

Toronto, Canada

Live Green Toronto: Community action to reduce emissions



Live Green Toronto is a community-based program where proactive community members, volunteers and experts can channel their ideas into action. The goal is to provide the funding means and engagement events in order to raise awareness of local efforts and change the way people impact their communities.

118

ICLEI Case Studies

July 2010

Abstract

Live Green Toronto was designed to help neighbourhoods and citizens reduce climate change impacts at the local level. Active participation, through a series of networking, educational, and funding opportunities for social and infrastructural projects, provide the means to achieve the program's objectives. The foundation of Live Green Toronto is built on the range of institutional partnerships and person-to-person support offered by a group of what the City of Toronto calls 'community animators,' and the Live Green Toronto volunteers.

The power to live green

In November 2009 the City of Toronto adopted a sustainable energy strategy titled "The Power to Live Green". The mandate and goals of "The Power to Live Green" is to reduce Toronto's 1990 emission levels by 80% by 2050. This plan provides the necessary recommendations and actions for many different areas, such as home and business retrofits and sustainable transportation. Meeting these goals means expanding and strengthening the market for sustainable energy.

The Toronto context

The City of Toronto is the most populated city in Canada, and the 6th largest urban area in North America. It is continuously growing and changing with a population projected to reach over 3 million by 2031. Most of the population is born outside of Canada; and this is why Toronto is very ethnically and culturally diverse. However, the forecasted growth rate for the City of Toronto is much slower than the surrounding suburban municipalities. To the north, east and west of Toronto the population is expected to reach 7.45 million by 2031.

Toronto is Canada's business center and has sustained steady growth through its strength in many different sectors and a broad business base. One-sixth of Canada's labor force is located in Toronto, making up the following employment industries: medical and biotechnology, financial services, film and television, tourism, fashion and apparel, food and beverage, business services, and IT and New Media.



Population / Land area

Approx. 2.5 Mill. / 632 km²

Municipal budget

Approx. CAD\$ 10.3 billion (2009)
(€ 8.2 billion)

Local economy

Industry, finance, media

Role of city in region

Major international financial and business center



Live Green Toronto is one of the key vehicles established to assist people in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change in the City of Toronto.

Case Study

Volunteer program structure

This program has person-to-person interaction is through their large group of volunteers that play a role in providing environmental education and outreach. To be a volunteer, and in order to graduate from this program, participants must complete 20 hours of training and 40 hours of outreach participation. The issues addressed in training sessions are as follows: climate change, solid waste management, water efficiency, storm water management, energy efficiency, air quality, sustainable transportation and locally grown foods. They learn about these issues through city staff, members of various community groups and environmental professionals. The volunteers gain a strong understanding of city initiatives and how communities can benefit from the programs that are available.

In Toronto, the number of environment-related jobs is growing due to the implementation of environmental policies and plans that impact the types of jobs that are created. However, a clear definition of this sector is not easily defined. Emission reducing technologies, programs and all the jobs directly and indirectly associated with this sector contributes to the extremely diverse range of opportunities available.

Act Green, Build Green, Live Green

Live Green Toronto was established in May 2008 at the 3rd annual Green Toronto Festival as part of the City of Toronto's climate change, clean air and sustainable energy action plan. The primary focus of Live Green Toronto is to provide neighbourhoods and community groups with resources to take action and bring about positive environmental results. Financial assistance and the expertise of community animators are crucial to this program, but more importantly, recognizing that a myriad of options and diversity among those involved create a broad scope of perspective and support systems.

Interaction with Community Animators, who are an important part of Live Green Toronto because they have a wide range of knowledge and expertise and help facilitate and organize the community into taking action. The Toronto Environment Office (the municipal office overseeing the program) has awarded two contracts, one to ACORN Canada (the Association for Community Organization and Reform, Now Canada) and another to Citizens' Environment Watch. Both are grassroots non-governmental organizations that help create partnerships, momentum for action and connect like-minded people.

The **Live Green Toronto Festival**, which launched in 2005, is a large event for Live Green Toronto and the volunteers. The purpose is to celebrate success and interact with people. The festival started as a half-day event, and has now become a weekend-long event held at Yonge-Dundas Square; a public square in the heart

Photo: City of Toronto



Live Green Toronto Volunteers Program

of Toronto with exhibitions from over 100 businesses and organizations providing various environmental products and services. In 2009, there was an estimated 35,000 people participating in the festival.

Funding Opportunities: In May 2008, the Toronto City Council adopted the criteria and framework for two grants that provide financial support to neighbourhoods and community groups in implementing green ideas. The objectives of the funding programs are to support initiatives that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve air quality and to help adapt to the changes occurring as a result of climate change.

The purpose of the first fund, **Community Investment Program**, is to fund various initiatives that will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and facilitate sustainable practices. The objective is to build capacity within local communities and neighbourhoods to identify, develop and initiate actions that address the challenge of climate change. They can receive a grant of \$1,000 to \$25,000 to help explore and develop an idea for collective action. For 2009, City Council approved \$200,000 of funding for this program.

The second fund is the **Capital Projects Fund** where groups can receive a grant from \$25,000 to \$250,000 to assist in the implementation of a physical on-the-ground project that helps address climate change either from a mitigation or adaptation perspective. The purpose of this fund, as adopted by the city council, is to provide the means for implementing capital asset projects that result in significant reductions in greenhouse gas and smog causing emissions and which the local community has identified and is engaged in supporting. For 2009 the city council approved funding of \$1.6 million for the capital projects fund.

