

# WATER QUALITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE 2026 Program Plan

## OVERVIEW

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### Background

Since 2003, Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) has convened a Water Quality Education Committee (committee), composed of representatives from local governments to develop a regional watershed community education program.

The committee was formed in response to numerous requests from local governments to develop a cooperative approach to water quality public education and to meet federal NPDES Phase II regulatory requirements.

Since its founding the committee has developed a public education and outreach program focused on reducing NPS pollution to meet its original goal of community education. The committee's efforts have expanded to include professional training opportunities for both municipalities and the public on a variety of topics around stormwater management and watersheds.

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### Program Strategy

The Regional Water Quality Education Program (program) is a comprehensive approach to raising public awareness about watershed issues and water quality in the Kansas City region. The long-term public education and outreach strategy capitalizes on the momentum created by past water quality awareness topics and community initiatives.

The group has crafted a strategy that includes both regional and local messages and activities. Regional campaigns can be implemented using committee resources. Local actions support the regional program and campaigns but focus messaging and actions at a community level through local governments, nonprofit organizations and neighborhood groups. Local stakeholders are given opportunities to share or highlight their achievements through the committee's regular reports.

### Program Theme

The program's overarching theme — "Clean Water. Healthy Life." — focuses on changing behavior throughout the region in ways that improve water quality, community health and quality of life. The tagline "If it's on the ground, it's in our water" will be used widely as a practical reminder of the direct correlation between individual behavior and water quality.

Public outreach methods and activities vary each year but typically consist of a media campaign, a mini-grant program, trainings, and education and outreach materials — all which support the program theme.

## Public Education

Public education campaigns and MARC-hosted materials are a central focus of the program's outreach strategy. Each year the committee develops a primary message that supports the program's theme and brings attention to specific regional water quality issues. Educational materials are informed by regular community surveys and committee experience. MARC provides administrative and public affairs assistance in crafting the campaign elements and determining the most effective means for message dissemination.

While the program's yearly outreach campaign structure targets specific water quality issues, it remains flexible by promoting additional messages as opportunities or needs arise. Supplemental messages may target specific audiences or address certain pollutants using niche outreach strategies.

## Grant Program

Each year, the committee provides funding to organizations in the Kansas City area that sponsor education and outreach events related to NPS pollution through a competitive grant program. This grant program leverages committee funding by supporting other organizations that reach segments of the community beyond the impact of the committee's campaigns. Proposals undergo a competitive selection process and are evaluated by a selection subcommittee. MARC staff provides administrative and management support for the grant program as well as promoting grant opportunities to the general public.

## Training Opportunities

The committee provides expertise and funding for training opportunities on water quality best management practices (BMPs), targeted at select audiences. A subcommittee determines specific opportunities and needs for constituents and helps to develop appropriate training topics. MARC staff, in collaboration with the agency's **Government Training Institute: Academy for Sustainable Communities**, develops and sponsors the selected training programs. Past trainings have included best management practice installation and maintenance and native landscape workshops.

MARC provides ongoing administrative support for the Mid-America Green Stormwater Infrastructure Certification Program. This program was formed in 2024 as an on-line, on-demand GSI maintenance certification training for stormwater and landscape maintenance professionals.

## Program Reporting and Evaluation

MARC staff provides a detailed **annual report** that summarizes the work conducted during the past program year, with data quantified in a format that assists local governments in regulatory reporting under NPDES requirements.

The committee has historically administered a **biennial survey** to gauge the public's knowledge of and attitude toward water quality in the metropolitan area. Surveys measure the impact of public education efforts on overall public awareness about water quality concerns and track changes in resident behavior that might be attributable to the program's messages or outreach.

The baseline survey was conducted in 2003, with the most recent survey taking place in 2022. The biennial surveys measure changes against the 2003 baseline. Results help evaluate the program's initiatives over time, and provide guidance for future public policy, planning and education efforts. The 2022 Regional Water Quality Survey can be found in pdf format here: <https://www.marc.org/environment/environment-plans/regional-water-quality-surveys>. From 2023-25, the committee voted to delay administering the survey in favor of using funds for other committee activities. In 2025 the committee determined that a 4-5 year interval for survey release meets the needs of committee members, with funds allocated in 2026 for survey distribution and analysis.

## 2026 WATER QUALITY EDUCATION PROGRAM

The 2026 Water Quality Education Program is designed to meet the following objectives.

