Be Smart, Use Your Cart!

2014 SWANA Excellence Awards
Communications

City of Tampa
Department of Solid Waste &
Environmental Program Management
Executive Summary

On January 28, 2013, the City of Tampa Department of Solid Waste & Environmental Program Management launched a new way to recycle. “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” is an exciting, new automated recycling program for City of Tampa residents. Over a 15-month period, the 14-gallon blue bins used to collect recyclables at the curb were replaced with a 96 or 48-gallon green recycling cart, complete with RFID technology that will make them easier to track. To communicate the many benefits of this new program to residents, a comprehensive communications plan was implemented that included press coverage, a 30-second video PSA, direct mail letters and postcards, public information meetings, and recycling education pieces. The program has been an overwhelming success, with citywide residential recycling participation at 70%.
**Statement of Intent**

On January 28, 2013, the City of Tampa Department of Solid Waste & Environmental Program Management launched the first of five phases of “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” — a new automated carted recycling program for City of Tampa residents. To effectively communicate the value and necessity of the new program, a variety of communications and public education tools were developed and a comprehensive communications plan was implemented. In sharing our lessons learned along with the methods that have proven to be successful in rolling out this program, we anticipate that other municipalities will find this information useful. The City of Tampa Department of Solid Waste & Environmental Program Management is applying for the SWANA Communications Excellence Award in recognition of the “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” communications campaign.

**Research/Planning**

**Program Need**

In 2001, the City of Tampa began providing voluntary curbside recycling collection service to all single-family residences within the City’s solid waste service area. This service was offered as a means to increase residential recycling by providing a convenient recycling option for the citizens of Tampa. Each single-family residence was issued a 14-gallon blue recycling bin, collected once a week by City Solid Waste staff. By January 2010, the City hired a consultant to conduct a study on the participation barriers to recycling in an urban environment. As part of this study, the consultant analyzed two of the City’s lowest recycling participation areas and determined that a carted residential recycling program could increase participation as much as 28% and the tonnage collected by 23%.

A parallel study on the City’s residential curbside recycling participation was completed by City of Tampa staff in 2011 to determine the participation rate in each recycling route. The results served as the basis for carted recycling program implementation. Findings showed the City’s average residential curbside recycling rate was 33% with the highest participation route at 55% and the lowest at 12%. The study was the first of its kind conducted for the City of Tampa’s Recycling Program and established a comprehensive baseline participation rate by which the effectiveness of future curbside recycling initiatives can be measured. Participation data for every recycling route was collected first-hand by City Solid Waste employees following the trucks during normal collection.
From 2011 – 2012, the City of Tampa implemented a pilot program with fully automated residential carted recycling on MacDill Air Force Base. Staff tracked recycling participation and tonnage throughout the pilot and determined that the average participation rate for the study area was 52%. Based on the success of the carted residential recycling pilot program on MacDill Air Force Base, the City of Tampa decided to implement fully automated carted recycling for all residential recycling routes within the City.

After more than a decade of using 14-gallon blue bins for collecting recyclables at the curb, the City of Tampa introduced 96-gallon and 48-gallon green, wheeled carts with embedded RFID tags through a program called “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” To ensure the success of this program, a comprehensive internal and external communications plan was developed to inform City residents and staff about the new program, the do’s and don’ts of recycling, the benefits of carted recycling for the customer and the environment, and the safety of Solid Waste staff. Communications for the program also served to educate residents in low participation areas on the City’s curbside recycling program.

**Materials Used Prior to Implementing the Program**

Prior to launching “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” several communications materials were used to promote the City’s blue bin curbside recycling program including:

- **Curbside Recycling Guidelines Brochure**: included a list of all the recyclables the City of Tampa accepted in its program with associated photos
• **City of Tampa Solid Waste Website**: the site included several pages dedicated to the recycling program, including frequently asked recycling questions, and documents available for download.

• **Call Center**: staff were equipped with information to answer general questions about the City’s curbside recycling program.

• **Outreach and Education**: included recycling presentations at schools and community meetings, and education booths at all major City-sponsored events.
The general audience for the “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” communications campaign includes all single family residences within the City’s designated Solid Waste service area. A residential curbside recycling participation study conducted by the City of Tampa in 2011 helped to further segment the general audience and target communications to more defined groups. The study identified residential curbside participation rates for each recycling collection route and determined the City's average curbside recycling rate of 33% with the highest participation route at 55% and the lowest at 12%.

