

Training Guide

Community Recycling Program



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How to
Implement
a Community Recycling
Program

and
Expand
Current Recycling
Initiatives to

Develop
a Robust Diversion Program

When looking to start a recycling program in your community, you may have no idea where to start. Where does the funding come from? Who do I contact? Which practice should we use? These and more are all questions that must be considered when establishing an effective recycling program. The following should give you a good idea of how to design, organize, fund, and sustain your communities very own recycling program.

1. Determine your leadership
2. Gauge community interest
3. Determine what you want to recycle
4. Create partnerships
5. Design/ Set Up Collection Strategy
6. Advertise, educate, engage
7. Monitor your program



Step 1: Determine your leadership

When starting the process, figuring out your leadership is important. You can either have a single “Recycling Coordinator” or you can create a “Recycling Board” made up of passionate and connected individuals from your community. Having community leadership is essential when it comes to program coordination, public communication, community education, progress tracking, and more.

Step 2: Gauge community interest

Without a sizable amount of community interest and support, no recycling program will be successful. Not everyone is willing to put in the time and effort it takes to recycle, so gauging how interested your community is will be pivotal in your program's success. Getting local leaders involved can also open the door to community funding and action planning. Options include presenting at your city council meetings, releasing statements in local media (news channel, news paper, city newsletters, social media, etc.), or even door-to-door interactions.

Do not be discouraged by a low amount of interest at first. Support can be built up throughout the planning process as more and more details come together for the community to react to. Oftentimes, data about how much waste will be recycled instead of sitting in the landfill is a great tool to increase project success. Also, convenience will drive support for recycling programs. While curbside pick-up is the most convenient option, there is generally a fee associated with this service that is paid by customers. Another option is to set up recycling bins within the community where people can

drop off recyclable material without fees. Providing both options allows people to gauge how important convenience is versus no cost alternatives.

Step 3: Determine what you want to recycle

As recycling technology advances, so does what is able to be recycled. As far as your community recycling program goes, it's important to do a bit of research to find out how far away recycling markets are located and what materials are accepted. Also, you'll need a local hauler to take recycling materials to nearby markets. Is there a local hauling company willing to transport residential and commercial recycling material to market, or provide curbside services? Does your local community own garbage trucks that can be retrofitted to accept and haul recycling materials? How will you get recycling materials to market?

Some materials to consider recycling are:

- ✓ Paper
- ✓ Cardboard
- ✓ Newspaper/Magazines
- ✓ Plastics (#1-7, grocery bags)
- ✓ Tin/Aluminum
- ✓ Styrofoam
- ✓ Glass

Once you've identified what can be recycled in your area by locating recycling markets within a reasonable distance, you can start planning your strategy.

Step 4: Design/ Set Up Collection Strategy

Arguably the most crucial step to create a recycling program is designing your program to be efficient, economical, easy to use, and effective. Without these characteristics, establishing community support becomes difficult. Without community support, the program will fail.

When considering different recycling strategies, consider the different types of collection methods:

SINGLE STREAM VS. MULTI-STREAM COLLECTION

Single stream collection uses one bin to collect all of the various types of recyclables. Though easier for the consumer, this method is less efficient once brought to the recycling facility where it must then be sorted. This method can also lead to contaminated material if not sorted correctly, which could be rejected at market.

Multi-stream collection separates the various recyclables into different bins. This often is called source separating. Separating your recyclables before they get to a collection facility improves facility efficiency and lessens the chance that the material could be rejected and sent to the landfill.

No matter which method you choose, any recycling will help your community. Fortunately there are a ton of options available when it comes to different recycling strategies:



CURBSIDE RECYCLING PICKUP:

The option is the most convenient for consumers but typically costs a flat fee per month. Community members each receive official collection bins to be filled with mixed recyclables (single-stream). Bins are picked up typically once a week, bi-weekly, or once a month.

