

**Best Practices
Communication and Education**

**Municipal Web Site
Enhancement**

CIF Projects 198-200-214

Final Report

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Background

Preamble

The Blue Box Program Enhancement and Best Practices Assessment Project, Final Report, July 2007 concludes:

“Planning and implementing targeted P&E programs that support recycling and waste diversion are vital to municipal Blue Box programs. Each community’s ability to design and deploy P&E is affected by community size, geography, resources (financial, skills-based and time) and many other factors.

The strongest and most effective P&E campaigns strategically combine media and tactics. The Blue Box Program P&E Review report suggests that wherever possible, communities should try to implement a multi-tiered approach, with appropriate tactics selected from each of three tiers:

Tier 1 - Radio components or, if possible, TV (vs. print ads)

Tier 2 - householder drop of calendars or user-friendly tools showcasing website offerings; complemented by

Tier 3 - public relations or word-of-mouth strategies to animate communities-highly visible events and activities, community and corporate partnerships, role model identification, personal testimonials.

Communities that use this approach benefit from the mass media impact that helps build awareness and shift attitudes, combined with outreach that helps engage residents and contributes to skill-building.

Where limited budgets and media outlets constrain P&E program choices, the Best Practice P&E Review suggests focusing on a limited range of Tier 2 activities, deployed with greater frequency to achieve greater impact.”

Project Description

In the fall of 2009, the CIF identified an opportunity to develop and test best practice, Tier 2, P&E web site enhancements at three volunteer municipal programs.

The enhancements were designed to meet the needs of the participating municipalities by providing them with an interactive web site module that was attractive to residents, low cost, easy to administer, low maintenance and capable of providing dynamic recycling information, news and local



“how to” content.

This project sought to:

1. Evaluate the implementation of the web site P&E modules,
2. Enhance the selected programs existing website P&E,
3. Determine if there is a municipal demand for the modules,
4. Determine if additional programs should be provided with similar modules.

The project was carried out at a 50% funding level with the participating municipalities contributing module promotional costs and in kind staff time.

Findings from the project were made public in order to benefit all similar programs in Ontario.

Additional information about the Best Practices Project can be found at http://www.stewardshipontario.ca/bluebox/efund/bp_bluebox1.html.

Challenge and Opportunity

The Challenge Municipalities and especially smaller municipalities, are struggling to find a P&E tool that is effective, appealing and easy to administer. The current P&E model of print ads, mail outs and staff telephone interaction with residents has room for improvement.

Smaller municipalities generally lack the expertise, time and financial resources to establish and operate engaging web sites designed to attract residents repeatedly and provide ongoing and easily updated P&E.

Additionally, many smaller municipalities complain that considerable staff time is consumed answering routine “how to” and “where to” questions from residents calling in daily.

The Opportunity New technology now exists to address the expertise, time and financial resources issues described above.

Using the “software as service” business model, a dedicated P&E web module has been developed over the last five years specifically for the recycling/waste management municipal user.

This service provides all the necessary technical requirements to operate the software, provide monitoring and measurement statistics and host the web module which is simply linked to the existing municipal web site with only a few minutes of local effort. The municipality has only to provide an administrator who has full local control of all news, P&E information posted and users (members) accessing the site.

To engage local residents and insure repeat visits, the module provides a free to use, fully functional goods exchange service that allows residents to post items for recycling, trade or donation to other residents and local businesses. This innovative service encourages residents to visit the site over and over again because they have a vested interest in moving their surplus items or acquiring another resident’s items for their own use. Obviously, when residents return to the site, the most current local P&E information is displayed in front of them.



Project Description In the fall of 2009, The Emerald Group was engaged to recruit three volunteer municipalities to, test the service, supervise set up and training of local administrators and report to CIF on the following:

1. Determine if there is a municipal demand for the P&E modules,
2. Evaluation of the implementation of the P&E modules,
3. Determine if additional municipal programs should be provided with similar modules.

By November, 2009, all three municipalities had been selected and by March, 2010, the service was fully set up and operational in all locations, municipal staff had been fully trained and the sites were approved for public use.

By the middle of March 2010, municipalities had begun to advertise the sites and users were participating at all locations.

