

Chapter 9 | Engaging the Public and Motivating Behavior Change



Congratulations! You're about to complete the Community Recycling Ambassador course. The formal training is just the beginning of your experience as a CRA. Your next step – completing 30 hours of volunteer activities – will take you from a classroom learner to community ambassador and advocate for waste prevention, recycling and composting.

Hennepin County has made significant progress in the years since recycling was introduced, but our work is far from done. The state and the county have set ambitious recycling goals, aiming to recycle and compost 75 percent of waste by 2030. Our ability to meet our goals depends on the choices and actions of residents, businesses, organizations, and institutions throughout the county. CRAs play an important role in engaging and motivating the public and implementing successful waste prevention and recycling programs.

Even with the knowledge you have gained in this course, you may be apprehensive about educating the public. The tips included in this chapter and some experience in the field will help you gain confidence when discussing waste prevention, recycling, and composting with a broad range of people.

Included in this chapter

- Motivating behavior change
 - Doing outreach at events
 - Volunteer guidelines
 - Outreach activities
 - Resources for CRAs
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Motivating behavior change

A common mistake that people make when they start a program to motivate action around environmental issues (or any issue that requires behavior change) is thinking that by simply providing people with information will be enough to get them to change. But we can all think about an action that we know quite a bit about and think we should be doing but for some reason aren't doing it yet.

Motivating behavior change requires more than just information sharing. To be effective, we need to understand our audience, the barriers they face to taking action, and what would motivate them to take that action.

In order for people to take action, they need to:

- Value the action. Why they value an action will vary – they may value environmental protection, the benefits it provides to society, or the benefits it provides personally.
- Know enough about the issue and understand the consequences to themselves and the people and places that matter to them.
- Believe they are capable of taking the action and that the impact their effort will have is worthwhile.

But still, whether or not they take the action depends on the scale of the barriers they face.

In order to motivate behavior change, we need to:

- Determine what action we want people to take.
- Figure out what stand in the way of them taking action.
- Uncover what would motivate them to take that action.
- Choose and implement effective strategies to address the barriers and motivate action.

Selecting behaviors

The actions you encourage people to do should be specific, directly result in environmental protection, and impactful to both your audience and the environment.

To choose a specific behavior, think beyond a general topic, like preventing waste, to specific actions within that topic people could take, such as avoiding single use plastics, mending or repairing household items, using reusable items instead of disposables, shopping at reuse stores, and so on. It's best if you get even more specific. For example, instead of focusing on using reusable items, decide if you're focusing on reusable bags, reusable water bottles, reusable napkins, reusable straws, etc. Each of these specific actions will have different barriers and motivations for your audience.



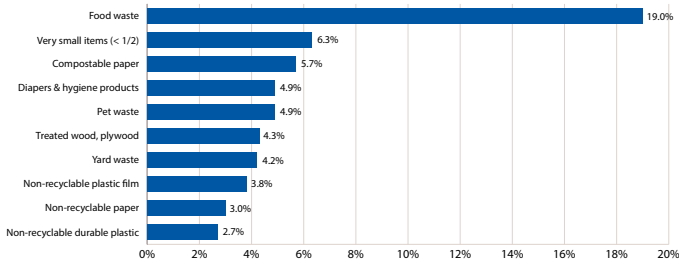
The behavior you choose should also be “end-state,” or result in the direct environmental benefit you're looking to achieve. For example, if you are focusing on getting people to compost in their backyard, it's not enough to get people to purchase a compost bin. They have to put the bin together, find a place for it in their yard, actually start composting their kitchen scraps and yard waste, and use the finished compost they create.



You should choose behaviors to focus on that are impactful for both the environment and your audience. Considering the impact is helpful if you're trying to decide which behaviors to focus on.

For environmental impact, determine which actions will have the greatest environmental impact by considering any data you have or can collect or doing research on data that others have collected. For example, Hennepin County is focusing on expanding organics recycling and preventing food waste because waste sort studies show that food waste is by far the largest proportion of the trash.

Top 10 most common materials found in the trash



For audience impact, consider how likely it is for your audience to take the action and how many people are already taking the action. You want to focus on actions that your audience is likely to be interested in taking but aren't already doing.

Identifying barriers and benefits

Once you've selected an action, you need to find out what stands in the way of your audience taking this action (barriers) and what would motivate them to take this action (benefits).

It's easy to assume you know what the barriers and benefits are, but it's important to ask your audience. Even having a few simple conversations can be eye-opening and help you develop a truly effective plan.

