



**Northwest  
Regional Planning  
Commission**

## Public Participation Policy

Adopted by the Board of Commissioners

October 30, 2024

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# 1. Goals and Objectives

The **goal** of this Public Participation Policy is to describe how NRPC will provide the public with thorough information in a convenient, accessible, and timely manner, and identify opportunities for the public to participate in our work. In so doing, we will also aim to achieve environmental justice, as described in federal and state policies (see Section 5).

The following objectives have been identified to achieve that goal:

## **Objective 1**

The NRPC will act to ensure that all of our actions, policies, and operating procedures reflect our commitment to celebrate diversity and ensure that our practices are inclusive in the communities we are serving.

## **Objective 2**

The NRPC will keep the public informed of ongoing activities through a variety of communication methods.

## **Objective 3**

The NRPC will encourage the participation of all community members in its work, including regional and local planning processes.

## **Objective 4**

The NRPC will strive to improve public participation and environmental justice by working towards the empowerment of communities.

## **Objective 5**

The NRPC will strive to cooperate and collaborate with existing groups who do similar work in the fields of planning, housing, economic development, water quality, energy, transportation and emergency planning in the Northwest Region.

## **Objective 6**

The NRPC will actively engage the public in its work according to the policies contained in this Public Participation Policy and in accordance with state and federal law.

Questions and concerns regarding NRPC's public participation process should be directed to NRPC Executive Director Catherine Dimitruk at [cdimitruk@gmail.com](mailto:cdimitruk@gmail.com).

In addition to guiding the NRPC, this document is intended to inform and inspire affiliated entities throughout their work. As affiliated entities, any public participation that is conducted should reflect the spirit of this document. Affiliated entities can also consider adopting their own public participation policies that complement the NRPC's policies.

## 2. Spectrum of Participation

The NRPC has adopted a Spectrum of Participation as its guiding framework for public participation. NRPC's framework was adapted from a framework developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), which has been used as a basis for public participation planning in several other regions and municipalities. The NRPC Spectrum of Participation defines four levels of participation in order of increasing public involvement in the decision-making process. Depending on the level of participation required for a specific activity, each level of participation can be applicable in different contexts.

This spectrum will provide a guiding framework to create individual public participation plans for NRPC projects and programs. A template for participation planning based on the Spectrum of Participation is located in Appendix A of this document. Decisions about establishing or adjusting the level of participation for a specific project or program will be made using the following considerations:

1. What is the purpose of the engagement?
2. Stakeholders: Who is potentially impacted by this project or program?
3. What strategies and tools will the NRPC use to ensure it has information from and research about the relevant groups and communities?
4. How will the NRPC effectively reach all of its audiences?
5. What are the potential barriers and risks to doing this work?
6. If there are decisions to be made, how does community participation fit into the overall decision-making process?
7. How will the NRPC inform the community of benchmarks or progress throughout the process?
8. How will the NRPC evaluate the success of its public participation plan, both in terms of processes and outcomes?

The following sections will describe the engagement and outreach strategies that are encouraged as part of each level of participation.

Note that each level of the Spectrum builds on the previous levels (from left to right), including strategies of participation used to involve the public in NRPC activities. Strategies are not repeated under each level, as it is implied that they are included in successive levels.

## The Spectrum of Participation

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
The NRPC will provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions.	The NRPC will seek public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.	The NRPC will work with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	The NRPC will partner with the public in all steps that require decision-making, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	Final decision making power is placed in the hands of the public.
<i>Characteristics of Participation</i>				
Primarily one-way channel of communication	Two-way channel of communication	Two-way channel of communication	Two-way channel of communication	Two-way channel of communication
One to multiple interactions	One to multiple interactions	Multiple interactions	Multiple interactions	Multiple interactions
Continuous over term of project	Short to medium term	Medium to long term	Medium to long term	Medium to long term
Addresses immediate need of the community	Shapes and informs regional programs	Advances solutions to complex problems	Advances solutions to complex problems	Advances solutions to complex problems
<i>Strategies of Participation</i>				
Website, database, brochures, posters, flyers, display ads, press releases, email announcements, newsletters, social media	Public hearings, legal ads, work groups, comment forms, surveys, analysis reports, technical assistance studies	Advisory/steering committees, project meetings, workshops, open houses, forums, direct mailings and email blasts, staff outreach	Community or co-led committees, advisory boards, coalitions, partnerships, policy development and advocacy	Community-led planning efforts, community-hosted forums

## *Level 1: Inform*

Under the “Inform” level, the NRPC will provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions. The NRPC’s promise to the public is “we will keep you informed.”

