



Case studies of using the Motivations (draft)

There are many ways that the Motivations for Sustainable Living can be used by businesses (both start-ups and established companies), as well as organizations, municipalities, and campaigns, with two foundational purposes:

- Get existing audiences or customers to do more by embracing existing or new offerings;
- Strategically reach new target audiences or markets.

For example, after 160 businesses in Guelph-Wellington were introduced to this Motivations approach, they explored how to weave these insights into their business models and expand their market. A consumer goods company ramped up its social media outreach, and a new downtown store highlighted both the style and thriftiness of second-hand goods — accelerating growth and enhanced outreach for both businesses.

Explore some of the ways the Motivations have been used across Canada and in Finland in the following pages! Reach out if you'd like to apply the Motivations to your target audience or customer base at info@oneearthliving.org. We can also run a virtual or in-person workshop.

Contextualise consumer choices

OPEN Technologies and Vancity Credit Union (Canada)

Key Motivation: Work Hard, Live Large (Lifestyle Maximising in Québec)

Sustainable Living Solution Area: Move away from fossil fuels for home heating and cooling.



The 'Ah-Ha' Insight

As part of a 750-person survey in Southwest BC, OPEN Technologies and Vancity integrated the 7 Motivations for Lighter Living to understand what drives homeowners to install electric heat pumps. The findings were unexpected: people motivated by “the planet” were actually less likely to own a heat pump. Instead, the 7% of the population with a Work Hard, Live Large motivation — those who prioritize comfort, performance, and personal convenience — were more than twice as likely to have adopted one. These homeowners typically lived in newer, detached suburban homes, highlighting the role of structural conditions.

The Result

With this insight, OPEN reframed its recommendations: rather than rely solely on environmental messaging, policy should address market conditions and barriers, such as upfront cost, home suitability, and contractor availability. These findings were published in the report *Stuck* (2022), which has since informed public policy conversations across Canada.



“Applying the Motivations to our survey allowed us to reinforce other findings in our research that showed that structural market factors are more important drivers of heat pump adoption than sustainability considerations. The negative correlation between heat pump ownership and prioritizing healthy planet and sustainable lifestyles was surprising to us but critical in developing our recommendations for policymakers. It's also a guaranteed highlight of every presentation of our work!” — Donovan Wollard, CEO, OPEN Technologies



This case illustrates how motivational segmentation can challenge assumptions — and why understanding what truly drives adoption is essential for designing effective climate programs.



Find new market opportunities

Järki Särki (Finland)

Key Motivations: Waste Not, Want Not / Eco-Trends / Healthy Life & Planet

Sustainable Living Solution Area: Reduce food waste. Promote lower-impact, local diets.

The 'Ah-Ha' Insight

As part of Sitra's Finnish Smart Everyday program, the founders of Järki Särki applied the 7 Motivations to understand how to expand their market for a canned fish product made from roach — an invasive species often discarded despite being nutritious and tasty. The segmentation revealed that early adopters (just 9% of Finns) were drawn by a mix of motivations: thrift and resourcefulness (Waste Not, Want Not), eco-consciousness (Eco-Trends), and dietary shift for health and planet (Healthy Life & Planet). With adjusted messaging and branding, the team realized they could reach a much wider audience — up to 53% of Finns.

The Result

With this motivational insight, Järki Särki successfully repositioned their product as both sustainable and stylish, scaling distribution to thousands of stores across Finland. In the first year, sales grew by 50%, followed by a 30% increase in year two.

“

We canned it in our home kitchen and wondered how such a good fish could be called junk fish... We decided to do something about it.” — Founders of Järki Särki

This case shows how motivational segmentation can help identify hidden market potential, especially for food innovations that challenge mainstream perceptions.



Apply motivations at the municipal level

City of Guelph (Guelph-Wellington, Canada)

Key Motivation: Shop, Style & Social

Sustainable Living Solution Area: Improve food waste sorting and diversion.

The 'Ah-Ha' Insight

Drawing on a Motivations study of 350+ residents, the City of Guelph found that 53% of respondents aligned with Shop, Style & Social, with another *16% aligning with Eco-Trends. These groups are strongly influenced by social visibility and peer behavior — rather than purely environmental concerns. The City responded with a behaviourally-informed pilot that made good sorting socially visible and rewardable.

