



Getting the Word Out

BY BETH SCHMITT AND HEATHER MCNAMARA

THE CURBSIDE VALUE PARTNERSHIP'S TEST KITCHEN GRANT PROGRAM PRODUCES INTRIGUING DATA ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SPECIFIC RESIDENT EDUCATION TACTICS.

After a decade working with communities to help increase participation and tonnage connected to curbside recycling programs, the Curbside Value Partnership (CVP) has amassed quite a library of best practices and learnings. To date, we've worked with more than 30 communities and four states around the U.S., and our focus has always been on tying education efforts to measurable results. And in planning campaigns, answering key questions is central to campaign planning with any community partner, such as "did the campaign help lift participation?" or "did tonnages go up?"

But we also get asked a lot about individual strategies. "What's the most effective tactic for reaching people?" or "Do billboards work?" and "Do you have to have money dedicated to advertising?"

CVP advocates for fully integrated campaigns. In other words, reaching people in multiple ways and reaching them multiple times, to achieve the greatest impact. But last year, CVP decided to develop the CVP Connect "Test Kitchen" grant program to explore questions about specific tactics, and to provide answers grounded in data.

After an application process, CVP selected six communities as "Test Kitchen" grant recipients and worked with each closely to develop and execute their chosen grant activities. Communities' activities fell into one of three broad buckets: direct marketing, peer-to-peer outreach and traditional advertising. Each community was awarded a \$10,000 matching cash award and up to \$15,000 of in-kind marketing and creative support from CVP.

Here's what we learned.

Direct marketing

We tested the efficacy of direct mail postcards and door hangers in two communities: the City of Grand Prairie, Texas, and La Porte Solid Waste District in La Porte County, Indiana.

Grand Prairie developed a direct mail postcard and door hanger with a specific call to action: Residents were told to call to receive a free recycling bin delivered to their door. The idea was to determine which medium – postcard or door hanger – was more effective and to test how both stacked up against doing no outreach.

After delivering material to separate test groups of 300 households each and measuring set-outs over a six-week period, Grand Prairie officials found that postcards yielded higher results in set-outs than door hangers. This is interesting since both used the same basic message.

Households that received the postcard had an average set-out of 54.3 percent at the end of the six-week period, compared with 46.9 percent for the door-hanger group. The control group, which received no outreach at all, averaged a set-out rate of approximately 44 percent.

And what was the response to the call to action? The community received 47 bin requests from the combined 600 households who received either a postcard or a door hanger. Of the 47 requests, 27 came from the door hanger recipients and 20 from the postcard recipients. The bottom line: There was no statistically significant difference between door hanger and postcard outreach and both proved to be more effective than no outreach at all.

La Porte County, Indiana, meanwhile, wanted to focus on raising participation rates and lowering contamination rates in the rural, southern part of the county. To address these issues, organizers distributed a direct mailer that included visuals of what can and cannot be recycled to help residents better utilize the program.

After comparing participation and contamination rates for the test group households and three separate control groups that did not receive the mailer, La Porte officials concluded none of the rates significantly improved as a result of the direct mail outreach. Organizers believe there are larger systemic issues in dealing with the rural population that cannot be addressed through direct marketing. Barriers include inconvenience and distance to curb (households in this area have driveways that often measure more than a mile long, which discourages residents from rolling out their carts for collection) and a perception that recycling is unnecessary. Some residents in this community believe they can more easily burn their recycling with garbage than set it out at the curb.

Peer-to-peer outreach

CVP has long believed the personal connection that comes with peer-to-peer outreach is one of the most effective ways to change recycling behavior. Social marketing gurus Doug McKenzie-Mohr and Wesley Schultz reiterate this in their book, *Social Marketing to Protect the Environment: What Works*. The Green Alliance in Natchez, Mississippi and the community of Durango, Colorado focused on peer-to-peer outreach to connect and communicate with residents.

