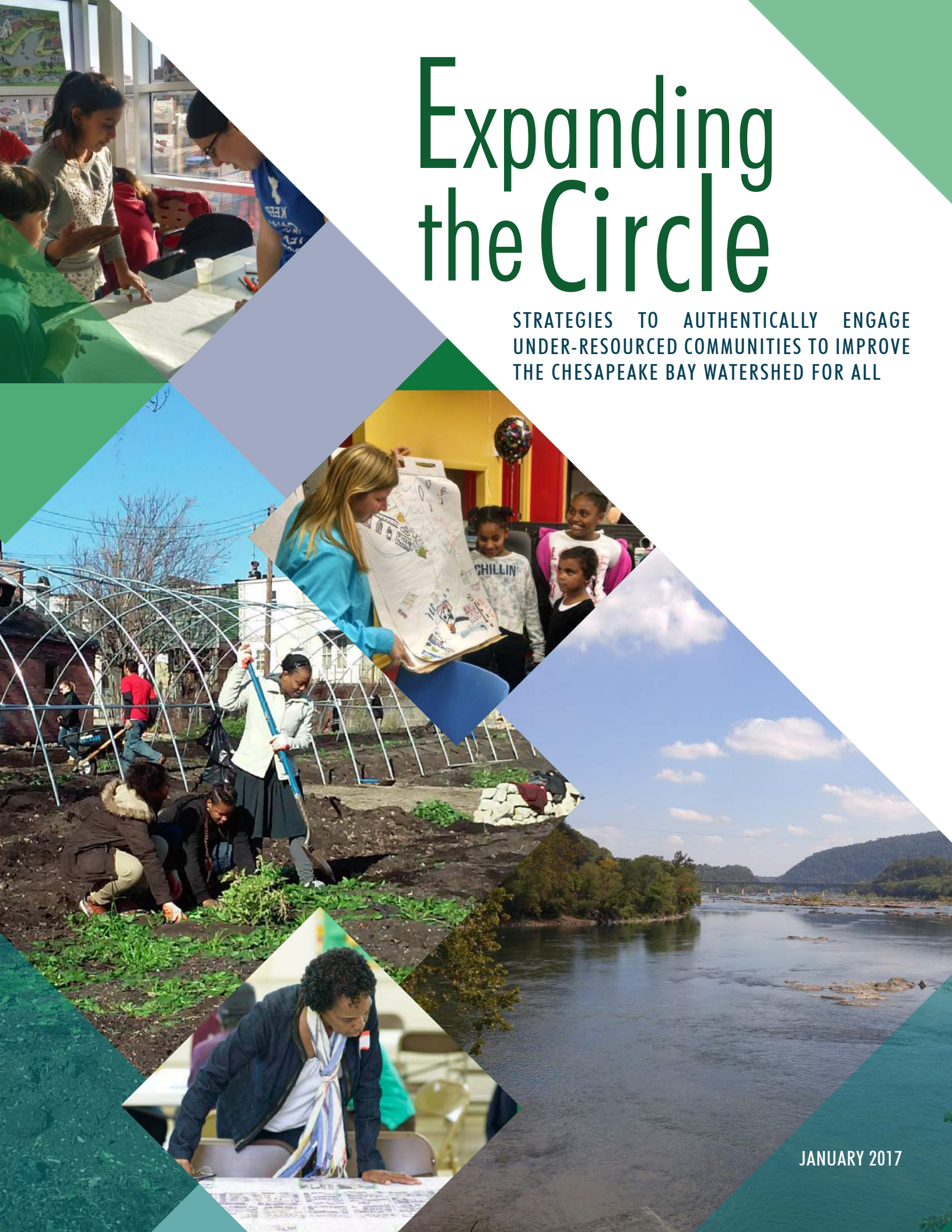


# Expanding the Circle

STRATEGIES TO AUTHENTICALLY ENGAGE UNDER-RESOURCED COMMUNITIES TO IMPROVE THE CHESAPEAKE BAY WATERSHED FOR ALL



JANUARY 2017

# Introduction

The Chesapeake Bay Funders Network (CBFN) is a collaborative funding network focused on increasing the capacity of communities and organizations to protect and promote the health of the Chesapeake Bay. The Chesapeake Bay watershed, which includes parts of six states and the District of Columbia, is composed of communities that represent many different cultures and economic backgrounds. Our watershed includes rural, suburban and urban areas, ethnic and religious enclaves, and economically struggling communities.

