



FOR A
**HEALTHY
ENVIRONMENT**



Composting Food Scraps in Your Community: A Social Marketing Toolkit

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PURPOSE

The *Composting Food Scraps in Your Community: A Social Marketing Toolkit* (Toolkit) is a resource for states, territories, local governments, tribes, and nongovernmental organizations who wish to create a composting campaign in their communities. More specifically, it is for communities that want to (1) launch a new food scrap composting program, (2) increase participation in an existing food scrap composting program, or (3) reduce contamination in their compost collection stream. It is designed to assist agencies that offer curbside collection or drop-off locations for residential food scraps. The Toolkit includes a planning process that uses social marketing principles to ensure communities are tailoring the campaign to their individual needs, and it is accompanied by customizable materials.

WHAT IS SOCIAL MARKETING?

Social marketing is a discipline that seeks to change behaviors for the good of society, communities, and people. The discipline of social marketing is built on a significant base of research that shows awareness and education alone rarely change behaviors. To create meaningful, sustainable behavior change, social marketing uses research-informed strategies to overcome the barriers that are preventing a specific behavior by providing people with personal, relevant motivators to act. This approach increases the efficiency and effectiveness of marketing efforts by identifying the specific behaviors that must change to achieve a program's goals, segmenting audiences based on who has the highest probability of changing their behaviors, and identifying the barriers preventing the behavior, the benefits to the audience of changing the behavior, and the motivators that are most likely to overcome barriers and spur change. If you'd like to learn more about the social marketing planning process, you can access EPA's online social marketing training modules [here](#).

BACKGROUND

Many states, counties, cities, and communities across the U.S. offer food scrap composting collection programs in their jurisdictions. These programs encourage (or require) residents to collect food scraps (and yard trim) at home and offer curbside collection or drop-off locations to aggregate and ultimately compost them. However, no two community composting programs are alike. For example, some communities may allow or require compostable plastic bags for collection, while others may not. Some communities may accept all food scraps, while others may not accept meat or dairy. The steps provided in this Toolkit allow communities and partners to customize a campaign based upon their goals and the operation of their composting program.

This Toolkit is rooted in the principles of social marketing. It is designed to help communities and partners create food scrap composting campaigns by applying the social marketing planning process to their individual needs. To inform this Toolkit, EPA interviewed six agencies that have implemented composting campaigns and reviewed relevant research and campaign materials.

This Toolkit provides existing composting campaign materials that can be customized and used by communities and it will help guide you through eight decision-making steps necessary for planning a social marketing campaign:



SOCIAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN ELEMENTS

STEP #1: DEFINE YOUR PURPOSE, GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The first step in the social marketing planning process is to define the campaign's purpose, goals, and objectives. These should be tailored to the specifics of your composting campaign. You should make sure you have defined each of these elements for your community before moving further into the planning process.

Table 1 contains definitions and two examples of purposes, goals, and objectives that you can adapt for your community:

Table 1. Sample m	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE 1	EXAMPLE 2
PURPOSE	Why you are creating the campaign.	Achieve climate goal of reducing methane emissions.	Create a more viable and efficient composting program by creating a cleaner stream of feedstock.
GOALS	What you're trying to achieve in the short- and long-term.	Increase participation in voluntary food scrap composting program.	Reduce compost contamination rates.
OBJECTIVES	What needs to occur to achieve the goal(s). Objectives should be measurable, focus on the desired behavior changes, and be as specific as possible (i.e., by who? How much? By when?)	1. Increase awareness about the program. 2. Increase the number of new sign-ups each month by 500. 3. Increase collection of food scraps in residential organics stream by 50 percent.	1. Raise awareness about what is and is not accepted in the residential composting program. 2. Decrease the amount of contaminants (such as plastic) commonly found in curbside bins.

