



Factsheet: Boosting Participation for Effective Economics

What's the value of outreach?

Communicating with your public is more than clip art and factoids. When you promote your recycling program, you're really working to increase participation and decrease contamination. What happens when you successfully do those two things? Right - Your program becomes more cost efficient.

Why is that? The fixed costs of recycling can be high – trucks, man power, equipment, buildings. The more “throughput” you have over those fixed costs, the more value you get out of them. If you buy and use it just one day a week to pick up two tons of recyclable, the cost of that truck per use and per ton is

very high. Pick up 10 tons on five days of the week, and you per use and per ton costs get much better.

Another way to look at it is if you purchase 100 rollout carts and only 50 get used on a regular basis, you are wasting half of your investment.

EPA's Resource Conservation Challenge has free outreach materials

A quick visit to www.epa.gov/epawaste/rcc will help recycling programs round up free PSAs, posters, and ideas for boosting participation.

How much should my community invest in outreach?

When you invest in outreach with your public, you're making a sound investment. How much should you consider spending? In its *Recycling Professionals Certification Training Manual*, South Carolina encourages communities to allocate about \$1.00 per household per

year. If changes are occurring to a program, then the figure would be higher than that. If your

community can't spend that amount per household, you will need to be more creative in finding no-cost or low-cost outreach methods to get the public's attention.

What are the two types of people in your town?

There are two types of people in your town – those who recycle and those who do not. The same message may not reach each group – in fact it often does not. Telling your public what, where, and when to recycle is a great way of appealing to those who want to recycle. Convincing the non-recyclers to start takes understanding the barriers these groups have and planning a way to help them overcome those perceived and actual barriers.

One way to look at this difference is think about recycling “education” versus recycling “promotion” Education is like an owner's manual that tells you how to use a product; promotion is what a company does to convince you to buy the product in the first place.

How do you design a recycling campaign?

In the old days, promo materials for recycling programs looked about the same: blue, green, a picture of the earth, a sapling, and a cute little kid. Some of that kind of stuff can be very effective. But now we know that it takes a little more creativity to reach our audience.

Where do you start? You start not by making an ad or sign but by evaluating your audience. Host a couple of focus groups (a classroom, a club, a church group, people at the mall) and try to figure out what the perceived and actual barriers to recycling are. Not everyone will have the same barriers so as you talk to people, try to find relationships between pockets of your population and their reaction to your community's recycling program.

How do you know what your public thinks they know?

Understanding the public's perception to your program will help you define your audience, craft a message, and plan an outreach approach. What

Earth 911 – Free online tool

How do visitors, new community members, and established program users alike find your program? Earth 911 allows you to upload your locations to people can find you by your zip code.

sorts of things do you want to find out? Here's a start:

- Who recycles regularly? Most research shows that 60-somethings have high participation rates and kids in elementary school love to recycle. Those 18-35 year olds tend to participate less frequently. South Carolina's 2006/2007 "Residential Recycling Study" found that people who classify themselves as light or non-recyclers tend to live in rural areas, come from lower income households, have lower education levels, and only have access to drop-off recycling facilities.
- Who thinks recycling is hard? Is it really hard (little or no access) or is it a perceived difficulty (I get tired of tossing my can into a different bin)?
- Do people know when, where, and what to recycle?
- What myths do people have about recycling?

How do you reach the recycling enthusiast?

When working to improve your recycling outreach, it's often easiest to make sure you're reaching the audience who want the information. You'll want to be sure that people know when to recycle, where to recycle, and what to recycle. How do you do that? Here are some basics:

- **Signs on bins.** Clear signage at drop-off centers is a must. Photos help with language barriers. Some communities go so far as to create stickers for every curbside bin but those can become outdated as your program grows.
- **Brochures or fliers.** A program overview can be handy for distribution at festivals, workplaces, or by your drop-off center attendants. They help interested people know the basics and can reduce contamination.
- **Annual newsletter.** If you operate a curbside program, have your collection crew tape a one-page newsletter directly to the container. Many programs use utility bill stuffers as an inexpensive distribution method. A well-designed large ad in the paper can serve the same purpose. Highlighting local recycling success stories can be a fun twist.
- **Web site.** While a Web site won't often convince the non-recycler to start recycling, it's often very handy for helping dedicated members of your public get the information they crave. Remember, public advocates can be a communication tool for your program. Don't feel up to

Curbside Value Partnership

Looking for fresh tools to help build public support? Be sure to go to www.recyclecurbside.org for PSAs, outreach ideas, conversion tools, Web-based seminars, and other handy materials. Curbside Value Partnership is gaining partners across the Southeast.

