

2008-09 Communications plan for Metro's Blue Lake Natural Discovery Garden

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BACKGROUND

As the agency in charge of regional solid waste planning, Metro is working to reduce not only the amount of the region's solid waste, but also the toxicity of that waste. Since many garden products contain chemicals that are toxic to people and wildlife, Metro developed a natural gardening program focused on common garden products and the residents who use them.

Metro's natural gardening program is an integral part of the Nature in Neighborhoods initiative. This coordinated, regional effort was designed to protect and restore fish and wildlife habitat and integrate natural areas into the urban environment. All of Metro's natural gardening programs highlight the connection between yard and garden care and the health of wildlife habitat and local watersheds.

The latest addition to Metro's natural gardening program is the **Blue Lake Natural Discovery Garden**. Like other Metro natural gardening program offerings, the Discovery Garden was designed within a community based social marketing framework*: garden features, activities and messages serve to address perceived barriers and give visitors a fun and pleasurable experience that reinforces the benefits of natural gardening.

In its research, Metro found that concern for one's own family – children and pets – was a strong motivator for people choosing to learn about and use natural gardening techniques and products. Metro's Blue Lake Natural Discovery Garden was designed with this fundamental human concern for family in mind.

NATURAL DISCOVERY GARDEN HIGHLIGHTS

Built in 2007, the garden was placed strategically adjacent to the children's water park in Blue Lake Park. The garden design provides an opportunity for families to learn about the benefits of natural gardening (human health, abundance of interesting bugs and wildlife, healthy rivers and streams); learn about natural gardening strategies (composting, native plants, rain gardens); and then engage in hands-on activities to reinforce the new knowledge and awareness (dig in the worm bin, touch and smell the leaves, climb on the rocks and logs). The garden features seasonal floral displays, chemical-free lawns, native plants, edible landscaping and fun kids' gardening areas.

The design of the garden, signage and activities have been designed to:

- Capitalize on people's concern for the health and well being of their children and pets
- Educate adults about natural gardening practices
- Reinforce the connection between gardening practices and the health of local watersheds and wildlife habitat
- Provide an enjoyable outdoor activity for the whole family

The setting

Metro's Blue Lake Natural Discovery Garden is located in Blue Lake Park in Fairview, approximately 15 miles east of downtown Portland. Approximately 100,000 residents visit the Blue Lake Park annually, primarily in the summer months. According to a Metro 2006 survey, these visitors come from a variety of locations within the region, but a slight majority live east of I-205. Most visit the park two to three times a year and many come to visit the children's water area. Two-thirds of the visitors are female; the majority of visitors come to the park with their

children. Two-thirds of the visitors say they have a garden at home, and most say their children spend time in the garden. As is true with the population at large, park visitors are increasingly multi-cultural.

COMMUNICATIONS GOALS

- Increase attendance at Blue Lake Natural Discovery Garden
- Increase participation in Metro's natural gardening activities offered at the garden

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES

- Appeal to parents' concern for their children and pets
- Establish Metro's Natural Discovery Garden as a fun place to learn about natural gardening practices
- Build awareness that natural gardening is becoming more the norm than the exception; it's part of our region's environmental ethic, like recycling
- Motivate green-leaning business and organizations to partner with Metro as leaders and active participants in Nature in Neighborhoods

TARGET AUDIENCES

- Parents 20-30 years old with children less than 8 years of age
- Multi-cultural residents who speak a language other than English at home.
- Pet owners living in single-family homes in the suburbs

KEY MESSAGES

- You can keep your kids and pets safe by gardening without chemicals
- Metro's Blue Lake Natural Discovery Garden is a **great place** to come to learn how to grow a beautiful yard and garden without chemicals
- Metro's Blue Lake Natural Discovery Garden is a **wonderful place** to bring your family to learn about and see the interesting bugs and critters that thrive in a garden without pesticides

TACTICS

Tactics support the communications strategies; one tactic can support several strategies and reach multiple audiences. The content of advertising campaigns, news releases, media pitches, printed and online information and choice of distribution channels should be guided by the strategies and key messages.

The following tactics represent expenditures of staff time and financial resources that:

1. Reach the largest number of people within the identified audience segments
2. Take advantage of "ready audiences," such as visitors to Blue Lake Park and participants in Metro's other natural gardening activities
3. Provide the greatest incentives for families to participate in garden activities and programs (some tactics are **new** activities that could be developed to attract target audiences to the garden; this would provide even more story material and generate even more publicity)
4. Position Metro as a leader in Nature in Neighborhoods, inspiring support and partnerships with area businesses and organizations

Tactics to reach all audiences

- Place ads and pitch stories to Community Newspapers and suburban monthlies (to reach suburban audiences); The Oregonian, Portland Tribune for urban audiences; and all urban monthly papers and neighborhood association newsletters

- Publicize the garden through all Metro facilities and events:
 - Blue Lake Park (at the gate, in the park)
 - Metro’s natural gardening seminars and annual tour
 - Salmon Festival
 - 4th of July at Blue Lake Park
 - Hazardous waste roundups
 - Oregon Zoo
 - Home and garden shows
- Distribute publicity materials about the garden at locales visited by people interested in gardening, such as nurseries and plant centers
- Create special events at Blue Lake Park that attract target audiences (“touch, feel, smell” guided tours, free “bring your kids to the Discovery Garden” days, clinics on how pesticides affect pets, etc.)
- Seek media partners and sponsors (garden centers, KGW Going Green, KINK, etc.) to help leverage the reach of paid media