As a fairly new residential curbside program, the Green Alliance, the organization that promotes recycling in the region that includes Brookhaven and Natchez, Mississippi and Vidalia, Louisiana had a need to focus on increasing awareness and participation among residents. With CVP's support, Green Alliance developed a unifying campaign called "Divert It." Because high school football is such a huge part of the community culture, Green Alliance trained local high school football players and cheerleaders as volunteers for conducting door-to-door outreach and delivering door hangers, which helped lend credibility and excitement to the campaign. The idea was to look at the power of engaging residents. In Natchez, officials tracked participation rates for six weeks after the outreach took

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Consiga su papelera de reciclaje gratis. Llame al 972-237-8061 para el 31 de Julio del 2013, y le dejaremos un bin y las instrucciones de reciclaje a su puerta.

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Grand Prairie TEXAS

Direct mail image from campaign in Grand Prairie, Texas.

place. They found when volunteers left the door hanger but did not interact with residents, there was an average participation increase of 11 to 12 percent. But when interaction did take place the participation rate increased by 14 percent. Two neighborhoods served as the control groups and received no personal outreach or door hangers, and there was no change in participation in either of those groups.

The second personal connection test community involved a small but enthusiastic group of individuals. Residents in Durango, Colorado were reported to have a strong passion for the environment and recycling. But when in doubt about the recyclability of a specific material, residents would throw it away instead of recycling it. Since a lot of new materials had been added to the list of accepted materials, recycling organizers felt significant improvements were possible.

Therefore, Durango's outreach was focused on informing residents about the wide breadth of materials that can be recycled.

Durango organizers developed a block-captain program which involved training

Jump into RECYCLING

Don't just dip your toe into recycling. jump in with both feet!

RECYCLE

Instead of dropping in your trash can, recycle these products in your recycling container. No sorting necessary! Place your recycling container curbside by 8 a.m. on Tues.

Cardboard and Mixed Paper

- Newspaper, magazines & catalogs
- Computer printouts
- Mail and paper
- Recycled paper and cardboard boxes, paper towel rolls, egg cartons, etc.
- Junk mail & envelopes, greeting cards, pamphlets, business cards, booklets, booklets
- Photo books and photo's books
- Paper bags

Plastics

- Milk cartons, juice cartons, soups, instant noodle cups

Metals

- Soft metal cans and bottles
- Steel cans/bottles
- Aluminum cans, foil and pie plates
- Empty and deodorized aerosol cans
- Empty paint cans
- Clean paint per manufacturer's label

Plastics includes all #1 through #7 plastics such as:

• PET/BOTTLES	• HDPE/BLENDS	• #3/PLASTIC
• #4/PLASTIC	• #5/PLASTIC	• #6/PLASTIC
• #7/PLASTIC	• #1/PLASTIC	• #2/PLASTIC

No glass for curbside pick-up please. Recycle at home and bring to one of our drop-off locations.

No plastic bags! They can smother! Take newspapers out of bags please.

Thanks for committing to jumping in with Both Feet!
Your 4 wheels can have a lasting impact!

do the right things!

For more information visit DurangoRecycles.com

Durango campaign leave-behind prompt.

community members to conduct door-to-door outreach in their neighborhoods. Volunteers hit targeted areas, and households were only counted if actual outreach occurred. Materials were never left at a home without a conversation with a resident. Volunteers asked residents to pledge to learn the list of what can be recycled and to do their best to recycle everything on it for four weeks. Residents were also given a magnet and brochure to serve as reminders of their pledge and what was accepted.

Among the six test neighborhoods, Durango saw an increase of 14 percent in tonnage compared with baseline data from the four weeks before the outreach began. Durango officials also found the test neighborhoods recycled approximately 10 percent more than the six control neighborhoods during the pledge period.

Traditional advertising

Billboard, transit and other types of traditional advertising are fairly common tactics when it comes to communicating messages, but gauging their effectiveness and value can be difficult. CVP worked with Athens-Clarke County, Georgia and the City of Fayetteville, Arkansas to test specific advertising tactics



"More" campaign image from Athens, Georgia.

and measure the impacts on their recycling programs.

