

**New England Strategic Outreach and Education Plan
for Reuse and Waste Prevention: Developing
Linkages between Material Exchanges, Schools and
Municipal Governments**

Final Report

Submitted by: Northeast Recycling Council, Inc.

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I. PROJECT OVERVIEW

The “*New England Strategic Outreach and Education Plan for Reuse and Waste Prevention: Developing Linkages between Materials Exchanges, Schools and Municipal Governments* “ was a one-year project funded by EPA through its Environmental Education Grant program and undertaken by the Northeast Recycling Council, Inc. The following were the project goal and objectives.

Goal

To promote reuse and waste prevention by school and municipal government purchasing agents by developing critical thinking and problem solving skills and applying them to an understanding of the environmental benefit of reuse, waste prevention and how state and federal procurement laws apply.

Objectives

1. Develop a “*New England Strategic Outreach and Education Plan for Reuse and Waste Prevention*”.
2. Create linkages, information and education exchange among the New England Materials Exchanges, and between Materials Exchanges and public sector purchasing officials.
3. Framework for maintaining ongoing linkages, cooperation and information exchange.
4. Enhanced critical thinking and problem solving skills for Materials Exchanges and public sector purchasing officials on the topic of reuse and waste prevention.
5. Toolkit and PowerPoint® presentation about reuse and waste prevention for public sector purchasing officials.
6. Increased waste prevention and reuse in the public sector.
7. Model for Waste Exchanges beyond the region to use for outreach and education to public sector purchasing agents.

II. PROJECT TASKS & PROCESSES USED

1. Working Committee – A Working Committee was developed to serve as a second set of eyes and ears for the project, in addition to NERC’s oversight and management. Committee members included representatives from the New England states’ recycling offices and Materials Exchanges, and school and municipal purchasers. The Committee participated on four conference calls to discuss the progress of the project tasks and to provide feedback and suggestions on every step used for the project implementation and development of deliverables. (See Attachment A. for the conference call minutes.)

Committee members included:

- Judy Belaval and KC Alexander, CT Department of Environmental Protection
- Paula Flack, ReCONNstruction Center, CT
- Sharon Bruce, CT Government Finance Officers Association
- George MacDonald, ME State Planning Office
- Harold Arndt, ME Materials Exchange
- John Crisley, MA Department of Environmental Protection
- John Majercak, MA Materials Exchange
- Marilyn Gordon and John LaFleche, MA Association of School Business Officials
- Mark Toussaint, NH Materials Exchange
- John Trevor and Paul Caccia, RI Resource Recovery Association and Resource Xchange
- Carolyn Grodinsky, VT Agency of Natural Resources
- Ellen Roffman, VT Business Materials Exchange

(Please note that there was no representative from the NH Department of Environmental Services due to staff layoffs.)

Our original plan was to include three school and three municipal purchasing agents on the Committee. In our efforts to recruit these members, we found that most of these public purchasers were unable to participate on the Committee due to time constraints, but were willing to assist us with getting on the Association of School Business Officials (ASBOs) and Government Finance Officers Associations (GFOAs) meeting agendas to present the survey, and to electronically distribute the survey and other emails to their membership. In order for us to better understand the perspective of these purchasers without their presence on the Committee; we made it a point to have individual conversations with the ASBO and GFOA members after the presentations we made at their events.

2. Identify and Assess Capacity Building and Outreach Needs

NERC conducted a survey of school and municipal purchasing officials to learn about their purchasing habits and methods for disposing of surplus property. Working with the Committee, NERC created the survey forms – one for the schools and one for municipalities- and posted them on NERC's website. They could be filled in on-line or downloaded and then faxed or mailed to NERC. (See Attachment B. for the survey forms.) NERC sent an announcement of the survey request through the GFOA and ASBO electronic listservs, newsletters and email lists. (See Attachment C. for the announcement.) In addition, Committee members made a total of six presentations at ASBO and GFOA events to educate these purchasers about the Exchanges and to directly request them to fill out the surveys, which were distributed at these events. (See Attachment D for the PowerPoint presentation used).

In order to have a strong response rate to the survey, the Committee felt it was important to offer an incentive. As a result, we created a raffle for the survey respondents. The prizes included four \$50 gift cards donated by Staples. The four raffle winners were selected during the regional strategic planning meeting. The winners were: George Nelson of the Grand Isle Supervisory Union, VT; Katherine Bryant of the Windham NE Supervisory Union, VT; James Finch of the Town of Brandford, CT; and Charles Volpe of the City of Danbury, CT.

