Evaluating Conservation Improvement Programs in North St. Paul

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PROJECT A: PROCESS DESCRIPTION

Rationale

Through the Conservation Improvement Projects (CIP), the City of North Saint Paul is encouraging the smart use of energy in both business and residential sectors. With funding from their local electrical utility facility, North Saint Paul is able to offer rebate programs and energy audits to businesses and residents. The City of North St. Paul addresses three different populations within their residents; they are: residential, low income residential and commercial. Low income residential comprises approximately 450 residents, residential is about 5,215, and commercial is around 700 customers (B. Frandle, personal communication, October 7, 2013). These programs both inform the public about energy conservation techniques, and promote taking action in the name of smart energy use. CIP is an important piece in North Saint Paul's plan to grow and improve their community in a healthy and sustainable way.

Goals, Objectives and Outcomes

In order to ensure the success of the evaluation plan for CIP, a goal must be specified. The goal of the project has two components: 1) design an evaluation plan to assess current energy efficiency programs 2) see if these programs are being effectively marketed or communicated to residents of North St. Paul to enhance participation.

The goal of evaluation will work to enhance the vision that the city of North St. Paul has for the environment over the next 20 years. In North St. Paul's Comprehensive Plan for the years 2008-2030, they plan to protect and enhance the lakes, wetlands, woods and wildlife and promote actions, practices, and developments which will sustain the environment. (North St.

Paul Comprehensive Plan, 2008). The evaluation created will effectively measure energy conservation opportunities and how residents can become more involved.

In order to achieve the goals and create a holistic evaluation, certain objectives must be completed:

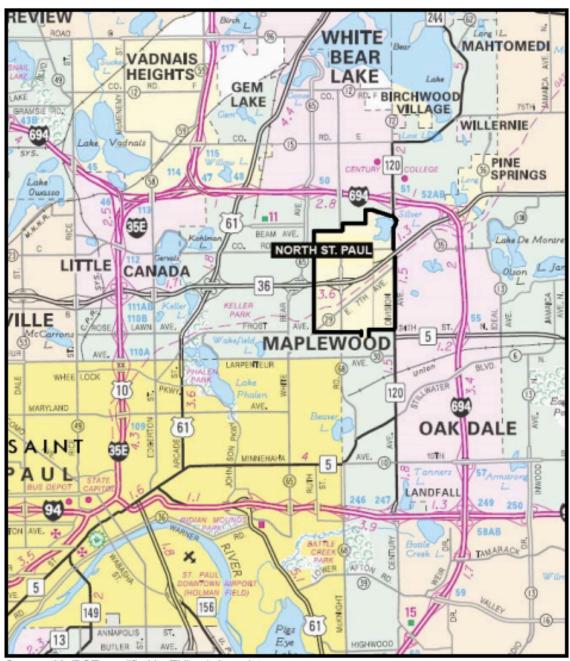
- Review relevant North St. Paul documents in relation to energy efficiency:
 Comprehensive Plan, Conservation Improvement Programs, North St. Paul website, 2013 North St. Paul Rebate Report
- Identify key stakeholders and interview them (City staff, participants of conservation programs, municipalities)
- Review the current energy conservation programs offered in North St. Paul
- Assess the level of participation in the conservation programs
- Review the communication and marketing surrounding the energy conservation programs

As a result of the evaluation, the city of North St. Paul will be provided with a plan to assess their conservation programs, and recommendations for the next steps North St. Paul could take to increase program participation, and deliverables such as a survey template and logic model.

