



NYC Materials Exchange Development Program

Strengthening NYC's materials exchange and reuse sector

Proceedings Summary from the 2008 NYC Materials Exchange Conference

On Wednesday, November 5th 2008 the NYC Materials Exchange Development Program (MEDP) hosted the second annual NYC Materials Exchange Conference. The event was held at The City College of New York (CCNY) and was funded by NYC Department of Sanitation (DSNY) Bureau of Waste Prevention, Reuse and Recycling. The conference brought together NYC's reuse organizations to explore approaches to improve operations, develop sector strategies, and connect with colleagues.

Welcoming Remarks

The day began with opening comments given by Dr. Vasil Diyamandoglu, an Environmental Engineer at CCNY and the Executive Director of MEDP. Dr. Diyamandoglu spoke about urban sustainability and the role reuse has played in moving the City towards a more sustainable future. After briefly highlighting the day's events, he introduced MaryEllen Etienne, Managing Director of MEDP, who delivered the first presentation.

Presentation: Looking Back, Moving Forward

Ms. Etienne's presentation outlined MEDP's activities of the course of the previous year. Beginning briefly with an overview of MEDP's mission to strengthening the materials exchange and reuse sector, Ms. Etienne then explained how projects, such as the sector assessment report, capacity-building workshops, online resources, and the annual conference, had provided vital support to the reuse sector.

Ms. Etienne then highlighted several initiatives being developed by MEDP. These include the Materials Exchange Certificate Program, the Data Management Project, a members-only communications forum, online resources, and the third annual conference. The online resources include a Reuse Sector listserve/discussion forum, and several downloadable "How To" documents that provide a range of business development advice.

Ms. Etienne also touched upon another projects undertaken by MEDP. These include the creation of the NYC Reuse Directory (a comprehensive booklet profiling MEDP's members that can assist with public and intra-sector referrals) and provision of material donation referrals through its operation of NY WasteMatch. MEDP's education programs, such as the master's course being held at CCNY and our student sustainability club, have also been a part of our commitment to promoting reuse in NYC.

Panel: New Lessons & Best Practices

The first panel, a conversation between diverse constituents of NYC's reuse sector, was moderated by David Hirschler of DSNY. The panel focused on best practices and lessons learned in all phases of reuse operations - from start-up operations and gaining support for organizational change, volunteer management to increasing awareness, managing effective operations in a limited space and creating effective strategic partnerships.

The panelists included Robert Crocker, Director of Catholic Charities Community Services; Mauricio Hernandez, Senior Vice President Retail Sales of Goodwill Industries; Martin Nichols, Operations Manager of Recycle-A-Bicycle; Eva Radke, Executive Director of Film Biz Recycling; and Lisa Stein, Executive Director of Recycle-A-Bicycle.

Ms. Radke began the discussion speaking on the challenges of starting a new reuse organization, while Mr. Crocker shared his experiences of taking an existing one and gaining support to move it towards a greener initiative. Ms. Stein and Mr. Nichols added their viewpoints on the best methods for outreach and visibility of a mid-level program, as well as building core staff with volunteer services. Mr. Hernandez spoke on the opportunities and challenges that are unique to the New York region, having spent a significant time operating a large organization both in the area and elsewhere. During these discussions the audience was provided a variety of examples of methods to expand capacity, such as strategic partnerships opportunities, trend watching, and setting up community outreach programs which provide skills training for volunteers services.

Ms. Radke specifically talked about the challenges she met starting Film Biz, and advised new organizations on the benefits of utilizing all existing contacts, regardless of a direct relation to organizational goals. In addition, Ms. Radke stressed, most importantly, the need for an attorney consultation as a first step towards protecting and legitimizing an organization early. This step, Ms. Radke stated, can move an idea into fruition at a much greater pace, saving time and money.

Mr. Crocker added to Ms. Radke's comments about contacts, by stating that he had expanded his program from a small thrift shop to full-scale materials reuse program by linking to the broader networks of reuse and environmental sustainability – which allowed his program gain the support of its larger parent organization. Mr. Crocker highlighted the importance of participation in collaborative strategies, such as within the Reuse Sector, in order to gain support and expand capacity of an organization.

