

Understanding community education and engagement

An effective education and engagement strategy is essential to the successful introduction of a new organics collection services in your community. To ensure residents are given the knowledge and skills to undertake the behavioural changes they are asked to do, it is important that community communications are well researched, planned and adequately resourced.

There are three main approaches to community engagement:

- ✓ Information Giving
- ✓ Information Gathering
- ✓ Consultation.

Information Giving usually involves a unilateral announcement of intent or decision by a group, authority, or organisation, with no attempt made to gather or listen to views. Stakeholders have a lack of 'buy-in' to the decision as they are often excluded from the decision making process. An example could be delivery of a brochure or leaflet in the mail to residents, which outlines the benefits and costs of a food and garden collection scheme.

Information Gathering is an extractive (market) research form of engagement where individuals or groups are engaged in interviews or questionnaire based research. Respondents have no opportunity to influence the process or the eventual use of the information. Surveys canvassing participation rates and residents' attitudes to a scheme, such as around liners, caddies or collection frequencies are an example of information gathering.

Consultation is the seeking of views on a prepared proposal, system or plan. There is an intention to listen to responses and the potential for amendments to the proposal to be made. Those consulted do not share, but may influence, decision making.

The most successful community engagement comes through participatory planning and decision-making, where groups are fully consulted at all stages and on all questions. This may not be easy initially, but it can help ensure decisions are widely accepted in the long-run.



Public consultation through door to door visits (Hyder)

The different stages

When introducing new services, the education and engagement strategy must be staged and maintained over a period of time. There are a number of clear stages including:

- 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.



Information brochure (The Hills Shire)

1 Pre-launch communications

Before introducing a food waste collection scheme, it is essential that all householders are provided with information about the new service. Pre-launch communication could include an information leaflet, advert or notice informing residents that a new service is being introduced; what the new service is; when it will be introduced and why; what types of organics householders will be able to recycle; and who to contact with queries (for example the number for a helpline, and a website address).

2 Information when the service is rolled out

To follow up after the pre-launch leaflet, councils should produce communications materials to support the launch of the service. This communication usually takes the form of a 'service leaflet' outlining how householders can participate (in terms of collection dates and what to do with their collection container), what types of organics householders will be able to recycle, who to contact if they have a query, and practical advice on how to make the most of the system and deal with any potential problems.

3 A monitoring and evaluation program

At the inception of the scheme a monitoring and evaluation program should be considered in order to establish a baseline from which outcomes from the scheme can be measured. It is also advisable to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the communication methods used. This will help ensure future communication activities benefit from lessons learned regarding ways of targeting different audiences, and the effectiveness of different formats for delivering a message.

4 On-going education and communications

It is also essential to continue education and communications to householders over regular intervals throughout the life of the organics collection service.

More information is provided in Factsheet 11 – *Community Education and Engagement*.

Case Study – Gippsland Regional Waste Management Group

The Gippsland Regional Waste Management Group (GRWGM) in Victoria encompasses the municipalities of Bass Coast, Baw Baw, East Gippsland, Latrobe, South Gippsland and Wellington Shires, covers an area that extends from Phillip Island to Mallacoota, and is home to about 250,000 urban and rural residents.

GRWGM received funding from Sustainability Victoria for a project that tested several strategies to reduce the amount of organics sent to landfill. Conducted in 2011, a key part of the project included a 6-month kerbside food organics collection trial for two different urban areas, testing both the collection and processing systems. A 6-month home composting and food waste avoidance program was also trialled in rural areas, in order to test the suitability of five different composting methods overall.

A range of different systems and approaches were tested because GRWGM recognised a one-size-fits-all approach would not work across its diverse community. The collection trials in the townships of Mallacoota and Churchill were designed because these communities already had access to a garden organics collection. The Home Composting program was conducted in Inverloch and Golden Beach, rural areas where a kerbside service was not economically feasible and avoidance of organics from the waste stream is a high priority.

In planning to conduct the trials, GRWGM acknowledged it was an organisation virtually unknown to the communities it was working with, which would cause issues in engaging residents to participate. To improve community buy-in to the project, the organisation consulted and collaborated with key community groups operating in those townships. During the roll-out, the local Rotary Club, Lions Club and Friends of Mallacoota groups were employed to conduct the door-to-door distribution of kitchen tidy bins and education packages. This was mutually beneficial as it improved interest in the objectives of the project, while supporting these local groups financially.

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The trials also engaged the communities by working with local processors to test different methods of processing. A local cattle farmer accepted the food and garden waste material collected in the Mallacoota area and processed this in-kind during the trial. The farmer already produced compost using local by-products such as abalone offal and timber mill sawdust. Given the farmer was willing to test the low-tech 'City to Soil' method of composting (developed in the 'Groundswell' Project in southern NSW), the GRWMG provided the specialised inoculant and tarps required for this approach.

GRWMG found that, by working closely with the community in regards to both the collection and processing systems, the trial achieved a high participation rate, low contamination levels, and good results from the use of the end-product compost to improve local beef pastures. The trial was so successful that East Gippsland Shire Council continues to offer the service in Mallacoota and provide support to the processing of material.

Lessons Learnt: Gippsland Regional Waste Management Group demonstrated that cost-effective diversion of organics from landfill can be achieved in regional areas by engaging and collaborating with the local community and using a combined approach of source-separated food organics collection, low-cost local compost processing, and home composting.

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