

Superfund and Cultural Competence - Building a Foundation for Effective Community Engagement

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What is culture and how
does it show up in EPA's
work with communities?

Experiences with Community Engagement



Poll 1 & 2

If you are on a Superfund site team at EPA:

1. What is the feeling when your team is getting ready to initiate engagement with a new community?
2. Recognizing that all communities are unique, what patterns or similarities are you seeing in the way communities impacted by a Superfund site respond to EPA?

What is *culture*?

1. The beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place or time
2. A way of thinking, behaving or working that exists in a place, organization or among a group of people



Culture ...

- Is not always based on race and ethnicity.
- Is often invisible.
- Is only visible in the presence of difference.
- Provides a shorthand based on assumptions.
- Is a layered phenomenon.



What are the layers of your cultural identities?

- Make a list of your cultural identities.
- All of these identities can be an asset to you!
- They can help you connect with people who have similar cultural identities and encourage curiosity that leads to building relationships with people who have different cultural identities.

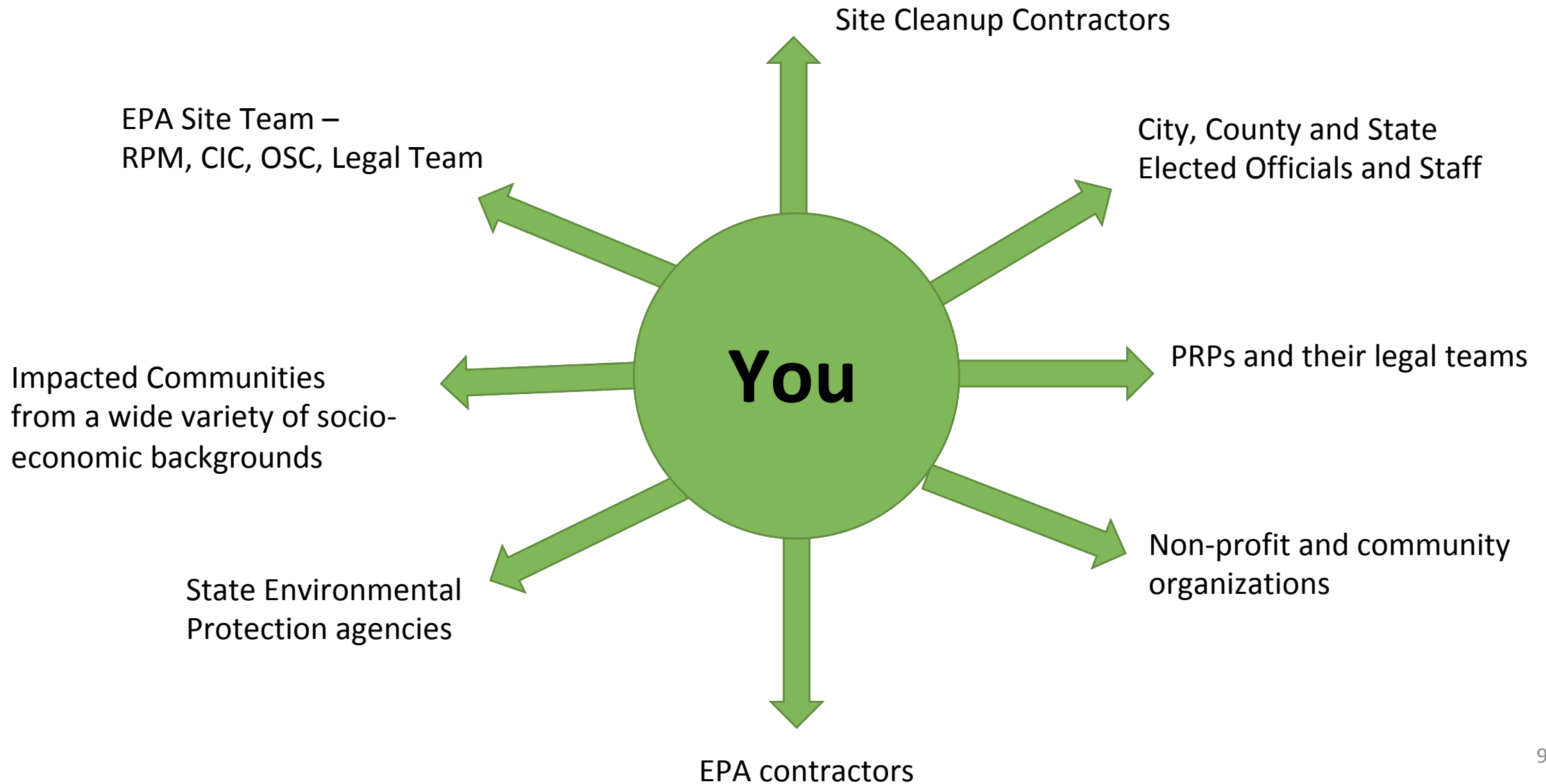


Relationship building across difference

- Cultural orientations are woven into the very fabric of who each of us are
- “Culture” includes much more than race and nationality
- What cultural identities do the people below share? Which are different?



Relationships Map



Poll 3

3. Which of these relationships are the most challenging?

Why is it sometimes challenging to communicate with communities impacted by Superfund sites?

- Distrust in EPA/federal government.
- Our interactions often don't go below the surface level.
- Having to explain technical issues to people with non-technical backgrounds.
- It seems like the community is making assumptions about me before I have even walked in the room.
- Because of a past experience, I am nervous about how the interaction will go.
- Generalized discomfort with each other.



Cultural Competence can help bridge these gaps!

Competence:

- Having the knowledge that enables a person to speak, understand and APPLY a topic.
- Ability to apply knowledge in appropriate and effective ways.

Cultural competence is:

- The ability to be seen as valuable in varied cultural contexts.
- A skill you can build!



Culturally Competent Person has ...