Setting

North St. Paul is a city of 3.1 square miles, in Ramsey County, Minnesota, east of the city of Saint Paul. The city is situated on Beam Avenue to the north, Century Avenue to the east, Holloway Avenue to the south, and Ariel Street to the west. According to the 2012 census, the city had a population of around 11,460 people. With it's a six block-long Main Street, this small

Figure 1: Map of North St. Paul



Source: Mn/DOT, modified by Thibault Associates

(From City of North Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan, 2008–2030)

industrial village turned first-ring suburb, North St. Paul embraces its small-town feel but also recognizes it is part of a larger region. With 125 years of history, North St. Paul is a tight-knit community with bonds to the town atmosphere, its neighbors, and their shared past. But it is also a town that looks to the future, embracing technology and seeking new ways to capture the next wave of innovation and ingenuity to propel the community forward. With an abundance of city parks, schools, churches, a quaint downtown district, and peaceful neighborhoods, North St. Paul is a town with a great quality of life. It is connected to a thriving metropolitan region, and appreciates how this enhances residents' access to a diversity of jobs, cultural and recreational opportunities, quality healthcare, and higher education opportunities. Although as a community North St. Paul seeks to become more "urban" by investing in progressive infrastructure improvements and more compact development, it will strive to preserve the small-town atmosphere by ensuring that future projects adhere to a quality design standard and aesthetic character (City of North St. Paul Website, 2013).

The City's tax base is comprised mainly of residential property. The ten largest taxpayers make up almost ten percent of the City's estimated market value. This provides the City with a stable source of property tax revenue. The City's largest private employer is Target Stores, Inc. It employs approximately 270 people and is part of a large chain of stores. The city receives most of its revenues from taxes (57%), grants (32%), charges for services (8%) and other sources (3%) (CAFR Report, 2012).

Staff, Participants, Funders/Sponsors

The overall Comprehensive Plan for the City of North Saint Paul consists of four major institutions; the Planning Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission, the Environmental

Advisory Commission and the City Council. The staff at the City that would be directly responsible for the evaluation project would be part of the following departments: City

Administration, Finance and Utilities, and Community Development. The City Administration consists of the city manager, deputy clerk and communications director. Finance and Utilities consist of the finance director, accountants, customer service specialists and the utility billing coordinator. The Community Development staffs consist of the community development director, economic development director, the building and zone official, the community development specialist and secretary, the deputy and assistant fire chief. The City Staff consists of personnel who have backgrounds in engineering, accounting, community development and planning, public service and public relations, environmental and city regulations, and finance. Additionally, there are staff personnel at the University of Minnesota Center for Urban and Regional Affairs and the Institute on the Environment.

The participants in the program according to the CIP program description are businesses and residents of the city of North Saint Paul. The families are going to be from single family, and two-family demographics. These types of residencies include townhomes, apartments, and condominiums. The funders are going to be the city of North Saint Paul. Specifically the sponsors of this program are the Minnesota Municipal Power Association. The Minnesota Waste Wise non-profit which is an affiliate of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce would fund the Energy Smart program in local businesses (City of North St. Paul Website, 2013).

Activities/Events

Rebates:

Rebates are offered to both residents and businesses through the Conservation Improvement Programs. In order to receive a rebate, a person would just have to fill out an application for the corresponding rebate program. The different rebate applications are listed below, the actual applications can be found on North Saint Paul's website.

- o Appliance & Recycle
- Central A/C Tune-up Rebate
- Home Energy Audit
- Lighting New Construction Rebate
- Motor Efficiency Rebate
- O Quality Installation Central A/C Rebate
- o Residential CFL Rebate
- o Residential LED Rebate Application
- Vending Machine Controller Rebate
- Variable Frequency Drive Rebate
- Custom Rebate (For rebates that do not fall under the above categories)

Energy Smart:

Energy Smart is a program funded in part by the Conservation Improvement Programs. Through Energy Smart, business and homeowners are able to apply for free or reduced cost energy audits. These energy audits, when completed, will give the home/business owner a list of most effective energy conservation actions that could be taken, as well as a list of possible financial incentives.

Other:

The Conservation Improvement Projects can take on many forms. The City of North Saint Paul has used funding from CIP for providing compact fluorescent bulbs to those interested in them, and are seeking other cost-effective ways of increasing energy conservation within their city.

Program Budget

The required Conservation Improvement Program expenditure is \$100,000 per year. Of this dollar amount, \$10,292 is spent on low income residents. The rest of the money is spent on residential and commercial rebates (B. Frandle, personal communication, October 7, 2013).

