The Recycling Partnership

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Request for Grant/Project Interest

2026 California Recycling Behavior Change and Community Engagement Initiative

Respondents should carefully read this document before submitting an application of interest. Respondents must submit their interest using the included form. No other format will be accepted.

Introduction

The Recycling Partnership (The Partnership) is a U.S. non-profit solving recycling's toughest challenges, together, by tackling programs no single company, community, or policymaker can fix alone. In just over a decade, we have helped over 2 million households gain access to recycling, kept more than 2 billion pounds of material in the system, and helped pass Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) laws that now cover one in five Americans. We do this work shoulder to shoulder with communities, companies, and policymakers, so that change does not just happen — it lasts. Learn more at https://community.recyclingpartnership.org/home.

The Recycling Partnership is looking to fund and deploy innovative projects with California residential recycling programs to accelerate local adoption of recycling best management practices and conduct research on innovative behavior change strategies. This document details an opportunity to work with The Partnership to deploy data-backed recycling behavior change tactics and test new combinations of tactics to measure their impact.

This is an exciting, high-profile opportunity to enhance your community's recycling program using behavior change strategies and technical support provided by experts in the recycling field. Being successful requires a high level of readiness and commitment from the respondent, their elected officials, city/county administrators, and those involved with the community's recycling program, including hauler(s) and the materials recovery facility (MRF) that will support project deployment.

Behavior change, the science of helping people adopt new habits by removing barriers and making desired actions easier and more consistent, is a critical step to increase recycling rates. But how exactly can we get people to change habits for good? Education and outreach are often part of the solution, but research shows that these by themselves are not enough to change behaviors.

Most people want to recycle and believe it matters, yet they face real barriers. Confusion, low confidence, misaligned routines, and infrequent or impersonal communications can interfere with consistent recycling. To close that intention-action gap, we must leverage the science of behavior change, identify friction points for residents, design solutions, and provide supports that make it easy to act on values they already hold.

This Request for Interest (RFI) seeks communities that want to work with The Partnership to deploy proven tactics and test emerging ones in a behaviorally informed, multichannel recycling engagement campaign.

The Partnership is particularly interested in working with communities that meet the following criteria:

- Located in California
- Collect 250–450 pounds of recyclables per household per year.
- Recycling contamination rate below 25%.
- Municipally hauled recycling or a cooperative hauler with reliable reporting.
- Access to MRF or recycling audit data.
- Recycling set out or participation tracking.
- An openness to using collateral from The Partnership with research-backed images, styles, and messaging that may differ from typical community branding.

Funding Goals

The Partnership aims to work with multiple communities to develop and deploy a customized combination of tactics, or "recipe." The recipe will be designed to deliver recycling program improvements by increasing participation and recycling set out rates, improving the capture of quality recyclable materials by focusing on specific container messaging, and building general awareness about recycling as a valuable activity. These tactics will include a

combination of direct-to-resident outreach such as mailers or cart tags, digital solutions and upgrades, surveys, and project measurements.

Specifically for this opportunity, The Partnership aims to deliver a combination of preplanned behavior change tactics to the community. While it is always possible to localize the engagement strategies, we expect minimal deviation from The Partnership's research-backed collateral. The goal is to test, deploy, and measure the effectiveness of these tactics across multiple communities.

While The Partnership anticipates providing grant funds to deploy some of these projects, communities or partners with existing funding or budgets are also encouraged to express interest in moving projects forward with technical support or combined funding.

Eligibility Requirements

1. ***General***
    a. Funding is primarily available for single-family residential curbside recycling programs. However, there is an interest in developing some limited multifamily and drop-off behavior change projects outside of the RFI.
    b. Counties, municipalities, solid waste authorities/districts, and tribes are the primary entities eligible to receive funding.
    c. Recycling collectors/haulers that serve or plan to serve single-family and are responsible for community engagement will be considered.
    d. Funding is only provided for projects specifically designed by The Partnership for deployment of a behavior change project.

2. ***Community Curbside Collection Minimum Requirements*** (if interest is in single-family curbside recycling)
    a. Respondents must have universally provided, cart-based, curbside recycling services for single-family households, meaning a cart has been provided to all homes without a special request. Recycling service costs must be bundled with waste services (i.e., there must not be an additional fee for recycling services).
    b. Communities must provide at least a 65-gallon recycling cart for weekly services and 95-gallon recycling carts for service every other week.

c. At a minimum, communities must have baseline data that includes monthly trash and recycling tonnage, with at least two years of historical data. A community with routing data that can accurately measure recycling set outs and/or household-level participation will be given strong consideration.
d. The community must not have had any major service changes (such as a move from bins to carts or a transition to a new hauler) within the past year or have any service changes planned in the next 18 months.

3. ***Education and Outreach*** – Respondents must be able to outline their existing outreach programs and budgets to establish an understanding of the baseline engagement.

4. ***Measurement Plan*** – Respondents must agree to monitor monthly tonnage data before implementation, after implementation, and five years post-project using The Partnership's developed Solutions Hub (no cost to the community). In some cases, The Partnership may deliver a grant to include additional measurement such as a capture study or MRF audits. Any routing data a community can supply is highly desirable.

5. ***Funding Recognition*** – Respondents must be willing to use The Partnership's logo on engagement materials that have been funded with grant proceeds and to make mutually agreeable acknowledgments indicating the project was partially funded by a grant from The Partnership. This may also include recognition of The Partnership's funding partners. Examples of logo usage are available upon request.