STEP #2: CHOOSE YOUR PRIORITY AUDIENCES

Priority audiences are groups of people who are likely to be receptive (persuadable) to changing their behaviors. You should define specific priority audiences so that you can choose messaging and communications channels that reach and resonate with each of them. Choosing priority audiences for your campaign rather than creating a campaign that tries to reach “everybody” or the “general public” will help ensure that the campaign is as effective as possible. To determine priority audiences:

- 1. Brainstorm all possible audiences in your jurisdiction.**
- 2. Choose your priority audiences**—those who can most quickly and cost-efficiently help you reach your goals and objectives (from step #1). For residential composting programs, you should consider audiences that have access to curbside collection services. Factors to consider when choosing your priority audience mix include:
 - a. **Size of audience:** How many people in your community fit into the priority audience group? You want to choose large enough segments to be able to maximize your campaign's impact.*
 - b. **Impact on issue:** Does this audience have a lot of compostable materials that are currently going into the garbage?*
 - c. **Receptivity:** What is the likelihood of positive receptivity to composting messaging among the audience group?*

You likely want to pick one or two priority audience groups for each campaign. Focusing on a couple of audiences will allow you to be precise with the best messages (step #6) and media channels (step #7) to reach your priority audience.

- 3. Create a profile of each priority audience.** What do you know about their demographics (e.g., who are they? Where do they live?) and their psychographics (e.g., what is important to them? What are their values and beliefs?). This profile can be created using new or existing research from within your community. The profile will help you ensure you choose campaign messaging that resonates with your priority audiences.
- 4. Consider influencers.** Influencers are people that can persuade your priority audience group to change their behavior. For example, for composting behaviors, an influencer audience could be school-age children who could encourage their family to participate in composting.

It is also recommended that you consider equity in your priority audience selection. Considering equity means thinking carefully about the residents in your community to evaluate factors that could impact people's access to and response to a composting campaign. These factors include things like preferred languages or unique cultural influences or the cost or access to participating to composting programs.

STEP #3: IDENTIFY DESIRED BEHAVIOR CHANGES

After choosing and understanding priority audiences, the next element of developing your campaign is to identify desired behavior changes that can be promoted through your campaign interventions. Behaviors promoted should fall within the parameters of social marketing behavior change principles, which specify that a behavior should be a simple, clear and singular action that the audience can take. It is also important to note that your campaign should be launched with just a few behaviors to start, and that additional behaviors can be added over time.

Brainstorm desired behavior changes. Below is a list of example behaviors to consider for your composting campaign.

1. Evaluate the potential impact of each behavior.

- **Impact:** *Will the desired behavior change have a large impact on achieving your goals?*
- **Probability:** *Are people likely to change?*

2. Evaluate whether the behavior is non-divisible.

Is the behavior a simple, clear, and singular action that the audience can take?

Non-divisible behaviors with high potential impact and high probability of change are good targets to consider for your campaign.

Sometimes there are several steps that your audience needs to take before the end desired behavior change. Each step could have its own barriers and motivators. If this is the case for the behavior you choose, it can be useful to map the steps in a behavior chain and then identify where you need to start with your audience. Below is a list of example behaviors to consider for your campaign.

- Sign up for curbside collection of food scraps
- Collect food scraps in your kitchen
- Use a kitchen countertop container to collect your food scraps for composting
- Do not put plastic in your compost bin
- Remove produce stickers before putting scraps in your compost bin
- Remove spoiled food from containers and add to your compost bin
- Drop food scraps off at a collection location
- Bring your food scraps collection container to the curb on collection day

STEP #4: MAP BARRIERS, BENEFITS & MOTIVATORS

Based on your priority audiences (step #2) and chosen behaviors (step #3), the next step is for you to analyze the barriers that may prevent your priority audience segments from doing the desired behaviors, and the possible benefits and motivators that could overcome those barriers. These elements are defined as follows:

- **Barrier:** Anything that reduces the probability of the priority audience engaging in the desired behavior
- **Benefit:** The benefits that will be delivered to the audience if they practice the behavior (what is in it for them?)
- **Motivator:** What will motivate the audience to act to change their behavior?

The following sections outline common barriers, benefits, and motivators for behaviors related to composting and keeping compost streams free of contamination. This is not an exhaustive list. You should evaluate each behavior you are seeking and define the specific barriers, benefits and motivators that are relevant for your priority audience.

