

Document 2: Summary of Rain Ready Ottawa Feedback



Rain Ready
Parés pour la pluie
Ottawa

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1. Feedback from Rebate Applicants

A feedback survey was sent to all applicants with completed projects in November 2023 to solicit feedback on the pilot program.

The survey was sent to 64 individuals, with 27 completing the survey. This represents a healthy response rate of 45%.

1.1. Program satisfaction

Overall satisfaction with the application and claim process was high, as was satisfaction with the final rebate amount, with both levels of satisfaction greater than 85%.

Most encouragingly, respondents indicated a high likelihood of recommending Rain Ready Ottawa to a friend or neighbour.

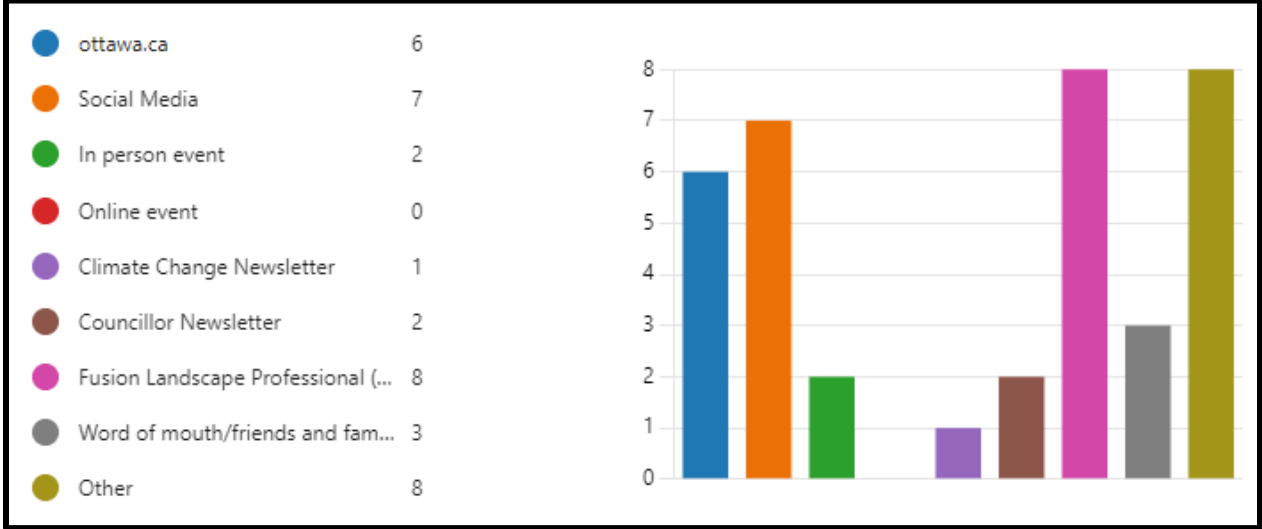
The high level of satisfaction from applicants reported throughout the feedback survey supports the current approach being taken for rebates, while also providing helpful direction on improvements that should lead to increased uptake of rebates and increased project installations. These changes in particular will be discussed later in the feedback summary.

1.2. Program Awareness

Of those who applied for a rebate without prior knowledge of the program, most were referred to it by a Fusion Certified Professional (FLP).

Applicants cited ottawa.ca, social media, and FLPs as the top three sources for becoming aware of Rain Ready Ottawa, with the remainder distributed amongst other outreach activities like in person events, word of mouth, and newsletters.

Figure 2: How did you hear about Rain Ready Ottawa?



1.3. Motivation

Applicants were asked to provide their motivation for installing their projects. Making their property more environmentally sustainable was cited by 85% of applicants, followed by 51% indicating they wanted to proactively protect their property from stormwater issues, with 40% indicating they wanted to solve existing stormwater issues they were experiencing.

Figure 3: What was your motivation to install your projects? (Select all that apply).



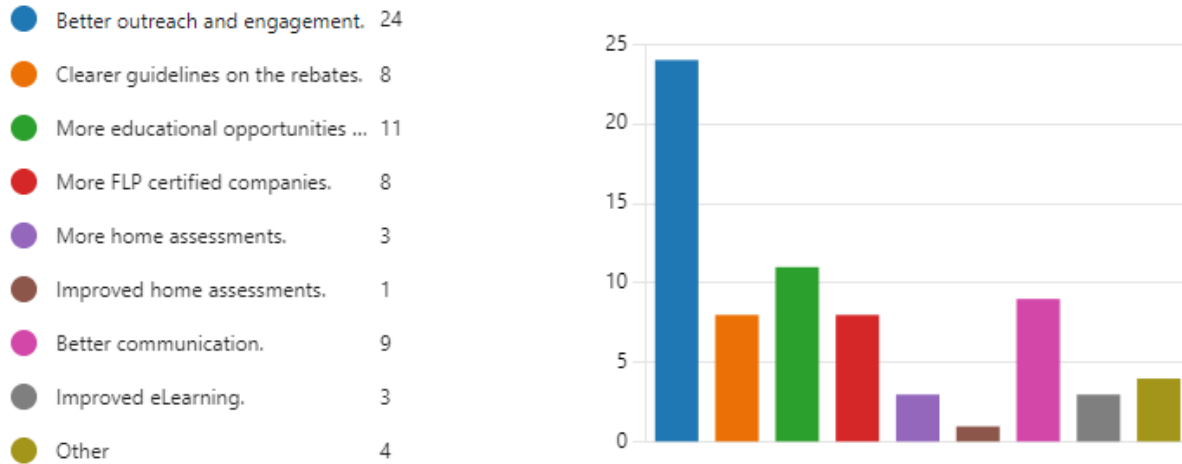
1.4. Improvements

With regards to improvements, applicants cited clearer guidelines and a simplified application and claim process as potential benefits to the rebate program. Some found the current applicant guide difficult to find and use, while others felt that it provided good guidance, but likewise was difficult to locate on the existing service page.

