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Austin Resource Recovery - Business Outreach and Education  

City of Austin  
Population: 885,400 (1.2 million in Extra-Territorial Jurisdiction)  
Cost per household for project: $3.78  
Approx. budget: $764,0139 for FY15 (excluding full time employee salaries and benefits)
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Universal Recycling Ordinance (URO) requires commercial properties to provide convenient recycling to tenants and employees. Over 2,300 properties including retail, medical, multifamily, offices and food establishments are currently impacted by the ordinance. Austin Resource Recovery’s Business Outreach team proactively assists businesses by providing tools to promote reduction, diversion, reuse and recycling. Resources including videos, bilingual education and signage, on-site consulting, and online reporting allow the business community to implement cost-effective resource management strategies. Business Outreach staff leverages partnerships through direct engagement, multimedia, and relationship building to implement effective programs that increase community-wide diversion.

Commercial materials make up approximately 75% of total discards in Austin. Our diverse commercial sector with unique needs and material flows requires ARR staff to take an innovative approach to implementing Zero Waste programs. By working towards Zero Waste, Austin will attract innovative people and businesses, closed loop systems, and maintain our environment for future generations.

STATEMENT OF INTENT

WHY WE ARE APPLYING

In the world of solid waste, a significant amount of attention, training, and recognition is given to educating residents about proper recycling. However, minimal attention is given to the complexity and challenges associated with educating the commercial sector. In adopting the Universal Recycling Ordinance, Austin Resource Recovery (ARR), a City of Austin department, found itself challenged with educating a wide array of businesses and industry types about various Zero Waste ordinance requirements. ARR’s Business Outreach Team (BOT) rose to that challenge by successfully utilizing a suite of resources and tools including:

- Launching a new on-line reporting system
- Creating an online Zero Waste Business Hub
- Producing a five minute educational video
- Developing tip sheets that address industry challenges
- Designing bilingual education and signs
- Offering customizable messaging and education
- Generating graphics and icons for businesses to use in their branded messaging
- Assisting with on-site waste assessments and audits
- Offering business recycling starter kits
- Incentivizing early adoption of Zero Waste through rebate programs
- Providing focused workshops tailored to industry type
- Attending events and networking opportunities at business and industry organizations frequented by our target audience
- Presenting at industry and business group meetings
- Keeping lines of communication open for stakeholders; shared phone line and email inbox staffed during regular working hours
Additionally, many large cities like Austin rely on managed competition or franchise agreements to provide consistent services and messaging. However, Austin's free market approach to commercial waste and recycling services lends itself to less coordinated messaging and inconsistent service standards. Therefore, every business is uniquely serviced by a local private service provider. Recognizing the need for partnering with the private haulers, ARR developed the Universal Recycling Ordinance Hauler Guide. This technical guide outlines compliance expectations using real world examples highlighting anticipated challenges and proposed solutions.

ARR staff received emails and phone calls from municipalities across the U.S. wanting to learn from our experiences. This application to SWANA Awareness Campaign Excellence Award is intended to recognize the Austin's leadership and communicate some of the lessons learned so that other communities can leverage our insights to implement effective education/outreach programs for their businesses community.

The Business Outreach Team is focused on providing the tools and technical help that commercial properties in Austin need to implement cost-effective waste reduction strategies and comply with local ordinances. Staff takes a unique approach to providing customized resources that are built from direct feedback and interaction with the business community. In addition to building relationships with the business community, the Business Outreach Team provides services with a personalized approach based on a "consultant model" which sets our program apart. BOT meets property owners and managers on-site to experience first-hand their operations, challenges, opportunities and shares best practices. The consultant model allows staff to focus on working with businesses cooperatively, rather than simply enforcing ordinances. BOT follows-up with these businesses to identify areas where they can streamline and reduce the costs associated with material management. This approach allows for a rich dialogue between City staff and commercial properties that allows both parties to understand how we can work together to reduce the amount of materials burned or buried in our community.
RESEARCH AND PLANNING

NEED / RESEARCH USED TO IDENTIFY PROBLEM

Austin is among the ten fastest growing cities in the United States. With the demands of a rapidly expanding population, effectively managing resources becomes paramount. On December 15, 2011, ARR, the City of Austin's solid waste service department, presented Austin City Council with the Department's Master Plan, which was unanimously approved. A culmination of two years of research, stakeholder engagement and community input, the Master Plan outlined interesting facts about the composition and source of the City's discards and helped to set goals for the Department’s programs and services for the next 30 years.

