Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo
Curbside Recycling Pilot Project

Solid Waste Association of North America
2012 Marketing Excellence Award

Submitted by:
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The DAGNY Partnership
2012 MARKETING EXCELLENCE AWARD
CHECKLIST AND RELEASE

2012 Applications must be submitted to SWANA no later than Friday, April 13, 2012

*** PLEASE NOTE THAT ENTRY REQUIREMENTS HAVE CHANGED ***

Application Checklist (Please make sure the following items are included in your submittal packet)

- Completed release statement (this page), to be scanned and included in digital submission
- Check (made payable to SWANA) or credit card payment for nomination fee (in U.S. dollars) via Excellence Award Nominations
- At least 2 pictures of your operation (may be included in nomination text)
- One copy of your award submittal uploaded using your purchased 2012 SWANA Excellence Awards Application Uploading Instructions
- If you would like to mail your submission, please contact Jesse Maxwell, Program Coordinator, at jmaxwell@swana.org or (240) 494-2237.

Release Statement: I certify that the information provided in this application is accurate and correct to the best of my knowledge. SWANA reserves the right to publish the enclosed information. Nominations become the property of SWANA. My signature gives SWANA the right to reprint or make available for purchase any portion of this submittal.

Signature: [Signature]
Date: [April 13, 2012]
Executive Summary:

Since 2005, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) has offered a residential Recycling Depot program. Several years ago, the Municipality established a goal of achieving 50 per cent waste diversion by the end of 2012.

To help achieve the waste diversion goal and to support the Municipality’s vision of becoming a northern leader in sustainable communities, the RMWB decided to introduce curbside recycling.

The Municipality undertook a three-month-long curbside recycling pilot project to ensure the program worked well before its community-wide implementation. The pilot project involved neighbourhoods with Friday curbside waste collection – two urban neighbourhoods and one community several miles outside the city.

The pilot project tested operational matters and all marketing and communication materials to ensure residents had the information they needed to fully participate. Many residents in Wood Buffalo moved to the northern Alberta community from other parts of Canada. They bring different recycling experiences and expectations with them so the materials had to cover the basics of curbside recycling as it is designed specifically for Wood Buffalo. The marketing strategy used the well-established and very popular Wood Buffalo recycling mascot to keep continuity with the existing recycling initiatives and to ensure a friendly, customer service-based approach.

Statement of Intent:

For the past several years, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) has promoted a Recycling Depot program to encourage residents to take their recyclables to seven Recycling Depots throughout the community. Results have been impressive, with about 500% more residential material recycled in 2011 than Wood Buffalo residents recycled in 2005.

The Municipality made the decision to introduce curbside recycling to increase residential recycling even more. To ensure the program worked well before community-wide implementation was undertaken, the Municipality decided to hold a three-month-long curbside recycling pilot project.

This award submission deals with the social marketing required to ensure community support for the concept of moving from one recycling system (Recycling Depots) to an entirely new recycling system (curbside collection) and to ensure strong participation in the curbside recycling pilot program. The Municipality understands that the evolution of household recycling from depots to curbside is required if the municipal objective of achieving 50 per cent waste diversion by the end of 2012 is to be achieved.

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo is a member of the Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA) and encouraged The DAGNY Partnership, marketing and communications consultants, to apply for the 2012 SWANA Marketing Excellence Award to share our strategy and its excellent results with others facing similar challenges in introducing new residential recycling programs.

Research/Planning:

Need for the pilot program:

The population of the RMWB, particularly Fort McMurray, grew by about 65% from 1999 to 2005 (and is still growing annually). This growth put huge capacity and financial strain on all municipal infrastructure, including the landfill. To stretch the lifespan of the current landfill – therefore saving significant capital costs – and to help preserve its overall environment, the Municipal Council set a goal to achieve 50 per cent waste stream diversion from the Landfill by Dec. 31, 2012.
To meet this target, the Municipality began a residential recycling program that encouraged residents to take their recyclable products to seven recycling depots located throughout the community. While this program is achieving impressive results, the Municipality made the decision to implement curbside recycling. Research shows curbside recycling results in significantly more materials being recycled. Curbside recycling is estimated to provide 35% diversion from the Wood Buffalo waste stream when fully implemented (25,000 – 30,000 tonnes/year) compared with the approximate 1,200 tonnes currently collected annually through the depot recycling program. As well, while recycling depots are the most cost-effective recycling option to implement, Wood Buffalo’s research showed that its investment per tonne of recycled material is lower for curbside recycling.