Georgia Uses Shock Value to Promote Discussion

I Don't Recycle is Georgia's approach to appealing to the non-recycler. Designed for 18-30 year olds, this campaign is heavy on the social media tools. Check it out at www.yougottabekidding.org

designing a Web site? Hire a part-time college student to get the job done!

- **Welcome package.** Does your community have a service that contacts new residents? Be sure your recycling information is included in that basket of goodies!
- **Helpful attendants at drop-off centers.** Want to know the public face of your recycling program? Look at your attendants. Those are the people your public associate with your program. The more you can encourage them and help them educate others, the stronger your program will be.
- **Publicize program changes.** Add a new material? Get the word out! Not only will this reduce

contamination, it helps the public to understand that their community is committed to having a fresh program.

How about those who are not so enthusiastic?

In their MGTK, EPA Region 4 reminds us that:

When speaking to non-recyclers, it's often better to appeal to their sense of positive gain more than address what they're missing by not recycling. How can you achieve this? Here is a list of ways you can help make recycling the social norm:

- *Non-recyclers often don't see the immediate benefit of recycling so getting your message across via a different voice can be influential. How can you help church leaders, civic group leaders, and business bureaus to voice your information? Hearing a message from a respected, but unexpected person can make a world of difference.*
- *What is on the side of your recycling trucks? If they are not promoting recycling, they should be! This serves as a reminder, or prompt, that recycling is available in your community. It also helps to stress that your program is current. Remember that people pay big bucks to advertise on the sides of busses and trucks – you get to do it for next to nothing!*
- *Encourage a commitment to recycling – and then publicize it! Getting permission to print a new recycler's name in the newspaper (or your newsletter) can help form a long lasting commitment.*
- *Have you thought about incentives? Some communities offer monthly cash prizes to randomly selected citizens who put full, contaminant-free recycling containers on the curb. Do you work*

with a hauler? Write a citizen incentive program into your contract.

- *Recycling factoids appeal to current recyclers but rarely do they sway the mind of a staunch non-recycler. Make sure that your outreach materials use diverse approaches. EPA Region 4's Municipal Government Toolkit offers current information on recycling impact on your community, the climate and energy use, and the economy.*
- *Consider that elected officials might fit into your non-recycler category.*

It is important to consider what message might work best in recycling promotion. Recycling is a powerful strategy to combat climate change, but that won't convince climate change skeptics to recycle. But you may be able to talk to folks about the energy benefits of recycling, since everyone pays a gas and electric bill. Recycling as a job creator may appeal to people focused on the economy. Patriotic citizens might want to know that recycling helps keep Americans employed and helps wean us from foreign sources of oil. Recycling is as red, white, and blue as you can get!

What's this I've heard about social marketing?

Reaching out to appeal to the non- or light-recycler takes more creativity. That's where the concepts of social marketing can help you. What is social marketing? It's the idea that we're working to change behavior, not sell a product, so our communication approach should be different than that of standard marketing. Here's an overview of the steps:

- **Identify an audience.** Is it a neighborhood, a generation, a business type, or something else all

What about incentives?

In its *REACT* workbook, the RE3.org campaign sites the success of cash incentives. Many communities include cash-type incentives as a component of their hauler contract. Here's an example from RE3.org:

Monroe city officials launched a new program in late 2004 to increase recycling rates. It's a year-long incentive-based program aimed at reducing the city's waste volume. Families agree to be in the program and are eligible for cash prizes ranging from \$25 to \$75, earning points for the amount of recyclables and trash-to-recyclables ratios. Each month the program eligible pick-up routes rotate to give all citizens a chance to participate. The monthly winner is featured in the local newspaper. At the end of the year, the overall winner gets a cash prize of \$500 from BFI, the city's trash and recycling hauler.