ARR provides curbside trash and recycling collection services to over 200,000 single-family homes, and 2,200 small businesses accounting for only 25% of the city's total discards, while Commercial properties are responsible for the remaining 75%. Since commercial landfill waste and recycling services are provided through an open-market system, ARR recognized that partnering with commercial businesses was imperative in order to make substantial progress towards the Zero Waste Goal.

A Zero Waste Strategic Planning process carried out in 2013 identified common elements of successful commercial diversion programs which include:

- Network of programs, vendors, non-profits and educational resources that support recycling
- Outreach materials, posters, and implementation resources posted on website
- Dedicated staff to continuously improve recycling programs and update outreach and education materials as recycling laws and capabilities evolve
- Contractors or staff available to provide onsite assistance and advice to businesses in unique circumstances
- Periodic reporting by affected businesses or property owners
- Registration and reporting of tonnages by private haulers and requirements to help customers recycle correctly
- Increasing fines and enforcement for blatant disregard of commercial recycling requirements

ARR constantly works to incorporate all of these practices into their commercial recycling outreach and education programs. A suite of communication, education and marketing tools has led to successful engagement with the commercial sector.
RESOURCES BEING USED PRIOR

Historically, the role of the Department, once named Solid Waste Services, was to pick up household waste, dispose of dead animals, and sweep the streets. As the Department moved to embrace Zero Waste, Director Bob Gedert led a paradigm shift from waste management to resource recovery. In the new vision for our department, materials are reused to their highest and best use and the department name changed to Austin Resource Recovery. Additionally, a 30-year Master Plan was developed that identified programs and initiatives needed to support our Zero Waste goal.

Since approximately 75% of the discards generated in Austin are from commercial businesses not directly serviced by the City of Austin, the Business Outreach Team’s focus shifted from a reactive team helping businesses when they call to a proactive group of professionals that provide useful and timely technical advice for properties and businesses in Austin. The URO, which requires convenient recycling at commercial and multifamily properties, took effect Oct. 1, 2012 and is intended to increase the life of local landfills, reduce environmental impacts, and encourage economic development.

Prior to the roll-out of the URO and the development of the Business Outreach Program, communication and marketing tools used by the Department were focused on conveying collection schedules and other information pertaining to single-family household trash and recycling collection.

TARGET AUDIENCE & REACHING THE INTENDED TARGET

The Business Outreach Team is responsible for outreach to all commercial or multifamily properties who do not receive curbside trash and recycling services from Austin Resource Recovery. This includes retail, medical, schools, industrial, apartments, condominiums, and food establishments. Reaching out to the community (tenants and employees) as a whole has proven to be an effective tool to get businesses recycling. Direct mail is sent to property owners while phone calls and emails are sent to businesses and property managers.

By Oct. 1, 2017 all commercial properties in Austin will be required to ensure tenants and employees have convenient access to recycling. By Oct. 1, 2018, all food enterprises will be required to ensure their employees have convenient access to organics diversion services.
MULTIFAMILY PROPERTIES

- Apartments
- Condominiums and townhome communities
- Mobile home parks
- Dormitories
- Assisted living facilities
- Other multifamily properties

NON-RESIDENTIAL COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES

By October 1, 2017, all properties will be required to ensure tenants and employees have convenient access to recycling.

- Retail stores and malls
- Medical facilities
- Hotels and motels
- Religious buildings
- Commercial office buildings
- Private educational facilities
- Industrial and manufacturing facilities
- Other non-residential commercial properties

FOOD SERVICE ENTERPRISES

By 2018, all establishments with food permits will be required to ensure their employees have convenient access to organics diversion services.

- Grocers
- Food and Beverage Distributors
- Restaurants
- Bars
- Catering
- Cafeterias
- Commercial kitchens
- Food trucks
- Other food service enterprises required to hold a food permit
CAMPAIGN GOALS

Our goal is to provide commercial and multifamily properties with educational tools and resources that are flexible and customizable, yet specific enough to meet their business needs while helping them to comply with the Universal Recycling Ordinance.