Figure 2: Logic Model for Conservation Improvement Projects

		Inputs	Participants	A	ctivities	Outputs		Outcomes
Situation: Lack of energy efficiency Priority:	Increase energy efficiency while still encouraging development	Funding from municipal electrical facility City staff	Homeowners Business Owners	Ene Aud	ergy Smart lits stom pates	Energy rebate given to participants Energy Smar audits given to participants Custom rebate produced	t to	Short Term Decreased Energy Use Knowledge of smart energy choices Medium Term New businesses move into North Saint Paul Long Term Responsible
		Assumptions Community involvement Desire to redu energy use		External Forces: Cost of energy Priorities of citizens Availability of staff and resources			energy use choices by all community members	

PROJECT B: EVALUATION CONTEXT

Purpose

After an extensive analysis and consideration of a wide variety of factors regarding the City of North Saint Paul's Energy Conservation program, our team has determined that a formative evaluation would be the most appropriate course of action. The purpose of the evaluation will therefore be to determine to what degree the program is progressing in meeting its objectives and goals as well as identify strategies that the program can implement to increase program performance. According to North Saint Paul's Comprehensive Plan for the years 2008-2030, the Energy Conservation program fall within the City's framework of promoting actions, practices, and development projects which will sustain the environment (North St. Paul Comprehensive Plan, 2008). The evaluation created will effectively measure energy conservation opportunities offered through the program, how efficiently those opportunities aid in the conservation of energy and money, and the level of involvement from the residents and businesses. In the end, we will be able to use the results of the evaluation to determine if there are any recommendations that can be made to the program in order to more effectively reach North Saint Paul's Conservation goals.

Evaluation of Stakeholders and their Concerns

Our evaluation will be conducted to serve the interests of many different individuals and groups of stakeholders. Among the first steps to undertake in our evaluation is to identify those people and entities that have an interest in the evaluation planning process and determine their concerns. More importantly, in order to ensure that the goals of both the program and the evaluation are being met and to increase buy in in the evaluation process, identifying those individuals or

groups with a deep or key interests has become a primary focus in our stakeholder analysis. This identification and classification process is also important because these key stakeholders would be even more invested and interested in the evaluation concerns we address in our evaluation plan. Table 1 summarizes some of the key stakeholders at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels and their concerns in our analysis of the City of North Saint Paul's Energy Conservation Improvement Projects (CIP).

Table 1 has been constructed based on the level of involvement each stakeholder has with the Conservation Improvement Projects. We considered individuals and groups at different levels of the framework in which the CIP exists. Starting at the primary stakeholder level, we chose individuals who have a direct role in managing, developing, and implementing the program. The top concerns at this level were focused mainly on how the program can appeal to more businesses and residents and if the CIP is helping to reach the City's sustainability goals, which are to support alternative modes of energy generation and reduce energy use.

At the secondary level we identified groups that are more removed from the daily operations but have a role in managing and participating in the program. Their concerns are mostly tied to how much money they will save as a result of the Conservation Improvement Projects. At the tertiary level we have included individuals and groups that have an interest in the planning process of the program. The concerns of these stakeholders are mostly related to how the program will affect the overall community in which the City of North Saint Paul exists.

Evaluation Questions to be Addressed

From our stakeholder analysis, the evaluation that our group will be designing intends to answer the questions that have been identified to be relevant to key stakeholders at different

Table 1: Stakeholders

Stakeholders	Stakeholder Category (1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd)	Concerns or Questions
Brian Frandle: Director of Electric Utilities	1 st	 How can the program reach more if its intended population? How can the program be improved to appeal to more residents and businesses to increase participation? Are the services offered through the program adequately meeting the needs of residents and businesses?
City Manager, Wally Wysopal	1 st	 How can the City save more money and energy through the programs offered through CIP? How effective is the CIP? Is the CIP helping to reach the City's sustainability goals?
Finance Department of North St. Paul	2 nd	 Is there enough money for the audits and rebates offered through CIP? How will the CIP affect their budget for other City needs?
Participating Residents/Commerci al businesses of North St. Paul	2 nd	 How will CIP help to save money? What are the costs in participating in CIP? How do they become participants in CIP?
Mike Greco, Program Manager RCP	3 rd	 How can the University of Minnesota help to provide resources to make this program more successful? How can collaboration between the University of Minnesota and the City help to reach program goals?
Community of North St. Paul	3 rd	How will this program benefit the City of North St. Paul?

