

Chapter 9

The Hampstead Carbon Challenge

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ABSTRACT

In 2008, the Hampstead Public Library partnered with the New Hampshire Carbon Challenge to encourage Hampstead residents to reduce their carbon emissions. The multi-faceted month-long initiative included programs, services, and resources designed to educate people and motivate them to take the Carbon Challenge and help the environment. The project provided activity and publicity, which helped the library position itself as an information resource in the community. The partnership provided fresh ideas and enthusiasm to both the library and the Carbon Challenge. The Hampstead Public Library pioneered some best practices for future Carbon Challenges in other locations, and leveraged the knowledgebase of the Carbon Challenge to provide a meaningful and memorable experience for its patrons. The Hampstead Carbon Challenge was a lot of fun for everyone.

INTRODUCTION

The Hampstead Public Library established a productive partnership with the New Hampshire Carbon Challenge in 2008. The New Hampshire Carbon Challenge later became the New England Carbon Challenge™ (<http://necarbonchallenge.org/about.jsp>). The partnership helped to move both organizations closer to their goals. For the Carbon Challenge, our library provided a successful platform for spreading the word about carbon emissions and educating people about simple things they could do to reduce their household

carbon footprints. For the library, the Challenge brought the staff and community together and positioned the Hampstead Public Library as an information resource in the community.

The New Hampshire Carbon Challenge is structured around the simple premise that households can make easy reductions in their use of fossil fuel energy and that these changes, when coupled with the actions of other households, can have a significant impact in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and stabilizing the risk of climate change. Households that have *Taken the Challenge* have, on average, reduced their annual energy use-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61350-387-4.ch009

age by 16%, are saving more than \$700 a year, and most actions can be implemented in less than an hour. Since many homes and families waste a lot of energy unknowingly and are unaware of how easily they can reduce their energy consumption, the Carbon Challenge also appeals to residents for whom frugality and energy independence are greater motivators than reducing one's environmental footprint.

The Hampstead Public Library's month-long Carbon Challenge initiative provided a way for the library to publicize that it is a place for people to get information that will help them make important decisions in their lives. It energized the staff and involved them in a meaningful project. The combination of programs with related services and resources positioned our town to vie for the honor of having more households from Hampstead take the Challenge than any other town. This project helped the library to be more visible, educated our patrons, and helped make a difference to the environment. Working with our community partner, the New Hampshire Carbon Challenge, enabled the Hampstead Public Library to expand its reach and influence.

BACKGROUND

The Hampstead Public Library

Hampstead is a town of almost 9,000 people situated in the southern tier of New Hampshire, near the Massachusetts border. It is primarily a bedroom community, with residents traveling to larger communities in New Hampshire and Massachusetts for work. There are three campgrounds and many seasonal residences with access to the lakes in town.

U.S. Census Bureau (2009) statistics show that Hampstead is an affluent, educated town with little diversity. As is common in New Hampshire, almost all Hampstead residents are white. Only 2% of Hampstead residents live below the poverty

level. Ninety-three percent of residents over the age of 25 have high school diplomas, and 34% have Bachelors degrees.

The Hampstead Public Library was founded in 1888. The library is open six days a week including four evenings for a total of 54 hours. Its current home is in a building originally constructed as office condominiums (Figure 1). Ten thousand square feet are utilized on the first and second floor. The library holds 48,000 materials, including books, audiobooks, movies, magazines, and newspapers, with a total annual circulation of 70,000. Ten computers are available for public use, but since most people in town have computers and high speed internet access at home there are usually no waiting lines. Three meeting rooms, which accommodate 136, 62, and 10 people, provide space for library programs and for local non-profit groups. Two study rooms are also available for smaller groups. The basement houses a Thrift Shop which is run by the Friends of the Library, as well as storage space. Storybook Garden, behind the library, is maintained by the Hampstead Garden Club.

I joined the Hampstead Public Library (HPL) in March of 2008 as its Director. I earned my MLIS degree online from San Jose State University that same year. I had worked part time in another library in New Hampshire for 10 years. Before that, I had been a software engineer and engineering manager. The library staff, including two additional full time librarians (one with a MLS degree) and seven part time employees, worked a total of 243 hours each week (6.08 FTE). We also had two high school pages and two part time custodians.

In addition to the library's appropriation from the town (\$396,000 in 2008), which comfortably met the library's needs, we received significant donations. In 2008, the Friends of the Library, civic groups, and individuals donated funds to purchase the library's 13 museum passes and added \$5,000 to our \$1,000 programming budget.

The library focuses on providing informational and recreational reading and programming. An ac-

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