meaningful CONVERSATION

• provides healthy deliberation
• allows for varied points of view
• encourages sharing of personal experiences
• supports shifts in thinking
• furthers concern for the common good

strong COLLABORATION

• develops new and renewed partnerships
• builds trust and mutual respect
• shares information and resources
• fosters meaningful relationships
• offers creative ways to connect and leverage resources

an engaged COMMUNITY

• fosters greater citizen involvement
• strengthens existing networks
• encourages and supports emerging leaders and associations
• has the capacity to identify, investigate and address the issues at hand
Civic Engagement in Watershed Projects

For many years, watershed assessment and planning has largely been a government agency activity, with limited citizen involvement. Too often, citizens and stakeholders were given opportunities to become involved too late in the process when they could do little to influence policy decisions and implementation plans. As a result, there has been limited ownership or buy-in to these plans. Not surprisingly, implementation of water quality plans and practices have often stagnated or not met goals developed for a particular watershed. This experience has led MPCA to reconsider the ways in which it studies and manages water pollution. In addition, The Clean Water Council has recommended that MPCA encourage greater civic engagement in watershed planning by encouraging more citizens to become leaders for change in their communities and holding individuals personally responsible for making needed changes that could reduce water pollution.

Since watershed protection and restoration depends largely on changing the behaviors of citizens who live on the land, it will require a real commitment at the community level to address problems in our lakes and streams. Watershed assessment and planning must be much more inclusive, with the public playing a much more active role, beginning early in the planning process. Citizens must be involved in framing the problem, developing solutions and taking responsibility for implementation.

How does civic engagement help Minnesotans take responsibility?

Civic engagement requires a different orientation - where the government works to create the appropriate venues and opportunities for Minnesotans to take part in the watershed planning processes and to take a greater share of the responsibility for clean water. How can this be encouraged and supported? At its best, civic engagement supports and encourages the following:

- **Conversation** - Government can provide a safe place where diverse stakeholders can meet to engage in deliberative dialogue. The quality of the conversation is very important. Citizens and Stakeholders are not brought together to debate each other, or to try and persuade others to support one view over another. Dialogue allows for the airing of many points of view and for the sharing of personal experience and stories. When meaningful dialogue occurs, participants are confronted with ideas that may challenge their own. In the end, significant shifts in thinking can occur among participants. Conversation can move people beyond self-interest to a concern for the common good.

- **Collaboration** - Collaboration requires social structures within a community that allow meaningful relationships and partnerships to emerge and mutual respect and trust to develop between previously disconnected neighbors, businesses, and local government officials. Trusting relationships can result in the sharing of information, resources and connections that support water restoration and protection efforts. When citizens find creative ways to connect and leverage resources in the community, exciting things can happen.

- **Community** - Civic engagement, at its core, builds community. Government, individuals and organizations can strengthen communities by strengthening existing or building new networks between people, building bridges during times of conflict and fostering a greater level of citizen involvement. Many Americans crave a deeper sense of community. Watershed activities can provide one important opportunity to build and increase social capacity across Minnesota.

For more information, go to [www.pca.state.mn.us](http://www.pca.state.mn.us) and search under civic engagement.