



The Role of Community-based Social Marketing in Supporting Active and Sustainable Transportation

Overview

A growing body of research shows that community-based social marketing (CBSM) is highly effective in influencing behavioural change.

CBSM is a practical approach that stresses direct contact among community members and focuses on removing structural barriers that prevent people from changing their behaviour. It has been successfully used to encourage people to adopt a number of sustainable behaviours, including active and sustainable transportation habits.

This issue paper explains how CBSM works, reviews the tools and approaches used, and provides examples of programs where these techniques have been applied.

Selected Resources

1. McKenzie-Mohr & Associates, [Fostering Sustainable Behaviour](#)
2. Cullbridge Marketing and Communications, [Tools of Change: Proven Methods for Promoting Health, Safety and Environmental Citizenship](#)
3. Victoria Transport Policy Institute, [TDM Marketing: Information and Encouragement Programs](#).

References are found at the end of this issue paper.

Context

For stakeholders involved in active and sustainable transportation, it will come as no surprise that changing long-term transportation habits is a challenge. Canada is a car-dependent nation, with approximately 86% of Canadians traveling to work by car as drivers or passengers, a figure that has remained virtually unchanged since 1986 (Statistics Canada, 2005).

Appeals to the health, environmental and financial benefits of using active or sustainable modes of transportation can be effective at creating awareness of the issue. Research shows, however, that long-term behaviour change rarely occurs as a result of information only.

Community-based social marketing has been shown to be much more effective in promoting active and sustainable

transportation than mass marketing. CBSM is a practical, hands-on approach that recognizes the barriers to behaviour changes, provides solutions to overcoming those barriers, and emphasizes direct contact with community members.

It is important to note that the term ‘community’ in community-based social marketing is not restricted to geography. Although it can mean a specific neighbourhood, community can also extend to include members of the same denomination, those within similar socio-economic groups, or community groups that share similar interests.

Community-based Social Marketing

Community-based social marketing was developed by Dr. Doug McKenzie-Mohr, an environmental psychologist, as a way to foster sustainable behaviours.

Dr. McKenzie-Mohr explains that when individual community members use resources wisely—by using active and sustainable modes of transport, for example—the community as a whole moves towards sustainability. In *Quick Reference: Community-Based Social Marketing* he writes that, “To promote sustainability, it is essential to have a firm grasp of how to effectively encourage individuals and businesses to adopt behaviours that are resource efficient.”

CBSM involves five main steps: 1) identify the desired behaviour change; 2) identify barriers; 3) design the program; 4) pilot the program with a small segment of a community; 5) evaluate and improve the program on an ongoing basis as it is being implemented (*Fostering Sustainable Behaviour*, 1999).

1) Identify the desired behaviour change

For a CBSM-based program to be effective, program organizers first need to know exactly what behaviour(s) they are seeking to change or promote.

The more specific the behaviour, the easier it is to design a program that will be effective. A program that helps people to cycle or walk on smog days, for example, is more precise than a campaign that encourages people not to drive.

2. Identify barriers

Barriers prevent people from changing their behaviour and can be either external or internal. Lacking shower and change facilities at the workplace, or inconvenient transit routes to common destinations, are two examples of external barriers. Internal barriers include people's perceived notions that walking, cycling or taking transit requires too much advanced planning or is unsafe.

To identify these barriers, CBSM proponents use a range of research methods, usually starting with a literature review to identify the barriers uncovered by others in the past, followed by focus groups, surveys and/or observational studies of specific behaviours.

3. Design the program

Once the barriers to a specified behaviour are identified, a program can then be designed using the appropriate approaches or tools that will overcome them.

Before implementing any program, it is often useful to obtain feedback from the target audience by testing concepts and/or communication materials. Their comments will help fine tune the program and increase the likelihood of the program's success.

4. Pilot the program

Piloting the program first with a small group of people will help identify any problems or additional barriers and refine the program.

Ideally, at least two groups are used in the pilot: one group that receives all of the program's tools and approaches, and a control group that receives only limited or no information.

A pilot program may also include testing two or three possible approaches to see which works better.

5. Evaluate and improve the program

Once the pilot program is completed, it is important to evaluate the actual behaviour change—the number of people who actually changed their habits as a result of the program—not just how aware people are of the program or issue. If the pilot wasn't successful in changing behaviour, it should be revised and may also require a second pilot program.

Ideally, once the program is underway, organizers will continue to test different approaches in an effort to continually improve the initiative and make it more effective.

Tools & Examples

CBSM identifies a number of approaches and tools that are used to build a person's motivation and, thus, change his or her behaviour. These approaches and tools act

synergistically when used in combination, however any of the approaches can also be used independently.

These tools include: obtaining a commitment; prompts; personalized communication; norm appeals; word-of-mouth; overcoming specific barriers; incentives and disincentives; and feedback.

Obtaining a Commitment

Many CBSM-based programs ask people for a pledge or agreement to carry out a specific action. Research shows that once people make a commitment to one activity, they are not only more likely to follow through with it, but also more likely to agree to more demanding commitments in the future.

