

# Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes & Energy and The Recycling Partnership

## Recycling Quality Improvement Grant Program Request for Proposals—June 2, 2021

The Recycling Partnership is a national nonprofit transforming recycling across America. Improved recycling creates jobs, protects the environment, and empowers communities. For more information regarding our programs, staff, and funders, visit: [www.recyclingpartnership.org](http://www.recyclingpartnership.org).

The need to improve the quantity and quality of recyclables is a high priority in Michigan, which claims one of the lowest recycling rates (15%) and contamination rates in excess of 25 percent. Due to the current state of recycling, Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) and The Recycling Partnership (The Partnership) partnered in 2019 on a grant application process to increase quantity and quality of recycling in Michigan communities. Within the grant, The Partnership partners with MI communities, counties and/or authorities by providing financial and technical assistance to develop and implement a comprehensive education and operations behavior strategy to decrease contamination from curbside and drop-off recycling programs while increasing recycling capture and improving quality.

In Phase 1 of this grant process, The Partnership selected 14 successful grant applicants geographically dispersed across Michigan, representing over 100 communities and over 600,000 residents. These drop off and curbside programs implemented their projects in 2020 and early 2021. All grantees saw an increase in participation in their recycling programs, as well as a decrease in contamination with a high of 45% reduction.

Because of these outstanding results, EGLE and The Partnership are seeking grant applications for Phase 2 of funding. Applications will be accepted from communities, counties or authorities who wish to engage with residents directly and indirectly to change recycling behavior of those contaminating the stream. Bonus funding will also be available for communities that want to use behavior-specific data from their quality improvement project to do additional follow up education after their initial project is complete. We will be selecting five to ten applicants in MI by this request for proposal process that will include communities or groups of communities diverse in geography, type of recycling program (drop off, curbside), rural or urban and socio-economic status. This is an exciting, high-profile initiative that requires a high degree of readiness and commitment on the part of the applicant's elected officials, city administrators and those involved with the community's recycling program, including hauler(s) and the material recovery facility (MRF). All questions related to this application should be sent to Cassandra Ford at [cford@recyclingpartnership.org](mailto:cford@recyclingpartnership.org).

Applicants should carefully ***read this entire document prior to submitting a proposal.***

## Recycling Quality Improvement Grant Program Eligibility Requirements

For the purposes of this grant program, an eligible applicant is a local government entity or a public solid waste management authority representing a collection/region of local governments, located in Michigan. An applicant must have a curbside recycling program and/or a drop off recycling program and have indications of a contamination issue. The proposed project area can be an entire community or a portion of a county or community, depending on the number of households. The Partnership will work with EGLE to select 5-10 applicants geographically dispersed throughout the state of Michigan and representing both rural and urban areas.

## Funding Availability and Use of Grant Funds

Grant funding is available up to \$3/household for drop off programs and up to \$4/household for curbside programs, up to 50,000 single-family households per applicant for the following items:

- Staff for tagging carts or auditing drop-off locations,
- Printing tags,
- Printing and mailing direct mail pieces,
- Website and other social media,
- Community signage,
- Tagging & analyzing mobile phone app (curbside only)
- Drop-off site anti-contamination security solutions (i.e., fencing, cameras, etc.),
- Subscription to an online recycling digital communication platform, and
- Other innovative contamination reduction strategies.

The Partnership will provide graphic design support to customize the educational materials for each community. The Partnership requires that the grantee use The Partnership's template for educational materials. However, each community can use its existing recyclable material images and icons as needed, as long as best practices are taken into consideration. Grant funds cannot be used for purposes other than education and outreach for cleaning up the residential curbside recycling stream and the drop-off recycling stream. Additional programmatic efforts may be included as agreed upon by all parties as long as the minimum educational requirements are met. Additional households beyond the 50,000 could be added depending on matching funds from additional partnerships with other stakeholders such as industry, solid waste authorities and communities. The Partnership is open to creative solutions by applicants to combat contamination and will work with awardees to find solutions that fit their needs.