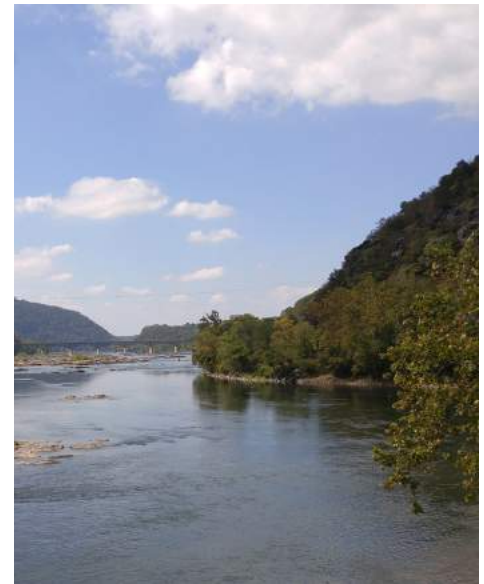
Forgotten waterways often run through forgotten communities. Yet the watershed organizations that serve the Chesapeake Bay region often do not reflect the watershed's diversity in their staff, boards and volunteer bases. In addition, diverse and under-resourced communities, whose quality of life is most likely to be impacted by watershed challenges, are often the least likely to have an active relationship with a watershed organization. However, research shows that these communities are often very interested in environmental issues and are under-engaged by environmental organizations. This insight has encouraged us to broaden and deepen the circle of people who are engaged in watershed issues. It has also motivated us to look for creative connections between watershed issues and the day-to-day needs and concerns of communities of color and low-income communities.

In 2015, CBFN launched the Capacity Building Pilot Program. This work was a component of the Capacity Building Initiative, a program run by the Chesapeake Bay Trust on behalf of CBFN. The Capacity Building Pilot Program provided technical assistance to three watershed organizations in the region who were ready to substantively engage with under-resourced, diverse communities. We enlisted an environmental consulting firm, Skeo, to provide each organization with tailored technical support during their pilot projects. Support included coaching, mentoring, capacity building trainings, meeting design and facilitation assistance.



This report summarizes each pilot project, lessons learned, and recommendations for both watershed organizations and funders. Our hope is that this report will inspire watershed organizations and funders from watersheds across the United States to use the tools described

here to build relationships with under-resourced, diverse communities and to invest in partnerships that improve these communities' quality-of-life in connection to their waterways.



