

# TRANSFORMING TRASH

in Urban America



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The Partnership for Working Families is a national network of leading regional advocacy organizations who support innovative solutions to our nation's economic and environmental problems. Together we are a voice for working families, promoting policies that create quality jobs and thriving, healthy communities. We advance innovative campaigns, provide issue specific resources and share winning strategies and lessons with allies dedicated to creating a new economy that creates opportunity for all.

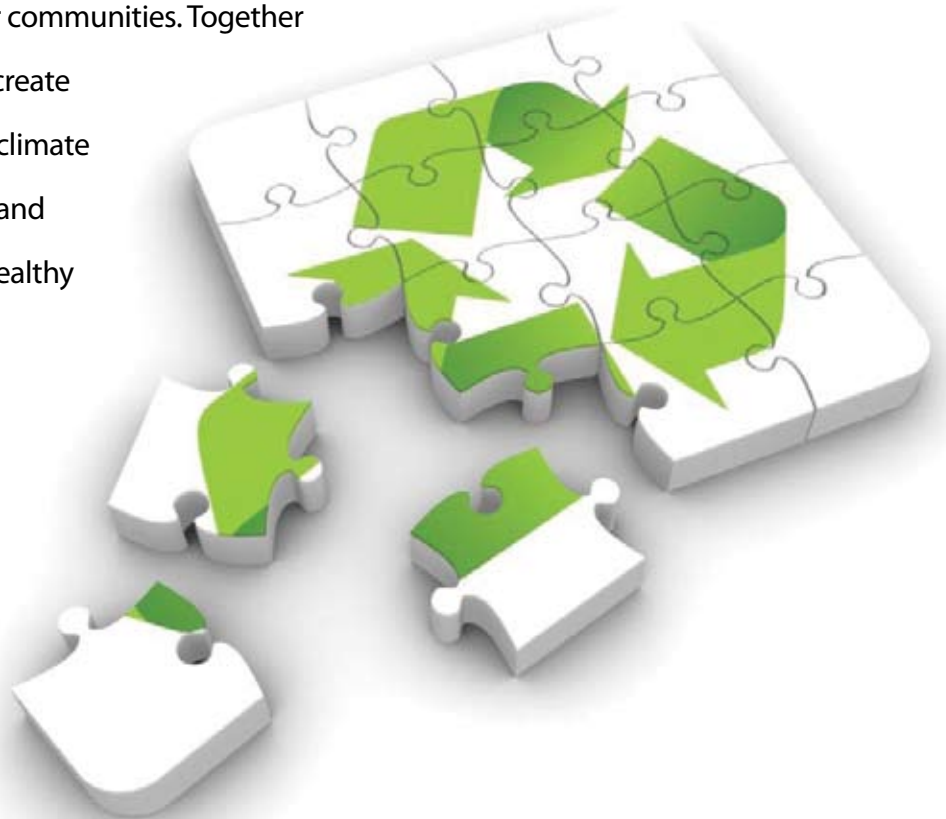
The Partnership and affiliates share the goal of developing powerful local organizations that pursue and win campaigns that connect and enhance worker and community organizing, expand democracy and combat poverty by raising job standards and addressing the needs of low-income communities. We share a commitment to building labor and community power and base-building, developing new leaders and organizing strong regional and national alliances based on mutual self-interest and respect. We maintain a commitment to racial justice and believe that regional organizing around power-building agendas can help transform the poverty and inequality that are endemic to metropolitan regions.

## **T**ransforming the way local governments manage trash






promises to improve conditions in many cities by turning bad jobs into good jobs, creating new employment, decreasing pollution, and lowering costs. Cities can move toward zero waste and capture a range of worker, community, and environmental benefits by introducing new systems for managing trash.

Some cities are adopting a new approach toward recycling that delivers a range of public benefits. Sustainable recycling combines robust recycling programs with high road job quality and economic development policies. This approach contrasts with what exists in many cities, where there are low recycling rates and little attention is paid to the environment, workers, or communities. Together the elements of sustainable recycling create trash management systems that fight climate change, create family-sustaining jobs, and support strong local economies and healthy communities.

This vision of clean, thriving cities requires policymakers and leaders to take an aggressive and proactive stance toward tackling trash problems.



## A sustainable recycling system includes the following elements:

				
<p><b>Complete recycling programs</b> and outreach campaigns that create widespread participation in residential and commercial programs and tackle food scraps and construction and demolition waste.</p>	<p><b>Zero waste source reduction and reuse strategies</b> that reduce trash generation.</p>	<p><b>Standards that maximize environmental justice benefits</b> by addressing the disproportionate impact the industry's facilities have on low-income communities and communities of color and requiring the use of clean natural gas trucks and efficient routes.</p>	<p><b>High road job quality policies</b> that ensure workers earn family-sustaining wages, receive health care benefits, have a voice on the job, and receive the training they need to stay safe and advance their careers.</p>	<p><b>Economic development policies</b> including tax incentives, procurement policies, and infrastructure development that promote the expansion of the recycling-reliant manufacturing industry.</p>

The elements of sustainable recycling are best supported by strong management systems, like franchise agreements and service contracts, that empower cities to set environmental, economic, and operational standards.

Cities often use open-market systems to manage relationships with private companies, leaving them without the regulatory tools needed to set standards. Under an open-market system, haulers can obtain a license or permit to pick up trash by filling out a few forms. In Los Angeles, the

**To learn more about the how the Don't Waste LA campaign is addressing these challenges see page 13.**

commercial open-market system resulted in 125 private commercial haulers, limiting the city's ability to provide oversight or enforce standards. This system takes a toll on infrastructure with several different trucks picking up trash on the same street on the same day. Customers face inconsistent services and rates, with some customers paying four times more than others and no guarantee that recycling services are offered. The city also misses out on much

needed revenue under this system. Commercial haulers self-report their gross receipts, of which a percentage is paid to the city. An audit of just 12 haulers revealed that receipts were underreported and the city was owed \$1.3 million. Finally, commercial collection truck drivers face dangerous and sometimes fatal working conditions when they are forced to work on faulty vehicles without the proper safety mechanisms or training. This hands-off approach limits cities' ability to set standards that will hold private companies accountable for the impacts they have on workers, communities, and local economies.

