

Creating an Earth Day Clean-up Event

General Comments – Earth Day is a popular event and many people and groups will want to help. All that is needed is someone to energize and organize them. I found the result was the generation of pride and group spirit, which further resulted in more people wanting and working for a clean town and healthy environment.

Well in advance of Earth Day in April (I would recommend at least 6 weeks and more is better) contact the most active civic group in your town. For my town it is the Downtown Business Owners Association. Get a personal (in person) line in with a “get-er-done” member of the group, preferably the head of the group.

Introduce yourself as a person interested in the environmental health, beauty and community spirit of the town. And let them know you are willing to volunteer to head up an Earth Day clean-up. My experience with this is that they were really appreciative of the willingness to volunteer.

Ask to be placed on the agenda of one of their meetings (at their convenience) to discuss the project and explore all the lines to activate for volunteers.

Come to the meeting with a general outline of what you hope to accomplish and how you envision getting it done. But be willing to listen and co-create with members. I found that they wanted a different date than I proposed and had a different idea of the time and this worked really well.

Work out the date, time, location and as many details as possible at this meeting.

Look for someone who has media contacts to get the word out that volunteers are wanted and everyone is welcome to participate via radio, newspaper, etc. (These groups usually put on events and have someone who already does this function. If not, you can do it yourself by contacting the local papers –on-line and print, local radio, community newsletters, etc.)

Some of the members will have many community contacts and ask them to forward an email you will send them with details on the clean-up event.

Prospect for other groups who will want to participate. Ideally you will have several groups, each with a person in charge who can round their people up and get them to work during the clean-up.

Some groups that may work for you – local colleges often have an environmentally focused group and may want to heavily participate. This takes more time to arrange since they already

will have projects on-going and this may be close to their spring break. Schools, Boy and Girl Scout groups, outdoors groups all may want to tackle various areas and nature trails. The garden club may want to plant flowers and there may be some individuals or groups who want to plant trees.

The main thing you will need for the clean-up day is a table, plastic gloves for the expected number of volunteers and trash bags. You may be able to recycle some of what is cleaned-up, but that is more difficult and depends on the recycling program in your town. Recycling is the ideal way to do it, you just need to figure out how.

You will want to coordinate with the town office to have workers and a truck lined up at your collection point to take the trash bags to the disposal/recycle point. If your town charges for disposal you need to have the town absorb this cost or fund it.

You can probably get local stores to chip in the gloves and trash bags. You just ask if they want to donate materials for the clean-up. I got a yes and had all costs covered.

The location where you will pass out gloves and bags and assign clean-up areas needs to be convenient. We used a downtown spot with a big lawn and plenty of street parking and set up a table with materials.

I had a big sign made for free by the local Coca Cola bottling plant and set that up on the day. There was a sign the town uses for events and the Earth Day event was posted on it for a while before the day.

I made sure the local papers knew about it as well as advertised it (for free as community volunteer event). So we had several reporters take pics and run articles after.

I had maps and highlighters and assigned street sections to the volunteers if they didn't have a personal spot for which they wanted to take responsibility.

Most of all we made it fun!

Each year we've talked of expanding it. There can be informational posters about recycling or even demonstrations of composting, etc. It can be a total fun creative activity with all kinds of possibilities for involvement and education.

Hope this helps! Let me know if any questions.

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