“Stuff of Life” Program

Iowans choosing family and friends, community, experiences and resource protection over “stuff”

We are extraordinarily grateful to the Resource Enhancement and Protection Conservation Education Program and the UNI Recycling and Reuse Technology Transfer Center for their funding support of this project.

What if we could start a movement to help Iowans create better quality lives AND reduce their environmental impact at the same time? In 2015, we—the UNI Center for Energy and Environmental Education—started on a journey to do just that. Right away we activated a remarkable team of Iowans to join with us, learn with us, and make connections with others. Here’s a one-page version of what we wanted to do and what we decided.

Project’s purpose
The materials—“the stuff of life”—that Americans use daily have their own life: They are extracted, transported, manufactured, used and disposed of around the globe—including in Iowa. This “stuff” is a root driver of environmental problems and the number one source of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) in the US.

Research exists related to this environmental problem. A few organizations around the country also educate about these topics. Yet, most Iowa environmental educators (EE) don’t know how—or even if—they should educate about this subject. This project’s purpose was to further the state’s ability to change knowledge and behaviors around this topic...ultimately reducing GHG...and identify plans for implementing subsequent projects.

What we achieved—the 3-sentence version
We identified congregations and college/university students as target audiences for future efforts. As a direct result of this project, three new initiatives are underway. We are developing two college student initiatives and a partner is developing a congregational initiative. More is in the works, as well!

Read on for a bit of our vision, a sample of the resources we found that were exceptional, and for other details on how we will proceed. There’s also an invite for you to join us.
We—UNI CEEE and a team of diverse Iowans—are talking about climate change in ways that appeal to Iowans’ self-interests. We want eager and enthusiastic folks to make the changes we need in this world.

Our Vision
By 2020, we will see more and more pockets of Iowans eating meals together, putting their energies toward experiences and toward building family and community connections. And they will value/appreciate material goods because they are sacred and scarce.

In this future, the pockets of influential Iowans will buy more local products, buy fewer products, and be more resourceful with products. The economy will be healthy and vibrant, and economic stability will be valued more than growth.

Background: The Team
A team of 11 passionate Iowans (see Attachment I) from a variety of professions, geographic locations, backgrounds, and beliefs came together three times in 2015. Our goal was to figure out how to start a movement to help Iowans create better quality lives and, simultaneously, reduce environmental impact. Led by Anita O’Gara, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation vice president and director of development, the team went through a decision-making process developed by ActionMedia. We started with the end goal in mind: What knowledge and behavior changes did we want? From there, Anita asked and re-asked the team the following questions:

Who can make it happen?
What story do they need to hear?
Who should they hear it from?
How can we tell them?

In addition to using this decision-making process (called the amplification process), we researched what organizations had similar missions or reached audiences that the team determined were most primed to hear how to enhance their lives and reduce their environmental impact.

We also investigated and identified effective methods of communications and education. Throughout the process, we secured buy-in from our team of environmental educators and other community influencers that Iowa needs to address the issue of “stuff” and how it relates to life satisfaction.

Ultimately, we identified through the amplification process how to make the stated desired impacts happen. Our next step is to implement our plans.
Effective Communication and Education

Though we did a lot of research, we were strongly influenced by “Sizzle: The New Climate Message” from Futerra Sustainability Communications. Their advice for messaging about climate change? Sell the sizzle, not the sausage. In other words, if you're selling hot dogs, says Futerra, sell the sounds and smells that make people hungry. With climate change, Futerra recommends selling the sizzle of a compelling low carbon heaven, rather than painting a picture of climate hell.

Futerra also promotes use of a simple, four-step narrative: Vision → Choice → Plan → Action.

The team’s efforts will employ those ideas that Futerra has found work, and we have started crafting our narrative. Below is our narrative.

Vision.
Our one-line descriptive vision needs work, but here’s our draft:
Iowans choosing family and friends, community, experiences, and resource protection over “stuff.”

Choice.
We have a choice. We can continue to consume till the cows come home. That has its appeal.

With this option, we’ll see more of our time spent shopping and then tidying up the stuff we buy. We’ll also be consuming natural resources beyond nature’s bank account. This choice means sacrificing a stable future for our kids, grandkids and other young’uns.

