



Fostering Chesapeake Stewardship Goal Implementation Team (GIT5) Meeting

When? Monday, September 23rd
10:00 am – 3:30 pm EST

Where? Anacostia Community Museum,
1901 Fort Place SE, Washington, DC 20020

Hybrid Option via Zoom.

[Meeting Webpage](#)

MEETING PURPOSE

- Experience, witness, and consider the powerful, meaningful impact that can be achieved by connecting land conservation, access to nature, education, programming, stewardship and attention to equity and inclusion.
- Infuse new perspectives, spark ideas and inspire discussion around how all of our different lines of work intersect, and how we can increase our collaboration and coordination toward more collective, strategic impact.
- Get outside, talk with each other, connect.
- Explore how to increase benefits across multiple outcomes by pairing needs and priorities of the community with CBP environmental conservation efforts.

MINUTES

10:00 AM Welcome and Introductions –

Wendy O’Sullivan, National Park Service, Stewardship Goal Team Chair, welcomed attendees to the meeting and helped set group intentions. This meeting was intended as an opportunity for deep listening, collaborative and strategic thinking, and inspiration.

Daniel Koval introduced the guiding question for the day.

- **Guiding question for the day** – What does it look like when we effectively combine stewardship, education, diversity/equity, protected lands, public access, and climate and health considerations into a comprehensive approach that centers people in environmental conservation?

In person and virtual participants watched a video to center us and jumpstart thoughts about the interconnections of our work and subject areas through a tangible community based example.

- Video and Article: [A reimagined Oxon Run Park takes shape in the heart of Southeast Washington D.C.](#)

Katrina Lashley, Researcher for [The Center for Environmental Justice at the Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum](#), introduced the Center and the Anacostia Community Museum’s history, mission, research, and programs. She described four pillars of their work: Policy & Advocacy, Art & Culture, Faith, and Inclusive Leadership. Some key programs include Women’s Environmental Leadership, the EJ Academy, and the Garden Program. She discussed how restoring the Anacostia River watershed comes with the tension of the memory/experience of DC residents being pushed east of the Anacostia and how a goal of the museum is to document experiences of the local community stakeholders and serve as a convening space for environmental justice and civic engagement.

- Kristin S. - Has anything particularly surprised you in this work or is there any challenge you haven't been able to overcome yet?
 - Katrina - I was surprised in the sense that these issues are nothing new, they have existed since the museum's creation in 1967 because they are baked into systems of hierarchy. In spite of these larger challenges, communities have dug in and have a strong history of work. Communities of color are often unacknowledged for their role in stewarding these places. It is important to bring community members into the decision making space. Capacity is also a large challenge, especially for small organizations in the community.

10:45 AM Workgroup Updates –

Leads for each of the Stewardship GIT Workgroups provided a lightning update highlighting one key aspect of their work or project. Other CBP groups represented were invited to give a brief announcement about an item they are working on as well.

- **Stewardship WG** – Meredith L. provided an update on the [Chesapeake Steward Map](#) project, a tool developed to better connect people working in stewardship and to help those seeking partnership or assistance. Those who are interested in the map can reach out to Meredith at lemkem@chesapeake.org to get involved.
 - Check out the [Chesapeake Steward Map](#) and [Opt-In to join the map](#) if you wish.
- **Diversity WG** – Brittany H. described how the workgroup has been restructuring itself to be action-oriented and achieve greater engagement. The workgroup has formed small action teams to work towards the actions identified in the new two-year work plan.
- **Public Access WG** – Lisa G. provided updates on the data collection process and new public access sites. The group is well on its way to meeting its targeted outcome of opening 300 new waterway access sites by 2025.
- **Protected Lands WG** – Aurelia G. provided updates on the work toward achieving the outcome, which is on course to meet its target of protecting 2 million acres in the watershed (above its baseline in 2010) by 2025.
- **Education WG** – Shannon S. described the ongoing work to develop a strong and effective network-of-networks approach to increasing environmental literacy in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Local Inspiration - Community Connector Organizations

We heard from two community-facing organizations about their work with local residents and communities. Their work spans and weaves together education, stewardship, workforce, health, access to nature and conserving greenspace, and environmental justice/equity.