## App to Action—Bonus Funding Availability

Additional grant funding is available up to \$1/household for previous successful grantees or after new grantees have community-specific recycling behavior data, up to 50,000 households per applicant for the following items:

- Follow-up education and outreach using household specific data collected during the curbside tagging project or the drop-off survey project,
- Additional education and outreach to diverse populations within grantee's community to promote equity and inclusion within your recycling program,
- Follow-up MRF audit to determine long-term contamination rate reduction and/or
- Other innovative education and outreach strategies.

Successful grantees of this bonus funding are not subject to the “Additional Requirements” listed below, as they should have completed those during their first grant award. Bonus grantees will work with The Partnership to determine the exact specifications of their project, budget and reporting required after implementation. The additional funding is subject to the same disbursement of grant funds protocols and cannot be used for purposes other than education and outreach for increasing quality and/or participation within the residential recycling stream.

## Additional Requirements

An applicant must also meet all the following requirements:

- 1. The applicant must provide curbside recycling collection either publicly or privately collected and/or provide drop off recycling sites either staffed or unstaffed.**

Preference will be given to communities that have:

- a. Identified an existing contamination problem within their recycling collection system.
- b. A commitment from hauler and community to reject contaminated carts at the curb and/or staff drop off sites to audit materials as they come in.
- c. A consolidated or regional approach to waste and recycling collection or education (i.e., multiple communities joining together to consolidate resources and create uniform messaging).
- d. A planned approach or commitment from the community to increase equity and inclusion of their diverse populations within their recycling education and programs.

- 2. Education and Outreach**—Based on previous lessons learned and research data, The Recycling Partnership has developed education and campaign materials to support all requirements listed below including printed materials, signage and social media programs. The following strategies are a minimum of what is required of all successful grant applicants.

- a. Coordinating inspection of recyclable materials placed in collection containers by residents to determine if non-acceptable/detrimental materials are being deposited into the container; and direct engagement with the resident to educate them on the acceptable items for the program via the tagging protocol established for curbside programs and/or an informational card for drop off sites. For curbside programs and depending on the community, if a container is identified with non-acceptable materials, the container will be either tagged with a warning tag and left out for collection or tagged with a warning tag and rejected until the incorrect materials are removed from the collection container. The community will be responsible for inspections and field work through existing staff, seasonal staff, contracted staff or temporary employees.
  - b. Developing detailed printed materials such as educational flyers/postcards that include specific messaging regarding service collection days, acceptable materials and other information. Printed materials will be distributed to the targeted community in a minimum of two mailings.
  - c. Proper onsite signage to educate residents (required for all drop off programs, optional for curbside programs). This can be developed and printed within the grant budget if needed.
  - d. Developing electronic media messaging programs. At minimum, each grantee must have a website to allow for proper recycling information to be disseminated to the residents on an ongoing basis. MI EGLE has developed individual grantee-specific recycling information pages on their RecyclingRacoons.com page that can be used by grantees that do not have an existing recycling program website. Additional social media messaging is encouraged but not required.
  - e. Optional—Developing and implementing a community-wide digital information system where residents can obtain detailed information on their recycling program (Recycle Coach, ReCollect, Recycle by City, or other).
- 3. Material Mix and Top Contaminants**—The material mix should match the existing contractual obligations and practices that have evolved between the MRF and community. This program is not intended to re-evaluate the material mix outlined in a contract. The program is an effort to refocus the anti-contamination messaging on the most detrimental non-acceptable material.
- 4. Technical Assistance**—An applicant must work with the Partnership for technical support and assistance to ensure the community adopts best management practices for its anti-contamination program. For more information regarding these practices, see the Partnership’s [curbside anti-contamination tool kit](#) or the [drop off anti-contamination tool kit](#).
- 5. Measurement Plan**—An applicant must agree to various measurement requirements including a minimum of 4 cart taggings over entire proposed project area for all curbside programs or a minimum of 4 weeks of onsite staff to audit and educate residents for drop-off recycling programs.
- a. **Cart tagging (curbside programs only)**—Each successful candidate or designated staff will be trained by The Partnership or an applicable