The pilot sites are currently operating as:

www.Wellington.Reuses.com

www.Kenora.Reuses.com

www.Peterboroughcounty.Reuses.com

A pilot Ontario wide portal has also been activated at:

www.Ontario.Reuses.com



Municipal Demand

Recruitment

In October, 2009, The Emerald Group solicited sixteen small municipalities for interest in the project via email. Response was rapid from nine municipalities which provided authorization to proceed within three weeks. Two municipalities approved the project between six and eleven weeks later. Four municipalities did not respond to the initial offer. CIF funding applications were submitted and prepared for each of the interested municipalities and approval is pending based on the results of this pilot project.

One mid sized municipality advised they were interested but were unable to participate because their IT department was uncooperative. It was explained that extremely little effort was required by the IT department, however, municipal staff did not wish to pursue the issue further at that time.

Selection Process

In order to reflect a representative municipal test sample across the Province, Kenora, Wellington County and County of Peterborough were selected as the project participants.

Based on this very limited recruitment effort and the very strong positive response, it can be fairly concluded that municipal demand for this P&E tool is high. Municipal staff were particularly interested in the ease of use, rich features and lack of technical expertise required to set up and maintain the system and these were often cited as the deciding factors in the decision to participate.

In addition, municipal staff reported that local council members and resident enthusiasm were high for the concept.

Typical feedback from residents follows:

“The site is brilliant! CongratulationsI hope that it winds up being well used. I will be posting notices about it on our bulletin boards and on our own website.

I have always thought that a “Recyclopedia” would be an invaluable idea and now here it is – I plan to share it with others, thanks.

D. P. (Mini Lakes, Aberfoyle)”



Evaluation of Service

Description

The “software as service” business supplies a web-based package of services in communities across North America which includes software, web-hosting, security, support and training. In return for an annual subscription fee, a total system is supplied which is specifically designed to operate a sophisticated municipal P&E tool along with a materials exchange in a simple, inexpensive and effective manner.

No software is required to be installed at the local municipality which permits better security, dedicated support and automatic upgrades as required. No local IT effort is required.

The system also tracks and reports on the number of visitors, weight and nature of waste diverted as well as the dollar savings and the Greenhouse Gas emissions avoided through diversion.

Websites are modular and include:

- Recyclopedia - an A to Z Reuse and Recycling Guide sorted by type of material
- Events Listings for recycling and waste management events
- Recycling News Section
- Recycling Links accessing other useful information directly
- Directories for Reuse & Recycling Businesses and local Non-profit organizations
- Online material (goods) exchanges where people can easily list items to give away, trade, locate or repair, that would otherwise be wasted.

The service also provides access to the combined experience of sixty other clients and site administrators through a systems forum that is continuously available to the local municipal administrator.

Municipalities supply local management and marketing. Everything else needed, including hosting, is part of the service. Sites can be administered using the built-in control panel requiring a skill level of



“web surfer” only. No programming or IT skills or additional costs are required. Local administrators control the publishing of all content in real time.

A one time set up fee and annual subscription fees cover:

- use of the software
- initial site design
- maintenance
- updates & upgrades
- administrator's control panel
- initial training & orientation
- secure, green, hosting
- continuing support
- discussion forum
- ability to direct email all users (instant newsletter/event reminder)
- gradual evolution of the site, to make it better, and to keep up with changes in the internet
- listing/links on a national portal (either www.reuses.com in Canada or www.2good2waste.com in the U.S.)
- development of www.Ontario.reuses.com Ontario wide portal
- i.e. everything, except local management, and local marketing.

Evaluation

The Emerald Group arranged for and monitored all phases of the set up, training and initial operation of the three test sites and acted as the direct link between the service provider and municipality. The following paragraphs describe the observations of the process and feedback of the municipalities:

Municipal staff indicated that they were highly interested in controlling the P&E content directly without having to submit P&E items to an IT department or third party programmer. This ability is a prominent feature of the software and saves significant time, cost and frustration while permitting maximum flexibility over timing of the release of P&E items and content.