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### Photo Acknowledgements

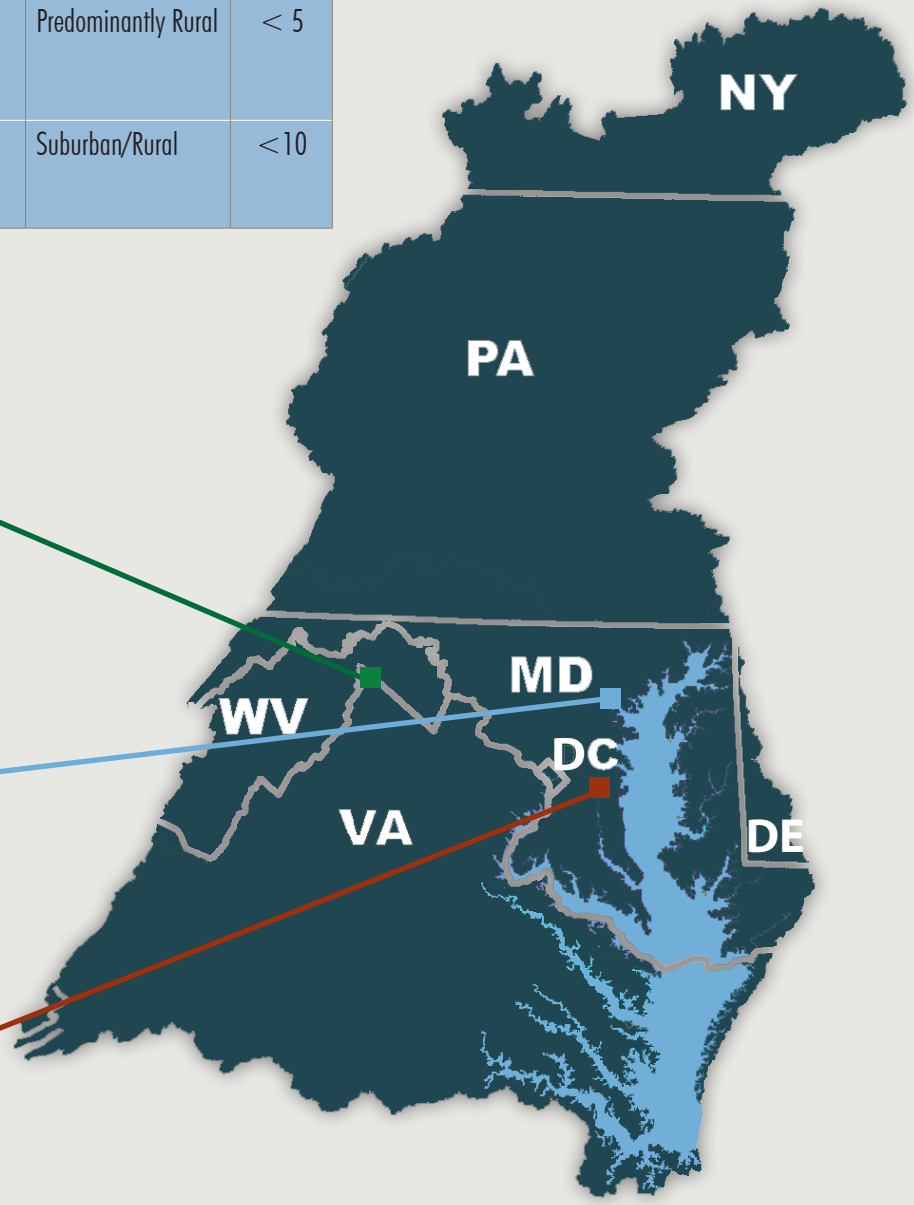
Several photos included in the document were provided by Blue Water Baltimore, West Virginia Rivers Coalition and South River Federation.

# PILOT ORGANIZATIONS

## Selected Watershed Organizations

The chart below describes the three watershed organizations who were awarded technical assistance through a Capacity Building Pilot. The accompanying map indicates the locations of each of the pilot projects within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

Pilot Organization	Founded	Pilot Geographic Scope	Urban/ Suburban/ Rural	Staff Size
Blue Water Baltimore (BWB)	2010	Inner-city Baltimore, MD	Urban	> 25
West Virginia Rivers Coalition (WVRC)	1990	Rural Jefferson County, WV	Predominantly Rural	< 5
South River Federation (SRF)	2001	Suburban Anne Arundel County, MD	Suburban/Rural	<10



West Virginia Rivers Coalition



Blue Water Baltimore



South River Federation

# Blue Water Baltimore

## Background

Blue Water Baltimore's (BWB) mission to restore Baltimore's rivers, streams and harbor includes programs to monitor water quality, clean pollution, and promote stormwater reduction. BWB recently launched the Deep Blue project, which aims to restore environmental health through green infrastructure in inner-city Baltimore.

For their pilot, BWB sought tools for building effective relationships and ongoing partnerships in the Oliver Neighborhood. First, BWB recognized a cultural disconnect between their predominately white staff and the predominately African American community residents. BWB knew that their staff needed the skills to address real and perceived cultural differences. Second, BWB noticed conflicts between local leaders in the project's target neighborhoods. BWB wanted to learn ways to resolve conflict and support development of a shared vision.

