

## Commercial Waste Reduction: Sorting Through Policy and Program Options

**The USDN Innovation Fund Commercial Waste Scan resulted in a self-service tool for communities to use to examine community-specific waste dynamics.**

Commercial waste markets vary greatly across North America. Some issue licenses to haulers doing business in their communities. Others provide commercial waste hauling services. Some haven't yet entered the waste markets at all. Variations compound when considering landfill ownership and operation responsibilities of individual recycling and composting facilities. Part of the challenge for city decision-makers is that this wide variation makes it difficult to find communities with comparable dynamics. It is challenging for communities to benchmark themselves and access best practices. To address this challenge, nine USDN communities – **Adams County, Boulder County, Cincinnati, Denver, Fort Collins, Houston, New York City, Salt Lake City, and Santa Fe** – collaborated with two non-member communities – Vancouver (WA) and Colorado Springs – to produce a [commercial waste roadmap and a phenomenal self-assessment tool called the Commercial Pick](#).

The intended result of this project was a roadmap for commercial waste reduction. The actual result was a lessons learned report and the Commercial Pick, a dynamic tool for policy analysis and program design. The Commercial Pick starts with a list of 23 questions, easily answered by jurisdiction. Answers from individual communities provide the model with information on unique community incentives, priorities, waste-related infrastructure, commercial, and political systems. The output specifies a list of programs that are suitable for that community's specific situation and conditions. Additionally, the tool identifies case studies from communities with similar dynamics. This allows the user to determine strategies, or portions of strategies, that will best work for their situation. It also allows the user to develop a plan for implementing a commercial waste reduction strategy. The accompanying report provides an overview of program types, typical phases of commercial waste programs, and other useful information obtained from surveys. This tool appeals to users who like to take complex situations and streamline them into digestible solutions.

### Impact on Cities

While guiding the creation of these tools, participating cities learned how to think about commercial waste in their communities. Denver CO staff noted a significant finding: strong waste diversion goals and committed staff are key factors to successfully achieving waste diversion. Before they started this project, they thought the only option was to motivate change through higher tipping fees. Now instead, they are placing more emphasis on staff driving commercial waste reduction efforts (by licensing more haulers, for example). The final project report helped Denver understand the phases a community can move through to best select appropriate strategies that fit existing community situations.

Houston TX staff identified that connecting businesses with better information and starting a business recognition program were the best next steps for their existing commercial waste reduction efforts. Additionally, this project gave the participants better direction on how to work with their Solid Waste Department to continue commercial recycling efforts. It also taught them how to enhance the recycling portion of their green business challenge program.

Salt Lake City UT pulled from many ideas in the report to create its [draft commercial waste ordinance](#). The city is now working with commercial recyclers on a licensing plan that allows tracking of recycled waste amounts. They are also working on a mandated recycling program for businesses that meet certain waste disposal quantities.