

# **Empowering Communities to Achieve Behavior Change**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The City of Seattle's Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE) has identified that successful climate campaigns depend on both a top-down approach from local government as well as a bottom up thrust from grassroots efforts. Providing a space for the two to meet has been fertile ground for OSE and resulted in greater action towards changing behavior that reduces climate impact from the use of energy, transportation, and waste generation.

To help community-based organizations scale their own efforts, inspire behavior change among Seattle residents, and generate greater, measurable impact, OSE designed a "Call For Projects" support program, engaging key stakeholders in the program design process, targeting local sustainability-minded groups to provide feedback on content and framework for the OSE designed program. These interviews and focus groups allowed OSE to tap into the energies that would drive the community groups to design projects that result in individuals taking concrete action to decrease their carbon footprint. By providing seed funding and assisting in designing behavior change efforts for evaluation, OSE will be able to track at a high level the quantity and quality of actions taken as a result of community-based programs – data that can feed into the progress of Seattle's most recent Climate Action Plan.

This paper will discuss how a user-centered program design process, and efforts to align city goals with those of local grassroots organization can result in achievement of behavior change for energy efficiency and climate impact reduction goals. Implications for utility program design and implementation will be highlighted and discussed.

## **Setting the Stage**

With its location in the Pacific Northwest, the City of Seattle has a long history of operating at the forefront of the environmental movement, both facing challenges, and creating solutions. The city developed its first Environmental Management Plan in 1997 and under the leadership of Mayor Greg Nichols became one of the first U.S. signatories of the Kyoto Protocol leading the way towards more than 1000 cities across the United States to take up that challenge. This existence has become self-fulfilling, attracting a progressive-minded populace, with Seattle noted as one of the most liberal cities in the U.S. In a 2007 survey of over 660 King County residents, more than 75% of respondents said they were "extremely/very concerned" about the impacts of global warming on the next generation (EMC 2007), and in 2010, the City Council established carbon neutrality as one of its sixteen Council priorities. As part of this evolution in demographics and priorities, the City of Seattle created the Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE) as an executive department in 2000.

## **Seattle Office of Sustainability and Environment: Background**

Seattle OSE's mission is to accelerate environmentally sustainable practices by the city government and in the community at-large. Through the coordination of City departments, and collaboration with business partners, non-profits, community-based organizations and learning institutions, OSE has been successful in developing and implementing resource conservation initiatives. Successful OSE efforts have included:

- “Climate Action Now” (CAN) – An OSE messaging campaign and toolkit, including an on-line carbon footprint calculator for Seattle residents
- “ReLeaf” Tree Ambassador Program – A field based learning curriculum designed to teach communities to assist in the City's 30% canopy goal
- “Carbon Coaches” – A first of its kind program to train local residents about climate change so that they could become ambassadors for climate impact reduction in their communities.

With its development of the “COOLective” program and curriculum in 2010, OSE began to shift its community engagement focus toward transferring tools and skills to community-based organizations to empower them to make their own program ideas actionable and effective. OSE sought to empower leaders of civic, academic, neighborhood, non-profit and faith-based organizations to develop and deliver a tailored and effective climate engagement campaign with their respective constituency and/or members through development of the COOLective program. The COOLective program consisted of a series of five workshops, coaching sessions and workbooks that integrate best practices in program design, communication best practices and working sessions to inspire, guide and shape the development of climate campaigns. In total, eight community groups started the program, with six completing development and implementation of their campaign. The diversity of participating groups was exceeded by the diversity of campaign types and goals, which were launched during the winter and spring of 2011 (Wysocki 2011).

### **Community-based Organizations**

The City of Seattle is blessed with an active citizenship that regularly engages in public dialogue around socio-political issues of all types. The roster of these groups stretches into the thousands with representation from every stripe including faith based groups, neighborhood sustainability teams, and business coalitions. They represent populations ranging from an elementary school to a city-wide sustainability platform.

