miOttawa Department of Public Health

Action-Informed Survey Development Process

Applied to
Material Management Plan (MMP) Survey

Daniel Galanto

Presented to the Michigan AoS Chapter
March 31, 2026

Summary

The problem

Data Overload

- Extensive data review can delay timelines and action

Inactionable Responses

- Some information does not lend itself well to making decisions or producing action
  - i.e. survey development methods for BRFSS are great for understanding the landscape but less helpful for informing specific action

The solution

During the survey development process:

- Start with **purpose(s)**
- Include only questions for each **purpose**
- Visualize potential responses and what team will **do** with that information
  - Include action steps in plan
- Revise & add questions based on above proposed action steps

The result

Have a near-exhaustive framework for action

- Analysis can be conducted according to the purpose
- Goal-oriented results can be presented without iterations of review
- Next steps are pre-determined (reduces delayed action)

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Background

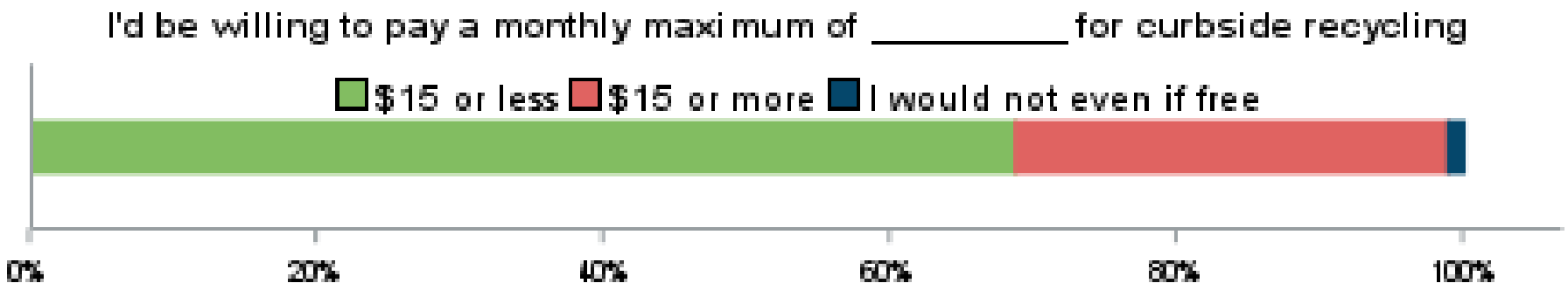
In Practice

- OCDPH Sustainability Program developed board to create and implement a Materials Management Plan
- Statute: Natural Resource and Environmental Protection Act 451 of 1994
  - Subpart 11 of Part 115
- Goals - (among others):
  - **Develop organics diversion tonnage target**
  - **Develop minimum recycling service level standard**
  - **Strategic education & outreach plan**
- Deadline: July 2, 2027

Ottawa County

According to the NREPA Act, Subpart 11 of Part 115, a Material Management Plan was formed to divert organics from the landfill, develop minimum recycling service standards, and educate residents, among others. The deadline to create this plan is July 2, 2027, however the best way to address these goals should be data-informed. The board suggested the health department develop a survey to inform action on these goals.

Data is one piece of the puzzle



Action is best when it's data-informed. But only data **informed.** When there's expert input, such as a board or other considerations, data cannot be the sole driver to action. For example, when we asked respondents, "What is the minimum you'd pay for curbside recycling," most said $15 or less. However, it's not practical to strictly adhere to this response for logistic, financial, and other reasons. If action was 100% data driven, other expertise and consideration would be ignored.

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Methods

The Problem

Excited for data



What do we want to know?



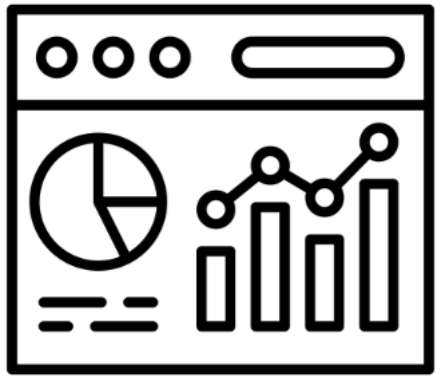
Great survey



What do we do with this?

