

COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAM



CASE STUDY

Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center Uses Art to Inspire Pollution Prevention

Since 1993, the Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center (SU-EFC) has established itself as an international leader in the field of environmental finance, environmental stewardship, and sustainable infrastructure management, with expertise in technical assistance and communicating environmental problems and solutions. The SU-EFC has program experience and capacity for delivering education and technical assistance on Sustainable Materials Management and water issues.

Challenge

SU-EFC aims to increase awareness about preventing plastics pollution in waterways by educating and engaging individuals about the impacts of plastic pollution in local communities in New York State (NYS) through the visual arts.

Approximately 80% of marine debris originates on land and from watersheds—resulting from intentional actions such as littering and illegal dumping; as well as non-intended actions, such as debris blown out of trash receptacles.

There are many environmental, economic, health, and safety impacts that are associated with marine debris, and specifically plastics pollution. Environmental impacts include harm to marine life through ingestion of, and entanglement in, plastics pollution; ecosystem alteration due to efforts to remove marine debris; and the transfer and movement of invasive species on floatables. Plastics pollution affects the economy jeopardizing tourism, fishing, and posing a navigational hazard. In addition, there is increasing concern about the impacts of broken down plastic debris, or microplastics.

Our waterways are currently facing pollution in the form of single-use plastic bags, bottles, take-out containers, cigarette butts, and microplastics. These items provide short-term convenience to the consumer at the cost of public and environmental health. For some people, having this science-based evidence is sufficient to change their patterns of consumption and waste-disposal. However, for most people, this evidence alone is not enough to incite behavioral changes that lead to reduced consumption.

Solution

Art, in various forms, is potentially an effective means of conveying messages and inspiring change as it appeals to emotional rather than just rational aspects of human nature. As a result, SU-EFC decided to use the visual arts to engage and empower communities throughout NYS to decrease single-use plastic consumption.

They achieved this through creation of four plastics pollution prevention videos highlighting the impacts of single-use plastics, an art contest and gallery event to engage students of NYS Colleges and Universities in a competitive contest to create works of visual art with the message of source-reduction of single-use plastics, and a social media campaign.

CHALLENGE

- Increase awareness about preventing plastics pollution in waterways by using visual arts
- Educating and engaging individuals about the impacts of plastic pollution in local communities

SOLUTION

- SU-EFC created 4 plastics pollution prevention videos highlighting the impacts of single-use plastics
- Held art contest and gallery event to engage university students in a visual representation of the impacts of single-use plastics

RESULTS

- The four, two-minute plastic pollution videos were viewed approximately 46,000 times via Facebook and 3,000 times via Youtube
- The art contest consisted of 38 students representing 6 different colleges and universities
- The event was attended by 30+ individuals; 100 percent of which said that they learned new and interesting information about plastic pollution



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Results

Recognizing that there are numerous videos circulating the internet regarding single-use plastic pollution, SU-EFC decided to use a narrative, comedic lens to present the topic. They created four, two-minute videos to educate viewers about the negative impacts of single-use plastics. The videos were uploaded and digitally distributed resulting in approximately 46,000 Facebook views and 3,000 YouTube views. The videos were also screened at three different events throughout NYS with facilitated discussions.

In addition, SU-EFC held an art contest and gallery event to engage college and university art students across NYS by having them create works of art that depict the issue of water pollution caused by single-use plastics. They held a webinar for 58 interested contestants representing 13 different colleges and universities. The art contest then consisted of 38 students from 6 colleges and universities that submitted artworks including 2-D designs, animations, paintings, drawings, sculptures, and mixed media. Digital images of each piece were uploaded to the "Plastic-Free Waterways Through Art" Facebook page and contestants were encouraged to share their entries through their social networks. Facebook "likes" counted as one point each toward each contestant's final score. The pieces were also shared with the NYSAR3 (New York State Association for Reduction, Reuse & Recycling, Inc.) board, 7 members of which scored each piece using a 40-point rubric for a potential 280 additional points for each contestant.



The Gallery Event began with a talk by Asher Pacht, Director of Environmental Programs at the Beacon Institute, who provided an overview of single-use plastics and encouraged attendees to help tackle this issue by participating in cleanup sweeps and through source reduction. The printed artworks were taken by him to be displayed at the Beacon Institute's Main St. Gallery and Denning's Point facility.

Online Media:

- [Website](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Plastic Free Waterways Video Series](#)

TESTIMONIAL

"The New York State Pollution Prevention Institute (NYS2I) provided in-depth support for our 'Plastic-Free Waterways Through Art' project through consistent and direct one-on-one assistance. NYS2I staff were eager to hear about our project progress so that they can provide us with helpful ideas, key contacts, and resources to deliver our project successfully. As a result, the 'Plastic-Free Waterways through Art' project reached more than 13,000 people on concepts and methods for reducing single-use plastics in their homes and communities through a social media campaign, an educational video series, a college/university student art contest, and an in-person gallery event."

– Melissa Young,
Principle Investigator/Assistant Director,
Syracuse University
Center for Sustainable Community Solutions

NYSP2I PARTNERS



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