There are many ways to figure out barriers and benefits. You could conduct a survey, bring people together for a focus group, discuss the issue one-on-one in an interview, observe people taking the action, or conduct research into what others working on your selected behavior have found.



It's important to remember that barriers and benefits will vary based on your selected action and your audience's knowledge, experience, values, and interests. However, there are some common themes when it comes to barriers and benefits.

Some benefits commonly heard related to waste issues include:

- Visibly seeing the impact of their actions
- Protecting the environment
- Helping future generations
- It's the right thing to do
- Getting a "feel good" benefit
- Saving money
- Having less stuff to deal with

Common barriers to taking action include:

- Intending to take the action but needing motivation
- Not caring about the action
- The action sounds hard, time-consuming, or messy
- Confusion or lack of information
- Forgetting to act
- Lacking skills
- Not having the infrastructure or tools to take action



Strategies to motivate behavior change

Once you know the barriers your audiences faces and what would motivate them to take your selected action, you can develop strategies that will be effective in creating change. Research on human psychology and behavior change suggests the following strategies are effective:

- **Make it easy to act:** The more convenient an action is, the more likely people are to act. Develop infrastructure, promote best practices, and provide the tools people need to take action.

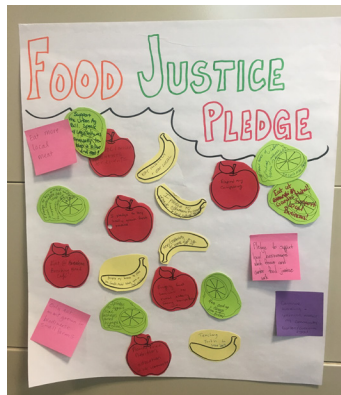
Providing color-coded, clearly labeled recycling bins, recycling guides, and individual bags or bins for people to collect recycling are good examples.



- **Develop skills:** Social anxiety or feeling incompetent can prevent people from taking action. Engage people in hands-on activities that give them the opportunity to learn the specific steps needed to take action. Provide a safe space for people to try an activity and ask questions. Conducting waste sorting activities, hosting composting workshops, teaching people how to make green cleaners, and teaching repair skills at Fix-It Clinics are all good examples.



- **Build commitment:** People want to be consistent – if we say we are going to do something, we feel compelled to follow up and do it. Commitments are a good way to nudge someone to finally take that action they’ve been thinking about doing. You can use written, verbal, individual, public, or group commitments. Invite people to fill out and return a simple pledge form identifying one or more actions they commit to take, or have people share the actions they are pledging to make on a poster or in an online forum. Following up to see if someone has taken the action or needs additional help strengthens the commitment and the likelihood of someone taking action.



- **Create social norms:** The actions of individuals are influenced by others and the desire to be socially accepted (way more than people will typically admit). Social norming involves using messages and setting expectations that let people know “this is how we do things.” For example, when working at a business, school, or apartment building, use announcements, posters, buttons, lawn signs, and more to send the message that taking actions to prevent waste or recycle more is the norm.

- **Use social diffusion:** People make decisions based on the actions and recommendations of people or experts they know and trust. Train-the-trainer programs like the CRA program are good examples of social diffusion. Look for opportunities to train and empower community leaders and early adopters to spread the word, be a champion for your program, and engage others in getting excited and taking action. Get commitments from them to talk to others.



- **Use prompts:** Prompts serve to remind people to take an action they intend to do. Prompts help overcome the issue that we often operate on auto-pilot as we go about our daily routines. Realizing you forgot your reusable bags only once you get to the checkout counter is a prime example. Providing a “remember the bag” prompt close to where people store their bags is a good way to snap them out of their routine and remember to bring their bags. Provide a visual reminder, such as a sticker, window cling, or flyer, that reminds people to act. If you’re asking people to take a pledge, think about how they could take home a reminder of the commitment they made.



- **Capitalize on trigger and major life events:** People can be more receptive to integrating new habits at times when they are already going through changes and switching their routines. Some major life events to consider include when people are moving, changing jobs, getting married, or having kids. Big events like Earth Day or an annual celebration at a business, organization, or school are also good opportunities to provide information about environmental issues and lead-by-example by modeling waste prevention and recycling strategies.



- **Celebrate successes:** Publicly announce your goals and take time to celebrate successes. This is a good way to build momentum for future change. Set interim goals for your program or campaign and acknowledge when you've achieved those milestones.

