

CAG Communications and External Relations Plan
Gowanus Canal CAG Outreach Committee
DRAFT

The CAG's Charter calls for a Communications and External Relations Plan. The Plan is directed to include, but not be limited to, methods for responding to press inquiries, disseminating information, responding to speaker/presenter requests, developing and updating printed and online materials.

The following draft focuses only on the dual challenges of disseminating information and developing materials--the areas of work that are most critical for building consistent, proactive community engagement.

The Core Priority: Part of the CAG's mission is to inform the community about the Gowanus Canal and uplands cleanup, and to be a platform through which community concerns can be voiced. The larger and more effective is the CAG's reach and engagement, the more it is fulfilling this part of its purpose. Is the CAG reaching its audiences, and in the process, shaping awareness, participation, and public perception of environmental risk and progress? There are areas to improve.

The Challenge: The CAG's most urgent communications challenge is reach. Data analytics indicate the CAG website has few visitors, monthly CAG General Meetings are attended by few non-CAG members from the community, and meetings held in the community that are typically hosted by DEC are modestly attended. At the same time, cleanup of the Canal and uplands sites continue to generate redevelopment pressures and public-health concerns, and the increasing population of residents and businesses need understandable and accessible information about what is happening and how it may affect them.

CAG's Role: While government agencies and responsible parties conduct investigations, generate data, select remediation solutions, and determine when those efforts are complete, the CAG's role—supported by independent technical assistance when desired—is to review and evaluate those agency findings, advise and provide inputs, and ensure information reaches the broader community in accessible, timely, and useful forms.

To address this challenge, two lines of work are proposed: 1) growing CAG's contact list; and 2) generating consistent content worth signing up for. What's outlined below is the proposed way the CAG can increase its reach and engagement within the Gowanus community.

The infrastructure: We want to build reach and have a system for capturing contact information. The following are the proposed ways of doing this:

1. *The public email address.* Utilize the existing email (gowanuscag@gmail.com) more visibly as a single external point of contact. Assign a monitor with a defined response protocol.
2. *A sign-up form and contact list.* Review any existing roster of email contacts and consolidate as may be appropriate. Going forward, create a system that makes it easy for people to sign up to receive information from the CAG, and for the CAG to manage a hopefully growing contact list.
3. *A list-building discipline.* Every outgoing communication should include a prompt to join the contact list. Here's examples of what that means:

- Every flyer could carry a QR code linking to an online sign-up form--if we can figure out how to do that.
 - Every event should have a sign-in sheet with an email opt-in field for receiving updates from the CAG.
 - The CAG website and social media pages should have a way to sign on to our list.
 - We should figure out a way to take attendance and get emails for non-CAG members who join a General Meeting--people who aren't with the city, state, feds or elected officials.
4. *Cross-Posting.* We need to identify additional opportunities for getting CAG content out into the community through groups who disseminate their own newsletters, email blasts and/or have active social media accounts. This includes, for example, local elected officials, Community Board 6, school PTA's, neighborhood block associations, businesses, and nonprofits. Meeting announcements and other types of messages can be disseminated through this network.

The Standing Commitments: The CAG's outreach makes four commitments:

A monthly meeting summary: A plain-language, one or so paragraph write-up of each general CAG meeting, written for those who didn't attend the meeting, emailed to the full list and posted to the website. It should include a standing invitation: "*Questions or issues for the next meeting? Email info@gowanuscag.org.*"

Manage a live list of active remediation projects in Gowanus, based on information provided by agencies--NYC DEP, NYS DEC and the EPA.

Manage an active website and social media presence that amplifies the above updates and other relevant updates coming from city, state and federal agencies. Expand the CAG's social media presence by establishing an Instagram account.

Everything else is event-driven, meaning if there's an event that the CAG is involved in, then a communication tailored to the event is generated and communicated to the contact list, along with the standard invitation to sign up for future updates.

Planned Outreach Events & Products: In addition to the regular communications, the Outreach Committee commits to supporting the following activities that engage and further build the CAG's reach:

- *Two public CAG Face-To-Face Meetings:* In the balance of 2026, the CAG commits to hold at least one face-to-face General Meeting. In addition, the CAG is in the process of planning a Town Hall on soil vapor intrusion, preferably co-hosted by one or more local elected officials. These are the CAG's recurring opportunity to convert interested residents, workers, businesses and organizations into list members and prospective CAG members.
- *Thomas Greene Park Outreach:* At the planned Thomas Greene Park outdoor event in early October, the CAG can provide information about the status and plan to remediate the contamination that sits beneath the park. An "explainer document" has been drafted by Friends of Thomas Greene Park and is ready for distribution.

- *Hand Out Materials:* The CAG has updated one “explainer document”--the Superfund Fact Sheet. The goal for the balance of 2026 is to draft two additional documents, the focus of which is to be determined. The candidates identified so far are: soil vapor intrusion explainer, the Citizens MGP Site, CSO tank explainer, printed CAG calendar, glossary of acronyms, and a physical visual aid.

Summary

Stepping back, we’re trying to clarify for ourselves the following five questions:

1. **Who We Are & What We're Trying to Do** —The CAG is an independent community advisory body to the EPA’s Superfund. Our communications goal is to keep the Gowanus community informed and to build a contact list that makes each outreach effort reach more people than the last.
2. **Who We're Talking To** — There are three priority audiences: a) CAG members; b) Gowanus-area residents, businesses, schools, day cares, community groups, local electeds, and city and state agencies; c) Target audiences identified through the CAG representation initiative that’s currently led by the Facilitation Committee.
3. **How We Communicate** — Priority channels of communication are to be determined, but include email, website, social media and printed materials. Where possible, the CAG should seek opportunities to distribute outreach materials through partner organizations, schools, tenant associations, block associations, libraries, and local nonprofits.
4. **Who Does What** — We need to name individuals who will take responsibility for tasks--who monitors/manages the public inbox, and who manages the contact list. The CAG should clarify what categories of communication require formal approval and what categories may be handled administratively to ensure timely outreach.
5. **How We Know It's Working** — Five metrics are proposed to track how well the CAG is living up to its objective of increasing its reach/engagement:

Growth & Reach

- a. Growth of contact list
- b. Monthly visitors to website

Reach through partners

- c. Number of partner newsletters, email blasts, social media accounts, etc. that cross-post CAG content

Engagement

- d. Volume and nature of incoming emails
- e. Virtual and face-to-face community meeting attendance

This draft plan, once finalized, is a working framework, not a permanent policy. It should be reviewed every 6 months or so to determine what is and is not working and adjusted as appropriate. After this document is edited/finalized by Outreach, it will move to the full CAG for review, adjustment and ultimately, a vote.