Characteristics of participation include:

- Primarily one-way channel of communication
- One to multiple interactions
- Continuous over term of project
- Addresses immediate need of the community

## **Strategies of Participation**

### *Website*

The NRPC’s website ([nrpcvt.com](http://nrpcvt.com)) is a comprehensive source of information on the organization’s services and programs. Contact information, meeting minutes, and links to municipal websites and resources are available in an organized and accessible format. Staff members ensure that the website is updated regularly and contains the most current information available. An accessibility review was conducted in 2023 as part of a major website update. Any future major updates to the website will involve a similar review to ensure that the website continues to meet all ADA requirements and is compatible with screen readers and other accessibility features.

### *Regional Data Scorecard*

The NRPC compiles regional data on its Clear Impact Scorecard. The scorecard brings together data from a variety of federal, state, and regional sources to showcase year-over-year trends for regionally relevant indicators. Topics include housing, health, demographics and the economy. The goal of the scorecard is to make accessible the contextual data that the NRPC is taking into consideration throughout its regional planning process, and to provide a resource for partner organizations and community members to obtain data on topics of regional concern. The scorecard data is updated yearly and published at [nrpcvt.com/regional-data/](http://nrpcvt.com/regional-data/).

### *Posters, Flyers, and Display Ads*

Materials with general information about the NRPC or announcing upcoming meetings or other events are distributed to public places such as city halls and town offices, public libraries, community centers, and local businesses. These may also be part of a direct mail campaign to residents and businesses. Content typically includes the date, time, location and brief description of the purpose or project. The NRPC occasionally publishes ads to promote meetings that are not regularly scheduled, such as corridor study workshops. These are published in selected newspapers in order to reach a larger audience than those who typically read legal notices.

### *Newsletter*

The NRPC publishes a monthly newsletter to inform community members about ongoing projects and provide information on upcoming meetings and workshops. The newsletters are distributed to all subscribed email contacts and published on the NRPC website every month.

Previous newsletters are posted at [nrpcvt.com/resources-publications/nrpc-newsletter/](http://nrpcvt.com/resources-publications/nrpc-newsletter/). Community members who wish to subscribe to the newsletter can do so by clicking the link on the home page of the NRPC website, or by contacting Emily Adams ([eadams@nrpcvt.com](mailto:eadams@nrpcvt.com)).

### *Press Releases*

Press releases are sent to local media to inform the public about projects being undertaken or recently completed, funding opportunities and awards, and updates regarding NRPC programs and services. Regular mention of the NRPC in local media outlets reminds residents of our presence and projects that may impact them.

### *Email*

Meeting announcements and supporting information are emailed to interested persons in the NRPC master database. Email is also used to disseminate project updates and progress reports, and to announce funding or other opportunities. Email contacts for all NRPC staff members are available at [nrpcvt.com/about-nrpc/staff/](http://nrpcvt.com/about-nrpc/staff/).

### *Social Media*

The NRPC takes advantage of various social media resources to share information about the organization and its projects. NRPC has active accounts on Facebook on YouTube. Facebook is used to organize events and promote public awareness of NRPC programs. YouTube is used to provide access to recordings of public meetings and public awareness campaign videos. While the NRPC does not have currently have its own Front Porch Forum account, plans are being made to establish one. In the meantime, staff members post on Front Porch Forum to promote programs to specific community pages.

Social media is used as a one-way channel of communication by NRPC, and comments are disabled on all Facebook posts and YouTube videos.

