

E&E Project Evaluation Form

****Please be advised that completed evaluations are made available publicly and are posted on Stewardship Ontario's E&E Fund web site****

Project Name/Number/Priority area: Analysis of User Pay Programs in Ontario - #126
Lead Sponsor/competed by/date: County of Oxford; Clayton Sampson; February 1st 2006
Project Duration: 5 months
Total project value: \$45,700 **E&E funding amount:** \$31,200

Section 1 – To be completed by Project Applicant

1) What were the Project Goals and Objectives *(as per the E&E Application and/or Contract)?*

An examination of user pay waste systems in Ontario to:

- Update and analyse data on current status of user pay
- Present the collected data at a workshop focused on the design, implementation and administration of user pay systems
- Update and distribute the User Pay Implementation Manual

2) Were the goals and objectives met? *(and if not why not?)*

All the outlined goals of the project were met.

3) Summary of Project Accomplishments *(i.e. what did the project do/achieve?):*

- Collected and compiled current data on user pay waste systems in Ontario
- Updated the User Pay Implementation Manual and made it available to all municipalities
- Organized and carried out a workshop (September 29, 2005) on User Pay.

4) Summary of Project Limitations *(e.g. is there anything that should have been done differently?)*

There were no project limitations with regards to the goals that were initially outlined. The primary research tool for the research was a multi-page detailed survey. Due to some challenges in obtaining responses from some programs, telephone and email follow-up was necessary to ensure a 100% response rate. In evaluating how this might have been done differently, it may have been more productive to send the detailed survey out only to user pay programs that had been implemented relatively recently (i.e., within the last 5 years). Older programs (i.e., 6-15 years old) should have received an abridged version of the survey (many of the questions in the survey could not be answered by present staff, or would have entailed significant work to locate records).

5) What do you consider to have been the key “lessons learned” from this project? Does your project/activity represent a “best practice”?

- The majority of municipalities in Ontario do operate some form of a user pay program.
- This project has found that user pay programs lead to increased recovery rates of blue box recyclables.
- The implementation guide is intended to provide municipalities with information that will lead to the implementation of “user pay best practices” (although further effort is required to better define these best practices).
- Updating of user pay information, in particular program type, unit costs and service level, should be undertaken on a regular basis. This will make possible the tracking and documentation of program changes/evolution (e.g., partial to full, unit cost changes, bag number reductions, etc.).
- WDO’s annual datacall tracks programs already in the system, it does not reach all Ontario municipalities and as a consequence misses information. For example, the datacall is completed by municipal boards/associations such as Bluewater recycling Association, Quinte Waste Solutions, Ottawa Valley Waste Recovery Centre, Amalguin Recycling Initiative, on behalf of most of their member municipalities. In most cases, the member municipalities do not complete the datacall themselves. As a result, the more detailed information on these municipalities (apart from e.g., total recycling tonnages provided by their boards or associations), is not reported or tracked by the datacall.

6) What specifically are municipal staff doing with the experiences and data from this project? Do you have plans to apply these lessons in your program? Please explain how.

The information that was collected is being made available (electronically or hard copy, on request) to municipalities that may be considering implementation of user pay.

7) Has your municipal council been informed about the project and its results?

Oxford County Council’s Waste Management Steering Committee, on which a number of Council members sit, has been informed about the project and its results, which confirms that Oxford is the largest full user pay program in Ontario. The committee has in turn informed Oxford’s Council.

8) Do you think there are opportunities to share/replicate the successful elements of this project with other Ontario programs? If yes, how and where?

Yes – Municipalities who have a user pay program in place can use the updated manual to improve their program. Those that don’t can use the manual to initiate, plan and implement a user pay program.

9) Did this project result in either reduced costs per tonne of Blue Box waste recycled and/or increased Blue Box tonnes diverted? (Please explain)

The results of this project showed that implementation of user pay does positively impact the amount of recyclable material collected. Detailing and providing information on user pay can result in more municipalities implementing these types of systems, which in turn would result in increased Blue Box tonnes collected.

Section 2 –To be completed by Stewardship Ontario (and reviewed by applicant)

9) Did this project do what it set out to do? If not, what were the reasons/ barriers?

As per the original contract, this project's objectives were to:

- Update and analyze data on the current status and best practices of user pay in Ontario;
- Based on these findings, organize a workshop to present best practices for the design, implementation and administration of user pay collection;
- Update and distribute User Pay Implementation Manual.

This project's main deliverable was the production of an updated User Pay guide, which main findings were presented at a User Pay workshop in September 2005. Although useful data on current User Pay systems throughout Ontario was gathered, the project did not generate good financial information on user pay programs.

10) What are the key learnings from this project? Are there any next steps? What is being done to share the results?

The financial information portion of the multi-page detailed survey was not filled out as well as was anticipated, and thus contributed relatively little to the overall understanding of the financial aspects related to user pay programs. Project leaders identified the following reasons for the poor cost information:

- The survey questions on cost were not detailed, simply asking for total costs for the different waste management programs;
- Very few survey respondents answered these questions (the questions inquired about pre- and post-implementation costs, which for some programs meant looking up records that were over 10 years old - most couldn't or wouldn't provide the information);
- The few programs that did answer the cost questions would have needed to be contacted with additional/follow-up questions before meaningful data could be extracted.

As mentioned by the project leader in question 4 above, it may have been more productive to administer the detailed survey only to those programs who have implemented User Pay relatively recently (i.e., within the last 5 years). Older programs (i.e., 6-15 years old) should have received an abridged version of the survey only.

To address the lack of consistent and quality financial information, Project 191 (recently approved by Stewardship Ontario's Project Committee) aims to determine the financial cost/benefits of implementing user pay waste systems through a detailed review and analysis of user pay programs. An examination of all aspects of the waste program before and after the implementation of user pay to determine possible cause and effect relationships will thus be carried out.

The User Pay guide will be promoted at the upcoming AMRC conference (Feb. 15-17th 2006), and will be made available on AMRC's web site. It is anticipated that the guidebook, along with other User Pay tools that are to be developed through Project # 190 (including a package for politicians and a top-ten questions FAQ as well as information on program management, P&E, multi-family user pay, etc), will be posted on Stewardship Ontario's Knowledge Network in late March. Moreover, once the findings from Project 191 are ready, a Help Desk function may also be set up on the Knowledge Network.

11) Was the project good value for the money (*e.g. were there measurable program or system cost reduction benefits, cost effective tonnage increases, etc?*)

The user-friendly and thorough guidebook produced through this project represents a valuable resource for both municipalities who are looking to improve their current UP programs, and those that are considering establishing such a program.

Although no direct system cost savings or blue box tonnage increase can be attributed to the preparation of the Guide, it is a tool that is expected to lead to future improvements (and efforts will be made to track these benefits).

12) Does this project represent "best practices"? If yes, explain.

At this stage, due to the above-mentioned lack of valid financial information, it is premature to define User Pay as a "best practice". As previously mentioned, follow up work has been approved through the E&E Fund to more explicitly explore User Pay best practices.

13) Tonnage and Financial Summary

Did this project have a direct impact on Blue Box tonnes recycled? (Please explain)

While the project provided some evidence that User Pay programs lead to increase capture of Blue Box tonnes, such increase seems to vary widely across programs. Moreover, the composition (and therefore net revenue contributions) of these additional tonnes is not clear.

Did this project have a direct impact on the cost of Blue Box recycling? (Please explain)

Determining overall waste management system cost impacts is one of the follow up E&E project's key objectives.