

CPA# 5861386
2016 Commercial Food Waste Grant
Final Report

Grant Information	
<i>Grantee:</i>	Cedar Grove Composting
<i>CPA Number:</i>	5862391
<i>Project Title:</i>	Increasing Food Waste Diversion in Diverse Communities
<i>Report prepared by (name):</i>	Casey Funke
<i>Date report prepared:</i>	July 13, 2018
<i>King County Solid Waste Division Grant Manager:</i>	Karen May

Project Information
<p><i>Provide an overall summary of the tasks and accomplishments of the project, based on project goals and objectives as outlined in the grant Scope of Work and Timeline. Capsulize information about the project that will allow county staff and potential interested businesses to learn key information about the project. Include the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>a quantitative and qualitative assessment of the results and impacts of the project (including milestones achieved and results for other measurable deliverables)</i> • <i>internal and external factors that contributed to or impeded the success of the project (what worked, what did not).</i> • <i>an assessment of the potential for replicability and sustainability of the project by other commercial entities</i> • <i>overall lessons learned.</i> • <i>an assessment of the success of the Equity and Social Justice element of the project, if applicable</i> <p><i>Your grant manager will contact you if more information is needed.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>a quantitative and qualitative assessment of the results and impacts of the project (including milestones achieved and results for other measurable deliverables)</i> <p>We were tasked to select and partner with 10 restaurants with preference for those whose owners are people of color, foreign born or whose primary language is not English. Additionally, we were tasked to partner with two farmers markets in areas of King County, outside of Seattle, where the population is considered to be more diverse.</p> <p>Over the course of the grant, we reached out to over 100 restaurants that fit this description and numerous famers markets. We ended up partnering with 13 restaurants and two farmers markets (Renton and Burien).</p> <p>We conducted waste audits at each restaurant and farmers market to identify percentage of trash that could be diverted into organics. We then put together proposals for all restaurants</p>

(examples attached). We created signage in Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai to help with separation and conducted staff trainings for all participating restaurants. For the farmers markets, we attended each market on a market day and interfaced with market goers and vendors to help educate on organics diversion.

We provided all restaurants and market vendors with compostable packaging lists and pricing and offered 5 free yards of compost as well to be used for landscaping and/or gardening. The compostable packaging conversation was hard as the price of compostables outweighed the savings on the back end by downsizing garbage. But we had success with a few of our customers, most notably Project Feast, who purchased compostable packaging and received the five yards of compost to be used in their partnership garden with a nearby church. This was great to see as they were really taking the program full circle.

We continued to analyze waste diversion data and reeducate staff as needed. Many of the restaurants we worked with were family owned so staff turnover was less of an issue than normal in the restaurant industry. We also managed contamination in the compost and provided feedback to customers as needed to make sure we were receiving the correct material.

By the final quarter of the project, we were diverting over 25 tons of material from the landfill every month and had accumulated 300 tons of material diverted since Q2 of 2017.

As of July 13, 2018, all restaurants we worked with during the course of this grant were still composting effectively and we are excited to continue to work with them moving forward. For that reason, we believe the overall scope and purpose of the grant was reached and it certainly helped us reach areas and potential customers we might have overlooked otherwise.

- *internal and external factors that contributed to or impeded the success of the project (what worked, what did not).*

One of the major barriers we encountered in convincing businesses in these outlying areas of King County to compost was the relatively small difference in price points between compost collection service and regular garbage collection. In general it is about 50 percent cheaper to haul organics in Seattle than it is garbage, resulting in significant cost savings for a business that can implement organics collection and reduce garbage. These cost savings were less significant in many of the areas we were focused on such as Kent, Auburn, Burien and Renton and thus made businesses more reluctant to go through the process of implementing a program. On numerous occasions, potential participants provided feedback that the savings just didn't outweigh the added work to train staff and set up new bins.

