

REGIONAL MODEL OF PUBLIC EDUCATION AND OUTREACH WORKBOOK

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United Way
Centraide
Ottawa



United Way
Lanark County



United Way
Renfrew County

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We would also like to acknowledge staff at United Way Ottawa for their help in creating this model. In particular, we would like to thank the Director of Community Initiatives with responsibility for EARN, the Marketing and Communications department, and the Senior Advisor for Public Affairs for their contributions.

The Regional Model of Public Education and Outreach was produced by United Way Ottawa with support from the Government of Ontario.



INTRODUCTION

This handbook has been produced to share our experiences with other organizations who may undertake projects with an urban centre and rural partners.

Description of the project

United Way Ottawa leads an initiative called the Employment Accessibility Resource Network (EARN). EARN builds partnerships with employers and service providers to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities. It also provides a coordinated access point for education and expertise on employment, accessibility and workplace inclusion for both people with disabilities and employers.

The success of EARN positioned United Way Ottawa well in the community to lead *The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Project*, funded by the Government of Ontario through the Enabling Change Program. The project ran between October 2016 and October 2017 and its key objectives were two-fold: to educate and inform businesses in Ottawa as well as in Lanark and Renfrew Counties about the AODA and its compliance requirements with a focus on the accessible employment standard; and to create and pilot a regional public education and outreach model that could be scaled province-wide, particularly in regions where there is an urban hub surrounded by rural areas.

The AODA project was successful in meeting—and in many cases surpassing—its objectives. For example, our project team needed to educate and inform a total of 2,400 small and medium-sized businesses on the AODA and its compliance requirements, as well as reach 3,000 individual participants. By the project's conclusion, 2,412 businesses and 3,734 participants had been reached. Additionally, 91.25 per cent of survey respondents reported an increase in their knowledge of the AODA standards and compliance requirements thanks to our efforts.

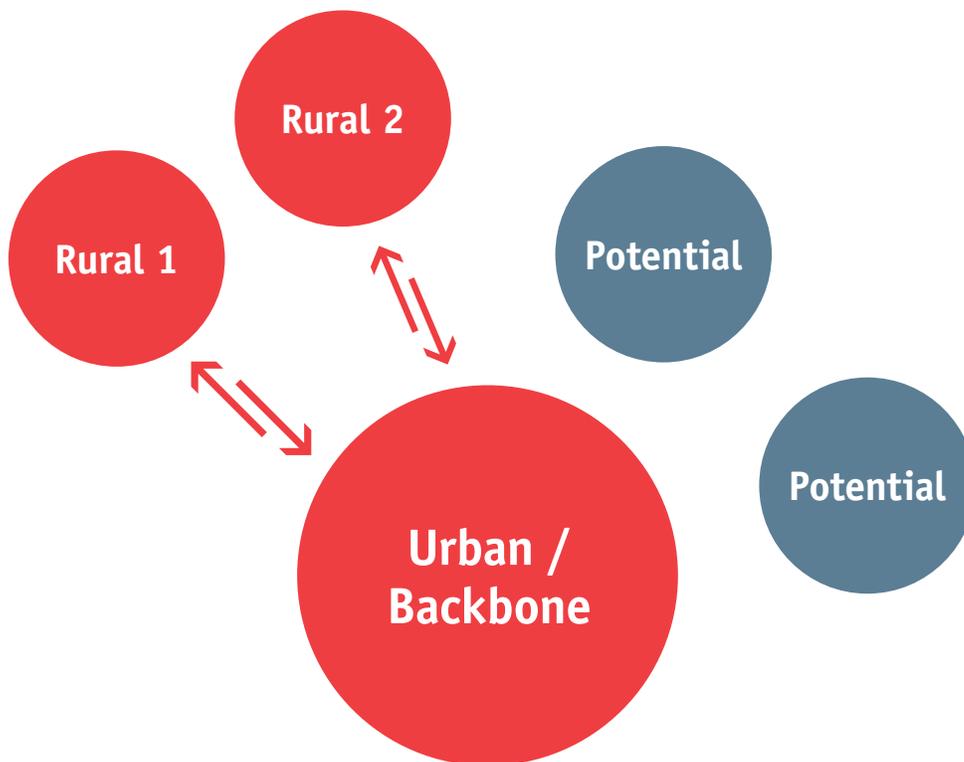
The *Regional Model of Public Education and Outreach* was developed based on our experience with support of the project partners. The full document can be found at <http://earn-paire.ca/aoda/>.

