

SNEP Forum

Webinar Transcript

June 13, 2023

Adam: Ok, so first off I'd just like to please join me in a big round of applause to all our facilitators of the day. Thank you all and please continue clapping for CEI and BCC teams for helping with such a seamless event. Thank you to Emily and all of her crew and to all of you folks in the back, this has gone so smoothly, very appreciative for you all. During this last segment, I'm going to try to keep this as brief as possible just so folks can get on the road, I'd like to or actually, I'm sorry, there is one more round of applause necessary and that's to all of our poster presenters so thank you again.

[Applause]

Now, for this segment what I would love to do is just kind of do a brief round robin to invite our facilitators and anyone else in the audience to share some of the takeaways that they've taken away for during any of the sessions today or if there was a particularly discuss or interesting discussion that you kind of want to expand on with the full group here, most of the full group here, some of the full group here, this would be that opportunity to do that, so who's brave enough to start?

Ian: I'll be the microphone runner as well, so I don't know, oh yes I'm Ian Dombroski EPA region one, so I was on the how to tweak and improve the SNEP program, as a whole I think our broad takeaways were that it's usually easier to get SNEP funding through a secondary party, so through the Swig or through the network. EPA direct funding, the applications are a little challenging, the reporting requirements are a little challenging as well, same thing with quality assurance project plans there were some mentions of you know like a universal Co-op or streamlining the quality assurance process a little bit. We heard that generally the Swig and the network are well received, folks really like them, got like three pages of notes here. A bit more emphasis on dam removal would be good and let's see another key takeaway here was sort of a training the trainer approach to some of the way that the network does things. Yeah and I think that's about it. Am I missing anything else Steph? Thank you.

Elizabeth: Hi, I'm Elizabeth Scott and I facilitated this session on public-private partnerships and we discussed about, we discussed that concept in very broad terms and really got kind of at both the private sector interests as well as from kind of private business all the way down to kind of the small non-profit and I think the ideas that we came away with are the importance of public and private partnerships in that very broad sense and that for private entities often we have consultant firms, for example, who are providing services to municipalities that aren't really recognized like often they'll help with preparing grant applications and there's really no kind of way to acknowledge that which I don't know that it really hinders their involvement but we talked about it'd be good if there was some way to be able to recognize the level of effort that they put in on these projects and I guess they just put it off to business development but they are basically providing a service and providing technical assistance to municipalities in the process of doing that. We also talked about the importance of incentives for and I think entities in general, private and, you know incentives for these relationships to occur just put it in very broad terms, and we also heard from one private business interest that said that his business would be willing to invest significantly in the region to bring some technology capability to the region, but needed some guarantee of business, kind of that there was some security and they're making that kind of investment that they would be able to get a return on their investment kind of thing and so that certainly with some food for thought to that we took away from that and then we also heard from the issue of small organizations and particularly in the space of really wanting to be more inclusive in working with some of the disadvantaged communities and really hearing from the communities, and not just kind of telling them what they need to do, but hearing what they think is needed and that it's really important to involve those folks, but there's often a challenge with them being able to come up with a match that's needed even with, you know, sometimes in-kind services that that can be really challenging and that really just the value of collaboration and that there is an assumption I think often at government level that that just happens and that we don't need to actually try to program for it or to you know provide incentives for collaboration but

that is really key to our being able to meet our our goals at scale and not just go like grant project by grant project, but really try to like take this to another level that we really need the collaborations of public and private relationships to help make that happen. And there's a couple people in the group, but add anything that I missed.

Adam: Yeah, any other thoughts on Elizabeth or Ian's comments? And this is for the full group, we can open it, good, all right, all right.

Matt: Hello everyone, I'm Matt, I'm with the U.S EPA region one, I helped facilitate the coordinating among technical assistance providers and thank you for segwaying so well into the session that I helped facilitate. One of the main things we talked about was how cooperation and coordination aren't just things that come out of nowhere, it takes funding, it takes a lot of effort, and it takes time, and we've talked about a lot of things with a very small group, but another key point we talked about is how some small rural towns just aren't realistically never going to have the capacity to do some of the more technical things, they don't need to do these things regularly, so they really need the support and assistance from these technical assistance providers. Yeah, I'm gonna pass it off.

Adam: Thanks Matt.

