

DRAFT Gowanus Canal CAG Communications & Outreach Plan

The CAG's Charter calls for a Communications and External Relations Plan. The Plan is directed to include methods for responding to press inquiries, disseminating information, responding to speaker/presenter requests, developing and updating printed and online materials.

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.

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.

Planned Outreach Events & Products

Towards broadening the CAG's reach and deepening community engagement in the cleanup of the Canal and uplands, the Outreach Committee proposes the following actions.

Public General Meetings: Consistent with the CAG Charter, host a minimum of quarterly in-person General Meetings.

Town Hall: Host at least one Town Hall annually.

Community Outreach: Conduct outreach at public events in the community when possible.

Communications: Generate short summaries of monthly General Meetings and quarterly summaries that track the progress of the Canal's cleanup.

Explainer Documents: Generate 1 - 2 short issue-focused documents per year that explain in non-technical language what is, for example, soil vapor, CSO tanks, water quality, cleanup of former MGP sites, or other relevant issues.

Map of Remediation Sites: Manage a list of active and completed remediation projects in Gowanus covering sites in the NYS Brownfield and Superfund programs, the CSO sites, and the cleanup of the Canal itself.

Social Media: Increase the use of CAG's website, Facebook and Bluesky accounts, and start an Instagram account, as additional ways for increasing reach and engagement.

Mailing List: Grow the CAG's contact list.

Performance Metrics & Review

The Outreach Committee will evaluate performance every six months and review the full plan on an annual basis. The following are the metrics.

1. *Reach & Growth:* Total email subscriber count, unique monthly web visits, and social media reach.

2. *Engagement*: Net-new email subscriber sign-ups per month, non-member attendee counts at monthly public meetings, and volume of direct public inquiries.
3. *Partner Network*: Number of community organizations and neighborhood groups cross-posting CAG updates monthly.

CAG Agreements

To realize the proposed Communications & External Relations Plan, the CAG agrees to the following:

1. The Gowanus Canal CAG Communications & Outreach Plan
2. Public-Facing Communication Protocol (see Appendix A)
3. Speaker Request Protocol & Presenter Guidelines (see Appendix B)
4. Protocol for Handling Press Inquiries (see Appendix C)
5. Developing Social Media Guidelines (see Appendix D)

Appendix A: Public-Facing Communication Protocol

To eliminate approval bottlenecks and prevent public communications from dragging, the Outreach Committee proposes a tiered approach.

Tier Level	Scope & Communication Type	Required Approval
Tier 1: Administrative	Monthly meeting summaries, event alerts, reposting official EPA/DEC notices, list sign-up prompts.	Outreach Committee
Tier 2: Educational	Fact sheets, explainer documents (ie, what's soil vapor, the CSO tanks, MGP cleanup, etc.)	Relevant committee vote, then full CAG vote
Tier 3: Policy & Positions	Comment letters to EPA/DEC/DEP, public resolutions, press releases, formal policy stances.	Full CAG vote (may or may not start at the committee level)

Appendix B: Speaker Request Protocol & Presenter Guidelines

Purpose & Coordination

When local groups—such as PTAs, block associations, or community forums—ask for a CAG representative to speak, the Outreach Committee will communicate the opportunity to CAG members and connect the host group with a knowledgeable volunteer or committee moderator.

Four Core Guidelines for CAG Presenters

Stick to Approved CAG Materials

For official messaging, presenters should base talking points on officially ratified documents (Fact Sheets) positions (resolutions), letters (to DEC for example), and published meeting summaries.

Reflect the Community's Diverse Views

When asked about complex issues where the CAG hasn't taken a formal vote, presenters should highlight the range of community perspectives heard at our meetings.

Wear "Two Hats" Clearly

Presenters should include a simple, standard disclaimer to distinguish between group consensus and personal views--something like: *"I'm here representing the Gowanus CAG to share our process and official positions voted on by the full group. I'll make it clear when I'm offering a personal analysis or opinion that the CAG has not taken a position on."*

Use Every Event to Build Our Network

Every speaking opportunity is a chance to grow our reach. Presenters should always bring a sign-in sheet with an email opt-in checkbox or show a QR code slide so attendees can easily join our mailing list and learn about upcoming general meetings.

Appendix C: Protocol for Handling Press Inquiries

Core Rule

- **Individual vs. Official CAG Voice:** Per Section 20 of the Charter, CAG members speak only as individuals, unless a statement or position has been formally voted on and approved by the full CAG.