Applicants were surveyed on ways that Rain Ready Ottawa could be improved to get their neighbours involved, with 89% indicating that better outreach and engagement would be the most likely to generate more uptake from others in their neighbourhoods.

Following this, 40% indicated more education opportunities to support skill development amongst residents as a key activity to drive uptake. Other notable potential activities include 30% citing more FLP certified companies as important, and 30% further supporting the need for clearer guidelines for rebates.

Figure 4: Improvements to Rain Ready Ottawa to get more people involved.



1.5. Project Outcomes

Applicants indicated that since the completion of their projects, they have seen multiple improvements to both their property and how stormwater is managed on it. Around 75% had reduced the amount of runoff leaving their property, with 40% reporting less ponding and localized flooding, and another 23% experiencing less erosion. With the onset of cold weather at the time of the survey, 63% reported less ice build up on their hard surfaces.

When thinking about extreme weather, 67% felt that their home was more climate resilient and environmentally sustainable, while 52% indicated a feeling of peace of mind during extreme weather events as a result of the stormwater management improvements they've made to their property.

2. eLearning Feedback

Users of the Rain Ready Ottawa eLearning platform were sent a feedback survey in December 2023 to gauge their experiences with the current eLearning platform, solicit feedback on improvements, and solicit feedback on ways to improve course outcomes.

The survey was sent to all 258 users at the time regardless of the amount of progress they have made on the course content. In total, the survey received 33 responses, or a response rate of 13%.

2.1. Program Satisfaction

Overall satisfaction with the eLearning courses was around 77%. Improving the content and resolving technical errors is expected to lead to a better rate of satisfaction amongst users.

Around 40% of users have either applied for a rebate or are planning on applying in the future. A quarter of users who have taken the eLearning courses are not eligible for the rebate.

Unfortunately, minimal feedback was received from users who had not started or completed any courses, limiting the amount of feedback that could be used to improve the experience for users who did not progress far past the registration stage. However, the high response rate from users who completed numerous courses indicated a high level of engagement from certain segments of the population, and their motivations were consistent regardless of rebate eligibility.

General feedback indicated strong support for Rain Ready Ottawa as a program and support in expanding the rebate program to capture more areas of the city. Users were also surveyed for input on additional eLearning courses they would find helpful. Over 80% indicated they would like a learning course that helps them better understand how to prepare for extreme weather events.

Most users became aware of the eLearning courses after visiting ottawa.ca/rain

2.2. Motivations

Users' motivations for signing up for eLearning was most commonly cited as wanting to learn more about how they could make their home more climate resilient and sustainable. This was cited by 77% of those who signed up for the courses. Following this, 61% wanted to sign up to learn about a specific stormwater solution, and to qualify for the rebates. Lastly, 52% wanted to gain general stormwater management knowledge.

2.3. Course Completion

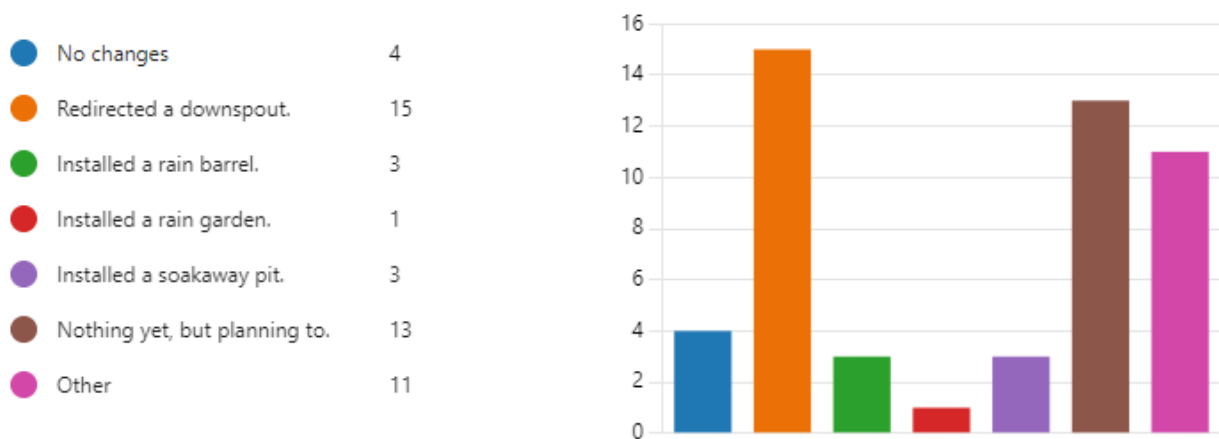
Most users who responded to the survey indicated they had completed at least one course, with a majority having completed four courses. Only 16% of users who responded had either not started a course or had not completed one.

For those who did not start or complete a course, a lack of time was cited as the most common barrier, alongside technical problems with the platform. Technical issues are supported by feedback that has been received in the RRO inbox. Most technical issues have been traced to user permissions surrounding website cookies or browser updates.