Engaging these groups offers OSE a voice across Seattle's diverse array of neighborhoods and demographics. More importantly, that voice is known and trusted. Studies show that in any messaging campaign or behavior change program, the deliverer of the message matters, and is often as important as the message itself. Having the message delivered by someone who the audience can personally connect to or who they trust can engender a sense of belonging and familiarity, increasing acceptance of the message or change desired (Allen 2010; Cialdini 2008). In addition, when faced with a change proposition, people want to know that their peers are engaged in similar efforts, and are willing to communicate what they are doing to make that change happen (Heath 2010; Pike 2009). In contrast, messaging directly from the King

County government actually appears to dampen the likelihood that an audience will take action, with those messages and actions having a political or social component being the least likely to be taken (EMC 2007). By working with community-based organizations, OSE is able to tap into positive results, avoid negative connotations associated with politics, and leverage the hyper-local relationships these groups have cultivated.

### **The Challenge(s)**

Currently engaging in its first revision of the Seattle Climate Action Plan (CAP), OSE has begun to focus its efforts on developing and accelerating programs that contribute to measurable gains toward the CAP, with a specific focus on behavior change. Though the prior campaigns were successful in their own right, each seemed to tail off in popularity and participation for a number of reasons.

For one, due to a lack of resources, prior programs had not allowed for adequate follow up and follow through with participants. The evolution of OSE offerings, from the messaging and carbon footprint calculator of Seattle CAN to the program design support of the COOLective built upon each preceding program, but connecting the gap between participants in each program proved to be a challenge. Although efforts like the COOLective promote cycles of continuous improvement, without consistent prompting the resources and attentions of community groups are stretched too thin to keep focus on this, despite its importance from a program design and execution perspective.

Second, coordination of and between participating community organizations has been a challenge. Seattle's geography and urban geography have created a collection of small, separate and diverse communities, rather than one large urban core. With sizeable hills slicing the city into small pockets, each neighborhood has its own unique culture, and accordingly, hundreds of its own unique community groups and organizations. Offering a one-size-fits-all program from the City is an impossible task. Coordinating campaigns between the City and community groups for climate change programs often resulted in far too many resources expended on program administration.

Lastly, these prior hurdles were compounded by the the downturn of the economy and a sense of "climate fatigue" amongst the general population of Seattle. Climate fatigue as a phenomenon was first widely reported by Kerr in 2009 in *Science*. He noted that, despite the rapidly accruing evidence of society's impact on global climate change and increasingly deteriorating metrics being reported by the IPCC, many people were becoming turned off by anything connected to the phrase "climate change" (Kerr 2009).

OSE needed a new community re-engagement effort that built on its prior efforts, and that aligned with its CAP update and helped groups scale the great work they were already doing, but was unsure as to where to place energy and resources. Was climate change the right message to build around? What were the energies of citizens and community groups? What kind of support did they need, and want, to scale their efforts?

## Program Design Process

### What We Thought We'd Do

We entered the re-engagement program design process with some initial concepts in mind, knowing that we wanted to pull from the best of prior efforts. To do this, our design strategy was as follows:

- a. Initial brainstorm and best practice review
- b. High-level program sketch
- c. Stakeholder interviews
- d. Refine program design
- e. Stakeholder focus groups
- f. Final program design

The initial brainstorm drew on prior OSE programs like the COOLective to select what we felt were the 'best of class' and which aspects we wanted to carry through into this next effort. To generate further creative expansion, during the best practice review we assessed engagement programs from a variety of sources, both municipality and community-based as well as those from the private sector. In this initial phase no boundaries were placed on potential best practices to review. The only requirement was that they demonstrate significant and measurable results. During the best practice review some emphasis was placed on those examples that were community-based and a good proxy for the level of resources available to OSE. The initial universe of best practice engagement programs included:

- a. City of New York's "plaNYC" (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/planyc2030>)
- b. Sustainable South Bronx (<http://www.ssbx.org/>)
- c. University of Washington's "Ride in the Rain" (Washington 2011)
- d. Cliff Bar's "2 Mile Challenge" (<http://2milechallenge.com/>)
- e. Utah's "Clear the Air Challenge" (<http://cleartheairchallenge.org/>)
- f. Melbourne Water's "Conservation Coaching" Framework (Humphreys 2010)
- g. Park City's "My Sustainable Year" (Park City 2011)
- h. City of York's "REAP" (<http://www.resource-accounting.org.uk/>)
- i. Minneapolis' "Climate Change Grants" (Minneapolis 2011)

Based on this review and the design team's past experience with similar efforts the concepts of coaches, and online tools and resources were most attractive to the team.