## Technical Assistance

Skeo facilitated a Building Cultural Competence (BCC) training and a Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) training that helped build the capacity of BWB staff, community members from the Oliver Neighborhood and outside resource partners to work with each other effectively. The full-day BCC training helped BWB staff explore how cultural differences and stereotypes can pre-limit the outcomes of cross-cultural interactions. Participants gained new skills for building meaningful cross-cultural relationships in their work.

Next, BWB partnered with the Oliver Neighborhood Association to host a community-oriented CPS workshop facilitated by Skeo. The workshop provided the first opportunity for many of Oliver's community leaders to be in the same room. Participants learned more about their personal conflict styles, discussed ongoing conflicts and partnership challenges, and developed a shared vision for productive collaboration.

## Outcomes and Accomplishments

As a result of the BCC training, relationships between BWB staff and the community have improved. Staff feel more comfortable building cross-cultural partnerships with community leaders and have the skills to initiate open dialogue about cultural differences. This has helped to build trust and increase neighborhood ownership of the Deep Blue work.

Additionally, BWB staff have identified internal organizational cultural competence goals, including addressing gender dynamics and strengthening relationships between staff who work in the office and staff who work in communities. BWB is actively working to incorporate many of the lessons from their BCC training into their HR practices and staffing decisions. BWB is also developing a multi-year strategic plan to increase diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace.

Finally, as a result of the CPS training, BWB staff, Oliver Neighborhood leaders and their resource partners are working together more smoothly and frequently.



"Shifting the internal culture of our organization is the first step towards building even stronger relationships with the communities that we work with."

Carl Simon, Director of Programs

## Lessons Learned

### 1. Build Organizational Capacity

- ✓ Invest in cultural competence resources and trainings before engaging communities (learn before you go, rather than as you go).
- ✓ Include all staff, including human resources and upper level management, in cultural competence training.
- ✓ Encourage relationship building and collaboration between office staff and staff who work primarily in communities.
- ✓ Expand cultural competence training support to include post-training opportunities to discuss and navigate the issues or questions that arise following the training.



### 2. Strengthen Community Relationships

- ✓ Evaluate community meeting agendas for cultural relevance.
- ✓ Keep the focus on community needs and priorities.
- ✓ Begin initial conversations by acknowledging real and perceived cultural differences between the community and the organization.
- ✓ Ask for feedback from community leaders on how the organization can best support the leadership and goals of the community.
- ✓ Maintain relationships through regular contact to build long-term trust.

### 3. Support Community Partnership Building

- ✓ Recognize, acknowledge and navigate divides in community leadership alongside community leaders.
- ✓ Invest in effective trainings and tools to build consensus, implement Collaborative Problem Solving and mediate conflict productively.
- ✓ Invest in cross-sector partnerships that support community leadership and shared implementation projects.

## Next Steps

Moving forward, BWB is continuing regular community outreach efforts to build relationships and ensure consistent communication with Oliver Neighborhood leaders.

The BCC training has energized BWB and inspired a commitment to examine and improve diversity, equity and inclusion. BWB hopes to seek additional technical assistance for institutionalizing changes that can move the organization forward. BWB believes that creating a culturally competent organization is a long-term investment that will require multiple phases of training, planning and implementation on both the internal and external aspects of the organization's work.



### Building Culturally Competent Relationships

The BCC training gave BWB staff the skills to quickly build trust and respect with community members when there are cultural differences. In the context of Baltimore's recent tensions around police brutality, these skills were critical for a predominately white organization hoping to develop partnerships in African American neighborhoods.

During an outreach meeting in the Oliver neighborhood, BWB staff started the meeting by acknowledging race and other cultural differences between staff and the community. Staff invited community leaders to share feedback about how the Deep Blue project could keep community voices at the forefront.

