

Skagit County Partnership

Jurisdictions and Geography

Skagit County lies in northwest Washington state, bordered by the Cascade Mountains on the east and Rosario Strait to the west.

The Skagit County Shared RCM Partnership was not part of the regular program during startup. In 2008, Puget Sound Energy (PSE) helped set up a Shared RCM program in Skagit County with nine partners – the cities of Anacortes, Burlington and Sedro-Woolley, the town of La Conner, ports of Anacortes and Skagit, Skagit County, Public Utility District #1 of Skagit County and the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community. Eight of the partners, not including Skagit County, are grouped relatively near each other in the west side of the county. The Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG) was the administrator of the partnership.

The partnership as it exists today consists of Skagit County and the Port of Skagit.

Because the Shared RCM program funded through the Department of Commerce helped support the partnership administered by SCOG and currently by Skagit County, both will be discussed in this report.

Partnership Details

The nine entities of the original partnership, administered by SCOG and set up by PSE, signed an inter-local agreement in late 2008/early 2009. The three-year grant from PSE for the partnership ran from July 2008 through June 2011, and the original RCM was hired for three years starting in November 2008.

The RCM from the SCOG partnership contacted the WSU Energy Program during the startup of the Shared RCM program to find out if they could access grant funds. Because the Shared RCM grant program had funds for ten partnerships, yet only had contracts for seven, Commerce and the WSU Energy Program agreed to use some of the remaining funds to assist the SCOG partnership with a half-time technical position. With nine partners, the RCM needed assistance to implement action items and provide hands-on support for the partner facilities, including detailed analysis to make operation and maintenance changes.

The contract for these funds was between Commerce and Skagit County, not SCOG, because the county would be the technician's employer.

The job announcement called for an energy management technician who was a licensed electrician because the person would be working on lighting projects. However, no applications from qualified technicians were received, so a second job announcement was made a month after the first. The title for this position was Facility Management Conservation Technician, and the job qualifications now specified that being a licensed electrician was a desired, but not necessary, qualification.

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A Facility Management Conservation Technician was hired in late 2010 but was not a good fit for the position, so the position ended in February 2011.

At about this time, a change in leadership at SCOG and financial difficulties prompted the beginning of a transition away from SCOG as the administrator of the program. Skagit County signed an amended contract with Commerce and received additional funding (increasing total funding to the same as the other RCM partnerships) to work toward a renewed or new partnership by December 2011. This entailed obtaining commitments from agencies and developing new inter-local agreements. The expectation that a new technician would be hired was put on hold.

The RCM partnership separated from SCOG and moved to Skagit County. Not all original members continued to participate in the Shared RCM program – Skagit County and the Port of Skagit are the only two to continue. They adopted their inter-local agreement in February 2012. Skagit PUD, which is a water utility, considered joining the partnership but decided not to do so. Some of the original partners felt they had been given sufficient tools and assistance by the RCM and could continue resource conservation activities on their own.

The original RCM retired in November 2011 and a new RCM was hired. The RCM is employed at Skagit County. Some of the RCM grant funds were used for additional energy training for the new RCM and other Skagit County building staff.

Program Timeline

Project Milestones	
7/1/2010	Commerce contract start date through Skagit County
8/12 to 9/1/2010	Tech position open, no qualified applications received
9/17/2010 to 10/1/2010	Tech position open second time
10/21/2010	Technician started work
2/2011	Technician laid off
4/2011	Contract amendment signed, providing additional funding
11/30/2011	RCM retires
11/30/2011	SCOG-administered program transferred to Skagit County with fewer partners
2/14/2012	Inter-local agreement signed between Skagit County and Port of Skagit
6/30/2012	Commerce contract end date

Hiring Process

The WSU Energy Program was not involved with the hiring process for the original Shared RCM with SCOG because that program began through PSE before the Shared RCM program existed. The WSU Energy Program was also not involved with hiring the current RCM because she was already employed by Skagit County as the Sustainability Coordinator with an Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) and moved part-time into the role of RCM.

Hiring of the technician is described above under “Partnership Details.”

The complete WSU Energy Program report and descriptions of the other partnerships are available at:
<http://www.energy.wsu.edu/PublicFacilitiesSupport/ResourceConservation/SharedRCM.aspx>

RCM Tasks

The new Skagit County RCM program hired three short-term staff in the following positions:

- A facility assistant, who reviewed ten facilities and identified 62 energy conservation measures;
- A technical assistant, who created eight documents, provided high-level analysis of documentation for 11 facilities and organized hundreds of program and report files; and
- A data entry assistant, who completed data entry for 125 individual water, sewer and solid waste accounts and created 247 graphs and 13 summary documents.

Facility Assessments

Facility assessments had been completed by the SCOG RCM prior to involvement with the Commerce grant. The new RCM plans to update the assessments of facilities for Skagit County and the Port of Skagit.

Data Tracking

Utility Manager was used by the SCOG RCM although, with nine agencies, he sometimes found it difficult to keep up with inputting data. A part-time data entry assistant was contracted to assist with data input.

