

Hosting the 2014 EAC Symposium

Lessons Learned

Symposium Subcommittee

- **Subcommittee Governance**

- Clearly establish subcommittee governance to ensure that members/volunteers/City staff understand committee mandate, powers, decision-making, reporting structure to BEPAC/Environmental Planning/Council
- Ensure that everyone clearly understands the 'decision-making' hierarchy, particularly the expectations/role of City staff. EACs are advisory to Council, and therefore, committee decisions that affect/involve the City (facilities, image, corporate structure, policies/procedures) should be cleared by staff before proceeding.
- Establish rules of order to run meeting – establish meeting schedule
- Establish a chair/co-chair and other subgroups as necessary to run the symposium (invitations, food, venue, speakers, etc.)

- **Expectations**

- Establish committee/symposium expectations – what constitutes success for the symposium, ie. Attendance numbers, growth of members/volunteers in hosting this type of event, sponsorship, etc.
- Go easy on attendance expectations – EAC members are volunteers – expectations should be for 1-2 reps per EAC and you will not get all EACs, especially those from further away, or those who feel that their particular mandate is not being addressed by the Symposium. We had 47 registrants and about 42 showed up. But these attendees represented 17 EACs.
- Brampton used the symposium as a learning opportunity on how to host an environmental event
- Identify what would make the committee cancel the symposium? Funding? Lack of attendance? Lack of volunteers? Etc. Establish how you would go about making this decision and who makes it, i.e. subcommittee, BEPAC, staff or Council? This is especially important once you have notified/invited the other EACs to the event. In anticipation of this issue, establish deadlines for symposium logistics to ensure that volunteers complete tasks that are tied to decision-making.

- **Meetings**

- Meet monthly for approx. 6 month to define Symposium theme, agenda/speakers/topics and general logistics
- Meet 2x/month for three months before to nail down these issues
- Meet weekly one month prior to event to finalize last minute details

- **Volunteers**
 - Establish volunteer expectations for members of the subcommittee (whether BEPAC, city staff or community volunteers) and accountability
 - Get student volunteers (university, college, high school) although recognize that availability may be more limited relative to adult volunteers

- **Budget**
 - Either establish a budget and stick within it, or determine what type of Symposium you want to host and establish a budget (i.e. 1-2 day event – professional or free speakers – type of venue – type of catering – extras). i.e. Brampton did simple – Oshawa’s was more elaborate.
 - Get early Council approval of budget or determine funding /sponsorship strategy. Registration fee has always been \$25.00 – and this does make it easy for attendees, especially those who are paying their own way. However, it may be appropriate to raise the fee to \$30.00 or have a graduated fee – one for EAC members paying their own way, and a fee for those members that the municipality will pay for.
 - If fund raising/sponsorship, get started early to determine that you can raise the monies.
 - Define the type of sponsorship you are seeking – monies, in-kind service (food, rentals, etc.)
 - Who will you accept sponsorship from? Any business – only those businesses/enterprises that are sustainable – work within the field of the symposium, etc.
 - How will you recognize sponsorship at the event/post-event
 - Will you let the sponsors attend symposium? Advertise at symposium?
 - Know some of your major costs as early as possible in organizing symposium – venue, rentals (tables, chairs, sound system, dining ware), catering, etc. to ensure that the budget/funding raising is sufficient

Symposium Agenda

- Establish symposium theme as early as possible – this will help you identify topics/workshops/etc. and the type of speakers you are looking for. Brampton decided that we want to learn from the symposium, and wanted a theme/agenda that was relevant to all EACS - hence how to do Community Engagement. It was our intent that speakers would use their own initiatives to be able to explain how they achieved (or didn’t achieve) community engagement – what constitutes a successful community engagement campaign/activity – what are the issues to beware of.
- Avoid being ego or municipal-centric in defining agenda topics/speakers/etc.
 - We knew that EACs were not going to travel to Brampton to hear a brag fest about our activities, successes, etc. We invited speakers from other EACs, agencies, etc. that could speak to the theme and provide a perspective that was relevant across municipalities, residents, etc.
 - We even invited EACs to identify a Community Engagement topic that was worthy of being the Keynote.

- Invite the youth – whether as attendees or speakers/presenters. Try to get some involved on the committee.
- Don't pack the agenda with back to back speakers. Allow time for questions/answers. Be strict about sticking to the time for each speaker/answer period. This is actually the toughest issue to stay on top of throughout the day.
- Develop work sessions to keep attendees engaged and contributing to the success of the symposium. We were thrilled with the attendees involvement and output in the two working sessions that we held.

Catering

- We did half and half – catered sandwiches and coffee – and self-catering for breakfast products, snacks and lunch time salads, fruits, veggies, etc. Costco was an excellent source for food and kept the costs down. We thought that people might be hung up on the 100 mile diet, organic, etc. and this was not the case. People just wanted to enjoy good snacks and a lunch.
- Determine quantities and reduce by about 25%. We had way to much food, especially if you offer lots of fruit, veggies and salads, then your bread products can be greatly reduced.
- Need to ask registrants about allergies, food intolerances, etc. Gluten free (bread type) products are now more easily available; however, we found that fruit, veggies, salads were way more attractive for meals/snacks than glutenfree bread products.

Invitations

- Get list of EAC contacts as early possible (minimum 4 months before event) – use EAC website (once it has been updated) and/or contact municipalities directly. We sent all of our material through municipal staff – and this was variable between Planning, Community Services and Clerks (municipal administration) who was the contact point for the EACs.
- Send invite about 3 months early, but follow-up with many reminder emails. Some EAC members were circulated the invite, many EACs need to take the invite to their regular meeting – and this was variable from a monthly meeting to a quarterly meeting.
- Establish a deadline for registration to finalize some of the logistics (seating and catering), but frankly expect that there will be late submissions. We allowed registration up to the day of the event. The more the merrier. Ensure that you can change basic order/quantities (caterers, rentals, venue set-u[]) with only 24 hours' notice before the event.
- Send good instructions to registrants for getting to the venue.
- Have a volunteer contact for day of the symposium in case registrants get lost etc. Make sure this information goes out with Symposium agenda, etc.

Venue

- Choose a local venue that supports your theme – or at least helps to represent the environmental aspects of the municipality. think a venue that provides a relaxing setting is great for environmental volunteers.

- Set up the day / night before.
- Get a couple of volunteers just to run the kitchen/food – prep, set up, clean up, etc. This job will keep them busy for much of day.
- Get a volunteer to run your audio/visual equipment. Pre-load presentations.
 - Even in a small venue you may need audio equipment.
- Have a greeter/all-purpose volunteer to assist registrants when they arrive.
- Have a Master of Ceremonies for the day
- Have a timekeeper – use 2 and 1 minute and 30 second warnings for speakers and MC.

Exhibitors

- Invite CAs, local community environmental groups, etc. to display at symposium, be part of speaker series and/or participate in sessions. This worked great for us. We invited exhibitors, but only one member was free, additional members had to register and pay registration fee (to help offset food costs).
- Ensure venue has room for tables for exhibitors.

Registrants

- Clearly identify that municipal staff (liaisons to EACs) are invited.
- May want to open it up to any or all councillors that wish to attend from any municipality.
- Consider local agencies/community environmental groups/etc. that support EACs, etc.