The first program sketch envisioned an on-line toolkit, information source and suite of how-to guides to help groups and individuals decrease their impacts associated with home energy use, transportation, waste and food. One of these how-to guides would aide individuals in developing a strategic plan to reduce their carbon footprint. To capture results, when downloading the toolkit, participants would complete an on-line pledge, selecting from specific behavior change actions that they could then check as completed on subsequent visits to the website. The theory was that this suite of on-line resources would be advertised by select community groups through their involvement in the stakeholder interviews and focus group workshops.

The next step was to take the key qualities of the initial sketch, along with other exploratory questions, and conduct targeted stakeholder interviews for input and feedback. Between December 14 and December 22, 2011 we interviewed representatives from eight community-based environmental organizations that had been active in city sponsored programs before, listed below in Table 1. These were not conducted as comprehensive data gathering surveys, but captured qualitative feedback on what issues and needs were operating at the community level, and what role OSE could play with its engagement programs.

**Table 1. Stakeholder Interviews Conducted**

Community Organization	Contact Interviewed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seattle Greenways Coalition</li> <li>• People for Puget Sound</li> <li>• Sustainable West Seattle</li> <li>• CoolMom</li> <li>• Undriving</li> <li>• Northwest Sustainable Energy for Economic Development</li> <li>• Sustainable Seattle</li> <li>• Earth Corps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cathy Tuttle</li> <li>• Heather Trim</li> <li>• Christina Hahs</li> <li>• Terri Glaberson</li> <li>• Julia Field</li> <li>• Jennifer Grove</li>   <li>• Terri Butler</li> <li>• Steve Dubiel</li> </ul>

Personal Communications held December 14-22, 2011

These interviews were intended to further shape and refine the program concept to better fit stakeholder needs, and confirm that the program design was moving in the right direction. What we found was quite the opposite; stakeholder feedback informed us that how to guides and on-line toolkits were not what the community was asking for.

All eight interviewees were delivered the same set of questions in Table 2 below, from which emerged some critical themes that would fundamentally change OSE’s program concept and design. Each question had a set of clarifying or guiding questions associated to prompt the conversation if needed.

**Table 2. Interview Questions**

Question Categories	Questions Asked	Response Summary
Taking the Temperature of Climate Change Motivation	1. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being complete apathy and 10 being completely obsessed, please rate the motivation that you feel <u>today</u> to do work around climate change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All 8 respondents rated their motivation at 7 or above</li> </ul>
	2. Please rate the motivation that you felt <u>3 years ago</u> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 of 8 respondents said their motivation had increased</li> <li>• 3 of 8 said it had decreased</li> </ul>
	3. Please rate the motivation that you sense today <u>in the community</u> of people you interact with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responses rated community motivations anywhere from 1 to 8</li> </ul>
	4. Please rate the motivation that you sensed <u>3 years ago in that same community</u> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 of 8 respondents noted a decline in motivation amongst community members</li> </ul>

Question Categories	Questions Asked	Response Summary
Looking for What Worked	5. Of the programs that most stick out in your mind and that you found particularly effective, please take a moment to describe that to me and to identify the bright spots that made the program work so well for you.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The most common programs that emerged across all 8 respondents were involving Transportation and Local Food programs</li> </ul>
Looking for Hooks	6. What are people in your community especially excited about right now? What are the issues that hook people's attention – the things that they are not only willing to participate in on the weekends, but that they have <u>fun</u> participating in and that they want to share with others because they believe their friends will like it too?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The most common themes that emerged were around Local Food, Transportation, and Consumerism</li> </ul>
Identifying the Tools	7. What are some “things” that you think would help ignite a new round of community engagement around climate change? A tool or a resource that could be given to people to make them want to participate?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Don't sell it as climate change</li> <li>OSE can be more of a facilitator</li> <li>Grants and funding would go a long ways</li> <li>Sharing best practices and collaborating</li> </ul>

Personal Communications held December 14-22, 2011

Four key themes emerged: 1) It's not about climate change, 2) Communities don't need more information or toolkits, they need implementation support, 3) The most community focus is found around transportation, local food, and battling non-renewable energy sources, not energy efficiency, and 4) The City should act more as a hub and facilitator.

