

COMMUNITY POWER

Partners on Waste Education & Reduction
Solid Waste Management Coordinating
Board
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Sustainability Follow-Up Report Round 12 Grant Projects from 2012-2013

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The information in this report was gathered from follow-up interviews with Round 12 grantees whose projects ended in August of 2013. Follow-up was conducted with eleven of the 15 grant projects including: A Better Society, Al-Amal School, Asian Outdoor Heritage, Carpenter St. Croix Valley Nature Center, Laura Jeffrey Academy, Macalester-Groveland Community Council, Minnesota Zoo Volunteer Conservation Corps, Mount Olivet Lutheran Church, New American Academy, Payne-Phalen District Five Community Council, and West St. Paul YMCA.

Of those organizations that are not part of this report, there were two organizations that did not respond to requests for an interview two others that could not schedule an interview in time to be included in the report.

The purpose of the follow-up interviews is to determine the lasting impact of the grant on the organization. The results are similar to findings from follow-ups with groups from the eleven previous years. As previously found, a high number of groups continue to offer some waste reduction education beyond the end of their contract with SWMCB.

Replicable products or programs

Of the groups interviewed, most of them developed products or programs during their grant project that could be used by others. These products or programs can be implemented by another community group with little or no cost. These products will continue to be included, when possible, on the organization page of individual grant projects:

<http://www.rethinkrecycling.com/grants/grantee-projects-all>

Examples

A Better Society created a repeatable program, SecondLife-in-a-Box, which enables youth to successfully organize the collection/redistribution of reusable items. By providing an easy-to-use template and program support, more youth groups are able to implement projects and have a bigger community impact on waste/toxicity reduction.

Macalester-Groveland Community Council has pictures of kitchen set-ups on their website, which include configurations of backyard and/or organics drop-off collection containers. They've been helpful for other groups.

Continue Waste Reduction Programming

100% of groups interviewed continued to offer waste reduction information and/or programming past the grant period. As in past years, all the groups interviewed continue to educate and engage their audiences in waste and toxicity reduction after their grant ends. Round 12 grantees report actively engaging 15,225 people and reaching an additional 558,450 people with waste reduction messages since their projects ended in 2013.

Examples

A Better Society is still doing school supply drives at the end of the school year at multiple elementary schools, including Bluff Creek Elementary and Excelsior Elementary. They're helping the schools run their programs and make them more efficient. A Better Society is also helping to connect them with organizations that will take reused school supplies, so that program is growing.

Asian Outdoor Heritage is continuing to do recycling education and tells people where to dispose of their hazardous materials. They have been expanding to the metro-wide Hmong Community, not just St. Paul. They have had workshops and booths at Hmong events, including the Hmong New Year event at the Excel Energy Center in St. Paul.

Zero-waste lunches have continued at Carpenter St. Croix Nature Center. Teachers request that their class have a zero-waste lunch when they visit the nature center. Teachers get a flyer to send home and most students choose to participate. Naturalists give instructions and volunteers help the students sort their waste. Classes get verbal praise for reducing waste at their lunches. Recycling bins are still being used in their nature center. They also hold zero waste events, including the Apple Blossom Race, where county staff have helped.

Laura Jeffrey Academy was awarded another grant in 2013-2014, and they are doing a lot of waste reduction in their lunchroom. The girls are really thoughtful on what goes where. The school focuses on the lunchroom at the beginning of the year. In the second part of the year, they talk about how they can cut down on waste, even when the students are cleaning out their lockers, and how they can reuse.

Workshops, informational tables, and e-news articles are some of the ways the Macalester-Groveland Community Council is continuing their work. They also developed a brochure and offered informational sessions about the organics drop-off site. At the informational session, they educated about recycling as well. They have opened the organics drop-off site to anyone living/working in St. Paul. In addition, MGCC was awarded another grant focused on reuse and repair in 2013-2014.

The Minnesota Zoo Volunteer Conservation Corps continues to talk to people about waste reduction and composting at display tables. They have their own prize wheel with recycling and composting questions for families to answer. They added a program at the zoo this fall called "Gotcha Going Green." On a daily basis, staff or volunteers will walk around the zoo looking for people doing something green. If they see people picking up materials, like a bottle to recycle, they give people a card saying we caught you going green.

Recycling and organics separation are continuing at Mount Olivet Lutheran Church. They have also expanded this program and started separating organic waste at their location in Victoria. They are doing some educational activities as well, but they are not as numerous as during the grant. Last spring, a group toured a commercial compost site.

Payne-Phalen District Five Community Council is trying to integrate messaging about recycling, composting, reuse opportunities, and household hazardous waste disposal in all of their outreach. At tabling events, they also give away reusable shopping bags from Ramsey County which include recycling information.

At Al-Amal School, recycling collection is continuing building wide. The blue bins are still in place, and the custodians collect the recycling separate from the regular trash. There are still recycling posters up around the school, and they have a large display at the entrance of the school. They recycle their bottles and cans at lunch as well as milk cartons. There are some students who take turns to make sure their classmates are recycling correctly.

