

The Horinko Group
Engaging the Public for River Sustainability and Livable Communities
Water Salon Series, Part III
Summary and Synthesis
October 25, 2010
National Great Rivers Museum
Alton, IL

Purpose and Overview

The Horinko Group sponsored the third and final installment in its 2010 Water Salon Series to explore the role of civic engagement as a necessary element for moving us toward river sustainability and more livable watershed communities. Participants examined the core principles of civic engagement as an effective means to engage a demographically diverse but aligned cadre in deliberating transparently, inclusively, and scientifically for collaborative decision-making. Innovative public engagement approaches were presented that offer the potential for such multi-level decision-making and capacity building for shared visioning about whole water systems, providing a foundation for systemic water management and governance. Building on past salons, the importance of social capital continued to be recognized as a critical component to evolving from more traditional public involvement into inclusive civic engagement.

The Salon featured a panel of thought leaders to initiate and establish context for the afternoon's discussion, while providing insight into case studies and lessons learned from current civic engagement efforts underway and opportunities for additional individuals and communities to join in the water dialogue (refer to *Attachments I and III: Agenda and Executive Biographies*).

Context

Following The Horinko Group's April 13, 2010 Water Summit entitled, *Sustaining Our Water Resources Through Collaboration*, a series of quarterly Water Salons were designed to provide participants from government and non-government entities the continued opportunity to engage in a collegial, robust, and reflective discussion about current and pressing water resources topics. Each of the ensuing salons intended to delve deeper into the central issues and themes emerging from the Summit.

The first Water Salon entitled, *Water Managers and Decision-Makers: Searching for Synergy*, was held on June 15 and featured Dr. Gerry Galloway, retired US Army Corps of Engineers Brigadier General and Professor of Engineers at the University of Maryland to explore the fundamental disconnect among operating water practitioners and decision-makers in government, civil society, and the private sector. The salon resulted in a set of key considerations for overcoming the identified challenges, while providing additional insight into the underlying issues discussed at the Summit.

The second Water Salon entitled, *Addressing Water Issues and Finding Common Direction Through a Social Capital Framework*, was held on August 31 and featured Dr. Stephen Gasteyer, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Michigan State University to examine building bridges between experts/regulators and the public using social networks to raise awareness and promote social learning, consensus, advocacy, and accountability for water needs and interventions.

The third and final installment in the 2010 Water Salon Series was held on October 25 and featured Todd Ambs, President of River Network, Anne Lewis, Founder of America's Waterway, and Theo Brown, Senior Associate of AmericaSpeaks to examine the use of civic engagement principles and processes to bring people together for informed and committed action along our nation's waterways.

Based on the reoccurring issues from the past Summit and Salons, participants were asked to reflect on the following questions prior to the event:

- In what ways might we promote civic engagement and active outreach and education?
- In what ways might we support political courage in water resources decisions for the long-term?
- In what ways might we further protective vs. reactive decision making?
- In what ways might we build trust among water resources stakeholders across jurisdictions and government levels?

Welcome, Objectives, Introductions

Patrick McGinnis, Water Resources Team Leader, The Horinko Group

In his welcome, Patrick McGinnis, Water Resources Team Leader for The Horinko Group, challenged participants to consider ways to build a broader appreciation and understanding about water resource issues currently facing our nation. "The scale and complexity of the decisions we are confronted with demand collaboration informed by our best science, technology, and common sense," Mr. McGinnis stated. He asserted, "Our success will be driven by our ability to participate fully, communicate thoughtfully, and cooperate willingly."

Mr. McGinnis introduced moderator Anne Lewis, Founder of America's Waterway. As moderator, Ms. Lewis will provide additional context and orient the topic, revealing how and why public engagement can foster the necessary conditions for authentic public involvement on a range of shared issues. Complementing her presentation, Theo Brown, Senior Associate of AmericaSpeaks will describe the innovative technologies available to bring diverse views together for more creative thinking and decision-making. Prior to doing so, Todd Ambs, President of River Network will illustrate how the principles of civic engagement have been applied successfully describing a number of case studies.