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<tr>
<th>GOAL</th>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
<th>TACTICS</th>
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| 1. Communicate the City's Zero Waste policies, primarily the Universal Recycling Ordinance, to all affected properties | Develop and execute a strategic outreach and communication plan | Send direct mail to affected properties (reminder postcards, letters, certified mail) 
Produced video about the Universal Recycling Ordinance 
Lunch & Learn training sessions organized and held on a regular basis to provide in-person outreach to affected properties 
Technical Guides and industry tip sheets created and distributed |
| 2. Facilitating improvements in business diversion programs | Provide free and confidential waste reduction and diversion consulting services to all businesses within Austin city limits | Provides technical assistance to commercial businesses through on-site assessments 
Offer free business recycling starter kit that includes sample bins, signs, decals, and employee/tenant education 
Group phone line and email where citizens can reach entire team quickly and directly |
| 3. Increase knowledge of waste diversion opportunities at commercial and multifamily properties | Bilingual employee and tenant education | Develop customizable educational materials and communication tools available online 
Providing presentations and trainings related to business community 
Create signage and guidelines for containers |
| 4. Increase accessibility to Zero Waste resources | Website as central business hub | Partnered with Re-TRAC connect to develop interactive online reporting tool and diversion calculator 
Connect businesses to the Austin Material Marketplace, a free online business-to-business tool where users can post surplus materials and find by-product synergies |
| 5. Go beyond compliance, to promote reduce, reuse, recycle. | Help community look at discards as a resource and not as waste | Facilitate highest and best use of materials 
Public event tabling 
General outreach through media outlets including print and radio ads |
Referral to the Austin Green Business Leader Program through the Office of Sustainability |
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<tr>
<th>OBSTACLE</th>
<th>OPPORTUNITIES</th>
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<td><strong>Reporting Tools</strong></td>
<td>ARR has played with several different tools for properties to report on their diversion efforts. Having an easy and interactive reporting tool is crucial to proper and consistent reporting. Re-TRAC, a waste diversion tracking tool and reporting system, is an effective way for property managers and owners to easily report on diversion efforts and for the City to gather data regarding affected properties.</td>
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<td><strong>Large Number of Affected Properties</strong></td>
<td>ARR has met this challenge with an approach that phases in the number of properties affected each year according to their size. This serves as a great opportunity to help each property individually with their industry specific needs through personalized communication and educational materials.</td>
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<td><strong>Identifying Appropriate Contact</strong></td>
<td>In the case of condominiums or large multi-tenant commercial properties, identifying the best contact for outreach can at times be a challenge. Significant effort is made to engage business and property owners and managers through groups they commonly work with including local chambers of commerce, professional networking groups, industry groups, and service organizations.</td>
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<td><strong>Cost of Adding Diversion Programs to Properties</strong></td>
<td>Another challenge of implementing the URO, is the added initial cost properties incur to establish recycling services. While this additional cost may be minimized with reduced trash services down the road, ARR is helping to subsidize some of this initial cost by marketing a rebate program. The Zero Waste Business Rebate Program is valued up to $1,800 dollars for properties that either start a new diversion program or expand an existing diversion program.</td>
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<td><strong>Proper Use of Diversion Programs by Employees and Tenants</strong></td>
<td>A major concern for multifamily and commercial business properties, is that tenants and employees do not use the onsite diversion programs correctly. The Business Outreach Team schedules onsite visits to disperse personalized educational materials and property specific diversion program information. This outreach activity teaches how and what is recyclable, which carries over into home life.</td>
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IMPLEMENTATION/EXECUTION

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

June: Begin ad campaigns and contacting newly affected properties
July: Promote workshops and begin direct outreach campaign.
August: Continue direct outreach campaign, revise current industry specific tip sheets, website updates and improvements.

September: Direct outreach campaign and promote early reporting with emails, postcards, letters, and Lunch and Learn trainings
October: Reporting begins. Launch targeted ad campaign in local media outlets.
November: Continue direct outreach campaign; develop tip sheets and other educational materials

December: Reminders (emails and postcards) are sent to all affected properties who have not yet reported
January: Last chance reminders sent (emails and postcards). Lunch and Learn trainings held.
February: Past due reminders sent (emails, postcard, letter)

March: 1st letter of non-compliance goes out
April: 2nd letter of non-compliance goes out and site visits are scheduled for non-compliant properties.
Earth Day community engagement.
May: Properties are sent to Austin Code Department

BUDGET

This campaign costs City of Austin households $1.25 per household for FY15.

ADVERTISING FY15 PROJECTED $130,000

- Includes print, radio, and online ads outreach to newly affected URO properties,
- Marketing Zero Waste technical assistance and onsite services, and
- Raising awareness about the benefits of recycling and diversion at commercial properties.
- Sponsorships, events, and workshops conducted by 3rd parties

PRINT MATERIALS FY15 PROJECTED $45,000

- Includes printing, mailing, and related costs to send letters to newly affected properties
- Printing and mailing of Annual Diversion Plan reminder postcards (twice per year)
- 18-inch decals for exterior trash and recycling containers, agreed to as part of the stakeholder discussions.

