



## **Climate Change Campaign Final Report**

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## **Introduction**

In Vermont, transportation accounts for over half of all green house gas emissions. Driving less is arguably one of the most impactful and immediate personal changes that Vermonters can make to reduce their emissions. However, a number of factors make it challenging for Vermonters to make this important connection and ultimately change their transportation behaviors—from Vermont’s rural landscape patterns which often necessitate a vehicle for travel, lack of public transportation and other mobility options, personal preference, and the embedded car culture that prevails across the U.S.

CarShare Vermont sought FY 17 UPWP funding from the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) to design a community-based social marketing campaign to help people better understand the impact of their personal transportation choices on climate change, and to demonstrate how relatively modest shifts in transportation habits can meaningfully combat climate change. More specifically, we wanted to showcase how utilizing a service like CarShare Vermont allows people to own fewer cars and consequently drive less, making greenhouse gas emissions reductions easier to sustain over the long-term.

## **Phase 1: RFP Process & Market Research**

To begin the project, in early fall 2016 we developed a request for proposals to identify a marketing and design firm to assist with the communication strategy and creative design of the campaign. We issued the RFP to two local firms, as well as one in NY. Place Creative was the only firm to respond to our request. Fortunately, they came forward with a strong and compelling proposal and we chose them for this project.

To help inform our campaign messaging and strategies we first conducted market research to better understand our community’s feelings about climate change and the perceived role of personal transportation choices within this larger societal issue. We organized a series of focus groups and used Front Porch Forum to recruit participants. In particular, we were looking to hear from self-described environmentally-minded residents of Burlington and Winooski that currently owned one or more vehicles and were *not* current CarShare Vermont members. We hosted two sessions in early January with a total of 9 participants.

In addition to the focus group sessions we also conducted a survey in hopes of hearing from a broader segment of our community. We put the survey out on Front Porch Forum, as well as Facebook and Instagram. We received 48 responses.

The key takeaway from our research was that climate change is a large and overwhelming topic, especially for those individuals and households who want to do more for the environment. People teetered between feeling like the problem is too massive to make a dent and believing that individual actions really do matter. There were strong feelings of despair and hopelessness about the plight of our planet, particularly in light of the current political climate. People also expressed sincere optimism that we can (and will) continue to make progress at the local and state level.

Participants believed that the key to our campaign's success was helping people figure out how best to focus their energy so that they could overcome the potential inertia that often leads to inaction. They encouraged us to break things down into manageable action steps to help people realize that making personal changes in transportation habits does not necessarily require major shifts in lifestyle or extreme effort.

It was also clear to us that this campaign needed to avoid scare tactics (e.g. images of sinking polar bears, extreme weather events, etc.) or utilize a blame and shame approach. We gleaned that we should instead keep our messaging light, humorous, and positive.

Participants loved the idea of showcasing the real life impacts of CarShare Vermont's members in easily digestible facts and figures. Many were unfamiliar with our service and had no idea of the environmental and social impacts of our community-based nonprofit. The collective impacts of our membership was engaging and compelling to them, which was encouraging to hear.

After digesting the feedback from our focus groups and survey responses, Place Creative honed in on a campaign concept that incorporated humor coupled with compelling information to catch people's attention and start a larger conversation in our community about the connection between our personal transportation choices and climate change.

## **Phase 2: Welcome to Burlingtopia**

Place Creative proposed that the the hook of the campaign be a short video, or rather series of videos, that gently pokes fun at some of the extreme behavior people exhibit in the name of climate change contrasted by a much simpler, more impactful strategy: carsharing.

Playing off of the successful comedy series *Portlandia* set in Portland, Oregon, the concept of "Burlingtopia" emerged. Similar to *Portlandia*, we wanted to use a sketch comedy format to follow two Burlington residents, Willow and Gravity, during their earnest trials and tribulations combating climate change. Whether it's making their family eat a local kale-only diet, waiting until late January to turn the heat on, or becoming a tiny car household, this Burlington couple goes to extremes to do their part to reduce their carbon footprint. These extreme scenarios are juxtaposed with the idea that joining CarShare Vermont is an easier and more sustainable way to more meaningfully address climate change, one that does not require nearly as much sacrifice or hardship.

The Burlingtopia campaign centers on a series of three 60-second videos that drive people to the CarShare Vermont website to learn more. Once there, viewers can explore a long form infographic that tells a story about the climate change effects of joining CarShare Vermont. More specifically, it illustrates the impact of downsizing from two personally owned vehicles to one, or from one to zero, and it compares this impact to those derived from other, perhaps more intense actions (e.g. planting a forest of trees, dramatically shifting home energy use, etc.). The infographics utilize real and verifiable CarShare Vermont data to showcase the

significant carbon reductions that our members achieve when shedding a household vehicle, which accounts for nearly 60% of our membership.

We applied the data and graphics we generated for the long form infographic to create a large window display for our office, as well as a series of short images to share and promote on social media and in Seven Days. Again, the images are intended to drive people to our website to learn more.

To compliment our own campaign, we have also been spurring conversation around climate change on social media by posting relevant articles, infographics, and research findings. One article in particular that was especially timely was based on a recent study published in the journal *Environmental Research Letters*. It focused on the highest impact personal actions individuals can take to effectively reduce their carbon, pointing out that governments and educational institutions are doing an insufficient job communicating the most effective strategies. According to the study, at the top of the list of ways to combat climate change at the personal level, second to having smaller families, is living car-free. The most commonly promoted actions—such as recycling, reducing home energy use (e.g. air drying clothes), and purchasing a hybrid or electric vehicle—yield a fraction of the impact as reducing vehicle ownership.