Opening Remarks – Lessons Learned from Public Engagement

Todd Ambs, President, River Network ([Click Here](#) to download presentation)

Todd Ambs, President of River Network, leads a national conservation organization that empowers people from 700 partner water groups and tribes from across the nation through training, matching grants, and consulting services in eight regions. These groups were formed

to address natural and water resources, wetlands, land conservation, wildlife, forest resources, pollution abatement, monitoring, and energy issues through education and advocacy activities. River Network's services bring organizational skills and stability to help these partners play a meaningful role in public engagement.

Mr. Ambs recounted lessons learned through a case study on public engagement involving the Great Lakes, a national and international resource for the economy, recreation, and the environment that accounts for 20 percent of the world's fresh surface water. When the Great Lakes were threatened with water withdrawals, the governors of eight states and two Canadian provinces joined forces and crafted a vision to develop a compact through an extensive collaborative and public engagement process involving over 100 days of face-to-face meetings, 400 conference calls, 62 public meetings, 150 days of comment periods, 50,000 written comments, and 92 drafts of a governing document. The public engagement activities built ground rules for discussion and engagement, trust, and consensus. The openness and learning that was forged through the public engagement process became a model of transparency and collaboration. It led to a 2005 agreement signed into law in 2008 to protect the resources of the Great Lakes. The shared vision and collective goodwill that developed from the process has sustained a participatory culture across ten jurisdictions.

The Great Lakes Basin Compact is the first multi-jurisdictional agreement of this magnitude in the world. The second directive in the Annex (2001) stipulated a broad-based public participation program sustained through an Advisory Committee (including Ohio, Michigan, and Ontario Province in Canada), engagement with agriculture, NGO, and industry stakeholders, and periodic reports to the public. A key component of success was a sustained sense of place etched into the fabric of life among the population in the region, which bred a passion to save the resources of a revered water body. The principles of public engagement (transparency and trust, inclusion and demographic diversity, special recognition of Tribes and First Nations, sustained engagement, and participatory culture) have created a living document that guides work and progress regionally along the Great Lakes. The public had abundant opportunities to provide their input and decision-makers listened. Perhaps the greatest principle applied was patience to allow the culture of participation to develop and take hold.

Seven Principles of Civic Engagement – Water Policy Applications

Anne Lewis, Founder, America's Waterway ([Click Here](#) to download presentation)

Anne Lewis defined civic engagement as a process that “engenders collective action to identify and address issues of public concern, instilling a sense of personal responsibility to uphold obligations as part of a community.” Civic engagement is more than consensus building, collaboration, communication, or public advocacy.

Ms. Lewis reviewed the *Seven Principles of Civic Engagement* and engaged in a lively discussion with participants about how each applies to river sustainability. The principles are based on the work of the *National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation* (2009), which summarized seven principles to effective collaborative water management (see www.ncdd.org/pep/).

1. Careful Planning and Preparation

Thoughtful design, organization, clear purpose, and attention to the needs of participants reflect this principle. This step establishes inclusive oversight, ensures that data and science inform the discussion, incorporates both facts and values as a framework for discussion, and provides a common language. Not only is information

authenticated to support an informed discussion, but also trust is built through confidence in the groundwork.

2. *Inclusion and Demographic Diversity*

These factors lay the groundwork for quality outcomes and democratic legitimacy. Diverse ethnic and geographic representative generates new ideas. The diversity legitimizes outcomes.

3. *Collaboration and Shared Purpose*

This principle is useful when the issue is complex and involves many stakeholders. The objective is to create a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for the solution through steps that take the group from awareness through shared understanding and affinity, to expressed preferences and involvement, and finally to commitment and action. This principle is critical in today's interconnected society where diverse interests and perspectives must be addressed, and is especially critical to leverage resources and integrate solutions while avoiding duplication of effort.

4. *Openness and Learning*

Fosters new ideas and builds trust by allowing questioning and evaluation of ideas.

5. *Transparency and Trust*

Having a neutral meeting convener and an open process reinforces the trust building, which in turn encourages people to contribute willingly to solution finding.

6. *Impact and Action*

Concrete goal setting with attention to measurable results can lead to actionable public policy.

7. *Sustained Engagement and Participatory Culture*

A successful meeting or public discussion is not the end game. Sustained informed participatory public dialogue breeds meaningful and ongoing change.