Franchise agreements and service contracts support sustainable recycling programs and empower local governments to set standards that hold private trash companies accountable for their impacts. Standards that expand recycling services, create good jobs, promote transparency, and reduce pollution can be incorporated into these management tools. For example, the City of San Jose's franchise agreements have enabled the city to partner with private companies that will help them achieve zero waste. These agreements





## American cities are ripe for sustainable recycling!

**S**ustainable recycling promises to clean up the environment by dramatically increasing recycling while creating a significant number of family-sustaining jobs and building a strong recycling-reliant manufacturing sector. Extensive research led us to findings that indicate both a need for sustainable recycling in major cities across the country and a wealth of opportunities to create it, including:

- **Recycling rates are too low.** *Of the 37 cities surveyed, two-thirds have recycling rates below the national rate of 34 percent. Nearly half of the cities have recycling rates in the teens and single digits.*
- **Our disposal habits are unsustainable.** *Burning trash and burying it in landfills strains local budgets, degrades the quality of life in our communities, and accelerates climate change. The cost of maintaining these destructive disposal habits is just too high.*
- **Sustainable recycling works!** *San Francisco, Seattle, and San Jose are proving that it is possible to dramatically reduce the amount of trash sent to landfills and build a thriving recycling sector that uplifts workers and promotes economic development. These cities should be looked to as models and hubs of innovation.*
- **Recycling-reliant manufacturing will help the environment and local economies.** *Manufacturing with recyclable materials reduces pollution and preserves the natural environment by decreasing our reliance on raw materials. A thriving recycling-reliant manufacturing sector will put hundreds of thousands of people to work and generate economic growth.*
- **Incomplete approaches only produce moderate success.** *Cities like Minneapolis and Chicago have elements of sustainable recycling in place. The lack of a complete approach has kept these cities from fully capturing the environmental, job creation, and economic development benefits of recycling.*
- **Increasing recycling can create good jobs.** *Seattle offers a model for using concrete policy tools to ensure that workers throughout the waste stream earn fair wages and receive health care benefits. Workers benefit from collective bargaining agreements and a living wage policy that is enforced through the city's contracting process.*
- **A wealth of opportunities to do better.** *Each city surveyed presents an opportunity to increase recycling, create good jobs, and lower costs by building on existing programs and, in most cases, taking a more proactive approach toward managing trash.*



give the city the tools needed to set and enforce standards that establish a living wage for haulers, service requirements, emission standards, and franchise fees that are paid to the city. San Jose's sustainable recycling program has resulted in a 70 percent recycling rate.



Cities all across the country face trash problems. Current systems of disposal are expensive, dirty, and short-sighted. New York spends \$300 million a year exporting trash to other states. Detroit has spent the last 20 years servicing debt for an incinerator that it now pays to burn the city's trash. In Los Angeles, landfills could reach capacity as soon as 2014.

In addition to being the most common methods of disposal, landfills and incinerators are also unsustainable. Landfills and incinerators are major producers of greenhouse gasses and toxic air and water pollutants. Landfills produce 34 percent of methane emissions in the US. Incinerators generate dioxins that not only pollute the natural environment; they are a proven source of human carcinogens that cause cancer and developmental problems.

Despite the promise of sustainable recycling, too often cities take a hands-off approach toward trash. On the whole, the waste industry is destructive, exploitative, and expensive. Private waste companies invest heavily in landfills and incinerators. While these methods of disposal are

profitable for the industry, they are accelerating climate change and polluting the natural environment. This industry exploits a vulnerable workforce. Many of the most dangerous jobs pay poverty wages and are staffed by people of color, immigrants, and temporary workers. Trash management is also expensive for cities. In a time when most cities struggle with budget deficits, they are missing an opportunity to lower costs by taking a hands-off approach toward managing private trash companies

Some cities are proving that there is a better way of managing trash. San Francisco, San Jose, and Seattle have created sustainable recycling systems that combine effective recycling programs with high road job quality and economic development policies. Not only are these programs producing some of the highest recycling rates in the country, they are also creating good jobs, spurring innovation, and shifting the way residents and businesses think about trash. These successes are the result of robust residential and commercial recycling programs that are supported by public education campaigns that generate widespread participation. In addition, these cities are tackling the challenges of construction and demolition (C&D) waste and food scraps to maximize recycling. All of these programs are supported by strong management systems that promote industry accountability and transparency, and policies that establish job quality standards and promote economic development.




Policymakers and local leaders have an opportunity to develop sustainable recycling programs in many of America's largest cities. Transforming the way cities deal with trash will create stronger local economies and communities by putting hundreds of thousands of people to work in good family-sustaining jobs. This model of recycling will deliver large-scale environmental fixes by helping curb climate change. According to the Tellus Institute's report *More Jobs, Less Pollution*, building on best practices and increasing recycling by 40 percent would create 1.5 million jobs and double greenhouse gas emissions reductions.

Sustainable recycling can be achieved in American cities. Together these local transformations will deliver large-scale benefits for the environment, workers, communities, and the economy. In-depth research and interviews with city staff revealed how 37 major cities manage trash and recycling. Our analysis proves that there is a path to sustainable recycling in each city.

A handful of cities have built sustainable recycling programs; however, most cities lack a comprehensive approach. Some cities have many of the elements of a complete recycling program in place, but have taken an uneven approach toward raising standards for workers. Many cities have incomplete recycling programs that only address residential trash. In these cases, residential

haulers are the only workers that benefit from job quality standards. Finally, there are many more cities that, for a variety of reasons, have limited recycling programs. Regardless of the variations, the opportunity to build a sustainable recycling program exists in each city.

The chart below depicts the progress America's most populous cities have made toward developing sustainable recycling programs. Each city is placed on this chart based on current recycling programs and workforce and economic development policies. The cities that have made the most progress, like San Francisco, appear at the top of the chart. Cities that are just getting started, like Columbus and Dallas, appear at the bottom of the chart.

RECYCLING SYSTEM	HIGH ROAD JOBS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICIES		
	High road jobs throughout the waste stream and economic development	Some high road jobs and efforts to promote economic development	Potential to create high road jobs and promote economic development
 <p><b>COMPLETE</b></p>	San Francisco San Jose Seattle	Austin Oakland	Portland
 <p><b>INTERMEDIATE</b></p>	Cincinnati	Boston Chicago Los Angeles* Minneapolis New York	Philadelphia Riverside Sacramento San Diego San Antonio
 <p><b>NO/EARLY-STAGE</b></p>		Atlanta Detroit Denver Miami Milwaukee	Phoenix Pittsburgh St. Louis Washington, DC Baltimore Charlotte Cleveland Columbus Dallas Houston Kansas City Las Vegas Memphis Orlando Tampa

\*Los Angeles recently decided to develop an exclusive franchise system with rigorous job and economic development standards which will change its position on the matrix.