Armed with this information, two specific groups were targeted for communications activities:

- **Avid recyclers** – For this group, messages and communications materials focused on improved customer convenience and the opportunity to recycle even more with the introduction of the larger recycling cart.
- **Non-recyclers / Low participation** – Communication efforts for this group stress the do's and don'ts of recycling and emphasize the potential for future customer cost savings associated with recycling as the City plans to transition to a “pay as you throw” system for garbage collection in the coming years.

**Program Goals & Strategies**

The following are goals and strategies for the program launch and communication activities:

- **Goal 1**: Create awareness of the launch of “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!”

  **Strategies**
  
  - Secure local media coverage before and during program implementation;
  - Strengthen internal City communications by equipping the Utilities Call Center with adequate information to inform customers;
  - Conduct community outreach through face-to-face meetings with neighborhood associations;
  - Develop a variety of communications materials for dissemination to customers affected by the transition to automated carted recycling.

- **Goal 2**: Communicate the advantages of the transition to automated carted recycling
Strategies

- Develop key messages that emphasize customer convenience, environmental benefits, collection efficiency, driver safety, and the potential for customer cost savings. Key messages were used in the several communications tools disseminated to target audiences.

- **Goal 3:** Double the documented recycling participation rate in each area of program implementation

Strategies

- Develop a communications tool that educates residents on the myriad of recyclables the City accepts, encouraging residents to recycle more than they throw away

Obstacles & Opportunities

The rollout of the program provided certain challenges, many of which were anticipated in the planning phase. Obstacles and opportunities with the launch of “Be Smart, Use Your Cart” included the following:

- **Contamination of recyclables with garbage:** To address this potential obstacle, the program was rolled out in five phases over a 15-month period. Recycling routes with the highest documented recycling participation rates received carts in the first phases. Additionally, only residents who were actively recycling on the day of cart distribution received a new recycling cart, although all single family residents that contacted the call center were eligible to receive a cart. Each cart’s lid also includes an embedded, UV-protected sticker that shows photos of the recyclables the City of Tampa accepts in its curbside program. (See Appendix for example of sticker.)

- **Container size:** Initially, there was minimal push-back from residents on the size of the new recycling cart. Since some residents expressed concern that the 96-gallon cart was too large, (either due to space constraints or the inability to fill the cart) the City offered a 48-gallon alternative to residents, and specifically those in multifamily units.

- **Missing communication touch points with certain demographics:** To ensure that all segments of the population had an opportunity to learn about the City’s new residential curbside recycling program, several methods of outreach were used which included both
traditional and online media and Spanish translation of materials. (See Appendix for examples of communications materials).

Implementation/Execution

Program Implementation Timeline

November 2012

- Recycling and Operations teams determined the number of routes that received carts in Phase I and assigned trucks and drivers to those routes.
- Meetings were held with City of Tampa Utilities Call Center staff to present the program to them and give them a copy of all communications tools available to residents about the program.
- Website updated to include all program information for Phase I including maps of affected areas and FAQs. (See example in Appendix)
- Notification letters to all residents affected in Phase I were mailed.
- Neighborhood meetings were held in the communities that will receive carts in Phase I. (November 19 & November 28)

December 2012

- Neighborhood meetings were held in the communities that received carts in Phase I. (December 3, 4 & 6)
- Filming of “Spotlight Tampa” show segment and a PSA that both aired on City of Tampa Television in January 2013.

January 2013

- Coordinated and organized local media coverage on launch of “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” Program

City of Tampa Television – “Spotlight Tampa”

FOX 13 News – Aired January 28, 2013, 5:30 p.m.
• Official rollout of Phase I of “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” Residents received their carts and blue bins formerly used for recycling were traded in. (January 28 – February 1, 2013)

February 2013

• Coordinated and organized local media coverage on launch of “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” Program. (Tampa Bay Times – February 10)

March 2013

• Recycling and Operations teams determined the next number of routes to receive carts in Phase II and assigned trucks and drivers to those routes.
• Meetings were held with City of Tampa Utilities Call Center staff to update them on lessons learned from operations perspective and get their feedback to strengthen communications for Phase II.