Beliefs and Attitudes


- Moved from being culturally unaware to being aware and sensitive to their own cultural heritage and to valuing and respecting differences.
- Awareness of their own values and biases and how they may affect other cultures.
- Comfort with differences that exist between their culture and others in terms of values and beliefs.
- Sensitivity to circumstances (personal biases, ethnic identity, sociopolitical influence, etc.;;) which may require them to seek assistance from a member of a different culture when interacting with another member of that culture.

Knowledge

- A good understanding of the operation of the sociopolitical system in the United States with respect how other sub-cultures are treated differently from the dominant group(s).
- Acquired specific knowledge and information about the particular group(s) they are interacting or working with.
- Awareness of institutional barriers which prevent other cultures from using organizational and societal resources.

Skills

- The ability to generate a wide variety of verbal and nonverbal responses when dealing with difference.
- The ability to send and receive both verbal and nonverbal messages accurately and appropriately.
- The ability and willingness to exercise institutional, group, and individual intervention skills on behalf of people who are from a difference sub-culture.



How can building skills in
cultural competence
strengthen EPA's outcomes
at Superfund sites and in
other EPA work?

Cultural Competence in the workplace

- Working with communities of color, low-income communities, and/or communities who feel disenfranchised.
- Communities who have learned to distrust the government.
- Site teams that are culturally diverse.
- Communicating across language barriers.
- This is a critical and mandated part of our work.



How could cultural competence be important to your work?

1. Maximize our abilities to connect with communities under stress
2. Improve clear delivery of technical information (making it possible for the community to hear you)
3. Build the kind of relationships with community members that successfully work to accomplish shared goals
4. Move towards a shared future across differences through a broad perspective of other's cultural traditions

When is it important to recognize the impact of real or perceived differences?

- At the beginning of every project
 - The impacted community
 - Town/City staff and officials
- When a new colleague joins a site team that you are on
- When a disagreement or misunderstanding arises