Standard Handling Procedures

Scenario A: Inquiry Regarding Approved CAG Letters/Resolutions

When a journalist reaches out regarding an officially approved letter, report, or resolution (e.g., the PS 372 letter):

1. **Primary Response:** Forward the official document or direct the reporter to the public link on the CAG website.
2. **Connecting with Authors:** Offer to connect the reporter with the lead authors/committee members of the document (getting their consent first) to speak on the record as individual subject-matter leads (not as official CAG spokespeople).

Scenario B: Inquiry Requesting an "Official CAG Statement"

If a reporter asks for an official statement or position on an issue that the full CAG has not previously voted on:

1. **Explain the Process:** Inform the reporter that, per CAG governance guidelines, official statements representing the full body require a formal review and vote by the full membership.
2. **Offer Written Questions:** Ask the reporter to submit their questions in writing and share their deadline to determine if a formal vote is feasible.
3. **If Deadline Allows:** Follow the Charter's time-sensitive action procedure (Section 25) to draft, review, and vote via email if a quorum can be reached.
4. **If Deadline Does Not Allow:** Politely inform the reporter that the CAG cannot issue an official statement within their timeframe. Option to offer connections to individual members with diverse perspectives.

Scenario C: Inquiry Seeking Diverse Community Perspectives

If a reporter is looking for local insight on an issue where the CAG doesn't have a unified position, and individual members have different perspectives:

1. **Share Media Requests:** Share the reporter's inquiry with the broader CAG membership.
2. **Individual Outreach:** Allow interested members to reach out directly to the reporter.
3. **Mandatory Disclaimer:** Remind all participating members that they must explicitly state to the reporter: *"I am speaking as an individual/local stakeholder, not on behalf of the full CAG."*

Appendix D: Social Media

The CAG has a website, Facebook, Blue Sky and newly added Instagram accounts. The accounts are to be overseen by the Outreach Committee. The content of posts is to be consistent with past practice-- information about CAG General and Committee meetings, meeting summaries and videos, and ROD-related information. Posts may be amplified by other accounts. Instagram collaborations are to be avoided, and “liking” or “loving” third party posts is to be similarly avoided.

Determining what to post is to be guided by the existing decision-making rubric (see below), approved by the CAG for website content in May 2026.

Rubric for approving website, blog and social media posts

Category	Description	Process
CAG Meetings	Information about General CAG meetings, held monthly throughout the year	Outreach Committee posts
CAG Committee Meetings	Information about public meetings of the various CAG committees (Archaeology, Land Use, Water Quality & Technical, Outreach, etc.)	Outreach Committee posts
CAG hosted or co-hosted events and meetings	Information about public meetings and events that are hosted (or co-hosted) by the CAG, such as Town Hall Meetings, Hall of Gowanus, TAGA Bus Tour, etc.	Outreach Committee posts
Agency Action on a ROD-related topic	Information about public meetings, open comment periods, or press releases <u>on a topic related to the CAG’s scope of work</u> (primarily DEC, DEP, and EPA events).	All such events are eligible for posting. Any CAG member can alert the Outreach Committee and request that it be posted.
Elected Officials (City Council, Task Force, State & Federal) ROD-related topic	Information about independent events hosted by an elected official or representative body <u>on a topic related to the CAG’s scope of work</u> .	Eligible for inclusion if <u>approved by member vote</u> . Outreach will circulate a vote by email.
CAG Member (Org) Events, ROD-related topic	Information about independent events hosted by a CAG organizational member <u>on a topic related to the CAG’s scope of work</u> . (ex: Friends of Thomas Greene Park, FROGG, GCC, CB6).	Eligible for inclusion if <u>approved by member vote</u> . Outreach will circulate a vote by email.
Non-CAG Member Groups’ ROD-related topic	Information about independent events hosted by a community organization that is not a member of the CAG <u>on a topic related to the CAG’s scope of work</u> . Examples include Van Alen Institute, Voice of Gowanus, Gowanus Improvement District Formation Effort (Gowanus BID).	Not eligible. The Outreach Committee will respond to any external requests. The committee is open to partnering on such events and will encourage organizations to consider applying for membership. <i>In the event the CAG decides to co-host such an event, it would then follow the process for a CAG hosted event and be listed on the site.</i>
Non-ROD-related topics	Information about any event or activity that is <u>on a topic unrelated</u> to the CAG’s scope of work.	Ineligible.