April 2013

• Notification letters to all residents affected in Phase II were mailed.
• Official rollout of Phase II of “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” Residents received their carts and blue bins formerly used for recycling were traded in. (April 22 – 26)

• Neighborhood meetings were held in the communities that received carts in Phase II. (April 23)

• Coordinated and organized local media coverage on Phase II launch of “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” Program. (Tampa Tribune – April 27)

• Postcard developed and distributed, informing residents on how to get a cart if they were missed during the initial distribution week. (See Appendix for example)

May 2013

• Coordinated and organized local media coverage on Phase II launch of “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” Program. (Good Day Tampa Bay – May 1)

• Neighborhood meetings were held in the communities that received carts in Phase II.

“Good Day Tampa Bay” TV segment
August 2013

- Recycling and Operations teams determined the number of routes to receive carts in Phase III and assigned trucks and drivers to those routes.
- Notification letters were mailed to all residents affected in Phase III.
- Neighborhood meetings are held in the communities that receive carts in Phase III.

September 2013

- Official rollout of Phase III of “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” Residents received their carts and blue bins formerly used for recycling were traded in.
- Postcard informing residents on how to get a cart if they were missed during the initial distribution week was mailed.

December 2013

- Recycling and Operations teams determined the number of routes to receive carts in Phase IV and assigned trucks and drivers to those routes.
- Notification letters to all residents affected in Phase IV were mailed.

January 2014

- Neighborhood meetings were held in the communities that received carts in Phase IV.
- Official rollout of Phase IV of “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” Residents received their carts and blue bins formerly used for recycling are traded in.
- Postcard informing residents on how to get a cart if they were missed during the initial distribution week was mailed.

February 2014

- Recycling and Operations teams determined the number of routes to receive carts in Phase V and assigned trucks and drivers to those routes.

March 2014

- Notification letters to all residents affected in Phase V were mailed.
- Neighborhood meetings were held in the communities that receive carts in Phase V.
- Official rollout of Phase V of “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” Residents received their carts and blue bins formerly used for recycling were traded in.
Communications Budget

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<td>Neighborhood Meetings: (includes facility rental and staff time for 20 meetings)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Direct Mail: Notification letters and reminder postcards (includes printing, layout, graphic design, stuffing, labels and postage)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collateral: Embedded cart stickers (Website, FAQs, online brochure – created in-house at no charge)</td>
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<td>PSA: City of Tampa Television, 30-sec spot running for month of January 2013</td>
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Partnerships / Collaborations

Opportunities to collaborate with internal and external organizations have widely contributed to the success seen so far in this program. Through partnering internally with the City of Tampa Public Affairs Department, the program received in-kind services including graphic design and layout for collateral materials along with production of a 30-second public service announcement which aired for a month of City of Tampa Television. Likewise, through developing partnerships with the various neighborhood and civic associations throughout the City, the program received widespread word-of-mouth publicity at the grassroots level. Additional communications assistance was provided by City Council legislative aides and the City of Tampa Consolidated Utilities Call Center. A partnership developed with the Carton Council also helped to cross promote the launch of carted recycling in the City of Tampa while encouraging residents to use their green carts to recycle cartons.

How Planning Elements Were Accomplished

The initiatives set forth during the communications planning stage for “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” were largely successful during the implementation of the program. The primary communications goal was to
create awareness among our target audiences of the new automated carted recycling program. Media coverage on the new program positive and widespread, covered by nearly every local media outlet in Tampa. An op-ed about the program was also published in the *Tampa Bay Times*:

Excerpt from *Tampa Bay Times*, Published April 27, 2013

**Sue Carlton: A life-altering garbage bin (hey, it can happen)**

The new city-issued, wheeled-and-lidded recycling garbage cans are here.

We're somebody now!

Maybe to you, trading in your old-fashioned bend-over-and-pick-'em-up open bin filled with newspapers and milk jugs in exchange for a sturdy wheeled garbage can is not exactly a life-changing event. But such events can be small...

The big green can on wheels means no more bending and schlepping those old-school, open-air recycle bins stacked high and spilling Diet Pepsi cans all the way to the curb. No more rainwater or who knows what-all dripping from the bin onto your shoes. No more newspapers blowing down the street or getting sodden with rain.