Curbside recycling would help the Municipality meet its 50% diversion target, contain the costs of Landfill services, maximize efficiencies of collection services, help reduce collector injuries, minimize litter issues and reduce greenhouse gas generation from organic material going to the Landfill. Curbside recycling would also support Council’s determination to become a municipal leader in environmental stewardship by introducing an enhanced service designed specifically for Wood Buffalo.

Before full implementation was undertaken, the Municipality designed a pilot test to take place from mid-March to mid-June 2011 in three neighbourhoods to test its equipment, service protocols, communication and resident reaction to the enhanced new service and its resulting service costs. Strong marketing was needed to ensure residents in the pilot test areas were aware of the test, participated in it and offered their feedback. Getting detailed feedback was very important so the Municipality could adapt its service accordingly before it was fully implemented community-wide. Communication was also needed so the community’s residents outside the pilot test areas didn’t expect to receive curbside recycling until well after the pilot test had ended.

The Municipality contracted The DAGNY Partnership, a marketing and communications firm from Edmonton, a city about 280 miles southwest of Fort McMurray, to manage the pilot test communication. The DAGNY Partnership has worked with the Municipality since 2005 to develop and implement its Recycling Depot waste diversion strategy.

Research and analysis:
Because results from the pilot test were to be used to determine details of the community-wide service, the Municipality needed to understand public attitudes, perceptions and reactions to various curbside recycling service options. To acquire this knowledge, the Municipality conducted a random telephone survey of 600 households who already received municipal curbside waste collection (the same households that would ultimately receive curbside recycling service) in January 2010.

The survey can be viewed as a representative cross-section of the community with a margin of error of ±4.1% at the 95% level of confidence. In addition, an online survey was available to all Wood Buffalo residents. The online survey attracted huge response, with 1,488 complete and accepted responses.

During the pilot test, the Municipality tracked the number of calls of inquiry or complaint it received about the pilot test, the warnings and violations the collection crews left with residents and, of course, the amount of material collected. The Municipality also conducted a statistically valid survey near the end of the pilot test to explore the feasibility of the various service options that were tested as well as residents’ responses to the service, its cost threshold and its communication.

Target audience:
When curbside recycling is introduced to the entire community, it will be offered to all households that currently receive municipal curbside waste collection. Most of these residences are located in an urban area with some located in a small community about 12 miles outside the city, with a more rural environment. Many of these households are families. There are also significant numbers of three-to-four-person households composed of adults sharing a house. This characteristic reflects Wood Buffalo’s proximity to the Alberta oil sands where workers share accommodation.
Residents in the urban areas have had more direct exposure to Wood Buffalo Recycling Depot program although the majority of residents from the small rural community are extremely committed to preserving their beautiful natural environment and, therefore, are enthusiastic recyclers. Because of the relatively transient nature of Wood Buffalo (and its proximity to the oil sands), many residents are quite new to the community. Many know about, and have participated in, recycling programs from other parts of Canada. For many, their past experiences with recycling have resulted in their impatience to have curbside recycling introduced into their new community.

Most homes in two of three test neighbourhoods (Abasand North and Saprae Creek) are single-family homes. Abasand South, the third test neighbourhood, has a large portion of multi-family homes. This difference became critically important in testing issues including garage or yard space to store recycling bins, and collection truck access to the curb because of the number of parked vehicles.

The vast majority of residents in the pilot test neighbourhoods own their own homes. The average household size is 3.48 people. Household size is very important in determining the optimum size of bins relative to the amount of recyclables and household waste produced.

Most residents have some post-secondary education. About a quarter of residents have completed university and a quarter have high school education. About 30% of adults are under the age of 35, another 30% are aged 35-44, about 27% are aged 45-54 and only 11% are aged 55 and older.

Research shows families with adults between the ages of 25 and 45 form the core of consistent recyclers, no matter what type of recycling program is offered. Research related to the curbside pilot test shows the most enthusiastic curbside supporters are women aged 18-44 years, either young singles or couples and with pre-school-aged families.

Goals:
Goal (ensure residents in the pilot test areas are aware of the test, participate in it and offer their feedback):

1. Achieve a participation rate of at least 70% in the pilot test.
2. Attract sufficient numbers of participants in the surveys to achieve reliable results. (Measures: specific to each survey tool)

Goal (develop communication materials to aid resident understanding of, and participation in, the new service):

1. Prepared materials satisfy the communication requirements of at least 60% of residents in the pilot test areas.
2. Inquiries and complaints related to the pilot test are contained to less than 30% of residents in the pilot test areas.
3. Violation/warnings for non-compliance of curbside recycling procedures contained to less than 25% of residents in the pilot test areas.
4. Achieve material contamination rates of not more than 45-50%. (Note: material contamination occurs when residents put material in the wrong bin. Typical contamination on a new service can run as high as 65%.)