**It's not about climate change right now.** In 2007 the majority of King County residents, the county in which Seattle sits, were extremely or very concerned that global warming will be a serious problem in their lifetime, with 75% reporting the same about the impact of global warming on the next generation (EMC 2007). In our survey, we asked respondents to gauge the motivation of the community around climate change issues, and found six of the eight respondents sensed a noticeable decline in community energy on the subject. The main reason cited for the decline in focus was “the economic downturn taking a higher priority in people's everyday lives.” Ironically, in the same EMC Research study, 71% of respondents believed that efforts to reduce the release of greenhouse gases (GHGs) would make the U.S. economy more competitive, illustrating a disconnect between what people are saying and what people are will to do.

Fatigue around climate change was also noted. Most respondents recommended re-framing the issue and connecting it to local communities, and healthy living rather than to a global system.

**Communities don't need more information or toolkits.** Seattle community groups are feeling overwhelmed by the quantity of already existing tools and resources on-line. They noted that there is no need to work with them to create more “stuff,” since there is plenty already available. What they do need is support in putting all of these tools and resources to work, or even just identifying the right ones to use. When asked what would help them re-ignite community engagement around energy and climate change, they suggested:

1. Grants – With the economic downturn, non-profits and community groups have seen much of their previous funding evaporate. These groups were already operating on shoe-string budgets, and often as volunteers.
2. City coordination – This will be addressed further ahead.

**Energy has taken a backseat.** The most direct connection between community action and energy was in fighting the proposed addition of coal exports to several of the Northwest's existing seaports. The area has seen a sharp rise in the amount of coal flowing through its ports as the demand for the fuel has exploded in Asia. But there seemed to be no real urgency around energy efficiency and conservation or climate change. It is likely that the Pacific Northwest's history of conservation, cheap cost of power and predominant use of hydropower as the energy resource have all contributed to the lack of popular focus on energy with the economic downturn. In its place, transportation and the local food movement have taken hold.

Seattle's 2008 GHG emissions inventory showed that transportation was responsible for 62% of the city's total emissions; 42% of these were associated with road travel. The next highest contributor was air transportation at 18% and commercial buildings at 12% (Seattle 2008). While the City has made efforts to increase mass transit ridership and reduce single auto commuting using bridge tolls, grassroots efforts like Seattle Greenways, which promote walkable/bikeable communities with safer routes between communities, have gained a lot of attention and participation.

The local food movement is seen as an extension of the "building healthy communities" motif. Seattle has seen an explosion of community gardens, interest in urban farming and involvement in food cooperatives and community supported agriculture (CSA). Local food was even described as a kind of "gateway drug" into sustainability for some people.

**City as facilitator.** As described, the community feels that the tools and resources for community level change already exist. Their challenge is around locating the right resources, finding examples of what has worked elsewhere, and coordinating with other groups.

The majority of interviewees expressed a need to somehow locate best practices and share them across groups. This could include spreading specific programs and experiences as well as tools, resources and techniques that groups have found useful, and more importantly, *how* they used them. Respondents see this as a way to help groups and individuals expand their thinking of what's possible.

Interestingly, a common response saw people requesting that OSE play a role in facilitating this and connecting groups to existing resources and to each other. Rather than creating programs that compete with those services already offered at the grassroots level, OSE could be more of a "consultant to business and organizations... tying them into resources" (Hahs 2011). In such a role, community groups see OSE providing coordination, or a forum for collaboration, to help scale successful programs from one group across other groups. Though one group may have spent significant time and resources developing and implementing a program, that experience and materials can be transferred to another community or organization, where it can be replicated faster and more seamless.

