

# Community Engagement

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, *and* PRIORITY ACTIONS



## CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMUNITY

Meredith Comi, NYNJ Baykeeper (Co-Chair NJ)  
Joe Reynolds, Bayshore Watershed Council (Co-Chair NJ)  
Lisa Bloodgood, Newton Creek Alliance (Co-Chair NY)  
Carrie Roble, HRPT (Co-Chair NY)  
Shino Tanikawa, New York City Soil and Water  
Conservation District  
Michelle Luebke, Bronx River Alliance  
Harvey Morginstin, Passaic River Boat Club  
Pamela Pettyjohn, Coney Island Beautification Project  
Manuel Russ, Concerned Citizens of Bensonhurst  
Robert Alpern, Clearwater  
Maggie Flanagan, Waterfront Alliance  
Michelle Doran McBean, Future City, Inc.  
Nina Hitchins, The River Project  
Ted Enoch, Partnerships for Parks  
Nicholas Tufaro, Middlesex County Office of Planning  
Dan Mundy, Jamaica Bay Ecowatchers

Nancy Brous, NYC Water Trail Association  
Sally Yabra, Edison Township Boat Basin  
Althea Mullarkey, Scenic Hudson  
Bart Chezr, Gowanus Dredgers  
Louis Kleinman, Waterfront Alliance  
Julie Welch, SWIM Coalition  
Noah Chesnin, WCS/NY Aquarium  
Rebecca Kusa, WCS/NY Aquarium  
Susan Elbin, NYC Audubon  
Kathryn Heintz, NYC Audubon  
Bill Schultz, Raritan Riverkeeper  
Bill Surena, Future City, Inc.  
Dan Recklies, Protectors of Pine Oak Woods  
Ana Mendez, Future City, Inc.  
Jenna Bonasmusa, Interstate Environmental Commission  
Chrissy Remein, Riverkeeper  
Michael Dulong, Riverkeeper

Earth Day Volunteers on Plum  
Beach. Photo: Don Riepe



## Foster community understanding and involvement in decisions about the Harbor.

The waters of the Harbor and Estuary belong to the people of New York and New Jersey. Decisions about the future of this quintessential public resource, whether for water quality improvements, habitat restoration, public access, or maritime uses, are better when they incorporate public input and the place-based expertise of local residents. The key to effective public participation is an informed and active constituency: citizens and civic and community-based organizations that understand and are deeply committed to the wonderful complexity of this unique urban ecosystem, appreciate the role of science in making decisions about its future, and are savvy to the ways and means of government.

This ideal is challenged by the many other demands on the time and attention of citizens, managers, and decision makers in this busy region. Over the next five years, HEP will work to raise the profile of the Harbor Estuary and the importance of science in its management through a variety of communications tools, from an expanded web and social media presence to continued production of seminars, conferences, and waterfront festivals. HEP will support the growing number of interpretive centers and programs around the Estuary, including bringing together Harbor educators so they can share expertise and materials. HEP's participation in the Lower Passaic and Bronx/Harlem Rivers Urban Waters Federal Partnerships and direct sponsorship of Urban Waters Ambassadors in each watershed will better connect federal agencies, local government, and community in these two critical and higher need waterways. A special focus will be working with the CAC to expand and improve Citizen Science across the Estuary.

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Thanks to billions of dollars invested in clean water, public parks and the revitalization of former industrial sites for residences and commerce, the Estuary has moved closer to the lives of the people of New York and New Jersey. While the water has always been central to the distinct waterfront communities and maritime economy of the region, the waters of the Harbor and Estuary are more of a presence for more people today than it has for many generations.

Hurricanes Sandy, Irene, and Lee and rising sea levels have also brought the water closer to people's homes and businesses

—sometimes literally and unfortunately with tragic results. Helping move individuals and civic organizations from increased awareness to greater scientific literacy, broader civic discourse, and more productive interactions with managers and decision makers is at the heart of HEP's community engagement goal.

Environmental educators and social scientists understand that this ladder of engagement often starts with improving public understanding about the current condition and potential future of the Estuary. In partnership with HRF, HEP is developing a communications strategy that will assess key audiences, current and prospective outlets, potential partners, and capacity needs; identify how HEP can improve storytelling techniques and communications on all platforms; and specifically evaluate and recommend appropriate goals, roles, and needed human resources to address public awareness and raise scientific literacy about the Estuary and its management, in keeping with its mission and staff capacity.