2.4. Learning Outcomes

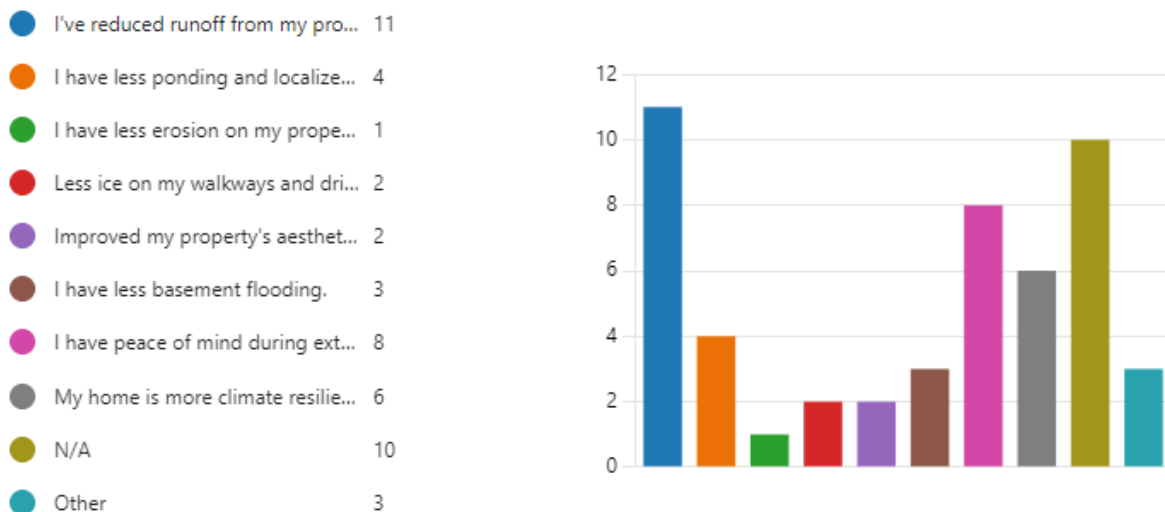
More than 87% of users reported making changes or planning to make changes to how stormwater is managed on their property as a result of taking the courses. Users most commonly reported making downspout redirections. With regards to those planning on making changes, many users reported plans to install a rain garden or permeable pavement in the future.

Figure 5: Changes made during or after taking the courses.



For users that made changes, the majority reported that they were successfully reducing the amount of runoff leaving their property. Following that, users reported feeling more climate resilient and having piece of mind during extreme weather events.

Figure 6: How being rain ready has helped users.



3. Fusion Landscape Professional Feedback

From October 31 to December 14, 2023, certified fusion landscape professionals (FLPs) were invited to provide feedback on the current Rain Ready Ottawa program via a one-on-one interview with the program coordinator. Invitations were sent to all 31 certified professionals at 20 firms in Ottawa.

Ten FLPs representing ten firms responded and participated in these interviews. Interviews ranged in duration from 30 minutes to 1 hour and focused on gathering both feedback on FLPs experience with the current Rain Ready program, but also their impressions of the FLP training and certification process.

3.1. Perceptions of Rain Ready Ottawa and Rebates

FLPs are broadly supportive of Rain Ready Ottawa and the rebate program. Rebates provide their clients with the support necessary to proceed with installing the stormwater management projects that RRO promotes. Likewise, general RRO outreach activities are educating clients on the value of these techniques, and also driving new business towards FLPs. Many FLPs have incorporated FLP techniques broadly into their work, with many reporting that all of their residential projects now incorporate some kind of fusion element. This provides additional stormwater management benefits to the City.

The rebates also give them a way to bring up fusion elements to their clients, kickstarting a conversation that often times results in fusion elements being incorporated into a client's design. Knowledge about the rebates also leads to fusion projects being installed regardless of whether or not the clients is actually eligible.

3.2. Client Motivations and Business Impacts of FLP

FLP certification has allowed certified companies to increase their client pool and better meet the changing needs of clients. More landscaping clients are looking for low maintenance and sustainable landscapes, which aligns with the benefits of fusion landscaping. Likewise, interest in fusion is being driven by clients increasing awareness of the impact stormwater has on themselves, and recent experiences with extreme weather events that have resulted property damage and flooding. Clients are generally unmoved by the need to protect city infrastructure but are swayed by the wider environmental benefits on the local watershed.

With regards to barriers, financial barriers remain for many clients interested in fusion techniques. Most often, this barrier is present for clients who are currently outside of the rebate area. However, lack of knowledge on the expected expense of landscaping projects contributes. To assist residents with understanding the potential costs of a fusion landscape, RRO could look to providing estimated costs within it's program materials for residents.

3.3. Suggested Improvements

To help them more effectively leverage and advertise RRO rebates, FLPs frequently suggested expanding the geographic scope of the rebate program. They also spoke to the benefit of being supplied with more promotional material and more partnerships

between the City through RRO and industry on promotional activities. Engaging more companies and getting them certified was also seen as a net benefit to both the program and to industry. One FLP also suggested exploring alternative course formats for industry professionals who are only involved in fusion maintenance, as opposed to design/build.

3.4. Perceptions of FLP Training

FLPs expressed positive opinions of the quality of the FLP training course, as well as the quantity of materials provided. The online hub was cited as a useful learning tool, and one that some FLPs would like to see improved to make it a more practical source of reference information.

The practical exercises that were incorporated into the training were frequently seen as beneficial but could also have benefited from more opportunities to directly engage current certified professionals on their experiences and lessons learned that other students could benefit from.

