Better Business Partnership

**Council Name:** Willoughby, North Sydney, Ku-ring-gai and Lane Cove Councils

**Web Address:** www.betterbusinesspartnership.com.au

**Size:** 129.1 square kilometres (combined)

**Population:** 247,601 (combined)

**Abstract:** The Better Business Partnership (BBP) is an innovative collaboration between Willoughby, North Sydney, Ku-ring-gai and Lane Cove Council to improve the sustainability of businesses on Sydney’s North Shore.

BBP is an engagement, ratings and recognition program, working with more than 300 businesses to assist them to improve sustainability performance. The program focuses on seven key areas including energy, water and waste reduction, community and staff support and transport and purchasing. BBP provides a free appraisal service which measures the sustainability performance of the business and provides an action plan to help improve their level of performance.

**Background:**
BBP was established in 2008 when Ku-ring-gai, North Sydney and Willoughby Councils formed a partnership to identify ways in which they could assist local business to improve their sustainability performance.

The Councils recognised there were several challenges facing business in terms of improving their sustainability performance including:
- Lack of recognition for businesses that have, or are, improving sustainability performance;
- Lack of a simple ratings tool to provide immediate feedback on sustainability performance and key improvement actions;
- Lack of resources to assist businesses (particularly small to medium) in becoming more energy efficient in preparation for increased energy costs in a carbon constrained economy;
- Lack of a regular face-to-face conversations and follow-up contact with business owners in relation to the sustainability performance of their business; and
- Lack of a coordinated integrated approach providing business with one contact point to link them with a range of sustainability solutions from a number of suppliers including council, Sydney Water, NSW Government and other organisations.

The key aim therefore was to make the process simple and provide as much fact-to-face assistance as possible.

This project has been assisted by the NSW Government through its Environmental Trust.
Implementation:
BBP has been a three year project made possible by a significant grant provided by the NSW Environmental Trust. The total budget for the project over the three years was $1.9 million.

The process includes:

1. Businesses register their interest over the phone or via the BBP website;
2. The Project Officer in that area organises a face-to-face meeting with the business;
3. The Project Officer will undertake a free sustainability appraisal looking at the areas of: Energy; Waste; Water; Community Support; Sustainable Purchasing; Sustainable Transport; and Staff Support.
4. The appraisal results in a tailored action plan for that business that to help find ways to save money and reduce their impact on the environment;
5. The Project Officer works with the business to assist in implementation of identified actions; and
6. Any actions that are undertaken by the business is verified and they receive a shop front recognition sticker and relevant badge.

Development and implementation of the project has included these key elements:

- Project Team – Project Coordinator, Education and Events Officer and three Business Engagement Officers;
- Steering Committee – comprising one representative from each partner Council who meets every 6 weeks with the Project Coordinator;
- Commissioning a Needs Analysis - to gather information on the values, needs and level of understanding around sustainability for small business;
- “Appraisal Tool” Development – As there were no holistic sustainability assessment tools available at the project outset, the BBP team developed its own “tool” commencing with a questionnaire/audit paper based system;
- Development of a Recognition Scheme - to recognise and reward businesses that take actions as recommended by the BBP team;
- Preparation of Communications Plan – to define stakeholder engagement goals and then develop marketing and media campaigns, branding and website (www.betterbusinesspartnership.com.au), networking events and consumer campaigns;
- Implementation of Client Relationship Management Database - a web based, central place to store and access business information for the project, upload leads and attach resources;
- Linking with Government Agency Programs - eg Energy Efficiency for Small Business and Business Waste Tool from OEH and Small to Medium Water Users from Sydney Water;

Program Launch and Implementation – BBP has now engaged more than 300 business and has had such success that partner Councils have agreed to continue the program for a further 3 years.
Outcomes:
The Better Business Partnership has meaningfully engaged 306 businesses. Working closely with these businesses, the team has provided support to implement sustainability actions as recommended in the Action Plans. Some key achievements include:

- Development of an electronic appraisal tool for business covering seven key areas of sustainability;
- 306 tailored BBP action plans developed for local businesses;
- Facilitated access for 130 BBP members to the NSW Governments Energy Efficiency for Small Business Program;
- 1,640 tonnes annual CO2-e savings through energy efficiency implementations in the local business community;
- Assisted access to more than $150,000 in funding for implementation of energy savings, through NSW Office of Environment and Heritage’s Energy Efficiency for Small Business Program and Community Savers Grant;
- $75,851 savings achieved on energy bills per year from businesses installing devices
- 1,518,128 annual kWh saved from businesses installing energy saving devices
- 262 attendees to the Better Business Awards 2012; (~1600 People’s Choice Votes!)
- 19.2 tonnes CO2-e savings through e-waste recycling and reuse;
- 15,135 kL water savings per year;
- BBP website and BBP TV.

Overall, the businesses have collectively been awarded 505 recognition badges for implementing measures that improve their sustainability performance, including initiatives like innovative staff development programs, installing an organics pulping machine/recycling system and purchasing organic products.

The BBP recognition program is also a key achievement which provides member businesses with free marketing and consumer campaigns. The BBP team have developed 13 case studies, both written and videos, that highlight actions in champion businesses.

Another major achievement was the Better Business Awards (BBA) held on World Environment Day, 5th June, 2012. The awards celebrated the achievements of business champions throughout the region with award categories across each of the seven key sustainability focus areas of the program. A People’s Choice award saw close to 1,600 votes coming in online and through in store voting boxes. The sellout event was a great success with more than 260 business and local council representatives in attendance.

Challenges:
There have been a number of challenges encountered during the project. Most of these have been addressed, resolved and solutions or changes made for the future of the Program. For others about to embark on a project such as this these may be valuable insights.
It was valuable to have the team all located in one central hub. Originally the staff were located within each Council across the region all using different IT systems, e-mail etc. In order to rectify this team were all moved to a central shop front style office location in Chatswood. Once the team was all in the same office there was clear communication and this ensured the team could maximise and streamline effort. This also enabled BBP to overcome challenges of different IT systems – (data management, GIS, email, web, CMS) developing a shared web based CRM for real time document sharing, business information and joint and consistent training of the team.

Staff turnover has been quite a challenge and speedy recruitment is not always possible. The time taken to develop the knowledge, undertake training, and re-engage businesses has meant some lost businesses. This has been overcome by having Project Officers work across Council boundaries (as opposed to previously being allocated a particular LGA) which allows Project Officers to be more geographically flexible and picking up businesses when needed.

Stakeholder consultation was formally undertaken at a number of points in the project and informally throughout. The reference group could have been improved through more specific questions, although this may have been time consuming this may have been solved through web surveys or had more people on the panel. Using champions as sounding board has been useful but it has also been suggested that businesses who are not champions be used to gauge more realistic feedback.

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