Tim: All right, I'm Tim Pasakarnis, the Cape Cod Commission, I moderated the session on sort of streamlining regional data and better understanding the SNEP region through all that regional data and it was, it was a sort of self-driven, maybe occasionally rambling discussion, I didn't actually do a lot of talking, I kind of started things off and then it went up into the balcony and sort of had a mind of its own, which was great because that was the point, the point was not for all of us to get up and talk at you all, the point was to get feedback from everyone attending, so I really appreciated that. Some takeaways, we got some reinforcement on things that we, some of the SNEP subcommittees, you know, thought we already knew, which were things like getting everybody's data into a similar format, it's really difficult and it's not an onus that we're going to be successful in putting on the people who are collecting data and even if we take away a lot of the barriers to doing that, there needs to be some incentive, some value to getting folks organizations to share their data and thinking about ways that we can add that value, knowing how this data is going to be used, it might be used in some ways by SNEP at the regional level, but used by Municipal staff, who we all know, are you know, already over taxed, not enough time and even beyond that used by Municipal boards and committees who are volunteers and you know really thinking about not, just can we get our data together into one place, but that's not the end, that's not the end goal, once we get to that point, how do we make that data useful to, you know, to all these different end users to the SNEP region and everybody here, but to the people who are actually making decisions based on that data and a big part of it also which was highlighted is the challenge of continuing to collect data after we've done something, after a project has gone in, after a grant is completed, because without that we don't really have the story of whether, you know, what was done was effective or not, and I think that was really good because then we could turn it over to Bryce for his section on how do we tell the stories of successes, so unless anyone who is in the data session wants to plug any other ideas, I'll do that and give it to Bryce.

Adam: Great segway!

Bryce: Yeah we're rolling with the segway, oh yeah, so Bryce Dubois, College of Holy Cross, so I facilitated two sessions, yeah, one the communicating projects successes and challenges and then the second round, academic institutional collaborations with the SNEP program. So I'll speak to both briefly and Haley you can correct me around the first, yeah, in terms of the communicating project successes and challenges, the way that we ran the session was to break up into three groups and ask for groups to respond to the three different SNEP missions, so you know, broadly relating to natural to sort of healthy watersheds and sustainable communities and so some of the successes that we noted were that groups have been leveraging some of the metrics as a way to sort of understand, write their goals and how to communicate that to their partners and to sort of argue for what's needed, still to come and perhaps also aware that where they're getting farther away from that bar and so we heard that that was useful to them in terms of storytelling. Also, of course, a challenge, right, sort of linking up those metrics where they

desire to sort of push especially around biophysical aspects and communicating that to a public that they're not weren't always necessarily sure was, you know, ready and prepared to engage in that kind of conversation. So a second part of that was, in terms of challenges, trying to understand how to, in an aspirational way, support young people in the communities to and the broader community to learn about you know how they're defining healthy watersheds so folks we're talking a lot about different strategies to develop school-based relationships and other sorts of things as opportunities to engage in that educational storytelling and you know larger educational didactic practices. So those are some successes and challenges and then one differentiation that we noticed was that of course, you know, we have two missions within the SNEP program that are very much around biophysical aspects and then the other sustainable communities and so the standard communities project, the narrative successes and challenges oftentimes felt very different from those sort of watershed aspects and so, for example, folks noted, you know, the pressure, financial pressures in Cape Cod and other places as a major challenge and trying to figure out how to, how to talk about that and so that exists, I don't think we've resolved that in a session, but that was something that we noted, which was really important in terms of thinking about how we narrate that as a, as a program and think about that as the things that we fund and how we talk about what we're up to, so those are some high-level things that came out of that session and then I'll just say in terms of the academic institutional collaborations, yeah what a really fun engaged session and spoke on the stage together and you know, we noticed that there are our formal collaborations that, are you know it's a smaller list, but that there is a much larger list of, you know, grant related relationships and so we saw those as opportunities perhaps to advance something like a SNEP affiliation or something along these lines to think about perhaps graduate fellowship relationships, different ways to sort of think about developing more formal relationships between SNEP and especially graduate students and in that way sort of get to the academic institutions as well, so think a lot about that as well as matchmaking, are there ways to sort of connect project opportunities within SNEP to academics that are interested in, you know, applied science such as what's unique about of course a SNEP or Noah funded things which are, you know, don't exist in that kind of applied way in for in other formats for academics and so this is these are unique opportunities to do sort of that applied basic science and so we're trying to think a lot about those opportunities together so those are my top level things. I don't know if there's anything else you would take away. Tim also was facilitating that session with me

Tim: No, I think, I think Bryce you did a really good job of summarizing and we got perhaps further into the weeds of just some of the challenges to establishing those relationships, but I think that was a necessary thing to figure out how to pull ourselves out of the weeds in the future and make some progress on that whole idea.