This strategy will help HEP better utilize its newsletter and website, seminars and workshops, conferences and festivals and other communication tools to engage its key audiences of environmental managers and stewardship organizations; public and private scientists; elected and appointed officials and their staff; and professional environmental educators; media and the public, specifically the active members of community and civic organizations and students.

Key partners in improving understanding and scientific literacy are the education professionals that operate from public parks, nature centers and other place-based learning opportunities across the Estuary. An assessment of 146 civic organizations indicates that they offer a broad array of programs that help engage people with the Harbor Estuary through public outreach and stewardship activities. While small in size, with an average budget of less than \$50,000, these organizations in aggregate represent more than 900 paid staff, 237,000 members, and more than 116,000 volunteers contributing about 5,000 hours per organization. Almost all conduct educational programs about the local environment; about 20% conduct boating, fishing, or swimming programs. These public and private organizations can help bring information and understanding to individuals.

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Expanding and improving the quality of Citizen Science is a particular point of emphasis. Citizen Science, also known as participatory or community-led science programs directly raise awareness about the need to protect and restore shared waterways. They advance scientific literacy, especially with young people, and can fill critical data gaps for managers, professional scientists and policy makers. A recent survey by the CAC found about 50 organizations that collect water samples to determine whether it's safe to kayak, monitor artificial oyster reefs to test different restoration techniques, or analyze the kinds of trash that washes up onshore to help stop trash at its source. Building the capacity of these organizations, and identifying how their efforts can meet agency needs are important opportunities identified through the assessment.

Collaborative participation in resource management decisions can help address many of the thorny issues present in the Estuary. Establishing opportunities for dialogue and creating sustainable collaborations can build trust between community-based organizations and public agencies and between agencies with differing sets of responsibilities. This is particularly important for environmental justice communities with significant barriers towards meaningful public participation with agency decision making. The Urban Waters Federal Partnerships in the Bronx/Harlem and the Lower Passaic Rivers seek to forge connections between and among federal agencies, local government, the community members and advance the collaboration needed to enhance social and ecological outcomes.