11:30 AM Nathan Harrington, Director, [Ward 8 Woods Conservancy](#)/ Tour –

Nathan provided background context about Ward 8 Woods Conservancy and its work with the community and their stewardship of the local forested area. Their motto is, "Healing the land, empowering people." One program that Nathan discussed was Park Stewards – a workforce development program which is committed to hiring and training residents who have barriers to employment (such as criminal history, disability, gaps in education and lack of work experience) to provide services in the park such as trail maintenance. One thought-provoking question that Nathan presented to participants was: *We don't rely on volunteers to cut grass or empty our trash cans, so why do we rely on volunteers to keep our woods clean?*

Nathan then guided participants on a short walk in the Ward 8 Woods just outside of the museum. He described the conservancy's history of stewardship in the woods and the challenges they have faced, including: limited organizational capacity and funding; challenges related to the complex ownership rights of different parcels of the land and to varying levels of investment and accountability regarding maintaining the land.

Those who participated in the walk built informal connections with each other and many picked up trash as they walked along, noting that the cared-for section was nearly trash free, and that there was a marked difference in the amount of trash found away from this area. The walk also highlighted opportunities for community and environmental benefits through land conservation and easements. For example, a privately

owned land plot near the museum is overgrown and has no house. It will likely eventually be sold to develop a house, however, Nathan prompted us to wonder about conservation opportunities:

- Could this parcel of land be bought or protected under an easement? Could it be made into a mini park to preserve the trees on it or increase tree canopy? If the trees are non-native could the land be restored to native vegetation and be used as a pollinator garden or rain garden with educational signage or community events?

12:45 PM Lunch and Networking – Meeting participants were invited to eat together, network, share revelations or ideas from the walk, and think about relationships and opportunities for connection. Participants also had the option to use lunch to visit the museum's exhibit.

1:30 PM Brenda Richardson, Coordinator for the [Anacostia Parks and Community Collaborative](#) – Brenda presented about APACC's mission, community engagement, and her personal relationship to the environment and environmental movement.

The Anacostia Parks & Community Collaborative is a network of community leaders and organizations working together to make the Anacostia River and its park system the best possible resource for residents of Ward 7 and 8 in the District of Columbia. Brenda discussed how community members of Ward 7 and 8 have been historically disfavored by systems of hierarchy and power. She asked us to shower communities who have been historically disfavored with favor in whatever ways we can. Brenda discussed how the community's trauma from experiencing racism, gun violence, disinvestment, and pollution inform relationships to their environment and level of involvement in stewardship. She said that for many years she never realized that the Anacostia River belongs to her too. This comes in part from how environmentalism has historically been led predominantly by white men, and in part from how people who are trying to meet their needs (food, rent, safety from violence and fear) do not have as much capacity to focus on environmentalism. She also discussed how complex environmental lingo is a barrier to participation in the environmental movement. However, discussing environmental movements in ways that meet community interests and needs can increase engagement. For example, she spoke to the importance of trees and vegetation to reduce urban heat islands and thereby help reduce violence, since increased heat is correlated with increased violence.

Brenda asked that if participants are to remember one thing from her presentation, that it should be Memory Forests. Community members have come together to plant trees to commemorate loved ones who have passed from violence. Families return to, care for, and feel connected to these trees and forests for many years to come.

1:50 PM Conversation with Brenda and Nathan

This was a two-way conversation with opportunities for Brenda and Nathan to both ask the attendees questions and provide perspectives from their communities. The conversation was very free flowing, so key topics have been organized by Challenges, Opportunities, and Takeaways.

Optional jump-starting questions:

- How can we, as a large-scale regional partnership, help amplify the impacts of and align our work with on-the-ground implementers who tangibly weave together access to nature, stewardship, education, and workforce development?
- How can we better engage organizations representing diverse communities to excite them about having a meaningful role in shaping conservation priorities in the watershed? How do we honor and center their voices in our work?
- How can a regional collaborative such as the CBP and its partners better support organizations that are rooted in and serving communities, and doing the programmatic work?
- What can we learn from this local level example that we can scale up for greater benefit to both people and the environment?

DISCUSSION

Opportunities:

- Information about who is responsible for sidewalk, treebox, etc. maintenance isn't widespread enough. Increasing transparency of this information could help reinforce accountability.
- To increase diversity in staffing, it can help to look at applicants holistically. If they don't have all of the work and internship experiences required, do they have other applicable skills from other aspects of their life (e.g., volunteering with their church or faith-based institution, etc.)?
- Implement trauma-informed training, cultural competency training, and psychological safety training in your organization if possible.

