

# Recycle-Bowl: Competition Fosters School Recycling

June, 2013



## Tools of Change Illustrated

- ▶ Feedback
- ▶ Financial Incentives
- ▶ Prompts
- ▶ Overcoming Specific Barriers
- ▶ School Programs that Involve the Family
- ▶ Building Motivation Over Time
- ▶ Vivid, Personalized, Credible, Empowering Communication

## Location

- ▶ K-12 schools, both public and private, primarily within the United States

## Results Summary

- ▶ Participating schools recycled 10% more than non-participating schools
- ▶ 4.5 million pounds of recyclables were collected in one year's competition
- ▶ 3% of participating schools used the competition to start a recycling program.
- ▶ 55% said they saw "some" or "significant" recycling increase during the competition
- ▶ The percentage of schools with a self-identified "good" or "robust" program went from 71% before to 83% after

## Initiated by

- ▶ Keep America Beautiful (KAB)

## Introduction

Keep America Beautiful created a competition called *Recycle-Bowl* that uses the Tools of Change to encourage recycling behavior in K-12 schools. The program has been successful at invigorating school development of and participation in recycling programs.

## Background

Keep America Beautiful (KAB) is a national non-profit focused on building vibrant communities through recycling, anti-littering, and community beautification campaigns. KAB has an affiliate network of nearly 600 state and local organizations. More recently, KAB has formed relationships with many state and regional recycling organizations. These affiliates

and partners helped KAB by providing them with local knowledge and recycling expertise. KAB developed *Recycle-Bowl* so that schools can take the structure and resources of the program, then customize them to their school's needs and situation. This pairing of expertise in program design and behavior change with the local knowledge of schools and recycling systems was a large part of what made *Recycle-Bowl* successful.

For KAB, the role of the individual remained at the forefront as the key recycling driver. Therefore, programs such as *Recycle-Bowl* focused on engaging and motivating recycling behavior on an individual or community level in order to enhance the national recycling rate.

## Setting Objectives

The competition sought to establish new recycling programs within schools, increase recycling rates in schools that currently recycle, and provide teacher/student educational opportunities about recycling and waste reduction.

## Getting Informed

KAB's *Recycle-Bowl* was built on a foundation of the best practices in environmental behavior change, environmental education, marketing, and program design research. The overall idea was to take a tested-and-proven formula based on school loyalty and inter-school competition and use it to engage schools in recycling.

Before its launch, *Recycle-Bowl* was piloted in California and Ohio in order to learn how to make the program more effective before a full-scale launch. One particularly important lesson was the need to involve the public and private hauling communities to support the schools in their efforts. As a result, KAB worked to engage the hauling community on a national level and advised schools to work closely with their recycling service provider.

### *Targeting the Audience*

In order to learn more about the particular needs of schools, students, teachers and administrators, KAB engaged with multiple education organizations, including the National Wildlife Federation, the North American Association of Environmental Educators, Project Learning Tree, the Green Schools National Network, and the Earth Day Network. Working with these organizations allowed KAB to design resources that would decrease the barriers to and

increase the benefits of the program from the perspective of schools.

## Delivering the Program

Recycle-Bowl was a 4-week-long competition in which schools collected and tracked cans, bottles and paper. Keep America Beautiful (KAB) provided resources and activities to assist the schools with running the program. Recycle-Bowl has three divisions: school, community, and open. The school division consists of schools that only collect the recyclable materials produced within their school. Prizes were awarded for the school with the highest per capita recycling rate in the country (\$2500 of educational and environmental resources), the school with the highest per capita recycling rate in each state (\$1000), the “most improved” school (\$1000 in recycling bins), and the school which recycled the most milk cartons (\$500). About eighty percent of schools in Recycle-Bowl were in the school division. (*Financial Incentives*)

The community division consisted of schools that collected recyclable material both from their schools and from the outside communities. In this division, the top three schools across the nation received \$1,000, \$750, and \$500, sequentially.

All winners in the school and community divisions received a plaque. These incentives were provided to help encourage the initial sign-up from schools, both because the research supports that this is an effective use of incentives, and because it can help support struggling school systems (Kelly et al, 2012; Kelly and Phelps, 2013).

Finally, the open division was for schools that registered after the deadline, did not want to

compete for a prize, or were located in a U.S. territory, Canada, or Mexico.

KAB provided participants with a fair number of resources to help engage and motivate, such as posters, scorecards, presentations, and videos. They also provided ceremony guides, templates for letters to various stakeholders or media, and recycling education resources, as well as information on bin grants and other infrastructure issues. A series of webinars were held for the recycling community as well as for the educational community (teachers, custodians, and administrators) to spread the word and provide support for program development. (*Prompts; Overcoming Specific Barriers; Mass Media; Vivid, Personalized, Credible, Empowering Communication*)

Overall, KAB provided a strong framework, but schools had the flexibility to make the program their own and incorporate for example, greater parental involvement, green teams, events, mascots, mini-contests, and other personalized touches. Where possible, KAB provided resources to facilitate these practices and helped schools make them as effective as possible. (*School Programs that Involve the Family*)

After *Recycle-Bowl*, ceremonies were held for the national winner and many of the state winners. These ceremonies provided recognition of schools' hard work, as well as demonstrated to the schools and their larger communities that recycling was important. Schools also received information on how well they did compared to other schools in their state, which provided feedback and an opportunity for goal setting for the next year. (*Feedback, Building Motivation Over Time*)

## Measuring Impacts

After the competition, the amount recycled per school during *Recycle-Bowl* was reported to KAB. Surveys were also completed by the school coordinators before and after each competition; providing information on school population (to calculate per capita recycling rates), perceived success of their recycling programs, perceived impact on behavior and attitudes, and usefulness of the educational toolkit.

*Recycle-Bowl* has in the past also been evaluated through qualitative interviews.

Finally, a group of students from George Washington University conducted an evaluation of *Recycle-Bowl* that compared the recycling rates of participating and non-participating schools.

## Results

According to the competition data, 4.5 million pounds of recyclables were collected during *Recycle-Bowl* in 2012; participating schools reported per capita recycling rates that were 4 times the national average reported by EPA.

According to the survey data, 3% of participating schools used the competition to start a recycling program, 55% of participating schools saw “some” or “significant” increase in recycling tonnage during the competition, and the percentage of schools with a self-identified “good” or “robust” program went from 71% before the competition to 83% after.

The student evaluation determined that participating schools recycled 10% more than non-participating schools.

Finally, the literature review, guided by the qualitative analysis of a small sample of interviewed schools, suggests that Recycle-Bowl is effectively employing many of the research-supported behavior change strategies called “Tools of Change” (Kelly and Phelps, 2013).

The Tools of Change planning resources are published by  
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## References

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[www.environmentalmotivation.com/strategy-guide/](http://www.environmentalmotivation.com/strategy-guide/)

Kelly, M. and Phelps, K. (2013). A Literature Review with a Focus on Best Practices Fostering Recycling in Schools and Colleges.

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This case study was contributed by Keep America Beautiful

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