The built in Recyclopedia is a key P&E element of the system and is currently scheduled for an upgrade and more prominent placement on the web sites. (see prototype: <http://www.recyclopedia.net>)

Residents were particularly impressed with this feature as it is specifically designed and dedicated to answering all the routine “how to” and “where to” questions about local recycling and waste



disposal options. Municipal staff liked the feature as they believe it will save significant staff time going forward by reducing routine telephone inquiries and repetitive print publications.

The recyclopedia also permits the local administrator to add direct internet links to local charity and recycling/disposal businesses so a resident can obtain contact information with one mouse click without leaving the site. Municipal staff did comment that the Recyclopedia could come preloaded with a standard template for quicker set up/implementation and the supplier has provided that template for future use.

Additional set up requirements consist of appointing a local administrator to manage the site and selecting local graphics and logos for use on the pages. These graphics are installed by the supplier promptly and are then approved by the local administrator before the site goes live.

Training

The training required to operate the site is minimal and consists of typically less than two hours of orientation in one conference call session. Several municipal staff can be trained as local administrators during one session if desired. Any number of local administrators can be assigned to share duties as desired.

Following orientation, the local administrator has access to supplier experts via online forums or telephone. The Emerald Group also provided assistance both directly to municipal staff and as a co-administrator on each of the test sites. This methodology permitted prompt resolution of any set up issues encountered by municipal staff who became competent with their site almost immediately.

Common issues and Province wide planning were handled through The Emerald Group as the single contact point. The average site became fully functional and ready for public use within sixty days of initial activation.

The current Ontario administrators have formed a support group to share tips and tricks as well as promotional/advertising strategies. This group meets via conference call monthly and it is anticipated that future administrators will benefit greatly from participation and will shorten the typical time required to set up a site by sharing experiences. As more municipalities are added, either a volunteer or a paid facilitator may be desirable/necessary to manage these sessions and bring common issues to the supplier.



The supplier is currently reviewing set up and training procedures to streamline the activation procedure and it is anticipated that future sites will come on line faster even though existing set up issues are minimal.

Goods Exchange

One of the major issues of small municipal P&E is getting residents to actually read it. This is the issue that is primarily solved by the local, free to use, goods exchange service featured on each site.

The goods exchange feature of the service is the lure which brings residents back to the site over and over again. Once users sign up to post an exchange advertisement, their contact information is available to the administrator who can direct email recycling news and events. The users own ad acts to keep them returning to the site and using it repeatedly.

This incentive for residents has proven to be a powerful lure in over sixty municipalities currently using the service in North America.

Estimated P&E Value

It is generally difficult to estimate the dollar value of P&E, however, the service does provide an included monitoring and measurement package that helps to quantify site activity. This feature will assist municipal staff greatly with reporting diversion and use statistics to local council and senior management annually.

The table below shows projections provided by the supplier based on two year follow up results for the www.2good2toss.com system in Washington State, and the www.madisonstuffexchange.com system in Madison, Wisconsin which have population densities comparable to the test municipalities.

The table below shows that, provided advertising for the site is maintained, the number of users, visits and exchanges continues to grow the longer the site is online. Eventually a self sustaining saturation point is reached when only maintenance advertising of the site is required to maintain high numbers of visitors.

The table uses the following assumptions:

1. \$75 per tonne for 'waste diverted'/tip fees saved.



2. \$5/1000 page views for 'communication & awareness value'
(lowest valued untargeted Google ads are about \$2.50 per 1000 page views each, per ad.)

PROJECTED WEB MODULE VALUE OVER TWO YEARS (MATURITY)

	Pop 1000s	Users	Diverted Tonnes	Tip Fee Saved /yr.	Daily Hits	Page Views/ day	Communication & Awareness Value est. \$/day est. \$/yr.	
Wellington County								
Best Results	200	4630	268	\$20,110	49449	25337	\$126	\$46,240
Avg. Results	200	1072	31	\$2,325	7024	4224	\$21	\$7,709
Peterborough County								
Best Results	34	792	46	\$3,450	8457	4333	\$21	\$7,908
Avg. Results	34	183	5	\$375	1201	722	\$3	\$1,318
Kenora District								
Best Results	64	1488	86	\$6,450	15894	8144	\$40	\$14,862
Avg. Results	64	345	10	\$750	2258	1358	\$6	\$2,477

Note:

As of March 19, 2010, the pilot web sites have had 91,247 hits. This is an impressive figure considering the very short time period they have been in operation (less than three weeks). This high interest level can be attributed to word of mouth promotion and some limited PSA only as insufficient time has elapsed for any printed promotion to have taken effect.