Barriers

- **Lack of awareness.** Without adequate outreach surrounding composting opportunities, residents may not be aware of their state or municipal composting program. They may not know how to participate in the program, where the drop-off locations are/which days food scraps are collected, or how composting can benefit the environment.³
- **Lack of knowledge about what can be composted.** People may also lack information or be confused about what materials are accepted in their composting program. This confusion drives contamination when unacceptable materials are placed in compost bins.
- **Lack of convenience.** Participation in a curbside composting program requires that a household figure out a system for food scrap collection. Collecting food scraps can be easier and more convenient when households have tools such as collection bins with lids or compostable bags; however, people may not know about these tools or may not be willing or able to manage the expense of them.⁴ This could also be seen as a lack of automatic motivation – separating out food scraps is not a regular household chore.⁵

- **Time pressure.** It takes time to separate materials for composting. Research shows that an increase in time pressure is associated with individuals' stress levels, which in turn distracts individuals from environmental issues, making it less likely they will engage in pro-environmental behavior.⁶ Additionally, individuals' perceived lack of time, including workload, housework, and family responsibilities, acts as a barrier to pro-environmental behavior.⁷
- **The “ick” factor.** Some people may perceive collecting food scraps at home to be unhygienic or unpleasant.⁸ They may fear their collection bin could attract insects, pests, and mold in the kitchen, which is generally a clean and hygienic space. Although people may easily participate in other types of pro-environmental behaviors such as recycling, they may get tripped up in the potential “immediate unpleasantness” of food waste separation.⁹

Benefits

- **Addressing climate change.** When people compost food scraps instead of putting them in the trash, they keep a valuable resource out of the landfill and reduce methane emissions that contribute to climate change.
- **Improving the environment.** Many people view composting as a tangible action they can take in their daily lives to help the environment.¹⁰ Instead of discarding food scraps and yard trim, composting them transforms them into a nutrient-rich soil amendment (i.e., compost) that can then be incorporated into yards, gardens, and parks to build healthier soil, support local food production, reduce fertilizer use, and reduce stormwater runoff.
- **Being efficient with your resources.** Composting ensures uneaten food and food scraps go to a good use and are not wasted.
- **Being part of a community effort.** Residents who participate in waste collection and recycling efforts become more connected to their community and are transformed from passive receivers to “co-producers” of public services.¹¹

Motivators

- **“Doing the right thing.”** Composting and doing it correctly can make people feel good about themselves for “doing the right thing.” Many people assign moral value to collecting food scraps due to feelings of obligation, guilt over sending food to the landfill, and a feeling of responsibility to benefit future generations.¹² Some people view composting as part of their identity of being a “good provider.”¹³ This may be a good opportunity to remind people that they already have to deal with their kitchen scraps in some way: it may as well be in a way that is good for the environment.

- **Keeping resources within the community.** When people know that the finished compost can or will be used in their community, they may be more motivated to participate in a composting program.
- **Saving money.** By removing food from the disposal stream, people can reduce the amount of garbage being put in their trash bins. In “pay-as-you-throw” communities, residents can save money by filling up fewer trash bins.
- **Helping to ensure the composting system works well/properly.** When non-accepted items (like plastics) end up in compost bins, they can contaminate the compost with microplastics that end up in people’s lawns and gardens. By only putting accepted items in the compost bin, people can help ensure their food scraps are put to good use.

To plan your campaign, you should map the barriers, benefits, and motivators for each of your priority audiences (step #2) and your chosen behavior changes (step #3). One of the keys to this exercise is to pick the top 1-2 items in each category to help you focus the message strategy for your campaign. This is also a good point in the process for a reality check: make sure that your benefits and motivators are strong enough to overcome the barriers to each behavior. If they are not, you need to either increase your benefits and motivators or pick a new behavior. Table 2 shows an example of how you could map possible barriers, benefits, and motivators for some sample behaviors.