# Understanding trash and recycling systems in 37 major American cities



## RESEARCH — AND — ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

**W**e conducted a survey of the principal cities of the 37 largest metropolitan statistical areas in the country to learn as much as we could about how each city manages trash and the potential for developing sustainable recycling programs. We conducted two phases of research. The first phase consisted of a detailed public documents analysis that focused on city waste management plans, recycling reports, and local news searches. Through this process we created a detailed picture of recycling programs and goals, management systems and relationships with private companies, and the issues surrounding recycling reported by local news sources. This research was followed by in-depth interviews with the staff that coordinate, direct, and manage recycling and waste management departments in each of the cities. Throughout this second phase of research we developed a more nuanced picture of the recycling and waste management landscape in each city. Each city was then placed on a matrix according to its progress toward developing a complete recycling system and creating high road jobs and economic development. The following table lists the criteria used to place each city on the matrix:

RECYCLING SYSTEM	HIGH ROAD JOBS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
 <p><b>COMPLETE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comprehensive plan for residential &amp; commercial waste</li> <li>Recycling goal over 70%</li> <li>Programs for C&amp;D and food waste</li> <li>Strong accountability system for residential &amp; commercial collection (franchise, contracts, or ordinances)</li> <li>Strong source reduction policies (i.e. recycling mandates, Pay-As-You-Throw, etc.)</li> </ul>	<p><b>High road jobs throughout the waste stream and economic development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active in developing end markets/taking a holistic approach toward developing a recycling sector (i.e. investing in infrastructure, oversight of processing, procurement policies, tax incentives, etc.)</li> <li>Industry-specific job quality standards for hauling and sorting (i.e. union contracts, living wage ordinance, prevailing wage, worker retention, skill certification)</li> </ul>
 <p><b>INTERMEDIATE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Programs for residential &amp; commercial waste</li> <li>Recycling goal between 50% and 70%</li> <li>Developing programs for C&amp;D or food waste</li> <li>Opportunities to create stronger management systems (transition from open market/strengthen franchise agreements, contracts)</li> <li>Some or considering source reduction programs (i.e. recycling mandates, Pay-As-You-Throw, RecycleBank, etc.)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Some high road jobs and efforts to promote economic development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some efforts to develop markets and manufacturing sector</li> <li>Either partial industry-specific job quality standards, or good standards in parts of the industry</li> <li>Two or more existing progressive job quality policies (i.e. living wage, local hire, etc.)</li> </ul>
 <p><b>NO/EARLY-STAGE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some programs for residential or commercial waste</li> <li>No recycling goal or goal below 50%</li> <li>No programs C&amp;D or food waste</li> <li>Weak or limited management systems</li> <li>No/minimal source reduction programs</li> </ul>	<p><b>Potential to create high road jobs and promote economic development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No/limited efforts to develop markets</li> <li>No/limited efforts to increase job quality</li> </ul>








This report is accompanied by an appendix that includes profiles of each of the 37 cities surveyed for this report. A preview of the profiles is included below. The full appendix is available on our website at:

[forworkingfamilies.org/resources/publications/transforming-trash-urban-america](http://forworkingfamilies.org/resources/publications/transforming-trash-urban-america)

Profile Preview



 POPULATION	593,820
 RECYCLING RATE	63%
 RECYCLING PROGRAMS	Mandatory Single-family Recycling & Food Scrap Mandatory Multi-family Recycling Mandatory Commercial Recycling & Food Scrap Construction & Demolition Recycling
 MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS	Single-family Residential: Non-Exclusive Franchise Agreements  Multi-family/Commercial: Open Market (with recycling ordinance that sets service & operational standards)
 HIGH ROAD ECONOMIC POLICIES	Sustainable Procurement Policy

**Portland has one of the highest recycling rates** in the country and is striving toward 75 percent by 2015. The city's highly effective recycling programs benefit from high participation among residents, institutions, and businesses fostered by recycling mandates and Pay-As-You-Throw programs. Although Portland has a living wage ordinance and local hire requirements, these standards are not incorporated into current agreements with private companies. Portland's recycling system could be improved by applying high road job quality standards to the trash and recycling industry.

Sources:

Portland Bureau of Planning & Sustainability, interview with Arianne Sperry; Portland Recycles! Plan (2008); Metro Council Garbage & Recycling Division



The need for an alternative to our unsustainable disposal habits is clear. The ingredients of sustainable recycling promise to transform trash systems, creating a greener, more prosperous future in America's cities. This approach requires cities to maximize recycling at houses, apartment buildings, businesses, and institutions and tackle the challenges of food scraps and construction and demolition waste. Good safe jobs must be created throughout the entire waste stream, which includes both residential and commercial haulers and workers at recycling facilities. Efforts must be made to expand the markets for recyclable materials and the recycling-reliant manufacturing sector. Finally, sustainable recycling programs need to be supported by strong management systems that hold private companies accountable, creating an efficient, low impact, cost effective system.

While the cities surveyed have various pieces of the recycling puzzle in place, there is a path toward sustainable recycling in every city. Current recycling systems and opportunities to improve fall into four broad categories including:

- ➊ **Sustainable recycling** — These cities have the ingredients of sustainable recycling in place and prove that it is possible to build a system that delivers high recycling rates, good jobs, and economic benefits. Each city has developed expansive recycling programs and implemented policies that raise standards for workers throughout the waste stream and promote economic development. These cities are models of sustainable recycling and centers of innovation as they strive to expand the amount of materials that can be processed, reused, and remanufactured.
- ➋ **Approaching sustainable recycling** — Although these cities have many elements of sustainable recycling in place, there is still room to improve. These programs fall short of sustainable recycling with gaps in the management systems for recycling programs and an uneven approach toward raising standards for workers and promoting economic development. As a result these cities present opportunities to improve by fully utilizing strong management systems to support existing recycling programs and taking a more aggressive approach toward raising worker standards and promoting economic development.
- ➌ **Fragmented recycling** — This group of cities has some of the elements of sustainable recycling in place, but lacks a comprehensive approach that will deliver environmental, economic and community benefits. The recycling programs and efforts to raise standards for workers are incomplete. Most of these cities have residential recycling programs, but commercial trash is often unregulated. While city hauling crews may be union, little has been done to raise standards for commercial haulers and recycling facility workers. Filling in the gaps in recycling programs, transitioning to strong management systems, raising job quality standards throughout the waste stream, and promoting economic development will get these cities closer to sustainable recycling.
- ➍ **Limited recycling programs** — For a variety of reasons, the cities in this category are in the beginning stages of developing sustainable recycling programs and report some of the lowest recycling rates in the country. Most of these cities lack citywide recycling programs and nearly all of these cities lack commercial recycling programs. In addition to the environmental benefits of sustainable recycling, these cities are missing the opportunity to create good jobs for residents and economic development. This group of cities cannot afford to miss an opportunity to build sustainable recycling systems that benefit workers, communities, and the environment.