Tactics to reach parents with children

- Submit articles and pitch stories to family-oriented publications:
 - Metro Parent magazine
 - Portland Family magazine
 - GreenScene
 - Oregonian special sections on family and kids
 - Oregonian FoodDay
 - Women’s magazines
- Create media stories and photo opportunities that focus on parents with kids in the Discovery Garden
- Identify parents with children who have made changes in their yards, and create media opportunities featuring these families in their yards
- Identify organizations and locations frequented by parents and kids: OMSI, summer camps at the Oregon Zoo, Children’s Museum
- Create special events and activities that help draw parents with children to the garden: free families’ day, special presentations about bugs and birds, kids coloring contest featuring what they learned at garden – publish in Community Newspapers – free Grandparents’ Day at the park (they bring their kids and grandkids)
- Seek opportunities for school field trips to the Discovery Garden (May, June, and September)

Tactics to reach multicultural audiences

- Foster relationships with editors and writers of multicultural publications; develop culturally relevant stories for placement in:
 - El Hispanic News
 - Las Noticias Latinos
 - Asian Reporter
 - Skanner
 - Observer
 - Spanish Yellow Pages
- Host Cinco de Mayo (and similar culturally relevant occasions) celebrations at the Discovery Garden – give out free plants, have multi-lingual staff available, put on a puppet show, serve food
- Distribute invitations to visit the park to organizations that serve Hispanics, Eastern Europeans, Vietnamese, Asians, etc. (churches, cultural centers, other?)

Tactics to reach pet owners

- Submit articles to pet-oriented publications (“Portland Tails”)
- Host a doggie obstacle course or Frisbee-catch event (is there any part of the park where you can have a dog?); doggies get bandanas with fruits and flowers printed on them
- Give presentations at the garden about pesticides and pets
- Distribute invitations to attend the garden to places frequented by pet owners:
 - veterinary offices
 - Humane Society, pet food stores
 - doggie day care centers
 - dog wash businesses
 - Lucky Lab pub, and other pet-friendly locals

EVALUATION/METRICS

- Attendance at the Blue Lake Natural Discovery Garden (measured by surveys or observation over time)
- Participation in the seminars and tours offered at the garden
- Stories about Discovery Garden published in area newspapers and magazines (track coverage)
- Number of new sponsors and partnering organizations

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR BUDGET

Metro has approximately \$10,000 in FY 08-09 to dedicate to this communications effort. Seek earned media opportunities and sponsorships to help stretch these available resources over the course of a multi-month outreach effort; focus paid media on summer months; leverage other Metro activities as venues for publicizing garden (e.g., Salmon Festival, 4th of July at Blue Lake Park).

Note: In 2008-09, Metro could choose to focus its efforts geographically, such as east of I-205, since a slight majority of Blue Lake Park owners live in that part of the region. This could serve as a large-scale pilot of sorts; allow staff to focus their efforts on a smaller population than the whole region; and intensify the effect of limited paid advertising and earned media.

TIMELINE

Focus the majority of outreach and publicity efforts and resources on months when the public is more likely to want to engage in outdoor activities and, when school is out. Begin ramping up communications activities in the spring and ramping down in the fall. Continue story development and placement throughout the year.

Sample activities by quarter:

January-March

- Write and place stories in parenting magazines about kids health and home and garden chemicals
- Design and produce paid media campaign
- Write and print a handout to use at public venues, including at Blue Lake Park gate

April-June

- Begin running paid media (June)
- Pitch “school’s out” stories to local media, with focus on things to do (spring and summer breaks)
- Identify interview sources: tour host gardeners with kids, past garden visitors, etc.
- Write press releases for distribution to targeted media and pitch stories featuring kids and

families at the garden

- Begin using handout at selected venues
- Include Natural Discovery Garden in other natural gardening related advertising and stories

July-September

- Run bulk of paid media
- Pitch “things to do with your kids this summer” stories
- Go after TV and print stories on the garden
- Continue sending press releases about activities in the garden
- Include garden in information about Salmon Festival and other late summer Metro events

October-December

- Evaluate success: increased attendance, participating in activities at garden, number of news articles and columns published, TV and radio news stories

** Metro’s natural gardening program uses education and community-based social marketing principles to affect behavior change in adults who use garden chemicals. Two key elements of a community-based social marketing (CBSM) approach are to identify barriers to a sustainable behavior and then design a strategy that utilizes behavior-change tools.*

Barriers to adopting natural gardening practices include perceptions that gardening without chemicals is too much work and isn’t effective. Metro’s natural gardening program offerings address these barriers. Free seminars, an annual garden tour and public demonstration gardens give the public the opportunity to see first-hand that natural gardening can be easy and effective. Metro also developed tools that help residents easily adopt new gardening practices, including coupons, online and printed information and one-on-one or small-group learning opportunities.