Facebook: [facebook.com/profile.php?id=100069004923575](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100069004923575)

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/@northwestregionalplanningc3521>

Links are also available in the footer of pages on [nrpc.com](http://nrpc.com) and in staff email signatures.

## *Level 2: Consult*

Under the “Consult” level, the NRPC will obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions during a project. The NRPC’s promise to the public is “We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the discussion.”

Characteristics of participation include:

- Primarily one-way channel of communication
- One to multiple interactions
- Short to medium-term
- Shapes and informs regional programs

## Strategies of Participation

### *Public Hearings and Legal Ads*

A public hearing is a formal process to solicit input and, when applicable, hold a vote on specific programs, policies or activities. In most cases items presented at a public hearing have already benefited from deeper engagement earlier in the process. Notifications to municipalities for public hearings regarding NRPC activities will include the full text of the document to be adopted or amended and a public hearing notice. The published legal notice (in the *St. Albans Messenger* or the *Islander*) will include the locations where documents are available for public review. At a minimum the locations include the NRPC office and municipal offices of NRPC member communities, coupled with an online version hosted on the NRPC and/or municipal websites. These announcements meet the requirements of the Vermont Open Meeting Law, Title 1 V.S.A. § 310-314.

Public hearings should have adequate sound amplification technology available to ensure that hearings are accessible to all community members. Translation services will also be made available when requested with at least 2 business days' advance notice.

Public hearings should be held in a hybrid format to ensure that members of the public who are unable to attend in-person for health, childcare or other reasons are still able to join and participate virtually. Any online participants should be able to see and hear clearly, and the call should be monitored for online participation. All NRPC meeting agendas are posted in advance and contain a statement at the bottom with contact information to request accommodations for a meeting. NRPC's protocols to respond to participation-related concerns such as Open Meeting Law violations comply with 1 V.S.A. § 314 and are posted on the NRPC website.

### *Work Groups*

Work groups are assigned a specific task, with a time limit for reaching a conclusion or producing a draft document, subject to ratification by official decision-makers. The membership of these groups often includes local people or representatives from interest groups, appointed by elected officials or agency executives. Work groups can be a method of engaging stakeholders in their native language. Work group meetings should have adequate sound amplification technology to ensure that they are accessible to all community members. Translation services will also be made available when requested with at least 2 business days' advance notice.

### *Comment Forms*

Comment forms are often used to solicit public input on specific issues being presented at a workshop or other public meeting. Comment forms can be very general and open-ended in nature, or can request very specific feedback.

### *Surveys and Questionnaires*

In-person and telephone interviews, surveys, and Web-based questionnaires are used to gather information from the public about potential new programs and when updating existing programs, services, and plans.



## *Level 3: Involve*

Under the “Involve” level, the NRPC will work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. The NRPC’s promise to the public is “We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternative developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the discussion.”

Characteristics of participation include:

- Two-way channel of communication
- Multiple interactions
- Medium to long-term
- Advancement of solutions to complex problems

## Strategies of Participation

### *Advisory and Steering Committees*

For some plans and projects, an advisory committee of stakeholders is assembled to assist in defining the project purpose and need, represent the interests of various constituent groups, and provide input, feedback and guidance on project documents and process.

### *Project Meetings/Workshops/Open Houses/Forums*

Public meetings and other similar events are arranged to disseminate information, provide a setting for discussion, and gather feedback from the public. Depending on the type of project, they can be hosted multiple times to develop planning documents and shape alternatives. These meetings may be held in different formats, including poster sessions, open houses/interaction periods, hands-on activities, formal presentations, question and answer format, brainstorming sessions, small break-out groups, or charrettes. Some will also support online or hybrid (online and in person) delivery. Some projects such as scoping studies typically follow a prescribed public participation process that includes at least two public meetings: a local concerns meeting and an alternatives presentation meeting. Each project should have an outreach plan tailored to the project’s specific needs. Meeting sites should be configured for and have equipment required to support effective interactions.