## Re-Designing the Program

The stakeholder interviews were critical to exposing our assumptions in our initial program design. We assumed that what had worked before would work again, and that community groups just needed more information, coaching and tools. While the essential qualities of those programs would be carried through, the vehicle through which they reached the target audience would need to be different.

The program design team shifted focus away from a content delivery based program, and built a new framework based on the common themes and needs identified in the stakeholder interview process. The new program design included:

- A “call for projects” competitive application process with winning projects receiving funding of \$2,500 - \$7,500
- Best practice behavior change project design support
- Best practice examples and keys to successful behavior change campaigns
- The space for groups to collaborate
- Project coaches to shepherd groups through the process and to conduct bi-weekly updates

All materials are available on the OSE website (Seattle CAN 2012), and two “workshops” are built into the project design and implementation process where successful applicants are advised by behavior change program design specialists. This last piece will help transfer these skills and knowledge to community-based groups, and will also ensure that the projects implemented will, at some level, have measurable results that OSE can capture and report towards its CAP progress. (More program detail will be provided further ahead).

## Further Design Input

Before finalizing our program design, we wanted to push it out in its draft form to our same target stakeholders from the prior interview process. But this time, we conducted the review as two separate focus groups, allowing participants to provide feedback, and have conversation with each other. See Table 3 below for focus group questions. In our minds, this was the first step to promoting collaboration.

**Table 3. Focus Group Questions**

Questions Asked	Response Summary
1. Do you feel that this design begins to bridge some of the gaps you have experienced or that you have felt existed in prior community engagement efforts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All 8 respondents expressed the desire for larger award amounts</li> </ul>
2. Do you feel that this design begins to bridge some of the gaps you have experienced or that you have felt existed in prior community engagement efforts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive response on the inclusion of collaborative workshops and design support</li> <li>• Further interest in OSE playing the role of facilitator or connector</li> </ul>
3. Given the City’s focus on its Climate Action areas, are there any gaps that still need to be addressed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None seen</li> </ul>
4. On a scale of 1-10, how interested would you be in having a coach assist you through the project design and delivery process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were mixed reviews</li> <li>• ¾ of the representatives were not interested in having a coach through the process</li> </ul>



Questions Asked	Response Summary
5. Are there any potential hurdles in this design down the road that you can think of?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There was the feeling that it could be a cumbersome process without adequate financial support</li> </ul>
6. On scale of 1-10, how likely would you be to put forth a proposal for funding under this program? (Why/Why not?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All 8 respondents responded with 10</li> </ul>
7. OSE would like to encourage projects to collaborate with other groups and/or neighborhoods. On a scale of 1-10, likely would you be to collaborate with another group if it provided extra points in the funding award rating system?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6 of 8 respondents responded with a 7 or above</li> </ul>
8. Does the proposed timeframe for project development and implementation (March – December) make sense to you and the work you would like to do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All participants said they had project ideas ready to go</li> </ul>

