



Working Together to Create a Sustainable Community

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March 14, 2014

To the AASHE STARS Review Committee:

Given my past professional and volunteer experience with waste prevention, I believe I am well qualified to assess the value and effectiveness of OSU's Repair Fair. For 18 years, I was employed by the City of Falls Church, Virginia, as the Recycling Coordinator and Environmental Programs Specialist. In that capacity, I developed the recycling and waste prevention program for a community of 10,000 into an award-winning model. Of the 18 communities featured in the EPA's "Cutting the Waste Stream in Half: Community Record-setters Show How," the City of Falls Church tied for the highest recycling rate. During nearly two decades working for local government, I became familiar with many other recycling and waste prevention programs in the region through my involvement with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government's Recycling Committee. In addition, I helped found the Virginia Recycling Association and served on the VRA board. Through the VRA, I interacted with recycling and waste prevention programs throughout the state. Since moving to Corvallis, Oregon, in 2006, I have led the Corvallis Sustainability Coalition, an all-volunteer organization with nearly 300 partner organizations, including Oregon State University. I can attest to the fact that OSU's Repair Fair is one of the most innovative programs I have ever seen.

The Repair Fairs are events at which people can bring their broken belongings and receive help fixing them for free. Also offered are do-it-yourself demonstrations that teach repair skills for common items, as well as other aspects of waste reduction and sustainable living (e.g., make your own non-toxic cleaning and pest control supplies, home energy and water conservation, etc.). Attendees leave with knowledge on how to repair their own belongings and live more sustainably. By having their items fixed, they neither need to discard their items nor consume new goods.

What makes the OSU Repair Fairs innovative is how uncommon they are at universities and how unique their model is. While this type of event has been popping up in some places in the U.S. in the last couple of years, I am not aware of any that are coordinated by, sponsored by, or held on the campus of a university. The OSU Repair Fairs provide a unique opportunity to engage students and staff (both as volunteers and attendees), while also engaging the off-campus community in a positive way.

While most outreach programs focus on recycling and diversion, the Repair Fairs are innovative in that they promote waste prevention. They are a great response to a culture of consumerism and help to instead cultivate a culture of reuse. They involve university students and staff, as well as community members. Learning is not passive but rather interactive, providing a hands-on learning experience and encouraging conversation and knowledge sharing. The Repair Fairs provide a unique learning and leadership opportunity for students who volunteer and in turn gain skills in event planning and coordination, marketing, and repair.

For the reasons listed above, I believe the Repair Fairs qualify for a STARS innovation credit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Annette Mills". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Annette Mills, Facilitator
Corvallis Sustainability Coalition