Community Forum Session: Initiating action
Facilitated by: Shannon and Lynn

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem Solving Model
Topic: Flooding

Element 1- identifying the issues.

Issue identification: impacts related to health, safety, environment, and economics
- When there's lots of rain the creek overflows: can take time to dry up.
- See a lot of white "mushy stuff" – mold, mildew, and other pollutants and contaminants.
- Asthma / respiratory issues
- Mold issues
- Mosquitos and incest that breed in standing water, West Nile Virus
- City tries to pay to have sewers separated
- Economic costs (slowing down / stoppage of business)
- Erosion on property – property value diminishes.

How to organize community
- Talk to immediate neighborhood and find out what their points of view are – they are likely to be similarly affected.
- Utilize e-mail lists from schools and other organizations – try to make contact with these people.

What are you going to do once you get people together? Use action words to describe what you will do.
- If have a mosquito problem, then eliminate vectors – contact the health department
- Tires are a huge problem. Must have action items to initiate a clean-up.

The group decided to focus on mosquitos for the remainder of the steps.

Element 2: Capacity Building

 What kind of information do you need to make goals a reality?
- Site visits
- Contact community groups and teams to find out about their experiences
- Know what diseases mosquitos can spread.

What support do you need from inside and outside the community?
- Community has information that agencies (such as EPA) do not have: tire locations, stories, and the "on the ground" information.
- 10-20 people can be very effective.
- The group may need assistance from the health department.
- Leverage as many skills from inside the community as possible.
- Delegate tasks and understand personal limitations.
- Bucket brigade to take air sample to lab. Each person is in charge of their block and feels like they are part of a team and can make a difference with their own participation. People who are in charge of collecting environmental samples feel special because they get to participate in an important way.
- However, people need to feel like there are results form their actions. Still, documentation is essential.

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- Problem solving models are important to help the community understand the big picture / the real problems.
- It is a slow process but it is important to establish trust (internal factor) when people interact with each other. Transparency repairs mistrust.
- Meeting attendee shared: used own money for piping to mitigate flooding of a creek.
  - Another meeting attendee counseled that it should not be necessary to use own funds, but should connect and communicate with specific people and partners.
  - Water and sewer department can create maps of the creek if there is not already one.
  - Tap into resources – students at GSU can create maps (GIS) for communities.
- A lot of data is available online.
- Important to network with people who have common problems and issues – important to start committees (no matter who small the committee is).

Element 3: Consensus building/conflict resolution

It's very important to establish ground rules and to understand behaviors. Continue to remind the group what you agreed to do / how you agreed to act.

External factors: things that promote and prevent accomplishing our goals
- Promoting external forces: EPA declaring proctor creek urban waters partnership.
- Preventing external force: city has not repaired the pipes, combined sewer systems, infrastructure – local community does not have day to day control.

Internal factors: Functional literacy may be a problem. To solve: figure out the problems intelligent yet illiterate people can solve.

Element 4: Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships and Leveraging of Resources

- Networking is important as is writing letters to get people (politicians, architectures, developers) to become aware
- EPA, recycling association, health department, local watershed department, housing authority
  - Everyone needs a clear role
  - Ask the same open-ended question to different people to see what kind of answers you get.

Element 5: Constructive Engagement by Relevant Stakeholders

Know the questions to ask. Tailor engagement of participants by what the participants want. It's important to come into a community offering something rather than asking for something because this can build trust.

Element 6: Sound Management and Implementation

- Clear and measurable action items and goals.
- Have a timeline.
- Delegate a responsible person for each action item. This is very important when you are working in a multi-person committee because it makes you answerable to each person.

- Monitor what you would include in a grant proposal. Funders what to see these details.
- *Always* document your outcomes.

Element 7: Evaluations, Lessons Learned, and Replication of Best Practices
- Important to have a clear and quantifiable idea of what you are doing.
- Success builds success, document your progress.
- Celebrating successes is critical in order to keep people motivated.