levels of the Conservation Improvement Projects. Key questions that have emerged from our stakeholder analysis at these different levels and questions that our group has deemed vital for CIP stakeholders include:

- How aware is the City of North Saint Paul community about the Conservation Improvement Programs?
- How can the Conservation Improvement Programs be improved to appeal to more residents and businesses to increase participation?
- How has energy use changed due to the information, goods and services provided by the programs?

These key questions, because of their importance for stakeholders at different levels and as well as their potential to significantly contribute to improving the Conservation Improvement Programs, are the evaluation questions that need to be addressed in our evaluation plan.

Constraints

The constraints that need to be addressed in our evaluation fall into four major categories, which include: the budget and time of the evaluation, access to stakeholders that provide key information, and collecting data for the evaluation, and ethical and political constraints to the evaluation.

Budget

First, the budget for this evaluation is more an allocation of time and resources than money. For time and resource allocation our group assigned different tasks to each other, and created specific deadlines for the completion of each project. There is no cost with regard to the City paying the

evaluators directly as the payment will be in terms of a grade created by the course instructor. The actual implementation of the evaluation created by our group could cost the city additional dollars. As a general guideline the amount the City of North Saint Paul should allocate around 5% of the program budget. The City of North Saint Paul did allocate some funds for an informational session on October 17, 2013. However, none of our group members were able to attend. The City of North Saint Paul has given computer and cloud space on their servers for this evaluation for our group. The City has also provided a limited budget for travel costs that include transportation costs but does not include meals, and lodging for evaluators that are doing evaluation work.

In consideration of printing and reproduction costs, our team will allocate these costs by using the resources provided by the University of Minnesota printing services. The costs associated with this are accounted for by tuition costs to the external evaluators. The City of North Saint Paul has provided facilities such as meeting rooms, and cubicles for the group to use if necessary. The time taken for the external evaluators to complete the evaluation projects is estimated at approximately ten hours a week. Transportation and time constraints are two of the biggest issues for the current evaluation group.

Access to Stakeholders

The Lead evaluator Humberto Guerrero is responsible for communication with the primary stakeholder for all necessary questions and concerns. For information about the project the group members communicate with the Lead Evaluator for any information that they need from the Project Lead stakeholder, Brian Frandle. Access is limited based on time and the availability of stakeholders to answer questions posed by the evaluators. The primary method of

communication between the project lead and lead evaluator has been through email. This is a constraint as the average response time between the stakeholder and the evaluators is approximately four business days.

Collecting Data

The data collection method that the evaluation group will work with is using currently available and archival data. This evaluation could be further enhanced by the ability to conduct surveys and questionnaires and interviews and focus groups of the target population. Unfortunately due to the above-mentioned transportation and time constraints of the current evaluation group surveys and interviews cannot be conducted. Obtaining the currently available and archival data would mean communication by the project lead to provide the information to the evaluation group. This would lead back to the access constraint, as it would depend on the timely response of the project lead as well as the availability of data. Based on the availability of this data the evaluation group can then make statements regarding the viability of the project. However, this is a limitation in itself as the evaluation is based on the available data, and no other forms of data that could paint a different picture in terms of results.