## Sustainable Recycling

**S**an Francisco, Seattle, and San Jose have developed recycling programs that prove sustainable recycling creates good jobs, increases recycling, spurs economic activity, and can save cities money. With some of the highest recycling rates in the country, they are expanding the range of materials they are able to process, reuse, and remanufacture. These systems are nationally recognized for advanced single-family, multi-family, and commercial recycling programs. They also include large scale composting operations that divert millions of tons of food scraps from landfills and effective construction and demolition programs.

Partnerships between city staff, private companies, and local advocates have created multifaceted recycling programs that work for all communities (immigrant, low-income, and communities of color) and locations (schools, restaurants, and

construction companies). Extensive outreach programs have fostered widespread participation.

Management systems, including franchise agreements and service contracts, have enabled these cities to promote accountability and transparency with private industry partners. These management systems have enabled local governments to establish standards that protect and fairly compensate the workers that make recycling possible. These cities use incentives to encourage private companies to produce a high quality and reliable supply of recyclable materials. Policies that help generate demand for these materials have also been enacted. Together, the elements of sustainable recycling work to create good jobs, solve urgent environmental problems, and are creating new economic opportunities for businesses and residents.

RECYCLING SYSTEM	HIGH ROAD JOBS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICIES		
	High road jobs throughout the waste stream and economic development	Some high road jobs and efforts to promote economic development	Potential to create high road jobs and promote economic development
 <b>COMPLETE</b>	<b>San Francisco</b> <b>San Jose</b> <b>Seattle</b>	Austin Oakland	Portland
 <b>INTERMEDIATE</b>	Cincinnati	Boston Chicago Los Angeles Minneapolis New York	Philadelphia Riverside Sacramento San Diego San Antonio
 <b>NO/EARLY-STAGE</b>		Atlanta Detroit Denver Miami Milwaukee	Phoenix Pittsburgh St. Louis Washington, DC Baltimore Charlotte Cleveland Columbus Dallas Houston Kansas City Las Vegas Memphis Orlando Tampa



SUSTAINABLE RECYCLING IN

# Seattle

WASHINGTON

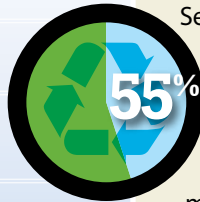


## POPULATION

620,778



## RECYCLING RATE



## RECYCLING PROGRAMS

- Mandatory Residential Recycling & Food Scraps
- Mandatory Commercial Recycling & Food Scraps
- Construction & Demolition Waste Bans



## MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

- Service Contracts for Residential & Commercial



## HIGH ROAD JOB & ECONOMIC POLICIES

- Haulers:  
Collective bargaining agreements & prevailing wage
- Recycling workers:  
Living wage
- Green Purchasing Program
- Risk Sharing with Recycling Processors

**T**he City of Seattle has effectively developed both elements of sustainable recycling, creating a system that decreases landfill disposal, creates good jobs, and delivers a more effective, lower cost system. Along with San Francisco and San Jose, Seattle is a model of sustainable recycling and a hub of recycling innovation.

Seattle's rising recycling rate of 55 percent is the result of increasingly aggressive efforts to expand programs and opportunities to divert trash from landfills.<sup>1</sup> In 2004, the city banned all recyclable materials from trash containers. Five years later, the separation of food scraps from recyclables and trash at residential and commercial locations became mandatory. Seattle benefits from widespread participation in its recycling programs with a 70 percent recycling rate among single-family homes. The city is particularly focused on increasing participation at multi-family buildings and has developed extensive outreach campaigns for institutions like schools, businesses, and immigrant communities. Subsidy programs that assist with the cost of collection services are also available for low-income residents. Seattle has also taken steps to divert construction waste from landfills. Bans on disposing concrete, brick, and asphalt in landfills will soon be expanded to include wood and cardboard.

These comprehensive programs are supported by a strong management system that enables the city to set environmental and job quality standards, and promote growth in the recycling sector. The city is divided into two service area contracts, each serviced by one private company. The contract requires that haulers earn a prevailing wage<sup>2</sup> of approximately \$25 per hour, and also allows employees to be covered by a collective bargaining agreement ensuring workers earn family-sustaining wages and receive health care benefits. All processing contractors are also required to pay a living wage of \$13 per hour and provide health care benefits at recycling facilities. These requirements have created more than 1,000 family-sustaining jobs for Seattle residents.

Service contracts have also empowered the city to more accurately track the amount of trash diverted from landfills and direct trash to certain facilities to create a more efficient system. Contracts with recycling facility operators are also used to encourage market development by absorbing some of the risk

<sup>1</sup> City recycling rates reflect a wide range of methodologies and criteria. These variances make comparisons of recycling rates challenging. Florida cities include trash that is incinerated in recycling rates. Meanwhile Seattle uses a more rigorous method that only includes materials that are truly recycled. For the purposes of this report, recycling rates are used rather than diversion rates which can be more generously calculated.

<sup>2</sup> A prevailing wage is the hourly wage paid to workers in a given area as determined by a governing agency through industry and occupation surveys.







associated with the fluctuating prices of recyclable materials. When prices for recyclables are high, the city is actually able to generate revenue from this agreement; however, when the prices are low, the city absorbs some of the processors' losses.

Finally, a strong contracting system gives the city the tools needed to enforce standards and penalize private companies that do not satisfy workforce and service obligations. Most recently, Waste Management paid a \$1.24 million settlement to the city for missed residential and commercial collection services due to the company's failure to reach an agreement with striking recycling drivers who were underpaid.

## Approaching Sustainable Recycling

**W**hile this group of cities is ahead of the curve in many ways, there is still room to improve. These cities have developed aggressive programs that increase recycling, but have taken a more uneven approach toward raising job standards throughout the waste stream.

These recycling systems can be improved in three ways: utilizing strong management systems to enforce and support existing recycling programs, expanding polices to raise job quality standards throughout the waste stream, and supporting the development of local recycling-reliant manufacturing.