Ms. Stein agreed with Mr. Crocker and added that public relations networks, such as green business associations and MEDP, provided good opportunities to serve as an outreach tool as well. Ms. Stein stressed the power of word-of-mouth and new media outreach; through volunteers and through 'You Tube' and Recycle-A-Bicycle's website. Posting images and success stories on these platforms not only provided public platforms to what the organization does, it also allowed information to be easily

forwarded to a viewers' associates. Mr. Nichols reiterated that this word-of-mouth outreach was also effective in terms of locating volunteers. By teaching volunteers skills that they can use, in addition to offering a product to them as a client, this offers an effective strategy for not only retaining volunteers, but also an outreach tool by which volunteers can show off their work and in turn provide a forum for further promotion.

Mr. Hernandez talked about the how the unique challenges of the NYC area, including transportation, required his organization to establish a simultaneously centralized *and* decentralized organization. This required each location of his organization to develop a semi self-sufficient program. As a result, this created an increase in strategic partnerships of each location within its local community. Mr. Hernandez also mentioned that these partnerships also recently have helped create national partnerships, such as the current computer take back partnership between Goodwill and Dell Computers. These strategic partnerships, Mr. Hernandez pointed out, are critical to the expansion of organizational capacity, as they serve to provide flexibility as well as a means of tracking specific trends within the sector necessary for survival.

Presentation: Data Management Project

Ben Rose, Member Services Coordinator for MEDP, provided an update on the Data Management Project called "Measure Your Treasure". The project was first proposed at the 2007 NYC Materials Exchange Conference. This project marks the first collective data management project for NYC reuse sector, and will create a software tool that would be accessible to all MEDP members. This project will create a common language (or data standard) for the sector, and provide a tool to manage data, such as inventory and contacts. In addition, the project will provide a platform for sharing information on excess and unwanted donations. Mr. Rose highlighted the three stages of this two year project, which encompasses a needs assessment, development and implementation, and outreach.

Mr. Rose informed the attendees that the first phase, needs assessment, was begun by reviewing the report from the Sector Assessment Project (SAP). The SAP statistically showed the need of over half (56%) of NYC reuse organizations for a new or better system, and an overwhelming need (71%) for increasing opportunities for networking and surplus sharing materials. In addition, Mr. Rose pointed out that results from the SAP suggest that improved technology resources would allow the sector to track and report on key data. Using this information, MEDP established the data management working group which followed through with the process of examining the specific needs of participating organizations and the sector as a whole. After defining the needs MEDP developed a funding proposal, which is currently is under review by Empire State Development.

Mr. Rose then walked attendees through the next two phases of the project, development & implementation and outreach (these phases are pending until MEDP receives funding). Once funded, MEDP will hire a contractor to work with participants and MEDP in developing a modular, scalable and expandable software system. The contractor that will be hired will create a customizable system that meets the diverse

needs of individual reuse organizations, and provides an agile development process, offers a maintenance package, and user friendly guides. Mr. Rose concluded by noting that the project would create a communication and data management system that would be easily accessible, flexible to diverse needs, and could guarantee long-term affordability for MEDP members.

Presentation: Materials Exchange Certificate Program

The second presentation unveiled the new Materials Exchange Certificate Program. This presentation was delivered by Stacey Lea Flanagan, a consultant working with MEDP staff to develop and implement the program. Ms. Flanagan spoke about how this series of interactive workshops, was designed to improve the effectiveness of NYC's materials exchange organizations and had been developed as a direct result of feedback received from the Sector Assessment Project (SAP); the 2007 Materials Exchange Conference; and the recent workshops (i.e. Low/No Cost Marketing Strategies and Nonprofit Liabilities).

Ms. Flanagan explained that this training opportunity is open to programmatic and administrative staff. It is designed to provide technical assistance, which will not only improve the participant's individual skills in strategic thinking, marketing, fundraising, and program development, but will also improve organizational operations and long-term growth within the sector.