How will this shape our action?

Maybe we should have asked…



We start here…

The Solution

Purpose(s)

Addresses purpose of survey?

What will we do if the data says X or Y?

Action Plan

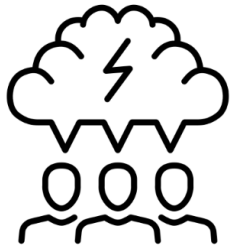
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Excited for data



What questions will address purpose?

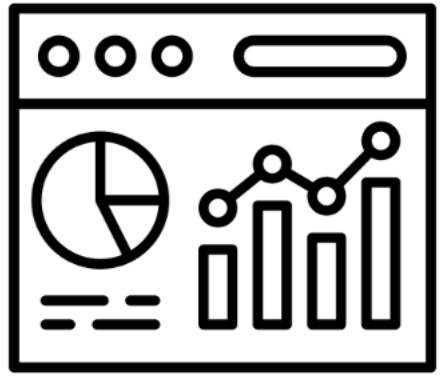


Rework question(s)

Great Survey



~~Maybe we should have asked…~~



…but before we start brainstorming, we identify **all** purpose(s) associated with this survey. If the purpose is exploratory, needed to inform action, or requested for special circumstances, this needs to be noted. Once we decide on purpose(s), we can start brainstorming with those in mind. Since one purpose of this survey was **to inform action**, instead of “What do we want to know?”, we brainstorm on “What questions should we ask that satisfy this purpose?”. In this way, each question had a purpose so there’s never a doubt as to why we asked the question.

The Solution

Purpose(s)

Addresses purpose of survey?

What will we do if the data says X or Y?

Action Plan

What do we do with this?

How will this shape our action?

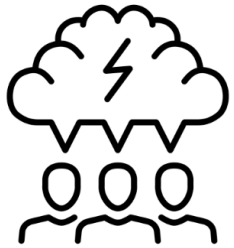
Rework question(s)

~~Maybe we should have asked…~~

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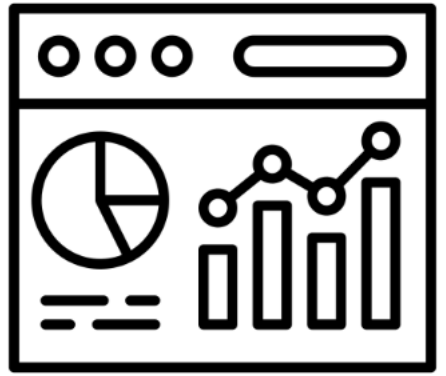


What questions will address purpose?



Great Survey





Once we have a series of questions that address the purpose(s) of the survey, we imagine “if the respondents say X, what are we going to do? Is this even actionable?”. This way, we can revisit the purpose to see if any particular result would truly get at the original purpose as well as develop a contingency action plan for general foreseeable results. This is important as it will be utilized for discussion and action purposes post-survey. If a question response has no action associated with it, it may not truly be needed in the survey.

The Solution

Purpose(s)

Addresses purpose of survey?

What will we do if the data says X or Y?

Action Plan

What do we do with this?

How will this shape our action?