Table 2. Sample behavior, barrier, benefit, motivator matrix

PRIORITY BEHAVIOR	PRIMARY BARRIER	BENEFIT	MOTIVATOR
Collect food scraps in your kitchen	The “ick” factor	Addressing climate change	Doing the right thing
Drop food scraps off at a collection location	Perceived time pressure	Being part of a community effort	Keeping resources within the community
Do not put plastic in your compost bin	Lack of knowledge about what can be composted	Improving the environment	Helping ensure that the composting process works well/properly
Sign up for curbside collection of food scraps	Lack of awareness	Diverting food scraps from the trash	Saving money

STEP #5 RECRUIT PARTNERS

Developing partnerships is a key strategy that can be employed to increase the impact of your campaign. By working together on composting, partners can amplify each other's efforts to create greater change.

You can use the following steps to recruit partners in your community:

1. Develop prioritized lists of potential partners.

Good partners often have the following characteristics:

- Complementary missions/goals.
- Overlapping priority audiences.
- Have something of value to offer/bring to the table and in turn, you have something of value to offer them
- History of collaboration and community involvement (a good partnership makes things easier, not harder)

2. Create recruitment materials (factsheet/pitch presentation that focuses on the value proposition for each partner type).

3. Conduct 1:1 outreach/partner pitch meetings.

4. Create a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with partnership details to ensure there is mutual understanding and accountability on both sides of the partnership. The MOU may include:

- What is the campaign providing the partner?
- What is the partner providing to the campaign?
- What is the timeline for implementation?
- How will both parties report back on activities and results?

The following list includes examples of potential campaign partners. You may find additional ones based on your community's specific needs.

- Waste haulers
- Community composters
- Schools
- Parks departments
- Celebrities/influencers
- Community Based Organizations/nonprofits
- Business leaders (will align better if the business is engaged in composting efforts)
- Nurseries/independent hardware stores that sell compost
- Retailers who sell kitchen scrap collection containers and compostable bags
- USDA Cooperative Extension System partners
- Compostable bag manufacturers
- Kitchen scrap collection container manufacturers
- Faith-based communities
- Composting facilities/processors
- U.S. Composting Council state chapters
- Restaurants
- Community gardens
- Elected officials

