

How to Start Operation Bed Roll in Your Community



Introduction

Community Works. The Greensboro community come together to launch Operation Bed Roll – a project that crocheted more than 100,000 non-recyclable plastic bags into more than 200 sleeping mats for the homeless residents of our commenting.

It is our pleasure to share our resources and best practices to help you start your own Operation Bed Roll in your city. Feel free to use our DIY resources and brand them with your logo. We encourage you to adopt the moniker Operation Bed Roll, to help us further spread the message of this project.

In the following pages, you will find the following:

- An overview of things to consider before you begin your project.
- Basic resources for creating plarn and bedrolls.
- Advice for the public communication portion of your project.

Thank you for spreading this message of recycling and public service, and teaching your community how to conserve, crochet and care!

Tori Carle

*Recycling Educator
City of Greensboro Field Operations
tori.carle@greensboro-nc.gov*

Amanda Lehmert

*Communications Specialist
City of Greensboro Marketing and Communications
amanda.lehmert@greensboro-nc.gov*



The Origins of Operation bed Roll

Operation Bed Roll was an effort launched by Greensboro's Field Operations in 2016. The goal was to teach residents that plastic shopping bags cannot be recycled under the City's residential recycling program and to keep those bags out of the landfill by finding a creative way to reuse them by making plastic bag yarn sleeping mats for the homeless. Over the course of the six-month project, more than 3,000 residents participated and an estimated 147,700 plastic bags were kept out of the landfill.

The Idea

Greensboro's Recycling Educator Tori Carle, an avid Pinterest user, came up with the concept of turning those unwanted shopping bags into plastic bag yarn – called plarn – that could be crocheted into a blanket-like mat. This craft project turned into a bigger idea: use the plarn to create bed rolls that could be used as a sleeping surface for people who sleep. The bed rolls are better than traditional blankets because the plastic is waterproof, easy to clean and doesn't attract bugs like cloth. We called the project Operation Bed Roll: Conserve, Crochet, Care.

The Greensboro Police and the local homeless day shelter, the Interactive Resource Center, were recruited to help distribute the bed rolls. The City Libraries were tapped to act as a bed roll drop off locations and to host workshops. We also recruited community partners that wanted to be a part of this unique project that has elements of environmental education, crafting, and helping those in need.

The Results

Between June 2016 and January 2017, Operation Bed Roll:

- Hosted **80 plarn workshops**
- Taught more than **3,000 residents** learned how to make plarn and bed rolls
- Collected **211 bed rolls** – surpassing its goal of 200
- Diverted an estimated **147,700 plastic bags** from the landfill
- Generated about **20 positive news stories** in the local and regional media, including a statewide news station.
- Reached **84,000 people** through city Facebook posts about the campaign

Other Project Highlights

- Greensboro's homeless outreach officer found that it was helpful to keep the bed rolls on hand when he had to deal with people who were sleeping on private property against the wishes of the owner. It was a kind gesture to provide some relief even while delivering a difficult message.
- Students from the Canterbury School, University of NC at Greensboro Garden Club, Irving Park Elementary After School Club, Western Guilford High School, and Southeastern middle and high school created plarn and bed rolls.
- Local businesses, the Greensboro Science Center, and religious communities joined the effort.
- Jewish Family Services volunteers created and donated 40 bed rolls.
- One local woman, Jean Diaz, was so inspired that she has created six bed rolls on her own.
- Sanctuary House, a day program for adults with special needs, gathered every week to make plarn. Several friendships have blossomed from their time together.

Getting Started

Operation Bed Roll can be scaled to meet the needs of your organization. Before you officially launch your project, here are some things you should consider.



■ Find Partners

While any group can start this effort (schools, churches, scouts, etc.), it is helpful to have the support of organizations like your municipal recycling center and an organization that serves your local homeless residents. Those partners will help you tailor your program and meet the needs of your homeless population.

■ Recruit Participants

It takes 500-700 plastic bags and upward of 100 hours to make one bed roll. Consider this before you decide how many bed rolls you decide how many volunteers you need. Many hands make light work. If one classroom can do a lot, think how much a whole community can do! Children as young as five can make plans.

Potential participants to consider include:

- boy or girl scouts
- religious communities
- schools (classes learning about recycling or service learning groups)
- volunteer organizations
- after school programs or summer camps
- assisted living or retirement communities
- groups for persons with disabilities

■ Set a Goal

How do you know your Operation Bed Roll has been a success? Set a target number of bed rolls before you start. For instance, we used data on the number of people sleeping unsheltered in our community to decide how many bedrolls we needed (at least two for each person.)

■ Develop a Communication Plan

You've got a great idea, but how are you going to share it with people? You'll need to decide how and when to share information with your community members, other organizations, and the media. Plot out your communications plan before you start, and put at least one person in charge of making it happen.

