

Project Profile

Synopsis

Project Title: Spotlight on Stewards

Grantee Organization: Detroit Educational Television Foundation

Contact Person: Riley Sutika, Foundations Development Manager (rsutika@dptv.org)

Grant Amount: \$40,000

Time Frame: April 13, 2016-October 15, 2017

Focus: Stewardship-Sustainability

Project in context

The Spotlight on Stewards program was collaboration between Detroit Public Television (DPTV) and the Southeast Michigan Stewardship Coalition (SEMIS) to develop video content and supporting curriculum on environmental stewardship topics for use by teachers in K-12 classrooms. Funded by the Great Lakes Fisheries Trust, it was an effort to leverage the established environmental story-telling expertise of DPTV with the place-based learning focus SEMIS brings to teaching and learning about the Great Lakes ecosystem.

Spotlight on Stewards was considered a pilot project to test the idea that the communicative power of media and the civic education of young people could be combined to encourage greater stewardship of our state's natural resources than either could accomplish alone. If this notion proved correct, existing infrastructure could be used to expand the program beyond the content produced by this project and to every corner of the state.

This report evaluates that effort, describing how it was conducted, the challenges and opportunities encountered along the way, and recommendations for future efforts to replicate or expand the initiative.

Goals of the effort

- Supply Curriculum based video and digital content to educate, inspire, and engage young stewards
- Amplify the coalition's work with video coverage
- Promote citizen and youth environmental journalism

- Increase awareness and understanding of the ecology of the Great Lakes
- Educate, engage, and inspire young stewards to action
- Help educators to better teach lessons pertaining to these topics
- Allow stewards to explore careers in the environmental journalism field
- Brainstorm new ideas that could be integrated into existing curriculum and programs
- Generate awareness to attract more resources, participants, opportunities, and community support
- Identify and create resources most beneficial to the mission of the hub

Results

The Spotlight on Stewards project culminated in several exciting products, including video content. These resources hope to connect engaged communities within Michigan who are working toward the common goal of protecting and inspiring change for the health of Great Lakes through restoration and preservation. The audience is teachers that are or may be interested in developing Place-based Education (PBE) at their schools, and students of these teachers. All products are housed online at [PBS Learning Media](#), a free library of high-quality, trusted digital content for educators with more than 100,000 videos, images, interactives, and lesson plans that are aligned with national and common core standards. Each year, more than 1.8 million educators around the country use PBS Learning Media.

Products and Resources

- Spotlight on Stewards [Place-Based Education \(PBE\) Curriculum](#) for Educators
 - The curriculum guide aligns with the two video segments produced for the project and is designed for educators who are interested in learning more about place-based education or implementing these types of programs at their schools. The guide includes information on key concepts of PBE, designing a PBE project, introducing students to PBE learning, and more.
- Two (2) video vignettes depicting different examples of local place-based environmental educational initiatives
 - [Planting the Seeds of Place-Based Education for Future Generations](#): Elementary teacher at Summers Knoll School Chris Swinko and math teacher Jessica Krueger from Ypsilanti Community High School collaborate across grade levels and schools through Place-Based Education (PBE) to address shared issues impacting both school campuses. An innovative, and powerful example of PBE, both teachers and students share how they are using PBE through this unique collaboration between their high school and 3rd/4th grade classes.

- [*All Aboard! Place-Based Education in a Different Kind of Classroom*](#): Detroit Public Schools Community District science teacher Chad Segrist shares how he uses Place Based Education (PBE) to help his high school biology class understand the ecology of local waterways, like the Detroit River. By connecting stewardship, the local environment, and community through hands-on experiences like the boat trip Chad's class takes in this video, teachers just like you can create new opportunities to engage students.
- Two (2) Video Vignette Resource Guides with summaries, highlights, and follow up reading material on each of the aforementioned video segments
 - Corresponding to the video segment, *planting the Seeds of Place-Based Education for Future Generations*, the [first video guide](#) provides additional information and lessons related to the PBE project at Ypsilanti Community High School and Summers-Knoll School.
 - Corresponding to the video, *All Aboard! Place-Based Education in a Different Kind of Classroom*, the [second video guide](#) provides additional information and lessons related to the PBE project at Frederick Douglas Academy for Young Men.

Final Narrative Report

1. Background/overview

The Spotlight on Stewards Project (working title) is a collaborative pilot program between the Southeast Michigan Stewardship Coalition and Detroit Public Television's Great Lakes Bureau that will facilitate connected, engaged communities within Michigan working toward the common goal of protecting and advocating for the health of Great Lakes through restoration and preservation. The program will utilize the strengths of each organization in order to further our shared goals.