As of March 19, 2010, the sites have also signed up a total of 87 users (members).



Barriers to Implementation

Status Quo Resistance to change is always a barrier to implementation of any new technology or process. The old methods of print and telephone should not be totally abandoned, however, as stated in the Blue Box Program Enhancement and Best Practices Assessment Project, Final Report, July 2007:

“Planning and implementing targeted P&E programs that support recycling and waste diversion are vital to municipal Blue Box programs. ...

The strongest and most effective P&E campaigns strategically combine media and tactics. The Blue Box Program P&E Review report suggests that wherever possible, communities should try to implement a multi-tiered approach”

Poor Advertising Failure to promote the site will result in poor performance, fewer exchange trades, fewer users and consequently fewer eyes on the P&E.

Promotion of the site need not involve excessive cost. Municipalities have already employed several low cost yet effective means of advertising such as:

- Local PSA announcements
- Signing up all municipal staff as users
- Announcements to local high schools
- Announcements to local service clubs
- Printing site URL and message on landfill scale tickets
- Raising annual subscription fees with earth day activities
- Mail out leaflets with municipal tax bills
- Sponsorships and/or cross links with local businesses
- Newsletters (direct emailing is possible to site users)
- Recycling truck signage
- Depot/landfill signage
- Recruiting local charities
- Add URL and message to recycling calendar
- Piggyback advertising with Goods Exchange Day/other municipal events
- Demo and sign up users at all municipal events



IT Department

Because this service is entirely supported and hosted by the provider, it requires virtually no work by local IT departments to implement. The service stands and operates completely independently and need not even be linked to the local municipal web site so waste management staff could operate the module without their municipal IT department. However, obviously, much more value will be obtained from the service if links/buttons are placed on the municipal site home and waste management pages that directly connect the resident to the module.

Most IT departments are not concerned by this level of effort, however, some IT departments raise internal jurisdictional issues and are unsupportive of external service providers. This is an artificial barrier to implementation that will likely diminish over time as other municipalities start to use the system and an Ontario wide portal is developed.

The service provider has considerable IT experience and is able to work out any serious IT issues almost immediately. (No serious issues were encountered during this pilot project). Since no software is installed or stored on the local site, no security issues can arise and no support issues are relevant.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusions

1. Municipal demand, local council and resident enthusiasm are all high for this service.
2. The implementation of this service in the test municipalities was easy and efficient for municipal staff.
3. Promotion of the site is required to insure success.
4. A supportive local administrator is required to insure success.
5. The use of a consultant knowledgeable with the service, software and supplier training as well as municipal recycling staff, procedures and local council politics will assist future implementation efforts.
6. A facilitator may be needed to roll out the service Province wide.



Recommendations Based on the observations and conclusions above, it is the recommendation of The Emerald Group, that the municipalities currently awaiting funding approval for this project be granted funding and advised to proceed with implementation.

It is further recommended that similar P&E web modules be offered to interested small municipalities, especially northern municipalities.

It is further recommended that an Ontario wide portal be constructed to rapidly guide any Ontario resident with an internet connection to local municipal P&E from any location in the Province. Refer to prototype portal www.Ontario.Reuses.Com

It is further recommended that a consultant knowledgeable with the service, software and supplier training as well as municipal recycling staff, procedures and local council politics be used to assist municipalities with implementing this service and developing an Ontario wide portal satisfactory to CIF and WDO.

Best Practices

This project fits within the following fundamental best practices as identified by the Blue Box Program Enhancement and Best Practices Assessment Project (2007).

- Appropriately planned, designed, and funded Promotion and Education program
- Establishing defined performance measures, including diversion targets and monitoring and a continuous improvement program.
- Established and enforced policies that induce waste diversion
- Multi-municipal planning approach to collection and processing recyclables.