In addition to the school and municipal surveys, NERC developed a survey for the Materials Exchanges. This survey was designed to understand the Exchanges' marketing practices. (See Attachment B. for the Exchange Survey.) The results from this survey were used to develop the afternoon regional meeting discussion.

3. Analyze Survey Results & Draft Strategic Outreach and Education Plan

NERC received 25 survey responses from school purchasing officials and 13 from municipalities. NERC analyzed these responses and created a PowerPoint presentation that was shown at the regional strategic planning meeting. (See Attachment E. or the survey analysis presentation.) NERC also summarized the six responses from the Materials Exchange. Three Committee members and NERC staff incorporated all of the survey results to create a draft outline for a Strategic Outreach & Education Plan. This outline took the form of the agenda for the planning meeting. (See the section on the planning meeting below.)

4. Hold Regional Strategic Planning Meeting

GFOA and ASBO members, Materials Exchanges, State Surplus Property managers and state recycling officials were invited to attend the Workshop. The invitation was sent to ASBO and GFOA members via their email distribution lists. (See Attachment F. for the announcement.) The total attendance at the Workshop was 21 - 4 school purchasers, 1 municipal purchaser, 8 Materials Exchanges and 7 government recycling staff, and 1 NERC staff. Although enthusiastic about the project and the opportunity to network with schools and municipalities, the State Surplus Property managers were unable to attend the workshop. We learned that this was because of two factors: 1) most of their offices are one-person operations, and 2) almost all of their time is consumed organizing state vehicle and equipment auctions.

The Working Committee decided to call this one-day meeting the Workshop for New England Materials Exchanges, State Surplus Property Programs, Schools and Municipalities, because we wanted attendees to realize that we were holding this event to do more than just talk with each other. We wanted to end the day with having developed a plan for what to get school and municipal purchasers to

consider the Exchanges and State Surplus Property programs as viable options for their acquisitions.

In addition, the Committee and EPA, Region I agreed to combine the afternoon Workshop session with the Annual Materials Exchange Managers Workshop. The Workshop morning sessions were geared toward introducing Materials Exchanges to schools and municipalities, presenting the survey results and discussing methods for keeping schools and municipalities informed about Materials Exchanges and state Surplus Property Programs. (See Attachment G. for the PowerPoint presentation on Materials Exchanges.) The afternoon session focused on marketing strategies for Materials Exchanges to encourage working relationships between them, schools and municipalities. (See Attachment H. for the Workshop agenda and minutes.) The Workshop minutes have been distributed to the Materials Exchanges, and the Survey Analysis presentation and the Surplus Property Program Fact Sheets have been posted to NERC's website.

5. Finalize the Plan

NERC drafted the Education Plan from the feedback received during the discussions at the Workshop. This Plan was distributed electronically to the New England Materials Exchanges for comment, and was then finalized by NERC. (See Attachment I. for the Education Plan.) This Plan, which outlines NERC's continued work with Materials Exchanges, was posted on NERC's website at <http://www.nerc.org/bulletin/20041201.html#2>.

6. Develop Outreach and Education Tools

This implementation of this task was substantively altered from the way in which had been anticipated and articulated in the original project scope of work. This was the direct result of information garnered during the survey process; in order to ensure that these tools would be as effective as possible to meet the needs of school and municipal purchasers.

Procurement Laws: Rather than researching procurement laws and how they address reuse and waste prevention, the Committee felt it was more important to clarify how and if public purchasers may access the state Surplus Property Programs. This led to NERC contacting the state Surplus Property Managers to inquire of their interest in developing a user-friendly one-page fact sheet that would answer the purchasers' most common questions:

- Who is eligible to use the Program and when,
- What types of items are available through the Program, and
- What is the process for accessing property through the Program?

Each individual was very willing to develop a fact sheet in time for the regional strategic planning meeting. (See Attachment J. for a copy of each state's Fact

Sheets.) The fact sheets have been posted on NERC's website at <http://www.nerc.org/statesurplus/index.html>.

Reuse and Waste Prevention Toolkit: As a result of dialogues with public purchasers, the survey responses and the Workshop discussions, we found that most school and municipal purchasers are primarily concerned about ease and accessibility in obtaining needed items, the availability of required items within their purchasing timeframe, and then price. These priorities are defined by the parameters of their job responsibilities. Although intrigued by the environmental benefits of reuse or the importance of waste prevention, the type of information they want about the Materials Exchanges is an Introductory Packet rather than a Toolkit, to inform them of the Exchanges and the services they provide, as well as the potential cost-savings from using the Exchanges.