Results and impacts of the project in the community

As of August 2009, the Live Green Toronto program has provided or committed financial support of about \$1,400,000 to 31 community- and neighbourhood-led climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives. Monitor and review plays a key role in the Live Green program, and is an integral part of any environmental initiative. As the program is new, they are not at the stage where they can provide measurable information on emission reductions. The impacts of the myriad of projects and neighbourhood energy initiatives funded by Live Green, such as collective solar energy system purchases and completing home energy audits, tree plantings, green roof installations, community gardens and food production activities, adaptation activities for managing storm water, and supporting people in adopting cycling or other alternatives as a method of regular transportation. All work in support of the City's year 2050, low carbon city goals, embedded in the Power to Live Green strategy.

Community Animators have established their methods and each use a different approach to providing animation services. ACORN Canada works directly with tenants in their service area, guiding residents through a process of identifying priorities, working on initial “quick win”

Live Green is active!

Live Green has been involved in many events and festivals such as: Canadian National Exhibition (CNE), Green Living Show, Earth Hour, Live Green Toronto Festival, Canada Blooms, Home Show, Community Environmental Days, Kids World of Energy Festival, Royal Winter Fair, Fresh Wednesdays and Tasty Thursdays, Junction Arts Festival, Car Free Day, Goodlife Toronto Marathon, and many other events. City staff and Toronto Environmental Volunteers assisted over 300,000 people.



Photo: City of Toronto

Live Green Toronto Festival

Funded projects

The initiatives funded include neighbourhood energy initiatives, such as collective solar energy system purchases and completing home energy audits, tree plantings, green roof installations, community gardens and food production activities, adaptation activities for managing storm water, and supporting people in adopting cycling or other alternatives as a method of regular transportation.

Tracking success

In the tracking of the Live Green Toronto program and its implementation, city staff have been monitoring indicators such as the number of users of the Live Green Toronto website, number of people attending events and activities, community and neighbourhood projects launched with the support of the Community Animators, and, where possible, reductions in greenhouse gas emissions occurring as a result of Live Green Toronto supported projects.

projects and building towards more complex/significant projects. Citizens' Environment Watch animates community and neighbourhood groups, providing support to organize events and meetings, connecting them to sources of funding and assisting with applications. They are also responsible for the development of three tools that will be incorporated into the Community Animators program. The first is the sustainability map which is an interactive online map of environmental services and resources. The second is a contact management system which is a database of all community contacts. Finally, there is also a video toolkit that provides information about 10 important environmental issues.

Lessons learned

Increased focus and funding opportunity for small scaled projects, neighbourhoods, and community groups

There have been two complete fund distribution rounds, and based on the recommended changes provided by the City of Toronto, an important area of improvement is the delivery of the community investment programs due to greater than expected demand and interest. Therefore, the Toronto Environment Office, as part of its 2010 budget submission, requested to re-allocate \$200,000 from the Capital Projects Fund to the Community Investment Fund, in order to provide greater support for community led climate change initiatives.

Community groups and neighbourhoods have also requested the minimum funding eligibility be reduced from \$25, 000 to \$10, 000 because community projects may fit the criteria for capital funding, but do not require the large grant. Reducing the minimum threshold would allow for smaller capital projects and remove some of the pressure on the Community Investment Fund.

Build brand recognition in order to gain external funding

To be able to allocate and distribute funds, it is important to be realistic in terms of how quickly those external funds can be solidified. Non-government supporters of Live Green Toronto need to see strength benefit and outcome from the program, which is why a strong brand is crucial. Building a brand brings the recognition this program requires; and recognition is the main factor for attaining capital investments.

Replication

A program like Live Green Toronto is only possible if a municipality has emission reduction targets in place; as this is the main factor driving this program. Though Live Green Toronto is supported by the Environment Office at the City of Toronto, it is not essential to have a dedicated municipal office. What is necessary is the commitment of senior management to give the program the proper profile within the municipality and drive participation from all divisions.

Establishing a profile for this program allows for sufficient funds to support community and large capital program. In order to build capacity, gain trust from external sources and stand by the commitments, this needs to be a continuous process whereby time and resources are allocated to its formation and implementation. Financial resources and staff (especially those in senior management positions) are two of the key factors to success, in addition to strong support from the Mayor and city council.

Budget and finances

In 2008 Toronto Council adopted a five year, \$21 million (net City of Toronto funding \$17 million) funding plan for Live Green Toronto, funded by the city's strategic infrastructure partnership reserve fund. Within the program, \$700, 000 was available for the two types of community investments: \$200, 000 for the Community Investment Fund and \$700, 000 for the Capital Projects Fund. In 2009 (until 2012), the grant amount increased to \$1.8 million, with the Capital Projects Fund increased to \$1.6 million and the Community Investment Fund remaining the same.

Key Contacts

Toronto Environment Office

21E, City Hall,
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5H 2N2
Canada

Tel: +1-416 / 392-6063

Fax: +1-416 / 338-0808

Email: teo@toronto.ca

[http://www.toronto.ca/](http://www.toronto.ca/livegreen/index.htm)

[livegreen/index.htm](http://www.toronto.ca/livegreen/index.htm)

ICLEI World Secretariat

Capacity Center*

Kaise-Friedrich-Strasse 7,
D-53113 Bonn, Germany

Tel: +49-228 / 976299-00

Fax: +49-228 / 976299-01

Email: publications@iclei.org

www.iclei.org

*taking over from the former
International Training
Center which was the Local
Renewables project manager.

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Acknowledgements

- We would like to thank Nancy Ruscica and the staff at the Toronto Environment Office.

Authored by Nicole Marzok and Leya Barry. Edited by Megan Meaney. Layout by Rebecka Arbin, ICLEI ITC.



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July 2010