COLLATERAL FY15 PROJECTED $77,000

- Includes “business starter kits” for businesses that provide samples of slim-jims and desk side containers, posters, decals, and other examples of materials made with recycled materials used to implement a diversion program.

TOTAL FY15 PROJECTED $252,000
PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

The Business Outreach Team relies on strong partnerships and collaboration throughout the community in order to successfully communicate effectively to our target audience.

Business and industry organizations help us reach our target audience through advertisements in their publications, speaking and tabling at events, and also provide important stakeholder feedback. Examples of some strategic industry and business organization partnerships include:

- Downtown Austin Alliance
- Austin Apartment Association
- Community Association Institute
- Building Owners and Managers Association - Austin
- Austin Hotel and Lodging Association
- International Facility Management Association - Austin

Local haulers have been a valuable resource for ARR as well. Informing and working with local haulers on the URO has been beneficial to helping businesses better understand waste diversion options and opportunities. ARR created a "Technical Guide" specifically for local haulers. This guide provides an in-detail explanation of how to implement a URO compliant diversion program. This guide is intended to act as a tool for hauler sales representatives in assisting their clients and future customers implement diversion programs.

Supporting and leveraging these strategic partnerships allow the team to efficiently reach multiple properties at the same time; thus saving time, money, and resources while allowing the team to develop strong ties to the community. In addition to external partnerships, the Business Outreach Team coordinates with other City of Austin Departments which provides essential support that is critical to the success and effectiveness of the campaign. The Business Outreach staff has built strong relationships with other City departments and provides expertise to help incorporate innovative Zero Waste principles into City policies and procedures. This approach accelerates the adoption of Zero Waste principles and programs within the City, as well as maximizes taxpayer and ratepayer resources in the community through coordinated outreach efforts. Key focuses are on:

- **AE Green Building** - providing input for green building standards to support recycling capacities and increases in construction diversion.
- **Public Works** - participate as a member of the Interdepartmental Sustainability Working Group (ISWG) to coordinate capital improvement projects, sustainability efforts, and test new ideas for establishing best practices.
- **Building Services** - ensure that all City of Austin facilities have convenient access to recycling, standardized signage, and the information needed to recycle right.
- **Corporate Purchasing** - establishing minimum standards for commonly purchased goods and services including percentage of recycled content, products that are easily recycled, and reducing packaging.
- **Office of Sustainability** - coordinating efforts to align Zero Waste with the City’s broader sustainability efforts
- **Economic Development Zero Waste Liaison** - support Economic Development Department’s development of alternative compliance capabilities (e.g. online materials matching, eco-industrial park) to boost local businesses promote the highest and best use of materials.
- **Watershed Protection, Health Department, and other COA departments** - partnering for cross-departmental projects that reduce the flow of materials to the landfill. Examples of projects may include used cooking oil, food recovery, mobile food vendors, and other Zero Waste initiatives.
Describe how well the elements described in the planning phase were accomplished

Reaching our target audience through the tactics outlined were met with varying levels of success. Different tools were effective for different property types or industry groups. For example, direct mailings work well for properties with no email information. However, whenever we are able to get an email contact (through phone conversation) we are able to reach affected property owners and managers more economically and quickly. Email correspondence also works well when inviting our audience to a training—we can link directly to an Eventbrite registration page.

As mentioned previously, identifying appropriate contact information for condominium communities can be a challenge because information about their HOA is not always made publicly available. In order to gather the correct information, we have created a double sided, self-addressed postcard mailer that we send to select condo owners with a request for contact information for the person who is responsible for managing the landfill trash and recycling contracts at their community.

**UNIQUE CAMPAIGN**

This multidimensional and comprehensive set of communication, education and marketing tools enables ARR to reach a wide audience in a range of industries to make progress towards Zero Waste. Our grassroots methodology of outreach is unique in the way information is presented to all community members involved; whether it is businesses, multifamily properties or the employees and tenants of those properties. The materials made available to the community and businesses are personalized with property name and property specific recycling information for tenants and employees. We also have industry specific recycling tip sheets for waste management supervisors and their employees.

**RESULTS/EVALUATION**

**CAMPAIGN RESPONSE**

Commercial and multifamily property owners and managers often express gratitude to the Business Outreach Team for providing high quality information and resources. Downloadable and customizable sample education makes it straightforward for property owners and managers to educate their tenants and employees about recycling. These pre-fabricated, URO-compliant tools (email messages, sample handouts/fliers, presentations, and signs) allow for clear communication with a low investment of their valuable resources.