Home to the University of Georgia, Athens-Clarke County has a large population of young residents, and officials there wanted to introduce fresh messaging that would speak to this audience and encourage participation in recycling. The county targeted traditional "on the go" advertising activities, including billboards, exterior transit bus ads and recycling truck signs within Athens, where they could control the exposure and reach to their targeted audi-

ence. With CVP's help, they developed the "MORE" campaign, which used a strong symbol that translated well across the different media channels. Advertisements ran for six weeks.

Over a three-month period, Athens-Clarke measured tonnage and found that the test group showed a stronger response to the advertising compared to the control group, a suburban neighborhood outside of Athens. The test group, statistics showed, recycled 6.4 percent more than the control group.



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Non-Ferrous Steel pan

Another college town, Fayetteville, Arkansas, wanted to inform residents about what can be recycled and motivate them to recycle more. They tested transit and radio advertisements as well as stickers affixed to pizza boxes from a local pizzeria. The ads drove residents to an online quiz where they could test their recycling IQ. Fun but relevant questions educated them about the program in a lighthearted way and offered a chance to win weekly prizes. Because of the broad nature of the advertising, Fayetteville was unable to segment control and test groups. Instead, officials used year-over-year data to measure results and saw a slight increase in tonnage – 2.6 percent – during the “Test Kitchen” activities period compared with years prior.

Test Kitchen takeaways

Overall, the “Test Kitchen” findings reiterate that education works. Beyond that, the trials demonstrate direct marketing can be one of the most effective ways to communicate with residents. The messages reach residents at home, where they engage in recycling.

On the peer-to-peer outreach front, the tests showed while creating actual conversations may be more time-consuming, connecting with residents is an extremely effective way to share information and make lasting impressions. In Durango in particular, organizers found this to be true. By combining the one-on-one outreach with the pledge to recycle they were successful in encouraging behavior change with residents. The Green Alliance’s data, meanwhile, proved personal contact when delivering the door hangers made

What are some effective education tactics?

- Peer-to-peer outreach can be useful in influencing residents.
- Time is needed to adequately train volunteers about the program and messages but is important as it will make them more likely to be effective in connecting with residents.
- It’s key to have a clear, concise call to action for your direct marketing piece.
- Tying a recycling pledge to outreach has repeatedly shown it can produce results.
- Direct marketing reaches people where they recycle, in their homes, making it a valuable tactic, though printing and delivery costs can be expensive.
- Make sure it is clear who the direct marketing piece is coming from to provide credibility.

the effort a more effective one than simply delivering a door hanger with no interaction. Keep in mind, however, that this tactic’s effectiveness also depends on your community’s culture. While Durango had success with personally delivering door hangers, not all communities have residents who would be open to receiving them. Some parts of the country would see this as an unwelcome intrusion, so it’s important to know your community’s culture.

Not surprisingly, traditional advertising proved to be the most difficult to measure. Because of its broad reach, it’s difficult to target specific audiences. Additionally, less accurate tracking metrics exist. In other words, you can’t measure how many people viewed your billboard or transit ad on any given day. Finally, most traditional advertising reaches residents outside of their homes, which can impact its effectiveness. While it’s important to caution against comparing one community’s results against another’s, we have gathered some general observations:

The time of year that outreach is conducted can have an impact. Summertime is more difficult to connect with residents because schedules are not routine. Alternately, deep winter months can prove

challenging for cold-weather communities, when there are fewer opportunities to reach people outside. Additionally, weather can affect how likely people are to set out their recycling each week.

The length of time the outreach is conducted affects the results. You could see an initial lift, but is it sustained? Alternately, you may not see an initial bump, but notice a gradual rise later on. Unfortunately, length of outreach is often tied to budget and staff resources, which is something many communities cannot control. There is no getting around the fact that sustained communication is important.

For more resources and information about CVP’s “Test Kitchen”, contact Heather McNamara at heather.mcnamara@hkstrategies.com. For more information about CVP Connect, visit www.CVPConnect.org. **RR**

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The Curbside Value Partnership is a 501(c)(3) organization designed to grow participation in curbside recycling programs nationwide. It is the only current national program that engages all recycling stakeholders (including government, private industry, haulers and materials recovery facilities) to identify solutions for improving curbside recycling programs through education and data analysis.

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