The Program will:

- Be based on the long-term messaging strategy.
- Promote community and individual behavior changes that reduce NPS pollution.
- Expand program focus to include training on Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) and initiate updates to stormwater standards on a regular basis
- Produce measurable results which will be regularly communicated to committee members.
- Be multi-tiered and allow for development of supportive actions at the local level that may be implemented independently of program efforts.
- Be flexible to allow for varying levels of local support and methods of outreach.

### 2026 Public Education Campaign

The 2026 education campaign will employ email blasts and social media promotions to engage the general public in a way that connects localities in both states (from urban to rural), provides education and awareness, and leads to behavior changes that prevent non-point source pollution. The target audience includes all ages, with social media filling the need for youth education and outreach at events and festivals. Alternative approaches include promoting the new content and transition to the new KCrainkeepers.org website as the primary avenue for education and outreach materials.

## Media

### Social Media, Digital Materials, and Giveaways

The committee will use social media to highlight successful programs in the bi-state region and 2026 Water Quality program activities. Highlights will be provided by committee members sharing city and county projects, as well as by promoting the work of our nonprofit partners.

The digital printer-ready versions of past printed materials will be hosted on the **KCrainkeepers.org** website and will be supplemented by giveaways for local government funding members.

Topics include:

- Native Plants
- Watersheds
- Green Stormwater Infrastructure
- Residential Chemical Use
- Pet Waste
- Litter
- Stormdrain Stewardship

Committee and local government action specific to promoting the public education campaign may include:

- Distributing giveaways and digital materials
- Incorporating information from the marc.org/water webpage in email blasts, newsletters and presentations
- Promoting local workshops

### Water Quality Program Website Update

The KCrainkeepers.org website will be finalized in the spring of 2026 with new media and graphic design and promoted to the public to provide tools and education that promotes recurring usage as a regional resource. The update will focus on generating more traffic to the site, making outreach and education materials accessible to the general public.

The new website will also increase the breadth of our available regional resources. Tools include rain capture how-tos, tips for healthy watersheds, resources for professionals and watershed education referencing the MARC regional environmental map Green Region Explorer and resources from local environmental partners.

## 2026 Training and Professional Development

The committee will continue management, expand content and usage of the Mid-America GSI Maintenance Training Program in 2026, guided by a Governing Board of local government representatives, nonprofit educational green infrastructure and workforce development organizations. The program seeks to verify the skills and knowledge of green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) maintenance professionals that will be hired to maintain GSI.

Individuals who complete the training successfully will receive a professional certification for GSI Maintenance. Certified individuals are listed on the marc.org/GSI program page under the GSI Directory, a resource of hirable certified individuals and companies able to maintain GSI. The administration and use of this training will increase the long-term success of stormwater management in the Kansas City region.

Program and content development was conceptualized by the Center for Watershed Protection (CWP) and regional stormwater professionals and

An in-person field certification will be piloted and delivered in 2026, tailored to regional needs identified by the WQEC and Governing Board.

The committee will begin planning for the 4th annual Kansas City Urban Stormwater Conference for February 2027. Regional stormwater professionals will attend and present on topics related to stormwater technology, design, installation and management. Topics may be revised and expanded, depending on planning committee feedback and presentation submissions.

## 2026 Grant Program

A subcommittee was established in 2008 to develop a grant program, issue annual Requests for Proposals (RFPs) and create guidelines for reviewing the grant requests. The grant program supports projects from nonprofits and community groups to implement education activities, events and projects that promote actions to improve water quality in the Greater Kansas City area.

## BUDGET PROPOSAL

Item	Description	Amount
<b>Education</b>		
	<i>*Contractual - ETC Institute</i>	\$ 26,882
	<i>Materials purchases</i>	\$ 3,000
	<i>GSI training materials</i>	
	<i>metal public education signs</i>	
	<i>promotional materials &amp; swag</i>	
	<i>Online and digital promotions</i>	\$ 17,618
	<i>special events</i>	
	<i>Rainkeepers website</i>	
<b>MARC Staff Support</b>		
	<i>Full Time Personnel: Salaries, benefits, indirect</i>	\$ 85,000
	<i>Part Time Intern: salary, benefits, indirect</i>	\$ 10,000
	<i>Travel &amp; registration fees</i>	\$ 2,500
	<i>Professional memberships</i>	\$ 4,000
	<i>Supplies &amp; general expense</i>	\$ 500
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$ 166,500</b>

\* contractual funds for ETC Institute management of the Community Survey: \$26,882 estimated

\*\* consultant fees for GSI Maintenance Certification administration in 2026 and additional program development are funded through a sub-awarded EPA Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Grant.