FLPs are split on opinions when it comes to the hosting format for the training. Virtual hosting was beneficial with regards for working better with learners' schedules, while also eliminating the need to commute to a single location. Some felt in person learning would provide benefits in terms of networking and technique demonstrations, but also acknowledge that those shortcomings are made up at other Landscape Ontario events. All were in agreement that continuing with half day session over four days was preferable to two full days sessions.

Perceptions of the exam were mixed. Some felt that there too many questions that felt like "trick" questions. Likewise, there was some content that was perceived as not being discussed within the course content. Learners would have also appreciated more constructive feedback following exam for sections that they failed and needed to redo. At present, there is no feedback provided on sections that learners fail, limiting the effectiveness of additional studying.

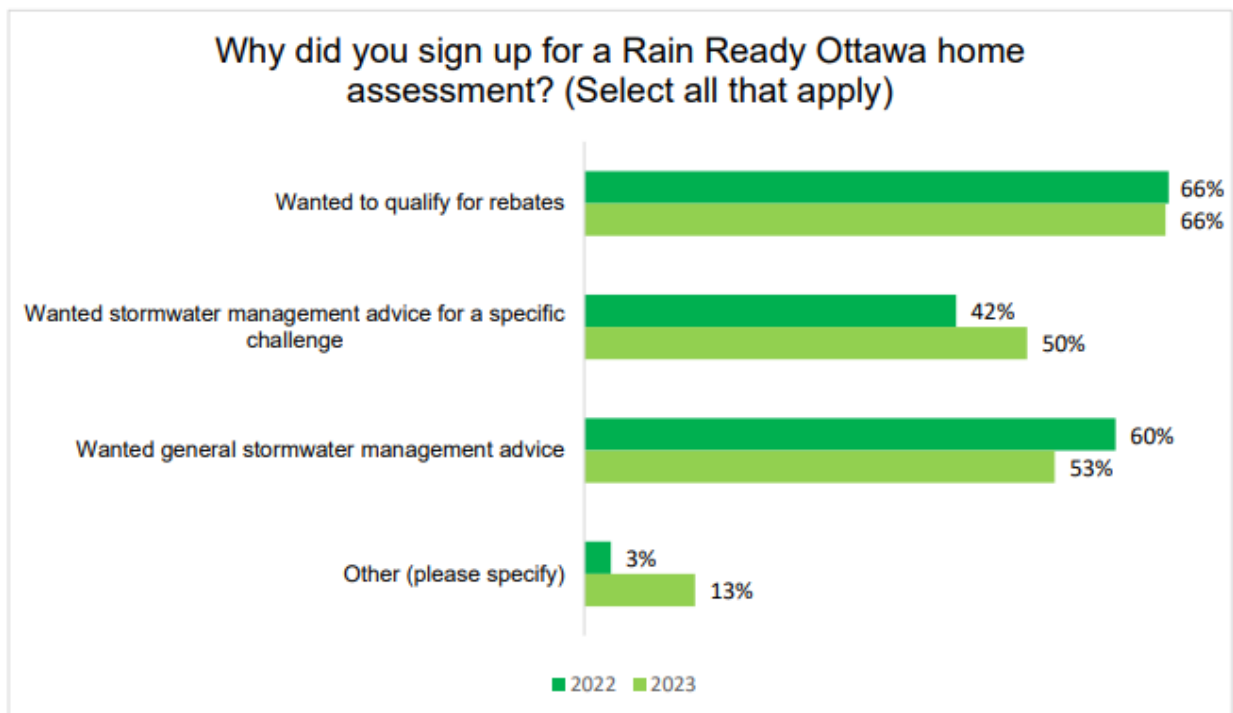
4. Home Assessment Feedback

Feedback surveys for recipients of a home assessment were conducted over two periods, October – November 2022, and October – November 2023. Home assessment recipients were invited to provide feedback on their experience with the home assessment process, report on any changes they may have made as a result and provide feedback on improvements that could be made to both the home assessment and the overall RRO program. A total of 100 responses were received across both survey periods and provided the following feedback.

4.1. Motivations

Residents' motivations for receiving a home assessment were most commonly for the reason of qualifying for a rebate (66%). In addition, they were motivated to receive a home assessment in order to get either specific or general advice on how to improve their stormwater management. These motivations remained consistent across both survey periods.

