

Implementation of an Air Quality Ethic: The Spare the Air Resource Team Project Case Study

The Problem

Over the past few decades the San Francisco Bay Area experienced an expanding population, with the attendant increase in the number of automobiles, and an increase in both traffic congestion and ground level ozone pollution, or smog. Exceedences of federal air quality standards for ozone occurred dozens of times annually throughout the 1970's and 1980's. In this same time period, government regulation of industrial sources of air pollution greatly expanded leaving mobile sources of pollution – mainly automobiles – as the primary source of smog.

In response, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (Air District) decided to implement a public awareness campaign to educate residents about air pollution and to encourage them to be a voluntary part of the solution. A request for proposal for a public outreach campaign designed to move residents toward lifestyle changes was issued and Community Focus was awarded the contract in 1991.

What We Did

The *Spare the Air* program was designed by Community Focus, using innovative community organizing techniques as well as traditional public relations and advertising to mobilize community support for the lifestyle changes necessary to reduce air pollution in one of the nation's most beautiful metropolitan areas. From 1991-2002 we managed all aspects of the *Spare the Air* program, including community outreach, direct outreach to employers, media and advertising.

Starting in 2002, Community Focus turned its attention exclusively to the *Spare the Air* community outreach program (our organizational focus and specialty). The main component of the community outreach program includes county-based air quality “resource teams.” These resource teams, as partners with the Air District, disseminate the clean air message to their communities and work to create a clean air ethic. They also provide contributions (resources such as money, expertise and in-kind support) to the *Spare the Air* campaign. Currently, there are six *Spare the Air* resource teams. We use a combination of facilitation techniques and community organizing skills to create and sustain the resource teams. Air District staff members also play a supporting role, attending some team meetings and providing technical expertise.

Why We Chose This Process

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We chose the resource team approach because it maximizes the effectiveness and reach of available resources. We were confident that the participation of community and business leaders on resource teams could effect the behavior change promoted by the *Spare the Air* campaign.

The resource team approach involves recruiting community leaders – including representatives from business, government and civic organizations – to implement public policy and long-term social change not by simply analyzing problems or proposing solutions, but by actually implementing solutions using the shared resources that the resource team members themselves possess (time, energy, expertise, money and connections). This method was chosen because the use of community leaders on resource teams helped mobilize the behavior change that the *Spare the Air* advertising and media campaign was encouraging.

The resource team process is four-fold: 1) identify a problem and bring community stakeholders together to form a resource team; 2) work with the resource team to investigate the problem and chose and plan projects to address the problem; 3) support the resource team project by gathering resources and facilitating project implementation and 4) achieve results, with community members having both input and involvement in solutions.

Results/Outcomes

Pollution Reduction

- Traffic reduction at schools in Contra Costa County (1994), Sonoma County (2003-ongoing) and Santa Clara County (2004-ongoing)
- Traffic reduction at business parks such as the reducing lunchtime trips project in Santa Clara County (1995), vanpool incentive programs in Napa and Sonoma counties (2003-2004) and a commute alternatives project in South Alameda County (2006)
- Traffic reduction aimed at tourists, such as the San Francisco/San Mateo MUNI to Golden Gate Park (1996), and the Transit to Trails (2001) maps and car free tourism websites in Napa (2004-ongoing) and San Francisco (2005-ongoing)
- Pollution reduction aimed at off-road sources of pollution such as lawnmower exchange events beginning in Napa and Solano counties (1997-1998) and ordinances to reduce use of lawnmowers and leaf blowers on Spare the Air days in Petaluma and San Francisco (1998)

Business Education

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- Employer breakfast workshops in all nine Bay Area counties (1991-1998)
- Transit and commuter resource guides for business employees in Alameda County (2001-2003)
- Commuter Choice Tax Benefits guide for businesses in the Tri-Valley area (2002-2003)
- Advisory relationship with Chamber of Commerce in Napa County (2003-ongoing)

Education and Media

- Whale bus tours for pre-school age children at Earth Day fairs in Marin County (1993 and 1996-1998)
- Cloud Guy Coloring Book distribution at elementary schools throughout the Bay Area (1996)
- Press conference for release of Commuter Choice Tax Benefits Guide (2003)
- SUV/Bike race in Santa Clara County, promoting commute alternatives (2003)
- Great Race for Clean Air, promoting multiple modes of transportation (2005, 2006)

Lessons Learned

1. **Don't be daunted by a limited budget.**
Significant change in long-term behavior can be accomplished on a shoestring. Making the most of the creativity and resources of the team will assure success despite a small budget.
2. **If you build it, they will come.**
Community members can become more invested in the interest of public agencies and voluntarily promote shared goals with their own resources when they see the value and positive impact of the work
3. **Long-term change takes long-term commitment.**
Organizing communities to promote long-term behavioral change requires serious commitment of resources and ongoing attention. Recruitment is a constant need and teams that have lost facilitative and financial support have ceased to exist.
4. **Adapt to change.**
Sustaining a long-term outreach effort like the *Spare the Air* resource teams requires
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constant adaptation to the needs of the funding agency and the local communities - economic downturns have limited the resources of the teams in both membership and the scope of projects.

In Closing

The *Spare the Air* Resource Teams have proven to be remarkable successes. The teams have survived over the long-term and individual participants have been willing to give of their resources generously. Some team members have served on resource teams for the entire fifteen-year history of the project! Team members have also been made more aware of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District both as an institution and agent for change. Participation on the teams has led to sustained behavioral change at the worksites of team members and in the local communities in which they have been active.