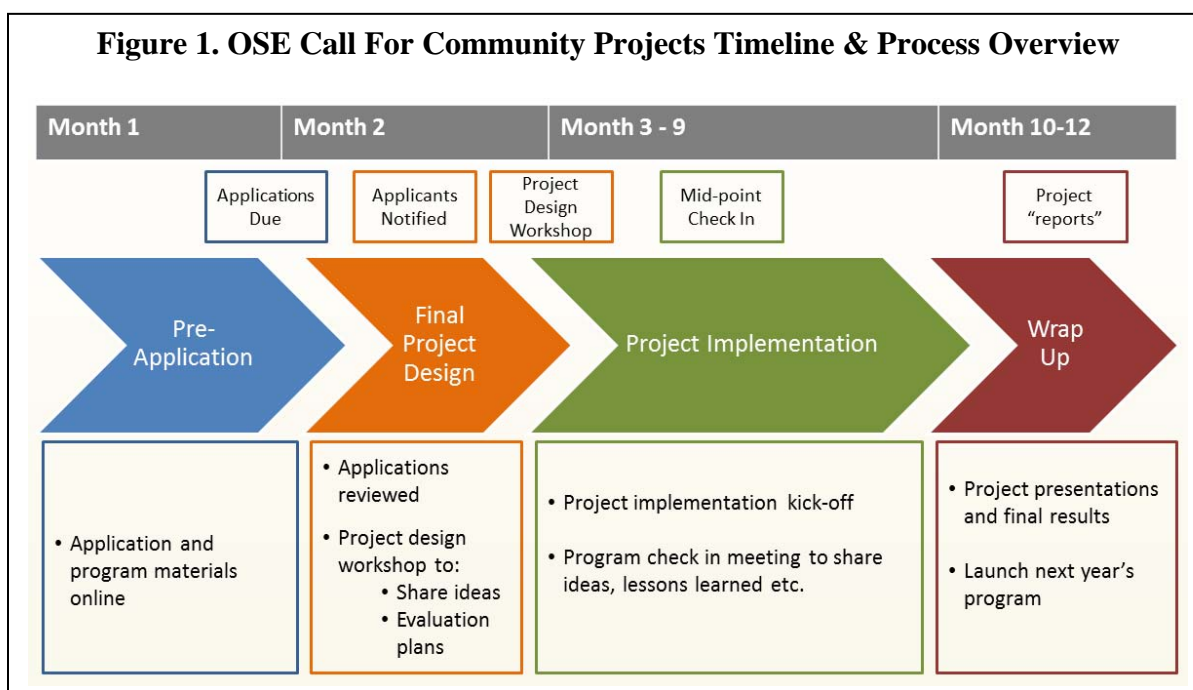
Personal Communications held January 20 and 23, 2012

In response to this round of feedback, a few key changes to the OSE program design were made:

1. The planned “Pre-Application” workshop to guide applicants through the process was eliminated in favor of a simplified web-based process
2. Project coaches were made optional, rather than a mandatory part of the process

### OSE “Call for Community Projects” Final Design

Currently accepting project applications, OSE’s “Call for Community Projects” program is offering a support framework including financial assistance and behavior change program



design support to help grassroots organizations scale up their existing efforts or jump start new program focused on behavior change. Figure 1 provides a high level overview of the program timeline.

There are six key materials available online to applicants that will feed into a project design workshop (see figure 1) where awarded project groups gather for coaching on designing and evaluating behavior change programs:

1. The program main page overview
2. A simple easy to complete application
3. A program details page
4. A focus on behavior change
5. Keys for successful behavior change programs
6. Four relevant best practice examples, highlighting their use of the above keys to success and specific behavior change best practices

The materials were created to complement the process above, building on prior OSE programs, and incorporating behavior change best practices from relevant examples and a comprehensive literature review. Two materials to focus on that will be integral parts of the project design workshop are the “How to Build a Successful Behavior Change Campaign” and the “Focus on Behavior Change” materials. Each of these highlights the key components needed in a successful program, why behavior change is important, and observations on how to create messages around behavior change.

Table 4 below summarizes the keys to success. Not all projects or programs will incorporate every component, but during the design workshop intensive the OSE “Call for Community Projects” program will work with projects to see that the majority are included and that each project closes with measurable results.

**Table 4. Behavior Change Program Best Practice Components & Messaging**

<b>Program Components</b>	<b>Messaging Behavior Change</b>
• Identify the specific behavior to change	• Provide a clear and easily attainable path
• Go after a specific audience	• Develop people-centered initiatives
• Set a clearly defined goal	• The deliverer of the message is nearly as important as the message itself
• The change should be easy	• Provide social proof – “Everyone else is doing it...”
• Define metrics and indicators	• Ask the audience to start small with public commitments
• Create a communications plan	
• Create an evaluation plan	
• Establish your baseline	
• Have a public pledge or commitment	
• Follow up	

Allen 2010; Cialdini 2008; Mohr 1999; Heath 2010; Fogg 2009; Ariely 2009; Gilbert 2006; Ehrhardt 2009

**Looking ahead at what's next.** At the time of this writing, the OSE “Call for Community Projects” program was in the application acceptance phase with the review period still three weeks away. We anticipate awarding three to five projects at varying award levels, and across a variety of neighborhoods. At the end of the program cycle we plan on holding a “project summit,” and including all Seattle area community groups where the results of the OSE awarded projects will be presented and celebrated. This platform will serve as the launching pad for next year’s program cycle.