Focusing on family, friends, community and awesome experiences is another option. This choice means taking the time spent tidying up our “stuff” and putting more of that time toward doing what we love with friends and family (and time alone doing nothing, when we need that). It also means participating in awesome experiences. So, we’ll have more card-playing and bouche ball, beer by the fire pit, more meals together, time spent loving it up with sweet dog Muffy, helping grow a community garden, and reading. Better life satisfaction and health in addition to whatever it is that matters most to us in the one wild and crazy life we all have.

So, what’s your choice?

Plan.
Our Amplification Team decided to target two groups: College students
Congregations
**College students.** This group of young people stand on the brink of their lives as they decide what their values will be. They represent a powerful target group with 60+ years ahead of them to live out those values. Happily for us, one of the Amplification Team members developed the Life Design course at the University of Iowa a few years ago. One of the most popular electives at the University, the course helps students use higher education as a means to discover their passions. Our colleague and all-around great guy, David Gould, offered information about his class and suggestions for our direction. He describes his course as appealing to students’ perceived selfinterests to find a meaningful, purposeful life. An article, called “The Economics of Happiness,” that he wrote for a local newspaper gives a clarion call for people of all ages to think about how this might apply to us and what actions we could take to find and live out our passions.

Central College in Pella, Loras College in Dubuque, and the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls also influenced our plan. From integrating learning across the curriculum to offering numerous student opportunities on and off-campus for meaningful, purposeful engagement, a lot of good stuff is already happening. These campuses and others seem primed for ideas to further move students to make life choices that positively impact their futures and the environment.

We will:

- Appeal to students’ self-interests.
- Help college students develop their lives around experiences and passions rather than stuff.
- Piggyback on the kind of life-changing impact that overseas travel appears to have on the way students view how they want to live their lives.
- Consider Living Learning Communities where students learn through experiential education.
- Tell stories and make it personal to help Iowa’s students better understand that sharing resources and focusing on closer human connections accumulates all sorts of benefits that could improve life satisfaction and reduce consumption.
- Help students remove barriers to living what they love and having a smaller environmental footprint.
- Focus on what people value, or what we think they will value.
- Forget about giving a bunch of facts and numbers at the onset. Though important, we need a story that’s stronger than the facts.
- Create actionable steps that colleges and universities can take.

**Congregations.** The team suggested many congregations focus on stewardship of the earth and care for creation, making them a likely audience for our movement. They recommended the following ways to connect with congregations:

---

**Appeal to the audience’s selfinterests.** "It’s about changing the culture to one that is truly in the audience’s self-interest. Changing to a culture that moves from materialism/consumerism toward mindful, joyful living in ways that spread and last.”
• Like the college project, frame the topic so it is about people's self-interest and focuses on relationships. Ask participants: If you focus on your self-interests/relationships instead of stuff, what does that free you to be and do?

• Use personal stories from the pulpit that will help congregation members relate the stories to their own lives.

We met with several Iowa congregational leaders to continue building relationships and developed this short list of outcomes for a congregational audience:

• Behavior change that results in less consumption and increased contentment
• A renewed feeling of ownership to conserve what is ours to survive
• Deeper relationships to each other and to the faith
• A deeper spiritual life

Simultaneously, Amplification Team member Sarah Paulos was thinking along the same lines. She developed Cool Congregations, a successful energy reduction/creation care program for individuals and congregations to lower greenhouse gas emissions. Cool Congregations started through Iowa Interfaith Power and Light, an interdenominational organization to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Now, the national Interfaith Power & Light organization oversees the program which is being used nationally.

With that model in mind, Sarah was energized to embark on another creative venture for Iowa Interfaith Power & Light. She received funding from the national office to develop a 90-minute workshop focusing on the connections between personal values, stuff, and environmental impacts. Participants will examine how a cultural obsession with stuff is driving climate change, and how faith traditions call them to reconnect with what is meaningful to live in harmony with the earth and each other.

We will:

☐ Seek funding for a curriculum development team to gather and brainstorm how an action guide should come together. A writer, or team of writers, will then develop a guide for congregations, creating 4-7 study sessions on topics to help congregation members create better quality lives with less environmental impact. It will be used in a few congregations, then evaluated and fine-tuned. This process will be repeated to ensure that it contains materials to help a variety of congregations.