Kim: Hi, I'm Kim Groff, I'm with the SNEP Network and I'm the Massachusetts liaison and I co-facilitated a session with Pang and the title of the session was understanding the unique challenges of municipalities, community groups and tribes, and we had a really great attendance at this session, the only group that we didn't have represented was tribes, but we had a good distribution of Federal, State, Municipal, Non-Profit, Regional Planning, actually County Government and Non-Profits and Community Groups and so the way we ran our session was we tried to make it interactive, recognizing that there was a lot of information in the morning session and so we had two exercises, and one was we posed a question, what do you need help with? basically was the question and we had created a word cloud. Adam, I don't know if you can pull that up? And it was very interesting because we started out off and as folks started to add words to the word cloud, we kept it open throughout the session, so it sort of shifted and changed and a lot of the themes that came out of this are things that have already been brought up by Ian and others and so a lot of need, it's interesting even though the program's been around since 2012, I think there's a broad spectrum of communities that SNEP assists, what is there 135, and they're all in various stages of development, many communities are still struggling at the front end and really building their capacity, the ability to create a pipeline of projects, to apply for grants, to do community engagement, community outreach, particularly where there's tribes or underserved environmental justice community so I think that's really reflected in this word cloud here and we're going to fill that out a little bit with notes that we took during the session. The second exercise was, we actually set up a scenario and it's something that we see quite often in the region where funding's available, we set it up that there was a million dollar ear mark for a fictitious community in the SNEP region that had about 20,000 residents, was located on an estuary, had environmental justice and tribal communities, that was really suffering from a lot of flooding

and sea level rise, had undergone rapid development and didn't have a lot of work done to date in terms of planning or prioritization, and we basically split up our session into four groups and they worked on it and it was really interesting to see that as time went on there was a lot of engagement and a lot of discussion about the scenario and so it was sort of purposely set up to reflect what we see in a lot of the communities that we're working with and as you might expect, oh we had them outline the tasks and how they would allocate the funding and so there was a few themes that popped out of that and feel free to pop it at any time, so a need for, you know, identifying projects and prioritizing projects and creating that pipeline, there was a recognition that we can't do a lot with a million dollars even though it sounds like a lot of money, so data gathering, getting all the information together in one place, doing some land use analysis, a lot of dialogue around engaging the communities that were underserved and most affected by the flooding and the sea level rise and how that required investment and time to engage the communities and really get feedback about what their experience is with those issues and I'm trying to think, what else? They thought a lot about recognizing that we have this influx through the bipartisan infrastructure bill that while there's good investment going in, there's recognition that it's not enough and so questions and dialogue around how can we sustain the funding streams to get to implementation and be able to support more implementation work. Can you think of anything else? No, you covered it. Okay, so we, what we did was we took notes and then there was great feedback that the SNEP program is wonderful, that it's there, it's wonderful that it's there as a resource with all the various ways that the communities can access technical support and funding, so that was a good takeaway as well.

Phaeng: Yeah, so I'm Phaeng, I co-facilitated with Matt and Kim. Matt, you did an excellent job, nothing to add there. So, what's really interesting, as Kim had mentioned, the first activity was this word cloud and so what we did was we asked folks to first, you know, enter the room and then enter the first thing that came into their minds and we got a word cloud and then after the activity asked them to, based on the conversations that they had within their groups, ask them to add to the word cloud and there were some interesting observations that I think parallel really nicely with what Kim was saying, so facilitation report or support got bigger, as you know, folks were thinking about community engagement and how to really get in touch with those community groups that are like on the ground and being affected by the flooding and so that one was a big one, and then representation and education also increased in size as the time went on in the discussion so those are I think very telling of, you know, what emerged as needs and just to reiterate what Kim said again, like a lot of the allocations of the one million dollars that we noticed were definitely in the forefront of the planning process so spending money on, you know, monitoring, developing quaps, community engagement and then by the time you get to the end there's not much left, but thinking about what other opportunities exist out there for implementation, so it was a really cool exercise and I really appreciated those who attended and provided us comment. That's it.

Marcel: Great. Hi everyone, Marcel Belaval with the U.S Geological Survey, I co-facilitated the session on scaling up from pilot to bigger with Adam and

Adam: I'm not leaving you in the wind Marcel, I'll help out.

