

Case study: Community Engagement through Doorstepping

Authority: Bexley Council
Theme: Waste and Recycling
Beacon round seven

Overview of authority

Bexley Council is a Unitary Authority in London that has a population of 220,000. Bexley has gained Beacon Status in waste twice now, the first time in 1999. It has a history of good practice in waste and recycling and currently recycles over 37 per cent of its waste. This makes it among the highest recycling urban council's in the United Kingdom, including the highest in London in four out of the last five years. This success is underpinned by:

- its comprehensive urban cutting-edge recycling services
- the Council's corporate processes that drive performance
- the development of markets for waste materials
- the management of waste on its own premises

Bexley has also used imaginative ways to ensure that all sections of the community are actively engaged in recycling. The authority has an impressive Schools Waste Action Club and Waste Minimisation and Recycling Focus Group. It operates an extensive door stepping campaign with the authority's recycling wardens each achieving over 500 visits per week. This case study will look at doorstepping as a tool to engage the community face to face.

What has been achieved?

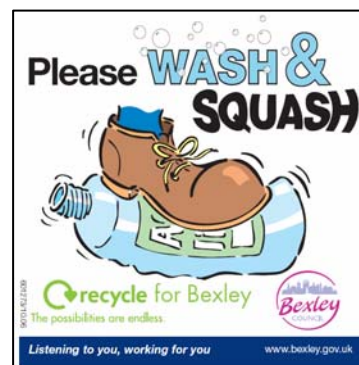
There are about 93,000 households in Bexley of which 15,000 are flats. The participation rates vary from fairly high levels in the south of the borough to very low levels to the north. Most of the high-rise flats are concentrated in the north of the borough. Flats are generally regarded as the councils hard to reach environments and most of them are occupied by hard to engage communities. Although the council had high recycling rates it was noted that service delivery in flats and estates was poor and participation was therefore very low. Bexley's normal standards of communication were not reaching this sector of the community. The council obtained internal funding through the Waste Performance Efficiency Grant (WPEG) and external funding from Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to undertake a comprehensive doorstepping campaign. Rather than generalising the message, the council took a conscious decision to have targeted and intensive campaigns for each section of the borough. For the houses in the south of the borough, where participation was high, the message focused on increasing the capture rates. The improved kitchen and garden waste collection service, which now includes meat & fish was heavily promoted. The messages conveyed to the houses in the north of the borough were about increasing participation.

The flats campaign focused on:

- understanding the barriers to recycling and tackling them
- raising awareness of the services
- service delivery improvements
- general improvements of the environment around the most deprived estates in the borough

Different leaflets were produced to reinforce the messages

- the “Scrape your Plate” leaflet targeted food waste
- the “Wanted” leaflet targeted glass bottles and jars
- the “Wash & Squash” sticker encouraged households to crush bottled and cans to increase the numbers that could be collected by the dry recyclables collection service



For the flats the council produced a Flat Recycling Guide that explains the service offered to flats and how easy and convenient it can be to take part in.

Campaign outcomes:

1. Houses (all borough)

- 34,150 houses visited and 13,277 residents interviewed
- 2,871 new boxes requests
- 50.5 per cent increase in participation on average across all services
- 27 per cent increase in material levels on average across all services
- 45 per cent decrease in contamination on average across all services
- 11.3 per cent increase in tonnage for organics year on year comparisons
- 67.5 per cent increase in tonnage of glass pre and post campaign
- 18.7 per cent increase in tonnage of dry-recyclables pre and post campaign
- 15.7 per cent increase in tonnage of paper pre and post campaign

2. Flats (all borough)

- 1,362 residents interviewed in Committed Recycler Survey (CRS)
- 27.1 per cent Committed Recyclers
- 56.5 per cent aware of Bexley's estate recycling services
- 59.1 per cent claimed participation in recycling in general
- four focus group meetings held.
- a better local collection service cited as the most common factor that would motivate people to start recycling or recycle more
- lack of communication from council cited as the most common reason for not being aware of recycling services

Service delivery tips

Do's:

- secure adequate resources to deliver the project through internal or external sources of funding
- tailor your messages to the audience
- undertake a targeted campaign rather than a blanket one
- engage specialist partners to deliver the campaign and assume a strategic role
- take time to establish barriers through a consultation process with residents and tackle them as a priority. Project partners are very critical in this aspect as they have an outside view of the issue and are not as distrusted by residents like council officers
- make contingency plans for infrastructure delivery there will be lots of requests as result of interest generated by campaign
- improve service delivery in order to maintain the increased level of interest
- pictorial leaflets are more effective in reinforcing the message

Don'ts:

- never do a blanket campaign; it's a waste of resources.
- one size never fits all in service delivery
- in meeting with residents, never promise what you can't deliver on, it increases mistrust
- never underestimate the level of interest the campaign can generate otherwise you'll be caught short either on service delivery or infrastructure availability (e.g. adequate level of containers and prompt delivery if requested).

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