

Third Quarterly Progress Report

Dates covered in this report: March 2017 - May 2017

Project Title: CaRe: Communicating about Recycling

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Project Website: <http://stem.jou.ufl.edu/recycling-and-the-environment/>

Work accomplished during this reporting period:

| Focus Group Location | County | Participant number | Focus group number |
|-----------------------------|---------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Gainesville | Alachua | 18 | 3 |
| Orlando | Orange County | 9 | 2 |
| Tallahassee | Leon County | 5 | 2 |
| Chiefland | Levy County | 12 | 2 |
| <u>Total</u> | 4 | 44 | 9 |

Focus Groups

During this quarter, the research team focused on conducting focus groups throughout the state in order to gain a better understanding of facilitators and barriers to recycling practices. Additionally, focus groups were utilized as a way to receive feedback from residents on current message strategies utilized by recycling programs across the state. In total, 9 focus groups have been conducted to date.

Participant Demographics

The average age of focus group participants was 28 years and the majority (n=31) of participants were female. Thirty-three participants identified as White or Caucasian, six identified as Black or African-American, four identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, and two participants identified as other. Most participants noted that they have some level of college

training and more than half of participants stated that their household income was less than \$20,000. Only 14 participants were homeowners and the remainder were renters in their current residence. Results related to participants' environmental perceptions are listed in the appendix.

Alachua County

Three focus groups were conducted in Alachua County. Of the three focus groups, two were completed on the University of Florida's (UF) campus. It is possible that the focus groups conducted on UF's campus, with solely student participants, contain results only generalizable to a specialized population and are not necessarily representative of all Florida residents. Overall, the Alachua County focus groups preferred messages that were simple with less text. All participants noted that providing recycling information in a variety of formats through a variety of channels would be most effective.

In terms of barriers to participation in the county recycling program, students mentioned that unless their apartment complex or residence hall provided them with specific receptacles for recyclable materials, they were less likely to recycle. Non-student residents mentioned that they were more likely to recycle if curbside pick-up was provided.

In all three focus groups, there was a positive perception of people who recycle regularly and frequent recycling was often related to being a good person and caring about the environment and others.



Figure 1
Orange County Focus Group

Orange County

The Orange County focus groups were conducted in Orlando. One focus group was comprised of eight participants. However, due to scheduling conflicts, only one participant was in attendance at the second focus group.

During the one-on-one interview, the interviewee discussed the ways in which recycling and sustainability were often "politicized," pointing out that people's inclination to recycle may, at times, be at odds with how

they perceive the concept and social image of sustainability. This information was important as such a unique viewpoint may not have been discussed in a group setting.

A theme that emerged in the second focus group was the discussion of whether or not preparing (i.e., cleaning and sorting) recyclable items was a valuable use of one's time. A few members mentioned that machines at waste management facilities sorted out the necessary items and were certain that all materials end up at the same place. Throughout the focus group, participants made references to how sorting recyclables and preparing recyclable items is "someone's job," and because of this they felt less inclined to engage in proper recycling behavior.

Interestingly, a few participants in the second focus group provided insight into other recycling programs they have had exposure to over time. Several participants noted that they lived in other states prior to moving to Florida and had more engagement with those recycling programs. For example, one participant mentioned that in New York, improper recycling resulted in fines. Other participants mentioned the convenience and ease of other out of state programs that increased their recycling participation.

As noted in other focus groups, Orlando participants stated that the more complicated recycling became, or the more effort that was required on their behalf, the less likely they were to follow through. Similar to other focus groups, participants in Orange County appreciated recycling messages with less text and clear messaging strategy.

Leon County

The Tallahassee focus groups were comprised of individuals who frequently and consistently engage in recycling at home and in the community. Convenience was a key factor in the discussion about recycling during this focus group but, recycling pick-up was just as important. Participants mentioned that the proximity of a recycling bin could have an effect on the recycling habits of an individual, while items requiring special recycling care (such as batteries) were more likely to get thrown into the trash due to the effort and location of facilities that accept these materials for recycling.