The impact and results were immediate: the community shared that BWB's presence and culturally-sensitive approach were the beginning of a great relationship with the Oliver community. Since the outreach meeting, the Oliver community has warmly welcomed BWB and invited them to bring external resources to help resolve conflicts and begin to develop a unified vision for the neighborhood. During the CPS workshop, leaders identified increasing neighborhood tree cover to provide shade and beauty as a common goal. This shared goal generated excitement about working together on a broader spectrum of efforts going forward.

# West Virginia Rivers Coalition

## Background

West Virginia Rivers Coalition (WVRC) is a statewide voice for conserving and restoring West Virginia's rivers and streams. Their programs include partnerships for clean water advocacy, directly engaging lawmakers and regulators on policy and enforcement, and using education and outreach to engage residents as advocates for clean water.

Because of new public input requirements, WVRC worked with Jefferson County to pilot a collaborative source water protection planning process. WVRC's goals for the pilot project included building diverse community partnerships and engaging a broader set of community members in source water protection planning.

## Technical Assistance

WVRC worked with Skeo to design a two-meeting process for building a cross-sector network of community partners. Skeo coached WVRC on identifying non-traditional partners who could help plan for and increase turnout at an upcoming public comment forum.

At the first Community Leaders Meeting, Skeo facilitated exercises that allowed these organizations to get to know each other, make connections between the socio-economic conditions facing West Virginians and local source water protection challenges, and discuss outreach and messaging approaches for hosting a community forum to collect input on the Source Water Protection Plan. Based on this input, WVRC identified additional organizations to invite to the next planning meeting. They also decided to hire a graphic designer using pilot project funds to develop culturally-appropriate outreach materials for the public comment forum.

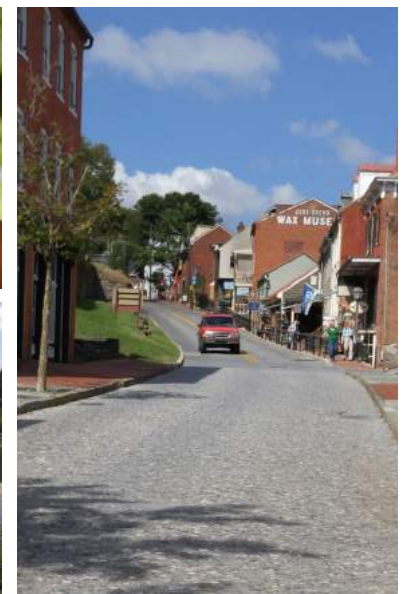
At a second Community Leaders Meeting, WVRC solicited feedback on the effectiveness of the draft outreach materials. Skeo then facilitated the development of an outreach plan that engaged all

the participants in encouraging the community to attend the upcoming forum.

## Outcomes and Accomplishments

Through the planning leading up to the public comment forum, WVRC forged relationships with groups that they hadn't worked with before. This new cross-sector network collaborated on whom to include at the meetings and which meeting spaces were most accessible. Because of their culturally-appropriate outreach materials and community engagement action plan, there was an unprecedented turnout at the public comment forum on source water protection. The partnerships formed during this process have extended beyond the forum to support a wide array of events.

WVRC has also used the public comment forum and planning format as a template for building cross-sector networks in four additional West Virginia counties who are addressing source water protection issues. WVRC's local community-building work is becoming recognized as cutting edge across the region. For example, through a partnership with the public utility, WVRC now shares messages with utility customers, reaching much more of the community.



"The network showed us that watershed organizations can play a critical role as conveners for source water protection and building resilient communities."

Angie Rosser, Executive Director

## Lessons Learned

### 1. Build Organizational Capacity

- ✓ Build staff values and skills for working with non-traditional partners.
- ✓ Invest in cultural competence training to assist staff in understanding the mindset created by the connection between the impact of industrial activity on the environment, histories of economic oppression, and present-day quality-of-life challenges in communities.
- ✓ Identify potential funding sources to increase staff size for ongoing local project support.