2. Project Completion

While the project was not completed in perfect alignment with the original proposal, the final product of this grant produced excellent resources and materials that meet many of the anticipated goals of the program. The final outcomes are much narrower in scope than that of the proposal. We do not think that the original expectations of this pilot program were realistic. DPTV did not initially anticipate the amount of time it would take to fully design, implement, and produce the project. Additionally, the challenges of implementing a pilot project with a first-time partner created new challenges as it took each organization a bit of time to understand how the other worked and operated. However, once the relationship developed, the collaboration flourished, leading to a very successful completion of the project!

Another obstacle the project faced was turnover and unforeseen situations that created a lack of continuity and staff capacity problems. A member of SEMIS' staff was injured in a serious car accident, temporarily stalling the project. Shortly after, DPTV's Great Lakes Bureau editor who was leading the project left the organization, further delaying the project. A no-cost extension was requested and approved. While these unfortunate situations did challenge the project, they did not jeopardize its success.

Outcomes

1. Increase awareness and understanding of the ecology of the Great Lakes

The video segments only marginally achieved this goal, if at all. The segment involving the Frederick Douglass Academy does so more directly than the We Are the Forest segment. It's possible, however, that there could be some impact depending on how the segments are used; if they are provided to audiences as examples of what can be done, they may ignite interest in stewardship issues and inspire others to explore similar opportunities.

2. Educate, engage, and inspire young stewards to action

There was general agreement that the project attained this goal, or at least is likely to depending on how much it is used with other school audiences. In addition, some believe that it also engaged the participating students more genuinely, as a higher level of focus and participation results from having cameras present for environmental stewardship lessons.

3. Help educators to better teach lessons pertaining to these topics

If this goal were being assigned a grade, it would probably be “incomplete.” It depends on how the segments are used. At the very least, they have the potential to be a precursor step to further exploration and professional development on environmental stewardship issues for instructors; these segments, in a sense, could put teachers “on the doorstep” of further growth opportunities. For those teachers who participated in the project, the filming didn’t change the way they prepared their lessons and activities, but it probably compelled them to improve their instructional delivery by being knowledgeable, clear, and succinct when the cameras were rolling.

4. Allow stewards to explore careers in the environmental journalism field

Any progress toward this goal was likely to be implicit, as environmental journalism was not discussed directly with the students who participated. One reason for this may be the transition from one producer to another; the first producer appears to have had a passion for this particular aspect of the project and emphasized it as it was being developed early on in the process.

5. Brainstorm new ideas that could be integrated into existing curriculum and programs

While it’s difficult to measure, there’s general agreement that there was significant progress toward this goal. The video segments and accompanying curriculum do an excellent job of highlighting the role in place-based education and examples of how it can be employed in teaching environmental stewardship topics. The two projects highlighted, We Are the Forest and the Sea Grant project, give tangible examples of the sort of programs that are available to teachers who wish to expose their students to environmental stewardship learning opportunities.

6. Generate awareness to attract more resources, participants, opportunities, and community support

The work done in the course of this project has the potential to catalyze increased awareness and community building, depending on how it is used. These two segments and the projects they highlight can further increase networks and the desire for this type of programming.

7. Identify and create resources most beneficial to the mission of the hub

There is no question that there was tangible progress toward this goal, even if only on a limited scale as a pilot exercise, as the project produced two very specific resources that are now available to other members of SEMIS and to other hubs around the state (not to mention anyone who chooses to access them worldwide through PBS Learning Media).

Communication/Dissemination

The project deliverables are being disseminated through [PBS Learning Media](#), which gives educators across the country access to thousands of innovative, standards-aligned digital resources, compelling student experiences, and professional development opportunities. More than 1.8 million teachers use the free content, which is aligned with National or Common Core standards, each year. To date, the Spotlight on Stewards Curriculum has already been access 166 times.

Going forward, the products will be featured on DPTV's greatlakesnow.org and used by SEMIS in their day to day work. Both organizations will continue to find ways to utilize and engage the content going forward to extend its life and maximize the benefit to teachers and students.

Reflections

Lessons Learned

1. Continuity is critical

Throughout the course of the Spotlight on Stewards project, DPTV learned a lot about the importance of project team continuity and communication! Although the lack of continuity was unavoidable and unforeseen, we recognize that the project would have run much smoother had there been one person managing it from start to finish. In the future, this is something DPTV will be more thoughtful and purposeful about to ensure those challenges do not occur again.

2. Start Small

As previously mentioned, DPTV does believe that the scope of the originally proposed project was not realistic for a pilot. Because the scope was too broad, DPTV and SEMIS prioritized the goals we deemed most important (more about this in the evaluation report) and focused on being successful in those areas. However, this process took quite some time to complete. In the future, we'd start small and design the program more collaboratively on the front end.

3. Be mindful of capacity

Both DPTV and SEMIS struggled with internal capacity. Both organizations have relatively small staffs with heavy workloads, which sometimes made it challenging to meet and communicate. In the future DPTV would evaluate our own internal staff resources prior to a pilot project implementation and budget appropriately to bring on additional staff, etc.

Recommendations

Please see evaluation report for full list of recommendations.

Attachments

- Evaluation Report