Similar to the focus groups in Orange County, participants expressed a dislike for the idea of negative reinforcement for poor recycling practices, pointing out that it would dissuade those who were attempting to recycle from recycling altogether. A consistent theme throughout all focus groups, positive reinforcement and providing incentives (especially those that were financial in nature), was viewed as something that would be very appealing and effective in terms of increasing participation in recycling programs. Once again, simple messages that could be translated to magnets, flyers, and billboards were also viewed as something that might be effective. Participants stressed that the majority of people do want to recycle, but simply do not know what to do. Thus, clarity and accessibility were viewed as being important.

Levy County

The two Levy County focus groups were unique as this population did not have access to a curbside recycling program. This, along with the lack of information distributed by their county regarding recycling resulted in almost all of the participants stating that they do not recycle at home. The majority of participants mentioned that they burn their trash because of the lack of

accessibility to recycling facilities as well as the cost and inconvenience associated with recycling. Although residential recycling practices were sub-optimal in Levy, participants did mention that they felt recycling was important and noted that when they are out in the community, have access to, and know where a recycling bin is, they will engage in recycling behavior.

Similar to the Orange county focus group, these focus group participants provided anecdotes of their experience with other recycling programs. All of the other programs were viewed more favorably than the Levy County program. Participants mentioned that financial incentives would be a facilitator to increased recycling behavior.

In contrast to other focus groups, Levy County residents preferred materials that provided more information and were more detailed than those preferred by other groups. This may be due to the fact that they are rarely, if at all, exposed to information about the county recycling program.



Figure 2
Recycling material for testing provided by FDEP

recycling information. All focus groups agreed that a variety in communication channel would be the best strategy to distribute the recycling message. However, rural participants preferred print materials more often than web-based materials.

Conclusions/Overall Focus Group Feedback

Overall, resident engagement with current recycling programs was primarily influenced by convenience. Participants with curbside pick-up were most likely to participate in residential recycling. In general, participants expressed a willingness to recycle in community locations as long as information was included on the bin, detailing what to recycle. Positive incentives were expressed throughout all focus groups as a way to increase participation in county recycling programs. In terms of message strategy for communication information about recycling, participants in more urban areas and younger participants were more likely to engage with materials with less text and more images. Older participants as well as those that lived in rural areas preferred more thorough

TAG Meeting

One TAG meeting was conducted on May 17, 2017. All members of the CaRe TAG were present and the main discussion of the meeting was centered around the statewide survey to be distributed throughout the state in June 2017.

Other Activities

The research team attended two recycling webinars in this time period, both of which were suggested from a TAG member. The first webinar was hosted by Keep America Beautiful and the second was hosted by Environmental Protection Agency. The lessons learned from these two events helped inform a vision for our survey development. Additionally, participation provided an important exposure to the professional field of recycling and expand our scope of understanding the range of initiatives taking place across different regions in the US.

Metrics:

1. List research publications resulting from THIS Hinkley Center project. None
2. List research presentations resulting from (or about) THIS Hinkley Center project. None
3. List who has referenced or cited your publications from this project. None
4. How have the research results from THIS Hinkley Center project been leveraged to secure additional research funding? What additional sources of funding are you seeking or have you sought? None
5. What new collaborations were initiated based on THIS Hinkley Center project? Keep Florida Beautiful has become a new collaborator and as a result of this project, the CaRe team will be giving a presentation on study results at their annual meeting in June.
6. How have the results from THIS Hinkley Center funded project been used (not will be used) by the FDEP or other stakeholders? Preliminary focus group results have helped to inform the revision of FDEP-sponsored communication materials for statewide recycling messaging. Members of the CaRe team have been in consistent contact with FDEP stakeholders regarding project updates and will continue to provide assistance by informing stakeholders of successful message development strategies.

Next Steps

Coding of focus group results

Researchers have developed a draft codebook based on open-coding of initial focus group transcripts and have identified several emerging themes. After the final version of the codebook has been constructed, members of the research team will code focus group transcripts as they become available in order to provide more comprehensive results. A draft of the codebook can be found in the appendix.