Aside from press coverage, the grassroots approach taken to promote the program at the community level proved to be valuable in gaining the buy-in of the several thousand residents who are affected by this program. Throughout the five phases of the program, City of Tampa Solid Waste staff hosted or attended 20 public information meetings to discuss the program with residents, get their feedback on strengthening communications efforts, and answer questions. One resident gave the following feedback on the City of Tampa Recycling Program at a neighborhood meeting held on May 7, 2013:

"As an active duty Naval Officer, I've been posted to every corner of the U.S. over the past twenty years. The recycling program in Tampa has been by far the best I've seen in regards to various types of items taken, courtesy of the drivers, innovation and outreach to the community. This is a fantastic service to our community and our environment! Thank you."

Andrew Ledford, Davis Islands Civic Association

The neighborhoods also took the information presented at the public meetings and published it in residential newsletters.
How Our Program is Unique

“Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” is different from other automated carting initiatives in that it is a program designed around solid data gathered in a curbside recycling participation study where City of Tampa Solid Waste staff individually tracked every household that participated in the City’s recycling program. Findings from this study helped determine the phased approach used in introducing automated carted recycling city wide. Phasing in carts based on recycling participation rates (with the highest participating recycling routes receiving their 96-gallon green carts first) has helped to build anticipation and friendly competition among neighborhoods, encouraging them to further increase recycling rates. Additionally, the City has opted for selective distribution, where only active recyclers in a given route will receive the green recycling cart, with the option for others to call in and order one at no cost. The selective distribution has helped to keep contamination down, allowed for better tracking of requests for carts (i.e. new recyclers), and reduced expenses associated with upfront capital costs. Another element that makes this program unique from others is having designated City Solid Waste staff in the field during each cart distribution period to troubleshoot on the spot and interact with customers face-to-face as well as equipping City Call Center staff with appropriate material to educate the public on recycling when residents called to order a recycling cart.

Results / Evaluation

Reaction to “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!”

Public reaction to the “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” program has been positive. By employing several communications touch points including direct mail letters and postcards, online media, brochures, violation tags, PSAs, community meetings and local media outreach, residents have several opportunities for sharing and receiving information on the program. Customer feedback has been paramount to adjusting the communications plan as needed to meet the needs of as many residents as possible. One resident expressed her excitement for the program in a Letter-to-the-Editor published in the April 26, 2013 edition of the Tampa Tribune:

LETTER OF THE DAY - Great news from Tampa

Kudos to our city for expanding the recycling program. I had written previously about my disappointment in the lack of commercial recycling. However, I have received a letter from the residential department advising us that we will be receiving 96-gallon bins on wheels for purposes of recycling. Great news! This is a great enhancement to this program and will undoubtedly bring about a huge increase in recycling. Making the program more user-friendly is the key to greater success.

Sydney Montgomery Bell
Another resident commented on his anticipation for receiving the green carts:

“I keep 2 indoor garbage cans in the house, 1 for recycling and 1 for non-recyclable. The Recycling gets taken out twice a week, and papers and plastic milk jugs added without the bag.....We have 3 recycling bins that are full each week, with bags on top of them, we only take the non-recyclables out about every 2 to 3 weeks......I’ll be glad when they finishing distributing the big green bins for recycling in South Tampa, it will certainly make my life easier...”

Mitchel Banks, TBO.com – April 27, 2013, 10:24 a.m.

**Measuring Success**

The communications goals set forth in the planning stage were met or surpassed during program implementation.

**Goal 1:** Create awareness of the January 2013 launch of “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!”

- **10 media impressions** – Outlets include Tampa Bay Times, Tampa Tribune, City of Tampa Television, FOX 13
- **20 public information meetings** – This led to additional publications of articles in neighborhood newsletters
- **109,000 direct mail pieces** – Including letters addressed to each residence affected and reminder postcards

**Goal 2:** Communicate the advantages of the transition to automated carted recycling

- Key messages were addressed in all 10 media impressions
- Key messages were also mentioned in all direct mail pieces and on the program Website

**Goal 3:** Double the documented curbside residential recycling rate in the City of Tampa

- With the launch of “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!”, recycling participation has more than doubled in the city of Tampa. Recycling participation is now 70% citywide, up 37% from the citywide recycling participation rate in 2011.
Improvements

We are continually working to improve communications in relation to the launch of carted recycling in Tampa. Some improvements for better communications include branding the City’s recycling trucks to serve as a constant reminder of the “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” program, and developing an effective way to use new and electronic media to develop two-way communications with residents.