The series includes seven workshops which will be interactive, group-work oriented and approximately three hours long. The topics covered will include: Goal Setting & Effective Planning; Board Development & Volunteer Management; Marketing; Taxes, Risk & Liabilities; Budgeting & Fundraising; Warehousing & Logistics; Program Evaluation & Reporting Success.

Ms. Flanagan mentioned that while training is free, thanks to support from DSNY's Bureau of Waste Prevention, Reuse & Recycling, there is an application process that requires the submission of the participant's application (i.e. contact information, a personal statement, and resume) and a supervisor's recommendation. The first workshop will begin on December 18th 2008.

Panel: Meet the Grantmakers

The second panel, a discussion with leading grantmakers in NYC, was moderated by Dana Lanza, Executive Director of the Environmental Grantmakers Association. The panel focused nurturing mutually beneficial relationships with grantmakers as well as how the current economic climate is affecting grantmakers and grantseekers.

The panelists were Mark Bodden, Vice President and Program Director of the Rudin Foundations; Hugh Hogan, Executive Director of North Star Fund; John Filippelli, Chief of the US EPA Region 2 Strategic Planning and Multi-Media Programs; Linda Jacobs of Empire State Development Environmental Services Unit; and Kyle Ridaught, former Director of Strategic Planning and Senior Vice President of Corporate Philanthropy for Lehman Brothers. After each panelist had introduced themselves, explaining their

relationship to the reuse sector, Ms. Lanza led the discussion by asking a series of questions first relating to grant proposals then to the current economic condition.

Mr. Bodden began the discussion by speaking about the aspects that make a proposal attractive to grantmakers, such as keeping an application concise and familiarizing oneself to the guidelines and sticking with them. Specifically, Mr. Bodden stressed that it was necessary to demystify and educate oneself as much as possible with the grantmaking process in order to reach success – in other words “know the funders guidelines”. Mr. Ridaught followed up on Mr. Bodden’s comments by adding that knowing the funder relationship timeline and sticking with it is critical to success in grantseeking. Mr. Ridaught recommending that grant seekers should learn how to “get in and get out gracefully,” suggesting that by reporting regularly, by asking for approval to reapply and by understanding a proposal’s “return on investment” your organization can “leave the door open” for reapplying in the future. Ms. Jacobs added that in terms of her own organization, the more quantifiable the data provided by the grant seeking organization, the better the chances of an application getting accepted. Knowing what specifically (e.g. tons diverted from the waste stream) grantmakers are looking for in reports, and an organization’s capacity to report those statistics, will give any organization an advantage in preparing themselves for a long-term relationship with a funder.

The panel then focused its attentions on the economy, its current and anticipated effects on the grantmaking, and advice to those seeking grants at this time. Mr. Filippelli began by commenting on how grant making has changed over the years, mentioning that both the increased requirements of metrics for reporting has formalized and increased competition for grants over the years. He added that partnerships will be the “crucial element to survival” during the economic downturn. All of the panelists agreed.

Ms. Jacobs mentioned specifically, in agreement with Mr. Ridaught’s comment earlier, that her agency seeks to give grants with a high likelihood of success or ROI, such as the further development of continuing organizations or new organizations partnering with existing organizations. Mr. Hogan mentioned that the biggest changes he sees as a result of difficult economic times would be that reuse organizations will need to begin connecting with environmental justice causes. All panelists agreed that watching these trends, and partnering with other organizations, is the best way to secure funding at this time. Adding to this, Mr. Ridaught encouraged organizations to also pay close attention to companies and foundations, which particularly have begun to focus on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Realizing which companies are at the forefront of CSR will help organizations greatly in raising funds during this economic down turn.

Strategy Session

The day’s events concluded with a break out session that considered sector concerns related to the current economic climate and how to work collaboratively so we can meet these challenges. This session was facilitated by MaryEllen Etienne and included further examination of issues previously addressed, as well as any other topics that hadn’t been addressed.

