Engaging Communities:
Grahame Collier

Abstract
This paper provides some hints for those involved in waste management about how to engage communities more effectively

Unlike some other aspects of the waste business engaging your community is an inexact science; it is a mixture of science and art. Like most of the remainder of our profession activities there are specialist skills in the design, delivery and evaluation of community engagement that are well understood and used effectively.

Engaging the community in an educative or other waste management process aimed at changing behaviour is a crucial element of the work of those employed in councils, other government agencies, the waste industry and those in the community interested in waste issues. High quality engagement involves defining your target audience. developing clear objectives for your activity and matching your engagement strategies to the needs and interests of your audience. Most often it is designed to encourage appropriate behaviour.

Introduction
Engaging our community is a challenge for all of us. How often do we say or hear our colleagues say that they have a problem in getting people to engage. It might be that they say:

"I can't get the contamination rate down."
"Why can't I get people to come to my education event?"
"Plastic bags are a major problem but there is no way people will accept the banning of them."
How do get people to compost more?

It might be that all of these challenges and many others that we face in the waste business are actually a problem of engagement. This paper provides some hints about how to engage the community more in your program.

Planning Your Engagement Program
Just like any other aspect of our work engaging the community must be planned in a detailed and fulsome manner. Effective engagement does not just happen. An immense amount of hard work goes into its planning. While there is no blue print, every program should have a tangible plan of what it is intending to do with whom and how it is intending to do it and evaluate it. Just advertising an event or service and expecting people to turn up or comply is not enough. People are generally time poor and so the traditional method of *"just telling them"* is not longer effective.

There are some steps involved in effectively engaging your community and these are outlined below.

Step 1: What Might You Want to Engage the Community About?
As far as waste management is concerned course this depends on your business or your specific project. In general terms, when you engage your audience [customer] you may want them to do some or all of the following:

- Comply with an existing service [e.g. recycle appropriately and not contaminate the system].
- Accept a change in service [e.g. comply with new waste services as they are introduced]
- Seek input, opinion and/or advice [e.g. community consultation about new waste contract].
- Change their behaviour to reduce waste [e.g. avoid waste generation]
- Change their behaviour to undertake a different activity [for example, compost.
- Enhance the credibility [marketing capacity] of the company or council.

The first issue for you to consider in community engagement is to be clear about what you are trying to do. It may be that you want to achieve more than one objective, through your efforts. If that is the case identify them and rank them in order of priority.

In essence, the answer to the question, "what do you want to engage the community about" identifies the problem or issue you are trying to address. Good planning always starts at this point. It is essential to know what you are trying to engage them about. What is the problem you are trying to solve; what is the problem behaviour?

Step 2: Who Are You Trying to Engage?
Before starting to engage people it is essential that you define your target audience as precisely as possible. The first step is to obtain a good demographic profile. You need to know and understand a number of basic facts about your audience including their:

- age
- gender
- education level
- socio-economic profile
- living situation [e.g. quarter acre blocks, multi unit dwellings/owners, renters etc]
- current behaviours that relate to your intended program

But high quality engagement strategies involve going beyond a mere demographic profile. You also need to be aware of a lot of other information, for example:

- How your audience learns/takes on new information? For example, is it community the media [local or mainstream and which one]
- Where they currently receive information/messages from?
- Do they read pamphlets, newspapers etc?
- Who are the champions within their community; will they listen to these people?
- Are there other programs or social norms that you can build your program on the back of?

- Who makes the waste related decisions and undertakes waste related actions?
- What are the barriers to people changing their current behaviour and taking up a more desirable behaviour?

In designing any community engagement process it is important to talk with stakeholders in order to define your audience closely. There are people out there who know things about your audience that you need to know. Find them and talk with them. Pick their brains about who it is you are trying to educate and how you reach them.

When defining your audience don't hesitate to ask them too "who they are," You may need to structure time into existing forums for this to occur effectively

Sometimes much of the material you want is already available in council or elsewhere. But be a little skeptical about it and interrogate it fully so that you get the best profile possible.

Step 3: What motivates people to be engaged?
People's willingness to engage is affected by a range of motivators. These are listed below and the mix will be different for every person in every situation.

- Passion. Personal values
- Crisis
- Knowledge of the issue
- Regulation, laws and fines
- Kids [concern for the well being of future generations]
- Proximity to the problem
- Others views and actions. Community champions, peers and normative behaviour
- Dollars [financial impact]

We have lots of motivators for engagement going for us. While it is clear that we would be wise to use whatever motivator possible to drive people's behaviour, which motivator works best to engage people about a specific issue is a key question.

While in this paper it is impossible to answer this question for every specific situation the table below provides some detail about how each of these motivators might be used to engage the community in a behaviour change process.