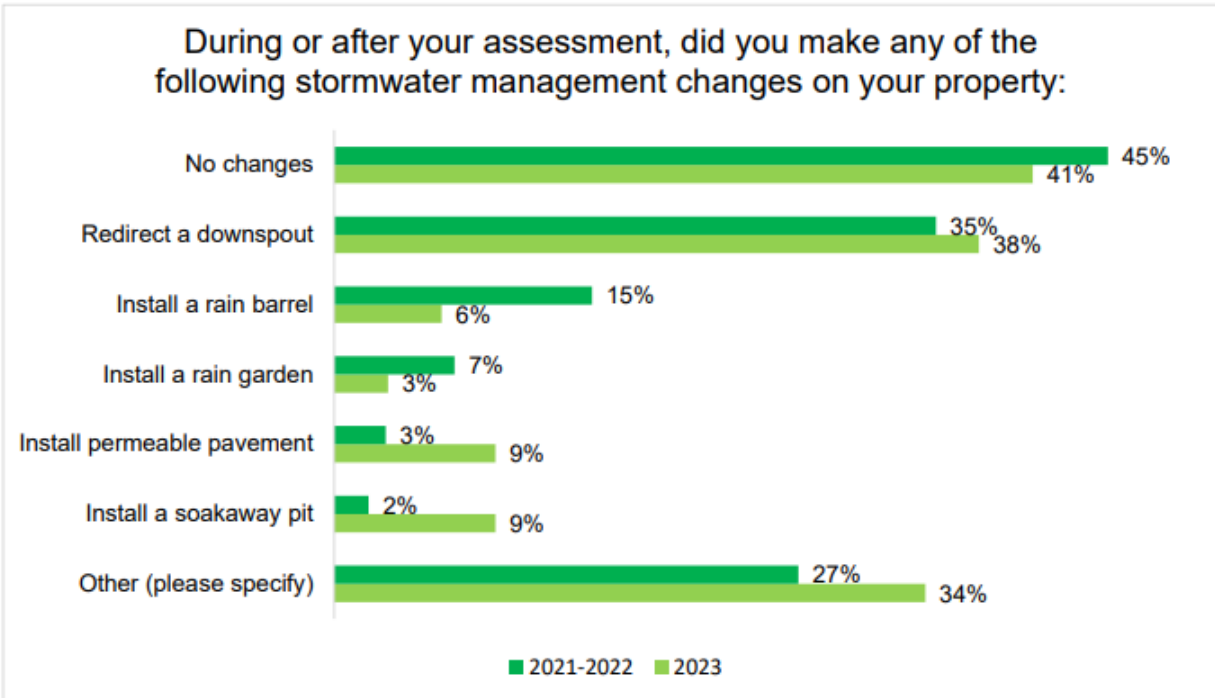
Figure 7: Reasons for Signing up for a Home Assessment



4.3. Outcomes

Following their assessment, approximately 1 in 3 reported making some kind of change to how stormwater is managed on their property, with the most common change being a downspout redirection (38%), followed by a soakaway pit (9%) and permeable pavement (9%) installation. The rate of rain barrel installations between 2022 and 2023 noticeably decreased.

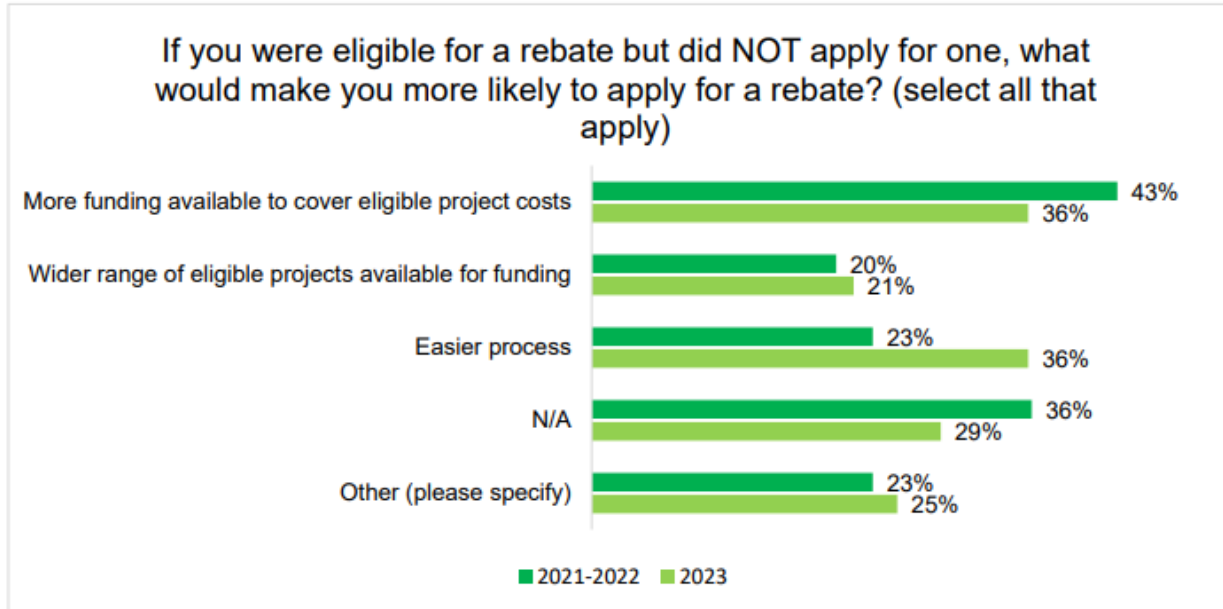
Figure 8: Changes as a result of a home assessment