Cultural Competence Training

- Communities
- EPA site teams internally
- Community + EPA site team together



Cultural Competence Training: Common Elements

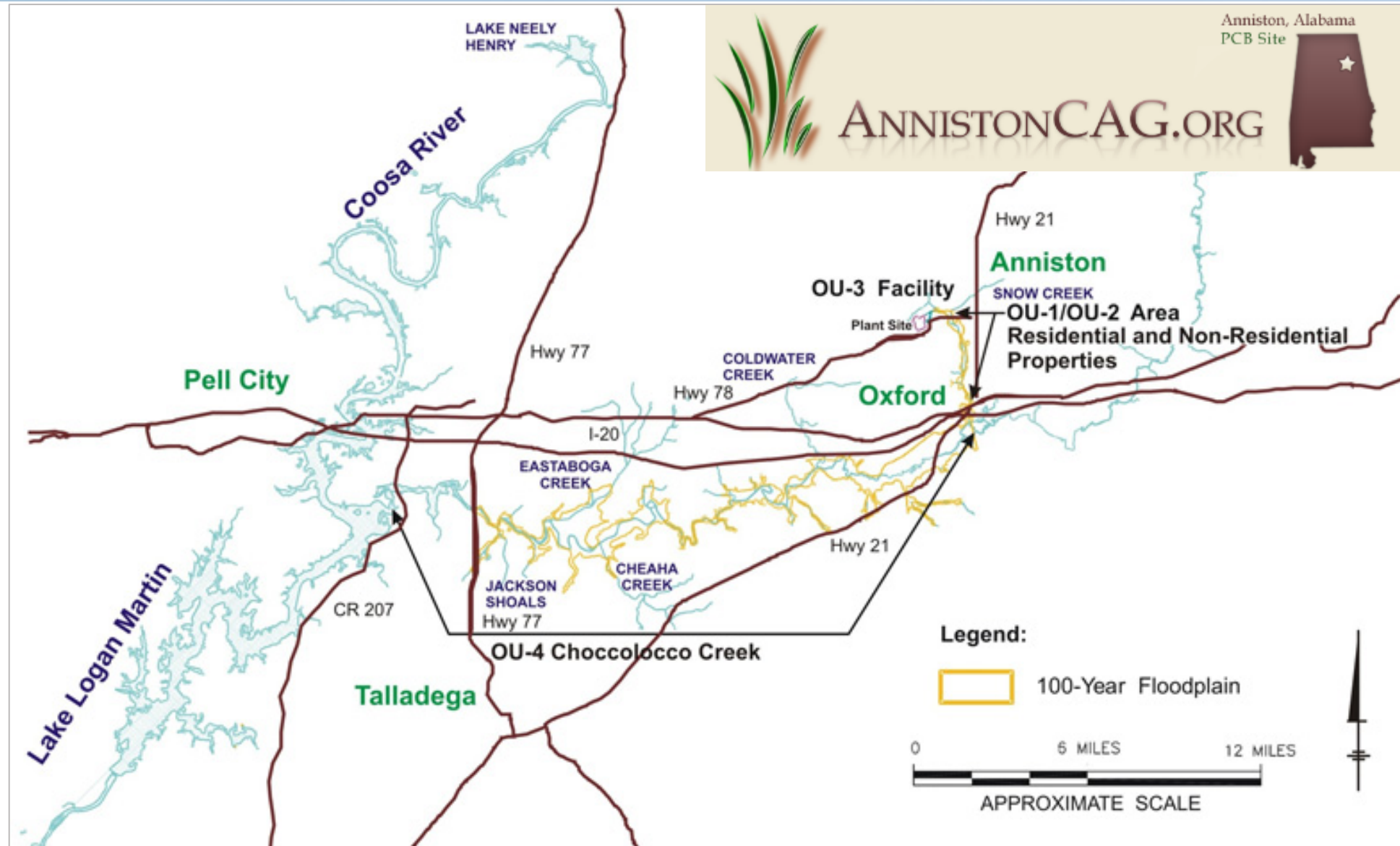
- Creates an atmosphere that builds trust and understanding.
- Gives participants a common language.
- Includes discussion of:
 - *Culture*: Expanding the definition and understanding how it influences our behaviors and perceptions
 - *Stereotypes*: The unavoidable presence and impact of stereotypes in multi-cultural societies
 - *The vicious circle*: Understanding the impact of “interlocking” stereotypes and breaking the vicious circle
 - *New outcomes*: Planning for results
- Allows participants to explore sensitive feelings and experiences in the process of creating a shared context for moving forward.





Case Studies

CASE STUDY: Anniston



CASE STUDY: Anniston

Key Issues

- Understanding technical information.
- Lack of trust across stakeholder groups.
- Need to build better working relationships.
- Need for regulators to be more cognizant of the emotional impact of living near a contaminated site.
- Need to meet outside of meetings to build better social working relations.