Civic engagement does not mean simply facilitating participation. Rather, it means facilitating citizens to come together to identify, tackle, and hopefully resolve issues and problems while building the capacity to formulate and implement strategies for making progress. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) released a report in August 2010 about engaging communities¹ that provides an example of applying the principles. The MPCA used a framework that involved assessment of conditions and working in an adaptive way to build community capacity. The framework included many factors: a strategic planning process that leads to a concrete project plan, an interactive idea bank of best practices and research on public involvement to stimulate creative thinking among project teams, a specialist network of organizations and practitioners skilled in group dynamics and civic leadership development to assist project teams, a practitioners forum for on-line video-based forum to share knowledge and expertise, and a performance tracking framework to enable local citizens and state and local government agencies to track project and program performance to evaluate success. This entire process builds community capacity, beginning with a statement of the problem and an assessment for the potential for engagement, including options for the best ways to involve

¹ See Alan McGowan, "Science and Policy for Sustainable Development," *Environment*, March-April, 2009, available at www.environmentmagazine.org.

people and actual civic engagement plans. Adaptive management enables adjustments to be made along the way in this capacity-building approach.

Group Discussion of the Principles

The group discussion revealed many insights and suggestions about how to apply the civic engagement principles to our shared water issues:

Principles 1 and 2 – Careful Planning and Preparation / Inclusion and Demographic Diversity

Civic action engenders collective action to identify and address issues of public concern. It instills a sense of personal responsibility to uphold our obligation to be part of a community, going beyond consensus building and public hearings.

Careful planning involves using both facts and values, while building a common lexicon. Be cautious not to use government bureaucratese and acronyms.

The public hearing model tends to divide and conquer by gathering people and then breaking them into work groups to develop different aspects of a subject. A more effective process for non-controversial subjects would be to engage people in an open discussion and focus on what is important or prioritize through “dot voting” (each person gets a number of dots to use as a vote to prioritize items on a list). To prepare for civic engagement, conduct relevant research prior and provide to participants before voting.

Asking people to rubber stamp a position is not an example of the deliberative civic engagement process. It is important to create a context for input that broadens perspectives and the conversation. A systems context is the best context.

The simple arrangement of the discussion setting can make a difference (e.g., set up round tables of 8-10 people for conversation vs. having rows of chairs facing a panel sitting up on a stage). Decision-makers should be placed at each table to facilitate discussion.

Use trusted individuals and institutions in the community to help organize the discussion and identify and invite participants. Meeting organizer should assume the role of “the honest broker.”

Inviting a diverse group into the conversation creates the opportunity for new ideas. Public education activities can be used to ready people for the dialogue.

Discuss and set ground rules for the discussion early on. People try to take a meeting over when they feel they are not being heard. Allowing an initial “complaint session” can help diffuse the tension.

Principle 3 – Collaboration and Shared Purpose

Collaboration allows for complexity and multi-party views on water. It is important to give people a sense of ownership over the problem and solution. There is more ownership when locals are involved and have a chance to agree on the outcomes. The further away you physically are from a river or waterway, the less involved people will be in sustaining the resource. A systems model will help link multiple levels and place the conversation in a broader context. Include the voices of landowners (e.g., farmers) that are in many cases integral participants. Open meetings are more likely to foster exploration of joint solutions than closed meetings.

A constant challenge will be getting people to agree to proactive planning without the impetus of an emergency. Strive to allow people to express their underlying fears. The challenge with this, however, is to get honest feedback. Fear of someone/something taking our water away can foster conversation and create a common bond among participants. Having a common adversary can be a starting point for discussion, conversation, and/or collaboration. Shared risk minimizes turf issues.

Avoid setting up “either/or” situations or discussions. Open-ended questions can foster collaboration. Use questions that are of shared public concern. A good facilitator can help promote such collaborative conversation.

Set the climate for collaboration in order to develop shared understanding and affinity. Look for the lowest common denominator upon which people can derive a shared purpose and do so early in the process. Water quality and water availability are underlying issues shared by many and therefore can be the starting point for discussion.

Acknowledge that sometimes participants want answers, not to generate answers.

Principles 4 and 5 – Opening and Learning / Transparency and Trust

A neutral, non-threatening convener can help build trust among participants. Participants should feel comfortable posing questions and questioning what is being said. Setting expectations is the key to building such trust and openness.