### 2. Strengthen Community Relationships

- ✓ Identify under-resourced communities within the watershed.
- ✓ Engage key leaders from under-resourced and diverse communities early to help plan and design public forums.
- ✓ Develop metrics to measure successful relationship building outcomes.
- ✓ Develop outreach and educational materials that connect the legacy of extractive industries, employment and workplace safety with the health of drinking water sources.

### 3. Support Community Partnership Building

- ✓ Identify funding to create culturally-appropriate outreach materials.
- ✓ Support forums to reach diverse and under-resourced communities.
- ✓ Engage decision-makers in the public forum process early and often.
- ✓ Evaluate and update the public forum approach based on local context.
- ✓ Engage regional watershed stakeholders by making connections between watershed contamination in West Virginia and related impacts on downstream communities in Maryland and Virginia.

## Next Steps

Despite WVRC's small staff size, they hope to find resources to maintain these new cross-sector relationships. WVRC believes these relationships have the potential to mobilize a broad cross-section of West Virginians for watershed protection.

Looking ahead, WVRC plans to build on their success in several ways. First, they plan to continue building water protection conversations in community-based organizations that have not traditionally addressed water issues. Second, as the draft and final local source water protection plans are released, WVRC will work with their partners to ensure that the comments shared by public forum participants are captured in the plans and that there is ongoing momentum for implementation. Finally, as legislative opportunities arise to improve water quality, WVRC plans to mobilize support from a wide array of community-based organizations.



### Expanding the Conversation through a Cross-Sector Network

For years, WVRC has struggled to expand the conversation about clean water in West Virginia. The 2014 drinking water crisis in Charleston, WV, created statewide interest and new opportunities for conversations. However, this is a challenging and complicated conversation, because West Virginians tend to believe they do not deserve a clean and safe environment. This mindset is rooted in the dominance of extractive industry across the state that has provided generations with stable jobs, but also has served as the primary contributor to the long history of river and drinking water contamination. The risk of being perceived as combatting industry prevents organizations from being willing to engage in this critical conversation and has limited opportunities to productively address environmental and health impacts.

By developing a cross-sector network that convened twice to plan and mobilize for a public comment forum, WVRC was able to create a new space for dialogue. Non-traditional partners — such as the NAACP, college environmental clubs, business associations, homeowners associations, and social service organizations — had a chance to talk about their common interests in protecting their watershed. They were able to acknowledge the tension of navigating community interests in economic development and environmental protections and develop a shared value for engaging in this tough conversation. Now that they know they are not alone and see the opportunity to work together for positive change, they are more likely to continue to engage with water protection issues and with each other over the long-term while continuing to address their own core missions.

# South River Federation

## Background

The South River Federation (SRF) provides water quality monitoring, rain garden installation, large-scale restoration and landowner education services.

SRF's pilot project focused on a restoration project at Church Creek, which runs directly past the Bywater Mutual Homes neighborhood of Annapolis, MD. The community is predominately low-income and African American. Residents experience regular flooding, while simultaneously have limited access to the creek. Through the pilot, SRF sought to inform the neighborhood about the restoration project, build new relationships, and learn more about how SRF could help meet community needs.

## Technical Assistance

With Skeo's assistance, SRF evaluated their past outreach efforts and identified an opportunity to partner with a respected neighborhood resident to host a Community Needs Assessment dialogue. Skeo facilitated several conversations between SRF and the community leader to design the meeting and develop a shared plan for community outreach.

Skeo, the community leader and SRF staff facilitated the community meeting collaboratively. Relationships were built over a dinner provided by SRF. An invited speaker – the founder of Blacks of the Chesapeake – shared the history of the African American community's relationship to the bay and the importance of protecting local waterways today. Finally, Skeo led a dialogue about neighborhood needs and priorities. Residents shared a wide range of community needs and expressed particular interest in employment opportunities and expanded access to nature.

Afterwards, SRF sought opportunities to leverage resources to meet community needs. They received coaching from Skeo that helped navigate and strengthen a sensitive cross-cultural relationship with a workforce development program.

