

The theory of the problem: Traditional conservation efforts and environmental education activities do not necessarily tap into the myriad people living in retirement communities, as well as members of the many faith-based organizations located in central Pennsylvania. These individuals represent potential allies in the world of river conservation – they could provide monetary donations, contribute their time and energy to on-the-ground efforts, and spread the word about the need for better conservation collaboration. However, given the large number of churches, synagogues, retirement homes, and other facilities, it will take a variety of messaging, methods, and time to outreach to their members. But once mobilized, there will be a large force for good.

The theory of change: To coordinate effective outreach to members of these groups on river and water conservation issues, RiverStewards will work with students from Elizabethtown College, Millersville University, and other high education institutions to develop presentations, outreach materials, and other items that will facilitate active discussion and engagement. Not only will this engagement benefit conservation efforts, but it will help bridge the gap between older generations and those of Generation Z and the Millennials, overcoming current stereotypes of those youth.

The theory of action: The first step in the effort is to identify retirement communities and faith-based organizations that would be open to hearing our message. The students will work with RiverStewards to identify these groups and keep a running list of contact information. Through an existing relationship with Landis Homes in Lancaster County, we will use them as a pilot project to test out our outreach materials and hone our message. The students will work with RiverStewards to develop one or more presentations, videos, handouts, and other materials to use during our visits to these organizations. They will be involved in the writing, design, and presenting. They will also develop social media materials to accompany the effort. The messaging will include information on the value of the Susquehanna River (economic, ecologic, and social) and how they can get involved (donations of time and money, spreading the word, etc.). The students will use their generational differences as a talking point to build bridges between them and the older generations. The culmination of this effort will be projects where students work side by side with members of these groups to aid the river and water conservation.

Budget and timeline to be determined.