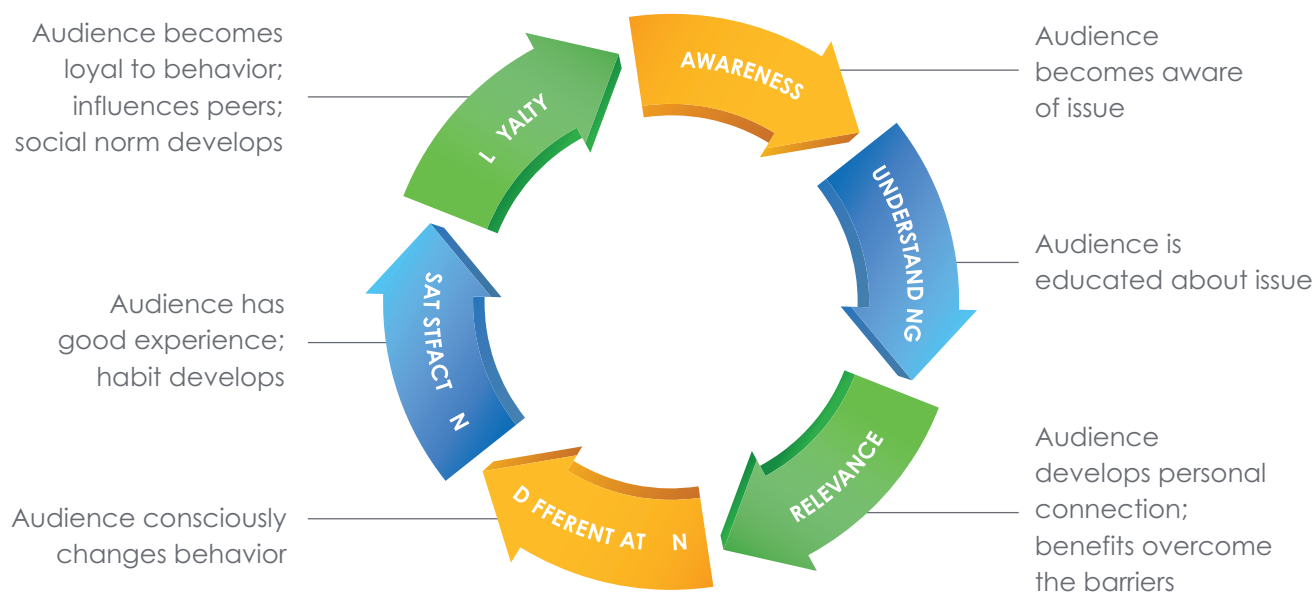
STEP #6 DEVELOP MESSAGES AND MATERIALS

In social marketing campaigns, campaign messages should help drive the desired behavior changes by presenting compelling calls to action and overcoming audience barriers by emphasizing the benefits of taking that action. An effective messaging strategy for your campaign will avoid the issue of message clutter: when campaigns deliver too many messages at once, the audience can feel overwhelmed, which can ultimately lead to inaction. To avoid this dynamic, it is recommended that your campaign materials each only focus on one message at a time with the suite of campaign materials being able to cover both awareness messages and multiple behaviors.

One of the recommended first steps to defining the message strategy is to map where your priority audiences (step #2) sit on the behavior change continuum.

BEHAVIOR CHANGE CONTINUUM

For each priority audience, identify the behavior you want to change and map your audience on the behavior change continuum:



SOURCE: C+C

On this continuum, **awareness** is a necessary first step before behavior changes can be addressed. If people are not aware of an issue, they are unlikely to engage with specific behavior change messages. Once they are aware and have a level of **understanding**, then you need to create personal **relevance** for them by helping them understand they have potential to reduce the amount of food they waste. After this understanding is established, specific behavior changes can be promoted (**differentiation**). The campaign can help spur initial behavior changes where the audience tries behaviors for the first time. Hopefully people have a good experience (**satisfaction**), leading them to establishing habits. Eventually, as more people practice composting behaviors, the campaign can build **loyalty** and trust with audiences acting as advocates for the behaviors and influencing each other to create social norms.

This Toolkit offers access to the materials from several composting campaigns that have been conducted by communities in the U.S. and Canada and can help you deliver awareness and behavior change messaging in your community.

KING COUNTY SOLID WASTE DIVISION, WASHINGTON

Compost Right

King County's Compost Right Campaign encourages residents to avoid plastic contamination by putting only food scraps - and not food packaging - in their compost bin. The campaign encourages King County residents continue to help both the environment and the economy by composting their food scraps and yard waste.



CITY OF PORTLAND BUREAU OF PLANNING AND SUSTAINABILITY, OREGON

Include the Food

Portland's composting campaign was created in 2011 when they expanded to include food waste in their composting program. These materials encourage residents to include food scraps in their green bin along with yard waste.



VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Let's Scrap Food Waste

The focus of this campaign is to create awareness of Vermont's landfill ban, communicate why it is important to keep food scraps out of landfill, and share tips on how to reduce wasted food.



METRO VANCOUVER REGIONAL DISTRICT

Food Scraps Aren't Garbage

This campaign launched in 2014 to build awareness of Metro Vancouver's Organics Disposal Ban and help residents use their green bins. It can be used to communicate specific messages, such as reducing contamination, connecting using the green bin and climate change, or building social norms.



These campaigns include a mix of awareness and specific behavior change messaging. You can access [all the campaign materials here](#). It is recommended that you look back at the framework you have created so far for your campaign using steps #1-#5 in this Toolkit and evaluate which of these campaigns might work well in your community. You could also choose to create new materials based on the planning framework you have established.

If you're planning to use campaign materials in this Toolkit, here are some guidelines to follow:

1. While four communities have provided a set of campaign materials for use by partners across the U.S., it's recommended that you choose one campaign to implement in your community. This way your campaign will be more consistent and cohesive across communication channels.
2. The Toolkit provides native design files for all materials so that they can be customized by partners. We encourage customization of the materials to include your logo, branding, and link to your website; however we highly recommend keeping the message and overall concept intact. If you use Metro Vancouver's materials, please provide attribution to Metro Vancouver on your website, posters, or where space allows.
3. Materials provided cannot be used for commercial purposes.

