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Waste Audit at Innovation Works London (A)

William Diebel and Professor Stephan Vachon wrote this case solely to provide material for class discussion. The authors do not intend to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation. The authors may have disguised certain names and other identifying information to protect confidentiality.

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In early June 2018, Laura Pendlebury, a student in the master’s degree program in Environment and Sustainability (MES) at Western University, was invited to lead a waste audit for Innovation Works London (Innovation Works), a social innovation shared space in downtown London (Ontario), which was an initiative led by Pillar Nonprofit Network (Pillar). The invitation came from the MES program director, who had contacted Innovation Works through his professional network. The program director saw a good opportunity for Pendlebury and possibly other students to gain valuable experience on a real project. This type of project also aligned with the program’s strategy to further develop its relationships within the local community.

Earlier that year, Pendlebury had gained some exposure to waste management and waste auditing procedures in her coursework, including a waste management workshop and waste audit project through the MES consulting course. She accepted the invitation, eager to enhance her expertise in waste management while gaining valuable project management experience. At a preliminary meeting with Innovation Works staff on June 11, Pendlebury learned that the week of June 18 would be an ideal time to start the waste collection for the audit, which left her 48 hours to compile a waste audit plan and allow sufficient time for Innovation Works’ approval. With little time to spare, Pendlebury started to formulate her plan.

Innovation works LONDON

The idea for Innovation Works was introduced in a living room amid a small gathering of like-minded individuals. Together, they imagined London’s very own co-working space where change-makers and innovators could intersect and cross-pollinate: a space dedicated to social innovation. The concept for Innovation Works would soon be embraced by a community of champions eager to make it happen.

Pillar was one such champion. Pillar drove the early development of the project, leveraging its experience in community impact and cross-sector collaboration. Working together with other local non-profit organizations such as Emerging Leaders, the London Arts Council, and the London Heritage Council, Pillar engaged the Centre for Social Innovation (CSI) to support the development of a co-working space for social innovators in London. Located in Toronto, Ontario, the CSI was Canada’s first co-working space for social innovators, and had been a globally recognized leader in the field of collaborative communities and innovation since its inception in 2004. Working from the CSI’s models and best practices, the Innovation Works project was propelled forward.

In August 2014, Pillar announced its purchase of the Garvey Building at 201 King Street in the heart of downtown London, Ontario. Innovation Works had a home. Pillar programing, staff, and resources supported the space but, at its heart, Innovation Works was a community-driven initiative.

Innovation Works encompassed a total of 32,000 square feet (2,973 square metres) over five floors (including the basement). The building was divided into co-working spaces (private desks and part-time desks), private offices, meeting rooms, events rooms, and other amenities; each floor had a unique combination of such spaces. The basement contained a small studio used for a weekly yoga class and a co-working space. The ground floor had a large common area, coffee shop, meeting rooms, and events rooms. The second and third floors comprised co-working spaces and meeting rooms, while the entire fourth floor was occupied by two companies each and had its own separate, enclosed offices and one large meeting room.

The June 11 Meeting

On June 11, Pendlebury met with Sienna Jae Taylor, community animator at Innovation Works, to discuss the upcoming audit. Taylor explained that the reason for the audit was to pursue one of Innovation Works’ core tenets. Taylor gestured to the wall behind them, referring to Innovation Works’ manifesto prominently displayed on the ground floor common area near the coffee shop. She singled out the first tenet, as displayed:

Put people and planet first

We are connected by one shared vision: to put people and planet first. Everything we do, every decision, exchange, system, product, and offering must move us closer to justice and equity.

Taylor explained that Innovation Works wanted to improve its waste management practices in line with its mission to “put people and planet first.” To pursue this mission, Taylor needed some help. She had some suspicions that Innovation Works’ current three-stream system (landfill, recycling, and organics) was not being used to its full potential, but without any hard data to back up her beliefs, she could not confidently formulate a strategic plan for improvement.

Taylor mentioned that Innovation Works employed a single caretaker who handled waste collection and disposal into three separate receptacles. Waste pickup was provided by three different parties: one for landfill waste, one for recycling, and one for compost. To collect waste for the audit, the caretaker, recycling company, and compost company would need to be notified in advance of the waste collection phase. The basement offered adequate space to store more than a week’s worth of waste.

Moving forward with the Plan

After the June 11 meeting, Pendlebury reflected on Taylor’s desire to improve the use of the three-stream system at Innovation Works. The daily fluctuation in occupants and activities at Innovation Works presented a challenge. Pendlebury wanted to mitigate the potential for day-to-day abnormalities in waste production to affect the data collection and subsequent analysis. She wanted to design an audit that captured an appropriate sample for analysis, and then provide Taylor with relatively detailed, actionable data, but with limited resources. She had access to some data from a previous student’s project at Innovation Works. That data included monthly energy and water consumption (see Exhibit 1) and the number of pickups for the three streams of waste (see Exhibit 2). Pendlebury had recruited four volunteers (including the MES program director) to help her conduct the audit, assuring them they would need only one evening to complete the audit together. She also determined that she would have time to assemble all the necessary supplies to complete the audit, provided she first completed a supply list.

Pendlebury got to work organizing her ideas by drafting an audit plan document. She had agreed to submit this document to her volunteer team and Taylor within 48 hours so that it could be reviewed in time to prepare for the waste collection phase of the audit.

Exhibit 1: innovation works’ monthly Energy and water CONSUMPTION, 2017

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Month** | **Gas (m3)** | **Electricity (kWh)** | **Water (m3)** |
| January | 3,318 | 28,690 | 30 |
| February | 3,019 | 26,952 | 30 |
| March | 2,578 | 30,147 | 40 |
| April | 1,270 | 26,788 | 35 |
| May | 766 | 29,462 | 35 |
| June | 583 | 35,375 | 35 |
| July | 635 | 34,484 | 35 |
| August | 579 | 34,110 | 40 |
| September | 512 | 35,115 | 60 |
| October | 688 | 26,833 | 70 |
| November | 1,928 | 28,690 | 49 |
| December | n.a. | 27,788 | n.a. |

Note: m3 = cubic metres; kWh = kilowatt hours; n.a. = not applicable

Source: Innovation Works files.

Exhibit 2: innovation works’ monthly Waste collection, by number of bins used, 2017

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Number of Bins** | | |
| **Month** | **Landfill** | **Recycling** | **Organic** |
| January |  | 26\* |  |
| February |  | 28 |  |
| March |  | 22 |  |
| April |  | 23 |  |
| May | 5\* | 34\* |  |
| June | 4 | 26 | 4 |
| July | 4 | 27\* | 4 |
| August | 5\* | 33 | 4 |
| September | 4 | 27 | 4 |
| October | 5\* | 33\* | 4 |
| November | 4 | 27 |  |
| December | 4 | 28 |  |

Note: All streams were picked up on a weekly basis. Each month, at least four pickups were made; an asterisk (\*) indicates when the number of pickups was five.

Source: Innovation Works files.