### *Direct Mailings and Email Blasts*

Direct mailings and email blasts are used to announce upcoming meetings or activities or to provide information to a specific group of people, such as those who may potentially be impacted by a project or those with a specific interest in a project. Materials should be provided in appropriate languages based on the neighborhood or community. An important step to ensure that this method of participation is successful is to compile and maintain up-to-date mailing lists. Before conducting a direct mailing or email blast, NRPC ensures that messages are sent out based on the latest and most accurate information available.

### *Staff Outreach*

NRPC staff or consultants sometimes conduct direct outreach to residents, especially to vulnerable populations when a specific need is identified.

## *Level 4: Collaborate*

Under the “Collaborate” level, the NRPC will partner with the public in all steps that require decision-making, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. The NRPC’s promise to the public is “We will look to you for advice in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.”

Characteristics of participation include:

- Two-way channel of communication
- Multiple interactions
- Medium to long-term
- Advancement of solutions to complex problems

## **Strategies of Participation**

### *Community or co-led committees*

For some projects a local community may provide project leadership or partner with the NRPC to co-lead a specific effort. This approach may attract stronger public participation than a project led solely by the NRPC due to the presence of local-level leadership. This “insider” approach can result in greater buy-in from the public as people may feel more directly connected to the project.

### *Advisory boards, coalitions, and partnerships*

Collaborative projects require regular, consistent participation and input from the public, key stakeholders, partners and others. Advisory boards, coalitions and partnerships comprised of these varied interests provide the necessary guidance and feedback to NRPC staff, consultants and others performing the day-to-day activities to bring a project to successful completion. These groups can be appointed by the NRPC board or created by a project’s core team.

### *Policy development and advocacy*

Through collaboration with member municipalities and the public, the NRPC can update existing or create new policies that guide future projects and development within communities. Since these are important decisions with long-term implications, it is vital that the public be informed and participate in the process. The NRPC can also advocate for necessary policy changes at all governance levels based on the involvement and support of the public throughout the policy development process. The NRPC regularly collaborates with other Regional Planning Commissions to advocate for policy changes at the state level that would benefit municipalities.

## Level 5: Empower

Under the “Empower” level, final decision-making power is placed in the hands of the public.

Characteristics of participation include:

- Two-way channel of communication
- Multiple interactions
- Medium to long-term
- Advances solutions to complex problems

There are generally few NRPC activities that fall under the Empower section due to NRPC’s statutory and contractual obligations. Member municipalities, through their local elected officials, are empowered in that they have the final approval and acceptance of planning and other activities completed on their behalf. Similarly, the NRPC’s Regional Plan and policies are determined and approved by representatives of the governing bodies of member municipalities.

The NRPC is a catalyst and facilitator for interest groups and municipalities to be empowered through our planning processes and projects. For example, a specific interest group may form an ad hoc committee to advocate for improvements as part of an NRPC study. Municipalities are empowered at the conclusion of a local scoping study to pursue construction or implementation funding.

In the future, it may be possible that work directly undertaken by NRPC falls under the Empower level. Strategies outlined in Level 4, such as community-hosted forums and community-led planning efforts could be appropriate methods of facilitating participation at this level.

## 3. Who is the Public?

When considering the concept of Public Participation, it is important to clarify what is meant by the “public”. In planning processes, the public is not a homogenous group of people, but a diverse group of stakeholders and community members with varying and unique interests. Anyone who has the potential to be impacted by a program should be considered a stakeholder.

Special consideration should be given to groups who have been historically underrepresented in the planning process. In Vermont, the state poll tax was a fee required to vote in local elections that ranged from the modern-day equivalent of \$40 to over \$200 and excluded an estimated tens of thousands of Vermonters from voting in local elections.<sup>1</sup> The poll tax was not fully abolished until 1982<sup>2</sup>, which led to the disenfranchisement of many residents in local democracy. Even today, a lingering preconception can exist that the most important members of a community to involve are

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<sup>1</sup> “Vermont’s Poll Tax.” *New York Times*, 28 May 1965, p. 32, <https://nyti.ms/4gkffPM>.