The City of Mississauga used this technique in its *Towards an Idle-Free Zone* anti-idling campaign. Project staff approached almost 500 drivers at 20 schools and asked if they would be interested in receiving an information card about the effects of anti-idling (the first commitment). They then asked drivers to reduce the frequency and duration of engine idling and to place a decal on their vehicle's windshield as a reminder (the second commitment).



The technique worked, with 85% of drivers accepting the information card, 82% accepting the decal, and 40% affixing the decal immediately.

Prompts

Prompts are used to remind people of a commitment they have made and/or to perform a particular action.

In Ottawa's *Walking the Talk*, a program designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through transportation demand management initiatives, participants received a bright yellow card and memo holder to remind them of their commitment to participate.

Participants were asked to display the card in a prominent location in the home over a two-week period in the months of May and June 2000, when walking, biking, and taking transit was easier to do.

The card included ten steps that could be taken to improve air quality and also offered space for each household to record which of the actions they participated in over the two-week period. In a survey conducted after the initial pilot program, 90% of respondents said that they kept the

prompt, and of those respondents, 30% reported walking and cycling more often.

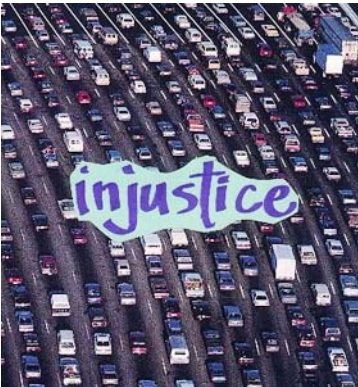
Personalized communication

People are much more likely to remember information that are tailored to their needs and evokes images that are personal to them.

Vancouver's *TravelSmart* program—based on the highly successful *TravelSmart* program first developed in Europe—works directly with particular neighbourhoods. A sample of households is contacted with a travel survey to determine participants' level of interest in using alternative modes of transportation. Households that indicate on the survey that they are interested in receiving additional information are sent a form that allows them to select specific materials to suit their travel needs (e.g., transit maps, cycling guides, trail routes, bike shop discount coupons, etc).

Once the materials are delivered (often by bicycle), participants can then take advantage of personalized travel advice by knowledgeable "TravelSmart Ambassadors," at a time and place of their convenience.

The *Off Ramp* program, created by Better Environmentally Sound Transport (BEST) in Vancouver, is designed to increase youth awareness of active transportation. It is



delivered by youth for youth (another example of the norm appeals approach) and uses personalized communication to get the message across. Poster campaigns, for example, give teenagers the opportunity to create slogans and images that resonate with their peers and

which prompt students to learn more about climate change and transportation alternatives.

Norm Appeals

People often mirror their attitudes and behaviour by observing those around them, particularly those people they interact with the most often, such as family or co-workers, or those they interact with within their community. Norm appeals, therefore, are a way of making group standards more apparent.

The *Canadian Commuter Challenge*, a national event that encourages people to try active and sustainable modes of transportation for one week every June, is an example of this approach in action.

Workplaces that agree to participate are encouraged to appoint one person who will collect the information from each of their coworkers and act as a "champion," encouraging their peers to participate.

Upper management staff at Export Development Corporation (EDC) in Ottawa, for example, chose to be the champions for their workplace. Each year's campaign sees the president and senior vice-presidents leading by example, using active and sustainable modes of transportation themselves, and often assisting in registering employees. Over the last six years that EDC has participated in the Challenge, cycling has increased and, as a result, EDC obtained additional underground parking space for bicycles.

Word-of-mouth

Similar to norm appeals, people often respond best to information received from people they interact with in their communities and whom they trust. *Tools of Change*, a Web site devoted to the CBSM approach, reports that "word-of-mouth is often responsible for the bulk of learning about and adopting a new behaviour."

Seattle, Washington's *In Motion* initiative was designed to provide residents in three neighbourhoods with information about different travel options. Those who pledged to participate could obtain a yard sign that identified them as a member of the program. In addition to raising norm appeal, the yard signs also stimulated conversation in the neighbourhood about the program and the various travel options, and also increased the acceptance of travel alternatives. When surveyed, more than 80% of residents in the target neighbourhoods recognized some element of the program.

Detroit, Michigan's *Ozone Action Program* also uses word-of-mouth to spread the message about the effects of ground level ozone, one of the primary contributors to smog.

The program uses the smog alerts as rallying call to get people to take action. Participating employers receive a variety of communication materials that help to spread the word among their employees and which offer alternative transportation solutions, such as telework, cycling, taking transit or carpooling.

Over a four-year period, awareness of the program increased from 52% in 1994 to 88% by 1998; those who took action as a result of the program also increased from 69% to 88% over the same period.

Overcoming Specific Barriers

There is no single approach or tool that will overcome every single barrier to active and sustainable transportation. Typically, however, one or two of the most difficult barriers will become apparent during the initial planning

stages. Programs that focus on overcoming these specific barriers will often be more successful.