representative to conduct cart inspections prior to recycling collection. The Partnership will facilitate regular meetings throughout the project and provide graphic design support, but the grantee will be responsible for the oversight and execution of the tagging program. Each cart set out for recycling will be examined through one full city-wide collection cycle by opening the lid, visually assessing the contamination on the top layers, and then tagging where warranted with an instructive message to the resident. Each set-out cart will be examined and tagged again in a minimum of three additional collection cycles following the first round of tagging and beginning an outreach program to reduce contamination. The number of carts tagged will be recorded over a minimum of four collection cycles to track whether the need for tagging decreases. A decrease in tagging will be an indicator of improvements in material quality. An app via mobile phone or tablet (devices not provided) is available through The Partnership to record and analyze tagging results for a fixed cost of \$1,000 per community plus monthly project management costs of \$100/month during project implementation.

- b. **Onsite Audits (drop off programs only)**—Each successful candidate or designated staff will be trained by The Partnership to conduct onsite audits of materials as they are being brought into a drop off site for recycling collection. The onsite auditor will talk to residents about why any contaminants found are not recyclable and provide educational cards as a reminder for next time. The auditor will record the number of interactions with patrons, as well as the types of contaminants found, the number of patrons using the site, the number of patrons with contaminants and any additional data necessary to evaluate the drop off site. A decrease in patrons with contaminants will be an indicator of improvements in material quality. A minimum of 10-20 hours per week for four weeks of auditing per drop off site is needed to determine if contamination dropped off decreases over time. The Partnership has created a digital survey (NestForms) that can be used by the community auditors to interact with drop off patrons and used to track information gathered onsite.
- c. **MRF Sampling Analysis**—The Partnership will select certain candidates to work with their MRF in order to conduct a benchmark sampling analysis of loads coming from the selected communities to determine the level and type(s) of contamination in the loads (this analysis will be used to determine the outreach and tagging process described above). The combined loads of at least two incoming truck routes will be isolated on the MRF floor, or other destination as appropriate, and ten -fifteen, 125-pound samples will be extracted from the loads for further analysis. This analysis will be conducted through standard waste composition techniques, by separating clean recyclables, which will be further sorted into composition categories from contaminants. The contaminants will then be further sorted into pre-determined categories to assess the leading types of contaminants and the relative weights or volumes of each. Specific protocols will be outlined with each MRF partner and will be consistent throughout the project. The data collected from these sorts will be entered into a GAP (Grading and Purity) database to be provided by The Partnership. This same procedure will be followed after the last cart-tagging round is completed. Changes in contamination levels will be tracked

and reported. All other curbside candidates that are not chosen to have a MRF audit will be required to work with The Partnership on development of a measurement system, such as a visual inspection app, that will provide a contamination evaluation both before and after the quality improvement project is conducted. The Partnership will cover the costs for audit training at each MRF and subsequent data collection outside of the applicant's budget as well as any visual inspection app creation, but all audit sort labor or visual inspection labor should be included in the grant budget or provided by the MRF or applicant. Each applicant should consider the audits as an opportunity to educate city officials, staff and other key personnel on the issues associated with recycling contamination, as well as a way to save grant money for other outreach efforts.

- d. **Visual Inspection Analysis**—The Partnership has created a visual inspection app and protocols that can be used to evaluate the quantity and quality of recycling material at drop off containers or on the MRF tipping floor. This inspection app can be programmed for individual containers at drop off sites or for entire load analysis at a MRF or transfer station.
- e. **Participation Tracking (drop off programs only)**—Successful grantees must have or develop with assistance from The Partnership a long-term protocol for measuring resident participation at the drop off recycling sites. A baseline participation percentage will be needed, as a goal of the grant is to increase participation. An increase in program participation will be an indicator of improvement in the recycling program. Site improvements, such as cameras and staffing, are eligible expenses within this grant and can be used to track participation, but grantees are not limited to these options.