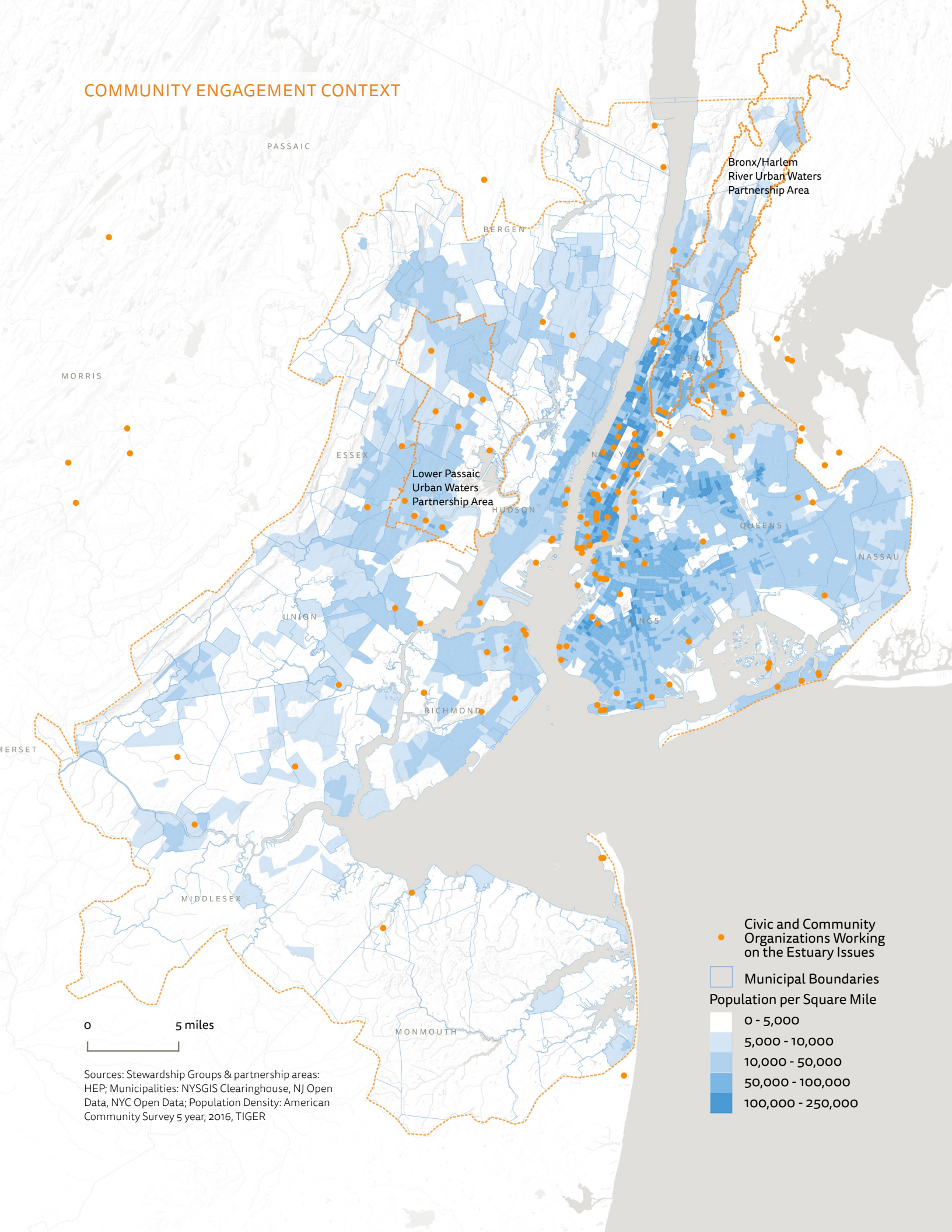
## Action Agenda Public Engagement

HEP is committed to engaging the public in the preparation and implementation of this Action Agenda, working in partnership with the members of its CAC.

- 1. Gathering Information 2016**  
Identified key opportunities and challenges related to each of HEP's goals at public workshops hosted by civic organizations
- 2. Present Results to Civic Partners**  
Targeted outreach to workshop participants for 2016 CAC meeting. Presentation and prioritization of challenges and opportunities by HEP goal, including estuary-wide and region-specific themes
- 3. Review and Prioritize Draft Actions 2017-2018**  
Program staff presented draft Actions for review, CAC offered revisions and prioritized the actions, final draft approved by CAC.
- 4. Identify Key Avenues for Public Participation in Implementation 2018**  
Program staff supported the CAC in identifying avenues where public participation could support implementation of shared goals
- 5. CAC Approval and Annual Work Plans; Ongoing**  
Each September, the CAC will develop an annual work plan identifying actions where their participation is key for successful implementation



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CONTEXT



## Summary Table ~ GOALS AND OBJECTIVES



# Community Engagement



*Foster community understanding and involvement in decisions about the Estuary.*

### **OBJECTIVE A** *Increase and improve the quality of citizen science efforts*

#### **CE-A-1 SHARED PROTOCOLS**

*Identify, create and/or publicize shared protocols for habitat and water quality monitoring by civic organizations.*

#### **CE-A-2 CONNECT VOLUNTEERS**

*Publicize and otherwise support means of connecting volunteers with opportunities to participate in Citizen Science efforts.*

### **OBJECTIVE B** *Support Federal Urban Waters Federal Partnerships in target waterways*

#### **CE-B-1 URBAN WATER AMBASSADORS**

*Underwrite Ambassador positions and advance Partnership priorities.*

### **OBJECTIVE C** *Enhance public understanding of the Harbor Estuary*

#### **CE-C-1 COMMUNICATIONS**

*Sustain website, monthly newsletter, social media, contact database, and other communication tools.*

#### **CE-C-2 EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

*Support educational programs, including the sharing of best practices among providers.*

CHALLENGES	INDICATORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>LIMITED PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF ECOSYSTEM</b> OBJECTIVES A, B, C</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>LIMITED PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF ECOSYSTEM</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation in Stewardship Events</li> <li>Participation in Civic Science</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>NOT ENOUGH PEOPLE INVOLVED IN CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS</b> OBJECTIVES A, B, C</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>NOT ENOUGH PEOPLE INVOLVED IN CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capacity of Stewardship Organizations (Number of staff/members/volunteers reported by civic stewardship groups)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### OBJECTIVE A

*Increase and improve the quality of citizen science efforts*

#### CE-A-1

### SHARED PROTOCOLS

*Identify, create and/or publicize shared protocols for habitat and water quality monitoring by civic organizations*

#### NEED

Over 50 organizations conducting Citizen Science in the Harbor Estuary completed the CAC's survey identifying the goals, needs, degree of standardization, and geographic scopes of their programs. Analysis of this data reveals a cohort of groups that hope to use their data to inform management decisions, but do not have QAPPs or rigorous protocols in place. Furthermore, as the survey data includes geographic information, there is an opportunity for HEP to connect groups monitoring specific waterbodies to discuss data standardization.

