Exploring the Benefits of Western New York Environmental Alliance Membership

Presented by: Hillary Chiarella, Monica Lippens
Advised by: Dr. Kenneth Shockey

**Buffalo Museum of Science**

The Buffalo Museum of Science focuses on science education in Western New York. They do not advocate positions, instead providing information so that the public can make educated decisions.

Museum leadership was asked to identify (1) ways that the Museum benefits from WNYEA membership, (2) ways that WNYEA benefits from having the Museum as a member, and (3) how WNYEA could increase efficacy. Leadership responded:

1. WNYEA helps the Museum find environmental information with “local context”. The Museum can easily find “current, locally relevant information” from member groups. This information has been used in Museum exhibits.
2. The Museum provides space for groups to gather and legitimize for WNYEA.
3. WNYEA should leverage its power to apply for capacity grants. Members could benefit by “following through” on discussions – going from talking to acting.

**Coalition for Economic Justice**

Coalition for Economic Justice (CEJ) advocates for economic justice for Buffalo residents. Major events include rallies, protests, and other forms of collective action.

CEJ leadership was asked to identify (1) ways that the CEJ benefits from WNYEA membership, (2) ways that WNYEA benefits from having the CEJ as a member, and (3) how WNYEA could increase efficacy. Leadership responded:

1. WNYEA gives CEJ a “seat at the table” with organizations that otherwise might not have interacted with. WNYEA’s 716 texting campaign and central website has allowed CEJ to reach a more broad audience.
2. CEJ ensures that questions of equity and accountable development do not “get left out of the [WNYEA] conversation”.
3. WNYEA should work to facilitate more communication between member groups. Task groups and working groups would be more effective if each group met more regularly.

**Abstract**

The Western New York Environmental Alliance (WNYEA) is a unique coalition of nonprofit environmental organizations. In this project we will investigate the different ways in which its diverse member organizations benefit from participation in WNYEA. Through our analysis, we will determine whether the network created through WNYEA increases the influence of both the collective, as well as each individual member organization. Our hypothesis is that the primary benefit of WNYEA is the ability to form interpersonal connections with professionals in other member groups, and that these connections allow member organizations to advance their individual agendas and long-term goals. In order to evaluate these hypothesized benefits, we will examine four member organizations that represent the diversity of WNYEA. We will conduct interviews with these groups focusing on the different ways in which each organization benefits from WNYEA membership.

**Conclusion**

Despite differences in operational philosophy and goals, members of the WNYEA consistently cite the ability to network with other members as one of the primary benefits of WNYEA membership. This was consistent with our hypothesis. Because of the uniqueness of each group, member contributions to WNYEA vary widely, from space provision to issue advocacy. All groups cite increased communication between groups and individual methods as necessary in order to achieve the short and long-term goals of both individual member groups and WNYEA itself.

**References**


**Buffalo’s Young Preservationists**

Buffalo’s Young Preservationists (BYP) celebrates Buffalo’s legacy and preserves its historic buildings by engaging the public and developing partnerships with local businesses and organizations. Because of the nature of their work, social media is heavily utilized.

BYP leadership was asked to identify (1) ways that BYP benefits from WNYEA membership, (2) ways that WNYEA benefited from having BYP as a member, and (3) how WNYEA could increase efficacy. Leadership responded:

1. WNYEA’s 716 texting campaign has helped connect BYP with a larger audience. WNYEA provides a system within which BYP can work, ith a good website and established audience, but BYP has not “tapped into” the resources offered by WNYEA.
2. BYP has not contributed heavily to WNYEA yet.
3. BYP has not worked with WNYEA for long enough to provide suggestions for WNYEA modifications.

**Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes**

Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes (CWVNW) aims to remove nuclear contamination from the West Valley Nuclear site. Because of the technical nature of their work, social media is not strongly emphasized; the group works through lobbying, lawsuits, and independent land surveys.

CWVNW leadership was asked to identify (1) benefits of membership in WNYEA, (2) their biggest frustrations with WNYEA, and (3) what WNYEA could do to increase efficacy. Leadership responded:

1. Task groups facilitate inter-member “idea cross-fertilization”. Participation has given CWVNW exposure and networking opportunities.
2. Bureaucracy within WNYEA is frustrating and poor communication between WNYEA leadership and task groups leads to task groups “not knowing what is expected of them”.
3. WNYEA task groups need to cooperate more often; assembling all task groups once per year would be beneficial.