

‘MAKING THE CASE’ FOR PLASTICS WASTE PREVENTION

BY ROBERT GRACE

Student competition shines a light on scalable, innovative local projects to tackle pollution

Sometimes the most productive movements to effect social change start at the grassroots level and permeate upwards. That certainly is the plan of the parties driving the creation of a university student competition that aims to identify and scale solutions to help address the plastics waste problem—initially in India and across Asia, but potentially, they hope, on a global scale.

Rob Steir, an environmental entrepreneur based in Delray Beach, Fla., is one of the forces behind the initiative, along with Doug Woodring, an American based in Hong Kong who is founder and managing director of the nonprofit Ocean Recovery Alliance, a non-governmental

organization (NGO) dedicated to helping save the planet’s oceans and waterways. (For an analysis by Woodring of how global oil prices affect demand for recycled resins, see February *Plastics Engineering*, p. 39.)

Steir is also co-founder and partner of Frontline Waste Holding LLC, a small waste-to-energy company focused on islands and developing countries and serves as a principal in a group he co-founded called CAPP. That acronym initially stood for Commitments Accelerator for Plastic Pollution but has since been rebranded as Collaborative Action on Plastic Pollution (<https://capp.global>).

CAPP launched in January 2020 and operates under the auspices of Woodring’s Ocean Recovery Alliance. The creation of CAPP was spurred by a 98-page report published in early 2020 that was funded by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). The report, for which Steir was the main author, was titled “Crafting High-Impact Voluntary Commitments to Prevent or Reduce Marine Litter” (see https://bit.ly/UNEP_marinereport).

CAPP’s mission, explains Steir, is to help support, facilitate and incubate initiatives that reduce or

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The goal of this competition was not only to identify and showcase high-impact plastics waste-reduction programs in India, but to demonstrate how those programs might be implemented in communities around the world. - Rob Steir





Doug Woodring

prevent plastics pollution from entering our ocean. Research shows, he notes, that sustainable outcomes develop from collaborative networks, data sharing and persistent action.

In 2020, CAPP secured the active engagement of two flagship nations—Curaçao and Fiji, both of which are island states that have serious proactive efforts to prevent plastics waste, and where the threats of climate change and plastics waste are considerable.

Solid Start in India

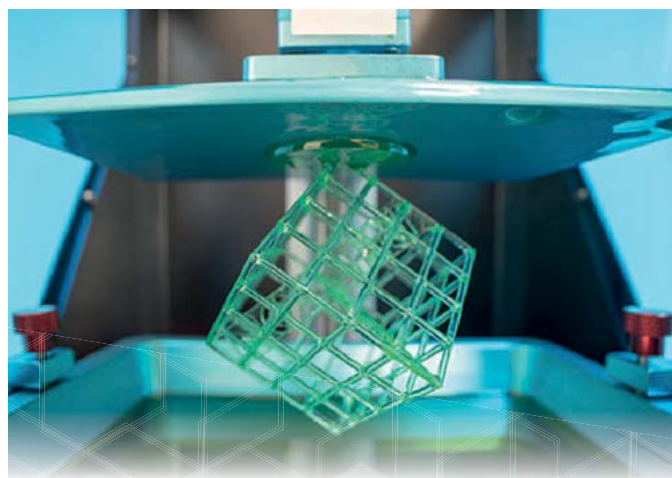
Beyond working with those two nations, CAPP also launched its first external program in India. This came in the form of the “Make the Case” competition (<http://cappindia.in>), for MBA and technical students nationwide, to identify top initiatives in India preventing plastics waste.

This initial contest, with \$5,000 in prize money at stake, attracted 165 registered teams, of which 16 qualified for the final round of judging. Six teams presented via YouTube during the final judging this past spring (watch at https://bit.ly/MakeTheCase_India).

The concept of the competition was to call upon the brightest youth in India, students at the top business and technical graduate institutions, to research, select and ultimately showcase proven plastics waste-reducing initiatives they deem worth replicating throughout the country.

CAPP hosted the project, in conjunction with the Goa Institute of Management and the Indian Plastics Institute. A working group met regularly from each organization, and the Chellaram Foundation, a 14-year-old Indian charity, signed on as the main sponsor, providing the prize money.