STEP #7: CREATE AN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

This step is where you determine how you should deliver your campaign's messages to your priority audiences. The following section lists possible activities that you may want to undertake. You should customize this approach based on what works best in your community to reach the priority audiences you have selected.

- **Campaign Creative and Material Customization or Development:**

You will want to either customize the materials you've adopted from one of the campaigns highlighted in this Toolkit or create new materials using your strategic social marketing framework. If your priority audience includes community members who prefer a language other than English, you will want to transcreate your campaign materials. Types of materials you may want to create include:

- *Advertisements (video, audio, digital, social, outdoor, print)*
- *Organic social media content (for use on your campaign's social media channels and also provided to partners to use)*
- *Printable or downloadable materials and guides (collateral)*

Transcreation goes beyond literal translation and considers both language and the cultural context within which it is interpreted, to deliver effective, culturally responsive and equitable communication campaigns to communities of color and cultural communities. A number of factors determine the way diverse audiences interpret messaging and brands—including country of origin, race, ethnicity, gender, language proficiency, etc. Transcreation looks at all of these factors to help craft messaging and visuals that resonate culturally with audiences.

- **Website Development:** It is likely you will want to create a website so your campaign has a place for consumers to learn more about food scrap collection and your composting program.
- **Media Planning and Buying:** Your campaign should include a media buy that delivers campaign messages to your priority audiences. It is likely best to contract with a media buying service that will work with you to strategically identify the best advertising channels and negotiate good rates and ad placements on your behalf.
- **Media Relations:** Earned media—publicity or exposure gained from methods other than paid advertising—can serve to help you distribute campaign messages at key points of the campaign. This could include media outreach surrounding the campaign launch, and around significant milestone announcements.
- **Social Media Influencers:** A social media influencer is someone who is paid to amplify your campaign's messages through their social media channels. If you want to use this approach, you should look for influencers whose followers align with your campaign's priority audiences.
- **Organic Social Media:** Organic social media should be an integrated and ongoing part of your campaign. The first step is to identify which social media channels should be utilized for your campaign. This decision should be made by looking at the channels that you have already and those that are most utilized by your campaign's priority audiences. The channels chosen should be monitored with a response strategy for comments.
- **Events:** Events that include one-on-one education about the why and how of composting are a great social marketing strategy to include in your campaign. Think about opportunities for partnering with existing events to deliver your campaign's messages.

Timelines for implementation will vary by community based on the resources you have available. However, it is good practice to think about running promotional windows where you have concentrated campaign activity for a six-to-eight-week period separated by times with less activity. This allows you to spread your resources and audience engagement over a longer period of time.

STEP #8: PLAN YOUR EVALUATION STRATEGY

The evaluation strategy for your campaign should consider inputs, outputs, outcomes, and overall campaign impact. It is important to note that most local communities will not be able to fully evaluate all four of these factors. Look at the data that is available or could be gathered for your community and create an effective evaluation strategy using the resources you have available.

- **Inputs** are the resources (budget, staff time, etc.) that were invested in your campaign.
- **Outputs** are the reach and engagement of the campaign (people reached through ads, events, partnership results, social media engagements, etc.).
- **Outcomes** are what happen as a result of your campaign—the amount of food waste captured by organics collection or the amount diverted from the garbage/landfill, the number of people who signed up for service or started putting food scraps in their composting bins, and changes in awareness and attitudes related to participation in your composting program. This can be done through surveys that track awareness, attitudes and behaviors, and waste audits.
- **Impacts** map back to your campaign's purpose (e.g., reducing greenhouse gas emissions, diverting landfill waste, etc.). This can be done through extrapolating these data points based on estimates of food scraps diverted from the waste stream that you are able to calculate as an outcome measurement.

CONCLUSION

The goal of the Toolkit is to provide local communities with a framework for planning and implementing effective composting campaigns. By sharing social marketing principles specific to composting and customizable campaign resources, the hope is that communities can leverage this work to efficiently launch local campaigns that help their residents participate in composting programs. You can access the [customizable collateral here](#) and you can visit EPA's [composting webpage here](#). If you have any questions about this Toolkit, you can contact SMMFood@epa.gov.

ENDNOTES

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