Summary: Regional Model of Public Education and Outreach

Based on the learned experience from this project, United Way Ottawa asserts that the following activities are essential:

- Establish an organization or group prepared to play the role of “backbone” or lead
- Develop a communications plan including key messages and materials
- Build a solid foundation
 - Prepare your team
 - Gather and internalize key information
 - Understand the communities you will be engaging with
- Set clear measurable objectives
- Develop activities that reinforce key messages
- Leverage partners
- Be aware of and understand cross-cultural issues

Urban / Rural Model



OVERVIEW OF OUR PROJECT

Roles and Responsibilities

United Way Ottawa's primary role was to give backbone support to the AODA project. This included human resources support (e.g. recruitment, offer letters, payroll) and IT services provided to Outreach Coordinators working in Ottawa and partner United Ways in Lanark and Renfrew Counties. With respect to responsibilities, the Director of Community Initiatives was the overall lead for the project, and managed the budget as well as the staffing complement.

The Project Team included a Project Officer located at United Way Ottawa and Outreach Coordinators at each of the urban and rural locations. The Outreach Coordinators were responsible for developing and implementing educational materials, pre and post engagement evaluation surveys, and weekly report templates. The Project Officer led the efforts, completed reports to the funder, and also leveraged the support of additional teams such as the Marketing and Communications department at United Way Ottawa to create a communications plan and marketing materials.

The Regional Directors in Lanark and Renfrew Counties provided local orientation and onboarding for Outreach Coordinators hired to support their respective counties. On a day-to-day basis, the Regional Directors provided supervision and guidance to the Outreach Coordinators. The responsibility of the partner United Ways was to also play an active role in contributing to project outcomes; to bring a rural lens to the task of educating small and medium-sized businesses; and to help create this model.

Everyone involved was made aware of key deliverables and was kept up to date on progress throughout the project.

Communications, Marketing and Promotion

A communications plan was created with the following in mind: educate small and medium-sized businesses about the province's accessibility laws with a focus on employment standards requirements; raise awareness of the business case for hiring people with disabilities; reinforce EARN's role in finding employment for people with disabilities; and increase community-wide collaboration between employers, service providers, funders and other stakeholders.

Educational materials

A package of shareable educational materials that could be customized for each partner United Way to increase local buy-in was created.

KEY PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Building the foundation

Know your subject area

To establish a solid foundation, Outreach Coordinators were provided with a two-week training period. The training was supported by both United Way Ottawa as well as provincial partners. The following are some of the opportunities they had:

1. Training on the AODA and compliance requirements;
2. Time to become familiar with project resources provided by the Government of Ontario;
3. Educational materials were tailored to meet the needs of our target audience. Feedback used to refine these tools was elicited from the Outreach Coordinators to further engage them in the learning process; and
4. A support tool was developed on how to conduct a conversation with a business during an initial meeting, which included examples on responding to employer questions/concerns about the AODA, pivoting to EARN and explaining the value that United Way brings to the community.

To sustain the knowledge and activities, a weekly conference call was held for the project team to share information, best practices, risks, challenges, and problem-solve as a group. These were held throughout the life of the project.

Know your neighborhood and local issues

Each Outreach Coordinator was hired partially based on their knowledge of the area where they were going to conduct outreach. The Regional Directors of the United Ways of Lanark and Renfrew counties, as well as the Director of Community Initiatives at United Way Ottawa provided valuable knowledge about their particular regions. This meant that each coordinator could start off with warm leads to businesses and organizations in their respective communities.

Outreach Coordinators also kept up-to-date on local issues by reading print media and actively monitoring social media to inform them about local activities, i.e. special events, conferences and meetings which they could attend to promote the project goals.

