



Assessing the Information Needs of Pollution Prevention Technical Assistance Providers in the Great Lakes Region

By Laura L. Barnes, Executive Director, Great Lakes Regional Pollution Prevention Roundtable and Soyma Anand, University of Illinois Survey Research Laboratory

Introduction

The Great Lakes Regional Pollution Prevention Roundtable (GLRPPR) is a professional organization that facilitates networking among and develops and promotes information resources and training for sustainability professionals in the Great Lakes region of the U.S. and Canada. GLRPPR's four focus areas are: Green Chemistry and Engineering; Technical Assistance; Behavior Change and Sustainability; and Sustainable Electronics. Because these focus areas are very broad, GLRPPR contracted with the University of Illinois' Survey Research Laboratory (SRL) to conduct a regional information needs assessment in 2014. The assessment was designed to determine how pollution prevention (P2) technical assistance providers in the region currently locate and access information; how they stay up-to-date in the field; how they prefer to receive training; and what training and information gaps exist within these broad focus areas.

GLRPPR staff worked with the SRL project manager to develop an assessment instrument, obtain Institutional Research Board approval, and encourage GLRPPR members to respond to the request to provide feedback. The full needs assessment report is available in IDEALS, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's institutional repository, at <http://hdl.handle.net/2142/73269>.

Demographics

A link to the survey was sent to the 408 people subscribed to the Roundtable e-mail list and GLRPPR's e-newsletter. The web-based feedback instrument was launched in early March 2014 and closed on May 7, 2014.

Sixty-five respondents completed the questionnaire and three partially completed it, which is a 16.6% response rate. Respondent demographics were: 59.4% from some type of government agency; 12.5% from universities; 7.8% each from private companies and non-profit organizations; and 69.3% from states in the Great Lakes Region.

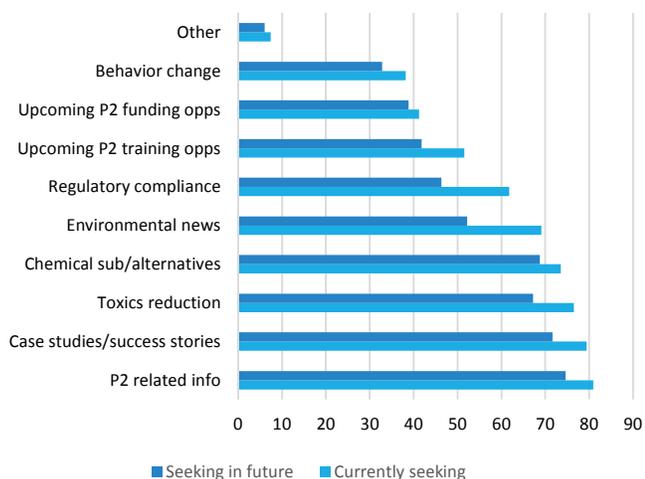
Information Seeking Behavior

Respondents were asked if they seek information for work or for some other reason. Results showed that 64.7% of respondents seek information on P2 or waste reduction as part of their job duties. 30.9% seek this information as part of their job duties **and** for some other reason.

Themes that emerged from respondents who specified a reason included: curiosity about or interest in the field; up-to-date information; care about the environment; reducing pollution, toxics at home; interest in personal or public health issues; and building projects and lawn and garden care.

Types of information that people often seek are shown in **Figure 1**. These data indicate that making it easier to locate case studies on the GLRPPR site should be a priority. They also support the decision to make Green Chemistry/Engineering a focus area.

Figure 1: Types of information sought (by %)



Sources Used to Find Information

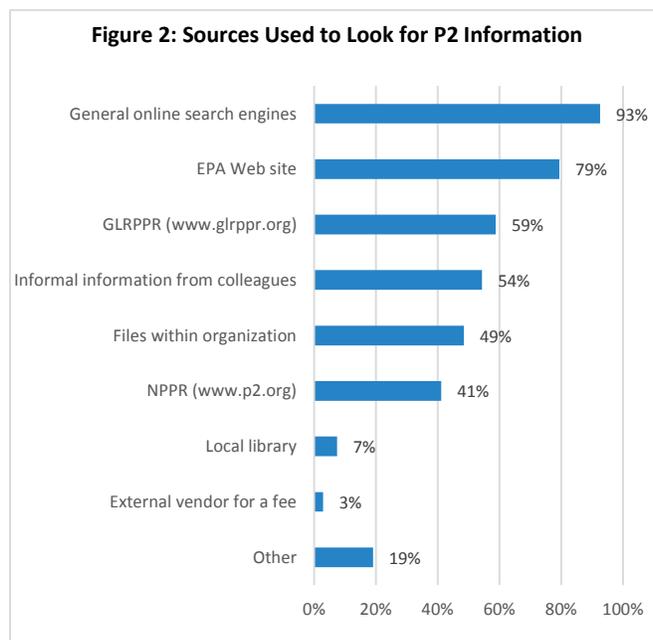
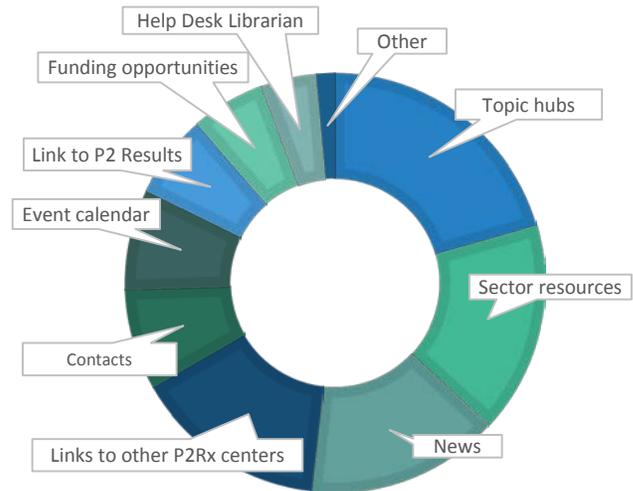


