

Conducting community education and engagement

Householders with the skills and motivation to use the new service are a key component to the success of a new organics service. Factsheet 4 outlines the types of community education and engagement and key issues to consider in preparing a communications plan. The communications plan will include various stages including pre-launch, new service roll-out, and ongoing communication.

During a pilot or trial, these stages occur over a shorter period of time and with a smaller target audience. Therefore the key messages and communication methods tested during a pilot trial may need to be modified during whole of service roll out.

A communications plan for a whole of service roll out will include communication strategies not appropriate for small targeted trials. Newspapers, websites and displays at events may provide more cost effective opportunities for reaching a wider audience. Schools, community groups and clubs may provide opportunities for more in depth workshops about the benefits and operation of the new organics service.



Information leaflet (Leichhardt Council)

The different stages

There are a number of distinct stages to community education and engagement, and the success of these will influence the success and acceptance of your scheme. The stages are:

- 1 Pre-launch communications
- 2 Information when the service is rolled out
- 3 A monitoring and evaluation program
- 4 On-going education and communications to householders throughout the life of the collection service.

Communications plan

To help guide the communications effort it is recommended that councils prepare a plan to guide communications and community engagement activities. The plan should focus on practical actions and:

- ✓ Identify target audiences; residents, non-English speaking residents, council customer service officers, media and other stakeholders
- ✓ List key messages
- ✓ Identify key issues and how these will be addressed
- ✓ Summarise communications strategies for each of the target audiences and project phases; before, during, and after roll-out of the scheme
- ✓ Outline roles and responsibilities of council and other project partners
- ✓ Outline budget and timelines for actions.

Pre-launch communication should commence 3-6 months before the new service is rolled out. The communication informs residents that a new service is being introduced, what the new service is, why it is being introduced, what type of organics householders can recycle and how to get further information. An example of a key message might be:

A green lid bin will be provided to all households in May 2013 for recycling of garden organics such as grass clippings, garden trimmings and weeds. The bin will be collected fortnightly and the material commercially composted to provide a quality product to upgrade local sports fields. This will lead to decreased council waste disposal and sports field maintenance costs as well as multiple environmental outcomes. More information is available at council's website [URL].

The key messages form the basis of simplified pictorial displays and brochures as well as more detailed communications such as media stories and workshops. The aim is for all stakeholders to be aware of the basic messages prior to receiving the new bin and the more detailed service roll out communication about how to use the service.

A more comprehensive pre-launch communication strategy would be required where multiple bin services are changing concurrently, neighbouring councils experienced issues implementing a similar service, or the local trial highlighted specific issues that could be improved.



Roadshow Event (Hyder)

When launching a major system change, other forms of communication such as roadshows, media publications and council displays may also be advisable.

New service communication

To follow up the pre-launch leaflet, councils should produce another communication to support the launch of the service, including more specific details about the new service, for instance when the service will start and how to use it. The new service communication would commence during bin delivery and 2 weeks prior to scheme roll-out and continue until the majority of households are correctly utilising the new service. The delivery of bins more than 2 weeks prior to the first collection runs the risk of householders commencing to use the bins too early and material putrefying.

Delivery of bins and or kitchen caddies provides an opportunity to also deliver information attached to the bin (sticker, stencil, hot stamping), on top of the bin (removal information brochure), within the kitchen caddy (brochures, fridge magnets, stickers, etc.). Delivery of the information material with the bins following the bin collection route can help ensure that the brochures showing collection day as Monday for example are delivered to only the households serviced by a Monday pick up.

New service communication gives the householder detailed information about the types of materials that can be recycled, the day of the week for the collection, who to contact for help, as well as practical advice on how to make the most of the new service and deal with any potential problems. For example:

- ✓ Whether or not meat and bones can be included
- ✓ Whether or not kitchen towel and soiled paper like pizza boxes can be included
- ✓ Whether scraps from dinner plates and processed food past its expiry date are encouraged or just food items like fruit and vegetable skins
- ✓ How to use newspaper as a liner in the kitchen caddy
- ✓ If liner bags are provided – the difference between compostable, biodegradable and recyclable liners, where to get further bags of the correct type, issues and consequences of using the incorrect liners, how often to change the liners
- ✓ How to discourage pests, vermin and odours
- ✓ How to wash kerbside bins without polluting stormwater

**FOOD AND GARDEN ORGANICS BEST PRACTICE COLLECTION MANUAL:
IMPLEMENTING YOUR SCHEME – FACTSHEET 11 –
CONDUCTING COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT**

- ✓ Who to contact if they have a query (e.g. helpline and website).

