

OFFICE OF CONSUMER ADVOCATE

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DIRECT EXHIBIT

OF

FRANK BODINE

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d/b/a BLACK HILLS ENERGY**

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KEY FEATURES/BEST PRACTICES OF COMMUNITY PROJECTS

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Make it local. One of the main features is to make the project “local”. The project or program can be a part of a larger effort, but it needs to appeal to potential participants because the outcomes will help them and their community. One of the primary ways to generate interest and participation is through appropriate messaging and awareness strategies. High energy prices and large utility bills will get the attention of consumers and will generate interest in some types of projects. Other participants might get involved because of community development, environmental issues, or being good stewards of the resources we have. It is important to remember that interests will be different for various groups and individuals.

One of the key components of making a project or program local is to have a local delivery system for technical assistance. It is this local assistance that motivates the public to get involved and to trust that they are getting the best information and advice.

In keeping with a local focus, it is important to identify local resources and champions, and key community groups and individuals before starting the project. A good example of this would be that an agriculture related program or project would likely benefit from information from the Extension Office. Develop partnerships between groups such as vendors and consumers. Establishing local connections will overcome any lack of trust some participants might have of contractors and auditors. Sending a person along with the auditor or contractor that is a local expert is also helpful. It is important to get buy-in or establish communication with local city government where possible because the local city government may have access to additional resources or have additional avenues for publicizing efforts.

It is also recommended to have a local presence in the form of an office in town or frequent visits to the town by project leaders. If that is not possible, a person who is always accessible to and preferably familiar with the community can answer specific questions about the project.

Communication plan. A formal communication plan is not a necessary component of a community project but becomes more important if a project is large in size or is on-going. However, each project should consider a list of communication options such as having a presence at local events, local city newspaper articles, TV news coverage, local access TV shows, information on a website and other social media, customer newsletters, and direct phone solicitation. Local resources and key community groups/individuals should

help form any communication plan for a project. If there is an education component, working with the local schools is suggested. An education component can be used even if the group does not have all of the necessary technical skills. Collaboration with other groups and organizations is beneficial, and referrals to technical experts should be encouraged.

If the decision is made to have a communication plan, the type of plan will depend upon the community and the target audience. For example, some customer bases do not respond to web-based information while others are highly responsive to web-based information. With a smaller project or in a smaller “community”, such as a church, personal invitations to participate and follow-up conversations are useful. Even if there is no formal communication plan it is important to establish person-to-person communication. The effort to make energy efficiency an individual and community talking point is important.

Energy efficiency is a difficult product to sell so it may be necessary to contact potential participants directly, with follow-up mailings, and media coverage, but the message must be consistent.

The type and scope of the project.

A combination between educational, technical, competitive or any other models is desirable. Even if a project is focused on other components, a model that utilizes a form of friendly competition can be used to motivate some individuals or communities. For on-going projects, a focus on an education and awareness as well as cementing a long-lasting presence in the community is beneficial. Giving local people the structure, tools, and support and letting them develop their own project is recommended.

Demographic factors are not important in the determination of the type of project, but once the decision to choose the type of project has been made, the projects should be tailored to reach out to different demographic groups and boost participation. Knowing the local culture is important in determining the type of project. For example, friendly competition might work best for some projects and in others, a type of cooperative effort would best fit.

If local contractors are going to be involved in the project, the program should be designed to encourage their participation. Quality assurance for the work performed is a necessary and important step in the process.

For on-going efforts or programs, an interface between program efforts and targeted audiences is recommended so that a community can build upon those efforts. Encourage the enhancement of community efforts without duplicating those efforts is advised. All organizations don't bring the same skill sets to the table, which is another good reason to work together.

Funding. Funding will be a critical feature for some types of projects and will likely be different for one-time efforts than for on-going-projects. Depending upon the project, some funding might be available from the local utility, but local resources should also be considered. Some form of local funding might even be necessary because many sources require at least a dollar for dollar matching. Those contributions can, however, be in-kind contributions.

Contributions can be generated and levered through the establishment of a charitable organization. Because donations to this type of organization are tax deductible, potential contributors are more likely to make donations (monetarily or in-kind).

Barriers.

The main barrier is obtaining funding. Even if funding is available initially and the project is successful, it is often difficult to sustain the funding efforts.

Many projects require volunteers to be trained, but getting volunteers to follow-through can be difficult.

Data collection can be a large barrier. Data availability at the commencement of a project can be useful in directing the program to areas of most concern, and data availability at the end of a project is useful for identifying impacts and sharing success stories.

It can be difficult to overcome some local attitudes and the reluctance of local leaders. If local leaders do not have an interest in the project, the project might not go forward.

Make certain that it is the "right time" to address energy efficiency via a community project. A community and its leaders should not be forced to address a topic when there is little interest in the topic. You can address some of the topics through an education and awareness process, but the audience must be receptive to the message. If it is an on-going project, maintaining enthusiasm and interest may be difficult.

Each stage of a project or program provides a potential participant with the opportunity to decide against adopting energy efficiency improvements. The process should be as easy and fast as possible.

End of project. Understanding success and building upon it important at the end of the project.

Measure the number of participants and, if possible, the amount of energy saved. Be sure to dedicate enough resources to track and document information about the project (outreach effort, spending, and participation levels) and evaluate the project periodically in case you need to modify it.

Feature the local success stories throughout the community.

Survey participants after the project event and get their feedback so that participant motivation can be monitored and continual improvements can be made.