RECYCLING SYSTEM	HIGH ROAD JOBS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICIES		
	High road jobs throughout the waste stream and economic development	Some high road jobs and efforts to promote economic development	Potential to create high road jobs and promote economic development
 <b>COMPLETE</b>	San Francisco San Jose Seattle	<b>Austin</b> <b>Oakland</b>	<b>Portland</b>
 <b>INTERMEDIATE</b>	Cincinnati	Boston Chicago Los Angeles Minneapolis New York	Philadelphia Riverside Sacramento San Diego San Antonio
 <b>NO/EARLY-STAGE</b>		Atlanta Detroit Denver Miami Milwaukee	Phoenix Pittsburgh St. Louis Washington DC Baltimore Charlotte Cleveland Columbus Dallas Houston Kansas City Las Vegas Memphis Orlando Tampa



**APPROACHING SUSTAINABLE RECYCLING IN**

**Oakland**  
CALIFORNIA



**POPULATION**

395,817



**RECYCLING RATE**



**RECYCLING PROGRAMS**

- Mandatory Residential and commercial recycling
- New requirement for food scrap collection in 2014
- Construction & Demolition Recycling Requirements



**MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS**

- Residential & Commercial Trash and Residential Recycling: Franchise Agreements
- Commercial Recycling: Open Market



**HIGH ROAD JOB & ECONOMIC POLICIES**

- Residential & Commercial Trash and Residential Recycling: Collective bargaining agreements
- Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy
- Ban the Box and local hire included in RFP

**Oakland** is an example of a city that appears to be ahead of the curve—with advanced recycling programs and strong environmental and labor movements—but Oakland is at a crossroads. Despite strong recycling policies, the standards for workers who handle the waste and recycling materials are amongst the worst in the region. Additionally, the city’s goal of achieving zero waste will remain a plan on paper unless there is a change in policy to ensure equitable and efficient recycling programs that rely on a skilled workforce, infrastructure, source separation, community education, and setting standards for commercial, organics, and other non-traditional recycling. Local advocates led by the East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy have identified three opportunities to build a more sustainable recycling model in Oakland that will help move the city forward to its goal of becoming a zero waste municipality including: introducing job quality standards for recycling workers, developing stronger systems for managing non-traditional recycling, and exploring countywide strategies for building sustainable recycling throughout the region.

Oakland’s successful recycling programs are supported by a framework of strong state, county, and city ordinances aimed at reducing landfill disposal. These ordinances require single- and multi-family residences, businesses, institutions, and construction and demolition contractors to recycle. In addition to a strong legal framework, the City of Oakland adopted a Zero Waste Strategic Plan in 2006, which established a goal of reaching a 90 percent recycling rate by 2020.

Although Oakland has established residential recycling programs, gaps in its regulatory structure are preventing the city from capturing the full benefits of sustainable recycling. Strong management systems for residential trash and recycling and commercial trash are increasing recycling, generating revenue for the city, and creating family-sustaining jobs. In contrast, a more hands-off approach toward managing the city’s relationships with commercial recycling companies and recycling processors results in low-wage, dangerous jobs and a missed opportunity to increase recycling, generate revenue and create living wage jobs.

Residential and commercial trash collection and residential recycling are managed through franchise agreements. Each of these agreements gives the right to collect trash and recyclables to one or two private companies. These

agreements have enabled the city to establish high road job quality standards for haulers and aggressive environmental standards. These workers benefit from collective bargaining agreements that ensure they receive fair compensation and have a safe work environment. Franchisees employ Oakland residents as full-time workers under a collective bargaining agreement that delivers family-sustaining wages, health benefits, and a safe work environment. Trash collection franchisees are also required to pay fees to the city, which generates about \$28.8 million annually in revenue.

In contrast, commercial recycling and processing facilities, operate under an open-market system. The open-market system creates gaps in service, quality of commodities for reuse, reporting, and enforcement. The city and county cannot accurately track the amount or type of commercial organics and non-traditional recyclables collected under this system, leading to inaccurate tonnage counts and no guarantee of maximizing recycling. Under the open market system there are no standards that protect material processing workers from hazardous conditions or substances, or that ensure recyclables are processed locally to their most effective use.

The working conditions at recycling facilities are also left out of Oakland's regulatory framework. A survey conducted by the East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy and labor and occupational health allies shed light on low-wage dangerous jobs that are staffed primarily by people of color and immigrants. Some recycling facility workers earn wages as low as \$10 per hour, well below the City of Oakland living wage and wages of comparable jobs in San Francisco and San Jose. The survey also found gaps in the enforcement of health and safety regulations resulting in 70 percent of material handlers reporting injuries and illnesses as a result of their work.

Despite robust programs for residential and commercial trash and residential recycling programs that increase recycling and create high road jobs for haulers, material processing remains a dangerous and low quality job. Oakland can create a complete and more successful sustainable recycling system by filling in regulatory gaps and raising job quality standards throughout the waste stream.

## Cleaning Up Trash in Los Angeles

**Transforming the way a major city manages trash** is a serious undertaking, but a strong coalition in Los Angeles is proving that it can be done. Transitioning the open-market commercial trash system to a franchise system creates a more sustainable recycling program in Los Angeles that benefits the environment, communities, workers, and the city budget.

Don't Waste LA — a comprehensive effort to overhaul Los Angeles' broken commercial waste management system— is leveraging the combined power of environmentalists, community leaders, and trash and recycling workers to transform Los Angeles' private waste industry. Three years ago, these groups launched a campaign to address the overflowing landfills, noxious recycling facilities and diesel spewing trash trucks, as well as the struggles of recycling and trash workers, that are emblematic of Los Angeles' *Wild West* commercial waste sector. Under the leadership of the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, the coalition has built public support for a comprehensive structural overhaul of the city's system — and is working to create a model for the rest of the country. Toward

that end, the city council recently adopted Don't Waste LA's proposal for an exclusive franchise for commercial and multi-family trash pickup. This new system will result in fair rates for small businesses, greater recycling and decreased reliance on landfills, more revenue to the city, and greater standards and accountability for the workers and communities regularly impacted by the city's trash.

Next, the coalition is turning its attention toward exploited workers at recycling facilities and strategies for developing local recycling-reliant manufacturing. Like most cities, the working conditions at recycling facilities in Los Angeles are dangerous and workers are exposed to a number of toxic and hazardous materials. These jobs are staffed by people of color, immigrants, women, and temporary workers who earn poverty wages. Raising the working standards at these facilities is a big step toward creating a high road system in Los Angeles. The coalition is also exploring ways to capture the benefits of the economic activity that could be generated by expanding local recycling-reliant manufacturing.