The Result

The Gold Star Program, developed through the Our Food Future initiative, recognized households with exemplary food waste sorting by placing gold stars on their green carts — sparking curiosity and a bit of friendly competition. Because the stars were visible to neighbours, they acted as prosocial signals, reinforcing peer norms. Over 500 stars were distributed, and 16 winners received local prizes, such as transit passes, museum memberships, and Downtown Dollars. A celebratory community dinner at Exhibition Park brought residents together and helped reinforce the shared spirit of progress.

- “The Gold Star program was our way of recognizing and rewarding our community members for doing a great job of sorting their waste.” — Ashlee Cooper, Smart Cities Office
- “Residents have noted that they appreciate their efforts being noticed... Several were pleased to win a prize that allowed them to engage in other sustainable behaviours such as public transit.” — Samantha Halloran, Environmental Program Specialist

The pilot contributed to Guelph’s broader goal of reducing landfill waste to 250 kg per person annually by 2030, and is being considered for broader rollout as part of the City’s curbside waste inspection program.



Clarify target market

Revivify (The Ethical Chair) (Canada)

Key Motivation: Eco-Trends

Sustainable Living Solution Area: Buy second-hand or refurbished before buying new.



The 'Ah-Ha' Insight

As part of the SHIFTing Consumer Behaviour program led by the Share Reuse Repair Initiative, The Ethical Chair (now Revivify) was introduced to the 7 Motivations for Lighter Living. Unsure whether their audience aligned more with Eco-Trends or Waste Not, Want Not, they conducted an A/B test on Instagram, comparing two messages:

- “Eco good” (reduce waste to landfill)
- “Social good” (support local repair jobs for refugees)

Both messages performed well, but the Eco-Trends message edged ahead with 57% of the engagement, confirming it as the brand's core motivational segment.

The Result

With this insight, the startup refined its marketing to reflect Eco-Trends values — emphasizing aesthetics, conscious consumption, and being a visible example to others — while still honouring its social impact mission. The team gained confidence in how to craft precise, dual-value messaging for stronger audience alignment.

“We learned to align the specific needs and motivations of our key audience with precise messaging designed to drive target behaviours. This will make our marketing much more effective moving forward.” — Rebecca Mears, Co-Founder, Ethical Chair



This case shows how even small-scale testing of the Motivations can reveal big insights — helping purpose-driven brands better connect with their ideal customer and stand out in a crowded sustainability market.



Case developed with:



Inform circular strategy

Global Outdoor Products Brand (U.S./Canada)

Key Motivation: Shop, Style & Social

Sustainable Living Solution Area: Choose durable and circular products over disposables.



The 'Ah-Ha' Insight

This U.S.-based brand, known for outdoor products like ice chests, stainless-steel drinkware, and soft coolers, was expanding into the Canadian market while simultaneously developing a circular economy strategy. To guide this effort, the team added Motivations-based segmentation questions to a customer survey in both countries, also measuring each segment's interest in circular initiatives such as product take-back and recommerce.

The results were striking: Shop, Style & Social consumers represented the largest growth opportunity — 41% of their Canadian audience and 37% of the U.S. audience — yet they were least interested in circular programs. These customers are more likely to join only when circularity feels trendy or socially expected. Meanwhile, Eco-Trends respondents, although a smaller percentage, expressed early and authentic interest in participating.

The Result

Based on these insights, the brand revised its strategy to first engage Eco-Trends customers — a values-driven group likely to adopt and promote circular practices early. The goal: make participation visible and aspirational, so that over time, Shop, Style & Social consumers would be drawn in through social influence and perceived norm-shifting.

“The insight from the ‘7 Motivations for Lighter Living Action in BC’ framework will help us create our [2022] circular economy strategy.” — ESG Program Manager, Global Outdoor Brand

This case illustrates how motivational segmentation can clarify strategic sequencing — ensuring early program adopters are aligned with the behaviors being promoted, and setting the stage for broader adoption through visible, influential social channels.



Create buzz around upcycled ingredients

Guelph Box (Canada)

Key Motivation: Shop, Style & Social (with Prosocial Appeal)

Sustainable Living Solution Area: Reduce food waste. Celebrate upcycled and local food products.

The ‘Ah-Ha’ Insight

Building on insights from the Guelph-Wellington Motivations study, Guelph Box identified Shop, Style & Social as the dominant local segment — a group that responds well to visually rewarding, shareable experiences. By aligning with this motivation and adding a prosocial twist, the team created a campaign that was both playful and impactful. The result was a limited-edition Upcycled Holiday Food Box filled with ingredients that might otherwise have gone to waste — and a strong call to “reimagine food.”

