

Green Infrastructure Champions Program

Issue

In urban communities, stormwater runoff causes localized flooding and creates water quality problems. When many of these older communities were built, stormwater management was not required, which resulted in stormwater runoff from most streets, parking lots, roads, and rooftops to be quickly conveyed to local waterways without any treatment. If localized flooding and improved health of local waterways is a goal to a better quality of life, these communities must be retrofitted with green stormwater infrastructure. To achieve this goal, local leadership is needed. Green Infrastructure Champions is an Extension program that was created to empower local stakeholders to play a dominant role in encouraging municipalities and other property owners to implement green stormwater infrastructure practices. They are provided with a series of training opportunities to increase their knowledge about stormwater issues and green stormwater infrastructure solutions. After participating in five workshops, these individuals are certified as Green Infrastructure Champions and become key players in implementing green infrastructure as a stormwater management approach in their community. Once certified, the Green Infrastructure Champion has access to technical



support from the Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) Water Resources Program staff.

Action

An educational program was created to train and certify Green Infrastructure Champions. Green Infrastructure Champions will be key players in implementing green infrastructure as a stormwater management approach town by town. Green Infrastructure Champions will be able to: 1) enhance their knowledge through green infrastructure workshops, seminars, and personal research, 2) engage community leaders to adopt green infrastructure as a stormwater management solution by updating ordinances and municipal master plans, 3) encourage local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and schools to incorporate green infrastructure in their existing landscaping, 4) secure funding for green infrastructure, and 5) publicize implementation of green infrastructure through social media channels. In 2019, nine two-hour workshops were offered on various topics. To become certified, you must take at least five workshops.

Funding

In 2019, this pilot program was partially funded by the Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, and New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium and was a collaboration of the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Water Resources Program and the Green Infrastructure Subcommittee of Jersey Water Works. In 2019, nine workshops were offered for free. In 2020, ten workshops were offered, a \$20 fee was charged for each workshop, and Duke Farms was added as a partner.





Public Value Statement

The RCE Water Resources Program will continue to work with the Green Infrastructure Champions to help them secure funding and implement projects. Within the first six months of completing the program, over \$30,000 in funding had been secured to purchase materials to implement green infrastructure projects. Since most projects are being constructed by local department of public works, the in-kind contribution from municipalities will be substantial. In New Jersey, existing development is a major cause of flooding and poor lake and stream water quality. A local champion is one of the best ways to empower communities to move forward with implementing green infrastructure for managing stormwater runoff from existing development.

Future Success

The Green Infrastructure Champions Program was successfully piloted in Burlington County, making the program available to people from the central part of the state. In 2020, the program is being offered 50 miles further to the north, and in 2021, the program will be offered in the southern part of the state. There has been a strong demand for the program. Each session has been filled. Funding will be needed to provide technical support to the certified Green Infrastructure Champions. We are currently seeking grants to secure this funding.

Impacts

Here are statistics from 2019 pilot program.

- nine training sessions (average attendance = 35)
- 72 people attended at least one session
- 23 municipals represented
- 20 NGOs/Partnerships/Nonprofit Organizations/ Academic represented
- 7 private organizations represented
- 37 certified as Green Infrastructure Champions

Several of the certified Green Infrastructure Champions have begun to implement green infrastructure projects in their community. One received a \$20,000 grant to complete a green infrastructure action plan and strategic plan. Several are giving talks on green infrastructure within their communities and at local schools. By the end of this year, it is anticipated that the Green Infrastructure Champions will coordinate the installation of at least 12 rain gardens, which will manage over 800,000 gallons of stormwater per year.



For more information about this project, please contact:



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