**6. Funding Recognition**—An applicant must be willing to use The Partnership logo on education materials and make mutually agreeable acknowledgments indicating the project was “funded in part by” a grant from The Partnership and EGLE. Applicants must agree to acknowledge special support of other funders as appropriate in educational materials and outreach efforts. An example of logo usage is available upon request.

## Grant Program Deadline and Submittal

The deadline for submitting an application to the Partnership is 3:00 p.m. EST on Friday, September 3, 2021.

A proposal for grant funding, including the application form along with the required letters of support must be completed online by the date and time listed above. All applicants are encouraged to complete the applicable surveys within the Municipal Measurement Program (MMP) prior to the submission of their application, but it is not required. All applicants receiving grant funding will be required to complete the MMP surveys before the completion of their grant program. See details on the application process below.

## Grant Review and Selection Process

Each applicant will be notified by email upon the submission of their completed application. Applications will be reviewed by The Partnership and EGLE. Grant recipients will be notified of preliminary award in early September 2021. Final grant awards will be determined by The Partnership and EGLE.

Key grant selection criteria will include:

- Ability of applicant to conduct all the required elements of this grant program.
- Readiness of applicant to successfully implement an anti-contamination recycling program including the required related outreach efforts.
- Commitment of applicant to send a designated staff member(s) to a required training and onboarding workshop hosted by The Partnership at the MI Recycling Coalition Conference in October 2021. This training and onboarding will be paid for by The Partnership separate from the applicant's grant budget. For grantees that are unable to safely travel to the conference or in the case of conference cancellation or transfer to a virtual platform, The Partnership will schedule an alternate time and place for the workshop and onboarding.
- Number of households in proposed project area.
- Willingness to reject contaminated carts at the curb (curbside programs only).
- Leverage of additional resources, including local, state, or other non-profit funding.

**Application Revisions:** The Partnership may work with an applicant to revise an initial proposal before entering into a grant agreement. Any changes to an initial proposal must be approved by The Partnership, EGLE and the applicant, and elements of the revised grant proposal will be incorporated into the grant agreement between The Partnership and the applicant.

## Anticipated Grant Project Start Date and Grant Period

Successful applicants will be required to enter into a grant contract with The Partnership. Resulting grant contracts will generally have a term not to exceed eighteen (18) months in length. Adjustments may be made to actual project start dates and contract periods by mutual agreement between The Partnership and grant recipients. Each grantee must expend funds and submit a final report within the grant contract period unless the term of the grant is extended by written agreement of the grantee and The Partnership. Requests for contract extensions should be submitted by the grantee at least sixty (60) days prior to the grant expiration date.

## Disbursement of Grant Funds

Distribution of grant funds is on a reimbursement basis, and payment of funds will take place within thirty (30) days of receiving a properly prepared invoice and required documentation of expenditure from a grantee. Total grant distributions from The Partnership will not exceed 90 percent of reimbursable costs until the grantee submits a final project report; the remaining 10 percent of reimbursable expenses shall be paid upon final report submittal. Funds not expended by the end of the grant contract term will be forfeited. Any funds expended prior to the start of the grant period will not be reimbursed.

## Required Proposal Format

**Applicants who do not already have a Municipal Measurement Program (MMP) account must first apply to the MMP. The application is found online at [www.municipalmeasurement.com](http://www.municipalmeasurement.com). Once the MMP application is reviewed and approved, access to the Grant application and MMP surveys will be provided. If an application is being submitted on behalf of multiple communities, separate applications are not needed. Only one letter of support from MRF, Hauler and Authority will be required for each application.**

The following information outlines the mandatory components of an application for grant funding. Please complete the proposal application online to answer the questions below. The form correlates to each section outlined below. **The application form must be used; no other application format will be accepted. Incomplete applications will be denied.**

**Section 1. Key Contacts, Letters of Support and Applicant Information:** Each applicant is required to provide its key contacts as well as letters of support from MRF and Hauler. Information must include:

- **Project Director:** The project director should be the main point of contact for the grant project and responsible for daily operations of the recycling program. This individual will also be responsible for understanding and providing information about the project.
- **Material Processor or Transfer Station:** Provide the name and location of the Material Recovery Facility (MRF) or transfer station where the applicant is located. The letter of support from the MRF operator or transfer station must indicate a list of the materials accepted for processing, the facility's ability to and willingness to assist or conduct the measurement and reporting of contamination data.
- **Hauler:** Provide the name of the hauler(s) utilized by the applicant if material is not collected by the applicant. The letter of support should include the hauler's willingness to participate however needed in the audit and tagging process.
- **Other Key Project Team Members** including designated outreach and education staff.

