



**How you can
start a successful
Choose to Reuse program
in your municipality**



Q: What is Choose to Reuse?

A: A Choose to Reuse program allows citizens to bring items in good working condition that they want to discard, but that perhaps someone else can use. In central Wisconsin, residents bring items to a designated location on scheduled weekends.

Q: Who can start a Choose to Reuse program?

A: YOU CAN! In our area, to date, concerned citizens helped start Choose to Reuse programs in four separate municipalities, including the Towns of Rome, Grand Rapids, Saratoga, Seneca, and Grant, and the City of Nekoosa.

Q: Why was it started in central Wisconsin?

A: Locally, the Choose to Reuse program was started in the Town of Rome, Adams County, as a way to keep usable items from being discarded. Considering increasing environmental concerns, this seemed like a sustainable, positive, and easy program for area residents. By recycling items at no charge, these items went to a new home, providing enjoyment for their new owners.

Prior to undertaking the program, Rome residents visited several sites to find out how they recycled items. In some locations, items are checked by a second-hand store and then sold to the public. This becomes a business requiring a business relationship, or creating a not-for-profit business which requires collecting sales tax and reporting taxes. In Rome's approach, they decided to place the emphasis on recycling and the use of local volunteers. Providing items for free was chosen as a simple alternative.

Q: Why should you have a Choose to Reuse program?

A: It's easy, fun and as the old adage goes, "One person's trash is another's treasure." Nearly everyone has items that they no longer use because they've purchased new, the children have outgrown them, it doesn't fit the décor anymore, etc. In these pressing economic times, many families would gladly take useable items from others.

This program provides an option similar to donating to a thrift store, but does it close to home with an immediate result.

Q: How do I organize a Choose to Reuse program?

A: Here are several tips to organizing a Choose to Reuse program at your location:

1. Find a centralized location that residents are familiar with and get permission to use that location.
2. Form a small committee of volunteers to help with planning, publicity, and helping on the day of the event.
3. Choose a season, months or days that you can advertise in advance.
4. Secure a covered location (if available), plus a few tables and shelves to display the items.
5. Advertise through your municipality's website, newsletter, or send a simple postcard to your residents. Submit news releases to local papers and websites. (They're free!) Publicize using social media.



When organizing a Choose to Reuse program similar to those in central Wisconsin, volunteers are key. Listening and working with people's varied ideas will help you succeed. Selecting a location where people assemble and drop off items, as well as timing are all considerations. The Town of Rome chose to use the Transfer Site because that is where most people go to dispose of unwanted items. Condition of the items was not as much of a factor as convenience was.



Each location or group must determine what their goals are - environment and recycling, or a business.

On the surface, this appears to be a “free” program, but in reality it is very volunteer-oriented. Also, consider that promotional materials and educating the public may involve some cost. If you choose to develop a brochure, flier or posters, you will need to determine how many and how to distribute these materials.

Tracking volunteer time is important if you intend to pursue grant funding in the future. Volunteer time becomes a potential matching component.

Q: What approvals are needed?

A: To help things progress quickly and smoothly, the following approvals are recommended:

1. Get approvals from municipal governing body (e.g. municipal board/council). Municipal approval is needed since the event is being held on public property. Incorporate this approval into meeting minutes and include dates and times of the event.
2. Check with the municipal insurance carrier. Insurance carrier may require a “hold harmless” agreement for volunteers to sign.
3. Let your contracted vendor for recycling & waste removal know about the event and check if it’s acceptable with current contract language.
4. Have your municipality’s legal counsel consider any agreements that you draft, etc.

Q: What are some potential barriers?

A: Potential barriers can be local government, a local Transfer Site (or whatever location is used), and residents who do not share similar program goals or care about the recycling. If held on public grounds, there may be liability or regulatory issues that need to be addressed by the municipality. Not everyone will agree that helping others is a benefit. Others may not be concerned about the landfills or environment. A budget may also be a barrier.