Multi-lingual leaflet (Zero Waste SA)

The service roll-out communication plan also needs to respond to any issues that arise during roll-out. Issues such as:

- ✓ Householders using a new liner bag every day thus exhausting their liner allocation
- ✓ An unprecedented hot spell increasing odour and pest issues before householders are familiar and committed to the new service
- ✓ High profile community members or media making incorrect statements about the new service
- ✓ Lack of understanding of the term organics bin to include garden and kitchen 'waste'.

All communication should be presented using simple and clear language and it is encouraged to use pictures.

On-going education and communications

to householders over regular intervals throughout the life of the food and garden organics collection service is essential in order to maintain household participation, high diversion rates and low levels of contamination. General feedback in terms of the tonnes of food and garden waste recovered, environmental benefits, quality and use of the composted material, may encourage further efforts by residents. While targeted communication and education may be necessary for particular households or suburbs.



Public Meeting (Hyder)



Bin Sticker (Zero Waste SA, Adelaide City Council)

A monitoring and evaluation program including seeking householder feedback will enable councils to identify how well the new service is performing, identify individual households or segment groups to focus efforts to improve service outcomes and if the communications have had the desired effect.

Key issues to consider in planning effective communications:

- ✓ Prepare a communications plan (12 months before service commences if possible) including a budget, scheduling of when activities should take place and by who
- ✓ Engage the communications/PR departments of council early on when planning and developing communications
- ✓ Senior council management and councillors need early involvement in planning new services to ensure their support
- ✓ Consider a partnership approach with the collection or processing contractor to help resource the communications and to obtain their input
- ✓ A pilot trial provides the opportunity to test communication messages and techniques.



Case Study – Goulburn Valley RWMG

‘Keeping in touch with your community’

Resource GV (Goulburn Valley Regional Waste Management Group) obtained State Government funding through Sustainability Victoria to conduct an organic waste collection trial in Moira Shire, which involved 230 households in Numurkah over a 4 month period in mid-2011. Participating households had an existing kerbside garden organics service but were delivered aerated kitchen bins and liners for convenience.

The trial was extremely successful and achieved an 85% presentation rate, an average yield of almost 3kg per household per fortnight and an additional 23% diversion from the residual waste stream. The service is on-going for the trial participants.

Considerations for community engagement and education were an integral component of the trial. The trial area was selected based on previous research indicating a higher than average organics disposal rate and a population representative of the Shire. Design of critical elements such as printed resources and evaluation were outsourced to professionals and were well-resourced to ensure their effectiveness. The education strategy included:

- ✓ A targeted education package delivered in person to residents to ensure participant understanding
- ✓ A comprehensive support program for participants to provide troubleshooting and gather feedback
- ✓ Use of SMS messaging to provide participants with real-time collection reminders and positive reinforcement
- ✓ Bin inspections with prizes for good performance
- ✓ A compost give-away to demonstrate a closed-loop approach
- ✓ Personal appreciation in writing from the Shire Mayor to trial and survey participants.

Following the successful completion of the trial, market research surveys were undertaken with a total budget of approximately \$18,000. Telephone surveys with 105 Numurkah participants and 100 non-participants provided a benchmark of community attitudes and behaviour, and gauge community acceptance of a potential future service.

The results of the community research and evaluation included:

- ✓ 82% of participants supported the trial prior to commencement
- ✓ Support increased to 96% of participants after the trial
- ✓ Common reasons for support included convenience and ease of disposal using the system
- ✓ The majority of the general community did not see any barriers to the service, however 24% viewed cost as the biggest barrier
- ✓ Participants recognised the benefits of the service more than non-participants
- ✓ \$1 per week appears to be the optimal cost people are willing to pay for the service with 74% of the general community willing to pay this.

Lessons Learnt: The trial demonstrated the importance of selecting innovative communication methods that meet the needs of the participants and of rewarding participants for using the service. It also demonstrated the importance of good project planning to ensure sufficient budget is allocated to thoroughly understand the attitudes, behaviour and expectations of the community in relation to the organics collection service. The trial will provide a thorough basis to inform a possible future decision to implement the service permanently across the Shire.

NB: Information in this factsheet is taken from the *Food and Garden Organics Best Practice Collection Manual* (2012) published by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. The full document is available on the department's website www.environment.gov.au/wastepolicy/publications/organics-collection-manual