• Use a natural resources curriculum written by two public school teachers as the basis for an action guide to help congregations learn about stuff, values, connections to natural resources, and what actions to take. We hope the Iowa Interfaith Power & Light workshop will spur those participants’ interest in this future study/action guide.

• Use many resources from two CEEE projects: Reclaim Your Holidays and Helping Students Protect the Environment and Live Well Resources and Workshops for Teachers.
Here's a tentative list of outcomes for congregational audiences using the action guide:

You will be able to:

- Reflect through writing, drawing, poems, and/or photos what you love, explain why this matters in terms of environmental and spiritual health.
- Explain that everything comes from the earth, and give examples of natural resources and products made from those resources.
- Understand that everything we buy has a long chain of environmental impacts and name three stages of a product’s life.
- Plan and execute individual and/or collective action to address environmental challenges with a renewed feeling of ownership to conserve what we and future generations need to survive. This will include individual actions resulting in buying less and being more resourceful with materials.
- Make a plan to help yourself find contentment and fulfillment without feeling you need more stuff.
- Talk with at least three friends/family about the content of the course.

**Action.**
Remember the simple, four-step narrative that is our guide, thanks to Futerra Communications’ “Sizzle: The New Climate Message”? It’s Vision → Choice → Plan → Action.

**Here’s our action on the college student front** – We’ve made some headway on actions as a result of our Recycling and Reuse Technology Transfer and REAP Conservation Education Program funding. The Center for Energy & Environmental Education staff will work with UNI student audiences in new ways this coming academic year.

- We will teach a two-credit course at the University of Northern Iowa focusing on helping students understand the connection between living better quality lives, increasing their life satisfaction, and reducing their impact on the environment. The course will include community engagement.
- We will lead two non-credit short courses for students to enhance their college experience in partnership with the Live Like a Student financial literacy campaign in the UNI Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships. Students will consider their values and priorities and learn the connection between stuff, environmental health and life satisfaction. They will then make a plan to live their values, save money, and help create a healthier environment. Thanks to funding from a UNI Conservation Corps and the Roy J. Carver Charitable Trust, a few students will receive internships to develop and implement their own ideas for action on campus or in the broader community.

**Our action on the congregational front** is to secure funds to write the Reflection and Action Guide and get it used in congregations. We will use the model described above in our Plan to write the guide. We will also partner with Iowa Interfaith Power and Light and support their workshops.
And, a few more tid-bits for you.

“Consumption” and “Overconsumption” Language Just Doesn’t Work.
Here’s What We Learned about Sharing the Facts that Drive this Program.
Let’s face it: When we talk about “stuff,” we are talking about consumption. Now, that’s a word that just doesn’t have much drawing power. Neither does “overconsumption.” We are staying away from the negative.
We do want some groups—particularly educators and those who have strong environmental inclinations—to understand the facts that drive these programs. With that in mind, we got feedback from environmental educators and learned there’s a lot of confusion on some of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) charts and graphs. So, we created a few of our own.

The Life of a Product. According to the EPA, when we classify emissions according to broad, economic systems, our “stuff” – the things we use daily—accounts for 42% of all greenhouse gas emissions (US EPA, Retrieved October 16, 2014, at http://epa.gov/climatechange/climate-change-waste/). To help audiences understand this, they need to understand that the entire life of a product is important to consider...not just disposal.

With the help of teachers, naturalists, solid waste educators, and our favorite graphic designer, we have a new graphic, The Life of a Product.

Here are a few Cliff’s Notes for you, if you would like to use this image to spread the good word.

- The bottle in the image is just one representation of the “stuff” we use. Here you’ll find the Life of a Product image as well as a few more graphics, such as t-shirts, that also represent our “stuff.”
- The life of most products currently used in America dead-end. They are not cycles, like we see in the natural world.
- Extraction and manufacturing are the most difficult stages for most of us to understand because they aren’t part of our daily lives.
- Say the words “waste” and “recycle” quietly because landfill and wastewater account for only about 3% of greenhouse gas emissions. Though recycling is great, this project is about putting emphasis on the root problem of over-consumption.
• Ask audiences "how can we reduce the need for extraction and manufacturing?" Better yet, ask: "what can we do before we even think about reusing products to further reduce environmental impacts?"