When beginning a Choose to Reuse program, finding ways to communicate your project will determine success. Utilizing multiple methods of communication is important. Successful methods included: using public announcements, addressing the Town Board for awareness and support, local cable access TV, fliers, and grocery bag stuffers were all used.

Q: What types of items are typically accepted?

A: Items that are typically accepted are items in good working condition that someone else can use and items that can be easily repaired or used for parts. These items include: indoor and outdoor furniture, small working appliances, lawn care items, household goods, bicycles, seasonal decoration, knick-knacks, office equipment, books, CDs, DVDs, VHS tapes, records, clothes, etc.



Any materials classified as hazardous waste (e.g. paint, DDT, prescription drugs) are NOT accepted.



Q: What other activities (e.g. collection of tires, large appliances, electronics, Clean Sweep, etc.) can be incorporated into a Choose to Reuse program?

A: Tire Day, “white goods” (e.g. household appliances), brush, etc. In looking at environmental and safety issues, being able to leverage resources and timing of related events is key. If you find a place that has an environment day, being open on that day would be a plus. Let people know what you accept, as well as when and where to take other items.

Recycling laws in Wisconsin changed in September 2010. They now require a fee for electronics and appliances. Each program must decide whether to take such items and if they are not “adopted”, how to dispose of them if a fee is required.

Q: When is the best time of year to hold a Choose to Reuse event?

A: Ideally having a recycling program year-round is best. The Town of Rome uses an event tent and is open from May through September, or until the weather no longer permits. In other townships in central Wisconsin, the event is held two to four occasions on Saturdays, from May through September. A good time is in August just before college students go back to school.

Q: How often should a Choose to Reuse event be held?

A: Frequency of doing an event like this will depend on the number of volunteers and their willingness to develop a program. Rome chose to hold them once a month and have continued that frequency after more than three years. Items are now left at the site and volunteers open and close each Saturday and Sunday. During the unadvertised weekends, people can still drop things off and pick things up. Rome also has support from Transfer Site employees and volunteers who check on things periodically throughout the weekend.

Q: What other considerations are there?

A: Volunteers are valuable to any program that has no paid staffing. One of the first steps would be to create a local planning committee. Once the committee has determined how your program should work, contact the local municipality or manager of the location where the program will be held to determine any permits or other regulatory items. If possible, address as many groups within your community to let them know your plans. It is important to determine a budget regardless of how small. You may need to ask for start-up funds or donations to promote the program locally.

Q: What is done with leftover Choose to Reuse items?

A: Different municipalities utilize different methods. The Town of Rome has done several things to reuse items. Each weekend that they are open, they evaluate how long items have been available and their condition.

If items are in good condition but susceptible to weather conditions, or if there is limited storage space available, a volunteer will take items to a local recycler, Goodwill, thrift store or local charitable organizations such as churches. For seasonal storage, volunteers sometimes donate storage space in a garage during the winter. Sometimes it is necessary to dispose of an item.

Q: Who can I contact if I have additional questions?

A: Contacts include the following people:

- Citizens for a Clean, Green & Welcoming Community
 - Joe Ancel (715.424.4366) – ancel@wctc.net
 - Carol Davis (715.423.3863) – cdavis@incouragecf.org
- Town of Rome, Adams County
 - Arlene Scalzo (715.213.0258) – ascalzo@scable.com
- Town of Grant, Portage County
 - Sharon Schwab (715.325.3827) – sschwab@flarkinc.com
- Town of Grand Rapids, Wood County
 - Bill Clendenning (715.423.2469) – wfc-sak@hotmail.com
- City of Nekoosa, Wood County
 - Bill Kaberle (715.886.7889)



To learn more about Citizens for a Clean, Green & Welcoming Community, contact Carol Davis at cdavis@incouragecf.org, or via phone at 715.423.3863, or Joe Ancel at ancel@wctc.net, or via phone at 715.424.4366.



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