

HENNEPIN COUNTY
MINNESOTA



Community Recycling Ambassador course manual

September 2025

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Introduction



Welcome to the Community Recycling Ambassador (CRA) program. As a CRA, you will play an important role in preventing and reducing waste, increasing recycling and composting, and conserving resources in Hennepin County.

Waste reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, conserve energy and natural resources, create jobs and economic development opportunities, and protect our environment and quality of life. Although we have made some progress in diverting waste, many recoverable resources are still being sent to waste-to-energy facilities and landfills, and the recycling and organics recycling rate has only increased slightly over the past decade.

Through the CRA program, participants learn about waste prevention, reuse, recycling, composting, community engagement, and behavior change. They then implement programs that prevent waste, increase recycling, and engage others in learning about these issues. This approach is critical to effectively changing behaviors and motivating environmental protection.

Bridging the awareness-action gap

Most people know they should reduce, reuse, and recycle to protect the environment, but what people think they should do is not always what they do. In fact, research demonstrates that just giving people information has little or no effect on their behavior. So if brochures won't change behavior, what will? Research reveals that personal contact paired with specific information and resources that address barriers to reducing waste is a powerful way to inspire action.

CRA's bridge the gap between awareness and action by motivating their friends, family, co-workers, and communities to reduce waste in their homes and workplaces. As a trained CRA volunteer, you will inspire people to change the way they think about and manage their consumer choices and their waste.

Program basics



The CRA program consists of two stages: formal training and public outreach. Participants attend about 12 hours of classroom instruction and then volunteer at least 30 hours implementing programs and doing outreach in their community.

The training program consists of classroom sessions and a field trip, when available. Classroom activities include visual presentations and group discussions. During the field trip, participants tour recycling and composting facilities.

When you agree to become a CRA, you make a commitment to volunteer, or "pay back," 30 hours through community outreach or waste reduction projects. Once you fulfill this commitment, you will become a certified CRA.

Your payback involves implementing a system or program that eliminates or diverts materials from the waste stream and/or providing direct community outreach to educate and inspire others to practice waste reduction.

Payback activities may be individual projects created by you and/or fellow CRAs that are approved by the program coordinator, or activities completed by volunteering with other organizations. Activities may also be organized by the program coordinator and could involve working with other volunteers and local education and solid waste programs. You can be notified of payback opportunities by joining the Facebook group or getting on the email list. Learn how at hennepin.us/recycling-ambassadors. CRAs are also encouraged to seek out and create payback opportunities that interest them and serve their communities' unique needs.



However you choose to participate in the program, your contributions are an important part of a larger movement to protect our natural resources.

The program manual

This manual is provided to supplement class content, reinforce key messages, and supply resources for outreach and education. Each week, you should pre-read the chapter or chapters that will be discussed in the next class.

Once you've completed the course, your manual will be your reference tool to help you develop outreach and education projects. Whether you staff an information table, give a presentation, or work on a project, your manual provides key messages and facts, common vocabulary used in the field, and information on the resources available to you.

Samples of Hennepin County factsheets, brochures and handouts are included as part of your training materials and can be ordered for free at hennepin.us/environmentaleducation.

This program is designed to empower you with the training and tools you need to educate your community on waste reduction, recycling and composting. As a CRA in training, you are encouraged to ask questions, share your experiences and provide feedback on the program.