Create effective communications

Although sharing information typically isn't enough to motivate behavior change, communications will no doubt be an important part of any program or campaign. Use the following tips to improve the effectiveness of your communications:

- **Make it attention-grabbing and easy-to-remember:** Use simple language, catchy phrases, easy-to-follow instructions, and helpful visuals.
 - **Integrate goals and impact:** Let your audience know what you are trying to achieve and what impact they can have by taking action.
 - **Make it personal and local:** Include information specific to your community. What is the problem and what impact will the changes have locally? Encourage people to share their stories, and feature people in the community taking action. Stories help engage people and show them how the issue is relevant.
 - **Use credible sources:** The more credible the source is viewed to be, the more likely the message will be influential. The information provided through your training and in this manual is a good source as it has been fact-checked.
 - **Make it concrete and actionable:** Let people know what you want them to do and how they can get involved. Provide the information they need to take action.
 - **Help people address barriers and plan for action:** Having a way for people to discuss their barriers, troubleshoot problems, and plan for taking action will increase their chances of actually taking action. Focus on improvement, not perfection.
 - **Use all of your channels:** Messages have a better chance of getting people's attention when shared in multiple ways. Consider all of your communication channels and touchpoints with your audiences and make a plan to distribute the messages everywhere you can.
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Doing outreach at events

Events can be a good opportunity to share resources and connect one-on-one with your audience. The following tips will help make your event outreach a success.



Preparing for the event

Learn about the event and the audience. Ask the event organizer how many people they expect to attend, what kind of crowd the event attracts, and why they attendees are coming. All of this will impact the materials and activities you bring.

Identify your key messages. It's useful to focus your outreach on one or two topics instead of trying to cover everything. Prepare some "opening lines" to introduce attendees to the information you have to share. Review background information about the topic you are providing information on and consider the questions you may receive so you are prepared to answer them.

Bring props and interactive displays. Having materials attendees can look at and interact with will make your table more engaging than simply having brochures and factsheets.

Arrive at the event early so you have plenty of time to set up. Always bring paper weights for outdoor events, even on non-windy days. It takes only one gust to scatter your literature all over the place.

Bring water and snacks to keep you fueled – hopefully you'll be talking a lot.



During the event

Be enthusiastic and engaging, and let people engage how they want. Some people will want to browse the information you have available before asking questions, while others will jump straight into a conversation.

Stick to what you know. It's ok not to know everything! Be aware of credible sources of information to point people to if they ask a question you don't know how to answer.

Keep your table tidy and organized through the event.

In your conversations, help people problem-solve and plan for action. When you can, try to get to what their barriers are to taking action and develop solutions together that will work for them. All of this will increase their chances of taking action.

Most importantly, have fun! Event outreach should be a rewarding way to share your expertise and get other people excited about these issues.



Volunteer guidelines

CRA's have many opportunities to help educate the public about waste prevention, recycling, and composting. How you spend your 30 hours (or more!) of volunteering is up to you.

Hennepin County depends on your important volunteer work and makes a significant investment in your training. In turn, Hennepin County expects CRA's to attend all training sessions and to fulfill the 30-hour volunteer commitment within one year (ongoing involvement is encouraged). Fulfillment of the expected volunteer time is required in order to become a certified CRA. Be sure to report your volunteer hours promptly after completing a volunteer activity.

Eligible volunteer opportunities

The program coordinator will provide many outreach opportunities from community organizations, cities, and other CRA's that you can sign up for, or you can develop your own projects with prior approval. Find out how to get notified of volunteer opportunities at hennepin.us/current-recycling-ambassadors.

Payback activities must meet the following criteria:

1. Implement or support a system or program that diverts materials from the waste stream.

AND/OR

2. Provide waste reduction, recycling and/or organics recycling education/outreach

When fulfilling your volunteer hours, remember:

- Be on time to events and obligations. If you need to cancel, contact the volunteer coordinator as soon as possible.
- Represent the county professionally and appropriately at outreach events. Personal opinions and editorial comments should not be expressed when volunteering as a CRA. Remember, you are an information ambassador for Hennepin County, so stick with the information provided in the training and through subsequent updates from the CRA program.
- Target your presentation and your language to the level of knowledge of your audience. Avoid jargon and overly technical material, but be careful not to oversimplify the issues.

Reporting your hours

Tracking volunteer outreach time is a vital part of the CRA program. It helps the volunteer coordinator know your activities and provides an official record of progress toward your 30-hour volunteer time commitment. This information also helps Hennepin County track the work and recognize the benefits of the CRA program.

We also count on you to let us know about upcoming events where CRAs could help spread the word about recycling, waste prevention, and composting.

