

# Improving Behavioral Outcomes in Extension Using the Tools of Community-Based Social Marketing (CBSM)<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Why does it seem so difficult to change people's behaviors? The success of many Extension programs, especially in the fields of family and consumer science, public health, and environmental protection and sustainability, depends on behavioral change. Yet it is challenging enough to educate the public in a way that leads to targeted behaviors in individuals, much less at a scale that results in significant impact. The good news is there is increasing evidence that, with the right approach, people can be encouraged to change. From recycling, composting, and picking up pet waste to saving water, the public is adopting new behaviors and giving up old ones (McKenzie-Mohr et al. 2012). The tools to do this can be found in Community Based Social Marketing (CBSM).

In the following examples, each project utilized some aspect of CBSM, such as knowing one's audience, choosing specific behaviors, and making new behaviors easy to adopt:

- A water conservation program in Ontario, Canada saw a 42% increase in water savings among households that received face-to-face visits from a utility conservation specialist, compared with a 1% increase among those that only received an educational flyer. The personal contact and outreach was not only more successful, but also more cost effective (McKenzie-Mohr et al., 2012).
- A campaign to stop drunk driving in rural Wisconsin reduced crashes by 17% simply by asking young men at

bars (the demographic most at risk) what it would take to get them to use a shuttle service to get home safely (Rothschild et al., 2006). The resulting program, called Road Crew (<http://www.roadcrewonline.org/>), offers low-cost, luxury limousine service between bars and homes. Over 85,000 riders used the service between 2001 and 2007.

- A safety program in the orange groves of Florida encouraged harvesters to adopt the use of protective eyewear by having harvesting crews joined by a paraprofessional who focused on eye protection (Monaghan et al., 2008). From nearly zero percent usage of safety glasses at the start of the program, crews that had a trained eye safety promoter increased their use of protective eyewear by over 30 percentage points, compared with those that just received free safety glasses with no education (Monaghan et al., 2011).

As change agents, Extension communicators recommend "best practices" that they hope will have a positive impact on broader social and environmental issues. Teaching homeowners how to save water in their landscapes, for example, and having a significant number of them adopt and maintain those practices, will help preserve water resources for future generations. If Extension can be successful at encouraging behavior change at individual, neighborhood, and community levels, it may help foster real social change and once again demonstrate the value of land-grant institutions. This publication focuses on the

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use of social marketing tools and concepts to change public opinion and behaviors.

## Social Marketing and CBSM

Social marketing involves the use of commercial marketing tools and concepts to promote behavior change and foster social change. Social marketing has been used successfully in conservation, public health, and safety programs (Andreasen, 1995; Kotler et al., 2002; Monaghan et al., 2008). Social marketing tools include the use of research to describe the target audience, as well as pre-testing of messages and campaigns to gauge acceptance and anticipate potential problems. Social marketing concepts include the idea that the public faces barriers to behavior change, and that change agents can help lower these barriers and introduce or increase benefits to make adoption easier. The tools and concepts of social marketing can be used by agents to help them think differently about their programs and their messages.

Community-Based Social Marketing (CBSM) takes social marketing a step further by engaging the target community in research, strategy development, and dissemination. This community engagement creates partnerships between CBSM practitioners and the public, improving the reliability of results and expanding opportunities for dissemination. The key lessons presented here from CBSM can improve outcomes for Extension programming that is targeted at improving quality of life, community engagement, and social change. The CBSM approach has documented success in areas such as water conservation, recycling, energy conservation, nutrition, and community health (Kotler et al., 2002; Monaghan et al., 2008; McKenzie-Mohr et al., 2012; Weinreich 2011).

Social marketing first developed in the field of public health, partly as a response to limited budgets and the need to demonstrate behavioral outcomes. Like Extension agents, public health professionals had to demonstrate efficiency in promoting change (Andreasen, 1995). Extension agents wishing to adopt social marketing will find that targeting behavior change programs in a particular community involves time and resource costs for research. In order to use CBSM, they must also invest time in community engagement. We remind Extension agents that behavior change is not easy; agents may question if they have the resources to do it properly or the time to devote to it. Using CBSM to influence behavior change will take a greater investment of time and resources than, say, a campaign to raise awareness about an issue.

There are six basic tools and concepts behind implementing a Community-Based Social Marketing campaign. In order to measure whether they are applying each tool or concept completely, we provide several questions that the agent should answer. These questions provide an idea of the resources and effort needed to complete them. Agents who want to incorporate CBSM in their programs can find more information at the end of this document, including websites and resource materials.

### 1. Engage partners to help understand the audience and respond to their issues

This is often an initial step in Extension programming and is a key principle of community-based research approaches and CBSM. A community advisory board composed of representative stakeholder groups, organizations, agencies, and average citizens is essential to successful social marketing. Extension agents are skilled at engaging the community members in their workshops and advisory boards. Community partners can be counted on to help the agent define the issues, design the research materials, contact participants, analyze the data and help develop the campaign (Bryant et al., 2009). The advisory board can help disseminate final campaigns to their colleagues, neighbors, and peers.

