

Linking Community Engagement to Transboundary Water Management

EMILY ZMAK^{*1}

¹*CDR Associates*

(a) Purpose of study or research hypothesis

The management and use of transboundary waters should reflect the diverse needs of the people whose livelihoods, communities, and quality of life depend on them. Yet, too often transboundary agreements focus on the technical elements of water management, and overlook the importance of social buy-in.

(b) Key issue(s) or problem(s) addressed

The Colorado River and its tributaries flow through seven U.S. States and Mexico, crossing municipal, county, tribal, state, and international boundaries. The Basin is (and will continue to be) impacted by climate change and population growth, resulting in less water and more demand for its use. The increased pressures on the Colorado River require new management approaches--and, concurrently, new efforts to engage with water users' needs and interests. In this case study, community engagement and technical analysis go hand-in-hand to explore the feasibility of a demand management program for Colorado's water users, thereby bridging the gap between the community and decision-makers.

(c) Methodology or approach used

This case study presents a deliberate approach for engaging diverse communities across a wide geography on complex, transboundary water policy issues. Key elements to the approach include: virtual tools to vary the pace and focus of the discussions; engaging representative stakeholders; topical meetings, which allowed water users to have deep discussions on the topics most important to them; and iterative policy drafts, which reflect the input of water users.

(d) Results or conclusions derived from the project

To date, the approach has resulted in deep discussions that help to define the issues most important to Colorado's water users. Virtual engagement facilitates geographic diversity, and participation includes farmers, municipalities, wildlife specialists, and recreationists from across the state.

(e) Implications of the project relevant to congress themes

This case study defines an approach for maximizing community participation (B5) in transboundary water management (E1). It also offers strategies and lessons-learned for ensuring diverse participation on complicated water policy issues.

Keywords : transboundary water management, community engagement, stakeholder engagement, collaboration