Please remember to report your hours regularly by completing the form at hennepin.us/current-recycling-ambassadors.

Outreach activities

CRAs educate the community through a variety of activities. Common activities include staffing informational tables (“tabling”) and giving presentations. This section provides information to help you effectively promote your outreach message.

Information tables

Tabling, or staffing an informational booth, is one of the most popular and effective ways that CRAs reach and motivate people to reduce waste. Some CRAs sign up for tabling assignments that the program coordinator sets up. Others find events and arrange for booths in their own communities. Some work with ready-made, topic-specific kits, while others like to create their own displays.



Whatever the approach, here are some basic tips that will make your tabling outreach more successful:

- Before you arrive, identify key messages to include in every conversation. Stay on message when you’re not answering individual questions. Keep your messages positive.
- Always wear your name badge for CRA projects.
- Don’t just sit there; do something even if the event is slow. Make eye contact as people pass by. Displays and literature are meant to assist you to communicate – not do it for you.
- If you’re working with a partner, take turns answering questions so that both of you get to interact with the public. Don’t jump in when it’s not your turn unless your partner asks you to.

- When signing up for an information table arranged by the CRA program coordinator:
 - Instructions for the event, including location, directions and the topic, will be sent to you.
 - You may be asked to pick up and/or drop off materials and a display.
 - You may table with staff from Hennepin County or other organizations. This is a great way to start out and learn, and it's also a chance to network with people working in the field. If you like working with them, you can give them your contact information and ask them to contact you directly when volunteer opportunities arise in their jurisdictions.
- You'll often work shifts with fellow CRAs.

Some CRAs may adopt a local event or farmers' market and cover different topics each week. Some create their own topics and displays, while others check out the displays that are available throughout the region.

When arranging a table yourself, check with the event coordinator ahead of time to ask:

- Does it cost money? If it does, do they offer a reduced rate or waived fee for non-profits?
- Do they provide a table and chair, and do they provide a canopy or tent for rain and sun?
- Where exactly is your space, and how large is it?
- Will you be expected to share a space?
- How many people attend this event?
- What languages do the audience of this event generally speak?

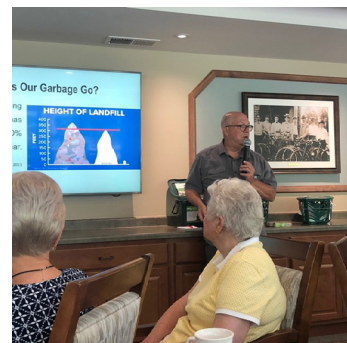
Here are some pointers to make your table more successful:

- Check with the CRA program coordinator to ensure there isn't already a CRA working in the venue or at the event. The coordinator may also have contact information for organizers of the event. Consider sharing a table with a Master Gardener if they already participate in this event.
- Review the list of materials and learning trunks that are available to CRAs.
- Make sure that your display, information and literature are correct for the jurisdiction that the event takes place.

Presentations and demonstrations

CRAs who want to make changes in their workplaces, multifamily housing buildings, religious organizations, or other community organizations often find that in-person or virtual presentations is a persuasive method. Some CRAs enjoy sharing their knowledge and passion for waste reduction in presentations and demonstrations, while others find the idea intimidating. Whatever your comfort level, we encourage you to try it!

You're welcome to call the program coordinator for advice, to rehearse your speech, or just for a confidence boost. Most people who take on the challenge of giving a presentation find it very rewarding. As with tabling, some presentations are prearranged by the CRA program manager, or you can set them up on your own. The following are some tips to make your presentation more successful.



Questions to ask the event coordinator ahead of time:

- What is the exact location and time of the presentation? (If needed, ask for directions.)
- How many people are expected to attend?
- Should I provide information and handouts in languages other than English? Will interpreters be provided?
- Will I have access to a table, electrical outlet, and power cord? (if needed, such as when using PowerPoint) Is a laptop and/or projector provided, or do I need to bring my own?

Presentation preparation:

- Keep it simple. Use PowerPoint presentations only if you have a table, projection surface, reliable equipment, and access to electricity.
- Review the list of materials that are available and select handouts to supplement your presentation. View and order the free resources available at hennepin.us/environmentaleducation.
- Consider checking out a learning trunk to use as a visual aid.
- Practice with someone you know using the visual aids. Time yourself to make sure you are working within the time allotted (be sure to leave time for questions).
- Arrive early to have plenty of time to set up and familiarize yourself with the setting.