An example of an advisory board devoted to reducing water use in a neighborhood could include homeowner association board members, contractors, utilities, and regulatory personnel. Agents establishing a CBSM advisory board should look for partners who can anticipate problems that may arise, facilitate access to new audiences, lend credibility, support the behavior change through other routes, and help spread the innovative behavior.

Questions agents need to answer:

- Who are the representatives from local organizations, agencies, groups, and communities that can support the desired behavior change?
- What different audience segments can they help you engage in the research?
- How can they assist with campaign dissemination?

### 2. Identify policies that may influence behavioral outcomes

Policies, including laws, codes, restrictions, and incentives all have a profound impact on behaviors among the public. They can also limit the success of behavior change programs. Agents and their community advisory boards should begin by listing policies (especially new policies)

that may help or hinder acceptance of the recommended behavior change. These policies could include watering and fertilizing restrictions, pricing schemes, cost share and incentive programs, local codes, and covenants. Identified rules may prevent the target audience from adopting a recommended practice from Extension even if they wanted to; this may force the agent and the community to revise their approach. Policy does not always affect all groups the same way; the agent and partners can strategize to choose target audiences that are most likely to be influenced to change as a result of these policies.

Research into policies and the behaviors mandated within them can help the agent come up with ideas for specific interventions and prioritize information needs among the public. For example, many recent fertilizer ordinances in Florida also contain provisions to stop the dumping of landscape debris and grass clippings into storm water systems. Some counties may even impose fines for leaving grass clippings on the street. These ordinances provide an opportunity to raise awareness about the connection between landscaping behaviors, stormwater systems and water quality.

Questions agents need to answer:

- What are the relevant policies, programs, or local initiatives that affect this issue?
- Are these policies failing to encourage behavior change and if so, why?
- How will policies shape your choices about the target behavior and audiences?

### 3. Select the target audience you want to influence and describe them through research

Before agents can select an audience, they have to identify the different segments that compose the “general public.” This is a step that must be based on research, including secondary data, to understand your audience. Different lifestyles and demographic characteristics are important and can be used to define groups of people into different segments.

One important way to segment audiences is by learning about their current behaviors, such as outdoor water conservation, and then using these practices to characterize them. For example, households that have in-ground sprinklers in their yard and also belong to a strict homeowners association (HOA) that imposes fines for brown lawns are more at risk for wasting water than homes

that don't have these features. If this segment is also more likely to use contractors for their landscape maintenance (as opposed to doing their own) that will shape the behaviors we can expect them to adopt. Just knowing these lifestyle characteristics of this particular group helps to know what is feasible in terms of change. Thinking about behavior change from a social marketing standpoint forces Extension agents to be selective and focused on particular audiences among their broad constituencies.

But what criteria should they use for selection? Is it better to focus on the group that has the most potential to affect the environmental outcome, such as high water users? This would be considered an *audience with higher impact*. If the agent is successful, this group could show significant water savings. On the other hand this group may face many barriers to change and fewer households overall may successfully adopt the recommended conservation behaviors.

Another approach is to choose an audience that has the best chance of successfully adopting the behavior, making them *targets of convenience* (Weinreich, 2011). Those who are more likely to adopt a conservation behavior early may already be aware of it through the media and perhaps motivated by their values to adopt it. They may be regular Extension clients or those who have never heard of Extension before. While this group may be smaller or have less impact overall, if they happily adopt the proposed behavior they will thank Extension for teaching them about it. Success in behavior change at a small scale is often the pre-requisite to widespread social change (Rogers, 2003).

There is no clear rule for choosing a target audience based on convenience over one that has a higher impact on a particular issue. It is often a matter of available resources, policies, or partnerships; getting the more difficult audience to change may require tools Extension doesn't have. By empowering constituent groups that are willing to change, such as the residents that come out for rain barrel workshops, agents may help advance social change, as long as they have a plan to do that. Agents who recognize the potential and the limits of a particular audience can structure their programming and set expectations for impacts accordingly.

To ensure behavior change from the public, social marketers identify and engage the key people that influence behavior - family members, contractors, landlords, government employees or those that provide services related to that behavior. For example, a landscape contractor could be considered someone who could help influence homeowners to adopt new water conservation behaviors in their yards.

Questions agents need to answer:

- What audience segments have been identified and described?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of targeting each audience segment? How is your chosen audience segment different from the other segments and why did you choose them?
- What do you know about their needs, values, or lifestyles that you can incorporate in your programming?
- Is there a key audience that influences behavior and how can you recruit their help?

#### 4. Specify the behavior you want the audience to adopt

The reasons for human behavior include a complex bundle of cultural and individual ideas, values, influential factors, and habits. One way to select specific behaviors for the Extension audience to adopt is to consider them as *products*. That is the way your audience sees them as they try them out, evaluate their usefulness, and either adopt or reject them as they would any other product. These products can be modifications of current behavior (resetting an irrigation timer as needed), learning brand new behaviors (installing a rain barrel), or giving up a behavior that is a high risk to the environment (spraying chemicals near waterways).

