

Summary of Community Relations Strategic Planning Sessions, August 20██

Introduction

Five groups of 3 to 6 section staff met to discuss specific public education programs: School Programs, Re-Use, Composting, HHW and Recycling. Participants were assigned some specific areas of research and brought their findings to the meetings. The groups discussed: trends, issues and weaknesses, strengths and opportunities, and priorities. They also identified those ideas that need further research before they can be adopted.

Summaries

School Programs

The partnership with the local school board continues to work well and is very popular with teachers. No major changes are anticipated for the grade 4 program, but a teacher feedback session will be held in 20██. (This was last done in 19██.)

Increasing numbers of higher grades, from junior high to post-secondary, are requesting tours and presentations. These will be accommodated wherever possible since they provide an important link to an age group that is typically more difficult to reach, has lower participation rates in recycling and is close to becoming householders.

Priorities

The teachers have observed that the learning we provide is often not being put into practice at the schools, representing a huge missed opportunity. They will explore practical activities that can be encouraged. For example, we will emphasize the importance of the Eco Station assignment, and will suggest additional ways to incorporate 3R activities such as collecting batteries, collecting

old school supplies for third world countries (eg., Tools for Peace), saving one-sided paper for reuse.

Other recommended activities:

- Bagged compost give-aways – small sample bags of our topsoil blend containing compost could be given to teachers, a link to both the Waste in our World and Plant Growth units.
- 12-month calendar – waste theme calendar could be used in a learning/display centre after the calendar year.
- [REDACTED] reception area – to brighten it up and make it more inviting, perhaps an historical or “garbage art” theme
- Website – could be an excellent regional public education tool for teachers and students

Questions: Will we be processing waste from the capital region, and will there be a need for regional school programs?

Recycling

The major new trend identified is e-scrap recycling. Governments and private sector companies across North America are developing recycling programs to deal with the huge growth in volumes of old computers, VCRs, cell phones etc. If the electronics recycling facility under the umbrella of Project Germany is established in 20[REDACTED], this will become a major focus of the public education activities around recycling.

Strengths and Opportunities

Recycling remains the one waste management activity that citizens relate to most readily, accept as “the right thing to do”, and commit to at a very personal level. As such, recycling is the door to further levels of participation in activities such as using Eco Stations, and reducing waste generation. The section will explore a more integrated approach to marketing (as opposed to separate campaigns for recycling, Eco Station use, and composting.)

People recycle out of a belief that they are doing the right thing for the environment. The environmental benefits of all the behaviors we encourage must be emphasized more. At the same time, recycling must be put into a broader

context as just one of the 3 Rs – greater emphasis should be placed on waste reduction.

Priorities

Research: a curbside participation study should be conducted in the fall. (This was last done in 19██.) As part of a quantitative study also to be done in the fall, demographics will be analyzed. Research in other cities has shown that the 18 to 29 age group has the lowest participation level. This information will help us to target our communications better.

Partnerships: the section has delivered its promotions primarily without the support of community partners. Partnerships with the private sector increase the resources available for promotion and increase the awareness and support of the private sector. Examples of partnerships that will be pursued: the local media, local grocery stores and home renovation stores, electronics retailers and Clorox.

Cross-cultural communications: The section will determine if the non-English speaking, English-as-a-Second-Language, and ethnically diverse customers warrant special communications efforts.

Listening to customers: this is the most important component of marketing/promotions. Customers are the key to effective communications – they determine the message. Customer feedback must be collected in a more systematic manner. Examples include: tracking input received from Master Composters/Recyclers, formal research activities, and an improved system of collecting feedback from the Hotline and feeding it regularly to management.

Modeling best practices within the branch: this will tie into the Environmental Management System currently being adopted. The branch must do a better job of practicing what it preaches, within our own offices, at public events that we host, as a resident of Century Place.

Leveraging Council's support: the Mayor and councillors are very supportive of our programs. This must be nurtured and sustained. Examples: providing key messages to speechwriters and regular updates to city council.

HHW and Eco Stations

Traffic to Eco Stations has been increasing steadily since the first one opened in 1991 (17% in 1991, 25% in 2001 and 22% in 2002). A 2002 survey found that 80% of adult single family residents and 62% of multi family residents are aware of the Eco Stations. Awareness does not directly correlate with use though; only 56% of single family and 26% of multi family residents say they use them.

The type of material received at Eco Stations is increasingly waste other than HHW – recyclables and garbage. This is despite the fact that awareness of Eco Stations accepting all types of waste, not just HHW, is very low.

Strengths and Opportunities

Eco Stations are the most comprehensive waste drop-off facilities in Canada.

Top reasons for not using them: 36% of mf residents claim they don't have suitable transportation, an average 25% (of both sectors) don't have enough to make a trip worthwhile, and 20% claim they don't have any HHW.

The major opportunities: increase awareness that Eco Stations accept all types of waste; offer options for people who don't drive, and offer methods of collecting materials to make a trip worthwhile.

Residents are not informed of the consequences of their actions and the environmental message is lost. There may be opportunities in focusing more on the environmental benefits of using Eco Stations and alternatives to HHW and disposal of waste.