Presentation content:

- Start with a strong beginning. The first few minutes are important to capture audience's attention.
- Use real experiences that people can identify with rather than loads of statistics.
- Keep it positive. Studies show gloom and doom/end-of-the-Earth messages discourage people rather than motivate them to take action.
- Use an outline and key messages rather than trying to memorize a speech word for word.
- Think about what will encourage this particular audience. Parents at a PTA meeting will have different interests (e.g., packing school lunches) than people attending a discussion at a senior center (e.g., effective food storage).

Interactive communication

Whatever the type of outreach, open dialog is often more compelling than talking points as an approach to social change. Hence, the most important part of your presentation may be a question and answer period after your talk.

You probably cannot cover all of the concerns or burning issues that your audience may have in your presentation. Opening your presentation to dialog will help you better understand and address some specific concerns that may be preventing your audience from making important changes.

The following guidelines will help you conduct a successful Q&A session:

- When you practice your presentation, ask your "audience" to ask some questions.
- Listening is the most important part of communication. Be sure to pay attention and address exactly what the person is asking. If someone asks, "Why can't we put plastic bags in curbside programs?" don't respond with, "You can recycle plastic bags at these locations..." They'll still wonder, "Why not at the curb?" Answer the question before you offer solutions.
- Review any sections of the manual that pertain to your topics. Many chapters cover common questions.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." As a CRA, you know a lot more than the general public, but we don't expect you to know everything! What you can do is direct people to good sources of information. This is a key function of CRAs.

Audience participation is another tool you may want to integrate into your presentation. Interaction often helps

individuals test new ideas, clarify their thinking, and develop skills for solving problems and resolving issues. As the presenter, you must provide the direction and keep discussion focused on the topic.

Strategies you might use to generate audience participation:

- Creating action plans
- Discussions (in smaller groups)
- Introductions with name games
- Role playing
- Show and tell (sharing personal stories)
- Skits
- Solving story problems
- Tours or field trips
- Quizzes

Visual aids



Visual aids can be very helpful to use at events and in presentations. They attract and hold attention, illustrate points, clarify information and aid in remembering facts. Your visual aids may be real objects, pictures, words,

or symbols. To be most effective, visual aids should be:

- Colorful
- Easy-to-understand
- Large enough to be seen by all
- Simple
- Neat
- Relevant to your topic

Individual project planning

When planning an individual project, use the following questions to guide the development of the project:

- What are the project goals?
- Who are the project partners?
- Who will this project target?
How will they be included in the development of the project?
- What resources will be needed (time, additional volunteers, materials, etc.)?
- How will you know if your project is a success?
- What criteria will you use to measure your project's effectiveness?

Resources for CRAs

When you volunteered to become a CRA, you made an active commitment to decrease waste in the region. But you are not making this commitment alone. Hennepin County staff is available to help you and will continue to provide and maintain the following resources:

- Training manual: This is a ready reference for a variety of ideas and data. New editions that are revised and updated for each class will be available at hennepin.us/current-recycling-ambassadors.
- Community Recycling Ambassador Facebook group: The group has volunteer opportunity postings and a forum for you to network and have discussions with fellow CRAs.
- CRA newsletter: The newsletter includes deeper dives into waste issues, CRA project highlights, Hennepin County program updates, upcoming events and training opportunities, and links to interesting news articles.
- CRA web page: hennepin.us/current-recycling-ambassadors is only accessible to CRA participants and contains class presentations, the training manual, past editions of the CRA newsletter, and the hours reporting form.
- hennepin.us/environmentaleducation: The county provides downloadable newsletter articles, social media posts, and images along with an order form to get printed copies of factsheets, brochures and handouts. The county also has activity guides for conducting education with a group and education kits that provide the supplies needed to conduct activities or create a display for events.
- Ongoing education and training opportunities: These will be posted to the CRA Facebook group and included in the newsletter.
- Industry and Hennepin County staff contacts to assist with difficult questions.
- Fellow classmates. You are encouraged to network with your peers.

Resources

- cbsm.com: The Fostering Sustainable Behavior website provides information about the method for motivating behavior change, also known as community-based social marketing. The website includes the full text of the Fostering Sustainable Behavior book plus articles and case studies.
- The Psychology of Sustainable Behavior: A handbook introducing research-based tips from psychology to help in efforts to empower sustainability. Find it at pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/p-ee1-01.pdf
- toolsofchange.com: A collection of social marketing case studies.
- hennepin.us/environmentaleducation: Communication, outreach, and environmental education resources available from Hennepin County.

Thank you
for becoming a
Community Recycling
Ambassador.

We look forward to supporting you
in your outreach endeavors!