The Result

The Guelph Box project harnessed prosocial motivations by offering an innovative upcycled food box during the holidays, packed with locally sourced ingredients that might otherwise have been tossed. A shareable social media campaign resonated with consumers and led to nearly 100 boxes sold, prompting an additional run in March.

The Portlandia-style spoof video and campaign invited residents to laugh, learn, and take action. The box featured products from: Greenhouse Juice, Beck’s Broth, Escarpment Labs, Heartwood Farm, Pfisterer Farm, The SEED, and The Commonfare Kitchen, and was sampled at the Take Home the Holiday Market.

“We’re actually pretty serious about the creativity and sustainability that goes into upcycled products. And we want you to be too.” — Guelph Box campaign team

By combining humour, local pride, and visible recognition, Guelph Box successfully tapped into social sharing and trend-forward motivation to promote circular food choices in a fun and memorable way.



Engage Eco-Trend parents through taste

Flavour Harvest was led by the Canadian Centre for Food & Ecology (Canada)

Key Motivation: Eco-Trends

Sustainable Living Solution Area: Encourage sustainable diets rooted in local, nutrient-dense foods.



The 'Ah-Ha' Insight

The Canadian Centre for Food & Ecology partnered with The Sweet Potato, a Toronto-based organic grocer, to apply the 7 Motivations for Lighter Living to its customer base. OneEarth Living conducted the customer survey, which revealed that 35% of shoppers were part of the Eco-Trends motivation segment — nearly double the national average. This group wants to reduce their environmental impact, set a good example through their choices, and buy local — but they respond best to simple, positive, and practical messaging.

To reach beyond existing customers, the campaign focused on Eco-Trend parents — particularly mothers — through a strategic collaboration with Healthy Moms, a trusted community of 20,000+ Toronto-area families. Healthy Moms brought deep insight into what parents respond to and helped shape both the messaging and the delivery: from in-store tastings to engaging communications to a joyful in-person event for children and caregivers.

The Result

The Flavour Harvest campaign centred on organic carrots from Pfenning's Organic, a multigenerational family farm. The two-day family event, supported by Healthy Moms and featuring a storybook bunny named Billie, offered taste experiences, hands-on learning, and take-home materials that made sustainability tangible — and delicious — for both kids and adults. The impact was lasting and measurable:

- 900+ parents and children attended
- 67% came back to shop
- 30% were new customers
- Sales of Pfenning's Organic Carrots rose by 70% during the campaign and stayed elevated for two months
- 73% of attendees purchased the carrots post-event, with 46% buying from The Sweet Potato, and 27% at other stores
- The email with the message "Carrots with 3x the Nutrients for the Win" performed best and became a long-term motivator



Cont'd (next page)

Flavour Harvest (cont'd)

- “Billie’s Carrot Quest celebrates The Sweet Potato and Pfenning’s Organics, both local brands. People who have the Eco-Trends motivation want to be a good example to others in their choices, so parents were encouraged to share Flavour Harvest with others through word of mouth and social media.” — Flavour Harvest team
- “For us it starts with the soil, but for consumers it starts with taste. The value of our partnership with the CCFE has been in the opportunity to collaborate to create meaningful taste experiences for a new, younger audience.” — Jessica Wynne, Pfenning’s Organic
- “There are people that we have seen weekly, that we first saw at Flavour Harvest, that we hadn’t seen previously. And we did get a bump in sales (after Flavour Harvest) at the new store and we have maintained that.” — CJ Chiddy, Co-owner, The Sweet Potato
- “Many customers have let us know they are still reading the book with their child, that the water bottle is their child’s favourite, or that they love the stuffed bunny. The items they received in their Bunny Backpack are still an active part of their life.” — Aviva Allen, Founder & CEO, Healthy Moms
- “After we attended Flavour Harvest, I actually messaged the entire class to say, ‘Hey, you guys have to check out this event.’” — Ashley, Parent & Attendee
- “The Flavour Harvest carrot event has made me buy organic carrots — and it’s specific to carrots. I couldn’t bring myself to buy the cheaper carrots.” — Sarah, Parent & Attendee

By identifying and engaging a specific motivation in a specific demographic (Eco-Trend parents) and partnering with a trusted peer network, Flavour Harvest succeeded in sparking joyful, nutritious, and lasting behaviour change — showing that motivational segmentation can be a powerful tool for food system transformation.

