



## Reframing Water Resources Planning and Practice

Communities that have successfully implemented green infrastructure projects have learned some useful vocabulary lessons, especially with respect to the language used to communicate about stormwater and stormwater management. Because stormwater can convey the idea that something is dirty or undesirable, some communities have begun to use the term “rainwater” to describe runoff, and to use other more positive terms, like “water harvesting,” to describe beneficial practices. Below are some suggestions that can help to reframe the debate in your community in a more positive manner and encourage public support for green infrastructure projects.

### Emphasize the benefits

How can you begin to reframe water resources planning in your own community and to embrace the positive benefits and value associated with implementing green infrastructure practices? For many communities, the first step is defining and focusing on the benefits that can result from the implementation of such practices. For example:

- Less reliance on potable water for landscape irrigation. Some communities have begun to quantify the benefits in terms of water savings. In arid communities in particular – for example, in Denver, Reno, or Southern California – these statistics can be compelling.
- Potential for groundwater recharge. In many communities, water supply is a major consideration. Treating runoff and directing it to groundwater recharge areas can help to address water supply concerns.
- More open space. Other communities – the Stapleton community at the former airport site outside [Denver](#), for example – couch the benefits partially in terms of additional acres of open space, greenways and trails provided, and partially in terms of a more sustainable approach to infrastructure. This approach has resonated with a younger, home-buying demographic and made the development a desirable place to live.
- A sustainable solution. Other communities emphasize the benefits in terms of a contribution to sustainable green building practices. [Santa Monica](#) is a good example of this. The contribution of low-impact development practices to watershed health has been documented in numerous publications (see US EPA, 2005) and can offer compelling reasons to promote sustainable stormwater management.

### Create a “pattern book” to guide design

While many communities have created technical manuals to guide BMP implementation, those who have taken implementation to the next level have developed design-oriented manuals that show which BMPs are most suitable for a given development type (for example, residential projects, retail, commercial, and the like). These design manuals are often richly illustrated with drawings and photographs that show BMPs installed in the landscape, and that convey the “look and feel” of the resulting landscape. The [Denver](#), [Chicago](#) and [Portland](#) Case Studies offer examples of such manuals.

Featuring well-designed and maintained BMPs is an important marketing tool to encourage public acceptance as well as promote implementation. Many manuals also illustrate how multiple BMPs can be combined on site to maximize effectiveness, or describe how larger-scale regional treatment can be used to address water quality treatment while maximizing development potential.

### **Emphasize positive “lessons learned” from pilot projects**

Many communities elect to “start small,” with highly visible demonstration projects that test new approaches – and then use their successes as a marketing tool. Sometimes the projects even market themselves. [Portland's](#) Siskiyou Street is a good example, where the city installed a series of infiltration planters within the public right-of-way in one neighborhood to capture street runoff. Residents of other neighborhoods liked the resulting landscape amenity so much that they were soon calling the city to find out how they could get the planters installed in their neighborhoods. In [Chicago](#), the city installed the first green roof on City Hall, demonstrating the city’s commitment to green building while providing a highly visible pilot test of the approach. The City now offers small “green roof grants” to encourage private sector participation with great success.

These pilot projects are a good way for communities to develop a familiarity and comfort level with green infrastructure practices, while also encouraging public awareness. Involving the public in the design, installation and maintenance of these projects – as in the [Burnsville](#) residential retrofit example – can also be a great way to begin to build public acceptance.

### **Promote successful projects**

Communities should not underestimate the value of actively promoting successful projects through the news media and through public education brochures. While word-of-mouth may work to stimulate public awareness – as in the [Portland Case Study](#) – communities should not feel shy about encouraging the local media to run feature stories on successful projects, encouraging local garden clubs to include green infrastructure projects on their annual garden tours, or incorporating them into their websites. Most professional associations – such as the US Green Building Council or American Society of Landscape Architects -- also host state chapter conferences; these can be good forums for presenting green infrastructure projects or hosting mobile walking tours.

### **You may also be interested in:**

[The Language of Change](#)  
[Bring Your Ideas to the Community](#)  
[Benefits of Green Development](#)

### **Case studies cited above:**

- [Burnsville, MN](#)
- [Chicago, IL](#)
- [Denver, CO](#)
- [Portland, OR](#)
- [Santa Monica, CA](#)