Workshop, Mindy Eisenberg, Associate Director of the Oceans, Wetlands and Communities Division, EPA, celebrated Ambassadors for bringing partners together. Urban Waters Ambassadors serve as local coordinators, facilitators and leaders at the UWFP locations. The UWFP will continue to harness partnerships to improve waterways and connect communities. The 2024 National Urban Waters Federal Partnership Workshop was the beginning of ongoing conversations among partners at different levels of leadership about equitable development, grant opportunities and strengthening partnerships. Based on feedback and learning from the workshop, next steps will focus on:

1. The program will continue building capacity on the principles of partnership impact and support the Urban Waters Ambassadors to step into their leadership role through a community of practice, partnership assessment and partnership management training.
2. The program will develop resources and materials to increase engagement of federal agency staff with Urban Waters partnership locations.
3. To advance the goal of developing more opportunities to integrate arts and culture into the program, the Urban Waters Federal Partnership and the National Estuary Program will launch an Artist-in-Residence Pilot in 2024.
4. The program will work to develop more opportunities to build the capacity of Urban Waters partnerships that want to pursue collaborative proposals.

To stay in touch with Urban Waters join the [Urban Waters Learning Network Mobilize](#).

Appendix

The Appendix includes resources shared during the sessions. The full agenda is available on [EPA.gov](https://www.epa.gov).

Day 1 Welcome

- EPA's Office of Air and Radiation and Office of Environmental Justice & External Civil Rights: [Community, Equity, and Resiliency](#)

Groundwork USA and National Endowment for the Arts – Equitable Development and the Role of Arts & Culture

- Urban Waters Learning Network: [Equitable Development and Anti-Displacement Collaborative Resources](#)
- PolicyLink: [All-In Cities](#)
- EPA: [Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool](#)
- Groundwork USA: [Learners to Leaders: Environmental Justice Literacy Curriculum](#) and [Green Space Actions Theory of Change](#)
- The Alliance: [Equitable Development Principles & Scorecard](#)
- Georgetown Climate Center: [Equitable Adaption Legal & Policy Kit](#)
- CREATE Initiative: [Sharing in the Benefits of a Greening City Toolkit](#)
- Small Business Anti-Displacement Network: [Toolkit](#)
- The Government Alliance on Race and Equity: [Equitable Development as a Tool to Advance Racial Equity](#)
- National Endowment for the Arts: [State and Regional Arts Organizations](#) and [Grants](#)

U.S. Geological Survey – UWFP Cooperative Matching Funds Projects

- USGS: [Urban Waters Federal Partnership Cooperative Matching Funds Projects](#)
- ScienceDirect: [Temporal variability and sources of PFAS in the Rio Grande, New Mexico through an arid urban area using multiple tracers and high-frequency sampling](#)

Climate Resilience Planning with the Equitable Resilience Builder Tool

- EPA: [Equitable Resilience Builder Tool](#) and [Equitable Resilience Builder \(ERB 1.0\) User Guide](#)
- EPA Science Inventory: Equitable Resilience to Flooding: [A resource for practitioners on understanding economic, health, and social vulnerabilities and inequities in response and recovery](#)
- Grand Rapids Urban Waters Federal Partnership: [Community Engagement and Planning for Watershed Resilience StoryMap](#)

Federal World Café

- NOAA: [Regional Collaboration Network](#) and [National Weather Service Local Office Contacts](#)
- EDA: [Investment Priorities](#)
- USACE: [Silver Jackets Program](#) and [Factsheet](#)

Partnership & Community Collaboration Academy – Increasing Partnership Impacts

- Reciprocity Consulting: [The Partnership Learning Project](#) ([Part 1](#), [Part 2](#) and [Part 3](#))
- [Partnership Impact Evaluation Guide](#)