CASE STUDY: Anniston

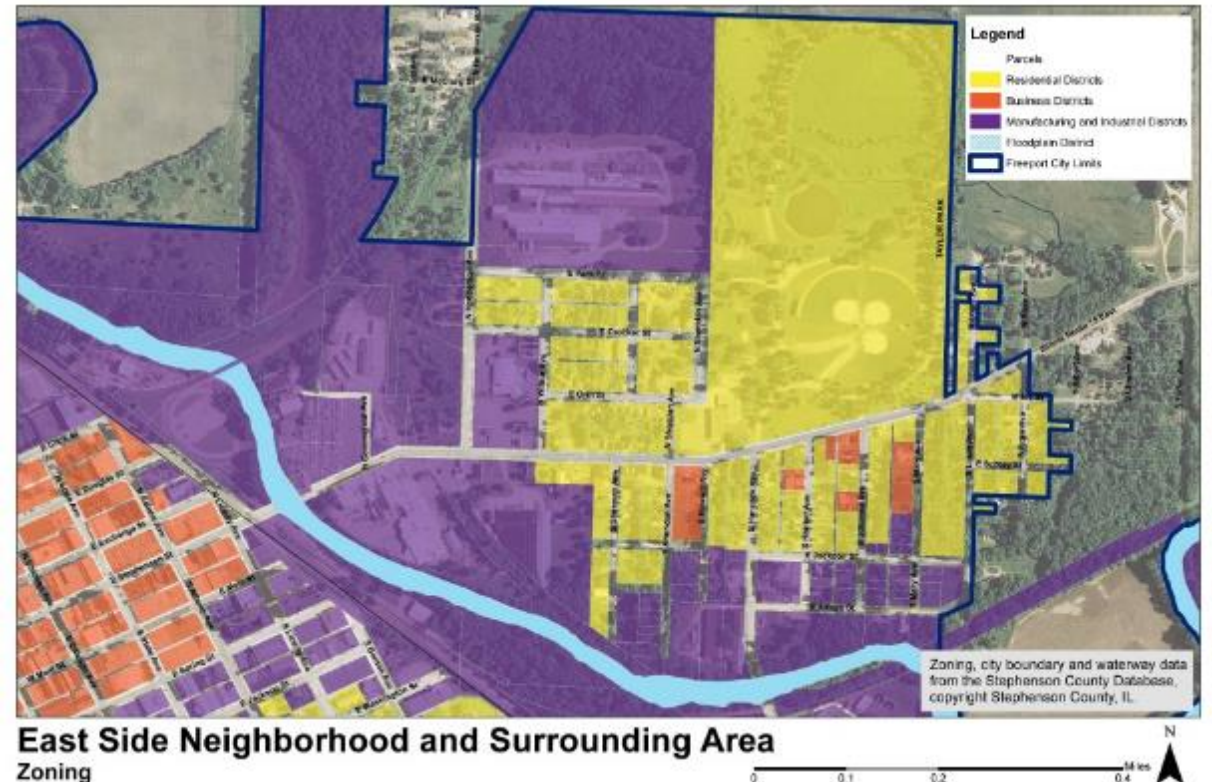
Lessons Learned

- The need to believe that something positive can come out of the group.
- Work together to achieve more productive results.
- The need to forgive past hurts in order to move forward.
- Clearly understanding each party's role helps clarify the true power of all of them as a group.



CASE STUDY: Freeport, Illinois

- African-American community.
- Cut off from downtown by the Pecatonica River and a railroad
 - Quality of life impacted by:
 - Flooding
 - Dilapidated housing
 - Limited neighborhood-oriented amenities
- Strained relationship with the City limits effectiveness of revitalization discussions.



CASE STUDY: Freeport, Illinois

Responses To BCC Training:

“I didn’t realize how committed City workers are to improving living conditions on the East Side.”

