

Greenovation: PARC

In spring 2007, I joined the Greenovation committee of the Knight Creative Communities Initiative (which has evolved into [Sustainable Tallahassee](#)), an effort to make our community more attractive to the “creative class.” I volunteered, with Lester Hutt, to lead a campaign to persuade non-bus riders to ride StarMetro. We achieved our goals and won a statewide award for our efforts. Here is the application form we submitted for the Florida Public Relations Association Golden Image Award competition. We received two awards: the Judges Award and the Award of Distinction.

Research/Situation Analysis

The Knight Creative Communities Initiative (KCCI) selected Tallahassee as one of three communities to receive funding to attract the “creative class,” people who choose communities because of their cultural, economic and environmental qualities. One Tallahassee initiative was [Greenovation](#), which set out to make the city a leader in “green” initiatives. And one project was PARC (Park-and-Ride Community), which promoted use of public transportation. As volunteers, we had no budget and the challenge to make a difference in 9 months. Tallahassee has 150,000 residents; 79.4% of the Leon County workforce drive alone to work; 2.33% use mass transit (2000 Census). Most riders are African-Americans and/or lower to middle class (StarMetro). AAA reported that the average cost of operating a vehicle at the time of the study was 62¢ per mile. Each gallon of gas dumps about 20 lbs. of CO₂ into the atmosphere. So there are good economic, environmental, social and “creative class” reasons to promote public transportation. But changing people’s attitudes about riding the bus – and then getting them to ride it – is daunting. Many buses run once an hour (6:40 a.m.-6:40 p.m., 5 days a week). Bus trips, which typically require transfers, take about twice as long as driving oneself. And passengers need exact change or must pay for weekly or monthly passes – losing rides if they don’t use them.

Objectives

- 1) To recruit more white, affluent, educated riders.
- 2) To recruit at least 30 people to join PARC.
- 3) To persuade at least 20 residents of the north Thomasville Road area to ride the bus an average 2x/week between Sept. 4-Dec. 7, 2007.
- 4) To increase positive attitudes about riding StarMetro.
- 5) To generate at least three positive stories in local media. 6) To promote bus riding after the pilot project ends.

Implementation

We selected StarMetro Route 16 – the one used by this writer – and targeted residents who resembled this writer – older, middle class, educated, professional, white and concerned about the environment.



Being interviewed by WCOT TV.

Strategies & Tactics

- 1) *Seek partners and give away SWAG.* StarMetro donated 50 one-month bus passes; more importantly, we got SM to allow PARC-ers to add 10-ride units to those cards afterwards. Premier Health & Fitness offered 30 parking spaces and free towel service; CoreMessage created the PARC name and logo; Moore Consulting designed our Web site; FedEx Kinko’s printed our brochure; Awards4U donated signs, foldable shopping bags and umbrellas; Commuter Services of North Florida gave lunch bags, water bottles, access to its mailing list, and help designing our research; Oppenheim Research conducted two focus groups; and three restaurants gave meal discounts.
- 2) *Emphasize benefits of riding the bus, saving money and cutting carbon emissions.* We rarely said “bus” to decrease negative associations; rather, we used “StarMetro.” Our slogan was “Ride StarMetro. Relax. Make a Difference.” We wanted people to believe they would “gain” time by letting someone else drive. We emphasized cuts in costs and carbon emissions.

- 3) **Build a constituency for Route 80X.** Rather than wait for the express Route 80X to begin (scheduled for Oct. 23 but not launched until Dec. 10), we got people used to the less-convenient Route 16 so that they would more likely transition to the twice-an-hour 80X.
- 4) **Use mass and controlled media.** We sent news releases, an editorial, radio PSA and a letter to the editor to local media. We distributed about 600 brochures through the mail, at the library and to area businesses. We sent e-mails to churches and city government. We shared how-to information and answered questions via our Web site and e-mail to PARC-ers.
- 5) **Promote a sense of community by hosting special events.** Understanding that adults do not want to look foolish, we hosted an orientation session, attended by about 20 people. We gave step-by-step instructions, which we posted on our Web site as well. We answered questions as they arose. We chatted with one another on the bus. We invited frequent and infrequent riders to participate in focus groups. And we ended with a celebratory party the day after the pilot project ended.



Local TV, radio and newspapers covered the PARC experiment.

Evaluation

We did a paper pretest (30 respondents), paper and online posttest (38 respondents) and two focus groups (23 participants).

Objectives: We met or exceeded all objectives.

- 1) We reached our target public: average age = 51; most-frequent income averages = \$40,001-\$60,000 and \$80,000+; 83% = college-educated; 53 % = advanced degrees; 77% = white, not Hispanic; 73.33% SA/A that they are “very concerned about global warming”; 50% SA/A that riding the bus saves them money. Focus group participants highlighted problems of infrequent service, late buses, poor communication from StarMetro but great communication from PARC. Most frequent riders were males; females tended to have more errands to run and thus needed more transportation flexibility.

- 2) 58 people officially signed up for PARC.
- 3) 25 PARC-ers said they rode StarMetro an average of 2x/week during the study; StarMetro data show an increase of 5.9% (11 riders/day) in November 2007 compared to November 2006.
- 4) After PARC, attitudes were statistically more positive that riding the bus is convenient, clean, comfortable, less costly and less stressful; that StarMetro personnel are helpful and friendly; and that riders are not nervous about riding the bus.
- 5) Local media ran at least three editorials, three print stories, five columns, three TV stories, one radio story and two blogs supporting PARC.
- 6) Between the pretest and posttest, 87.5% SA/A that they would recommend StarMetro to their friends and coworkers; and 83.3% SA/A that they intended to ride StarMetro between 2-5 times a week after the pilot test. StarMetro recently announced that ridership of the new 80X express bus (which runs in addition to Route 16) has grown so rapidly that StarMetro is using a larger-capacity bus during peak hours. Anecdotally, this writer has observed the creation of a “community” of 80X riders who regularly share bus-riding stories and advice with one another. The PARC team is now helping Sustainable Tallahassee and StarMetro.

Budget

Zero. All work was done by volunteers. Donations: \$5,000, not counting time.