
SOURCE WATER PROTECTION COLLABORATIVE

Administered by  Environmental
INITIATIVE

Britta Dornfeld, Environmental Initiative

Groundwater Protection Council Annual Forum

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Presentation overview

- Who we are.
 - Origins and first phase of work.
 - Current structure and members.
- Current projects.
- Takeaways.





Who we are

- Our mission is to catalyze collaboration across perspectives, power, and systems for social equity and environmental health.
 - Minnesota non-profit working for over thirty years on initiatives in areas including sustainable business, environmental justice, agriculture, and clean air and water.



Collaborative funding

- Funded primarily by Minnesota Department of Health grant, from Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment funds.
 - The Amendment: In 2008 Minnesota residents voted to increase state sales tax $3/8^{\text{th}}$ of one percent.
 - Dedicated to water, habitat, parks, and arts.
 - Protecting drinking water sources is a high-level goal.



Collaborative origins

- Started in 2019 with a two part listening phase:
 - Statewide community conversations with drinking water professionals about landowner engagement around source water protection.
 - Focus groups convened by Citizens League discussing drinking water knowledge with underrepresented communities.



Listening phase themes

- Problems varied from place to place but a few overarching themes emerged:
 - People are uncertain about where to get answers to drinking water questions.
 - Large and small water operators faced communication challenges and lacked engagement capacity.
 - There is a lack of trust between community members and government agencies.
 - Communities want to protect their drinking water.





Listening phase recommendations

- Support partnership and trust-building efforts at local level.
- Expand engagement capacity for officials responsible for providing drinking water.
 - Increase engagement capacity with underrepresented communities.
- Leverage existing drinking water protection efforts.

Current Collaborative formation

- To work on recommendations from the listening phase, formed statewide partnership in mid-2020.
 - Includes individuals from across Minnesota with expertise in source water, community outreach, engagement, or public health.
 - Have not met in person due to geography and the pandemic which has made relationship building difficult.



Collaborative members

- **Sarah Berry**, Local Public Health Association and Waseca County Public Health
- **Anna Claussen**, Voices for Rural Resilience (consultant)
- **Mae Davenport**, University of Minnesota
- **Annie Felix-Gerth**, Board of Water and Soil Resources
- **Tim Gieseke**, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- **Larry Gunderson**, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- **Stephanie Hatzenbihler**, Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District
- **Alex Keilty**, Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance
- **Amanda Lovelee**, Metropolitan Council
- **Aaron Meyer**, Minnesota Rural Water Association
- **Alycia Overbo**, Minnesota Department of Health
- **Jen Schaust**, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- **Dave Schulenberg**, Minnesota Water Well Association
- **Pat Shea**, American Water Works Association and Saint Paul Regional Water Services
- **Bruce Tiffany**, farmer
- **Lisa Vollbrecht**, American Water Works Association and Saint Cloud Public Utilities Department
- **Ed Zabinski**, Itasca Waters
- **Molly Zins**, Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnership



Vision and purpose

Vision

We make choices on the land that ensure clean, safe drinking water for all.

Purpose

Bringing together diverse groups and perspectives to advance collective action for protecting drinking water.



Current projects

Clearinghouse project

- Saw need for online clearinghouse of outreach resources and program development materials.
 - Aimed at natural resource and public health professionals.
 - Partnership with University of Minnesota Water Resources Center.
 - Currently adding resources into platform and planning for maintenance and relevancy.



Creative engagement project

- Experimenting with different ways to engage communities.
 - Know traditional methods of engagement, such as public notices and meetings, are not always accessible and often do not lead to behavior change.
- Two-year development process.
 - Have some artists in Collaborative but also many technical members who had not worked with art and ended up expanding their thinking on it.



Project development

- Put out RFP for an artist-in-residence in November 2022.
 - Goal was to have an artist-in-residence work in a rural host community on drinking water engagement from March-December 2023.
 - Chose cities of Little Falls, Fairmont, and Chatfield as potential hosts.
 - Wanted to focus on rural areas as they are often under-resourced.



**CALL FOR
ARTISTS**

Project outcomes

- Left the type of art project up to the artist as they are the experts.
- Instead, put in a series of outcomes we wanted the work to accomplish:
 - More empowered community members.
 - Increased local government capacity for drinking water engagement.
 - Increased connections between community and government officials.
 - Shift in mindsets around community engagement approaches.



Project progress

- Received 23 applications.
- Initially chose to work with Shirley and Sharon Nordrum and the City of Little Falls.
- Shirley passed away in early May.
- Paused the project for May; when Sharon let us know she could not continue the work, we talked to another finalist, Su Legatt, and she and Sharon coordinated to transition the work.



Current project plan

- Su worked with the Collaborative and many Little Falls groups, including the local high school, water superintendent, and city administrator, to develop her project plan.
 - She learned Little Falls, which is on the Mississippi, had originally been a paper mill town and gets its water from groundwater wells that are close to the river.
 - Decided to focus her project on bringing together the milling history of Little Falls with water and native plants.



Current project status

- This fall, Su will host a series of paper making workshops with plants from local ditches to discuss water with many different groups in the area.
- She will use the art and conversations from workshops to create community broadsides, which will be hung up around the city starting in December.





Take-aways

- Bringing together non-traditional partners can lead to unique efforts.
- Collaboratives need to balance relationship-building and action.
- Art can be a great way to spur engagement.
- Measure outcomes.
 - Working with Dr. Amit Pradhananga from the University of Minnesota on outcome measurement from the overall Collaborative and the creative engagement project.
- Go with the flow.

More information

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