The content for the Introductory Packet reflects the priorities expressed at the Workshop by the purchasers. The Packet includes:

- 1) A cover letter from NERC about Materials Exchanges and the money-saving opportunities they offer to public purchasers. (See Attachment K.)
- 2) Information on individual Materials Exchanges (To be inserted by Materials Exchange before mailing out.)
- 3) A PowerPoint presentation on how Materials Exchanges operate and can assist public sector purchasing officials. (Attachment G.)
- 4) The relevant state Surplus Property Fact Sheet. (Attachment J.)

(See Attachment J. for the introductory letter to be included with the Packet.)

PowerPoint presentation on Materials Exchanges: This presentation focused primarily on the money-saving opportunities provided by Materials Exchanges and is part of the Introductory Packet.

III. LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Working Committee plays a vital role. They were key in identifying individuals to include in the Workshop and outreach process. They played a critical role in defining the target sectors' needs and priorities. And they provided a mix of perspectives that effectively shaped the project outcomes.
- The more information you can find out about your target audience(s) the more effective your program can be. When we started this project, we didn't know very much about the decision-making processes employed by school and municipal purchasers. That knowledge evolved as a result of taking the time to communicate with them through the surveys, presentations made at their events and the dialogue that followed, and the Workshop discussions.
- Remaining flexible throughout the project was essential to maintaining effective communication with the target audiences. If we had refused to deviate

from our plan of promoting the use of Materials Exchanges due to their environmental benefits, rather than the cost efficiencies that they offer our target audiences would have stopped participating, and we wouldn't have learned how to most effectively promote the use of Materials Exchanges.

- Combining events with complementary agendas maximizes everyone's time and guarantees a greater participation level. By holding the Annual Materials Exchange Managers Workshop in combination with the Workshop for New England Materials Exchanges, State Surplus Property Programs, Schools and Municipalities, the understaffed Materials Exchanges were able to maximize their time by spending only one day out of the office, and were given the opportunity to meet with schools and municipalities to learn about their purchasing needs and to begin to develop collaborative relationships.

Also during the Workshop, the participants identified tasks that NERC could do to assist the Materials Exchanges in promoting the availability of their services to schools and municipalities. These were articulated in the Education Plan. This concrete set of tasks persuaded EPA New England and Region II to fund NERC to continue its work with the Exchanges for another year. This second year will include working with the New England Exchanges, as well as the New York Material Exchanges. This work will focus on developing a no- or low- cost marketing plan for Exchanges, as well as continuing outreach to the ASBOs and GFOAs. (See Attachment I.)

IV. ATTACHMENTS

A. Working Committee Conference Call Minutes

B. Surveys

- Schools
- Municipalities
- Materials Exchanges

C. Survey Announcement

D. PowerPoint Presentation on Requesting Schools & Municipalities to Fill Out the Surveys

E. Survey Analysis Presentation

F. Workshop Invitation

G. PowerPoint Presentation on Materials Exchange

H. Workshop Agenda & Minutes

I. Education Plan

J. Surplus Property Fact Sheets

K. Cover Letter for Introductory Packet

NERC

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Dear Purchaser Officer:

The Northeast Recycling Council, Inc. (NERC) would like to introduce you to several cost-saving options when purchasing needed furniture and equipment – the (Fill in name of the Exchange) Materials Exchange and the (Fill in the state) State Surplus Property program. These web-based programs offer a variety of quality surplus items that municipalities and schools may obtain at greatly reduced prices. Examples of some of these surplus items include: office and classroom furniture, computers, construction materials, and sports equipment.

Enclosed is a brochure of the (Fill in the name of the Exchange) and a fact sheet on the state's Surplus Property Program. These materials provide background information on these programs, as well instructions for browsing the available items on-line.

NERC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, who's mission is to leverage the economic and environmental benefits of its members to support reuse, recycling, and purchasing that supports environmentally-friendly products. NERC's membership includes recycling officials from the ten Northeast states (CT, DE, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, and VT), as well as Advisory members from a variety of private businesses. More information about our work can be found on our website at www.nerc.org

Please feel free to contact me with any questions about our work with the Materials Exchanges and state Surplus Property programs at 802-254-3636, or by email at maryann@nerc.org.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Remolador
Assistant Director