At the end of the term for the nine-member partnership and when the original RCM retired, data records for all agencies except Skagit County were purged. Thus, the WSU Energy Program has data for only Skagit County.

Reports

During SCOG's partnership, the RCM submitted monthly summary reports (as required by the Commerce grant) and a program update to SCOG.

The SCOG RCM program updates detailed recent activity, such as completed audits and facility action plans, audits for treatment plants and adoption of resource conservation management plans. This RCM also included enthusiastic news and congratulations about energy and cost savings, often with accompanying graphs and icons of stars and smiley faces. SCOG RCM Program Conservation Recognition Awards were given periodically at program meetings to agencies, departments and people in recognition for their outstanding efforts in:

- Reducing energy use by a single facility, by several facilities within a department or by a jurisdiction;
- Reducing CO₂ emissions; or
- Being resource conservation champions.

In contrast to the SCOG program updates, monthly progress reports did not report cost or usage reductions, but centered on reporting project activities such as meetings, presentations and bids.

Resource Conservation Projects

Six of the nine partners took part in a friendly “2011 Energy Stewardship Challenge” to try to reduce total energy use in daily facility operations by 5 percent for a four-month period compared to the same four months the previous year. Two of the partners met the 5 percent energy reduction goal, while the overall cumulative results of all six partners in the challenge was a 4.5 percent reduction in gross energy use. This equals 538 million fewer Btus, 28 tons fewer CO₂ emitted and \$23,000 in cost savings.

The challenge was a unique project developed by the RCM. This was in addition to the usual activities such as lighting retrofits, optimizing maintenance and operation procedures, identifying other upgrades, and working further with staff and management on energy efficient behavior change.

Lighting upgrades implemented by the RCM technician at Sedro-Woolley, Port of Anacortes, Burlington and Skagit County buildings resulted in annual savings of 41,066 kWh.

Communication Activities

Communication activities were a key tool used by the original RCM to engage the nine partners. He wrote enthusiastic reports and kept the partners up to date. Any success – small or large – was celebrated and reported.

An article in *Fluke* magazine highlighted the SCOG Shared RCM partnership and RCM.

Challenges

The biggest obvious challenge with the original configuration of the partnership was the sheer number of partners. Tracking data, visiting facilities, writing action plans, identifying energy efficiency measures and communicating with management and staff is time consuming with just a few partner organizations, not to mention nine, even if most of them have few buildings.

Response time from some partner representatives was extremely slow and it was difficult to maintain communication. Some staff were reluctant to change, and debated if energy efficiency upgrades were worthwhile.

Finding a technician who met the job requirements and fit into the work culture of so many different organizations was a challenge. After two separate searches and having to terminate the person who was eventually hired due to communication and performance issues, the search for the technician was put on hold and not picked up again.

A shortfall in funding occurred near the end of the SCOG partnership, and Skagit County funds were necessary to complete the partnership with all nine partners. It is possible that the shortfall could have been avoided if a higher level of commitment was required of each jurisdiction, such as paying in advance, providing a higher level of outreach and renewed commitment at regular intervals, or more thoroughly tracking the finances by the administering party.

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As for the 2012 Skagit County Shared RCM Program, it was a challenge to find potential partners willing to continue participating in an RCM program. There was indeed continued interest in RCM by more organizations; however, they opted to create their own RCM programs and positions.

Further challenges resulted from the transition of RCMs, the training involved and additional time required to process inter-local and utility agreements.

Results

Per the first RCM, cost savings from the first three years of the program, from both electricity and natural gas reductions, total nearly \$395,000 for all nine partners (see chart below). The results include adjustments made for weather, occupancy and other changes. It includes only the sites that showed reduction in usage. Overall, more than 3.4 million kWh were reduced compared to the baseline year. A total of 125 sites were evaluated.

Cumulative Cost Savings for Three Years Ending 7/31/2011			
	kWh	Therms	Combined
Anacortes	\$96,127	\$8,675	\$104,801
Burlington	\$50,509	\$22,296	\$72,804
La Conner	\$10,647	\$3,496	\$14,143
Port of Anacortes	\$2,807	\$714	\$3,521
Port of Skagit	\$4,863	\$1,744	\$6,608
Sedro-Woolley	\$28,990	\$15,822	\$44,813
Skagit County	\$90,275	\$27,980	\$118,255
Skagit PUD #1	\$16,811	\$90	\$16,901
Swinomish Tribe	\$11,542	\$1,461	\$13,003
Total dollars saved	\$312,571	\$82,278	\$394,849
Total energy saved	3.44 million kWh	70,015 therms	
Percentage saved	10.9%	18.6%	

Note: These data are from sites demonstrating savings only

Looking Ahead

The inter-local agreement between Skagit County and the Port of Skagit for the current Shared RCM partnership is scheduled to go through December 2014. The current RCM works part-time on RCM work and has other duties at the county. The county originally hoped to have four partners by the end of 2012, which would warrant a full-time RCM, but that has not occurred.

The success of the original partnership to reduce costs and energy use likely encouraged the continuation of the RCM program at the county and the Port of Skagit.

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