#### DESCRIPTION

HEP will develop workshops for protocol sharing based on the needs identified in the survey. These workshops will focus on aspects of habitat restoration and/or water quality monitoring where the intended program goal is either establishing baseline conditions, or informing a management decision. The workshops may focus geographically on specific waterbodies.

**KEY PARTNERS:** CAC, RWG, WQWG, IEC, EPA, NGOs

**RESOURCES:** Staff and leveraging; grant projects <\$200,000

**TIMELINE:** 2017-2022

#### OUTCOMES

Short term:

- Participants in the protocol workshops will adopt protocols suited to their program goals.

Long-term:

- Resource managers are equipped with additional quality data that can be used to advance habitat restoration and water quality goals.

#### CE-A-2

### CONNECT VOLUNTEERS

*Publicize and otherwise support means of connecting volunteers with opportunities to participate in Citizen Science efforts.*

#### NEED

Citizen Science projects depend on consistent, trained volunteers for data collection and processing. For many groups, volunteer recruitment for data collection is the biggest barrier to expanding their programs. Groups need assistance with reaching new memberships that may have pre-existing interests in Citizen Science, as well as interesting their existing members and networks in citizen science efforts.

#### DESCRIPTION

In order to assist Citizen Science groups in tapping into existing volunteer networks, HEP will identify and partner with hub organizations that match residents across the New York – New Jersey metropolitan area with volunteer opportunities. HEP will also support community-based organizations with their communication needs, helping them develop strategies for visualizing Citizen Science data and helping community-based organizations tell compelling stories about their local waterways and ecosystems.

**KEY PARTNERS:** CAC, RWG, WQWG, IEC, EPA, NGOs

**RESOURCES:** Staff and leveraging; grant projects <\$200,000

**TIMELINE:** 2018-2022

#### OUTCOMES

Short term:

- Partnership with a volunteer hub organization drives new volunteers to Citizen Science and raises the visibility of Citizen Science among the general public.
- Local community based organizations use their existing data to create data-driven stories that interest new volunteers.

Long-term:

- New leadership and greater percentage of the general public in the Harbor Estuary is consistently engaged in meaningful Citizen Science activities.





## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### OBJECTIVE B

Support Urban Waters Federal Partnerships in target waterways

#### CE-B-1

### URBAN WATER AMBASSADORS

*Underwrite Ambassador positions and advance Partnership priorities.*

#### NEED

The Passaic, Bronx, and Harlem Rivers and their watersheds were identified by HEP's assessment of public access and stewardship as having higher needs. These areas had fewer public access opportunities per person, higher population growth, and/or more economically disadvantaged populations. Fifty percent of the people living within one half mile of the Passaic River waterfront lack access to its shoreline. Along the shores of the Harlem River in the Bronx are some of the lowest income populations among all waterfront areas in the Estuary.

#### DESCRIPTION

The Bronx/Harlem Rivers and the Passaic Rivers are two of the 19 Urban Waters Federal Partnerships. These partnerships serve to reconnect urban communities, particularly those that are overburdened or economically distressed, with their waterways by improving coordination among federal agencies and collaborating with community-led revitalization efforts to improve our nation's water systems and promote their economic, environmental and social benefits. HEP will provide funding and administrative support for the Ambassadors for the Bronx/Harlem and Passaic River Urban Waters

Federal Partnerships. HEP will work with other with Partnership members to identify priorities and seek resources and collaboration to build local capacity; align federal government programs and investments; and find innovative ways to communicate the environmental and economic potential of safe and clean urban waters.

**KEY PARTNERS:** EPA and USGS serve as the federal leads for the Bronx/Harlem Rivers Urban Waters Federal Partnership. NYC Parks and the Bronx Council for Environmental Quality are other key partners. EPA and the USACE are the federal leads for the Passaic River Urban Waters Federal Partnership. The NY/NJ Baykeeper, The Trust for Public Land, and Ironbound Community Corporation serve on the Partnership steering committee.