<sup>2</sup> “Madeleine Kunin: Our Democracy Needs to Win the ‘Right to Vote’ Wars.” *VT Digger*, 12 July 2021, <http://vtdigger.org/2021/07/12/madeleine-may-kunin-our-democracy-needs-to-win-the-right-to-vote-wars/>.

voters or property owners. Underrepresented groups can include indigenous communities, People of Color, low-income residents, people who rent rather than own property, and people who are not already involved in local politics. Ensuring fair and equitable treatment of everyone in our communities is a key aspect of the NRPC's Statement of Inclusion. Furthermore, receiving buy-in from a wide spectrum of community members can help ensure that projects are successful.

NRPC recognizes that it is not "connected" to all populations. Many of our partner organizations have more direct ties to the communities that they serve. Over the course of a project, the best approach may be to disseminate information through our partner organizations to ensure that multiple audiences are reached. NRPC will also work to connect and collaborate with existing organizations who do similar work to ensure that NRPC's efforts are not being duplicated.

Depending on the project, a communications plan can be a useful tool for ensuring that all potential stakeholders are identified and that action is being taken to reach them. Developing a communications plan can also help develop messaging for different audiences. A communications plan can be used in conjunction with a public participation plan (see Appendix A). Below is an outline showing what a basic communications plan can look like:

1. Purpose of communication
  - a. What are the primary and secondary purposes of your communication?
  - b. Which levels of the Spectrum of Participation does your project fall?
2. Audience(s)
  - a. Who are the groups you are trying to reach?
3. Message design
  - a. Varies by audience
  - b. What are the typical content, mood, languages, modes, and channels of communication for each audience?
4. Human and financial resources
  - a. What human and financial resources are available to help conduct public outreach and communication?
5. Dealing with obstacles
  - a. What is the plan for dealing with misdirected, misunderstood or poorly received messaging?
6. Connecting with those who can help spread message
  - a. Who has contacts who can help spread the message, including news media?
  - b. What are reasons the contacts should or could be interested (i.e., why they would want to help)
7. Action plan
  - a. Who does what, and when?
  - b. Can include conceptual phases of work organized by audience
8. Evaluate results and adjust plan

An example communications plan is attached to this document in Appendix B. Additional communications planning resources are available from a variety of sources, including the [Community Tool Box](#) at the University of Kansas Center for Community Health and Development.

## 4. Legal Framework

The following regulations and requirements are the basis for the NRPC's Public Participation Policy. The Policy is intended to ensure that the NRPC is fully compliant with state and federal laws and that our work stays in line with the goals set forth in applicable regulations.

### Federal

#### *Title VI*

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 states that "No person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefit of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." Subsequent federal legislation has led to further protections under Title VI based upon age, gender, and disability, whether mental or physical. NRPC strives to ensure nondiscriminatory access to all programs, services, and activities by all interested stakeholders and to ensure that no person is excluded from participating in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to either intentional or unintentional discrimination under any program, service, or activity receiving federal assistance or funding. (For details, please see NRPC's Title VI plan.) NRPC has a designated staff member (Amy Adams) to coordinate Title VI procedures.

#### *Americans with Disabilities Act*

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), as amended (2008), requires involving the community, particularly those with disabilities, in the development and improvement of public services and capital facilities. Meetings and hearings must be held in ADA-compliant buildings. Reasonable accommodations such as qualified readers or interpreters, provision of or modifications to audio/visual aids or documents, or other visual, hearing, or mobility assistance will be made to assist those with disabilities to participate in meetings, planning, and programming activities.

#### *Environmental Justice*

Presidential Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Underrepresented and Low-Income Populations, was signed in 1994 and reinforced the non-discrimination requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Environmental Protection Agency defines Environmental Justice as the "fair treatment of people of all races, cultures and income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, programs and policies." Fair treatment means that no racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from the operation of industrial, municipal, and commercial enterprises and from the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal programs and policies. Together these two laws promote fair treatment of all people and are considered during all of the NRPC's planning projects.