Statewide Survey

In order to receive a broader perspective from a large sample of Florida residents, a Qualtrics survey will be distributed to 1000 Florida residents. This survey will serve to inform the facilitators and barriers to recycling behaviors as well as to understand the current needs of Florida residents in regards to recycling messaging. The results of the survey will inform the construction of recycling materials that include key components preferred by Floridians. As noted above, the composition of survey items was informed by collaboration with the research team and members of the CaRe TAG. Members of the research team are in the process of submitting an IRB protocol to the University of Florida's IRB02 office regarding the statewide survey.

Focus groups in different FL counties

Researchers plan to conduct six final focus groups. These focus groups will be held in the following counties: DeSoto, Palm Beach, and Okaloosa. Two focus groups will be conducted in each county.

Keep Florida Beautiful

Members of the research team were invited to discuss project goals, progress, and future directions at the annual Keep Florida Beautiful meeting. Three members of the research team plan to be in attendance and present study results and progress.

Manuscripts

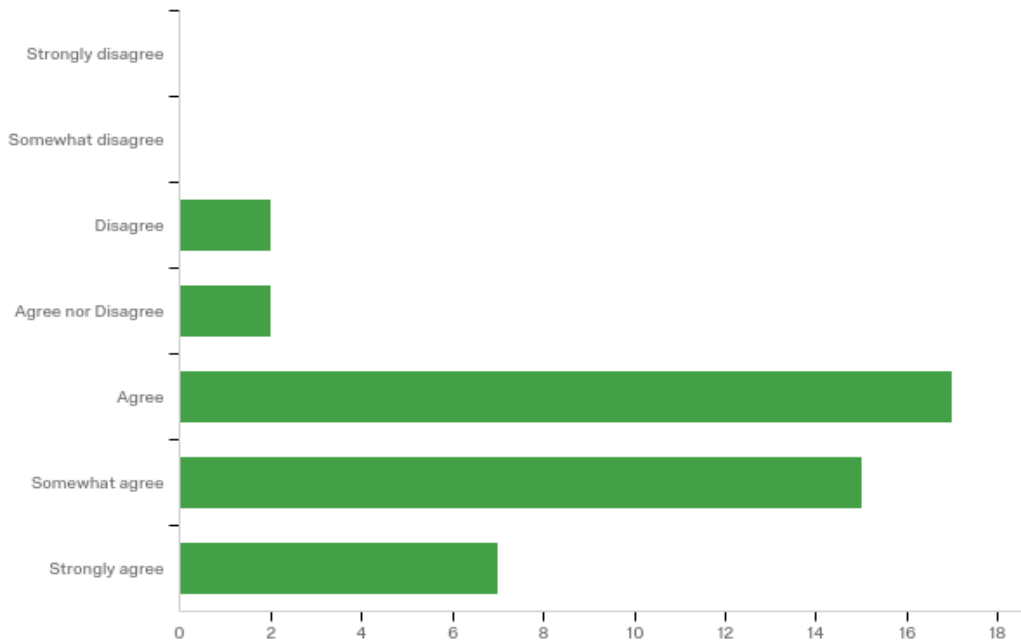
To formally disseminate findings, the research team expects to publish results in scholarly journals. Final revisions have been received on the website content analysis paper and is prepared for submission to *Resources, Conservation, and Recycling*. Pending completion of all statewide focus groups, a manuscript will represent significant findings from this phase of the project and be submitted to the aforementioned journal.