Approaches to outreach

The Outreach Coordinators were flexible in their approach to meet the needs of employers. In the weekly reports submitted by each coordinator, the following methods of outreach were most frequently identified:

Walk-ins

This approach was most common and the following are ways to maximize the opportunity:

- Practice how the conversation could develop before entering the business (i.e. potential questions that could arise, objections);
- Plan your route for walk-ins to make the best use of time (i.e. map out your area);
- Where possible, provide positive feedback (i.e. noticeable accessibility features) regarding the establishment related to your project before engaging an employer in a conversation;
- Be persistent yet patient. It may be necessary to wait while the business person serves customers, or come back at another time;
- Show interest in the business and its products/services;
- Communicate the reason for your visit succinctly as time is of the essence.

Presentations/booths

Reaching captive audiences at local events and business gatherings worked extremely well. We found out what was happening in the community by:

- Reviewing event apps weekly (e.g. Eventbrite);
- Checking chamber of commerce, BIA and other relevant sector websites for upcoming events, as well as signing up for their newsletters;
- Networking; and
- Leveraging our community partners and partner events.

Information sessions

We hosted small information sessions, which were promoted through the United Ways and the EARN network. These events were held at various times of the day, and in our experience, 'Lunch and Learn' events proved to be more enticing to employers than those held at other times of the day.

Community based approaches in our experience

Best approaches for all communities:

1. Prioritize business districts and neighborhoods for early outreach and revisit priority areas over the course of the project;
2. Network strategically through business leaders. This can lead to referrals, thereby creating 'buy-in' and more opportunities to promote your message;
3. Succinctly summarize the reason for the visit before providing information;
4. Be creative and adapt to the needs of your audience;
5. Hold events in different areas and at different times;
6. Be considerate e.g. choose venues with free parking and those that are easy to access for the businesses;
7. Be flexible—your day may need to start at different times, or you may need to shift your meetings based on the traffic flow of the business you are working with.

Differences we experienced between urban and rural communities:

1. In rural communities, there tends to be more sole proprietorships with only one or two employees, which means that more time is needed to reach the same number of participants in a rural community than in an urban area;
2. In smaller communities (typically rural) many people 'wear many hats', i.e. speaking at a town council meeting can reach small and medium businesses as well. This could allow you to quickly build relationships and be introduced to key stakeholders;
3. Distance between businesses is more of an issue in rural communities. Therefore, travel time must be taken into consideration when setting weekly outreach goals;
4. Coverage in print and online media seems easier to obtain in rural communities than in urban areas;
5. Connecting with chambers of commerce is more easily done in rural communities, where chamber members are fewer and speakers for events are more eagerly sought;
6. There is often a desire for information and training in rural communities, whereas larger hubs can be saturated with these opportunities;
7. Smaller audiences, larger geographies, peak vacation times and varied travel conditions in rural areas present unique challenges for event planning. This

called for creative ways of reaching out, e.g. booths at golf tournaments in the summer; hosting webinars in the winter, flexible schedules.

Overall strategies adaptable to other regions

Nurturing relationships

A focus of our project was collaboration, which allowed us to develop new relationships and to deepen existing ones. Immediate impact is difficult to measure, however, over time we know that lasting effects will bring more tangible results.

Here is an example of nurturing relationships in action:

The Outreach Coordinator in Lanark County nurtured relationships with Lanark County's three chambers of commerce (in Carleton Place, Perth and Smiths Falls), BIAs and the Mississippi Mills Economic Development Committee. These relationships had meaningful impact over the course of the project. For example; two chambers of commerce and one BIA posted articles written by the Outreach Coordinator in their monthly newsletters; one of these articles about the AODA was posted on Perth County's Facebook page; and another article is posted permanently on the Smiths Falls website. Nurturing these relationships also led to United Way Lanark County being able to have a booth at three golf tournaments, and also being invited to give presentations at various events. These relationships also played a role in sustaining the impact of our project message: by the end of the project, all three chambers in Lanark County had agreed to display AODA information at their offices on an ongoing basis. Also, invitations to attend summer events for the following year were extended.