All letters of support must be submitted with the application online.

**Section 2. Recycling Program and Project Description:** This section of the proposal should provide the background that reviewers need in order to understand the context of an applicant's recycling program; including information on the current recycling program detailing collection methods, frequency, participation rates (if available), educational and outreach strategies, successes and challenges currently facing recycling program efforts. Information provided should include a brief description of current curbside collection system(s) or drop off site specifics. Each applicant must also provide the most recent full year of recycling tonnage data if available. If the applicant represents multiple communities, each community included in the proposed project area should be listed and described. A proposed project area can be an entire community, multiple communities or only a portion of a community or county area. The proposed project area cannot exceed 50,000 households unless additional matching funds are included in the budget.

**Section 3. Budget:** In this section of the application, the applicant will complete the budget table by filling in the number of households in the proposed project area and estimating the budget for the required elements of the campaign.

When planning for education and outreach expenditures, please consider that at a minimum, The Partnership encourages four (4) educational components for supporting the recycling contamination work:

- An info card to be directly mailed to each household in the proposed project area (basic yes and no recycling information),
- "Oops" tags (curbside program only) or Oops cards (drop off program only) to reinforce correct recycling behavior as described above,
- Top issue mailer to be directly mailed to each household in proposed project area (targeting the most problematic contaminate agreed upon by MRF and applicant), and
- Top Issue Social Media/website outreach.

The Partnership requires that grant funds be used toward procuring these key outreach items. Additional outreach and educational efforts are encouraged to support the minimum key items above.

**Section 4. Timeline:** The Partnership seeks projects that can be implemented between January and December 2022, although an exact timeline will be finalized and agreed upon between successful applicant and The Partnership. A typical timeline to conduct the program as outlined including all best management practices, including pre-program contamination sort, tagging over four collection cycles or auditing materials brought to drop-off locations, educational campaign and post contamination sort is estimated to be 6-12 months depending on the size of the project area.

**Section 5. Measurement Plan:** The Partnership is grounded in measuring and reporting results. In support of this, applicants must indicate their willingness and ability to measure set out rates, recycling tonnage, tagging rates and/or drop off site participation/usage and recycling contamination before and after program implementation. To support the commitment towards measuring contamination,

the letter of support from the servicing MRF operator should indicate the MRF's willingness to assist in measuring and reporting contamination data.

**Section 6. Material Mix:** In the proposal form table, applicants should check off materials that are currently acceptable or not acceptable in the public recycling program and provide any additional information that is relevant.

**Section 7. Commitment to Best Practice Education and Outreach:** Each proposal should explain the applicant's commitment to best practice education and outreach, as well as describe the current education and outreach strategies (and results if available) used such as website, social media, radio, tv, newspaper, etc. An applicant should also describe any current digital online platform communication tools that are used (i.e., Recycle Coach, Recycle by City, Re-Collect, other).

## Definitions

**Bag (or Blue Bag):** Referring to containers used for bag-based curbside recycling collection. A Bag is a container made of flexible material, generally flexible plastic film, that is used by residents to collect and contain household recyclables and place materials at the street for curbside recycling collection service. A typical bag-based curbside recycling program requires residents to prepare materials for service by placing them in a translucent plastic bag that is blue in color (thus, these programs maybe known as Blue Bag recycling programs). Service of a Bag/Blue Bag is performed manually, requiring the collector to bend, pick up the bag, and carry it to the collection vehicle in order to perform recycling collection service. Processing of recyclables collected in a bag-based curbside recycling program requires that materials must be removed from the bag in order to be sorted into commodities.