Bins should be made of durable material and clearly marked to easily distinguish from regular trash bins. Residential bins aren't the only strategy either when it comes to collection. Bins placed in public places such as parks, shopping centers, downtown areas, etc., are another effective way to increase recycling rates in your community; however, these bins need defined, clearly marked signage to help consumers sort their recyclables into correct bins.

As mentioned in step 3, figuring out what materials you want to recycle plays a role in what strategy you should choose. Depending on how your recycling is hauled away (contracted hauler, city staff, etc) the materials you can recycle may be limited. Material can be hauled away to either the contracted company's site, a city transfer station, recycling markets, or recycling center. If hauled to a city facility, investing in a compactor is a great way to decrease the amount of space that the material takes up.

SORTED DROP-OFF DUMPSTER SYSTEM:

The sorted drop-off dumpster system utilizes anywhere from 5 to 20 dumpsters that each contain a different type of recyclable material. This strategy relies on people to transport the material to the dumpster location and then sort materials into correct bins. Using the multi-stream method, efficiency is increased at the collection facility.

Transferring material away from the collection facility for recycling is easier using this strategy because collection vehicles only need to pick-up bins and/or recycling material from one location, however with the size of bins a larger transportation vehicle is required.

TRANSFER STATION/RECYCLING CENTER:

The most efficient strategy is to build a recycling center where consumers can drop off their sorted recyclables directly to the collection facility. Recyclable material can be sorted into piles by way of separate chutes, and are further sorted and baled from there. By bringing material directly to collection sites, there is a reduction in carbon emissions otherwise emitted by collection trucks.

This method requires the most upfront cost, but saves money in the long run.

HOW TO IMPROVE RECYCLING IN YOUR COMMUNITY:

Reverse Vending Machines: Consumers can return empty bottles/cans and get back a deposit, refund, or public transportation fare. These machines are an easy way to encourage recycling and the cleaning of local streets and parks around your community.

Step 5: Create partnerships

Partnerships are an important step to get your recycling program off the ground. Beneficial partnerships will include haulers, municipal government, city leaders, your county's solid waste management commission, local businesses, recycling markets, and others that can promote and support recycling initiatives in your community.

Step 6: Advertise, educate, engage

Designing and setting up your recycling program is exciting, but don't forget about marketing the recycling services. Be sure to add your recycling program to official city websites/pages, create flyers to post around town, visit with your local business district to let them know about services being offered. Other great ideas to get the word out includes developing a social media page with useful information about the service, slipping a flier inside utility bills, present at public meetings, promote recycling services at community events, etc.

Making sure people know how to use your recycling program is also important. They need to know why they should recycle, what they should recycle, where they should recycle, and how they can recycle using the new or improved recycling program. Facilitating workshops, creating educational videos, and speaking to student classes are all effective ways to encourage the public to recycle.



Step 7: Monitor and Evaluate your program

Once you have everything put together and people are utilizing the new recycling program, keep an eye out for what you can improve on. Gathering perspective from community members is a good way to find out what changes could be made to better the user experience to promote an increase in recycling rates throughout your community.

If possible, track the amount of material being recycled prior to implementing your recycling program and after implementation to gauge the impact. Once you determine how much material is being diverted from the landfill, use this information to further promote your recycling program and garner some positive PR for your community. Track your progress over time as the recycling rate increases and inform the public about how much material is being diverted from the landfill with a kudos to those who are participating in the program. You can also track metrics such as greenhouse gas reductions in the landfill, jobs created to implement and maintain the recycling program, money saved on landfill tipping fees, and the amount of material that is being recycled.

Conclusion

Setting up a recycling program is a great way to offer services that benefit your community. Not only will the program create jobs and a more robust economy, recycling plastics, cardboard, glass, and metal reduces methane emissions in the landfill. A great first start is to offer a centralized location where recycling materials can be dropped off for free. Once this method has proven successful, it could be time to consider offering curb-side pick-up subscriptions where costs can be recuperated by local paying subscribers enjoying the convenience of pick-up service rather than having to self-haul recycling materials themselves.




If you'd like additional information or assistance, please contact Jennifer Trent at jennifer.trent@uni.edu.

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