Attendees were divided into two groups, and each group was asked to create a list of possible collaborative solutions to the issues facing individual organizations and the sector as a whole. The top three ideas included: (a) increasing resource sharing and referrals; (b) developing collaborative initiatives in fundraising and outreach strategies; and (c) utilizing existing low/no-cost resources that were readily available (see Appendix 1 for the list of strategies discussed).

To increase resource sharing and referrals, attendees suggested that members share existing resources and surpluses, such as staff and materials. For accessing and sharing materials Ms. Etienne suggested that members utilize NY WasteMatch. Other proposed solutions were to utilize the sector-based listserv in order to expand intra-sector communications and referrals, as well as to create a jobs board.

To develop collaborative initiatives in fundraising and outreach strategies, attendees suggested to utilize the current reuse directory as a joint marketing tool; starting a strategic partnership working group within the sector; and to connect, as a sector, with community networks (e.g. VOAD, Urban Agenda). Attendees also suggested a regular reuse roundtable, so that sector leaders can come together in regular meetings to discuss funding opportunities and plan outreach campaigns and events which combine resources for the benefit of the entire sector.

To utilize existing low/no-cost resources, attendees suggested reaching out to the moving industry and creating potential partnerships there. In addition, the idea of sharing information of volunteers was mentioned. It was also suggested that a future goal of the sector should be the creation of a data management system and a single website where all websites are linked (e.g. donatenyc.org) Ms. Etienne added that MEDP will continue to disseminate information regarding free resources which can help the sector develop (e.g. MEDP's forum/listserv, workshops, and the proposed data management project 'Measure Your Treasure').

Closing Remarks

Ms. Etienne thanked everyone for coming and reiterated a few of the next steps for MEDP. The program will begin to develop programs in order to stimulate sector-wide resource collaborations. These will range from organizing a Reuse Directors Roundtable, following through with the proposed data management project and Materials Exchange Certificate Program, and beginning to set up a discussion board on the MEDP listserv to further development of the ideas discussed.

Reception

A networking reception followed the conference proceedings.

A Note on Funding

Please note that MEDP, which includes our work on the Sector Assessment Project, the 2008 NYC Materials Exchange Conference and future activities are funded by the NYC Department of Sanitation Bureau of Waste Prevention, Reuse and Recycling. The networking reception was sponsored by CCNY's Civil Engineering Department and Filco Carting.

Further Information

If you require any further information about this conference, the Data Management Project, the Materials Exchange Certificate Program, or other members services; or to request a copy of the NYC Reuse Directory, please contact:

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Appendix 1: Notes from MatExCon08 Breakout Sessions

The following strategies were developed by breakout session participants who answered the following question: ***What are some collaboration/partnerships strategies we could the reuse sector employ?***

MEDP staff has since placed these strategies into categories based on potential implementation timing.

Available Strategies

- Create joint marketing tool to promote sector (i.e. NYC Reuse Directory)
- Create and use sector-based Listserve (available through www.nycmedp.org)
- Share surplus materials and obsolete inventory / Materials sourcing (available through www.wastematch.org)
- Refer to MEDP; Have one website where we are all listed (available through www.nycmedp.org)
- Perform research (ongoing work performed by MEDP, ideas for new research is always welcome)

Immediately Implementable Strategies

- Create a jobs board / share job postings (will be available through www.nycmedp.org)
- Create a Working Group for Strategic Partnerships

Short-term Strategies

- Connect with community networks (e.g. VOAD, Urban Agenda)
- Connect with the moving industry
- Create a list of core competencies, make this available to sector
- Share volunteer resources

Mid-term Strategies

- Sharing Technology (e.g. Inventory and Communications Systems)
- Create one website where all of our website are linked (e.g. donatenyc.org)

Long-term Strategies

- Create a Community Reuse Complex
- Share transportation and logistics resources (e.g. trucks, drivers, insurance)
- Share staff (e.g. 2 P/T warehouse workers = 1 F/T position)