## Fragmented Recycling

**W**ith some element of sustainable recycling in place, this group of cities presents numerous opportunities to transform the way trash is managed. For example, Chicago and Cincinnati lack complete recycling programs. Both cities have residential recycling programs, but these services are not available throughout the entire city. The first step for these cities is to expand programs into citywide programs. The City of Philadelphia has an effective recycling program for residents and requires businesses to have recycling plans. A weak management system for commercial trash limits the city's ability to enforce existing requirements or set standards that would expand services and raise standards for workers. In order for Philadelphia to have a complete recycling program, it would also

need to develop programs for food scraps and construction and demolition waste.

In addition to expanding recycling programs, many of these cities need stronger systems for managing relationships with private companies. Most of these cities use an open-market system to manage trash haulers and only require them to register with the city. In these cases cities have limited, if any, ability to establish service, job quality, or environmental standards. To remedy this, Cincinnati is in the process of transitioning to a franchise system that will limit the number of haulers and empower the city to provide oversight and set standards. This system will promote a competitive environment that will keep rates low and also encourage the expansion of services.

RECYCLING SYSTEM	HIGH ROAD JOBS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICIES		
	High road jobs throughout the waste stream and economic development	Some high road jobs and efforts to promote economic development	Potential to create high road jobs and promote economic development
 <b>COMPLETE</b>	San Francisco San Jose Seattle	Austin Oakland	Portland
 <b>INTERMEDIATE</b>	Cincinnati	<b>Boston</b> <b>Chicago</b> <b>Los Angeles</b> <b>Minneapolis</b> <b>New York</b>	<b>Philadelphia</b> <b>Riverside</b> <b>Sacramento</b> <b>San Diego</b> <b>San Antonio</b>
 <b>NO/EARLY-STAGE</b>		Atlanta Detroit Denver Miami Milwaukee	Phoenix Pittsburgh St. Louis Washington DC
			Baltimore Charlotte Cleveland Columbus Dallas Houston
			Kansas City Las Vegas Memphis Orlando Tampa



Many of these cities do not have to start from scratch to raise standards for workers as the recycling industry grows. Coalitions of community and labor advocates have won local hire policies that ensure poor people and people of color have access to new job creation, require that workers are paid a living wage and receive health benefits, and give workers a voice on the job. These cities have the opportunity to build on progressive worker policies by applying them to the growing recycling sector, ensuring that good jobs are being created for local residents. For example, Boston, New York, and San Antonio all have living wage ordinances. Each of these cities could incorporate its existing living wage requirements into contracts and agreements with private companies ensuring that jobs throughout the waste stream are good jobs.

Promoting the growth of the reuse and recycling-reliant sector will deliver significant environmental

and economic benefits. Recycling-reliant manufacturing will reduce society's dependence on raw materials. Expanding recycling-reliant manufacturing will reduce toxic emissions associated with the extraction process — the most polluting phase of the product lifecycle. This vision requires local governments to make policy decisions that will encourage growth within this sector including, subsidies, tax incentives, infrastructure development, and procurement policies. The growth of this sector will not only clean up the environment, it will also create a significant number of jobs. If the U.S. increased recycling by 40 percent over the next 20 years, one million recycling reliant manufacturing and reuse jobs would be created. This is especially exciting for formerly industrial cities like Chicago and Cleveland, as it is an opportunity to rebuild domestic manufacturing, create more jobs, and strengthen the local economies.





**POPULATION**

387,753



**RECYCLING RATE**  
Residential only



**RECYCLING PROGRAMS**

- Mandatory Residential & Commercial Recycling
- Food Scrap Pilot Program



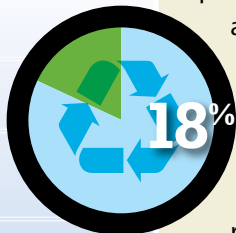
**MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS**

- Residential: Municipal/Consortium
- Commercial: Open Market



**HIGH ROAD JOB & ECONOMIC POLICIES**

- Residential Haulers: Collective bargaining
- Recycling Workers: Living Wage
- Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy



**Three factors are driving momentum** to build a sustainable recycling program in Minneapolis: a recent transition to a more streamlined recycling program, a goal to increase recycling by 17 percent, and existing policies that raise standards for workers throughout the waste stream. This momentum creates an opportunity to develop a more comprehensive program, strengthen management systems, and ensure that the existing job quality standards stay in place as the sector expands.

Although mandatory recycling was recently expanded to include commercial establishments and some institutions, Minneapolis' recycling programs primarily focus on residential trash. The city is currently running a small scale food scrap pilot program for households, which are delivered to a private composting facility. A recent shift to a single-stream recycling program for residential trash no longer requires residents to sort recyclables by material.

Minneapolis has a unique consortium structure for managing residential trash. Half of residential trash and recyclables are collected by the city, the other half are collected by Minneapolis Refuse Inc., which is a consortium of small haulers that provide services throughout the city. In addition to setting standards for the services the haulers offer, the contracts require that workers earn a living wage of \$12.19 per hour plus health benefits, or be represented by a collective bargaining agreement. The private companies that operate recycling facilities are also required to pay a living wage.

While the city has strong systems in place for residential waste and recycling facilities, it has taken a much more hands-off approach toward commercial trash. The city is struggling to enforce the mandatory recycling ordinance at commercial establishments. Minneapolis has an open market system for commercial trash through which haulers must obtain a license from the county. The standards that are established by this system are limited to insurance. Although commercial establishments are required to recycle, the city is left without the tools needed to ensure that private haulers are providing recycling services to businesses. As a result, most commercial trash is sent to the incinerator.

Transitioning the current open market system to a stronger management system would expand recycling, reduce reliance on incineration, and create a vehicle for raising job quality for haulers, moving the city closer to sustainable recycling.

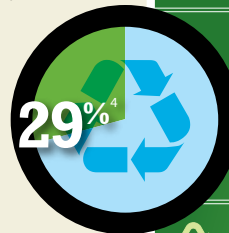
**A**lthough New York City is a leader in sustainability in the transit and green building sectors, it lags behind when it comes to recycling. With some elements of a sustainable recycling program in place, there are several opportunities to improve the city's recycling programs and introduce high road policies. The opportunities to improve include: building more comprehensive recycling programs, creating a stronger regulatory system for commercial trash and recycling, raising job standards throughout the waste stream, building on previous environmental justice victories to mitigate the impacts of the expanding industry, and supporting the growth of local recycling-reliant manufacturing.

