

# CHAMPIONS FOR NATURE:

## VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STRATEGY

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### ABSTRACT

When seeking to recruit and retain participants of all ages from various education levels and low participation in formal STEM education programs, a Citizen Science using Informal Science Education (ISE) methodological approach was adopted. Historical data of first NSF funded awarded to Conservation Trust of Puerto Rico (CTPR) for Citizen Science project showed bias towards participants from metro areas and from Universities of Puerto Rico. Therefore, for the second Citizen Science project we developed detailed specific strategies of recruitment and retention within 4 target underrepresented, underserved municipalities to increase inclusion and foster greater diversity of participants. The communication and marketing strategy to recruit participants to pass through contributory, collaborative, co-created phases of (ISE) incorporated materials with catchy, attractive designs blended with simple language about relevant community environmental issues through multi media.

While these strategies were successful in recruiting 80% of participants involved in all research projects during the contributory

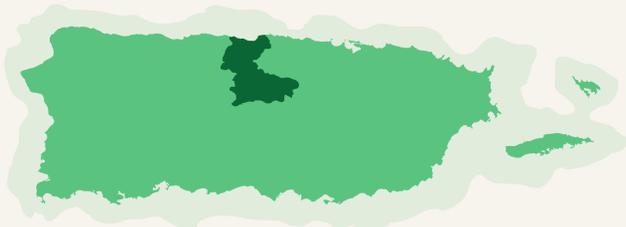
phase, they proved unsuccessful in the recruitment of participants from the four municipalities, to commit for the collaborative and co-creative phases. During the process of self-assessment with staff and evaluators it was concluded that using virtual media was ineffective in the target municipalities and modifications were required to increase participants from 4 municipalities. The adaptive strategies employed included 1) paper flyers to be distributed in frequently visited areas within municipality such as shopping malls, stores, libraries, and municipality buildings 2) for retention, volunteer leaders were recruited to give follow up telephone calls to one time participants 3) open house for family members of repeat participants to encourage participation and return to projects. CTPR recommends a marketing study be carried out at the beginning of the project and that reflection, evaluation and adaptation be a critical part of the recruitment and retention plan of a Citizen Science project.

### INTRODUCTION

The Conservation Trust of Puerto Rico (CTPR) is working on the project entitled: Efficacy of Informal Science Education (ISE) practices to develop Hispanic citizen scientists in the Watershed of the Río Grande of Manatí, Puerto Rico. We engage citizens in interactive, hands-on research projects to evaluate and monitor their environment and we included the evaluation of the teaching and learning processes that transform citizens from

being mere data collectors in scientific research to becoming co-creators of community projects that are relevant to measure the effects of land use change in their watershed.

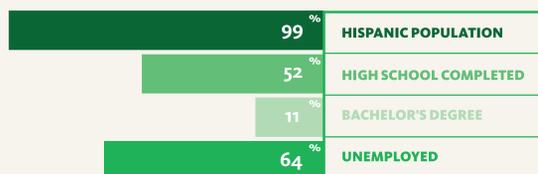
Our target audience encompasses youth and adults from the four rural Municipalities that are within the Río Grande of Manatí Watershed: Barceloneta, Ciales, Florida and Manatí.



Geographic location of study (watershed map)

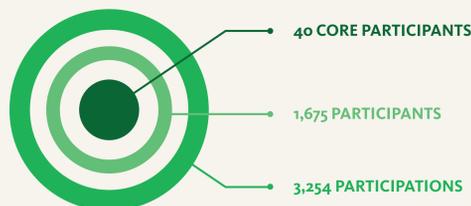
RÍO GRANDE DE MANATÍ WATERSHED

### CHARACTERISTICS OF TARGET AUDIENCE

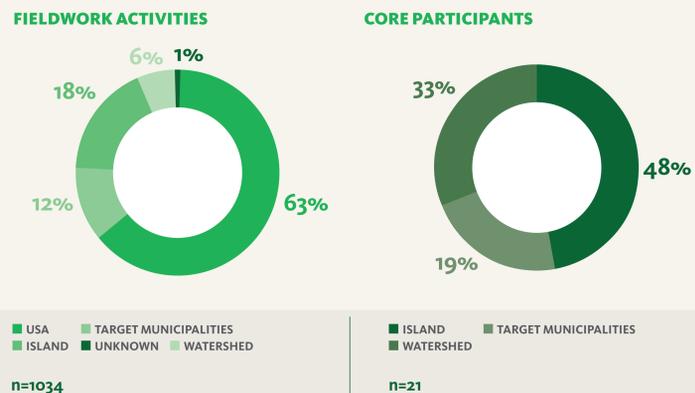


(US Census 2010)