## Outcomes and Accomplishments

By collaborating with a community leader, SRF learned best practices for communicating with neighborhood residents. Third-party facilitation allowed SRF staff to join the meeting as full participants and focus on building relationships. Finally, the Community Needs Assessment dialogue allowed SRF to learn directly from community members about neighborhood experiences, challenges and needs. This opened up a dialogue with residents about potential ways SRF's resources and watershed initiatives could help meet community needs.

SRF is now working to develop a long-term partnership agreement with a workforce development organization that offers an ecological landscaping summer internship program. SRF hopes to build on the program by offering additional skills-building opportunities to prepare interested youth for a career in the environmental sciences.

Additionally, SRF is prioritizing diversity, equity and inclusion within the organization. SRF has invited regional environmental justice leaders to speak at an upcoming board meeting. SRF is also looking for funding to conduct cultural competence training for staff and board members.



"Open and early dialogue helped us to understand community needs and leverage resources that meet both watershed and community goals."

Kate Fritz, Executive Director



## Lessons Learned

### 1. Build Organizational Capacity

- ✓ Invest in training to increase understanding and practice of cultural competence among board members and staff.
- ✓ Develop culturally-appropriate onboarding for potential community interns.
- ✓ Invite expert speakers to present the board with information on how to integrate cultural competence throughout operations.



### 2. Strengthen Community Relationships

- ✓ Build personal relationships with community leaders early in the project.
- ✓ Learn culturally-appropriate communication methods.
- ✓ Engage community leadership in developing community meeting agendas and defining the outcomes of a successful meeting.
- ✓ Focus initial conversations on listening to identify intersections between community quality-of-life needs and watershed goals.
- ✓ Confirm project goals and next steps with community leadership.

### 3. Support Community Partnership Building

- ✓ Build trust by clearly communicating the schedule of projects taking place in the community.
- ✓ Collaborate with community leadership to address roadblocks and delays on projects.
- ✓ Invest in building relationships with community members by consistently inviting them to participate in watershed events in and near their community.
- ✓ Connect the community directly to resources with a focus on increasing job opportunities for community residents.

## Next Steps

Looking ahead, SRF is seeking ways to continue the relationship building that started during the pilot. The local government permit process has taken much longer than anticipated and has caused project delays. Frustration with these setbacks has impacted relationship building in the community, and in a devastating turn of events, the contractor's port-o-john was burned down. Despite this incident, construction has continued and is almost complete. SRF is committed to continuing to build relationships with the Bywater Mutual Homes community and be a value-added partner by keeping the community informed about project schedules and possible job opportunities.



## Connecting Community Needs to Watershed Resources

SRF recognized that one of their main challenges in connecting with diverse and under-resourced communities in their watershed was learning how to demonstrate the relevance of their work. Many low-income communities have day-to-day needs that are more pressing than watershed protection. So finding the right ways to use to communicate what work SRF does and what resources they have available was critical.

By starting with a Community Needs Assessment dialogue, SRF could enter the Bywater community in a listening role and consider how their own resources and interests related to existing community interests. The Community Needs Assessment dialogue included facilitated discussion about the community's history, assets, challenges and needs.

One meaningful insight from the dialogue was that long-time residents were historically connected to the natural features of the area. New housing developments over the last several decades have limited the Bywater community's access to nature by privatizing remaining natural spaces. This historic connection to nature revealed a shared interest in access to nearby natural and outdoor spaces that led SRF and community residents into deeper dialogue about the way SRF resources for watershed protection could be used to meet present-day community needs. Together, dialogue participants identified job creation as one possible avenue for shared work on watershed protection and community reinvestment.

# Recommendations

The Capacity Building Pilot Projects served as a testing ground for how watershed organizations can engage their staff, boards, constituents, members and directly-impacted communities. The following recommendations reflect three themes that connect the lessons learned in each pilot. The first – building internal organizational capacity – is foundational to successful efforts at the second and the third – strengthening community relationships and investing in the community. Watershed organizations and funders who support this work are poised to strengthen their organizations and the impact of their work by building relationships that foster watershed restoration and address the needs and priorities of under-resourced, diverse communities.