4.5. Barriers

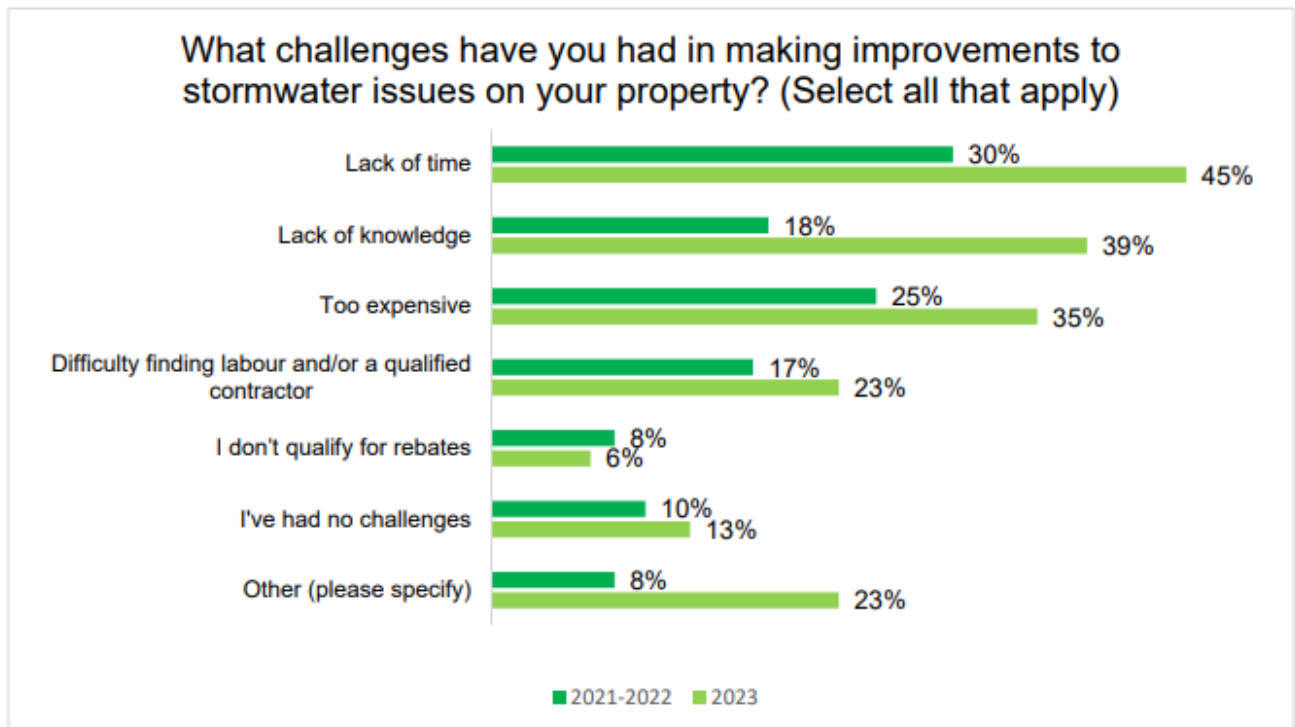
There was an 8% decrease (43% to 35%) in the number of survey respondents who said “More funding available to cover eligible project costs” would make them more likely to apply for a rebate. The most frequently selected response in 2023 to the question of what would make clients more likely to apply for a rebate was “Easier process” which 36% of respondents chose, representing a 13% increase over 2022 results.

Figure 9: Program changes to support more rebate applications



With regards to challenges in making improvements to stormwater management issues, Lack of time, lack of knowledge, and cost were the most commonly cited reasons, emphasizing the need for improved education resources and expanded rebate support. “Difficulty finding labour and/or a qualified contractor” also saw a 6% increase over 2022 results with 23% of respondents selecting it. Since home assessments were not done in secondary areas in 2023, we did not receive complaints from homeowners who were frustrated they qualified for a home assessment but not rebates. This was a common comment in 2021/2022 when home assessments were offered to homeowners in both the priority and secondary program areas.

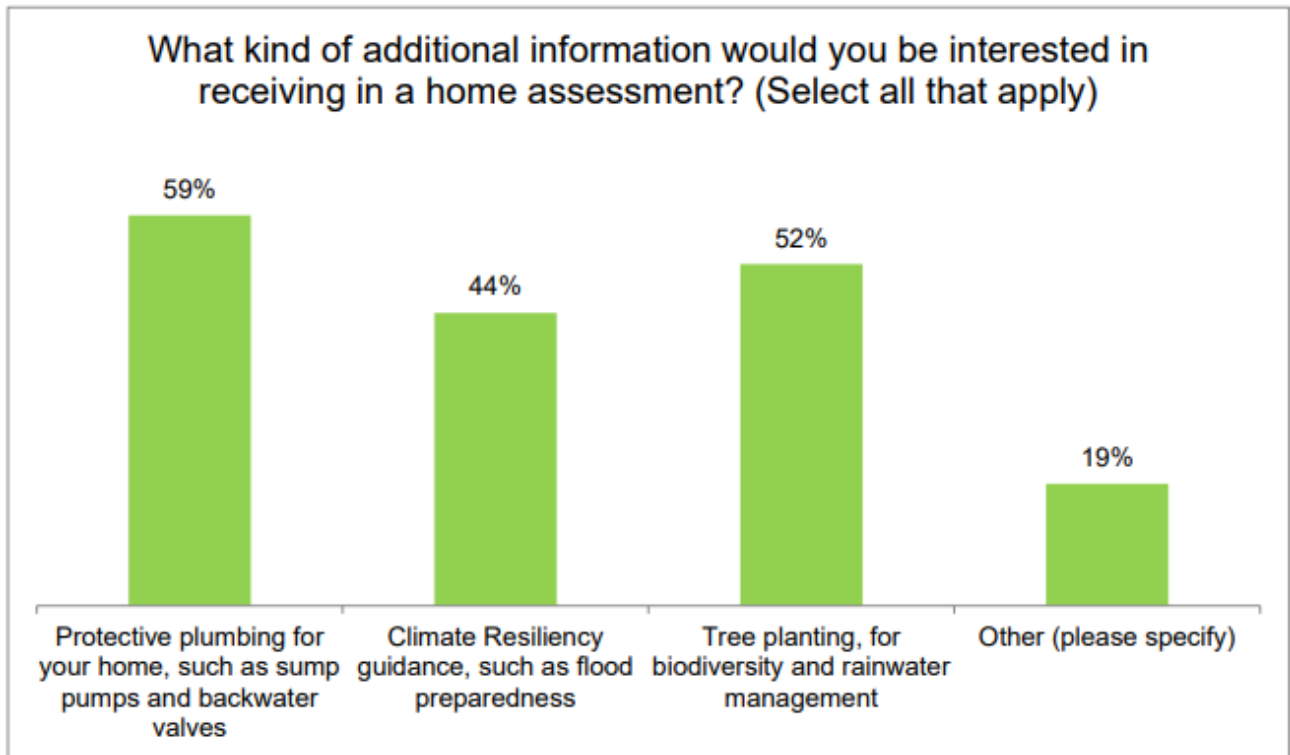
Figure 10: Challenges in making stormwater management improvements



