STRATEGY

“4C’s” Improvements to Containers & Collection Areas

The Recycling Partnership

Implement improvements to on-site containers and recycling collection areas to better support residents at the moment of disposal by making it physically and mentally easier to participate. This includes **convenience** of location, providing **clarity** with signage, using **color** to designate the purpose of containers, and ensuring right-sized **capacity**.

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

→ Residents are far more likely to recycle when containers are easy to access and as convenient as trash.

→ Poorly designed recycling areas create barriers that can lead to non-participation or incorrect use.

→ A disposal site should be designed to guide behavior so residents can act without needing to stop, think, or second-guess.

Behavior Impact

→ **40-130% increase** in material recycled

→ **Up to 10% reduction** in contamination

Estimated Cost Per Property

$250-5,000/Property

It is highly dependent on the number of improvements needed, type of signage and amount of capacity needed.

The Recipe for Recycling Behavior Change

Or click here to learn more.

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDANCE

Recommended Process

1 — Conduct site visits to assess current container systems and needs.

2 — Locate recycling containers in well lit, frequently trafficked locations that are next to trash disposal locations.

3 — Ensure recycling containers are all the same color throughout the property, keeping them a separate color from trash, and are properly labeled.

4 — Ensure container openings are convenient to reach for all residents and sized appropriately to encourage recycling the correct materials (i.e. cardboard containers slotted).

5 — Provide clear visual instructions and signage at the location where materials are being collected. Adapt signage to include languages appropriate for the resident population.

6 — Monitor container capacity to ensure areas stay clear of overflowing materials.

Things To Consider

→ Impacts are strongest when all 4C's are deployed together and reinforcement is ongoing.

→ Shared spaces can reduce accountability, requiring oversight to ensure it stays clean and well maintained to replace missing social cues.

→ There is limited data available on the effectiveness of container locks, and they have the potential to discourage recycling when not used correctly.

Measurement Recommendations

Good

Visual observations of containers to assess contamination and fullness, documenting trends overtime.

Better

Standardized pre-and-post inspections on fullness and contamination, supported by photos or app-based tools.

Best

Pre and post waste audits to measure capture and contamination.

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Variations

CONTAINER LOCATION

- **Centralized** in one location on the property.
- **Decentralized** throughout the property.
- **Co-located** with trash chutes on individual floors, requiring maintenance involvement for collection.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

TEMPLATES

The Recycling Partnership's Educational Material Design Tool

CASE STUDIES & ARTICLES

Metzler, Michelle. "Cracking the Code to Better Recycling." Multifamily Executive, 2018

Morrigan, McKenna. "The Path Toward Progress." Resource Recycling Magazine, 2016

ReLondon. Making Recycling Work for People in Flats 2.0. ReLondon, 2022