### State

#### *Environmental Justice Law*

As noted in the Findings section of Act 154 of 2022,

Article VII of the Vermont Constitution establishes the government as a vehicle for the common benefit, protection, and security of Vermonters and not for the particular emolument or advantage of any single set of persons who are only a part of that community. This, coupled with Article I's guarantee of equal rights to enjoying life, liberty, and safety, and Article IV's assurance of timely justice for all, encourages political officials to identify how particular communities may be unequally burdened or receive unequal protection under the law due to race, income, or geographic location (Section 17).

It is the State of Vermont's responsibility to pursue environmental justice for its residents and to ensure that its agencies do not contribute to unfair distribution of environmental benefits to or environmental burdens on low-income, limited-English proficient, and BIPOC communities (Section 19).

As the Act defines,

“Environmental justice” means all individuals are afforded equitable access to and distribution of environmental benefits; equitable distribution of environmental burdens; and fair and equitable treatment and meaningful participation in decision-making processes, including the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Environmental justice recognizes the particular needs of individuals of every race, color, income, class, ability status, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, ethnicity or ancestry, religious belief, or English language proficiency level. Environmental justice redresses structural and institutional racism, colonialism, and other systems of oppression that result in the marginalization, degradation, disinvestment, and neglect of Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color. Environmental justice requires providing a proportional amount of resources for community revitalization, ecological restoration, resilience planning, and a just recovery to communities most affected by environmental burdens and natural disasters.

The law requires state agencies to: identify, reduce, and eliminate environmental health disparities; ensure all Vermonters have equitable access to environmental benefits like clean air and water, healthy food, and public transportation; and prioritize resources for community revitalization, ecological restoration, and resilience planning. Although NRPC is not a state agency directly covered by the law, in program areas such as water quality Environmental Justice policies will in the future shape “*which investments provide environmental benefits to environmental justice focus populations.*”

### **Public Records Law**

The Vermont Public Records Law is rooted in the Vermont Constitution, Article 6, Chapter 1. The details of the law are available at Title 1 V.S.A. § 316-320. The law provides for inspection of public records in a timely way, a process for denying a records request, and a process for appealing that denial. NRPC fulfills requests for public records in a timely manner in conformance with the Public Records Law.

### **Open Meeting Law**

The Vermont Open Meeting Law, Title 1 V.S.A. § 310-314, defines open meetings, public notice requirements, right of the public to speak, executive sessions, meeting minutes, and enforcement

provisions. In carrying out its mission, programs, and projects, NRPC complies with Open Meeting Law requirements.

## 5. Implementation

The following implementation actions have been identified by NRPC to carry through the goals of the Public Participation Policy in the period following its adoption:

- 1. Introduce the Public Participation Policy to all NRPC subcommittees and identify levels of participation that will be used in the subcommittee's work.**
  - Review the Public Participation Plan at subcommittee meetings and determine which levels of participation the subcommittee's work falls within
  - Use the Public Participation Plan to guide subcommittee outreach efforts
  
- 2. Incorporate public participation planning and communications planning into NRPC's municipal and regional projects.**
  - Use resources in Appendix A and Appendix B where applicable to establish public participation plans and/or communications plans for new regional and municipal projects led by NRPC going forward
  - Track the number of public meetings and number of participants in meetings held by NRPC as a means to measure and evaluate success in public outreach efforts
  - Continue to look for opportunities to cooperate and collaborate with existing groups who work in similar areas.
  