4.7. Additional Support

To identify what additional support could be offered to clients through either an improved home assessment or other RRO activities, a question was added to the post assessment survey. Almost 60% of respondents said they would like to receive information about protective plumbing, such as sump pumps and backwater valves. 52% said they were interested in information on tree planting for biodiversity and rainwater management, and 44% expressed interest in receiving climate resiliency guidance, such a flood preparedness. Based on these results, ample opportunities exist for the City to tie in and share information pertaining to its other programs/rebates through the Rain Ready Ottawa Program, such as the Residential Protective Plumbing Program.

Figure 11: Interest in other types of resiliency information



Recipients were also surveyed to gauge support for adding a refundable or non-refundable fee to home assessments. Results from the 2022 survey demonstrated support for both options, while 2023 results demonstrated support for only the refundable option and at a reduced level of support. This feedback has been incorporated into considerations for a fee-for-service model for the home assessments.

5. Public Engagement Feedback

A public engagement survey was undertaken from February 26 to March 7, 2024. This survey was available on Engage Ottawa and was promoted city-wide through City media channels, Councillor communications, and Climate Change and Resiliency communications.

Approximately 270 people completed the survey. Responses were received from individuals evenly distributed across the various program areas, these being the priority, secondary, and outside retrofit areas.

5.1. Stormwater Management Concerns

When prompted about concerns related to stormwater runoff, respondents are most concerned about its impacts on local waterways, primarily in terms of conveyance of pollution (80%) but also in the erosion that large volumes of stormwater water can lead to (62%). Following that, respondents were concerned about localized flooding caused by stormwater in their neighbourhoods and on their properties (69% and 70%) respectively. A subset of respondents (30%) expressed concern for beach closures as a result of stormwater runoff. Additional comments provided further insight into respondents concerns with regards to the environmental impacts of runoff, in particular high salinity in local waterways from winter runoff.

5.2. Awareness of Rain Ready Ottawa

Respondents indicated a mixture of awareness of RRO, with a minority having engaged with the program in a substantive way. This included signing up for eLearning (7.3%), applying for a rebate (4.5%), or receiving a home assessment (4.2%). Others have undertaken exploratory interactions with the program by visiting the website (27%) or heard of it but haven't engaged with it (26%). Approximately 46% of respondents had never heard of RRO, indicating that there are a significant number of residents who are interested in engaging with RRO and more outreach and engagement should be undertaken to reach them. Those residents who had not heard of the program expressed interest in learning more and seeing how they could apply lot-level management techniques to their property.

5.3. Interest in Existing Supports

Interest in existing supports saw online resources be the most popular at 68%, closely followed by online learning (64%) and project demonstration and giveaways (60%). Overall, respondents are looking for learning opportunities from RRO when it comes to lot-level stormwater management. Additional comments suggested information on lot grading, rain barrels, and more information on what City is doing to reduce runoff from its own properties should be provided through RRO.

5.4. Interest in Stormwater Management Projects

There is interest in all of the projects that RRO currently promotes and provides financial incentives for (downspout redirection, soakaway pits, rain gardens, permeable pavement, and professional design services), and in new topics such as rainwater

harvesting and trees. Respondents indicated a high level of interest in rain gardens (77%), followed by rainwater harvesting (69%), and the stormwater benefits of trees (64%). Respondents were least interested in professional design services (28%).

5.5. Rebate Expansion Criteria

Respondents expressed broad support for the rebate expansion criteria (91%), which was described as the following:

“The City is considering expanding the eligible areas for rebates to all older parts of the city built without stormwater management infrastructure that drain into open watercourses before reaching the Ottawa or Rideau River. Prioritizing these areas in the next phase of RRO will let the program focus its resources on areas where it will have the most impact. Do you agree with this approach?”

For those who did not support the rebate expansion criteria (9%), they commented that RRO rebates should be available to all residents of the City as many residents outside of the priority areas experience stormwater issues. This was consistent across written responses regardless of whether or not the respondent felt they would benefit from the expanded rebate area.

5.6. Ideas for Future Program Activities

For future activities, respondents broadly want to see more learning opportunities that could equip them with the skills to better understand stormwater issues and how to install projects that could address those issues. The most popular option was a new eLearning course on how to assess your home for stormwater issues (56%), this was followed by strong interest in online seminars with trained professionals (50%). Additional comments expressed interest in opportunities to meet with neighbours and engage in peer-to-peer learning about stormwater management. Respondents also wanted more guidance when it comes to inexpensive solutions, and more trained professionals to help with project installation.

