

# SAVING RECYCLING



These are unprecedented times for the recycling industry. Already experiencing market fluctuations and educational challenges, recycling then faced COVID-19, which affected budgets and service provision while leading to increased residential volumes with more contamination. Going forward, some local governments may be faced with challenges as they examine their budgets and assess possible shortfalls.

The N.C. Division of Environmental Assistance and Customer Service (DEACS) would like to suggest some options to consider should you be faced with altering your recycling program. Remember that cutting a recycling program does not make the items that would have gone into the recycling bin go away; rather, that volume and associated cost has now been added to your solid waste budget.

If faced with a budget shortfall, communities should consider the following recommendations — many of which would never be suggested under non-pandemic circumstances — as temporary means to keep recycling programs intact during extraordinary times. Manufacturers in North Carolina and across the country are still depending on recyclable materials to make everyday products like toilet paper, plastic bottles, and food packaging. Temporary changes should always be clearly communicated to your residents with honest and concise messaging.

## Prevention

## Adjusting Budgets

Before making any cuts or changes to your recycling program, we recommend a close review of your budget to look for ways to increase revenues or cut costs. The Recycling Partnership found that 84 percent of Americans view recycling as a valuable public service. The per household cost to keep your recycling program running could only be pennies per day. While not all local governments in North Carolina charge fees, those that do assessed an average fee of \$14 per household per month for combined solid waste and recycling services in 2019.

## Small Changes

## Special Collections and Service Frequency

**Eliminate Special Collections:** Some curbside special collections programs such as textiles or electronics could temporarily be changed to drop-site only. You may also want to look at the costs for bulky items and white goods collection as they could be changed to drop-site or fee-for-collection.

**Reduce Service Frequency:** If your program has weekly collection, studies show that changing your pickup schedule to twice per month with 96-gallon carts has a large effect on your budget with little change in the amount of material collected. Most of the industry has moved to every-other-week (EOW) pickup. If your pickup schedule is already EOW, a temporary change to monthly pickup can help keep operation costs down. These options can drive additional traffic to your drop sites, so you may need to adjust your hours of operation. To keep recycling route drivers employed, they can be temporarily assigned to drop sites. Residents may also ask for additional recycling carts. [Grants](#) are available from DEACS and others to help you purchase 96-gallon carts, make changes to your drop sites and educate the public about changes.

## Reducing Cost

## Removing Glass

**Collect Glass Separate from Single-Stream:** Most material recovery facilities (MRFs) in North Carolina have multi-tiered pricing menus with glass-in or glass-out options. Choosing glass-out can be a quick way to cut costs from your program. Instead of requesting that your residents throw the glass in the trash, we recommend that you first partner with your county to use its existing convenience sites to collect glass. A second option is to convert one of your own established drop sites to have a glass-only dumpster or carts. If you do not have any established drop sites of your own, you can make one with very limited space. Grant funds can be used to help you build a glass collection center and to educate the public about changes. Strategic Materials has options to assist you with cost efficient glass-only pickup. To connect with Strategic, contact:

**Tom Syre, Regional Sourcing Manager, Strategic Materials, Inc. | 281.702.0984 | [tsyre@strategicmaterials.com](mailto:tsyre@strategicmaterials.com)**



## Extreme Measures

## Suspension



**Temporarily Suspend Curbside Pickup:** If you are faced with the challenge of suspending curbside pickup, suggest a 6- or 12-month suspension and commit to re-evaluating the decision. Be sure to offer an alternative drop-off recycling option to your residents. If you do not operate your own drop sites, be sure to coordinate with your county if you plan on diverting recyclables to them. This option may drive additional traffic to your drop sites, so you may need to adjust your hours of operation. To keep recycling route drivers employed, they can be temporarily assigned to drop sites. [Grants](#) are available from DEACS to assist with additional dumpsters to accommodate increased volume and educate the public about changes. If curbside recycling is suspended, do not instruct residents to use recycling carts for trash overflow as this will confuse residents and make it difficult to restart recycling service later.

**Drop-Site Only - Temporary Change to Source-Separated:** The last resort to save recycling in your area may be to temporarily offer source-separated drop-sites. While it is a step back in recycling's evolution, it provides the most protection from market disruption. If you are not dealing directly with a MRF, there may be additional work needed to find markets for all of the materials. DEACS staff have relationships with many recycling companies and can assist with finding markets. [Grants](#) are available from DEACS to assist with additional dumpsters to accommodate increased volume and to help educate the public about changes.

**If Your Recycling Program is Suspended:** A decision to end a public program comes with the responsibility of removing the associated infrastructure (recycling carts) from the community. Do not use clearly-marked recycling carts for trash pickup. Using recycling carts for trash pickup confuses residents and makes it difficult to restart recycling service later. It also contributes to the myth that all recycling goes to the landfill and jeopardizes the credibility of neighboring programs that have committed to continuing recycling service. Recycling carts that were purchased with state funds cannot be used for trash pickup. Local governments that decide to use recycling carts for trash collection will not be considered for future recycling grants once conditions improve.



## Messaging Matters

## Talking to Your Residents



Present potential changes as an opportunity for the recycling public to help during these unprecedented times. The additional work required now for recycling is an opportunity for your residents to be part of the solution. Through the state's recent Recycle Right NC campaign, we saw that the majority of people who recycle want to be involved, are enthusiastic about recycling, and will support changes if you appeal to their sense of civic responsibility and the need for their participation to ensure success.

Education is the key to any successful program change. Let your residents know what change is taking place, why it needs to happen, when it will start, and how long it will be in effect. DEACS staff are available to help with your messaging and share best practices in how to communicate with the public to avoid undue disruption. Educational materials have been designed to support strong messaging for communities that need to make program changes. A phone call or email to our staff could save you months of resident confusion and dissatisfaction.

Reach out to a [DEACS staff member](#) anytime for assistance.

Click [here](#) to review DEACS grant opportunities.



The N.C. Division of Environmental Assistance and Customer Service (DEACS) is a non-regulatory division of N.C. DEQ offering technical and financial assistance to businesses, manufacturers, local governments, institutions, economic developers and citizens in environmental management. For questions, call 1-877-623-6748. [www.recyclenc.org](http://www.recyclenc.org)