This example demonstrates how nurturing relationships with community partners earns goodwill, sustains project impact and enhances the awareness of the value an organization can bring to the subject matter community-wide. A significant result of this project was the extent to which organizations across the regions reached out to each United Way for expertise as a result of our greater profile and reputation.

Leveraging partners

United Way Ottawa has an established network, EARN, where each member has its

own network of employers and partners. Through EARN, the project was able to greatly increase its reach and impact in the community. Taking the time to understand the existing networks that may be available to any project is a valuable exercise and can lead to a much greater collective impact in the community.

Although the rural United Ways that took part in the project did not have an established network like EARN, they did have partners through the organizations they fund, their donor base, and the relationships they have established and nurtured in the community.

As a result, this multitude of partnerships was leveraged to engage more employers and community leaders than would have been possible otherwise, thereby increasing the overall impact of the project.

Understanding cross-cultural issues

We learned that many small businesses in Ontario are owned and operated by newcomers to Canada, whose first language was neither English nor French. Learning how to communicate effectively with these small and medium-sized businesses owners was crucial to effectively demonstrating inclusion.

Accordingly, we researched and created the *Building Cross Cultural Competency* document, which can be found on www.EARN-PAIRE.ca.

Engaging Outreach Coordinators

Effectively engaging Outreach Coordinators was essential for the AODA project to succeed in reaching its goals, especially when project delivery was in three separate regions.

Examples of engagement activities:

- Holding a joint training session during onboarding for the Outreach Coordinators;
- Setting weekly numeric goals for outreach facilitated engagement and project focus;
- Completing weekly reports to document the week's events, successes and challenges;
- Keeping in regular touch with each coordinator through email and telephone conversations; and
- Inviting outreach coordinators to events with the lead organization/office.

Effective methods of information sharing and proactive problem-solving:

- Weekly reporting conference calls allowed for information and expertise to be shared and issues discussed. If and when issues arose, they were solved more efficiently as a group;
- Regular reports allowed for reflection on each week's experience to improve performance;
- The agenda for weekly conference calls always included discussion of successes, challenges, and risks to the project.

CONCLUSIONS

Launching a project

- Having the lead organization that provided centralized HR, IT and managerial resources and supports was integral to the project's success;
- Engaging the leadership of the Regional Directors in each United Way in the project was also key;
- Having stakeholder and partner engagement in each area prior to commencing the project was essential as a baseline of support from which to launch project activities;
- Nurturing and leveraging relationships with community partners—as well as partners within EARN and United Way networks—led to the sustainability of project messaging after the project is completed;
- Giving Outreach Coordinators an adequate and well planned orientation period prepared them to become familiar with the project and key messages, helping with the development of new ideas that we could implement as the project progressed;
- Key factors that contributed to reaching project deliverables:
 - o Developing a solid reporting structure and data collection process
 - o Holding weekly report conference calls to share successes and challenges and complete weekly tracking of results
 - o Developing project tools and resources customized to be region specific
 - o Building an effective and engaged outreach team
- Leveraging special events such as local golf tournaments was most effective in the rural communities;

- Tailoring and adapting resources as needed based on geographic circumstances was very useful for informing and educating businesses;
- Having the opportunity to complete recruitment, hiring and onboarding prior to launching the project would have given more time to dedicate to project delivery.

Adapting to the Rural Context:

- Understanding that in rural communities a top down approach to outreach led to becoming known and respected, especially where local leaders may also be business people. Nurturing relationships with town councils, municipal councils and accessibility committees was, therefore, an effective means of promoting the project to businesses in rural communities; as compared to urban.

Communications:

- Developing a communications plan that encompassed all forms of media and coverage led to more awareness of our project and attendance at events.
- Obtaining media coverage was easier in rural communities than in Ottawa.
- Again, becoming aware of cross-cultural communication issues and creating the Building Cross-Communications Competency document provided Outreach Coordinators with strategies, tools and best practices in engaging with businesses run by newcomers in Ontario’s multicultural landscape.

Public education and outreach are important activities for affecting change, and we know that many partners need to be engaged to make it successful. We hope that you are able to use our project learnings to help you deliver a similarly successful result.



If you have any questions about our project or to discuss how our learnings may apply to your project please reach out at any time.

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