Marcel: So, I think an interesting thing and I'll talk a little bit about what we covered in our session but I think the theme that I'm hearing that's the through line on all of this is, how we can better improve our communication at so many different levels? And now I think it's all just, because Adam is the communications coordinator for SNEP that he set this up for the Forum, but so we, quickly again, we were in the scaling up pilots to larger scale application session and we quickly kind of identified that pilot was not necessarily just limited to a strict definition of pilot, but we meant anything that could be replicated or scaled or used more broadly, you know, how can we build that bigger, how can SNEP do a better job with that and the theme that emerged was information sharing amongst people that are working in this space and so that exists all the way from the very kind of small scale design projects like, for example, PRB's, permeable reactive barriers, where there was just a SNEP grantee that put together a technical guidance on how you develop those permeable reactive barriers, so sharing that type of very technical guidance among amongst the SNEP community all the way up to like watersheds scale planning and how you help a community decide whether they would use that technology, have the resources to access that and then apply it appropriately and the theme that came out was, it's really all about people sharing that information between SNEP grantees and between SNEP community members

that are working in those spaces and that a really good way to do that is through in-person interactions and I think people really got a lot of value out of just the conversations they were having here at the Forum between other SNEP Partners, the poster session, just hearing what people are working on and sharing information that way so that was a theme that came out that, you know, SNEP could be more engaged in facilitating those interactions between people especially in an in-person setting and then we also acknowledge that, you know, getting people to attend in-person workshops is hard and, you know, communities that don't have resources, you know, wouldn't be able to participate in that, so if SNEP does develop more of those in-person type interactions that, you know, SNEP should be strategic about making sure that communities they can't access those are finding other ways to access that information.

Adam: Yeah, the only things I'll add to Marcel's summary is, that it was pretty universal in our session at least, that final reports are not necessarily the best way to convey information and lessons learned from grant opportunities, so even though, you know, final reports are something that we have to require as a federal entity, we might be more strategic in asking how those final reports are structured so that there is at least an actionable executive summary or a tactical manual or matrix that could be more easily applied to other, you know, communities or organizations that could more readily apply the lessons learned to their unique scenarios. The other thing that I'll just mention is, that there was another suggestion to really encourage our grantees to host field trips, at the complete like during the completion or even during a grant implementation project to, you know, invite other people within the region to walk through their projects to learn from their approaches and to just allow more opportunities for that in-person technical assistance or technical exchange, rather information exchange, that isn't, you know, necessarily readily available by just reading a report, so I thought there it was a really engaged session and yeah I thought those suggestions are definitely ones that we can look into, oh also the, to consider the provision of child care at future events just to encourage more widespread attendees or attendance. Thanks Marcel. Haley.

Haley: Thank you, it's going to be hard to not echo what everyone's been saying, I feel like we've done such good input throughout the day. So, I helped just in this last session, facilitate a conversation on threats to habitat, specifically, and how SNEP can create goals related to habitat and maybe I shouldn't have been so surprised about it, but I think with such a diverse group of stakeholders and since we have a program that's so multifaceted, we got a lot of holistic feedback that really kind of resounded what we've been hearing of we, you know, we continue to need more capacity through all areas of a project and thinking through our habitat needs, as well as just funneling resources to those places so everything from more resources to make sure we're hearing from all of our stakeholders throughout our region, into thinking through the policy processes that exist that we have to work in, thought a little bit about how in extreme weather events how we're going to deal with those things and how we can holistically for through the process of potential retreat in the future and I think a lot of what we talked about in the habitat session was also reflected in another session I helped run around storytelling and I think even though our region has its own sub-regions with its own challenges there are a lot of common challenges and I think we heard a lot about one way SNEP can help is to help uplift areas where people have been successful in dealing with threats and ways that they can continue to take on challenges in a collaborative way. Thank you.

Adam: Excellent. Thank you, Haley.

Tom: Hi, I'm Tom Ardito and I've facilitated a couple sessions, the first one was on keeping track of funding and we were talking about, you know, the whole landscape of grants, not just SNEP grants, but grants that fund, you know, green infrastructure and habitat restoration, the kind of work that we do and it was a really good conversation. We talked a lot about barriers to application, particularly for small organizations and how the complexity of applications can be difficult, there was a lot of appreciation for the letter of intent process where, you know, you can float a very abbreviated application and save time, you know, before, you know, whether your application is viable or not, and related to that we talked about metrics in and we talked about sort of the tension in metrics and how we as the grant makers really want to be able to assess the overall impact of the program, but how from the applicant's perspective, that can be challenging because it's a lot of information they need to pull together at an early stage of a project when they're developing an application that they may or may not have and just the, you know, time and technical demands around pulling that information together can be