Internal Waste Management

Waste reduction and internal waste management practices became a larger priority for most of the interviewed grantees. Many grantees report that waste reduction became a larger priority for their organization

after participating in the grant. Most groups made changes to reduce waste in their office or building. Common changes include increased recycling and reuse, as well as adding compost collection.

Examples

A Better Society considers themselves to be a pretty eco-friendly organization in the first place, and they always think about ways to reuse things. They have a lot of youth volunteers, and it is ingrained in them already. Some of the things the youth collect are made into something else. For instance, A Better Society keeps broken crayons and makes them into new crayons, which they then sell at art fairs and farmers markets.

The grant added composting and zero waste events to the Carpenter St. Croix Valley Nature Center. Even their bathrooms have compost containers.

Several of Macalester-Groveland Community Council's events were zero-waste before/during the grant. After the grant ended, all the events were. They also added composting in their office. There is also a lot of reuse that goes on at MGCC. Staff are more aware and don't just throw things away.

Recycling had been going on for quite some time at the MN Zoo. They had just begun a composting program, and educating staff and the public about the program fit well with Community POWER. The food service company is also on board with the composting program and helps provide labels for the containers.

The great thing about the timing of the grant is that last summer Mount Olivet remodeled their church kitchen. They designed the kitchen so there are three places for the different streams. They did not have recycling containers in the kitchen before, so adding recycling and organics took a lot of coaxing. Now all the types of waste are included in the new kitchen.

Payne Phalen Community Council made their annual meeting a zero-waste event. All the service ware was compostable, so they had just a couple handfuls of trash. A representative from the Council said they probably would not have done this if they had not participated in the Community POWER grant program.

A lot of the YMCAs have community gardens, like West St Paul and Eagan, so they can compost materials. The 2013-2014 grant at Eagan YMCA allowed them to make a larger on-site composter to handle the additional waste.

Environmental Behavior Changes

Community POWER serves as a catalyst for additional behavior changes to benefit the environmental. Once a person or organization begins to make

changes to benefit the environment, like instituting waste reduction and recycling, other changes often follow.

Six of the ten organizations interviewed have instituted things like energy and water conservation measures as a result of being involved with the Community POWER program. Some examples are installing more energy-efficient light bulbs in their offices, showing families how to create rain barrels, turning down the air conditioning or heat when not at home, and avoiding the use of pesticides on trees and plants.

In addition, all of the project managers stated that they have made changes in their own personal lives, such as recycling more (and encouraging others to do the same), starting to compost, and other measures as a direct result of their involvement in Community POWER.

Barriers to Continue Projects

Nine of the eleven groups interviewed required additional funding to continue their projects. Several groups used their own operating budgets to continue their projects, while others are seeking resources from other funders. Some groups report that they need more staff capacity to continue parts of their projects. The following are additional barriers experienced by grantees to continuing their projects:

A Better Society wishes they had permanent staff person doing their web work, would make it so they could update materials online more often. In general, it would be great if they had more staff and volunteers so they could expand their reuse programs to more schools.

Because of the lack of capacity in staff at Asian Outdoor Heritage, they sometimes miss grant deadlines. Lack of volunteers is one of their biggest challenges. Every year they have to scavenge for volunteers.

New American Academy also mentioned lack of volunteers as an issue. Their community is big on volunteering, and most of New American Academy's work is based on volunteer help. Their problem is recruiting long-term volunteers who would be available in the future.

Payne Phalen Community Council reported that their social media presence is limited. Rethink Recycling did a great job of making good materials accessible, so they have the resources; they just need to be able to get them out to the community routinely.

Feedback on Community POWER Program

When asked what was most helpful about the way Community POWER is structured (in terms of what helps the grantees to be successful in their projects), the former grantees reported that technical support from staff, was most valuable, followed by the resource materials, grantee meetings, networking with other grantees, and funding schedule.

Comments from grantees

It's a great project and I hope you continue to get funding. It's a great way to work with community groups.

Honestly I don't find listening to lectures at the grantee meetings that helpful. I feel like doing my own research is more helpful. On the other hand, putting together our presentation is really helpful so we can share it with others.

The funding schedule not falling on a calendar year was a challenge. If you were an academic institution, it was be awesome.

It was good to see presentations from past grantees. It was helpful to see what others were doing and to hear what didn't work.

I didn't like that the grant only allowed a small amount of money for recycling containers. We wanted more resources for bins, and the church didn't want to put a lot of our money toward waste containers. We applied for a grant from Hennepin County for recycling containers at our Minneapolis campus.

What I loved about the grant was that the deadline to apply forced us to make a plan and apply. I knew the church management wanted to support it, and it added formality to get us off the ground. We had to rally around the project and not get distracted by something else.

Rethink Recycling and County Resources

Grantees were asked which resources from the counties and the Solid Waste Management Coordinating Board they continue to use and which have been most helpful.

Examples

A Better Society gets resource sheets from the Carver County Environmental Center which they take to events.

Asian Outdoor Heritage had one of Ramsey County's staff give a presentation at a youth event. They obtain brochures, calendars and posters in Hmong

and English from Ramsey County. The photos help their members understand. It's also nice to have the materials ready-made.