Goal (ensure the expectations of the broader community for implementation of curbside recycling remain realistic):

1. Contain demands for community-wide implementation of curbside recycling to anecdotal comments that do not require intervention by Council or senior administration.
Anticipated obstacles and opportunities:
Severe time constraints of the Municipality’s team resulted in extremely limited consultation time to work through the logistical issues of a new service and its marketing/communication. Also, because the Municipal team had no on-site communications assistance, The DAGNY Partnership had all materials produced in Edmonton, prepared so they were ready to use, then shipped.

There were also challenges in determining how much detail to offer residents so they had enough to participate knowledgeably and not so much that important information was buried.

Finally, there were challenges in giving the entire community enough information about the pilot test to satisfy their curiosity while containing their expectations.

Implementation/Execution:

General messages:
- The introduction of curbside recycling to Wood Buffalo marks an environmental milestone for our community.
- Curbside recycling will be implemented community-wide after the Municipality assesses the results of the pilot test and ensures its operational requirements are in place (by late 2011 or early 2012).
- Wood Buffalo residents have been clear that they want curbside recycling; the Municipality has responded by designing a cost-effective service unique to our community.
- The new service builds on lessons learned from other similarly-sized communities and reflects input from a resident survey conducted in early 2010. The service features a multi-bin sorting system and introduces semi-automated recycling and waste pickup.

Messages specific to pilot test neighbourhoods:
- The Municipality appreciates your participation and cooperation during the pilot test.
- Your feedback about the pilot test is important to the success of the pilot.
- You will not be charged any incremental recycling collection fee during the pilot test even though you will be receiving enhanced collection service.
- The materials in your Customer Care package give you everything you need to know to participate in the pilot test. If you need more help, call us!

Roles and responsibilities:
The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo team managed all operational responsibilities, all liaison with the Municipality’s senior management and Council members, and all coordination between the various components of the program. Since curbside recycling represented a paradigm shift in service delivery, the Municipality was careful to coordinate activities and information with administrative staff, collection staff, senior management and members of Council.

The DAGNY Partnership was responsible for all strategic communication development and implementation, communication budget management and administrative followup. My business partner, Dagny Alston, led the strategy development, budget management and liaison with a sub-consultant who provided market research services. I led communication implementation and detailed project liaison with the Municipal team. We shared overall client liaison.

Solution overview:
Because communication is a key to every part of the pilot test, held from March 18 – June 24, 2011, involvement began with the development of the pilot’s operational aspects. For example, all members of the team and the bin supplier worked to ensure the bin labels communicated clear, consistent information before the bins were manufactured.
The decision was made to have the materials feature RRRibbitt the frog, Wood Buffalo’s recycling mascot.

RRRibbitt has become an extremely popular, very well-known figure in Wood Buffalo over the past several years, and featuring him on the curbside materials offered a strong branding link between this new service and the recycling program familiar to Wood Buffalo residents.

Because of his popularity, we knew the materials would be well received – and therefore better read. RRRibbitt is especially popular with children, who have been instrumental in getting their parents into the recycling habit at the depots and who also will have an important role to play in getting their families into the curbside recycling habit.

Clearly, the primary objective of the communication materials was to give the pilot test residents all the information they needed to understand the new service and participate in it.

The materials were designed so minimal changes would be needed when the Municipality is ready to introduce curbside recycling to the entire community. Feedback received from the pilot test initiated some tweaks to the materials (for instance, some restructuring of the FAQs and better clarity between the light blue and dark blue bands on the collection calendar) used when full implementation began in late 2011.

We knew the pilot test residents would be curious about the new service and its basics before the test began. We also recognized they would need sufficient time to study the specifics of the service before collection began.

To offer initial information, we organized two evening open houses in Wood Buffalo and invited pilot test neighbourhood residents through a letter of invitation from Wood Buffalo Mayor Melissa Blake. The letter was hand-delivered to homes in the three neighbourhoods to contain specifics of the open houses to those neighbourhoods.

We were aware of general excitement throughout the entire community regarding curbside recycling and wanted to limit attendance by residents outside the pilot test areas.
Communication materials at the open houses included a series of display panels that "told the story" of curbside recycling.

As well, samples of the three bins were on display; residents were encouraged to examine them and try wheeling them. Residents were encouraged to sign up that evening to participate in a formal evaluation near the end of the pilot test. The open houses were so successful that they were repeated when full implementation began in late 2011.
Samples of display boards presented at the Open Houses

The major communications package was the “Customer Care” package of information delivered to each pilot test home with the three bins (one household waste bin and two different recycling bins) within a week of the start of the new service.