Source: RE3.org

together?

- **Identify the barriers to behavior.** Surveys, face-to-face interviews, and focus groups can help.
- **Outline an approach to increasing participation.** Are you going to appeal for help from local clergy? Start a school recycling program? Work with the Lions Club? Partner with grocery stores to collect bags and film? Network construction companies with C&D recycling facilities? Partner with a local college for increased resources?
- **Test that approach.** It's easy to skip this step but it's worth the effort!
- **Roll out the outreach technique.** Who in your community can help you spread your message?
- **Regularly monitor the results.** You may need to tweak your message or approach to remain flexible.

So how does this apply to your program? It means that after you've established the basics above, you can work at identifying approaches that may best help you increase participation. Some key social marketing terms include:

- **Commitment.** Studies show that getting a written commitment can help keep people involved. Need ideas? How about a sticker that people can put on their trash can that says, "This family recycles!" Or take names of people who plan to recycle more while at a local festival, then print those names in the paper (with permission). We love to see our name in print! This works really well with businesses in a partnership with the chamber of commerce.
- **Social Norms.** When people feel that their neighbors do something, it makes them more likely to participate. Why? It feels normal, expected, and accepted. Think of it like positive peer pressure. Some communities choose to partner with the local newspaper to highlight one family each month who does a good job recycling. This helps recycling feel normal, helps to encourage participation, and is free press for you!
- **Prompts.** Signs on bins, ads on recycling trucks, and articles in the paper all act as prompts to remind people that recycling is something they've committed to and that it's part of the social norm.
- **Communication.** Talk to your public, and when you do, know your audience - including their beliefs, attitudes, and behavior. Use a credible source and look for partners such as clergy, elected officials, teachers, and club leaders. Always include your phone number and Web site, but remember that only the dedicated persons will make the effort to call.

Are your elected officials supportive?

The EPA Region 4 MGTK reminds us that building support from elected officials is crucial to developing the upper-level program support needed for your recycling program to flourish. When looking to improve your program, consider the following questions:

- **Does your city and community council have a good understanding of the local and regional impact of recycling?** Sure recycling is good for the environment, but do your city or county officials understand its impact on energy use? If not, EPA Region 4's Municipal Government Toolkit has extensive climate and energy information that can help ensure your governmental partners understand the modern picture of recycling. The EPA WARM model ¹ can further evaluate your community's energy and green house gas savings.
- **Do they know that regional markets are strong and that recycling has a strong impact in the local and regional economy?** EPA's Jobs through Recycling² site reports that for every job collecting recyclables, there are 26 jobs in processing the materials and manufacturing them into new products. The Southeast has a strong focus on manufacturing and recycling supports local jobs. Remember that recycling adds up to tax revenue.
- **Do your leaders know of recycling businesses located within or near your community that benefit from your recycling program?** Partnering with a recycler or an end user/manufacturer in your area can help capture the ear of an elected official.
- **Your elected officials might be interested to learn that recycling helps improve your public's perception of their community.** For more information on the social impact of recycling, see EPA Region 4's Community Development and Recycling³ link. This resource is part of the Municipal Government Toolkit.

Remember, recycling is a growing industry with strong potential. Your council members are interested in growing businesses that result in more tax revenue and jobs. Conveying the value of recycling to elected officials is not always easy. Many officials are not aware of the powerful dynamics of the recycling industry. By arming yourself with the facts, you are one step closer to getting the support you need to make recycling a reality.

¹ EPA WARM Model: www.epa.gov/climatechange/wycd/waste/calculators/Warm_home.html

² EPA Jobs Through Recycling: www.epa.gov/epawaste/conserves/rrr/rmd/index.htm

³ MKTK Social Impact Fact Sheet: www.epa.gov/region4/waste/rcra/mgtoolkit/Community.html