Challenges:

- A lot of green job trainings last 1-2 years, but a lot of graduates of those programs are struggling to find permanent positions afterwards. People sometimes bounce between temporary/seasonal positions.
 - Ward 8 Woods wants to pay a living wage and give pay increases which means that if they keep workers on too long those workers can't make the same amount of money in another job. Workers need to be trained and equipped with marketable skills to help with future employment.
- Some programs exist that work with incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals and youth, but effective implementation requires adaptability to meet the needs of the participants. For example, if youth do not have breakfast or the proper gear and clothes to work in environmental jobs, they will not be set up for success.
- Job series with strict educational and experiential requirements are a barrier to employment.
- Brenda's greatest fear for disfavored communities is that in an extreme weather event, they will be lost - both in the sense of not knowing how to react, and not receiving adequate support. Ward 7 is thinking of creating a climate resiliency hub. But one issue Brenda raised with such a hub is that fear of violence would prevent some from going there in an extreme weather event. So people working in the climate change sector need to also have a mindfulness around public safety concerns when designing climate resilience and adaptation solutions.

Takeaways:

- Environmental injustice issues are systemic, complex, institutional, and extremely challenging and resource intensive to change. However, we cannot let the size and complexity of these issues paralyze us into inaction. We can each think: What resources do I have influence over in my institution, organization, or daily life? How can I redirect those resources towards the folks who need them the most, or who have been denied access to them the longest? How can I personally make my work and my organization's work more equitable, diverse, sustainable, and just? This requires us to work intentionally, to not take the easiest route, and to have conversations with communities about what they truly need and want.
 - Also, think creatively. When you talk to people about the things that they need (e.g., a safer route to work, more public transportation, more jobs) there are opportunities to work *for* them rather than doing or assuming something that they might want. People often care about their communities, not water quality, but there are opportunities to serve both communities and the environment simultaneously. For example, people participated in Adopt-A-Block in DC less because they care about trash going in the river, but more because they wanted their communities to be clean and safe.
- Accountability, transparency, and consistency are incredibly important for building and maintaining trust with communities.
- The prioritization and protection of psychological safety in an organization's work culture is vital for retaining diverse employees.
- Work to make grant opportunities as easy to navigate as possible.
 - Nathan's Suggestions:
 - Programs to help organizations fill out and understand grant applications are beneficial.

- Don't require audited financial statements. They can cost \$10,000 to get which makes them cost-prohibitive for many small organizations.
- Keep applications as short and non-repetitive as possible.
- Think about deliverables – For example, it's hard to prove whether something actually led to reduced littering and dumping. So requiring those sorts of deliverables can be exclusionary to practitioners based on the nature of the work.
- Microgrants are beneficial.

2:30 PM Small Group Discussions, Reflections, and Ideas for Action

Activity – While up and moving, attendees talked in small groups about the guiding questions below. Remote attendees participated in the activity in a breakout room online. The whole group came back together to discuss reflections and ideas for collaborative action.

Discuss today's guiding question –

What does it look like when we effectively combine stewardship, education, diversity/equity, protected lands, public access, and climate and health considerations into a comprehensive approach that centers people in environmental conservation?

- What is working well at the intersection of these topics?
- What is your biggest challenge or where are you stuck?
- How do you want to move forward with what you've learned from today?

Discussion, Reflections, Ideas for Action:

- Tackle and dismantle the illogical.
- Work to break down barriers to participation and empower local communities to take action.
- Quality of tools and programs matters more than quantity.
- Consider addressing funding ideas:
 - Grant programs need to talk to each other and coordinate more frequently.
 - The communities that we're trying to serve aren't necessarily looking for environmentally focused money. So how can we partner with the housing authority or other agencies or programs that communities are more familiar with reaching out to for funding?
 - Fund capacity building for organizations.
 - Think about how existing funding programs can be structured/restructured to start some of this work (like capacity building).
- Work in a trauma-informed manner. Meet people where they are and work with them in their context without projecting our funding quantifiers and needs onto the community.
- All Bay issues are people issues. Lead with a community centered approach.
- Community action can be an antidote to environmental despair (e.g., climate anxiety).

3:15 PM Announcements and Closing

Many thanks to our hosts at the Anacostia Museum, the presenters, all participants, and the GIT 5 team for a productive gathering!