In New York City, residential and commercial recycling is required by law, but the recycling programs in place lack the scope, scale, and participation needed to significantly reduce the amount of trash that is sent to landfills. The residential and commercial recycling rates are just 17 and 30 percent, respectively. The City recently announced a plan to increase the residential recycling rate to 30 percent by 2017, but has not made public any plans to increase the commercial recycling rate. Currently, infrastructure is inadequate to recycle several important parts of the waste stream: food scrap organics, construction and demolition waste, and rigid plastics that make up half of New York City's recyclable plastics.<sup>3</sup> In order for New York City to achieve its 75 percent recycling goal by 2030, the City must expand the scale of existing recycling programs and build strong management systems needed to support complete recycling programs and high-road job and economic development policies.

New York City also lacks the strong private sector management systems that are needed to support complete recycling programs and high road job and economic development policies. Residential trash and recyclables are collected by the city. City collection workers are represented by one of the strongest unions in New York, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 831, also known as the Uniformed Sanitationmen's Association. The city also developed a *Clean Fleet Program* that placed particulate filters on more than 1,500 city-owned collection trucks, reducing emitted diesel particulate matter by 90 percent.

<sup>3</sup> The city will begin accepting rigid plastics once the South Brooklyn Marine Terminal recycling facility comes online.

<sup>4</sup> New York City generated over 14 million tons of solid waste in 2011. Just 29 percent of residential, commercial, and construction and demolition (non-fill) waste was diverted from landfills and incinerators via recycling.



FRAGMENTED RECYCLING IN

# New York City

**POPULATION**

8,244,910

**RECYCLING RATE**

**RECYCLING PROGRAMS**

- Mandatory Residential & Commercial Recycling

**MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS**

- Residential: Municipal
- Commercial: Open Market

**HIGH ROAD JOB & ECONOMIC POLICIES**

- Residential Haulers: Collective bargaining agreement
- Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy





Commercial trash and recycling operates under an open-market system and does not produce the workforce or environmental benefits of the residential system.<sup>5</sup> More than 230 private companies collect commercial trash in New York City. The city has focused much of its regulatory power on combatting a long history of corruption and mob activity in this industry. A franchise system for commercial waste collection would offer a comprehensive solution to the workforce, efficiency, and environmental issues of the private hauling industry. It would establish worker standards, efficient truck routes, a clean truck program, and fair and standard rates for trash collection that incentivize recycling. Job quality standards should also be expanded to cover recycling facility workers.

As New York City expands recycling programs and infrastructure, it is critical that the impacts of the system are equitably distributed across the city. The city's dense population and scarce land means that trash and recycling facilities are located in residential areas. The majority of private waste transfer and recycling facilities handling commercial trash are sited in low-income communities of color. These communities bear the brunt—in the form of diesel emissions from trucks and air and noise pollution from the facilities—of handling the vast majority of commercial trash. New York City's environmental justice organizations won a historic victory in 2006, moving the city to locate new marine waste

transfer stations equitably throughout the five boroughs. Environmental justice advocates are building on this victory to oppose incineration schemes and ensure that new recycling facilities are equitably distributed.

Finally, increasing recycling and local recycling-reliant manufacturing capacity could create tens of thousands of new jobs and mitigate the environmental impacts of the current system. New York City spends \$300 million per year exporting trash to landfills. Not only is the current system expensive, long-haul trucks emit diesel particulates as they transport trash. By exporting trash to landfills, instead of recycling it locally, an opportunity to create a significant number of jobs and reduce pollution is lost.

There are a wealth of opportunities to build a sustainable recycling program in New York City. ALIGN: The Alliance for a Greater New York is building a coalition of labor, environmental and environmental justice groups to advocate for a transformation of the solid waste system. This coalition is uniting to expand recycling programs, create better systems for managing trash and recycling, raise wages and improve working conditions for workers throughout the waste stream, reduce impacts on low-income communities of color, and expand the local recycling-reliant industry.



<sup>5</sup>Some commercial workers have fought to win a voice on the job and benefit from collective bargaining agreements.








## Limited Recycling

**W**hile many cities have heeded the call for sustainable recycling, some cities are just getting started. In some cases these cities are fighting against incinerators and so-called waste-to-energy schemes. Other cities are in the throes of a budget crisis and improving trash management is not a top priority. As a result, many of these cities are in the beginning stages of building

a sustainable recycling program, with few or none of the program or policy elements in place. Regardless of the challenges these cities face, there is great urgency to improve the way trash is dealt with. These cities cannot afford to miss this opportunity to clean up the environment, create good jobs, spur economic growth, and lower costs by creating sustainable recycling systems.

RECYCLING SYSTEM	HIGH ROAD JOBS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICIES		
	High road jobs throughout the waste stream and economic development	Some high road jobs and efforts to promote economic development	Potential to create high road jobs and promote economic development
 <b>COMPLETE</b>	San Francisco San Jose Seattle	Austin Oakland	Portland
 <b>INTERMEDIATE</b>	Cincinnati	Boston Chicago Los Angeles Minneapolis New York	Philadelphia Riverside Sacramento San Diego San Antonio
 <b>NO/EARLY-STAGE</b>		Atlanta Detroit Denver Miami Milwaukee	Phoenix Pittsburgh St. Louis Washington DC Baltimore Charlotte Cleveland Columbus Dallas Houston Kansas City Las Vegas Memphis Orlando Tampa





LIMITED RECYCLING IN

# Milwaukee

WISCONSIN

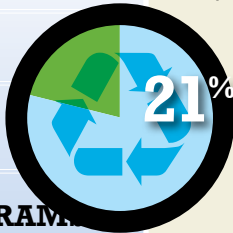


## POPULATION

597,867



## RECYCLING RATE



## RECYCLING PROGRAMS

- Mandatory Residential & Commercial Recycling



## MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

- **Residential:**  
Municipal
- **Commercial:**  
Open Market



## HIGH ROAD JOB & ECONOMIC POLICIES

- **Residential Haulers:**  
Collective bargaining agreement

**A**lthough Milwaukee has few of the program or policy elements in place for creating a sustainable recycling program, momentum is building to transform the way trash is managed. Milwaukee exemplifies the economic development potential of building a sustainable recycling program. Developing strong recycling programs and enacting policies that support the development of recycling-reliant manufacturing could put thousands of people back to work in an economy crippled by the disappearance of industrial jobs over the past 30 years.