Field trips or subject site visits can help to foster greater understanding and acceptance.

Principles 6 and 7 – Impact and Action / Sustained Engagement and Participation

Expectations should be set using concrete and measurable goals.

Make developing a public policy an objective. Set a policy agenda.

Identify a constituency.

Set target dates and milestones to accomplish goals and objectives.

Engage people using a variety of media to expand and maximize the audience.

Technology as a Tool for Civic Engagement

Theo Brown, Senior Associate, America Speaks

Theo Brown provided an overview of AmericaSpeaks, a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization dedicated to engaging citizens in public decision-making. AmericaSpeaks has engaged the public in forums related to planning and growth, budget and fiscal policy, health care, economic development, education and youth development, disaster recovery, public policy, development of organizational strategy, and international issues. The organization holds town meetings and summits of up to 5,000 people through a process that replaces speeches and panel presentations with round-table discussions supported by a trained facilitator, detailed and balanced background discussion guides, the interjection of short background videos developed with the help of local groups, and electronic support that provides participants with a summary and synthesis of their democratic voting about issues.

Mr. Brown further described the process and technology used by AmericaSpeaks to transform table discussions into recommendations through wireless groupware computers and polling keypads. “Theme teams” working offline provide a summary and synthesis in support of responsive feedback and voting by participants. The quick turnaround from discussion to prioritized ideas results in a written 3-4 page report for the participants and decision-makers. This enables decision-makers, who have observed the table discussion to get greater buy-in to the issues and to respond to citizen input at the end of the meeting. This democratic technology-based process is responsive, transparent, and empowering for citizens, community leaders, and elected officials.

Mr. Brown presented a brief video that demonstrated the process at work. He stressed how the technology can effectively connect people across jurisdictions, brings experts into the discussion, and link individuals regardless of distance, inclement weather, or other challenges. The process of democracy in action levels the playing field by promoting self-democracy among equals to hear all diverse voices/perspectives for an unbiased synthesized report. The process of listening fosters learning, new insights, and an enhanced commitment to act. Everyone has a voice and the potential to make a difference in promoting a culture of participation and community action. The structured meeting format can be used to promote listening sessions up and down the Mississippi River to be a catalyst for ongoing conversation toward sustainable action.

Closing Remarks

Anne Lewis and Patrick McGinnis wrapped up the Salon by highlighting central themes and key outcomes from the discussion:

Ms. Lewis, “Water issues require finding new ways to get people involved and to solve problems. Thoughtful preparation and planning beforehand can launch civic engagement processes and shortcut the time to get to decisions, but the approaches described can also be inserted in the middle of a process. New ways to plan for civic engagement can build livable communities. The Seven Principles of Civic Engagement are guidelines for applying a new science of deliberative democracy.”

Pat McGinnis, “As discussed this afternoon, there are certainly a number of new organizing technologies available to bring people into the water conversation. Adaptive management and civic engagement will further help to inform and engage stakeholders. Bringing these two approaches forward in an integrated fashion can better position decision-makers at the national, regional, and local levels to steward our water resources in a manner that sustains more livable communities. Broadening participation in important water discussions while strengthening the measure to which those discussions are informed by our best science and management practices will continue to require leadership and champions.”

Path Ahead

The Horinko Group’s 2010 Water Summit, Salon Series, and Webinar Series centered on communication and collaboration in water resources development and stewardship. In 2011, we will build on these efforts, turning our attention to sustainability strategies that advance early and actionable objectives in areas conducive to attaining on-the-ground results. These efforts will be resultant of effective communication and collaboration in areas where a shared common purpose can be forged while respecting the differences that too often have kept us apart.

