STRATEGY

“Feet on the Street” (FOTS): Cart Tagging + Mailers

The Recycling Partnership

Deploy cart tagging (four rounds) that provides immediate, specific feedback paired with a simple corrective instruction when contamination is observed. Second offenses trigger rejection of service (recycling not collected) until the contaminant is removed. Share a press release and provide basic instructions by direct mail before and during the program.

Program Type	Primary Impact	Recipe Activation	Evidence Base
✓ **Curbside**	⬜ Participation	⬜ Access & Program Design	✓ **Effective**
⬜ Multifamily	⬜ Capture	⬜ Ease (Physical)	⬜ Emerging
⬜ Drop-Off	✓ **Contamination**	✓ **Ease (Mental)**	⬜ Understudied
		✓ **Appeal**	
		✓ **Norm**	

RESEARCH OUTCOMES

What’s Known & Why This Works

→ FOTS targeted engagement has been shown to reduce contamination by 19-62% while maintaining or increasing average household recycling set-out.

→ The impact lasts 10 months to three years, depending on follow-up education and outreach.

→ Feedback, coupled with service rejection, turns recycling from an abstract expectation into a visible social interaction. Specific, actionable feedback, paired with clear next steps, increases correct behavior.

→ Cost-efficiency and effectiveness are maximized in areas with higher contamination, where improvement potential is greatest, and in urban/suburban areas with universal recycling services.

Behavior Impact

→ **19–62%** contamination reduction

→ **Set-outs:** maintained or increased

Estimated Cost Per Household (HH)

$8-12/HH

The Recipe for Recycling Behavior Change

Or click here to learn more.

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDANCE

Recommended Process

1 — Establish baseline data on contamination.

2 — Before inspections begin, share a press release and send an informational mailer to explain the initiative, build trust, and provide basic instructions.

3 — Inspect each cart four times over four consecutive collection cycles. Issue warnings first and then reject service for households where contaminants persist.

4 — Mid-program, send a mailer addressing the top contamination issue.

5 — Collect contamination data to compare with baseline levels.

Things To Consider

→ Focus on a short list of priority contaminants (e.g., bagged recyclables, plastic film) to avoid message dilution.

→ Use a dedicated crew and train inspectors to apply tags consistently.

→ Use durable materials like waterproof tags and rubber bands to tie tags to cart handles.

→ Pair Feet on the Street with ongoing outreach and continuous programming for lasting impact.

Measurement Recommendations

Good

Simple counts of set-out rate (how often a cart is set out) and tagging occurrences by the tagging crew, combined with hauler tonnage data.

Better

Add a mobile app to track tagging rates, contamination trends, set-out rates, participation rates (if a cart is set out at least once per 30 days), and container fullness rates.

Best

Add pre- and post-contamination audits.

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Or click here to learn more.

Variations

CURBSIDE

- See **Strategy for "On-Truck Smart Cameras" and "Hybrid"** approaches to curbside inspections and feedback.
- **Less than four rounds of cart tagging**: This may yield less dramatic results than the full four-round model. In limited studies, a two-round approach still demonstrates meaningful contamination reduction.

DROP-OFF

- Adapt with in-person staff to interview patrons and review materials brought for recycling. **See Strategy for "Feet on the Site."**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

TOOLKIT

Recycling Contamination Reduction Kit: 5 Steps to Replicate The Recycling Partnership's Feet on the Street Cart-Tagging Campaign

CASE STUDY

Improving Quality in Orange County, FL