



TURF REMOVAL AND REPLACEMENT PILOT PROJECT: PROGRESS REPORT

AUGUST 9, 2017

TASK 1 SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

The goal of Task 1 in the Turf Removal and Replacement Pilot Project was to first learn what other efforts or programs exist in Colorado and across the US in order to ensure that our project builds upon existing knowledge or offers a new perspective rather than recreating the wheel. Additionally, we sought to hear directly from homeowners to learn about their impressions of their yard, interest in water conservation and turf removal as well as their preferences on potential incentives that CRC could offer as part of this project. We were able to meet all of the goals of Task 1, and feel strongly we have the information and foundation to create four compelling program models for homeowners in our participating cities. A summary of accomplishments and findings can be found below.

CRC staff conducted phone and in-person interviews with a variety of program managers of landscape change programs, notes from these discussions and research summaries can be found in Attachment 2. Key findings from the research indicate that although there are a variety of program models and incentive structures the majority of turf removal programs, at their core, offer a financial incentive in exchange for the homeowner removing turf. Where we saw the most variation was in the educational offerings that accompanied these programs as well as in the way that the financial incentives were earned and administered. An example of this is that some programs offer a simple dollar per square foot regardless of cost, while others rebate only materials. Additionally, differences were seen in how success was defined. Many providers' goal was just to get the high-water landscapes out while others like Aurora, CO only rebated the cost after the homeowner had shown significant water savings.

Following our research with other turf removal programs, CRC sought to engage Colorado residents to learn more about their thoughts and motivations around landscape change projects. The CRC gathered information from 3 surveys sent to Slow the Flow participants, Garden In A Box participants and Garden In A Box newsletter subscribers. In total, we heard from over 1,300 individuals and results can be found in Attachment 3 and 4. Key findings from these surveys include the impression that most homeowners are open to the concept of turf removal projects and given the right incentive could be compelled to take action. When asking them which incentives were the most appealing, help with landscape design was a clear favorite, followed by plant material and irrigation assistance. We found it interesting that a financial incentive was low on the list of preferred options, however, many of the existing turf removal programs are structured to offer reimbursement or payments for turf removal.

Key findings for CRC from Task 1 included the overall theme that many of existing programs had many steps, were complicated, and this complexity often was one of the key reason that homeowners did not participate or complete projects. Additionally, based on our research both of existing programs and homeowner preferences we chose not to include financial incentives as one of our program models.

TASK 2 SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

The goal of Task 2 was to take the research and findings from Task 1 and use it to develop four program models with different incentives for Colorado homeowners to remove turf. An additional deliverable for this task was rules and procedures for how each program model would operate and recruitment guidelines. Task 2 was successful and completed on time. Below is a brief description of the work that was performed.

CRC analyzed the findings from the research phase of the project and due to a strong response from the survey participants it was fairly clear to us which of the program models would be most compelling and provide useful information to both CRC as well as the water conservation community. The following are the four incentives/barriers that we will be removing for homeowners:

1. Help with physical removal of lawn (will be left with bare dirt area ready for compost, planting and mulch)
2. Help installing or converting your irrigation system into a drip system
3. A professional landscape design and consultation (will receive a design of your yard including where you will remove your lawn)
4. Plant material (low water perennial plants and shrubs) and a plant-by-number design

Once the program models were selected CRC staff developed a variety of documents outlining the general rules and structure for the project as well as training materials for the Slow the Flow auditing staff on how to identify qualified applicants and communicate with them about the program. The primary trait that we will be looking for in homeowners, beyond having an irrigated area of turf, is the ability to take on a landscape change project this fall as we are hoping to have 100% of accepted participants complete their projects. The homeowner forms and procedure documents can be found as Attachment 6 and 7. These materials may continue to be revised as we begin to implement the program.



POTENTIAL NEED FOR REVISIONS TO THE SCOPE OF WORK AND TIMELINES

CRC is currently on track to meet all the deadlines for the project as originally scoped. However, in meeting with community members and funders we brought up the project to the Walton Family Foundation. They have expressed interest in matching CWCB's funding to allow the project to grow from 20 homes to a total of 60 homes and they would also contribute to bringing in additional guidance with the goal of incorporating an academic social science perspective. CRC is currently in the process of applying for a grant with WFF and if awarded would like to ask for an extension from CWCB on the final report so that we are able to incorporate all of the findings from the 60 homes. We will keep CWCB apprised on our progress with this additional funding.