5.7. Open Comment Feedback

Written comments indicated strong support for the program and an interest in receiving more guidance on how to better manage stormwater. These comments were received from residents residing across the city, from urban to suburban to rural areas.

Many stated a desire to see City take similar actions on its properties and install more demo projects that residents can visit to learn more. Likewise, there was a frequent desire to see the City encourage/enforce these measures on new development and infill development.

There at times remains confusion around the application and rebate process and what activities people are eligible to access, an issue that increased outreach and communication could help address.

Written comments specific to program activities illustrated how Rain Ready Ottawa support is leading to action. Multiple respondents who received a home assessment

reported implementing all of the changes, while several rebate recipients reported on the positive outcomes of their projects.

Notably, responses from residents outside the priority areas indicated an interest in engaging with more education content regardless of financial incentives. Communications and engagement activities should be more broadly pursued across the city in order to meet that demand.

Additional public feedback is summarized in table 1 below and includes sample responses received through the public feedback survey.

Table 1: Summary of Feedback from Open Response Question

Topic	Key Themes	Sample Responses
Expanded Rebate Eligibility	<p>Expansion of rebates to secondary area</p> <p>Expansion of rebates City-wide</p> <p>Expansion of eligible costs</p>	<p>Expand the area / access to the rebate program. Provide more financial support to help homeowners make their properties more rain ready.</p> <p>Rebates for homeowners/tenants who want to create rain gardens or reforest their property should be made available across the city.</p> <p>The City should have discounts or rebates for installing rain barrels or other smaller things that homeowners can do themselves.</p>
Expanded Program Types	<p>Rain barrel rebates or giveaways</p> <p>More support for other housing/ property types.</p>	<p>Rain barrels would help with the harvest and homeowner's water billing.</p> <p>We have a significant quantity of dense housing, these areas do the least for the environment in most instances. As I live in a condo we do not participate in any programs, as often there is no money for us unless we pay and this is not feasible given costs, inflation and our aging community. Would like to see general options for all and options at low or minimal cost for condos, apartments, and community housing complexes.</p> <p>Schools should also be eligible for the Rain Ready program, especially those located in the priority retrofit areas.</p>
Flooding Concerns	<p>Areas that lack Stormwater Infrastructure</p>	<p>My street has no storm drains on it, and almost every resident gets flooding in the spring.</p> <p>There are pockets in neighbourhoods without stormwater sewers that would benefit from retrofit as well. Look into those and make them eligible.</p>

Topic	Key Themes	Sample Responses
Densification and new development	<p>Green infrastructure as a part of infill development</p> <p>Green infrastructure requirements for other property types.</p>	<p>[The City should be] mandating rain gardens be created on commercial/industrial properties (incl. for-profit rental housing) as well as on public property for the whole city.</p> <p>It is extremely important for Ottawa to develop and enforce by-laws for rain permeable driveways, parking lots, foot paths.</p>
City Action	<p>City taking action on its own properties.</p> <p>Creek restoration</p> <p>Runoff and densification</p>	<p>I think the city should make all its buildings "rain ready" and publicize the process on its website, social media, newsletters. Partner with community associations to make community centres rain ready and publicize in the local community newspaper.</p> <p>I would love to see the city do something in terms of its landscaping and tree planting. It's wonderful to see residents do their part but there is a lot of public land that could be far better managed by the city to help Ottawa be rain ready.</p> <p>Need more visible--well publicized demonstration sites...public has to "see" the benefits.</p>
Program Administration	<p>Improvements to navigating the content.</p> <p>Improvements to the application process.</p> <p>Clarity around rebate/project requirements</p> <p>More options to contact program coordinator.</p>	<p>I have found it difficult to navigate the content to find what I need.</p> <p>The program could be simpler. Calculating allowances and costs based on square footage of impermeable surfaces is not straightforward. Each mitigation measure is assessed differently. There should be more options and leniency for DIY work instead of the need for professional services. Not easy to find professional help for smaller jobs either.</p> <p>It's confusing how to get the rebates especially with a wait list for the home assessment. If that was clearer, it would help.</p>

Topic	Key Themes	Sample Responses
Education	<p>More online education resources</p> <p>More in person education options</p>	<p>Those of us who aren't eligible [for rebates] would like some ideas about the rain too. We have a small amount of yard; I'd like to know how we can maximize our efforts to redirect water!</p>
Outcomes	<p>Implemented changes as a result of RRO.</p>	<p>After the RRO assessment we have invested our own resources in implementing the recommendations, including rain barrels and permeable pavement. Thus, the modest public funding for the assessment leveraged a much larger private investment on our own.</p>
Expanding city-wide	<p>More Outreach and Engagement on RRO concepts with residents city-wide</p> <p>Opportunities for interested residents to access RRO supports regardless of geographic location.</p>	<p>Make design and learning aspects of program available to all Ottawa residents, even if the rebates are only in designated areas.</p> <p>The success of RRO Pilots should now broaden to a city program to many unique and various communities including rural villages who express interest to take action.</p> <p>I think the approach should be to get everyone to start thinking [about] making changes, it doesn't matter where you live, we are all impacted so everyone who can make a change should be encouraged, regardless of where you live and where you have stormwater management infrastructure in your area.</p> <p>I really hope you expand the program to all residents where there is a (potential) impact. My neighbours across the street live below me on a hill and they have spent \$80K on foundation due to water issues. I worry about possible flooding on the street, and I would like to reduce the runoff with a garden and trees and anything else but not sure what to do. Would like the City's help.</p>



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