Ethics and Political Constraints

There could be some ethical considerations when it comes to evaluator credibility and the clear purpose of the evaluation. Evaluator credibility might come into play because this is an external evaluation and there are no city participants in the evaluation committee. If the evaluator credibility is threatened, then the results that the evaluators find could be invalid as well, resulting in the evaluation being useless. The purpose of the evaluation is also a key factor

because if the purpose is not defined correctly it could lead to the wrong conclusion, and would not be very useful to the stakeholders. As the evaluation group it is our responsibility to ensure that we continue to communicate effectively with the primary and some secondary stakeholders about the purpose of the evaluation. As a group we are aware that the purpose of the evaluation could change in light of new data, or evidence and so continuing to monitor that change as well as communicating that to the project lead and others responsible is of vital importance. Result transparency is another constraint, but the City of North Saint Paul will have to present the results that the evaluation group found to the residents and businesses if they request it. This specific evaluation is used to evaluate the marketing aspects of the Green Energy Initiative; the main use of the evaluation will be for the City and how to improve its marketing methods.

Political constraints could play a part in the evaluation process if the City of North Saint
Paul had changes its management or administration during the period of our evaluation.

However, since this is a short time period, there shouldn't be any political constraints in that
respect. Another political constraint could come in terms of results and how they are used. Since
the evaluation group are external evaluators our objective is to provide the information to the
City of North Saint Paul so that the city can use the information of the evaluation how they see it.

Advisory Group Role and Responsibilities

The advisory group consists of the staff at the city of the following departments: city administration, and finance and utilities. The city administration consists of the city manager, deputy clerk and communications director. Finance and utilities consist of the finance director, accountants, customer service specialists and the utility billing coordinator. The city staff consists of personnel who have backgrounds in engineering, accounting, community

development and planning, public service and public relations, environmental and city regulations, and finance. The role of the staff at the city is to assist the evaluation group with any information and resources that are needed in order to complete the evaluation. The city staff reports to the project lead, and provide the information needed for the project lead to make his decision. The project lead, Brian Frandle, Director of Electric Utilities, is responsible for providing the evaluation group with the information, and data needed for the evaluation. Further Brian is the primary contact at the City of North Saint Paul for the evaluation group and will be the primary representative of the city. Any information, data and resources provided by the City of North Saint Paul are as a result of the project lead. Additionally, the purpose of the evaluation is something that the project lead and evaluators discuss at length throughout the evaluation process. The evaluators therefore, base the purpose of the project and the evaluation on the project lead's information.

Additionally, there are staff personnel at the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) and the Institute on the Environment that serve as on an advisory role for the evaluation group. CURA assists the evaluation group with helping communicate with the project lead. Additionally, the CURA staff can provide quick general information about the project to the evaluation group that the regular project lead may not have time to provide.

The participants in the program according to the CIP program description are businesses and residents of the city of North Saint Paul. The residents and business's role in the evaluation is that they are directly responsible for the results of the data and the use of the program. As mentioned before in the constraints section if there were more resources that were available to the evaluators then perhaps a survey or focus group could have been conducted to obtain the residents and business perception of the Green Energy program.

PROJECT C: EVALUATION DESIGN

Evaluation Purpose

In consultation with Brian Frandle, the main purpose of the evaluation is to determine whether or not the CIP is effective. Emanating from this broader question, as an evaluation group we combined three evaluation questions to evaluate the evaluand (CIP). The information obtained from the evaluation questions can then be used by the City to accomplish the goal of improving the CIP. These evaluation questions are focused on effectiveness of the CIP in reaching its target population, the level of participant satisfaction with the CIP, and the extent in which energy consumption for participants has changed. Considering these factors, the evaluation questions have been elaborated as follows:

- 1. Is the CIP program reaching the target population?
- 2. How satisfied are participating residents and businesses with rebates and energy audits offered by the CIP?
- 3. To what extent has energy consumption changed for the participants of the program in North St. Paul since the implementation of CIP?

1. Is the CIP program reaching the target population?

Brian Frandle, the project lead for the CIP, is concerned about the effective implementation of the projects towards the overall goals of the City's Conservation Economic Development Initiative: promoting economic development, ensuring fiscal sustainability, and promoting energy development. In order to communicate the CIP, the City currently distributes brochures, and has information online about the CIP, however, the effectiveness of these distribution methods have been questionable.