Priorities

- Research options for residents who don't drive or have difficulty getting material to an Eco Station. Ideas include: toxic waste pick-up whereby residents can book a special pick-up, a Take it or Leave it event where residents set materials out for other residents to pick up, or scheduled bulky item collection days.
- Research the possibility of providing a collection container for homeowners to store their HHW.

- Promote alternatives to HHW on website and other forms of communication.
- Develop partnerships to encourage Eco Station use. For example, with local retailers.
- Need to ensure more consistent messaging between Hotline and Eco Station staff.

Long term

- Residents are often dismayed that we do not compost the yard and wood waste they bring to an Eco Station. These should be chipped and made available to residents for mulch or as a carbon source for their compost. (Many residents in new neighbourhoods do not have a carbon source.) Eco Stations could become not only drop-off sites, but places to pick up a variety of products, including mulch, our soil mix or compost products, and leaves, in addition to paint.
- Waste starter kits for new residents – could partner with real estate agencies.
- Waste Directory – consolidate all our publications and possibly include other environmental information about the city. Drop city-wide with collection calendars.

Backyard Composting

(The Master Composter/Recycler Program has been reviewed in detail and is therefore not included in this summary.)

It can be safely assumed that the residents of City have higher awareness levels around composting since the co-composting facility was built, but there is no reliable data on how many people are actually composting in their backyards. A baseline must be established against which we can measure program effectiveness.

General trends in North America: gardening is growing in popularity. As gardeners become more knowledgeable and sophisticated, they are learning

more about soil amendments including compost. The consumer trend is also toward less reliance on chemicals.

Compost education messages are moving away from promoting waste diversion, to the healthy benefits of compost.

Strengths and Opportunities

The branch has many strengths to draw on, including a well-established Master/Composter program, a world renown composting facility, experienced staff who are committed to compost education, and managerial and council support.

Opportunities include:

- Making better use of the compost demonstration centre at local Nature Centre
- Making better use of Master Composter volunteers (as “compost doctors” and door-to-door visits)
- More community-based demonstration sites
- More community and retail partnerships
- Use of the Website
- Linking composting to GHG reduction
- Promoting low effort activities such as grasscycling
- Developing a social marketing plan specifically designed to increase backyard composting
- Create Master Composter Website – bulletin boards/chat site for volunteers

Priorities

- Baseline survey to determine how many people are currently composting, the barriers to composting, the demographics, attitudes etc of those who are composting.
- Set clear objectives for participation and develop a comprehensive social marketing plan.
- Revamp demo centres and approach (bring the centres to the people). Work with [REDACTED] staff re: demonstration area.

- Comprehensive Review of Master Composter/Recycler program

Reuse

During the past 3 years, the number of people attending garbage fairs and reuse roundups has increased an average of 40% per year. This is due partly to the change in format, with community leagues running their own garbage fairs and the contractor operating the larger reuse roundups, but it also underscores the residents' eagerness to participate in reuse activities when given the opportunity.

Greater emphasis on reuse would fit well with a move to focus more on environmental stewardship– Reduce, Reuse – then Recycle.

Strengths and Opportunities

- Residents are willing to participate in Reuse activities when it is convenient
- Reuse opportunities are not centralized anywhere and information is difficult to access.
- The internet offers tremendous opportunities for consumer exchanges

Priorities

- Contractors for the Reuse Roundups have submitted a proposal to the City Federation of Community Leagues, to house the contractor with this non-profit organization. The City would continue to provide funding. The CFCL would be eligible for grants and partnership funding to facilitate growth in the garbage fairs and reuse roundups. This proposal will be assessed over the next few weeks.
- Many cities have Reuse areas at their landfills (Take it or Leave it areas, Recycle Town, Garbage Reincarnation etc.). While the branch has one small program for setting aside reusable materials to be picked up by a charity, this could be expanded for residential use, whereby residents can help themselves to reusable items.

Long term idea

This idea can be expanded to include a very comprehensive variety of activities for residents – the [REDACTED] could become a place to not only drop off recyclables, waste and HHW, but also a place to purchase and learn about compost, drop off and pick up reusables, pick up mulch, look at postings for swap materials etc. It could become a totally integrated 3R and public education centre.

- Collaborate with the Salvation Army and possibly other charities to make clothing recycling easier and more convenient. (For example, kiosks next to depots are a good idea, but some logistical problems need to be remedied.)
- Calls from residents: residents often ask if we do pick-ups for the Eco Station, why we charge \$1.00 for tires when they've already paid the \$4 recycling fee up front, and why we don't compost the yard waste they bring to the transfer station and Eco Stations. Could the Branch not start chipping yard waste, and make the mulch available to residents?

Themes/ideas that were common to more than one discussion groups:

The methods of recording and disseminating comments and suggestions from the public via the Hotline must be improved. This valuable information could be channeled much more effectively to management.

We are not consistent with our messages to the public. Front line staff must be more aware of operational changes and key messages.

Public education partnerships with the private sector and other organizations offer tremendous opportunities and should be aggressively pursued.

City's environmental strengths should become a tool for promoting the city (rather than the current focus on economics and commercial advantages).