difficult. A little further along in the grant process we talked about the quality assurance plan, quap process and how that can be difficult, particularly for small organizations and we talked about ways to try to improve that and make it a little easier for organizations to meet that requirement, there were some really good ideas that came out of that part of the conversation. We talked about match and challenges related to that from a municipal perspective, one challenge that was expressed was just simply finding the funding or if or if in kind time is used just the burden of tracking that the fact that municipality is a particular unlike nonprofits are often not really oriented towards that type of grant management, fiscal management so it can be it can be challenging to them, we also talked about some thoughts around the need to fund more experimental habitat projects and test methodologies and this dovetailed, you know, with the other conversation about pilot projects really, but to test experiment, experimental habitat, restoration approaches and part of doing that is to be able to look at them over a long term and we talked about the kind of tension or conflict really between the period of performance of our grants which are typically a couple of years versus the very long periods of recovery in in habitat systems in particular and the need for adaptive management in many cases or at the very least long-term monitoring that often falls outside of the scope of a SNEP grant so, you know, it definitely, I think, gave us some things to think about and to follow on as to how we might be able to support those, you know, longer term performance monitoring adaptive management and also maintenance in the context of like storm water projects and that kind of thing. The other one I facilitated was a community-based design education and learning and Dr. Obropta joined us for that, so that was nice and the way we structured that was to invite a number of our grantees, our sweet grantees, who we thought were particularly good examples of community-based design to just talk about their experiences and it was a, you know, really diverse, it's only half a dozen or so projects that we had time for, but really diverse and including, you know, suburban projects, rural projects, urban projects and, you know, it was just a really interesting conversation and I think, you know, what they all had in common, I think, was that they relied on really strong partnerships, that they were embraced by the community because they had multiple benefits and I thought all of the grantees did a were really focused on listening to their stakeholders and listening to the community and in some cases talked about how they had changed their projects or their projects had evolved in it as a result of feedback from the community in ways they hadn't necessarily anticipated so, you know, the importance of that two-way communication, I think, was really, for me anyway, was something that stood out, having said that I mean there was also, you know, I also thought about how, you know, community-based design if you're going to think about it that way, it's really different in different areas and it's different depending on who's doing the project, I mean for a municipality they're going to approach it a little differently than than a EJ organization obviously, but then there are those commonalities and I think, you know, circling back to the point that was made about communication, you know, we talked a lot about better communication, not so much in that session, but throughout the day, you know, I kept hearing about the need to better communicate the results of our project and share our projects that that are funded through SNEP and to better share those results and I know that I'm certainly going to, you know, work on that within our program and work with EPA on that and find, you know, better ways of communicating and not just online, you know, a big part of what came through is that being in person and particularly being out on site on projects, is really valuable, so we'll look for more opportunities to do that.

Adam: Excellent, well, big thank you to each one of our facilitators and to each one of you for participating in that discussion or in these discussions throughout the day. We are right at time so if there aren't any, if you're, let me just take a pause, if there are any brief questions for the facilitators that we can address. If you have more involved conversations, I would encourage you to email us at seacoastalne@epa.gov and we're more than happy to direct those questions to the appropriate facilitator. We do very much hope that you got as much out of today as we did, I know it's a long day, but I hope you agree that it was as beneficial for you as it was for us and I hope that you know you'll be able to see the fruits of your labor in this discussion over the next few years. With that Mary Jo, I wonder would you like to come up just to close this out or do you have any, no I don't want to put you on the spot, but come on up here, so Mary Jo is our official program director for our section at EPA and Tom has the microphone.

Mary Jo: Hi, somebody called me the Phil Donahue of one of the sessions here because I was moving my mic and if you know who Phil Donahue is it's you're probably about my age and maybe not younger but I do want to say thank you, I'm with EPA and it has been really my pleasure to work with this team of tremendous professionals both within EPA and with our SNEP watershed implementation grant program,

Tom with the network, and just with Marcel, our federal partners, state partners, local partners and grantees, all of you, so thank you so much for being here, your input is so important to us, we want our program to make a difference, we want to support the needs in our region and I really thank you for the feedback that you've provided today and no need to let it stop today, we are here, we are always available and welcome your thoughts, so please, you know, feel free to get a hold of us, we have a newsletter that comes out every month, I hope you get it, if not, we can tell you how to, but it also gives you links to contact us, so please get a hold of us if you have thoughts and thank you very much, have a great safe ride home and a terrific rest of your day, thank you, bye-bye.

Adam: Thank you everybody.

Mary Jo: I think I thought I was cut off, I would also just give one shout out to Adam who facilitated today, as well as to CEI who helped us with logistics and Bristol Community College, so many folks that helped make today a success, thanks.

Adam: Thank you very much and just as a reminder all the presentations that were in this room or as when we were the main meeting room, not session one, will be recorded and all the recordings will be posted to the SNEP website, all the presentations will be posted as well, our slides, excuse me, and then CEI is going to be developing a summary report that is a culmination of all the feedback that we received across all the sessions today, so all of that will be sent out and posted to the website as well, so thank you all again and again have a safe ride home. Thank you