In the case of *Bike Smarts*, a Province of B.C. program that educates elementary school children about bicycle safety and encourages them to cycle to school, the major barrier was found not to be a lack of interest from students, but the safety concerns of parents. To overcome this barrier, parents were kept informed of the program and safety was stressed. Parents were also encouraged to participate along with their children so they could see for themselves the skills the children were acquiring.

In a post-pilot program survey, parents indicated the program made it safer for their children to cycle and that, as a result, their children cycled to school more often.

In addition to safety concerns, one of the single greatest barriers in any active and sustainable transportation program is the perception that active transportation takes too long. Organizers of the many *Walking/Cycling School Bus* programs across Canada, for example, find that many parents cite time pressures as one of the main reasons why they do not allow their children to walk or cycle to school.

To overcome both of these barriers, organizers first educate parents and caregivers about how the program works. By having adults walk with children, safety issues are addressed and, because all of the participating adults take turns traveling to and from school with the children, the responsibility is shared and no one adult shoulders a greater burden than any other. Parents end up saving time because they are not accompanying their children to and from school every day.



Incentives and Disincentives

Incentives can be offered for doing the “right thing,” such as providing tax breaks or contest prizes. Conversely, disincentives can be implemented, such as fines, for doing the “wrong thing.” Incentives for doing the wrong thing can also be removed, such as limiting the number of parking spaces.

A timely example of a financial incentive for sustainable transportation is the recent change to the *Canadian Income Tax Act* to make transit passes tax deductible.

Or take the case of the City of Windsor, which piloted a program in 2003 to provide free transit on smog days. The city and Environment Canada provided matching funds to



Transit Windsor to cover their operating costs for four free transit days. When a smog advisory was issued, Transit Windsor contacted the media, who relayed the information to the general public that transit would be free on all regular routes within the city. On these free transit days, ridership increased by up to 50%.

Disincentives often revolve around making it more difficult or more expensive to park. The Greater Vancouver Regional District’s employee trip reduction program, for example, phased out a 60% parking subsidy over the course of five years. Before this phase-out was complete, a variety of initiatives were implemented to give employees more commuting choice, such a carpool and ride-matching program, improved shower, change and cycling amenities, a guaranteed ride home service in case of emergency, and a subsidized transit program.

Feedback

People are more likely to stick with a behaviour change for a longer period of time (and potentially motivate others to change) if they see that they are making a difference in their community, their health or the environment.

The City of Boulder, Colorado’s *Go Boulder* program wanted to shift single-occupant vehicle use to more sustainable modes of transportation. Transit passes were offered to workplaces, schools and neighbourhoods, with guaranteed rides home for workplace pass holders needing to stay late at work or in the case of an emergency.

Organizers said that feedback to the community was a keystone to the program’s success. They enlisted the assistance of the local newspaper, which ran an average of two stories per month featuring *Go Boulder* successes and community participation. Five video presentations were also run repeatedly on the community television channel. Additional feedback was provided through promotional literature, special events and presentations to community organizations.

Over a four-year period, a 6% modal shift was achieved, with bus ridership at the University of Colorado alone increasing from 300,000 riders to more than one million riders in the first year of the program.

Stakeholders

CBSM-based programs can be delivered by a wide variety of stakeholders, including municipal governments, health, social and environmental agencies, non-government organizations (NGOs), schools and community groups.

The *Canadian Commuter Challenge* is a good example of a program that works with many different stakeholders. The overall campaign advertising and reporting infrastructure is administered by Go for Green (a national non-government organization) and supported by government and business partners, while each participating city runs its own campaign, often using a smaller, local NGO, community groups, or other local sponsors and partners to administer the program.

Lessons for Stakeholders

As the above example illustrates, partnering with a variety of organizations can bring more resources to a project, such as financing or expertise, and increase credibility of the issues with the general public.

The participation of community members is particularly important in any CBSM-based program, as highlighted by several of the examples in this case study. Research also shows that people are more likely to trust those people within their own social networks (e.g., family, friends, peers and colleagues). The 2005 Edelman Trust Barometer (a yearly survey to determine opinion leaders' trust in established institutions), for example, found that opinions leaders were more likely to trust "a person like themselves," (56% in 2005 up from 22% in 2003) than government, business or the media (EDT, 2005).

Many factors determine a person's decision to choose one transportation mode over another. Seasonal factors, the reason for the trip and its length, fuel costs, knowledge and skills, and other reasons all play a role. CBSM programs, therefore, work best when a variety of options are available and when they are delivered at the level where measures can respond to these needs (Noxon and Cullbridge, 2006).

Conclusion

The CBSM approach has been proven to deliver greater results when compared to information-only campaigns. Because of its pragmatic approach and the emphasis on personalized contact, people tend to respond more positively to the behaviour they are asked to change or adopt, and are more likely to continue the behaviour well after a program has been completed. CBSM-based programs can also have a domino effect in which participants spread the word to others, resulting in a greater payback on the initial program investment.

Implementing a CBSM-based program requires research, strategy development, piloting, implementation and

evaluation and it is this attention to detail that makes the approach so successful.

References and Resources

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