

Get the Word Out! A Practical Guide to Curbside Composting Outreach

Ready to Roll Out a Curbside Food Scraps Program? We're here to help you!

This easy-to-use guide will help you launch a successful outreach and education plan for your composting program—no communications experience needed! Whether you're starting from scratch or just looking for a clear path forward, we break it down step-by-step with quick real-world examples, suggestions for simple tools or templates you can make yourself, and tips to keep things running smoothly.

Amplify for Change has partnered with municipalities of all sizes to kickstart or fine-tune curbside compost programs. We get it—there's a lot to juggle. It can be hard to know where to begin. That's why we created this high-level overview: to give you a clear road map of the outreach journey ahead. Think of it as your guidebook to engage with your community, spread the word, and keep things moving in the right direction.

In this guide you will find approaches, tips and examples of how to conduct outreach for your curbside composting. You'll cover:

1. Set outreach and education goals
2. Determine your organization's capacity
3. Identify target audiences and partners
4. Brand your program and develop materials and messages
5. Develop one-year plan
6. Launch and Reinforce
7. Track, Evaluate, Learn and Grow

Are you ready to start? Let's go!

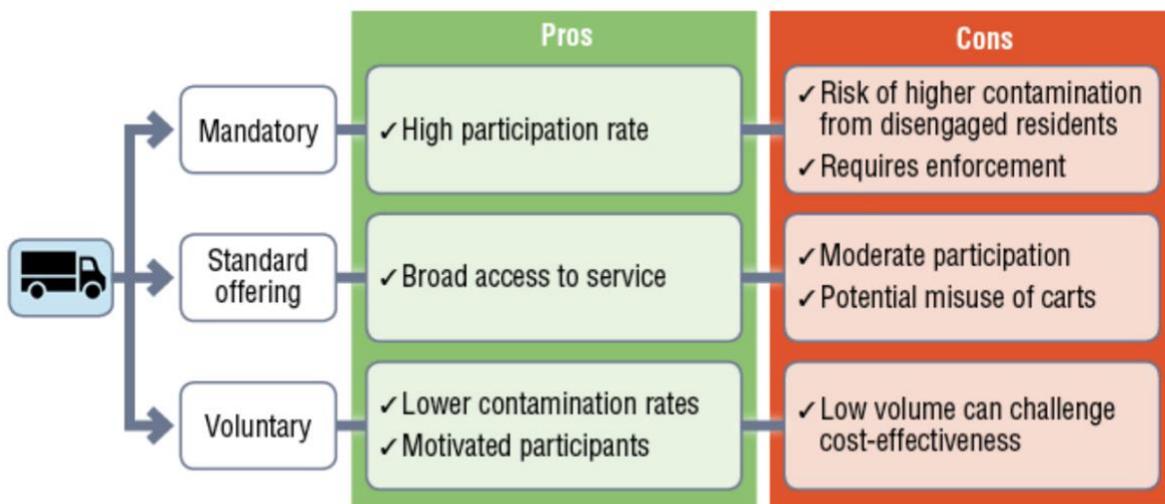


Before You Even Begin: Start Smart – What Type of Program?

Several months before launching an outreach plan, you'll need to decide what kind of program you're offering and set the policies to support it. If you've already done this, then move on to Step 1!

If you haven't designed your program yet, then now is the time to temporarily put this guide aside, roll up your sleeves, and determine what program model best fits your community. Will composting be required for all households? Or available to those who voluntarily sign up? Can food scraps go in the same cart as yard waste? What fee structure are you considering?

There are lots of ways to design a program—this is your chance to choose the one that meets your community's needs and municipality's vision. For more on selecting a program model, see our BioCycle article [Reducing Curbside Contamination Through Smarter Program Design](#).



Courtesy Amplify for Change

Step 1: Set Your Outreach and Education Goals

The main goals of a curbside compost program are usually high participation and low contamination. Your outreach and education (O&E) goals should clearly describe how you plan to raise community awareness and support those larger program outcomes. A strong O&E plan helps ensure residents not only know about the program but also understand how to use it correctly.