Replication in Other Communities

The “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” communications plan can be replicated in other communities. We’ve found that the most effective means of communicating with our residents is to meet them in their own communities. Carving out time to talk one-on-one with the end users is invaluable in gaining buy-in and clearing up misconceptions. Additionally, other communities can benefit from the embedded stickers that are on all of our carts which serve as a reminder and an education tool on recycling in the City of Tampa.
Appendix: Communications Tools

Be Smart, Use Your Cart Recycling Program

The City of Tampa has recently replaced the old blue recycling bins with a new 96-gallon green recycling cart.

If your residence has not yet received your green recycling cart, please call the Utility Customer Service Call Center at (813) 348-1111 to verify that your address is eligible and to request delivery.

- The green recycling carts will be serviced curbside in the same location where blue recycling bins were serviced. Green recycling carts will not be serviced in alleyways.
- Blue recycling bins will no longer be serviced. You must have a green recycling cart to participate in the curbside recycling program.
- If your blue recycling bin is not removed from your residence during cart distribution, please place the blue bin in your green recycling cart.

For more information please visit tampagov.net/SolidWaste.

(Left):
The “Be Smart, Use Your Cart!” reminder postcard was mailed to each residence on a route that transitioned to automated carted recycling. Sending the postcard resulted in many residents choosing to recycle for the first time.

(Below):
The Solid Waste website dedicated a page to the new program where browsers could find FAQs, maps and program information.

NEW!!! City of Tampa Introduces Automated Carted Recycling

In February 2013, the Department of Solid Waste & Environmental Program Management launched a new way to recycle. Be Smart, Use Your Cart is an exciting, new automated recycling program for City of Tampa residents. Over an 18-month period, the 14-gallon blue bins currently used to store recyclables at the curb will be replaced with a 95-gallon green recycling cart, complete with technology that will make them easier to track.

A 95-gallon recycling cart holds more recyclables, reduces litter, and easily rolls to the curb and back. Automated carted recycling offers a more efficient and effective collection process for the City, and is safer for refuse drivers. Automated recycling also helps to promote a more sustainable community.
Appendix: Communications Tools

**BE SMART USE YOUR CART~ AUTOMATED RECYCLING PROGRAM**

**CART SETOUT INSTRUCTIONS**
Place your recycling cart at the curb with the handle facing your residence the night before your recycling collection day, or by 6 a.m. on the collection day. Cart must be clear of parked vehicles, trees, and other obstructions that may exist around or above the cart. After collection, remove your cart from the curb to a storage location on your property by sunset on the collection day.

**PLASTIC**
- All plastics accepted.
- Remove caps and lids and place them separately inside your recycling container. Discard liquid & food residue, and rinse containers. Labels do not need to be removed.
  **NOTE:** Grocery bags are not accepted.

**GLASS**
- All glass accepted.
- Discard liquids & corks, and rinse containers. Remove caps and lids and place them separately inside your recycling container. Labels do not need to be removed.

**FIBER**
- Paper & cardboard accepted.
- Discard box liners and remaining food contents. Fold or cut cardboard to fit in the recycling container.

**METAL**
- Aluminum & steel accepted.
- Discard liquids & food residue, and rinse containers. Empty aerosol cans with spray nozzle. Large metal caps and lids may be recycled. Labels do not need to be removed.

**FOR YOUR INFORMATION**
- Removing caps from containers prevents them from becoming projectiles as containers are compressed into bails.
- Removing plastic grocery bags from the recycling carts prevents them from becoming tangled in machinery as recycling is sorted and processed. **Plastic grocery bags can be recycled at most local grocery stores.**
- Removing box liners prevents wax from contaminating paper as it is processed and recycled.
- Household chemicals, and appliances are **not accepted** and should not be mixed with regular recycling or trash.

For additional information, please call the City of Tampa Consolidated Call Center at (813) 348-1111 or Visit us on the web at www.tampagov.net/dept_solid_waste

*The above sticker is UV-protected and embedded in the lid of each recycling cart to remind residents, in visual form, of what they can recycle.*
Appendix: Communications Tools

Be Smart, Use Your Cart!
Phase II

Residential Automated Carted Recycling Program

Old Seminole Heights Neighborhood Association
April 23, 2013

(Left): Presentation used for public information meetings regarding the new program.

(Below): Brochure explaining the do’s and don’ts of recycling in the City of Tampa.