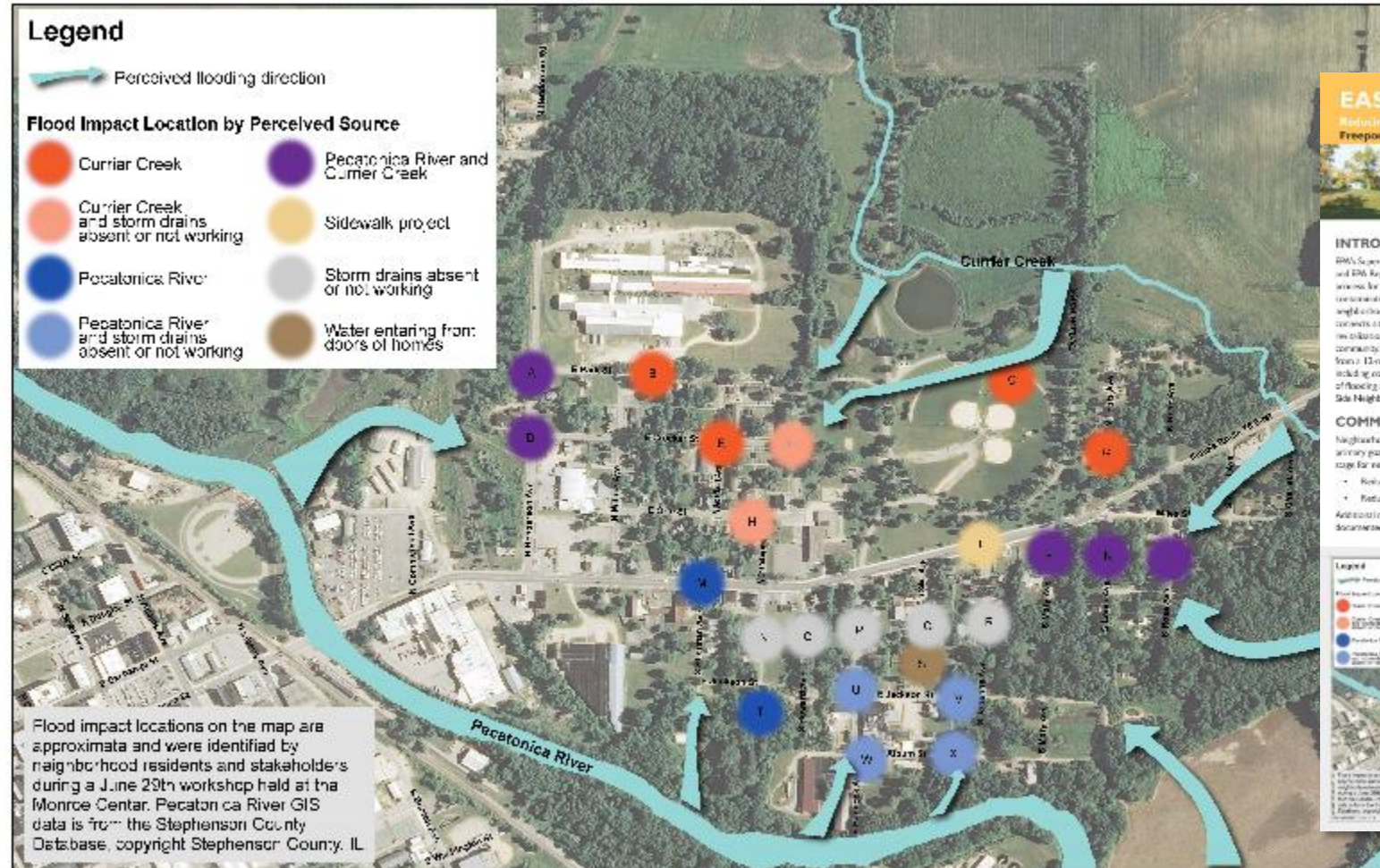
“Let’s host another training and include elected officials, Housing Authority board members and more neighborhood residents!”

“I liked how the training helped us think about things we already know about culture and gave us tools to start improving our relationships ...”

“I want to invite you all [city staff] to come to my family’s barbecue this weekend. Just come on in! We’ll be in the backyard!”



CASE STUDY: Freeport, Illinois



East Side Neighborhood and Surrounding Area
Neighborhood Flood Experience

EAST SIDE REVITALIZATION
Reducing the Impacts of Flooding and Floodway Regulations
Freeport, IL
DECEMBER 2013

ADDENDUM: FLOOD IMPACT REDUCTION
Green infrastructure strategies for reducing flood impacts on the East Side

INTRO
RWIS, Superfund, and RM Region actions for the community's long-term flood reduction and recovery. This 12-page report includes a list of floodway and floodway reduction strategies.

COMMUNITY
Neighborhood primary project stage for neighborhood
• Reduce
• Reduce
• Addressing documented

1 FOR NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS with sidewalks and large street area

For neighborhood areas that have:

- Sidewalks on both sides of street
- Large area between road and sidewalk

Potential Strategy: Planted Swales

Angled area between road and sidewalk provide space to collect, absorb, and filter rainwater from streets and sidewalks to reduce runoff and flooding.