Although it will take some time to see the full results of our campaign in terms of awareness building and membership growth, we believe that the combination of the videos and real data about CarShare Vermont makes a compelling case for why more people concerned about climate change should take a closer look at their own transportation habits. Our campaign aims to assure people that by focusing their energy on making incremental, long-lasting changes—such as owning fewer cars—they can make a more meaningful difference.

During the first week that we launched the campaign, coined “It’s Easier Than You Think,” the first video released was viewed nearly 3,000 times and we’ve received very positive feedback from throughout the community. Numerous passers-by have stopped to view the infographic on our front window and photograph it. Additionally, our social media posts have performed very well, generating organic engagement.

### **Partnership Development**

Another goal of our campaign was to establish partnerships with other organizations focused on climate change. We are pleased to have developed a new collaboration with 350 Vermont, and specifically the Mother Up! group. This group brings together local families that are working to address their environmental impacts and encourage activism at home and in other communities most impacted by climate change. 350VT invited us to present about how carsharing helps families reduce their vehicle ownership. We hope to engage with this group again in the future to incorporate the practice of carsharing into their climate change activism toolbox.

In addition, we also developed a new collaboration with Old Spokes Home to offer 50% off our Share-a-Lot membership to households that buy an electric cargo bike. They are working with Burlington Electric Department to develop an e-bike lending library to encourage households to consider electric cargo bikes as a viable long-term year-round commuting option in lieu of car ownership. We know of at least a few households that have used the combination of carsharing and e-bikes as a way to shed a vehicle and we hope to continue to encourage those kinds of behavior shifts and lifestyle changes. We plan to pilot some co-branded outreach this fall and profile a few families that we making these shifts.

### **Campaign Challenges & Future Opportunities**

As part of this effort we had originally considered developing a carbon calculator of sorts to help our members (and potential members) evaluate the impacts of carsharing on their personal carbon footprints. However, after doing research to see what other tools were out there, we discovered that a variety of carbon calculators already existed; and we realized that to develop something truly custom for our membership would require significantly more resources. We determined that the return on investment was not practical. That said, we believed there was still value in measuring and profiling the actual carbon reductions of our typical members. Because 87% of our members belong to zero or one-vehicle households, we decided to use the infographic described above to showcase the carbon reductions that result from downsizing vehicle ownership. Simultaneously, the campaign encourages non-members to consider the carbon reductions associated with carsharing and positively reinforces the behavior of our current members.

Another change to our project was that we originally set out to work with elementary schools in the Burlington area with the goal of helping educators better incorporate the subject of transportation into curriculum about the environment. This proved significantly more challenging than we originally thought. Early in the project (summer of 2016), we attempted to make connections with potential partners at several local schools. Due to the summer break, we had a low response rate. Those educators we heard back from suggested that we follow up at the start of the school year. By the time the school year was in session, however, we discovered that it may be too late to attempt to influence lesson plans, which were based on well-planned and practiced curriculums.

We then reached out to the Vermont Energy Education Program (VEEP) for some guidance. Our contacts at VEEP confirmed what we suspected—that it is actually quite difficult to influence existing school curriculum—largely due to the amount of time and planning needed to collaborate with teachers, as well as the cyclical nature of the school year with summer vacation creating a down time.

Our contacts at VEEP suggested that our efforts would be best focused at the middle and high school level, which is where they've had most success with their climate change curriculum. In the future they recommend that we look for opportunities through the Way to Go school challenge and possibly even partner with driver's education teachers to help students think about car ownership costs, as well as environmental impacts of owning. However, in general,

they reiterated that this environmental and social topic is just one of many schools are discussing, which is largely why it is challenging to find an internal school partner to champion it. Despite spinning our wheels a bit during this project component, we now better understand what is required and what might be most relevant to this population.

Finally, an additional challenge we faced in the development and launch of this campaign was quite simply the weather. Despite having a year to plan and execute our campaign, as well as being intimately familiar with Vermont's seasons, our project was delayed by late snowfalls and a wet spring. Because we concluded our market research in early January (we deliberately decided to conduct it after the holiday season to boost participation), it was February by the time we honed in on our key strategies and messaging for the campaign—namely a video series. Given the video content, we believed it was necessary to film outside (and without snow on the ground). We originally thought we would be able to produce the video in April, but foul weather and scheduling conflicts with the production team pushed it to the first week of June. Because the video series was the planned hook for the campaign, Place Creative delayed the rollout of the other campaign materials—the infographics and design elements needed to bring the campaign to life on line and in print. It wasn't until late June that we officially launched "It's Easier Than You Think."

Despite the grant funds being exhausted, however, we are excited to continue to promote the campaign throughout the summer and early fall through ongoing advertising, tabling events, social media, and through our partnerships. In fact, a local business recently offered to support the campaign by making a contribution to cover the cost of airing the videos at the Roxy Theater in downtown Burlington! We are also running a promotion around the campaign, offering a significant reduction in our Share-a-Lot membership fee for new members.

### **Conclusion**

Through the course of this project—from research and planning to execution and evaluation—we feel confident that our assumptions were true about the disconnect between people's concerns about climate change and their personal transportation choices. Therefore, we are proud to have delivered a campaign that brings to light a conversation that is not only relevant, but necessary. Moreover, we are more confident than ever that CarShare Vermont offers an effective and relatively easy solution for those interested in making a more significant personal impact on climate change.