The information package was taped to the lid of one of the bins so it would be easily visible and accessible.
The package contained a welcome letter from Mayor Blake, a brochure (pictured to the left), general FAQs, FAQs specific to each neighbourhood, an evaluation registration card and return envelope, a collection calendar suitable for posting on the fridge or cupboard door and two magnets to help with posting the calendar.

Cover of the eight-page brochure

Selected pages from the brochure
One of two different fridge magnets, included so residents could post their collection calendars on the fridge for easy reference.
Front side of the collection calendar. In the pilot project evaluation conducted after the pilot project had ended, the calendar proved the most popular and most useful communication product for residents.
As the bins and Customer Care packages were being delivered, we ran a flight of radio ads and print ads.

Both were kept very general in nature, again to keep the community apprised of the pilot test and to emphasize that full implementation would not be occurring for many months.

As well, because effective mass communication in the 21st century must include a social media campaign, our advertising included electronic banners run on the most popular local community websites.

We also ran interior bus cards on local buses to catch audiences during their regular routines coming and going to work.

A Facebook page, Wood Buffalo Green Team, was begun in 2010 to feature news and promotions related to Wood Buffalo’s recycling program. We posted various informal updates and comments on the page, mostly aimed at pilot test residents but all keeping the community-at-large up to date. Wood Buffalo’s recycling website, www.recycle-more.ca, also featured pages specific to the pilot test, offering more detailed information than was contained in the brochure and printed FAQs. The Municipality’s Recycling Hotline fielded inquiries and facilitated solutions to the few issues as they arose.

The media were very responsive to news issued about the introduction of curbside recycling. The Municipality’s Mayor Melissa Blake, in the dark coat, is an enthusiastic supporter of all recycling initiatives and made herself available for all requested related media opportunities.
The e-banner that was run as an ad on local popular websites. The e-banner was linked to the Municipality’s recycling website, www.recycle-more.ca.

Of course, the collection team is the “face” of the Municipality on collection days. We developed a series of collection stickers for this team to use when residents weren’t following the requirements of the program. The special stickers again featured RRRibbitt, ensuring a friendly customer service approach to encourage a change in behaviour.

These stickers presented a much more customer service-friendly approach from the Municipality’s usual violation stickers that took a bylaw enforcement approach.

**Budget:**

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<tr>
<td>Advertising &amp; public awareness campaigns</td>
<td>$ 15,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pilot introduction (direct mail) &amp; open houses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Customer Care information packages, delivery &amp; followup support</td>
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<td>Pilot evaluation (research)</td>
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<td>Project liaison/management</td>
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Results/Evaluation:
Goal: Pilot test residents: awareness, participation and evaluation of the pilot test.

1. **Achieve a participation rate of at least 70% in pilot test.** Results from pilot test survey. 97% of households participated. This figure represents the bin set-out rate. A typical “set-out rate” is anywhere from 20-35% and typically takes from two to four years to achieve. Of 1,255 homes in the pilot test, only 10-15 initially refused to participate. Within 3-4 weeks, virtually all chose to participate.


Goal: Develop communication materials to aid resident understanding of, and participation in, the new service.

1. **Materials satisfied at least 60% of pilot test residents.** Results from pilot test survey. Satisfaction levels (very or somewhat satisfied): 97% - bin labels. 96% - calendar. 86% - brochure & FAQs. 86% - open houses. Website – 85%. Used the material. 87% - brochure & FAQs. 86% - collection calendar. 75% - bin labels. 27% - website. 15% - open houses. Top four most important sources of information (1st and 2nd choices): 71% - calendar. 57% - brochure & FAQs. 54% - open house. 52% - bin labels.

2. **Less than 30% inquiries or complaints.** 132 inquiries/complaints received (0.7% of pilot test residents). This very low rate of complaints resulted in reduced support service costs since additional clerical staff were not required to answer calls from the public.

3. **Less than 25% non-compliance violation/warnings issued.** 237 notices issued (1.2% of pilot test residents). A typical learning curve for a new collection service is from six to 12 months depending on the complexity of the service and the communication accompanying its introduction.
Material contamination rates not more than 45-50%. Collection crews reported minimal, infrequent contamination (dirty or wet material, or wrong material for the bin) only. Estimate less than 10% contamination.

Goal: Ensure the expectations of the broader community for implementation of curbside recycling remained realistic.

1. **Contain demands for community-wide implementation of curbside recycling.** So few inquiries were raised on this issue that they were not noted separately in inquiry logs. On our Facebook page, three residents commented that they couldn’t wait for curbside to come to their neighbourhoods. None was angry or perplexed by the delay.