5. Deliverables

The Partnership will collaboratively review the suite of behavior change tactics to deploy in your community based on current program status and community needs.

1. ***Engagement Plan*** **–** At a minimum, the plan will include creative design (localized but not customized); direct-to-resident outreach such as mailers or cart tags; digital strategy, assets, and tracking; required support to update community websites; and collaborative measurement and reporting.
2. ***Technical Assistance*** – Each grant from The Partnership includes support for technical assistance and a project manager to support project deployment.

Respondents must use The Partnership's developed collateral with minimal localization.

6. Timeline

Respondents will be considered on a first-come, first-served basis. The Partnership's goal is to start review and awarding in July 2026. Depending on interest, The Partnership expects to accept applications under this RFI until September 2026. However, we reserve the right to shorten or extend that timeline.

Respondents that are awarded funding for a project will be required to enter into a grant agreement with The Partnership within 2 to 3 months of award. Resultant grant agreements will extend at least one year, with the actual term based on project initiation date and duration.

7. Funding

The Partnership seeks to put behavior change grant funding to work alongside investments from other sources, but there is no requirement that respondents provide a cash match to secure a project or grant funding. Budgets will be collaboratively developed during the scoping process and may be scoped for communitywide project deployment or partial community projects (pilots; A/B testing). Depending on scope it is expected that most grants awarded will be between $100,000 to $300,000.

8. In-Kind Assistance to Grantees

In addition to grant funding, The Partnership offers substantial non-cash assistance to successful grant applicants through dedicated staff support and technical assistance from The Partnership staff for recycling program development and implementation, such as outreach design support.

9. Measurement and Evaluation

In addition to baseline measurement provided by the community and/or their contractors, The Partnership may offer MRF audits, capture rate studies, surveys, or other appropriate

measurement opportunities. At a minimum, QR codes and digital metrics will be tracked and provided.

10. Interest Process and Submittal Requirements

There is no due date for applications of interest. Applications will be accepted on an ongoing basis through September 2026. Interested communities and The Partnership will take approximately 30 days to develop a scope of work and grant agreement. Successful communities should be ready to deploy within two to three months of project and/or funding award approval.

An application of interest should follow the specified format below and must be submitted via email to our grants team at grants@recyclingpartnership.org. Please send the email with the title "Behavior Change Grant Interest". Each respondent will be notified by The Partnership upon receipt of their application. Respondents may include an optional cover letter with their submittal should they wish to provide The Partnership with additional information or address issues not raised in this form.

The Partnership will initiate the development of a grant agreement for applicants selected to receive grant funding. Grant funds will be allocated by The Partnership to successful respondents as determined by The Partnership in its sole and absolute discretion.

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Initial Application of Interest

Applicants must submit their interest using the format outlined below. No other format will be accepted.

1. **<u>Contact Information</u> – Please enter the respondent's contact information and the community (e.g., city or county) where the project will take place.**

    a. **Respondents' organization:**

    b. **Respondent's name and contact information:**

2. **<u>Current Waste and Recycling Program Information</u>**

    a. **Describe how waste and recycling services are currently provided in the community where the project will be implemented. Include type of collection, collection provider, frequency of collection, etc.**

    b. **How many single-family homes are in your service jurisdiction? How many multifamily homes are in your service jurisdiction (if interested in multifamily projects)?**

    c. **If the respondent is a community or a public recycling program, please list the names of local governments and/or geographic jurisdictions served by the current recycling effort. Do you also service multiple units?**

    d. **If the respondent operates a local government/public recycling program, indicate how many tons are collected system-wide per year including trash, organics, bulky items, and recycling. What materials does the recycling program include? If material is currently commingled (collected together), please check that box and the materials collected, or provide a copy or link to your accepted materials list.**

        ☐ Cardboard, tons:
        ☐ Mixed paper, tons:
        ☐ Glass bottles, tons:
        ☐ Aluminum cans, tons:
        ☐ Steel and tin cans, tons:

☐ PET plastic (#1 plastic resin), tons:
PET formats accepted: bottles, cups, clamshells
☐ HDPE plastic (#2 plastic resin), tons:
☐ PP plastic (#5 plastic resin), tons:
PP formats accepted: cups, tubs, trays
☐ Other: _____, tons:
☐ Commingled recyclables, tons:
☐ Collected weekly, please note cart size (95-gallon, 65-gallon):
_____
☐ Collected every other week, please note cart size (95-gallon, 65-gallon):
_____

3. **Describe any recycling program challenges that you hope a behavior change project could address. Please use as much detail as possible.**

4. **Do you know what your community recycling participation or set out rate is? If so, please include that information and how you track/measure this.**

5. **What data do you collect around your recycling and waste collection program? What can you provide upon request?**

6. **Identify the material recovery facility, materials processor/broker, and/or the end markets that will receive, sort, and market the recyclables collected as a part of this project. Describe how the project connects with and/or builds local or regional recycling markets.**

7. **How will the respondent sustain this project once the project is over? What is the estimated amount of staff time the respondents can/will dedicate to operating enhanced behavior change strategies?**

8. **How long does it typically take your organization to fully execute a grant agreement?**

9. **Please add any other comments or information to support the application.**