The goal was to highlight a large number of plastics waste initiatives that are making a difference in India, to bring attention to the very best



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"MAKE THE CASE" COMPETITION

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About the competition

SHOWCASE
HIGH-IMPACT INITIATIVES
IMPLEMENTED IN INDIA TO
**REDUCE
PLASTIC WASTE**

The first Make the Case competition, in India, attracted teams of university students who identified effective local plastics waste-reduction initiatives that could be scaled up and applied throughout the country. Courtesy of CAPP

ones, to showcase any and all innovations that generate plastics waste-reduction results and to provide a number of high-impact initiatives that other stakeholders in India or globally can replicate.

In the competition, participating students sought out existing programs designed to reduce or eliminate plastics waste and rated their overall efficiency. The students had to complete a case study and make the case as to why the program they chose to feature was one of the most effective at helping to solve part of the plastics pollution problem in a particular community or region.

And the Winner Is ...

After a five-month process, the jury listened to all the presentations online on March 30, and Woodring announced that the grand prize went to a four-student team dubbed Nature Nurturers from the Mumbai-based SIES

Graduate School of Technology (see the full list of finalists at www.cappindia.in/awards).

The Nature Nurturers team chose to focus on Kabadiwalla Connect, a technology-focused waste management company that provides decentralized waste collection and processing solutions for cities. Based in Chennai, India's fourth-largest urban hub, the firm aims to leverage a city's existing waste infrastructure, working with informal waste pickers, to collect and process post-consumer waste in a more efficient, cost-effective and carbon-reducing manner.

Kabadiwalla Connect currently works in five cities across India, Indonesia and the Ivory Coast, with commercial contracts from Veolia, Unilever and Danone for specific engagements around plastics collection, recycling and informal integration.



"The goal of this competition was not only to identify and showcase high-impact plastics waste-reduction programs in India," notes Steir, "but to demonstrate how those programs might be implemented in communities around the world, improving knowledge sharing and efficiency to other communities that are also working to reduce their plastics pollution problems. Not only did these students accomplish that goal—they exceeded all of our expectations in the process and demonstrated that this type of competition can be successful in other countries."

The second-place team highlighted a model that incorporates plastics waste in the sub-base and base layers of roads during road construction, and the third-place team showcased a waste-to-fuel company that collects plastics from households and offers a technology process that converts the waste into oil and fuel. The winning team won \$1,000, with the runners-up earning \$750 and \$450, respectively.

Two further case study winners (\$350 prizes each) were announced in each of four additional categories—for initiatives offered by business, by NGOs or informal organizations, by local municipalities or by a stakeholder with limited resources.

Expanding the Reach

Both Curaçao and Fiji have already expressed interest in having CAPP host Make the Case competitions for the Caribbean and Pacific Islands as a way of identifying and showcasing effective programs that could help curb the plastics pollution problems they are facing.

Woodring says the group is in the process of launching a similar Asia-wide competition in Hong Kong now, led by CAPP and the City University of Hong Kong. Students from universities across all parts of Asia will be invited to join the competition.

"The Make the Case Competition aims to shine a light on programs and innovations that have already been put into practice and have the potential to be scaled, rather than focusing on entirely new startup concepts," he explains. "These are programs that often do not get the attention they deserve, and which can be helped by visibility, engagement and new collaborations." This can bring positive impacts to communities without the need for funding rounds and profit motives. Woodring calls this an "underdeveloped" space.

Dubbed an "Opportunity to Identify and Showcase High-Impact Plastic Waste Reduction Initiatives Across Asia," the pending competition launches this

month (September), culminating in December when the five finalists will "make the case" for the innovative projects they are championing. This year's finale will be held online and be open to the public.

"We envision this competition running annually with an in-person grand finale from 2022 onwards," Woodring says.

One exciting new opportunity for the Asia project is the addition of two recruiting weeks in November and January. In January, companies can access student teams for a fee. Plans also call for bumping up the prize money

to \$5,000, \$3,000 and \$2,000 for first, second and third place, respectively.

Steir says plans are already in motion to organize a second such event for India, with the same partners. Additionally, the winning student team in India has agreed to be interns for CAPP and will do a weekly webcast series of interviews.

CAPP is seeking funding sponsors for both the Asia and follow-up India competitions, as well as other parties interested in exporting this concept to other parts of the world. To learn more, contact Steir at rob@capp.global. ■



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