Engagement By….	Example….	Comment.
Engagement by Crisis or Event	■ Local landfill has to close because it is full	Crises hurt and it's hard to manufacture them. When crises occur it is important to use them to promote more responsible programs. However in most circumstances it is not appropriate to

		base the whole education program on them; or when the crisis passes so will the program.
Engagement by hip pocket	■ Paying what it really costs ■ User pays ■ Incentives, rebates and subsidies ■ Financial Rewards	Hip pockets and political/ organisational credibility are always intertwined. If the community is being asked to pay more then related education is required to explain why and to seek community support.
Engagement by knowledge	■ Information provision ■ Appealing to a rational, common-sense response ■ Just explain and they will do…	While knowledge is an important issue too much information can be counter productive; Some people know lots but "don't always do" OR "don't always do what they know." We often present too much information and people just don't read it
Engagement by attitudes and feelings	■ Passion ■ Concern for future generations ■ Motivation and visible activity	"Passion" works for some people some of the time. Early adopters and champions of waste avoidance in the community are often motivated by passion. But it is not necessarily a useful tool for others because sometimes it gets in the way and puts people off.
Engagement by regulation,	■ Penalties and offences	These do have a deterrent affect on behaviour when they are visible and appropriately enforced. Litter reduction programs provide good examples of this They establish a benchmark for what the community is prepared to accept. BUT just having a law on the statutes without enforcement is useless.

Step 4: Identifying what are the Barriers to Engagement?
To create an effective engagement process it is important to identify the barriers that may inhibit your audience from engaging in the behaviour/s that you wish to encourage. The more information you are able to obtain about the barriers inhibiting the take up of the desired behaviours, the greater chance you have for success in meeting your programs objectives.

So how do you go about identifying the barriers? For larger programs the following steps are recommended:

- There has been research carried out in Australia and overseas relating to the barriers for a variety of behaviours, so initially a literature review should be conducted.
- Following this, qualitative research through focus groups and observational studies may be carried out to scope the deeper attitudes and behaviours of your target audience.
- If you then wish to further enhance the knowledge you have on the barriers in your community further reliable information may be obtained by undertaking surveys of the proposed audience specific to the needs of your project.

For smaller more local programs a simple method is to identify your key local stakeholders [see above] and ask them specifically what till get in the way of the community engaging in a program. Talk with them; seek their views on what to do about the problem.

So that you can see the point of this step, some examples of the barriers that you might identify through this process are listed below. Note that this list is illustrative only and is not exhaustive.

- The audience are already recycling and so think they are doing enough
- The audience may have a low level reading ability; therefore to distribute a brochure requiring a high reading age would be a waste of time.
- The audience might not be able to attend evening events if child care is not provided; therefore run events at other times and/or provide child care.
- The audience do not read English well; therefore print material needs to be low literacy or translated into community languages.
- The audience do not place a high priority on acting on the waste as an issue that you want to focus on; therefore you have to raise their interest in the issue before you expect education to cause them to behave differently.
- The audience accept the need and the issue but don't know what to do about it; therefore education needs to be directed at providing realistic, alternative behaviours and not to waste time on explaining the need.

You need to ensure that your program is designed in such a way as to avoid or deal directly with these barriers.

Step 5: Developing your Goals Objectives and Outcomes
To conduct effective engagement programs you have to know what you are intending to do and what you are intending to achieve by doing it.

What you are intending to do is a *goal* and this can be broken down into *objectives* that when fulfilled will mean that the goal is achieved. What you have achieved at the end of a program are the *outcomes*.

Therefore a program that you might conduct might be shaped as outlined in the following example:

Goal: By 2007 all residents in the …….will increase resource recovery by 20%

Objectives: As a result of the water education program residents will:
- Increase compliance with kerbside recycling programs
- Recycle an additional 20% of paper, glass and metal products
- Install a worm farm or compost bin on site
- Reduce the amount of household waste that is collected in the general council clean up by 20%

Outcomes
These will measure the extent to which the objectives have been met. They are stated as outcomes of the program. For example 7% of the people started composting at home. This means that in total X% of people have dual flush toilets.

Goals objectives and outcomes always relate to the knowledge, skills and/or attitudes that you want to achieve through the program. They do not relate to the methods of how you are going to achieve these things. For example many people think that "distributing 2000 brochures" is a program objective. This is not the case. It is a method of the program; it indicates how we are going to deliver our program. The objective is what reading the brochure is going to help people to know, to believe or to do.

All projects must clearly state goals and objectives. Outcomes should be identified and measured. Engagement strategies must be used to develop these aims, objectives and outcomes and to orient the community towards their achievement.

Step 6: Plan and Deliver your Program
Once you have got to here you are ready to actually decide what you are going to do to engage the community. It seems crazy that you will have gone through the preceding five steps before you can even start but if you don't your engagement process will be a poor one

At this stage you will know how engagement will happen. Will it:
- be by print or face to face means?
- use other electronic processes; television, text messages web pages or email
- use letter box drops or demonstration events
- involve people talking with each other or attending workshops

The methods will become clear through the process of development of the engagement strategy.

Conclusion
Strategic, quality community engagement has significant benefits and outcomes. Though it you can identify the problem that is to be addressed and they intervene in the most

appropriate ways to address that problem with the audience. Community engagement promotes change. This is not to suggest that hunches, intuition and professional judgments don't play a part in good program design. In fact, they are vital at the right time and used in the right way. However they should be based on a knowledge and understanding of who the community is and how you might best engage them.

References: The following references are important reading for those involved in delivering and evaluating education.

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About the Author
Grahame Collier is the Director of T Issues Consultancy, a private company specialising in education and training. He was previously the Director of Industry and Community Education at the NSW Environment Protection Authority. He is currently the President of the Australian Association of Environmental Education.