Figure 2 illustrates where respondents most often go when they seek P2 information. The GLRPPR web site ranks third after general search engines and the U.S. EPA web site. The Other category includes: Pollution Prevention Resource Exchange - P2Rx (3 mentions); Environmental publications and newsletters; FedCenter; free vendor info; serdp.org; tech blogs; GreenBiz; GLRPPR newsletter; Grant monies for air quality through DERA or CMAQ; P2 Info House; PPRC; State Regulatory Programs; Industry Associations; local technical assistance/P2 provider – MNTAP; sustainability resources (1 mention each).

Respondents who said that they used GLRPPR as an information source were asked about the types of information they sought in the past. The top three resources identified were [topic hubs](#), [sector resources](#), and [news](#). **Figure 3** shows the percentage of respondents who used each service.

These data indicate that continuing to update LibGuides and Sector Resources is a priority.

Figure 3: Types of information sought on GLRPPR web site



Barriers to Finding Information

Respondents were also asked to identify barriers that they faced while trying to find information, regardless of source used. They were allowed to select as many responses as applied. 49.3% reported that they couldn't find any information on their topic of interest; 40.3% reported only finding incomplete information on the topic; 37.3% reported finding too much information to sift through; 34.3% reported a lack of good quality information; 19.4% said that they didn't know who to contact when they couldn't find information; and 35.4% reported experiencing no issues.

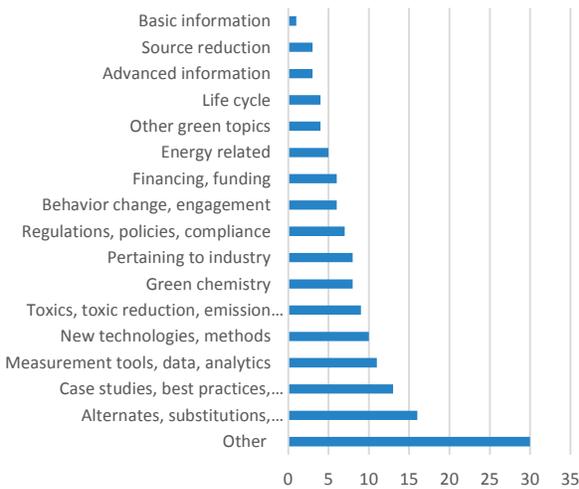
When asked to recall the last time they had tried to find information about pollution prevention or waste reduction, a little over half of all respondents indicated that they were unable to find all the information they needed. This number was higher for those frequently seeking information.

These results indicate that GLRPPR should better publicize P2Tech and the Help Desk Librarian service so that people know where to go for assistance. Furthermore, it appears that training on locating different types of P2 information may be useful.

Training Needs

Finally, respondents were asked to rate their likelihood, on a scale of 1-5 (1=Not Likely, 5=Extremely Likely), of participating in a training seminar about pollution prevention or waste reduction if it was offered in a variety of formats. The webinar and online training taken at one's own pace were the most popular options (mean ratings = 3.84 and 3.28, respectively, for all respondents). Even so, the mean likelihood ratings for taking part in training offered in these formats are less than 4.0 ("very likely").

Figure 4: Suggested topics for training



Frequent information seekers reported greater likelihood of taking part in trainings in all formats as compared to non-frequent information seekers. None of the other format options yielded a likelihood of taking part that was high or even moderate. **Figure 4** shows the topics on which respondents indicated that training would be useful. Detailed information about topics of interest is included in Appendix C of the final needs assessment report, available at <http://hdl.handle.net/2142/73269>.

In future funding cycles, GLRPPR will use this information to develop training (primarily webinars and asynchronous training modules) and other information tools to fill gaps identified by the assessment responses.

For more information

Laura L. Barnes, Executive Director
Great Lakes Regional Pollution Prevention Roundtable
One Hazelwood Drive Champaign, IL 61820
(217) 333-8957 or l-barnes@illinois.edu