Building on existing programs to create sustainable recycling programs promises to increase recycling and spur job creation and economic growth in Milwaukee. The first step toward sustainable recycling is developing complete recycling programs. Milwaukee's piecemeal programs focus primarily on single-family houses and have low participation rates throughout the rest of the waste stream. The city only reports a residential recycling rate of 21 percent, well below the national recycling rate of 34 percent.

Mayoral initiatives and series of laws are creating momentum to develop complete recycling programs in Milwaukee. State laws and city ordinances require recycling at residences, businesses, and institutions. The City of Milwaukee also initiated a 40 by 2020 recycling plan. This plan includes transitioning to a single-stream recycling system, consideration of Pay-As-You-Throw programs, and food scrap pilot programs. Public education campaigns that help residents and businesses overcome barriers to recycling would also help increase participation and recycling rates.

Developing large scale programs for both food scraps and construction and demolition waste would help Milwaukee capture the environmental and job creation benefits of sustainable recycling. Incentivizing collection and composting of all food waste from the residential stream could increase the residential recycling rate by 18 percentage points. Milwaukee's deindustrialization has created a wealth of salvageable building materials. Combined with a projected 2,300 foreclosed homes in the next two years, this provides an important opportunity for Milwaukee to create jobs through the diversion of construction and demolition waste.

Building a sustainable recycling program in Milwaukee is a unique opportunity to develop an enduring manufacturing center fueled by the community's own waste resources. It takes advantage of Milwaukee's substantial industrial land supply and the need for jobs in disadvantaged communities. The city is currently considering placement of an inter-governmental recycling facility. Using the new facility as an anchor, this park



would attract businesses involved in recycling, including organic composting, construction and demolition material reclamation, and electronics disassembly.

Milwaukee has a rich history of passing policies that ensure workers earn family-sustaining wages and receive benefits, and that low-income people and communities of color have access to new job creation. The expansion of the recycling and recycling-reliant manufacturing industry presents an opportunity to build on previous wins for workers and communities. Applying local hire and living wage policies to the emerging industry and protecting workers' right to organize would help revitalize an economy that has been devastated by the demise of the manufacturing industry.

Citizen Action of Wisconsin is developing a campaign that would pursue multiple strategies to create new jobs, while repurposing industrial land, and reclaiming valuable building materials from foreclosed properties. This campaign would create a more sustainable recycling program in Milwaukee, delivering increased recycling, job creation, and economic development.

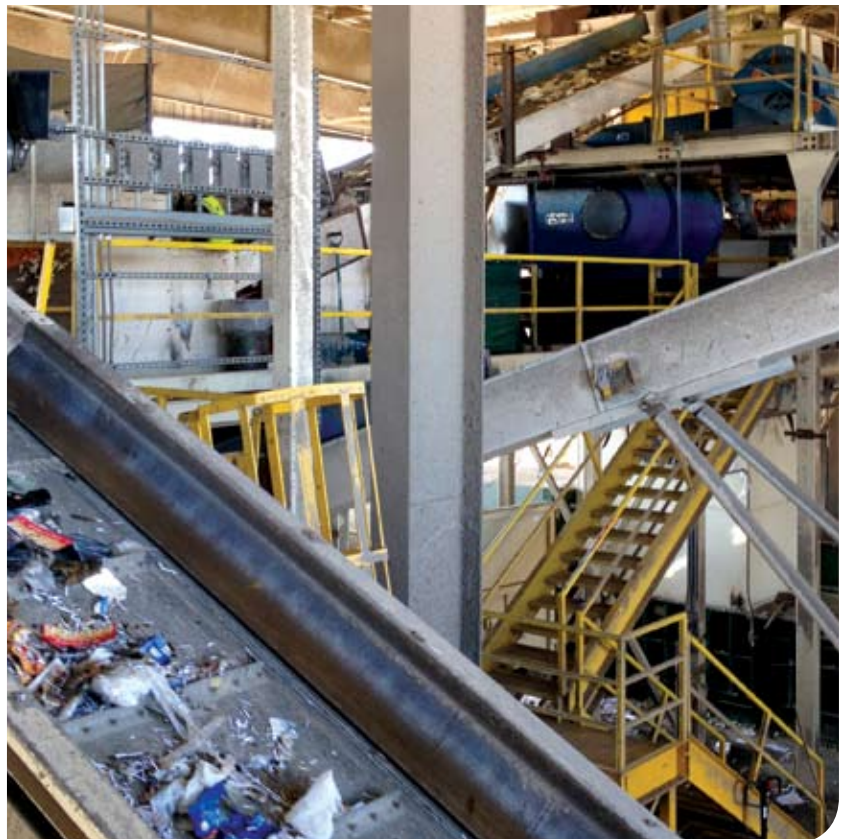
## Local change, large scale impact

**O**ur in-depth analysis of trash systems in the largest metropolitan areas in the country demonstrates that sustainable recycling is more than just a vision: it is a reality. San Francisco, San Jose, and Seattle prove that sustainable recycling works for the environment, communities, and workers.

Cities in every region of the country are taking on the challenge of finding more responsible and sustainable ways to deal with trash. Each city has a unique starting point and obstacles to overcome on the path to sustainable recycling, but the opportunities to create good jobs while creating better systems for managing trash are numerous.

Capturing these opportunities will mark a transformation in how trash is thought of and dealt with in the United States. Building on the best practices and increasing recycling by 40 percent would create 1.5 million jobs and double greenhouse gas emissions reductions. Local leaders have to push local governments to utilize policy and regulatory tools that will enable them to take a more proactive approach toward managing trash, delivering more recycling, good jobs, less pollution and more accountability from the waste industry.

We are presented with an opportunity to redefine the relationships local governments have with private companies, and build true partnerships based on accountability and transparency that support healthier, cleaner communities and thriving local economies.



The Partnership for Working Families network, together with allies in labor, the environmental justice and environmental movements, and local governments, is leading the effort to transform the trash industry and make it work for communities, workers, and the environment.

## Join Us and Take Action!

- Learn about the recycling and trash industry in your city. Contact us if you want suggestions on where to start.
- Start a conversation about what you could accomplish by transforming trash with your friends and allies.
- Send an email to [transformingtrash@forworkingfamilies.org](mailto:transformingtrash@forworkingfamilies.org) to get connected to other people who are working to implement a new vision of a sustainable waste and recycling system.
- Look for the profile of trash and recycling systems in your city at:  
[forworkingfamilies.org/resources/publications/transforming-trash-urban-america](http://forworkingfamilies.org/resources/publications/transforming-trash-urban-america).  
Contact us to learn more about creating a sustainable recycling system.



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