

CommUnity Conversations

Environmental and Healthy Community Organizations

April 28th, 2020

This event was the fifth in a series of virtual conversations bringing together service organizations and supporters from around Wisconsin to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on their work. Twenty professionals from environmental and healthy community organizations and their partners were in attendance. The conversation focused on programming adjustments, meeting new community needs, and thinking through program sustainability.

Adapting to COVID-19

Under normal circumstances, environmental and healthy community organizations coordinate day camps, school field trips, workshops, and other events for Wisconsin residents of all ages. With many of these activities on hold due to COVID-19, organizations are pursuing remote engagement opportunities, from home gardening workshops to guided meditation.

Volunteers are also an important part of conservation efforts for these nonprofits. Community members continue to be enthusiastic about getting involved, but organizations are thinking through how best to reduce risk. Initial efforts include mobilizing volunteers to take water quality measurements from their own property and engaging in other conservation efforts that can be done while social distancing.

Emerging Community Needs

Schools, teachers, and parents are all facing challenges in the transition to online learning. Nonprofits have heard a call for new curricular materials that can be delivered remotely. Some environmental and healthy community organizations are pivoting their work to meet this need by developing learning tools in partnership with local teachers and school systems.

Sustainability and Next Steps

Many of the revenue streams that environmental and healthy community organizations rely on, including fundraising events, are indefinitely on hold. However, school districts may continue to have budgets for educational programming in the fall. Nonprofits are exploring remote programming options for students, which is both in line with their missions and financial sustainability goals.

Even with adaptations, organizations are facing considerable uncertainty. Schools may well tighten budgets for environmental programming, and it is not clear when in-person events can safely resume or if virtual events can fill the revenue gap.

Call for Action from the Field

- Foster nonprofit-school partnerships and explore opportunities for collaboration on remote environmental education.
- Organizations need guidance on how to safely involve volunteers in conservation and citizen science efforts.
- Nonprofits need resources on remote engagement best practices and spaces to share learning with one another.



Extension

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