Here are some sample outreach goals for the end of Year One:

- 1) 90% of residents are aware that the curbside program exists.
- 2) 75% of residents say they understand how to use the program correctly.¹
- 3) 75% of residents agree that information – such as how to sign up and what can or can't go in the bin – is easy to find and easy to understand.

Creating O&E goals can be tough, but don't wait for perfection. Clear goals help you know if your efforts are working, and if not, what O&E strategies you may need to refine. Decide what your outreach efforts should achieve (e.g., increase sign-ups, improve sorting quality, reduce contamination), and align goals with broader municipal sustainability or zero waste objectives.



Make sure your goals are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. Here are some examples of SMART goals: achieve a 25% participation rate within 12 months of launch; reduce contamination rates below 5% by end of year two.”

Pro Tip: Changing resident behavior takes time, so be patient with your outreach and education goals. Progress won't happen overnight—it's a long-term effort, not a quick fix. It's a marathon not a sprint!

^{1,3} Resident understanding of the program is based on results from a community-wide survey issued at the end of the first year.

Step 2: Determine Your Organization's Capacity

Determining your internal resources such as staff availability and funding will help you decide the breadth of your O&E efforts. Questions for you to consider include:

- ⇒ Will a staff person be available to answer resident questions?
- ⇒ Is there a graphics team available to create a logo, develop branded outreach materials and update webpages?
- ⇒ Is someone able to provide data analytics to show which pages and materials residents access most?
- ⇒ Will there be people to attend community events and staff a booth?
- ⇒ Do you have municipal leaders ready to vocally champion the program?

As you'll read in future steps, a successful O&E plan requires content creation and dissemination; direct engagement with residents, partners, and haulers; and a commitment to track, monitor and evaluate data in order to shift gears on your approach as needed. If demonstrated success in the first year is important to your organization's leadership, figure out now how to get the resources to support your O&E plan not only in just your first year, but the next few years.

Pro Tip: Knowing what you or your team can realistically manage will help you set priorities, avoid overpromising, and design a rollout that's both effective and sustainable.

Step 3: Identify Your Target Audience & Local Partners

As a public program, your communications will reach all residents—but not everyone will be equally ready or enthusiastic about composting when you launch. That’s why it’s important to focus on finding the early adopters.

The early adopter population is ready and committed to participating in your compost program and can also serve as program champions down the road. Who might the early adopters be in your community? Are they folks who frequent farmers’ markets? Enjoy vegetable gardening? Have experience in backyard composting? Attend climate action or sustainability meetings and events?

Find your early adopters and learn what matters to them through conversations at local events. Ask why composting interests them so that you can build that into outreach messages. Learn from them what challenges they see with getting their neighbors on board in organics collection. Let them know your curbside program will be launching soon and ask if they are interested in being a part of it.

Pro Tip: Want to better understand your community and who your target audience is? Consider sending out a survey before the program begins to learn more about residents’ interests, concerns and how ready they are to start composting.

Identify Community Partners

Once you have a sense of who your target audience is, create a list of potential program partners. These are the organizations who will support your organics collection program and have a ready audience. Start a list like the one below. To what extent would schools, community groups, faith organizations, and block clubs be helpful if you ask them to share the word or co-host events about the new curbside compost program? Remember, in today’s world, we all feel stretched. Let your partners know you will provide them with flyers, social media posts, or emails to distribute to their members/audience to make it easier for them to support you.

Community Partners List					
Partner	Partner's Audience	Partner's Communications	Partner's Events	Contact Person	Notes
<i>EXAMPLE</i>					
Farmers Market Organizing Group	-General public -Community regulars	-Weekly email -Facebook Group -On-site signs	Market is 1x/ week May-Oct	Name, email, phone	<i>We can have an information booth at the Farmers Market</i>



How to Engage Community Partners

1. **Reach out personally** – Contact the organization’s main point of contact or a senior leader. Invite them to a brief one-on-one conversation or a group partners meeting.
2. **Explain the purpose** – Share your compost program’s goals and let them know you’re looking for trusted community voices to help spread the word in ways that feel local and familiar.
3. **Make it mutually beneficial** – Emphasize that their support helps build a cleaner, greener community—and shows their members they’re part of the solution.
4. **Learn about their reach** – Ask how they typically communicate with their members (email, social media, newsletters, etc.) and how many households they connect with.
5. **Invite collaboration** – Ask if they’d be willing to include compost program messages in their outreach and offer to provide ready-to-use content and graphics. Make it easy for them to help.