Dan from Washington County has been very helpful to the Carpenter St. Croix Valley Nature Center. The Nature Center has sent people to the Rethink Recycling website, including their naturalists and interns. Laurie, the grant manager, was very helpful. They have also used handouts from the grantee trainings.

Laura Jeffrey Academy has used a lot of the educational info and the e-newsletter from Rethink Recycling. They used the organics collection bags from Ramsey County for their chili cook-off as well.

Macalester-Groveland Community Council used a lot of signage and handouts from Rethink Recycling. Ramsey County gave them reusable bags to give away. They have also used articles from the Toolkits on SWMCB's website. They wanted to use the prize wheel but were not able to transport it.

Mount Olivet Lutheran Church borrowed a Learning Truck from Hennepin County showing packaging and pricing for individually wrapped versus bulk items. They also got recycling bags from Hennepin County to give away. When they did the commercial compost site tour, Hennepin County covered the cost of the bus.

New American Academy gives handouts to people to take home. They use materials from Hennepin County, including photos showing what is hazardous and what is not. They also share videos from Hennepin County.

Payne Phalen Community Council gets translated calendars from Ramsey County and leaves them at businesses and churches for Hispanic and other non-English speaking customers. They give out reusable bags from Ramsey County at National Night Out and other neighborhood events.

Lessons Learned

Things that would have been helpful for the grantees to know before they started their projects are listed below.

- Our timeline needed to be flipped due to time constraints from our videographer and volunteers.
- I wish we had put more funding in home visit resources. There was a team of six of us and it was overwhelming.
- For me it was really helpful to have taken the Hennepin Co. Master Recycler program. I think if I hadn't done that I'd have been more lost.

- I would've liked to have had a team of residents helping with the project, outside of the East Side Rising group. We had lots of discussions about litter in the neighborhood, but not a cohesive group.
- I wish I would've made the project broader than just composting. Having to do the project all year long was a stretch for the youth. They never spend that much time on a topic at school, so it was harder to keep them engaged.

Proud Moments

Those interviewed were asked what makes them most proud of the activities that have continued. Below are their responses.

I really enjoy going into the schools and talking to the kids. We created the resources, but it's great to see the kids get it in person. It's good to talk to them when they're young.

-Heather Tran, A Better Society

I am proud of the fact that we've been able to sustain the project. Teachers are following through; custodians continue to pick up paper for recycling. We've had some issues with keeping the committee of parents and teachers going, but it looks like the teachers are taking the responsibility in each classroom. We're trying to make many of the projects school-wide now, which makes it everyone's responsibility.

-Audrey Zahra Williams, Al-Amal School

We're most proud of reaching out to ice fishers. There's a lot of lack of education and information on why they need to recycle. Nationally we reach out to 200 ice fishers. We have plastic recycling containers that we give to the fishers. We've been getting a lot of good bags of recycling back, so we can see that it's been effective.

-Pao Yang, Asian Outdoor Heritage

I am proud that we are able to offer industrial compost collection. The grant inspired it, but it's also a sponsorship with Waste Management. We're walking the talk. We're not perfect, some people add contamination, but getting the conversations started in households is exciting. I love that the teachers expect it; they're almost driving it at this point. It's part of the education experience.

-Jennifer Vieth, Carptenter St. Croix Valley Nature Center

I'm really proud of the way we handle our lunchroom waste. The students are putting their food waste in separate containers from the trash. We are weighing the food waste and trash so the students can compete. We're also looking at a grant to have our own compost site.

-Lizzie Forshee, Laure Jeffrey Academy

The organics drop-off site growth is what I'm proudest of. Without the POWER project, we wouldn't have been able to grow the education program as much. The home visits and classes got people so much more excited and confident to participate. After the POWER project ended the program continued to grow, so it was helpful to already have educational content and resources.

-Lauren Anderson, Macalester-Groveland Community Council

We raised the awareness of recycling and composting both internally and externally, and we continue to do that. We're never going to get to 100% recycling and composting or even close if we don't keep talking about it.

-David Schmidt, Minnesota Zoo Volunteer Conservation Corps

I was really pleased that our circle decided to sell Tupperware at church. At our church bazaar in the beginning of November, my church circle sold Tupperware combined with an educational message. We borrowed a Learning Truck from Hennepin County showing packaging and pricing for individually wrapped versus bulk items. We used that as a message to say: buy Tupperware, buy in bulk, and package it yourself. It was very gratifying that someone from the congregation came up with an idea to connect Tupperware with waste reduction.

-Carrie Sandgren, Mount Olivet Lutheran Church

I am very proud that a lot of people are learning what recycling is for the first time and how important it is to do recycling at home. They used to put everything in the same container, and now a lot of the households have two containers.

-Asad Aliweyd, New American Academy

We like the fact that we get the reusable bags with recycling information into people's hands. Since the district council does a lot of activities, that's something we can universally apply and use in face-to-face interactions. That connection seems to really be helpful.

-Leslie McMurray, Payne Phalen District Five Community Council

I am proud of getting the garden off the ground and incorporating composting. It was a really good way to bring families together and do something active. It was also a great experiential learning experience.

-Betty Notto, West St. Paul YMCA