ATTACHMENT I: FINAL ATTENDEE LIST

Todd Ambs
President
River Network

Dr. Donna Ayres
Senior Consultant
The Horinko Group

Doug Bauer
Vice President
Pizzo & Associates

James Boyd
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Theo Brown
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Isaac Chapman
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ATTACHMENT I: FINAL ATTENDEE LIST (continued)

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Founder
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Jo Anne Smiley
Mayor
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Chuck Spitzack
Regional Project Manager
Navigation Ecosystem Sustainability Project
Rock Island District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Brett Stawar
Chairman
Meeting of the Great Rivers
National Scenic Byway

Tom Thompson
Mayor
City of Grafton, IL

Eli Weissman
Executive Vice President, Operations
Clean Water America Alliance

ATTACHMENT II: AGENDA

Engaging the Public for River Sustainability and Livable Communities

Water Salon Series, Part III

October 25, 2010

National Great Rivers Museum

Alton, IL

Registration and Lunch	12:00 – 1:00pm
Welcome, Objectives, Introductions Patrick McGinnis, Water Resources Team Leader, The Horinko Group (Facilitator)	1:00 – 1:15pm
Opening Remarks – Lessons Learned from Public Engagement Todd Ambs, President, River Network	1:15 – 1:45pm
Seven Principles of Civic Engagement – Water Policy Applications Anne Lewis, Founder, America’s Waterway (Moderator)	1:45 – 3:15pm
Break	3:15 – 3:30pm
Technology as a Tool for Civic Engagement Theo Brown, Senior Associate, AmericaSpeaks	3:30 – 4:00pm
Summary and Follow-Up Anne Lewis, Founder, America’s Waterway	4:00 – 4:15pm
Wrap-Up Patrick McGinnis, Water Resources Team Leader, The Horinko Group	4:15 – 4:30pm
Networking Reception	5:00 – 7:30pm

ATTACHMENT III: EXECUTIVE BIOGRAPHIES

Todd Ambs is River Network's fifth President and has worked in the environmental policy field for more than 30 years. His extensive experience in both state government and nonprofit organizations includes serving as Executive Director of two statewide river organizations, Policy Director for the Ohio Attorney General and Senior Policy Analyst for the Wisconsin Department of Justice. From 2003, until becoming President of River Network in May 2010, Mr. Ambs ran the Water Division for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. He has served on a number of water-related boards and commissions and was the lead negotiator for the State of Wisconsin during the development of the Great Lakes Compact. Mr. Ambs continue to serve on the Great Lakes Commission, Great Lakes Protection Fund, and the Upper Mississippi River Basin Association.

Theo Brown has a long history of working with AmericaSpeaks that began in 1998 when he was an organizing consultant to Americans Discuss Social Security. As a Senior Associate, he has worked on outreach and recruitment for many AmericaSpeaks projects through the years including Listening to the City, DC's Citizen Summits, and Voices and Choices in Northeast Ohio. Most recently, Mr. Brown was Director of Outreach for the Unified New Orleans Plan Community Congresses and coordinated local recruitment for the eight cities involved in CaliforniaSpeaks.

Anne Lewis is the founder of America's Waterway, a new and aspiring nonprofit formed to create an interactive community to unify the Mississippi River to build whole-River approaches to its character, condition and future. To launch America's Waterway, Ms. Lewis met with leaders in Mississippi River communities and in government to gauge their value for and associations with the River. She worked with these groups and River Network to raise awareness of civic engagement and collaboration on behalf of the Mississippi River. More recently, she has tapped into social networking and other communication strategies to initiate a dialogue about the Mississippi River's future. She is partnering with AmericaSpeaks to provide the technical platform to engage Mississippi River residents from all walks of life and areas of expertise to build a Mississippi River constituency that will sustain itself via the Internet.

Before starting America's Waterway, Ms. Lewis worked in the marketing communication and public relations fields where she has led strategic communication planning engagements for corporations, nonprofits and private foundations. Additionally, she has taught political organizing as well as served in state political party office.

Patrick McGinnis serves as The Horinko Group's Water Resource Team Leader for the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Systems. His experience and interest focuses on a broad range of economic opportunities for livable community design, strategic planning and facilitation, public/private sector interaction and consensus building. Prior to joining The Horinko Group in 2009, Mr. McGinnis worked over twenty years as a field biologist and public lands administrator with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, leading an effort to build a sustainable systems presence on an open space footprint of 164,000 acres of public lands and water critically situated at the confluence of the Upper Mississippi and Lower Illinois Rivers.

Currently, Mr. McGinnis serves on the board of the St. Louis Confluence Riverkeepers and the Meeting of the Rivers Foundation, the planning committee for the Meeting of the Great Rivers National Scenic Byway, and the marketing committee for the Audubon Center at Riverlands.