- 3. Establish an NRPC Front Porch Forum account.**
  - Set up a paid NRPC Front Porch Forum account with the ability to post twice per month on all pages in Franklin and Grand Isle counties
  - Determine how to use two posts per month at each monthly in-person staff meeting as part of a coordinated outreach strategy
  - Use metrics provided by Front Porch Forum to evaluate the success of NRPC's posts and refine them accordingly
  
- 4. Publish the NRPC newsletter on a more regular basis and explore methods to reach more people.**
  - Begin publishing newsletter articles on a regular monthly basis
  - Organize newsletter by target area of work to ensure that all applicable topics are covered each month
  - Use part of each monthly in-person staff meeting to generate newsletter article ideas and assign staff members to write them
  - Review current subscribed email contacts and expand the list to include more state-level officials who work with NRPC
  - Explore other methods for expanding newsletter reach, including adding subscribe link to staff email signatures

- Measure success of newsletter content by reviewing metrics to track number of opened emails and links clicked

**5. Expand social media presence on the existing NRPC Facebook account.**

- Join as many community-focused Facebook groups as possible and make posts in these specific groups in addition to regular posting to reach a wider audience
- Begin adding NRPC events to the Facebook events calendar and the evaluate the effectiveness of this method

**6. Explore the possibility of establishing an AmeriCorps VISTA position responsible for communications and social media.**

- Outline potential responsibilities for an AmeriCorps position focused on increasing staff capacity for communications and social media
- Coordinate with SerVermont to determine the feasibility of this position

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# Appendix A: Public Participation Plan Template

Project Name:

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
The NRPC will provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions.	The NRPC will obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.	The NRPC will work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	The NRPC will partner with the public in all non-routine steps of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	Final decision making power is placed in the hands of the public.
Project Activities:	Project Activities:	Project Activities:	Project Activities:	Project Activities:
Strategies of Participation: <input type="checkbox"/> Website <input type="checkbox"/> Regional Data Scorecard <input type="checkbox"/> Posters / Flyers / Display Ads <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter <input type="checkbox"/> Press Releases <input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Social Media <input type="checkbox"/> Other:	Strategies of Participation: <input type="checkbox"/> Public Hearing <input type="checkbox"/> Work Groups <input type="checkbox"/> Comment forms <input type="checkbox"/> Survey <input type="checkbox"/> Other:	Strategies of Participation: <input type="checkbox"/> Advisory / Steering Committee <input type="checkbox"/> Project Meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Workshops <input type="checkbox"/> Open Houses <input type="checkbox"/> Forums <input type="checkbox"/> Direct Mailing / Email Blast <input type="checkbox"/> Staff Outreach <input type="checkbox"/> Other:	Strategies of Participation: <input type="checkbox"/> Community / Co-led Committee <input type="checkbox"/> Advisory board <input type="checkbox"/> Coalition / Partnership <input type="checkbox"/> Policy development and advocacy <input type="checkbox"/> Other:	Strategies of Participation: <input type="checkbox"/> Community / Co-led Committee <input type="checkbox"/> Coalition / Partnership <input type="checkbox"/> Other:
Additional details on strategies of participation:	Additional details on strategies of participation:	Additional details on strategies of participation:	Additional details on strategies of participation:	Additional details on strategies of participation:

1. What is the purpose of the engagement?
2. Stakeholders: Who is potentially impacted by this project or program?
3. What strategies and tools will the NRPC use to ensure it has information from and research about the relevant groups and communities?
4. How will the NRPC effectively reach all of its audiences? Consider whether a separate communications plan is necessary (see Appendix B)
5. What are the potential barriers and risks to doing this work?
6. If there are decisions to be made, how does community participation fit into the overall decision-making process?
7. How will the NRPC inform the community of benchmarks or progress throughout the process?
8. How will the NRPC evaluate the success of its public participation plan, both in terms of processes and outcomes?

## Appendix B: Example Communications Plan Outline

Below is a prototype communications plan outline developed to support future water quality planning efforts in NRPC’s Clean Water Service Provider basins. It may be instructive for other types of work as well.

### 1. Purpose of our communication

#### Primary

- Educating the public about the issue the organization addresses.
- Recruiting program participants or beneficiaries.
- Rallying supporters or the general public to action for our cause.

#### Secondary

- Becoming known, or better known, in the community.
- Recruiting volunteers to help with our work.
- Announcing events.
- Celebrating honors or victories.