The improved Annual Diversion Plan, hosted by Re-TRAC Connect, is a dynamic reporting tool that provides real time compliance feedback to the user. The additional materials section of the Annual Diversion Plan has a built in calculator that allows property owners and managers to take credit for all additional materials that are diverted from the landfill. This built in calculator uses weight-to-volume conversion factors, pulled from the EPA’s Waste Wise website, giving users a simple tool to calculate and track their diversion rates without depending on expensive third-party audits or consultants.
## MEASURING SUCCESS (QUANTIFIED AND RELATED TO GOALS)

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<th>GOAL</th>
<th>METRIC (as of 4/10/2015)</th>
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| 1. Communicate the City’s Zero Waste policies, primarily the Universal Recycling Ordinance, to all affected properties | Properties phased in over 5 years, 2375 affected properties as of 2015  
Single stream recycling now available to business community—3 new MRFs in the community  
Sent reminder postcards, letters, certified mail to over 8,994 recipients |
| 2. Facilitating improvements in business diversion programs | Completed 135 site assessments in FY15  
Created industry specific tip sheets for industrial, organics hotel/motel, and retail properties  
Launched online Annual Diversion Plan using Re-TRAC.  
1,831 affected properties have submitted Annual Diversion Plans outlining their waste diversion programs and taking credit for additional materials diverted from landfill  
Over 59 hours spent on phone outreach in calendar year 2015 (YTD) |
| 3. Increase knowledge of waste diversion opportunities at commercial and multifamily properties | Completed five-minute video, post on website, use in trainings, 1,110 views on YouTube  
Held 16 lunch & learn sessions in FY15  
$90,000 funds available for Zero Waste rebates of $1800 per property (for a max of 50 participating properties)  
Flyers, newsletters, and signs distributed at site assessments and training events  
Decals and technical guide distributed to private haulers |
| 4. Increase accessibility to Zero Waste resources | Launched Austin Materials Marketplace with 61 local businesses now participating.  
Created Zero Waste Tip Sheet  
Distributed Technical Guide, Industrial Tip Sheet updated and posted on web (Organics and Retail Tip Sheets currently under development). |
| 5. Go beyond compliance, to promote reduce, reuse, recycle. | Number of events attended and number of persons interacted with at events  
Maintain relationships with business groups, networking organizations, and industry groups  
16 presentations and training events attended in FY15 |
| 6. Incentivize early adopters of Zero Waste | 61 businesses registered, 19 transactions, $28,508 in Disposal Savings & Value Creation, 4,150lbs and ~3,275ft³ Diverted from Landfill  
In May 2014, Austin hosted its first-ever Recycling Innovations Investment Forum. 10 companies pitched their ventures to 23 investors and an audience of nearly 100 spectators |
HOW TOOL CAN BE IMPROVED

In previous campaigns, ARR secured television advertisements and bus banners that successfully reached a wide and diverse audiences. Current communication tools have been primarily targeted towards affected property owners and managers. However, as more and more properties are phased in, targeting our message to the general public may become a more effective way of reaching our audience to make significant progress towards our Zero Waste goal.

CAMPAIGN REPLICATION

The city of Austin is a leader of waste diversion practices in our region. Other communities, in Texas and throughout the country, have reached out asking for insight and ideas on implementing some of our practices in their communities.

CITIES WHO ASKED ARR FOR IMPLEMENTATION ADVICE

- **PORTLAND, OR**
  - Ordinance (Organics)
- **WASHINGTON COUNTY, MN**
  - Reporting requirements
- **BOULDER, CO**
  - Ordinance and compliance
- **FLAGSTAFF, AZ**
  - Ordinance and Outreach
- **LITTLE ROCK, AR**
  - Ordinance and public engagement
- **FORT WORTH, TX**
  - Outreach processes
- **DENTON, TX**
  - Ordinance and compliance

The key to effective communication, education and marketing is adaptability. Because every community is different, stakeholder involvement is critical to the campaign and program's success, and will result in the development of tools that honor the character and needs of the community. While developing communication, education and marketing tools, it is important to keep the following in mind:

- Employ a wide variety of messaging and outreach techniques that address the unique needs of your intended audience
- Provide an array of customizable resources and tools that can help businesses with their distinct needs
- Direct engagement with stakeholders early and often provides feedback and input that can be integrated into outreach tools making them relevant and useful
- Allow room for adjustments—the ability to adapt as markets change (housing, recycling and business climate) is integral to successfully communicating with the target audience