Among the most important components of the CIP are the rebates and energy audits offered. The rebate and energy audit programs serve as an incentive for households and businesses to adopt energy practices and appliances that lead to the conservation of energy. The process for receiving a rebate and energy audit involves filling out an application for the energy rebate or energy audit after appropriate actions are taken for the resident/business to qualify for a specific incentive. In order to discern the number of households and businesses participating in

the program, the evaluation would require an analysis of the records kept by the City of North St. Paul for the number of applications approved for a rebate or energy audit. From these records, the number of participating households and businesses can be found, as well as the number of applications approved for each specific rebate/energy audit.

To determine if the CIP is reaching the desired population, the population of people with approved applications can be compared to the population of North St. Paul as a whole. By utilizing census data provided by local, state, and federal government agencies information on the population of the City of North St. Paul can be obtained. This census data will yield the necessary information to establish the demographic composition of residents in North St. Paul, as well as the total number of residents and businesses within the City.

Through the comparison between the population of residents and businesses that have approved rebate or audit applications and the entire population of the City of North St. Paul, a conclusion as to whether or not the CIP is reaching the target population can be made.

2. How satisfied are participating residents and businesses with rebates and energy audits offered by the CIP?

The City of North St. Paul wants to determine how satisfied households and businesses are with the key components of the CIP, in particular audits and rebates. The best approach for obtaining the data would be to measure the level of satisfaction of the CIP which would be done through an online survey or a mail-in survey. This is because a survey can have quantitative and qualitative data, and if implemented correctly could give the City of North St. Paul the needed information to determine if the target population is satisfied with the CIP. The households and businesses that participate in the CIP would be the recipients of the survey because they would be the primary users of the CIP.

The survey can include Likert scale and open-ended questions. These questions would provide quantitative and qualitative information that would give the city necessary feedback as to how satisfied the participating population is with the CIP. Likert scale questions would be included because it gives the ability to tabulate attitudes toward the CIP. The open-ended questions can then provide more detail as to why respondents answered the way they did for the Likert scale questions.

The survey would be distributed by mail or online depending on demographics. In general we would suggest a mail in survey if the target population is not very computer literate or does not have access to computers. However, for businesses an online survey could be preferable as online surveys are faster, and are easier to submit and distribute than mail-in surveys.

3. To what extent has energy usage changed for the participants of the program in North St. Paul since the implementation of CIP?

One of the main purposes of CIP is the conservation of energy in the community through the utilization of energy audits and rebates. In order to see if the CIP is promoting energy conservation in homes and businesses, an analysis of energy usage before and after participating in the CIP should be performed. The type of data needed for this analysis will be gathered from a review of energy consumption records, such as meter reading documents kept by the municipal utility company. Once this data has been gathered, the energy usage from participating homes and businesses will be compared with the data before and after they joined the program to see how energy usage has changed.

Furthermore, once the numbers have been gathered, the average amount of energy usage per household or business on an annual basis can be discerned. If a timeline with an established benchmark period is established for the last ten years, an energy usage trend per household or business can be obtained. Based on the annual changes in averages, the effectiveness of the CIP can be inferred. For example, if energy usage per household or business is decreasing, then it would appear that the program is performing as designed. But if there is no change, or an increase in energy usage per household or business, then it would appear that the CIP is not performing as designed.

Evaluation Question	Type of Data	Source of Data	Collection Method
What segment of the population is being reached by the CIP program?	Number of Approved audit and rebate applications Data on the number of households and Businesses in the City of North St. Paul	Fhe audit and rebate application data will be found in records kept by the City of North St. Paul. Census data will be found from information kept by government agencies at the City.	Review of Documents Review of Documents
How satisfied are participating residents and businesses with rebates and energy audits offered by the CIP?	Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with: Application Process Amount of rebate Turnaround time	Participating households and businesses within the City of North St. Paul. CIP Businesses CIP Residents	An online survey Mail in survey
To what extent has energy usage changed for the participants of the program in North St. Paul since the mplementation of the CIP?	Energy consumption data	Energy consumption records kept by the municipal power facility for the participants of the CIP.	Document review from before and after participation in the CIP.

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