### 2. Audiences

- Residents and property owners in CWSP basins and those in priority watersheds
- Those already committed to improving water quality
- Those already taking positive steps, especially those who are opinion leaders
- Those whose actions could if changed would improve water quality

### 3. Message Design (varies by audience)

Audience	Typical content	Mood	Languages/modes	Channels
Basin residents and owners, Municipalities	There is a problem, people are working on it, and things will be better when it is solved. (Hopeful)	All positive	English/French/? Plain and straightforward	Letters to editor, News stories/editorials, Social media, Community access TV/radio, FPF
Priority watershed basin residents and owners, Priority municipalities	There is a significant problem and/or there is a problem near where you live. People are working on it, but we could use your help. Things will be better when it is solved. (Tempered hopeful)	Mostly positive	English/French/? Plain but with some urgency	Presentations to groups, Participation in community events, Social media, Community access TV/radio, FPF

Those already committed to environment issues; includes potential partners	You know there is a problem. Here's what we are doing about it and what we hope to do about it with your continued support. We value your commitment.	Mostly positive	English/French/? Plain but with some urgency	Newsletters, Posters / swag, presentations to groups, web meetings
Those already taking action; includes existing partners	You know there is a significant problem. We value your action. Here's what we are doing about it and what we hope to do about it. How can we support you? Do you want to do more?	Mostly positive	Specific to group or individual. More technical or complex and with some urgency	Web meetings, Newsletters, Posters / swag, News stories (feature stories about those taking action)
Those who could take action and have impact	Here's what we think about the problem. What are your thoughts on the problem? We might be able to offer you something that addresses the problem. Would you consider?	All positive	Specific to individual. Plain / straightforward unless more technical indicated	One on one, Opinion leaders/peers, Word of mouth
Indigenous and diverse communities	What are your thoughts on the problem? Would you like to collaborate? If so, how? Evaluate web site's need for inclusive language	Neutral	English/French/? Plain and straightforward	One on one, Opinion leaders/peers, Word of mouth, Community forums/listening sessions, Faith communities

**4. Human and financial resources**

TBD – depends at least in part on eligibility of expenses from various sources.

**5. Dealing with obstacles**

- First step is avoiding them: Processes aimed at preventing misdirected, misunderstood and poorly received messages.
- General guidance: Determine when something is a problem. Find out what happened. Talk with those affected. Listen with respect. Be honest and apologize if at fault. Flex where flex

is possible. Correct message if/where it needs to be corrected. Continue sending the corrected message.

- Consider the plan for a true crisis (positions, answers to possible questions, notification process)
- Who does what: In a crisis, there should be only one point of contact in an organization.

**6. Connecting with those who can help spread our message, especially news media**

	Local/regional newspapers	Radio	Access TV	Community leaders/ institutions
Who has contacts?				
Reason the contact should or could be interested (i.e., why they would want to help):	Effect on their readers, the environment, the economy	Local radio – effect of issue on listeners Statewide radio- new angle on issue of statewide interest; get ahead of other outlets	Fits with their mission (as they are mission driven this should be easy sell)	Effect on their constituents, members of their group and friends, the environment, the economy; provides opportunity to be associated with positive effort; aligns with mission

**7. Action plan - Who does what and when**

What	Who	When
Discuss communication objectives, scope of plan, and phases		0-2 weeks
Discuss assets and resource needs in light of updated objectives, scope, and phases		2- 4 weeks
Discuss potential and likely resource availability		4-8 weeks
Create detailed 6 (or 12) month action plan		8 -10 weeks

Conceptual Phases of work, organized by audience:

1. Short term
  - a. Those already committed to environment issues; includes potential partners
  - b. Those already taking action; includes existing partners
  - c. Indigenous and diverse communities
2. Medium term/ Ongoing
  - a. Basin residents and owners, Municipalities
  - b. Those already taking action; includes existing partners
  - c. Indigenous and diverse communities

3. In the future/Long term:
  - a. Priority watershed basin residents and owners, Priority municipalities
  - b. Those who could take action and have impact

**8. Evaluate our results and adjust plan**