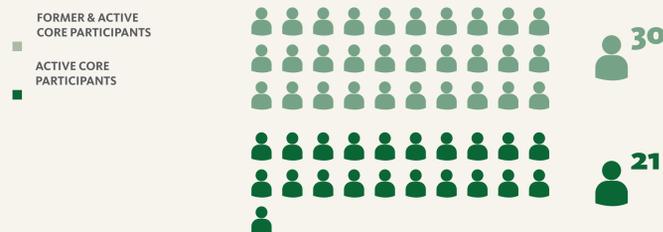
### RECRUITMENT GOALS



### CHART 1. PROVENANCE OF PARTICIPANTS



### RETENTION CHALLENGE



During the project we had a retention rate of 77% of core participants, 52% female and 47% male.

### RETENTION STRATEGY

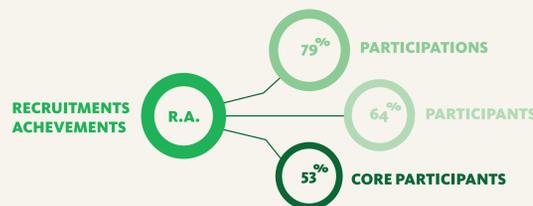
We reevaluated our strategies of retention, so we increase the follow up process. We have been increasing the direct contact with the core participants and the general public in the watershed after they participated in the projects. We communicate explicitly the importance of participation in the field activities so that they could develop their own community project about their environment. These strategies have been promoted with the support of volunteer leaders performing work on direct recruitment in municipalities and other tasks that they share with the project staff and scientists conducting research. These tasks relate mainly to the following:

- Regular meetings with core participants
- Scientifics and core participants meetings to establish their responsibilities and projects
- Follow up the bookings, confirmations and participations of regular and core participants
- Follow up on the needs presented in core participants project
- Support the initiative presented by the core participant to create innovative projects that contribute to their communities

### PROMOTIONAL TECHNIQUES

LOW COST	MODERATE COST	HIGH COST
Bi-weekly radio program Communities meeting Group presentations Posting flyers in school, universities, government offices, communities, etc. Telephone orientations Word of Mouth	Internet ads Social media Regional newspaper	Major newspaper Organization Fair Television

### RECRUITMENT RESULTS



### CORE PARTICIPANTS



### LESSONS LEARNED

- Have a dedicated team of volunteer leaders for the recruitment and follow up on the participants' commitment.
- One action that contributes to both recruitment and retention was the direct contact. Specifically, this contact has resulted in recruitment where experiences on research activities are shared, which stimulates interest in participating. In addition, continuous monitoring both the core participants and scientists who became their mentors to ensure that projects created are tied to what they have learned and translated by inserting new community members in the process.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- For future projects include an analysis of the average investment of time it takes to develop a participant from contributor to co-creator, to develop a more precise time line.
- Encourage participants to share their interests so they can relate what they are learning in projects with their stated goals and their everyday lives.

### REFERENCES

- Bonney et al, (2009). Public Participation in Science Research. Defining the field and assessing its potential in Informal Science Education. A CAISE Enquiry Report. Washington DC
- CRM - Internal Database
- US CENSUS (2010) www.census.gov

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All research, assistants, volunteer leaders and staff of Para la Naturaleza (CTPR).

NSF for funding grant 1223882.

Special thanks to all the core participants who continued their commitment during the course of this proposal.

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This program is sponsored by the National Science Foundation (NSF) under Informal Science Education Proposal 1223882, and by the Conservation Trust of Puerto Rico. The opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s), and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the National Science Foundation or the Conservation Trust of Puerto Rico



para la Naturaleza