Pro Tip: Leverage trusted community partners—like schools, neighborhood associations, or local nonprofits—to help spread the word. When messages come from familiar, respected sources, they’re more likely to be noticed and believed.

Step 4: Brand Your Compost Program and Create Simple, Consistent Messages

Choose a simple, catchy name for your compost program and design a logo that's easy to recognize. Aim for:

- A friendly look and feel
- Bright colors
- Positive messaging
- Simple visual
- Image that ties to composting
- Tagline that will resonate with your residents

Keep messages clear, visual, and repetitive. Use photos or icons to show what goes in (and stays out of) the organics bin. Use positive, friendly language. Focus on what people can do—not just what they're doing wrong. And repeat your core message across every format: postcards, websites, events, and cart tags.

What can I compost?

If it grows, it goes!

Acceptable food scraps include any organic materials like fruits, vegetables, peels, rinds, meat, seafood, bones, grains, dairy, and seeds/nuts/pits. Soiled paper towels and napkins (unless contaminated by cleaning chemicals), and greasy pizza boxes may also be composted.

Unacceptable items are known as contaminants and, ultimately, impact the quality of the finished compost product. The best way to keep contamination out of the finished product is to keep it out of the green lid cart in the first place.

Not sure where it goes?

When in doubt, throw it out! If you are not confident an item belongs in your organics cart, it is better to put it in your trash cart. This helps our City control contamination in our organics collections.

Acceptable (Green Box)	Unacceptable (Red Box)
Meat, fish, and poultry bones	Plastic of any kind
Dairy products (cheese, yogurt, etc)	Glass
Vegetable & fruit trimmings	Cooking oil, fat, and grease
Egg shells, bread, and pasta	Pet waste and kitty litter
Table scraps and solid food leftovers	Large branches and rocks
Paper towels and napkins	Collapsed large cardboard boxes and shiny cardboard
Coffee filters, grounds, and tea bags	Construction material
Greasy pizza delivery boxes	
Leaves and garden waste	
Branches and sticks the width of a pencil	

Funding to support this pilot program is provided by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and the City of Red Wing

Red Wing Food Scraps Collection Program

This September, we are excited to launch a free 3-month pilot food scrap collection program in your neighborhood! Spots are limited, so go to red-wing.org/FoodScrapsPilot or scan the QR code to sign up!



1 Line your kitchen bin with your compostable bag.



2 Place your food scraps in your lined kitchen bin.



3 Once your compostable bag is full, tie it up and place it in your trash cart.



4 Once processed, the food scraps will turn into compost!

DON'T LET YOUR FOOD SCRAPS GO TO WASTE!

Food scraps account for almost 30,000 tons of garbage in Portland every year. Composting food scraps reduces waste and creates nutrient-rich fertilizer.

Look inside for three simple steps to help you include the food in your new kitchen pail and turn your food scraps into compost.

Reminder: Beginning October 31, the frequency of your garbage and green roll cart will switch. Garbage will be collected every-other-week and food scraps/yard debris will be picked up weekly.

Three easy ways to get help:

1. Online: www.portlandcomposts.com
2. Hotline: 503-823-7202
3. Email: wasteinfo@portlandoregon.gov

Call your garbage and recycling company if you already have a kitchen pail that works for you.

TIPS FOR YOUR KITCHEN PAIL

- Empty your kitchen pail into your green roll cart **frequently**.
- Use an optional **kitchen pail liner** – newspaper, paper bag or approved compostable bag.
- Wash your kitchen pail in the dishwasher or by hand.
- Sprinkle baking soda in your kitchen pail and green roll cart to avoid odors.