The behaviors that Extension promotes could be a single act like installing a rain sensor, or something more complicated such as a group of neighbors cooperatively maintaining their yards to protect their storm water pond from runoff. No matter the complexity of the issue, choosing clear and coherent behaviors helps the agent conceptualize the components that shape behavior.

Questions agents need to answer:

- What is the specific behavior you want the audience to adopt?
- What knowledge, tools, and skills will be needed to adopt this successfully?
- What are the steps to successful adoption of the behavior and how can Extension facilitate them?

#### 5. Offer benefits that the target audience really wants

If Extension agents are going to ask their target audience to adopt new behaviors, they have to be explicit about what benefits the audience will receive for doing so. There is no incentive to adopt a new way of doing things if it is all

work and no reward. Rewards can range from savings to satisfaction from being frugal, participating with others, and making a difference.

Agents using social marketing should always link the behavior with the benefits that are important to the audience. If the behavior you are promoting does not come with easily identifiable benefits for those who switch to it, agents should ask people who have already adopted the behavior why they do it. The community advisory board can be useful for helping to understand the motivations for adopting a new behavior. The benefits can't be just the ones the agent thinks are important; we often assume saving money will motivate changes, for example, yet the savings from water conservation are limited if water is a cheap commodity.

The audience must accept the costs of changing behavior as being worth it because they get something in return. This could be a feeling of satisfaction for “doing the right thing” or making their neighbors happy or it could be convenience. No matter what the benefit, the agent must hear from the audience what they consider to be important. While there is no substitution for research to determine this, talking with audience members in a **focus group** is an easy way to uncover their perception of the benefits they value.

Questions agents need to answer:

- What benefit can you promote that makes it worthwhile for the public to overcome the barriers to adopting your recommendations?
- Have you asked if those benefits are something your target audience really wants?

#### 6. Recognize and reduce the barriers to adopting the behavior

What prevents the adoption of new behaviors even when agents have done a good job raising awareness? Social marketers look at the barriers to change, and these can be conceptualized as costs or competing behaviors. Convenience is an example of a competing behavior. Many homeowners have adopted their current landscaping patterns because of convenience; it is easier to set the irrigation timer and forget it, letting it run if the lawn doesn't need it. Even if homeowners over water their lawns, it is an inconvenience to learn how to manage the timer and remember to turn it on each time the lawn needs water. Convenience is a difficult barrier to overcome if there is not a significant benefit for doing so. Another barrier is the desire by homeowners associations (HOAs) to forestall changes in

their neighborhood landscapes, preferring to keep them in the same condition as when their homes were purchased. When it comes to residential landscaping, the disapproval of one's neighbors can heavily influence a homeowner's decision to change.

The costs to adoption are barriers the agent must help the homeowner to overcome, whether it is the monetary cost of a new landscape, the investment of time, the risks of change, fear of failure, or looking foolish in front of one's neighbors. Recognizing the competition and the costs of adopting a new recommendation provides Extension agents an opportunity to lower these barriers through demonstrations, tours, and workshops. Alternatively, they can seek to make the benefits of change so much greater than the costs that the audience can't resist adopting their recommendations.

Questions agents need to answer:

- What are the barriers to successful adoption of this behavior?
- What can you do to lower those barriers? What are your limits?

## Conclusion

This short list of CBSM tools and concepts presented here have been useful for changing behavior in many different fields, from conservation and recycling to public health and safety. Agents wishing to improve their success at changing behavior among the public may find that any of these tools and concepts are useful to their programming and are encouraged to use all of them to ensure success. These can be adapted to the way agents currently develop programming by identifying a situation, audience, objectives, outcomes, and impacts. Future EDIS documents on CBSM will show how to do this in a step by step method. Agents do not have to abandon their primary objective of providing science-based information to the public when they incorporate CBSM into their programming. It can help encourage behavior change as well as improve the delivery of education programs.

There are some disclaimers to keep in mind, however. Social change does not come easily or quickly. A percentage of the public still smokes cigarettes and forgets to use their seatbelts, despite many years of campaigns, lawsuits, regulations, and evolving norms. Agents hoping that the public will adopt conservation measures will face these same tests. By engaging partners early on, the CBSM approach becomes easier - the people you are trying to change are

advising you on what works and are helping to implement it. There are costs involved in terms of the research, the time investment, and maintaining the commitment of the community partners over time. While changing behaviors is neither cheap nor easy, the rewards are worth it for the agent and the public.

Here are some resources available to help the Extension agent wishing to implement CBSM:

### Web

Social Marketing Institute <http://www.social-marketing.org/>

Fostering Sustainable Behavior: Community-Based Social Marketing <http://www.cbsm.com/public/world.lasso>

Tools of Change—Proven Methods for Promoting Health, Safety and Environmental Citizenship <http://www.toolsof-change.com/en/home/>

Water Words That Work <http://waterwordsthatwork.com/>

On Social Marketing and Social Change <http://socialmarketing.blogs.com/>

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