We know from our work with K-12 educators that, though this graphic is good, it is not enough. We need to develop resources that allow our audiences to discover solutions to the challenges we face. We are seeking funds to create about 4-7 lesson plans to do just that. The lessons, we think, will include time for brainstorming and figuring out alternatives to this traditional life of products. For example, if we used refillable bottles, what would the Life of a Product look like and how would that benefit (or not) the environment and our life satisfaction? What if we only purchased the t-shirts we actually need and wear? What if we bought local products, and repaired the stuff we do own? Plans are underway to secure funds for these lessons, which will be adaptable to almost all age groups.

**Sources of Greenhouse Gas Emissions.** This graphic is also new and shows how many emissions are caused because of heating and cooling our homes, personal transportation and other activities of daily life.

**Sources of Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of Greenhouse Gas Emissions</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of appliances &amp; devices</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation of people</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building lighting &amp; HVAC</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuff</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions from each sector

Once again, the t-shirt symbolizes “stuff.” We have created a presentation that helps us understand these concepts better and you can access that [here](#). This nearly wordless pdf uses graphics to show the four categories of **Infrastructure**, Use of Appliances and Devices, Personal Transportation, and Heating and Cooling all totalled as contributing 58% of the nation's greenhouse gas emissions.

**The single largest contributor**, however, is Materials -- what we know as the “stuff of life.” Slides 119 explain these facts through pictures. Slides 20-38 then explain--with graphics--why "stuff" generates so many GHG emissions.

We’ve used this almost in silence, letting the graphics in the pdf speak for themselves.
We aren’t alone!
Many organizations in our state can make great partners. Here’s are a few of the related organizations and possible partners:
- Backyard Abundance
- Buy Fresh, Buy Local
- Blue Zones
- Cool Congregations
- Dubuque Metropolitan Area Solid Waste Agency
- (Petal Project & Green Vision Schools)
- Eco-Iowa City
- Green Iowa AmeriCorps
- Iowa Association of Naturalists
- University of Iowa Life Design (course)
- University of Northern Iowa Office of Sustainability

Maybe your organization needs to be added to the list? If so, contact Susan.Salterberg@uni.edu or Carole.Yates@uni.edu.

And two more opportunities for you... You're invited to be part of a statewide google group to share ideas on these many topics.... And you're invited to subscribe to our newsletters. You can always unsubscribe if you decide they're not for you.

How about you? What’s your connection to these ideas?
Are you getting an inkling that you connect with these ideas and want to learn more? If so, we'd love to have you join us on this continuing journey. If you're a trainer for Reclaim Your Holidays or if you've participated in the CEEE Helping Students Protect the Environment classes, you already are helping make this vision happen! We really can’t do it without you and many others! Let us hear from you: susan.salterberg@uni.edu, carole.yates@uni.edu

That's our story so far, but it's evolving daily. We want to roll it right up to your doorstep, knock on your door, and invite you to join us!

Acknowledgements. Three cheers for our financial supporters—the Recycling and Reuse Technology Transfer Center and Dr. Catherine Zeman, as well as the REAP Conservation Education Program.

Special thanks to Anita O'Gara for sharing her wisdom in so many different ways, for her availability, for her leadership and for her strategic thinking. A shout out to the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Anita’s employer, for granting Anita the time to do this work with us. And of course kudos to our Amplification Team and the hard, but fun, work they put into helping create an Iowa where we put family and friends, community, experiences and resource protection first.
# Attachment I

## Amplification Team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giselle Bruskewitz</td>
<td>Pella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlene Elyea</td>
<td>Peterson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave Gould</td>
<td>Iowa City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jen Jordan</td>
<td>Iowa City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave Mackaman</td>
<td>Des Moines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobbi Segura</td>
<td>Des Moines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Stringer</td>
<td>Des Moines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bev Wagner</td>
<td>Dubuque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Webb</td>
<td>Iowa City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita O’Gara, facilitator</td>
<td>Des Moines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Salterberg, UNI CEEE</td>
<td>Iowa City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carole Yates, UNI CEEE</td>
<td>Cedar Falls</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Attachment II

Stuff Presentation PPTX 6_2

Summary of Living Learning Communities

Academic research

- [Experiential Learning and other summaries](#)
- [Tim Kasser, D. Cain research](#)
- [Community Based Social Marketing actions for behavior change](#)