Craft Resource Guide

A key part of running an Operation Bed Roll program is crafting your heart out – and teaching others how to do it too. The following instructional worksheets and videos, and workshop outlines can assist you in those efforts. You are welcome to rebrand the printed materials with information about your city or program.



Do-it-Yourself Resources

- [Instructional Flyer: How to Make Plarn](#)
- [Instructional Flyer: Bed Roll Crochet Pattern](#)
- [Instructional Video: How to Make Plarn and Crochet a Bed Roll](#)
- [Instructional Video: Crocheting for Beginners](#)

How to Teach Plarn and Crochet Workshops

A typical workshop takes 1-2 hours, depending on the attention span and interest of the group. It is appropriate for children as young as five, although children's workshops should be limited to about 15-20 kids per instructor.

Note: We have provided instructions on teaching a crochet workshop, however Greensboro's Operation Bed Roll did not teach people how to crochet. We used online instructional videos to train people who wanted to participate, but did not know how to crochet. This system sufficed for our project.



Plarn Workshop Script and Timeline

This workshop can be used for upward of 60 adults.



1. Welcome and intro by workshop host or facilitator
2. Overview of the project. Make sure everyone walks away with this little bit of knowledge.
Talking points that can be discussed now or while the plarn is being made:
 - a. Plastic bags have a short lifecycle. They have a “use lifetime” of only 15 minutes before most go into the trash.
 - b. Operation Bed Roll started because plastic bags are NOT recyclable in your bin at home. Does anyone know where plastic bags can be recycled? A grocery store.
 - c. Bags are a big problem in recycling sorting facilities because they get tangled in the machinery that sorts your mixed up paper from plastic from metal from glass.
 - d. Bags can cause daily shutdowns of the assembly line style recycling plant. Employees have to climb into these machines and cut out the bags by hand—not a safe job!
 - e. It takes 500-700 plastic bags to make a bed roll.
 - f. Bed rolls are good because they are lightweight, easy to clean, don’t attract bugs and can prevent a person from losing body heat while they sleep on the ground.
 - g. Bed rolls can be used in lieu of cots at temporary shelters.
 - h. This is a good project that can be completed by people age 5-100. It goes quicker if groups work on a single bed roll together.
3. Teach participants how to make plarn (this [instructional flyer](#) is a handy guide).
Plarn making steps:
 - a. Flatten a single plastic bag.
 - b. Fold it in quarters, length wise.
 - c. Cut off the bottom seam of the bag and the handles with scissors or a rotary cutter. (Children should not use rotary cutters. Scraps should be collected and taken to grocery store for recycling.)
 - d. Cut remaining portion in quarters, making four loops.
 - e. T-knot the loops together to form a chain.
 - f. Repeat those step until you have enough plarn to make your bed roll. A completed bed roll will be about 2.5 by 6 feet with a carrying strap.
4. Time for Q&A
5. End workshop by providing information about where participants can drop off their completed plarn or bed rolls, as well as information about where plastic bags can be recycled in your community.

Crochet Workshop Script and Timeline

This workshop works best for 2-4 participants per instructor.



1. Have students sit beside or slightly behind you so they can see over your shoulder. Left-handed people should mirror what you do instead of looking over your shoulder.

2. Walk through these steps with students:

- a. Hold a crochet hook like a butter knife in your dominant hand (right hand for these instructions.) The hook part grabs your plarn to pull it through holes. The pointy part goes through holes.
- b. Have your plarn in front of you to the left. As you crochet, the plarn you are making with come out to the right.

3. Overview of a slip knot:

- a. Hold the end of your plarn with your left hand with about two inches sticking out of the top of your fist.
- b. Take the end loop of your plarn and put your thumb and index inside finger of your right hand inside the loop.

- c. Now with your fingers of your right hand, grab the plarn where it is coming out of your left hand.
- d. Let go with your left hand and pull the loop that is over your right hand fingers down to make a loop. Your crochet hook goes through there.
- e. Tip: Keep your plarn LOOSE! No tugging or pulling on your plarn. It should easily slide back and forth on the fat part of your crochet hook. NEVER pull on the raw material end of your plarn.

4. Overview of a chain stitch: the foundation of your project.

- a. Yarn over from back to front use your right index finger to stabilize the loop on your hook so it doesn't slide up, down, or around as you are working.
- b. Hook the plarn with your hook and use your left hand fingers to lift the loop on the hook up and over the end of your hook. Slide your loop down to the fat part of your hook. DO NOT PULL ON THE PLARN TO SLIDE IT DOWN. You have made your first loop!
- c. Repeat until you make about 2.5 feet of a plarn chain.

6. Refer participants to instructional videos to learn the chain stitch.

7. Time for Q&A.

8. End workshop by providing information about where participants can drop off their completed plarn or bed rolls, as well as information about where plastic bags can be recycled in your community.