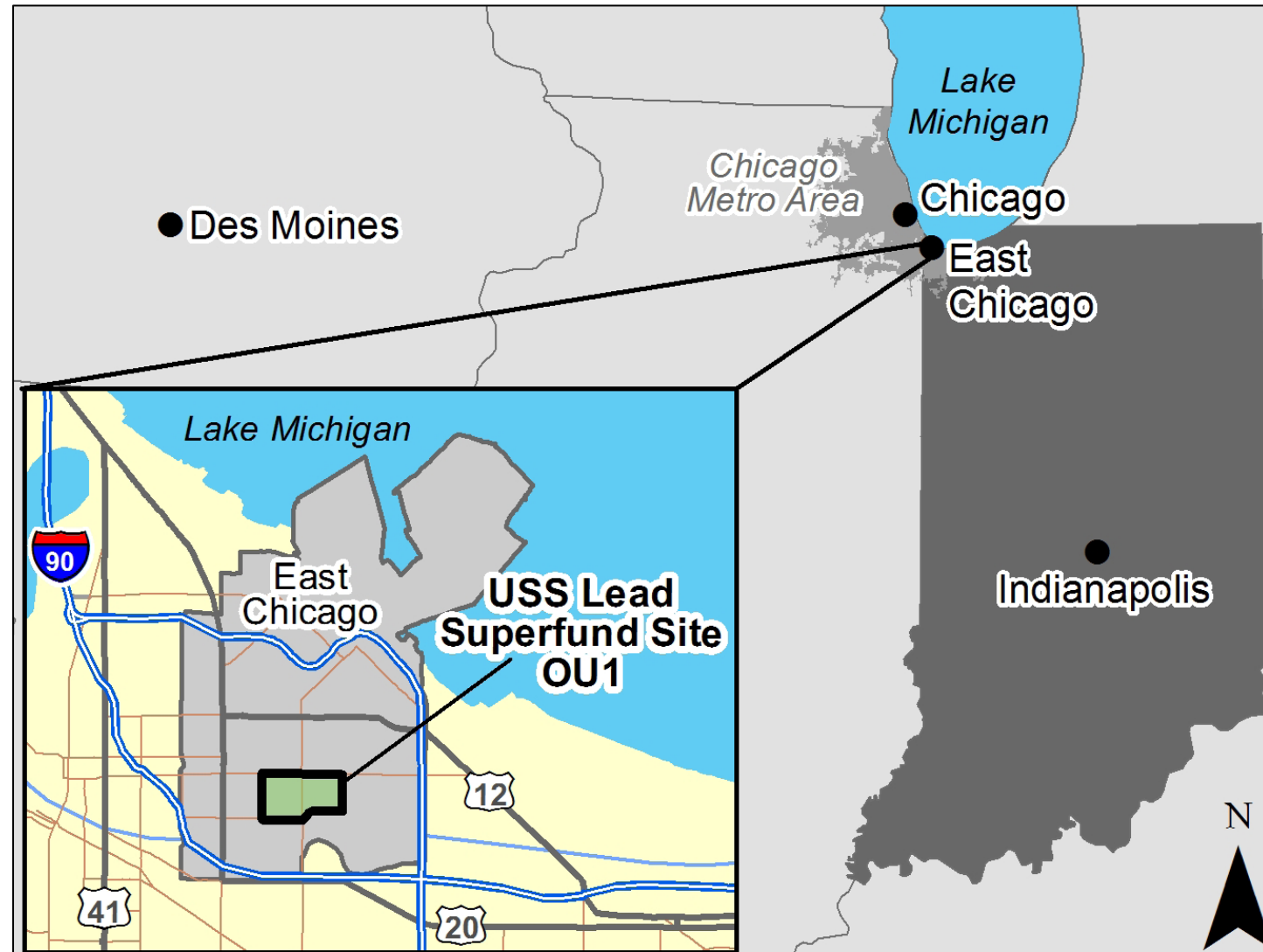
Notes

Planted swales can be planted with trees or planted to look like a garden. The photographs below show different types of swales, from simple grassy swales to planted plantings that provide natural runoff.

- Maintenance: Residents would like the City to have a maintenance plan in place for new plantings.
- Aesthetic: Residents would prefer swales planted to look like a garden. If maintenance funding is a challenge, residents would prefer grassy swales that are visually maintained.
- Community: Neighborhood residents would like to be involved in planning, planting and maintaining their swales. Planting and maintenance offer opportunities for neighborhood and jobs for residents.

DECEMBER 2013 A-1

CASE STUDY: USS Lead



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SuperJTI training program

- Pre-Employment Training – Cultural Competence.
- 40-hour Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER).
- CPR/First Aid.
- Other technical training as required by the remedial contractors



CASE STUDY: USS Lead

Lessons Learned

- Skills learned during cultural competency training helped trainees succeed in the SuperJTI training program and in jobs after the training program.



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