## What can Watershed Organizations do?

	1. Build Organizational Capacity	2. Strengthen Community Relationships	3. Invest in the Community
	Improve your organizational capacity to work effectively with diverse and under-resourced communities.	Build collaborative relationships with community leaders and community-based organizations.	Align watershed projects and programs to benefit under-resourced communities.
<b>Watershed Organizations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Host a cultural competence training to provide staff with tools and confidence to engage more productively with communities of different backgrounds.</li> <li>✓ Invite an equity and diversity expert to speak at a board or staff meeting on effective community engagement.</li> <li>✓ Conduct an organizational assessment to identify gaps and determine priorities to improve diversity, equity and inclusion in organizational staffing, community engagement and investments.</li> <li>✓ Develop a strategic plan to outline goals and strategies to benefit under-resourced communities and improve diversity, equity and inclusion in staffing, community engagement, projects and programs.</li> <li>✓ Actively recruit community residents and persons of color during the hiring process!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Reach out to community organizations to understand their goals and programs.</li> <li>✓ Collaborate with community leaders on how to align watershed projects and programs to better support community goals and priorities.</li> <li>✓ Co-host meetings with community partners to ensure convenient times and locations, effective outreach methods, and services such as meals, childcare and interpretation or translation.</li> <li>✓ Partner with community organizations on grant applications and projects that can meet shared goals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Evaluate the geographic distribution of programs and identify where to expand or prioritize investments to benefit under-resourced communities.</li> <li>✓ Sponsor, develop and staff a coalition to bring watershed and community groups together around shared goals.</li> <li>✓ Involve community partners early in project design to align with community needs and goals.</li> <li>✓ Hire contractors who agree to employ qualified community members for projects!</li> <li>✓ Offer paid internships for community residents!</li> <li>✓ Seek collaborative funding matches from non-watershed funders for projects that engage and benefit under-resourced, diverse communities.</li> </ul>



## What can Funders do?

		1. Build Organizational Capacity	2. Strengthen Community Relationships	3. Invest in the Community
<b>Funders</b>		<b>Promote diversity, equity and inclusion awareness and practices within your organization and among your grantees.</b>	<b>Promote collaboration among watershed organizations, community leaders and community-based organizations.</b>	<b>Incentivize projects that align watershed investments with community needs.</b>
		<p>Internal Organizational Capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Train funders' staff and boards on cultural competence and diversity, equity and inclusion.</li> <li>✓ Conduct an organizational assessment and develop an action plan for better integration of diversity, equity and inclusion within your own organization.</li> </ul> <p>Grantee Organizational Capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Incentivize funding applications that include cultural competence training and community engagement training for watershed organizations.</li> <li>✓ Fund organizational assessments to help watershed organizations evaluate diversity, equity and inclusion and identify opportunities to grow.</li> <li>✓ Fund watershed internships that promote hiring from under-resourced communities and under-represented groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Encourage funding applications that include collaboration with a community partner from an under-resourced community.</li> <li>✓ Consider supporting coalition development to facilitate collaborative projects between watershed organizations and community groups.</li> <li>✓ Consider supporting a retreat, action plan or training to encourage watershed organizations and community groups to collaborate on development of shared goals and investments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Encourage funding applications that directly benefit an under-resourced community by meeting a stated community goal or need.</li> <li>✓ Consider providing support to a community member or organization to participate meaningfully in a watershed project or program.</li> <li>✓ Seek non-watershed funding matches to integrate community benefits into watershed projects and programs.</li> <li>✓ Develop scholarship, fellowship and job-training programs for under-resourced youth and adults in environmental careers and green jobs.</li> </ul>

## Looking Forward

CBFN is already looking ahead at opportunities to build on the lessons learned from the Capacity Building Initiative. Over the coming year, CBFN will work collaboratively with its funders and their grantees to develop a comprehensive Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy. We hope to elevate this conversation across our network and provide tools and strategies that support efforts to diversify and grow the Chesapeake Bay watershed community. We are excited to be entering this new phase of the conversation and hope you will join us on the journey!





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