

MEASURED RESULTS CASE STUDY



Empathetic Messaging Leads to 20% More Households Opting Into Recycling

Muncie, Indiana



Building a better recycling system means more than delivering carts. Residents have to actively choose to participate, especially in opt-in programs. That is why The Recycling Partnership focuses not just on access, but on action. For more than 10 years, we have partnered with communities to test how education and outreach strategies influence participation, capture, and contamination, all factors that influence recycling rates. Every project builds on what came before. Each sharpens what we know and helps scale what works.

In 2023, Muncie, Indiana launched a new curbside recycling program. To participate, residents needed to request a cart, creating an opportunity to test if message design could influence enrollment.

What We Tested

The Partnership worked with the Muncie Sanitary District to send two types of mailers to single-family homes. Built on the success of the [Reynoldsburg, Ohio project](#), which tested messaging, one mailer used empathetic, visually engaging messaging with bright colors and a comic-style graphic. It was candid.

The other followed a standard approach with an environmental message in blue and green. It was more informative. A third control group received no mailer but may have seen outreach on the city's website, in the media, or at events. Over the seven-week campaign, residents could sign up by phone, mail, email, or online.

Results Were Clear

- 56% of all new enrollments came directly from the mailers
- **Empathetic mailer led to a 20% increase in sign-ups over the control group**
- Standard mailer saw only a 5% increase in sign-ups

Empathetic messaging did more than outperform expectations. It drove real behavior. That is the difference between reaching a household and resonating with one.

Want to Increase Participation?

Start with messaging that connects. Partner with us to scale proven strategies and bring behavioral insights to your program.



Empathetic Mailer: Showing empathy for recycling confusion



Standard Mailer: Instructional