TIPS FOR YOUR GREEN ROLL CART

- Set your green roll cart out **weekly**.
- Freeze food items and add to your green roll cart on your pickup day.
- Place sheets of newspaper on the bottom of your green roll cart to help absorb moisture.
- Use soap and water to clean your green roll cart. Pour dirty water onto grass or gravel, not down the storm drain.

Give your garbage disposal a break!

Resist using garbage disposals for food scraps. Grease, fats and oils are especially harmful and should go in your garbage. Give our sewer system a break and compost your food scraps instead!



STARTING OCTOBER 31

Bureau of Planning and Sustainability
Innovative. Collaborative. Practical. Sustainable.
City of Portland
Ann Aldrich-Hogan, Director

Printed on post-consumer recycled paper.

Pro Tip: A strong brand builds trust and boosts participation. When residents see the same friendly logo and tagline across mailers, bin tags, and social media, they're more likely to remember what goes where—and actually do it.

Step 5: Develop a First Year Plan

Now it's time to develop a plan! Start by mapping out a Communications Framework (see below). If it is helpful, start by thinking of the calendar year in phases: awareness, education, reminders. Consider the goals and tasks associated with each of the phases as a starting point. Once you have this in place, then create a project plan outlining your general timeline, activities, who's responsible and who can support you in your effort. If possible, start outreach several months before the program launches.

Communications Framework

Phase 1: Awareness & Education	Phase 2: Resident Engagement	Phase 3: Behavior Support	Phase 4: Community Reinforcement
Focus: Introduce the campaign and build initial visibility	Focus: Deepen resident knowledge & encourage initial behavior change	Focus: Reinforce correct use through reminders, rewards, and system changes	Focus: Strengthen norms, maintain momentum, evaluate impact
Campaign brand, logo and tagline	Farmers market & community events	Cart tagging	Keep program materials and webpages fresh looking and responsive to resident input
Website pages and FAQs	Engage champions (coach, mayor, etc.)	Resident phone calls to clarify about contamination	Conduct community survey
Launch Facebook page & start 2-3x/ week posts	Compost Facility Tours	Events with banner display	Engage partners for door-to-door conversations and establishing neighborhood leaders
Program digital and print: Do's/Don'ts flyer, Postcard, Resident How-To Guide, Cart Tags, Videos, Image library for social media posts	School events	Initiate monthly newsletter	Presentation to leadership on program progress
Utility bill message or postcard	Compost Awareness Week raffles	Compost Facility Tours	Set Year Two goals
Public buildings display	Cart tagging	Utility bill message on progress	
Partner outreach	Countertop bin giveaway	Ongoing Data Collection: participation, set out rate, tonnage, contamination, by route, by household size, by season	
Start compost collection in municipal buildings	Sign-a-pledge		
	1:1 education: compost bag pickup, community events, door-to-door		
	Community Access TV		

Pro Tip: Start small, but think long-term. A solid first-year plan should focus on what's achievable with your current resources—like a limited rollout, a few high-impact outreach channels, or targeting key neighborhoods. Set clear goals for participation and learning, and build in time to evaluate what works. Treat Year 1 as both a launch and a learning phase—it sets the tone for future growth.

Step 6: Launch and Reinforce

In the weeks leading up to your program launch, ramp up visibility through multiple channels—city newsletters, social media, school bulletins, and community events. Share clear, helpful tips about how to participate, what goes in the bin, and where to get compostable bags or kitchen bins. If your program includes welcome kits, distribute them where feasible (e.g., at events or pickup locations). Once the program begins, reinforce key messages with consistent reminders—like cart tags that provide quick feedback, fun contests, and regular updates that celebrate progress and answer common questions.

Strong social media posts combine clarity, tone, and visuals to drive behavior change. Each message is short, friendly, and specific — offering one clear tip at a time without overwhelming the reader.