Appendix

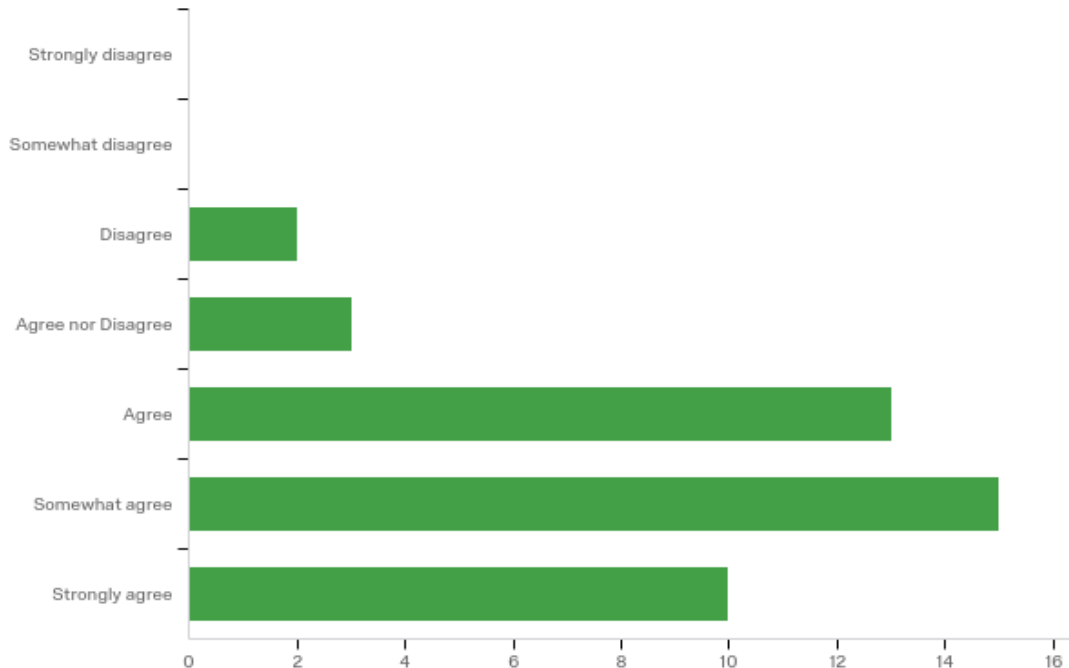
Environmental Opinions

Please see results from focus group participant demographic survey regarding environmental opinions below.

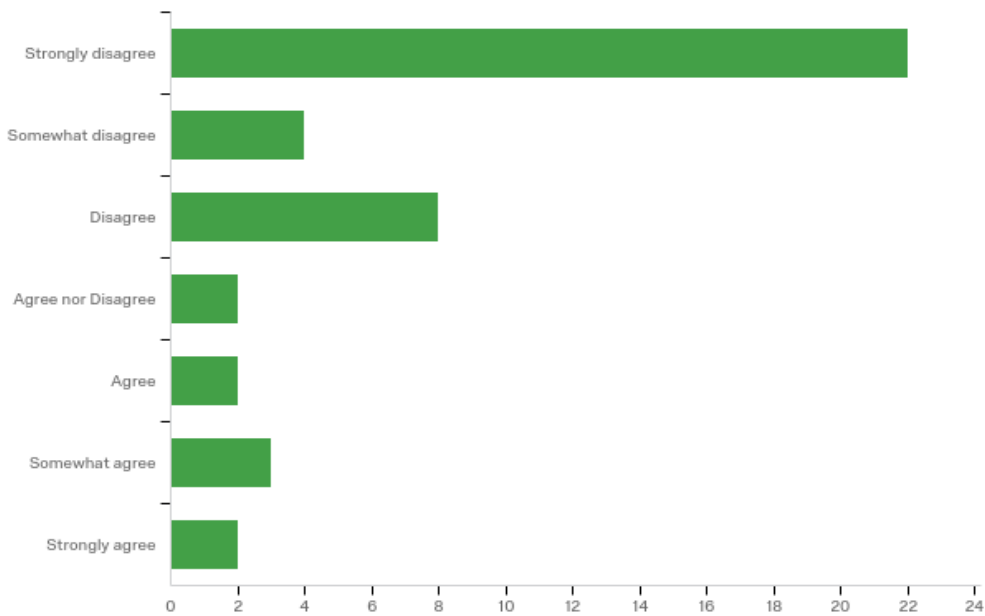
Please indicate the degree to which you disagree or agree with the following statements. I think of myself as an environmentally-friendly consumer



Please indicate the degree to which you disagree or agree with the following statements. I think of myself as someone who is very concerned with environmental issues.



Please indicate the degree to which you disagree or agree with the following statements. I would be embarrassed to be seen as having an environmentally-friendly lifestyle.



Please indicate the degree to which you disagree or agree with the following statements. I would not want my family and friends to think of me as someone who is concerned about environmental issues.