**RESOURCES:** Staff and leveraging; grant projects >\$200,000

**TIMELINE:** 2017-2022

#### OUTCOMES

Short term:

- Build local capacity, expand partnerships, and align Federal government programs and investment in the Bronx/Harlem River and Passaic River communities.
- Advance specific urban water projects including public access and flood resiliency on the Passaic River and the Harlem River Watershed Plan.

Long-term:

- Create new access opportunities, cleaner waters, and sustainable stewardship capacity in these higher need waterfront communities.



Engaging students in the life of the Estuary through restoration activities.  
Photo: New York Harbor School



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### OBJECTIVE C

*Enhance public understanding of the Harbor Estuary*

#### CE-C-1

### COMMUNICATIONS

*Sustain website, monthly newsletter, social media, contact database, and other communication tools.*

#### NEED

Building an informed and engaged constituency for the Estuary starts with effectively communicating scientific understanding and best practices among professionals and the public. Enhancing HEP's visibility with the Harbor Estuary community can showcase the importance of improved ecosystem management and the benefit it contributes to people while advancing progress on specific Action Plan elements.

#### DESCRIPTION

HEP and HRF are developing a communications strategy that will identify specific audiences and develop key messages and communication tactics. This effort will build on current efforts to reach the core of HEP Committees and Work Groups as well as other audiences. HEP hosts an annual conference that attracts 200-plus people, with every other year focused specifically on habitat restoration. HEP sponsors other events including the Waterfront Alliance's City of Water Day and the annual meeting of the Harbor Herons Working Group. The HEP websites, including [hudsonriver.org](http://hudsonriver.org), [harborestuary.org](http://harborestuary.org), [waterweshare.org](http://waterweshare.org), and our participation in [oasis.net](http://oasis.net) are vital portal of communications for estuary stakeholders and partners, and a key gateway to citizen groups and educational professionals for estuary related science and information. The upcoming improvements to [hudsonriver.org](http://hudsonriver.org) and [harborestuary.org](http://harborestuary.org) will offer additional opportunities to engage new audiences and advance scientific literacy and the data and insights of the State of the Estuary report and Environmental Monitoring Plan.

**KEY PARTNERS:** HRF, CAC, Waterfront Alliance, Hudson River Estuary Program

**RESOURCES:** Staff and leveraging; grant projects <\$200,000

**TIMELINE:** 2017-2022

#### OUTCOMES

Short term:

- More effective communication to HEP's core and new audiences.

Long-term:

- Improved understanding and increased public awareness of HEP and its goals.

#### CE-C-2

### EDUCATION

*Support educational programs, including the sharing of best practices among providers.*

#### NEED

Enhancing the ability of the growing number of education and public outreach programs with an organized structure will facilitate networking, resource sharing, and professional development.

#### DESCRIPTION

Education programs are a fundamental part of building public understanding and awareness of the Harbor Estuary. HEP will support and bring together a group of local and regional environmental education organizations to help facilitate and share best educational practices and higher quality resources based on the individual specialties and areas of expertise surrounding the Harbor Estuary. This regional network presents an opportunity for collective impact, stemming from a shared vision and values focused on the Harbor Estuary. The mechanisms which will make this group successful include creating a system amongst group members to both communicate and share resources, including quarterly meetings. Additionally, by inviting groups to share areas of expertise will help build fundamental skills amongst all Harbor educators. Impact of education programs can be best assessed when aligned measurement systems are used, creating a consistency in how successful programs are shared and discussed. HEP will also work with the Hudson River Park Trust and the Hudson River Estuary Program to advance construction of the proposed Estuarium in Hudson River Park.

**KEY PARTNERS:** Hudson River Park Trust, New York Harbor School and Billion Oyster Project, Hudson River Estuary Program, HRECOS, NGOs

**RESOURCES:** Staff and leveraging; grant projects <\$200,000

**TIMELINE:** 2018-2022

#### OUTCOMES

Short term:

- Promote networking, and information and resource sharing among participating organizations.

Long-term:

- Facilitate ongoing communication and resource sharing amongst participating organizations through developing online tools such as group list serves and an online resource portal.