Additionally, there were various reasons why a few of the businesses we worked with had difficulty downsizing their garbage, even after implementing organics collection. Restaurants inside the Great Wall Mall all shared garbage collection, so without full buy in from every restaurant in the mall, reducing the pulls on the trash compactor was difficult. Other restaurants, such as Pho Ha and Las Margaritas had dumpsters in high traffic areas and illegal dumping was a major problem. So even when they diverted their own material out of their garbage, sometimes they would still have other businesses and individuals using their bin.

One of the major factors that contributed to the success of our work was the fact that through the grant funding, we were able to offer prospective customers a comprehensive report and proposal based on real data we obtained from our waste audits. With the Great Wall Mall for example, we did a waste audit on their garbage compactor (attached) and found that over 50 percent of what was being thrown in there could be composted. This was an important factor in selling the program to the mall and each individual restaurant.

The high costs of compostable bags and packaging made it difficult for businesses to move to a fully compostable program. Many of these businesses were still using Styrofoam, which is incredibly inexpensive. So the difference in cost to compostables seemed astronomically high. In contrast to working with Seattle businesses, who have already seen costs go up as they have had to move away from Styrofoam, the price difference between what they were using and compostables was not so astounding. The same goes for the cost of compostable bags. We combated these barriers by offering discounts on compostable products to encourage their use which seemed to work well.

- *an assessment of the potential for replicability and sustainability of the project by other commercial entities*

We are confident this project can be replicated. We reached out to more than 100 prospect customers and of those 100, are working with 13. So the potential in these areas is enormous. And hopefully, composting is becoming more of the norm and potentially garbage rates will continue to go up, making the case for composting stronger.

- *overall lessons learned.*

The key takeaway we learned from this project was outside of Seattle, composting is still a tough sell. It can be easy to forget this with how prevalent composting is in Seattle, Issaquah, Bellevue and some other areas where the cities have really pushed it, even mandated it. So canvassing areas where folks are not inspired to compost, or in some cases don't even know what it is, reveals the challenges and also the opportunities.

- *an assessment of the success of the Equity and Social Justice element of the project, if applicable*

The equity and social justice element to the project was a major success and incredibly important. It required us to go into businesses that we may have previously passed over due to the perceived difficulty in communicating. Although the majority of the businesses we reached out to were minority owned, and many had owners and/or employees that didn't speak English or spoke English as a second language, communication was very rarely an issue. The signage we provided in different languages was absolutely crucial, not only to communicate our message, but also to create a platform to have a comfortable conversation. There were a few instances where we brought in a translator to help but in most cases, there was somebody onsite who spoke English well enough to translate our message. In a couple of instances, most notably La Canasta, a training was performed in Spanish. We received positive feedback from the owner, Olga.

Provide any other information that the grant manager should know about this project.

No additional information comes to mind at this time.

Provide feedback on your experience with this Commercial Food Waste grant program. Do you have suggestions for how to improve the program?

Our experience working on this Commercial Food Waste grant program was very rewarding and eye opening. It was rewarding because we were able to make significant changes to the waste disposal practices of businesses that otherwise might not be composting. This is different than our work in areas like Seattle where a restaurant is going to compost regardless of if they use Cedar Grove. They are required to do so by the city and most likely will find a hauler to set up service. In the outlying areas we focused on in the grant, composting is far less common and every customer we worked with wasn't composting prior to the grant, and probably wouldn't be had the grant not occurred. For this reason, the work felt rewarding.

It was eye opening in the fact that there is so much opportunity out there to still divert significant amounts of organic material out of the landfill. In Seattle, it can feel as if we have reached somewhat of a plateau in what we can compost. Of course there are always new restaurants opening in Seattle and getting them on board is important, but they typically are replacing previous restaurants so the overall diversion rate isn't changing all that much. But there are so many businesses in King County, outside of Seattle, that have never composted and those are the folks that we need to serve. This grant really showcased that and we will strive to make further impacts in these areas after the grant.