Communications Guide

Clear, consistent and continuous communication with partners and participants will be key to the success of your Operation Bed Roll project.

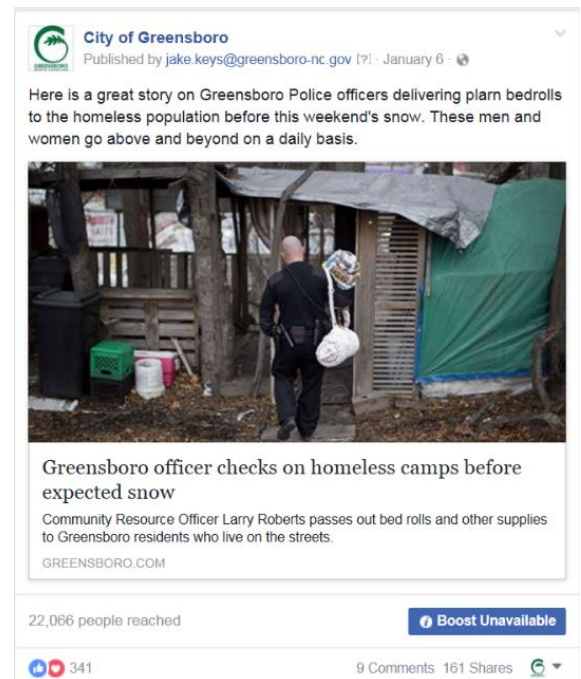
Tools and Resources

How will you communication with people about Operation Bed Roll? These are some options to consider:

- **A website.** Either a stand along page on an existing website or a small stand-alone site will be helpful if you have a large project with an aggressive goal and many partners. A single source for sharing resources and posting details about bed roll drop off locations and project results will be ideal.
- **News releases.** Media coverage can help amplify the reach of your project – both in recruiting new participants and spreading the recycling message. Even if you project isn't officially run by an institution or organization, it may still be helpful to explain the project via a news release to your local media. The Operation Bed Roll story is compelling and newsworthy, and almost sells itself. All you have to do reach out to your local media in a professional, clear way to get them to cover your story.
- **Printed materials.** It may be old fashioned, but hanging posters, handing out postcards or printing instructional flyers can be a beneficial means to share your message.
- **A Facebook page or Instagram account.** In Greensboro, we used our recycling and main city social media profiles to further spread the word about the project. It also helped to prompt people as deadlines were approaching and share news coverage of Operation Bed Roll. If you have a small project, a Facebook group or program fan page may be all you need to stay in touch with people.



Above: Greensboro's Operation Bed Roll webpage, which was updated throughout the campaign. Below: Facebook posts helped amplify the project's reach.



Communication Templates

The following are samples of written communications you may use for Operation Bed Roll. Please feel free to use these in planning your project.

Partner Letter

Dear [PARTNER],

Can you help us spread the word about a wonderful project in our community?

[YOUR ORGANIZATION] is launching Operation Bed Roll: [YOUR CITY/ORGANIZATION], an effort to keep non-recyclable plastic bags out of our landfill and turn them into something useful – crocheted plastic bag yarn (plarn) bed rolls for our local homeless residents. Our goal is to create [#] bed rolls by [DATE].

We will teach people how to make plarn at a workshop [TIME/DATE/PLACE]. Can you share this info with your members? If you would like to host your own plarn workshop, you can call or email [CONTACT PERSON DETAILS]. More details about the project can be found at [FACEBOOK PAGE OR WEB ADDRESS].

Thanks!

[YOUR NAME]

News Release

[YOUR ORGANIZATION NAME & LOGO]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Plastic Bags + Recycling = Helping Homeless Residents

[NAME OF YOUR CITY] (DATE) – [YOUR ORGANIZATION] has launched a new conservation and community service project called Operation Bed Roll: [YOUR CITY/ORGANIZATION] – an project meant to keep non-recyclable materials out of our landfill – and help some of our neediest residents have a safe place to sleep.

Operation Bed Roll started in Greensboro, NC, in 2016. It aims to transform plastic grocery bags into “plarn,” or plastic bag yarn that can be used to crocheted sleeping mats that provide an insulated barrier for those who sleep on the ground. In the coming months, we will train participants how to make the plarn bed rolls, which we will distribute the mats to the homeless throughout the winter. Our goal is to create [#] bed rolls. Each bed roll will take 500-700 bags.

Plastic bags like the kind you get when you buy groceries or other items cannot be recycled via the city’s residential recycling program. Creating plarn is a creative way to use those plastic and their craft skills to make bed rolls so these plastic bags can become something useful to the community.

We are hosting a plarn workshop [TIME/DATE/PLACE]. All completed bed rolls should be dropped off [LOCATION] by [DATE]. For more information about Operation Bed Roll, contact [SPOKESMAN NAME AND CONTACT INFO] or visit [FACEBOOK/WEBSITE.]