LIFT Scholarship Exchange Experience for Innovation & Technology (SEE IT)
Sponsored by: WRF, WEF, and NACWA

TRIP REPORT

SCHOLARSHIP UTILITY: *The Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD)*

SCHOLARSHIP UTILITY CONTACT: *Catherine Harris, Pollution Prevention Specialist*

ATTENDEES: *Catherine Harris, Martin Griffin, Emily Jones*

TRIP DATES: 04/02/18 - 04/06/2018

UTILITIES/SITES VISITED: The City of Boise's WaterShed, City of Vancouver Environmental Water Resources Center, LOTT Clean Water Alliance's WET Center, King County's Brightwater Center

TECHNOLOGIES/INNOVATIONS SEEN: Wastewater Utility Public Education Spaces

TRIP BACKGROUND and RATIONALE (250 WORDS): *What technology did you select to visit? What is the problem you are trying to address? How did you envision the LIFT SEE IT scholarship trip helping your utility?*

The Utility of the Future Blueprint for Action "calls for bold, transformational thinking and cooperation in our advocacy, in research and development, and in education and outreach efforts". The Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) in Madison, WI plans on doing that, in part, by developing a formal education program housed within a flexible space that engages and empowers water stewards. Thanks to the LIFT Scholarship, MMSD staff was able to visit four education centers at wastewater treatment plants in the Pacific Northwest who have already established these types of programs/spaces. In our multi-state, week-long journey, we observed innovative approaches to public education and explored the physical spaces at these treatment plants which enable learning. Public education, although not a traditional facet of most wastewater treatment plants, done well, has the potential to provide many direct and indirect benefits to a wastewater treatment plant, like for example, flow reduction and pollution prevention initiatives, as well as public image of the utility as a trusted community partner.

TRIP SUMMARY (1 page max. Please include 10 photos and a 1-2 minute video montage from the trip. The video does not need to be professional, however if you have the means to create a professional video feel free to do so): *Why did you select the specific utility and technology for the visit? Based on your visit, do you think this technology/approach works for your utility? How useful was the trip in your decision making process? What were some of the trip highlights and takeaways?*

The Boise Watershed, LOTT Clean Water Alliance's WET Center, Vancouver's Water Resources Education Center, and the Brightwater Center were selected for visits since they have a close geographic proximity, they all have experience in developing education programs, and a track record of successfully running publicly accessible education spaces. We spent a lot of time before the visit preparing- 5+ hours interviewing education and management staff at these centers- however, seeing the spaces in person, observing the education programs in action for even just a few minutes or hours was a great advantage. Not only did we get to see a range of different approaches/educational philosophies, facility designs, and staffing/funding levels, we built relationships with these treatment plant staff. If we ever have a question, run into a road block, or have a great success that we want to share, we know at least five other treatment plant staff who we can look to for guidance or support.

Some key takeaways for success include:

- Education doesn't just mean telling people something; inclusive programs that reach different learning styles in fun, engaging ways go a long way in delivering messages. We observed story-telling, structured play, scavenger hunts, gamification, formal education type lessons, and creation of passive learning opportunities through art, models, excellent physical space design, and treatment plant tour experiences all synergizing to deliver targeted, pre-agreed upon goals. Having these goals up-front of program design is essential.
- Remembering to speak to your audience, and that many are at the same understanding of wastewater – a very low level. Although different audiences need different delivery methods, the underlying messages should be simple as you build programs. Narrowing these messages to a few targeted goals ahead of developing programs is very important.
- Having educator-developed (as opposed to engineer or technical staff) public-facing outreach materials, helps ensure consistent messaging that is salient and understandable.
- In balancing tradeoffs between technical specificity and accuracy and public understanding, transparent, open communications are of utmost importance to build community trust. Openness fosters relationships with the public, so that when they have a question or concern, they know they can seek reliable, trustworthy answers with your utility.
- Exhibits should be developed for both beauty and durability.
- Even the best designed exhibits require a tremendous amount of upkeep/maintenance, content refreshes and redesign. Reworking exhibits and educational programming is inevitable and necessary on a frequent (3-5 year, at a minimum) basis. Identifying and ensuring a sustainable source of funding for educational programs, staffing, and upkeep of a physical space is utmost important.

This trip was a great experience, I am very thankful to the LIFT SEE IT Committee for selecting MMSD as a recipient of the funding. Although I wouldn't say that this trip necessarily helped us make a decision about whether or not to implement the innovation, it has dramatically added depth and nuanced detail to our vision and boosted our assurance and toolbox of resources to know what steps to take to get there. Because of the experience on this scholarship trip, I feel confident that our utility can move forward in this project, and with that, move one step closer towards becoming a Utility of the Future.