Below are a few examples of good social media posts to combine with a picture:

- Did You Know?  Clean cardboard goes into recycling and  Greasy pizza boxes go into organics carts. Folks can get mixed up with this, our tip is don't overthink it! If it's got food on it, put it in the organics cart.
- Hey friends, newsflash! You **cannot** compost pet waste. Don't put your cat's kitty litter or dog waste bags in organics carts. Animal waste is a source of pollution. It impacts water quality and human health due to its release of pathogens and more. Put pet waste in the trash! [pictures of an adorable dog and cat, kitty litter box and a dog poop bag with X over]
- Tip of the Day: Remember, no plastic bags in the organics carts, please! Plastic bags break apart into tiny fragments that can pollute our soil and water. Instead, use the free 6-gallon compostable bags the City provides for organics collection. These bags decompose and help create enriched soil that gets used at our parks and greenspaces.

Real-World Insight

Arlington County, VA rolled out their program over five months, combining press releases, school newsletters, community events, and welcome kits with coupons and how-to videos—showing how layered outreach builds awareness and confidence over time.

Step 7: Track, Evaluate, Learn and Grow

How do you know if you're achieving success if you're not tracking data? Collect data to understand what's working. Track participation rates, contamination levels, and number of outreach impressions. Use surveys, interviews, or audits to find out what still confuses people. Tag bins, listen to residents at events, and watch social media feedback to learn what's resonating with your residents and what they feel is challenging.



Compost It Right
think before you throw

- YOU ROCK!**
We didn't find any contaminants in your organics cart! Keep up the good work and use the list on the back to help keep it acceptable!
- NEEDS SOME WORK!**
We found some contaminants in your organics cart. Use the list on the back as a reminder of what items should stay out of your cart!
- OH NO!**
We found A LOT of contaminants in your organics cart. Use the list on the back as a reminder of what items should stay out of your cart or don't use the cart until you're ready!

HUTCHINSON'S FOOD SCRAPS AND YARD WASTE COLLECTION PROGRAM
Composting generates revenue for our City!

Real-World Insight

Hutchinson, MN saw a clear drop in contamination after just two rounds of bin tagging—proving that simple feedback tools can go a long way.

**Curbside Composting
Evaluation Tracker**

Number of ...	March	April	June	July	August	Sept	Oct
New partners							
Partners/champions distributing monthly campaign updates							
New volunteers							
Volunteers trained							
Website: visitors							
<i>Website: most popular item</i>							
Website: video views							
Facebook: posts							
<i>Facebook: most popular post</i>							
Public events							
<i>Participants engaged</i>							
Door-to-door, total houses							
Materials distributed							
Pledges signed							
2025 monthly average set out rate %							
2026 monthly average set out rate %							
2025 monthly average pounds per set out cart							
2026 monthly average pounds per set out cart							

Good programs don't stand still—they evolve. As your compost program grows, refresh your materials, test new ideas in areas with low participation, and continue connecting with your community. Ongoing engagement keeps the momentum going, strengthens habits, and helps bring more residents on board over time.

Real-World Insight

Minneapolis, MN—one of the nation's leading compost programs—didn't stop at launch. Each year, they added new outreach tactics, from refreshed signage to timely reminders, continually fine-tuning their approach to keep residents engaged and contamination low.

Next Steps for Success

Effective outreach doesn't end with a program launch—it's what keeps your composting effort growing, improving, and connecting with your community. As we've seen through real-world examples, the most successful curbside composting programs are built on clear goals, tailored messaging, strong local branding, and partnerships that extend your reach. But perhaps most importantly, they evolve. Good programs listen to residents, adjust based on data, and keep reinforcing simple, positive messages over time. A thoughtful, step-by-step O&E plan lays the groundwork for lasting behavior change and broad community support—not just early adoption.

Need help making it happen?

At **Amplify**, we specialize in designing outreach and education campaigns that get results. We've supported municipalities across the country in launching, refining, and growing their curbside compost programs—with strategies that are community-driven, tested in the field, and tailored to local needs. Whether you're just getting started or looking to strengthen what's already in place, we can help you build a program that residents understand, trust, and use. Let's talk about what success can look like in your community.

Reach out and we'll get back to you ASAP.

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