

water savings	revenue risk	ease of use	cost
low	low	easy	low

### How can Community Outreach benefit WDM in your Municipality?

Community outreach is a fundamental first step for increasing awareness and gaining public support for water demand management. Community outreach also plays a fundamental role in enhancing the planning and implementation success for most WDM initiatives. In other words, community outreach is a cross-cutting and ongoing WDM initiative. Some of the benefits of effective community outreach campaigns for WDM include:

- **Reaching water conservation targets:** Encouraging water-related behaviour change in customers – including increased uptake of municipal incentive programs – which can contribute to meeting the water conservation targets set by a municipality;
- **Increased awareness:** Fostering a public audience that is well-informed about municipal WDM initiatives, water resources, and the importance of water conservation;
- **Improved trust and support:** Building public support and trust in municipal water providers and initiatives (e.g. rate changes), a result of a well-informed public and increased transparency;
- **Public feedback:** Understanding customer preferences and other feedback that can be used to improve the design and delivery of WDM initiatives.

### What is Community Outreach?

Community outreach for WDM can run from the basic to the innovative. Targeting communications to your desired audience or particular water use can increase effectiveness, as can continually seeking out innovative approaches to attract your audience's attention.

Three types of community outreach activities are described below, with more in the "Idea Centre" box on the following page.

1. **Awareness Campaigns** – a typical awareness raising campaign uses local media (e.g. newspapers, newsletters, mail-outs, flyers), events, and other creative approaches (e.g. social media, web-based tactics) to communicate clear information to the broader public. The goal of the campaign could be to increase awareness about specific municipal WDM initiatives (e.g. watering bans, increased water rates or rebate programs) or general water-consciousness-raising information. General information could include helping resident and ICI water users better understand:
  - The life cycle of water supply resources (from source to tap);
  - The importance and need for water demand management (financial, social, environmental etc.);
  - Linkages with other systems (e.g. energy, wastewater, stormwater); and
  - The true costs of water – the infrastructure, operation and treatment costs involved in providing clean potable water to consumers.
2. **Narrowcasting Campaigns** – communities are typically made up groups or sectors of people and industries that differ in:
  - the way they use water resources;
  - the barriers that they perceive to reducing their water use; and
  - where they access their information.



REMODEL YOUR YARD.

Denver Water,  
2012

Narrowcasting involves identifying these specific user groups and behaviours and targeting your communication and outreach programs directly to those groups instead of to a broader audience. For example, campaigns targeting gardeners can be adapted to their knowledge of plants and the outdoors, and can be communicated through garden centres and other areas gardeners typically frequent. Other examples of influential groups of individuals in WDM include plumbers, builders, realtors, irrigation professionals and commercial operations.

**3. Community-Based Social Marketing (CBSM) Campaigns** – CBSM operates under the principle that “knowing” the right thing to do does not always equal “doing” the right thing. It goes beyond basic information transfer and uses a set of tools to overcome identified barriers and change behaviour.

Barriers are identified through social research to understand why a target audience does what they do, what their perceptions are towards water use and water rates and specific drivers of behaviour. Some CBSM tools include:

- Prompts – reminders for customers to engage in water conservation behaviour;
- Norms – change perceptions that the desired behaviour is the “right thing to do”;
- Communications – vivid communications with clear messages;
- Commitments – having residents commit to making the desired behaviour change;
- One-on-one contact – proven more effective at behaviour change than prompts alone.

#### Small Town Advantage

Small municipalities have a key advantage in terms of education and outreach about water conservation. Residents tend to be more engaged and involved in small communities where “everyone knows their neighbour.”

Small municipalities can take advantage of this by working with community leaders to pass along the water conservation message and lead by example.

#### Idea Centre: Community Outreach Activities

- Feature local conservation champions in the local media
- Take your water conservation message to local community events
- Showcase technology through demonstration projects
- Use water bills and inserts as information tools where possible (e.g. to show use between billing periods, average per person use or water budgets)
- Become a WaterSense member to access complimentary marketing material and logos to raise awareness of WaterSense certified fixtures
- Create a Water Public Advisory Committee to gain public input and feedback on water demand management planning, new initiatives and other areas of interest
- Engage schools in poster contests on the theme of water conservation
- Engage the public through social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)

#### Getting Started with Education & Engagement Campaigns

- Identify objectives for your campaign (e.g. raise awareness; communicate specific messages; etc.)
- Identify the group(s) that you would like to engage (“target audience”)
- Pinpoint the key message(s) that you would like to communicate, or behaviours that you would like to influence and change
- Take stock of the resources available for your campaign
- Think about partnership opportunities – with NGOs, other municipalities, universities, etc.
- Use past community engagement campaigns in your municipality or others for inspiration and ideas
- Identify the best ways to reach your target audience: TV? Radio? Professional associations? Social media? Face-to-face?
- Map out a community outreach plan – identifying your target audience, goals and objectives, key messages, communication activities, and evaluation mechanism.



“Use Only What You Need” water conservation campaign. Denver Water, 2006

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## Case Study

# Guelph's "Don't be a Water Hog" Campaign

Population (2011): 121,688

Density: 1,395.4/km<sup>2</sup>

Number of Meters/Services (2011): 40,032

Water Supply: Groundwater

In the mid 2000's, Guelph faced a key barrier to reducing residential water use – the widespread



accepted practice of extensive watering to maintain green and healthy lawns.

This outdoor water use was making it hard for Guelph to meet water demands. In response, Guelph launched the Outdoor Water Use Program (OWUP), a program with three levels of water use restrictions, accompanied by the "Don't be a Water Hog" campaign.

This early campaign included vivid communication messages to capture the audience's attention and prompts such as roadside signs to remind residents to reduce their water use. Soon neighbours were coaching neighbours about reducing outdoor water use and a transition away from the original norm was observed.

The communication plan won the Canadian Public Relations Society's Don Rennie Award in 2005, an award recognizing the development of strategic programs to address public relations challenges.

Today Guelph's OWUP program still focuses on effective communication strategies and annual social research to encourage more water conscious behaviour (see [Primer #5](#)). A recent public survey indicated 90 per cent awareness of the program.



Wayne Galliher,  
City of Guelph

Wayne Galliher, Water Conservation Project Manager at Guelph, advises that the key to the success of any community outreach campaign is "keeping communications convenient, accessible and visible, and having the courage to go out there and be seen."

## Resources:

- Community-Based Social Marketing: [www.cbsm.com](http://www.cbsm.com)
- Community outreach campaigns in Denver, Colorado: <http://www.denverwater.org/Conservation/UseOnlyWhatYouNeed/CampaignOverview/> and <http://parkhowell.com/tag/denver-water>

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