**Bin (or Recycling Bin):** An open container, typically constructed of plastic and measuring 12 to 18 gallons in volume, that is used by residents to collect household recyclables and place materials at the street for curbside recycling collection service. Service of a Bin/ Recycling Bin is performed manually, requiring the collector to bend, pick up the container, and carry it to the collection vehicle in order to perform recycling collection service.

**Cart:** Plastic recycling cart with wheels and lid. Also referred to as roll carts, barrels, or containers.

**Contamination:** Refers to the amount of inbound material that residents include in their recycling collection that is not accepted in curbside program, thus ultimately ending up in as residual at the recycling facility.

**Drop-off:** A form of collection of household recyclables wherein the generators must deliver the items to a central aggregation location.

**Drop Off Recycling Site (s):** Central aggregation locations, often serving rural areas, where the generators deliver recyclables. Retail collection of plastic bags and wraps at stores is a special type of drop off recycling site.

**Participation Rate:** The number of homes that put recycling out to be collected at least once during a monthly period. This is analyzed by actually observing specific addresses over a month-long period and counting each time they recycle. To calculate this rate, take the number of addresses that have recycled at least once per month and divide that by the total addresses observed. For an observation of a two-week period, if one hundred (100) homes are observed and forty (40) recycle one week and forty (40) completely different homes recycle the next week, that is an eighty percent (80%) participation rate.

**Set-Out Rate:** The number of homes with recycling placed curbside at any given time. This is calculated by counting the number of homes with recycling out and dividing that number by the total number of homes on a route. For example, if there are 100 homes on a route and 40 homes have recycling out, the set-out rate is forty percent (40%).

**Single-Family Residence:** Typically, this term is defined as a detached home or multi-dwelling property of up to four (4) units. However, it should be noted that some communities define a “single-family residence” to include multi-dwelling properties of up to a dozen (12) units. Confirm in your application how many dwelling units are included in your definition of single-family households.

## Classifications for Homes with Curbside Recycling Services

In Section 2 of the application for grant funding, communities with curbside recycling programs are asked the type of program that is currently in place. The following descriptions describe the choices that applicants may select from when indicating their current curbside recycling program.

**Automatic Service:** An automatic system where curbside recycling service is automatically provided to every single-family residence in the community and is paid for through general taxes, or fees or a utility bill. In this system, participation by any household is voluntary, though it is not possible to opt-out or avoid payment of the fee or tax that funds the service. A cart is delivered to every home; the resident is assigned a recycling day and on which he or she has the opportunity to the cart out at the curb for collection. The actual collection service may be conducted by public staff or through a private hauler contracted by the community, with the local government being billed for the recycling service and acting as a single payer for service at all covered properties.

**Opt-In:** The curbside recycling service is available to every single-family residence in the community (thus paid for through general taxes or fees), but the resident must specifically contact the local government or private hauler to set up service and/or purchase a cart to start receiving the service. If a resident does not request the service, he or she still pays for the program through general taxes or fees. This can be provided through a public or private hauler.

**Opt-Out:** A curbside recycling service established by a local government that is available to every single-family residence in the community and is typically paid for through a utility-style fee. Each resident receives a recycling cart and collection service unless he or she contacts the local government and DECLINES service or cart and is therefore not subject to the fee.

**Subscription Service:** The approach is a free-market system, where haulers provide service to customers upon request, financing the service through direct charges to the customers. The sub-categories of subscription service include:

- **Private Opt-In:** Resident must specifically contact the private hauler to set up service and receive a recycling cart. The resident then pays the private hauler directly for service. Those residents that do not contact a private hauler do not receive recycling service or pay for the program through taxes or fees.
- **Universal Private Subscription:** Residents are automatically provided with a recycling cart without having to opt in or contact their garbage hauler to add the service. A local government may require garbage haulers to provide automatic recycling service as a condition of receiving a franchise or license. Subscribers may pay a separate fee for the automatic service or the recycling service may be embedded in an overall combined trash fee. Either way, residents must pay the hauler directly for the service and the pricing does not change whether or not they participate in the recycling program.