Though we are not restricting projects to those that deal directly with energy use and climate change, we are requesting that each application demonstrate at least one connection through which we could see a decrease in greenhouse gas emissions as a result. The City of Seattle CAP acknowledges the connections of energy use, transportation, waste and consumer choices with greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. In 2011 Seattle and King County went as far as to commission the Stockholm Environment Institute to create an extended GHG inventory that attempted to catalogue the impacts of residents’ consumer choices, capturing the embedded emissions behind the different choices we make and products we use. As such, projects that fall within these buckets are eligible to apply to the program.

Each project will be coached through the creation of a comprehensive evaluation plan to ensure each project has clear metrics to measure progress and a methodology to capture measurable results. Such results will provide important feedback for the project teams, allowing them to assess and refine their projects for further evolutions and providing them the color and details to tell the story of their successes and lessons learned. This data will also provide OSE with rich color in measuring its progress against Seattle’s CAP and will help OSE continue to improve its approach to engaging Seattle grassroots organizations in its efforts towards decreased climate impact.

## **Conclusions**

Many resource conservation programs have reached target audiences through customer rebate programs, home resource audits, and large commercial and industrial incentive programs. These are critical first steps in reducing resource demand. By engaging behavior change programs organizations can magnify these savings and ensure that they persist over time.

Behavior change involves changing our collective culture by motivating individuals to alter their own daily actions to those that carry less impact, or ideally are regenerative to our local environment. And because we are inherently social creatures, one person’s behavior has the potential to influence another’s. Studies show that “peers acting as behavior models” is a much more effective approach to promoting conservation behavior than prompts or messaging alone (Allen 2010; Cialdini 2008). Having effective and efficient programs that promote behavior change amongst consumers will close that inevitable gap between potential energy savings and actual energy savings.

## **Embrace Behavior Change as a Crucial Tactic**

We know that information or toolkits alone don’t work. As noted by Doug McKenzie-Mohr in his work with Community-based Social Marketing (CBSM), awareness campaigns alone fall short in fostering behavior change. What is required are techniques such as persuasion,

influence, motivation, commitment, prompts, norms, communication, and incentives (Mohr 1999).

And yet, the tactic of choice for many programs thus far has been information campaigns and toolkits, often in the form of online resources and calculators, much like Seattle OSE. While these tools do play a role in developing behavior change programs, they are merely just that, tools. They require people and coordinated programs to make them actionable. And they need to include the best practices and keys to success above in order to have sufficient impact.

### **Ask Your Stakeholders**

Taking the time to repeatedly ask our target audience about what they needed, what they wanted, and what they felt would get people motivated was absolutely crucial to our program design and expected success. Instead of merely producing another toolkit and information source to add to the fray, we built a program that meets our audience where they are. Holding stakeholder interview sessions, a program design focus groups took up time up front, but was an otherwise low-cost way to gain highly valuable input and audience buy-in. In the product design and manufacturing space, the farther into the process you get, the more expensive it becomes to make changes. The same holds for municipal and utility program design; the more you can “prototype” an idea and test against your audience up front, the less chance you will sink resources into a program that doesn’t work.

### **Leverage Your Audience**

Many programs attempt to cover large and diverse geographic areas. Designing a one size fits all behavior change program is impossible, and designing programs custom to each neighborhood and social cluster is far too costly requiring human resources that energy efficiency or resource conservation departments don’t have.

These groups don’t have to design and own the programs themselves. There is a space that can be filled by local leadership such as government or utility companies as conveners and as facilitators. There are already fantastic ideas, resources and programs out there. What may actually be needed is someone, or some group, to play the role of creating the space for collaboration and information sharing. In the present time of tight budgets and declining funding, working with grassroots organizations in a coordinated manner offers the possibility of multiplying your impact and depth of reach. By offering time, funding, collaborative space and/or behavior change program design expertise, we have an effective alternative to creating in-house programs from scratch.

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