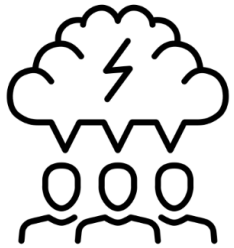
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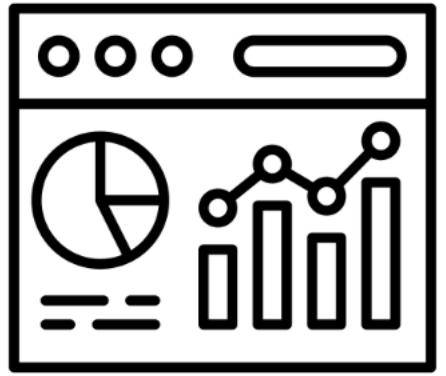


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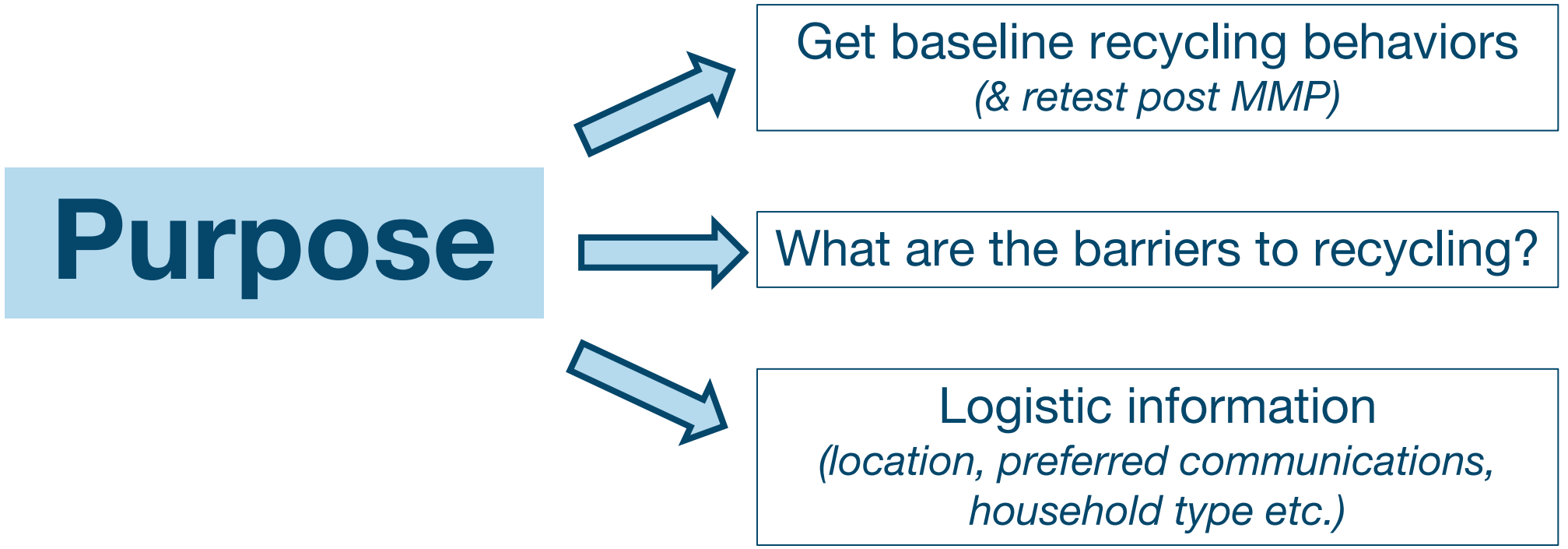
Great Survey





Lastly, once each purpose has a question or series of questions that satisfy them (and each question has a contingency action plan associated with it) we start to rework the questions. It doesn't require too much reworking since the process up until this point shapes the question dramatically.

Purpose



We started with developing our purposes. The three large purposes we identified where:

1. Obtain baseline recycling behaviors (to retest later)
2. Obtain barriers to recycling (and how we can reduce them)
3. Logistic information to subset by demographics, areas, and housing type

Questions

Get baseline recycling behaviors
(& retest post MMP)

→ Ex #1: Which best describes the recycling service you most commonly use?

1. Curbside
2. Subscip.
3. Drop off…
4. ….

What are the barriers to recycling?

→ Ex #2: Do you feel you have the info. you need to recycle effectively?

1. Yes
2. Some
3. No

Logistic information
(location, preferred communications, household type etc.)

→ Ex #3: Are you interested in receiving resources about the recycling system?

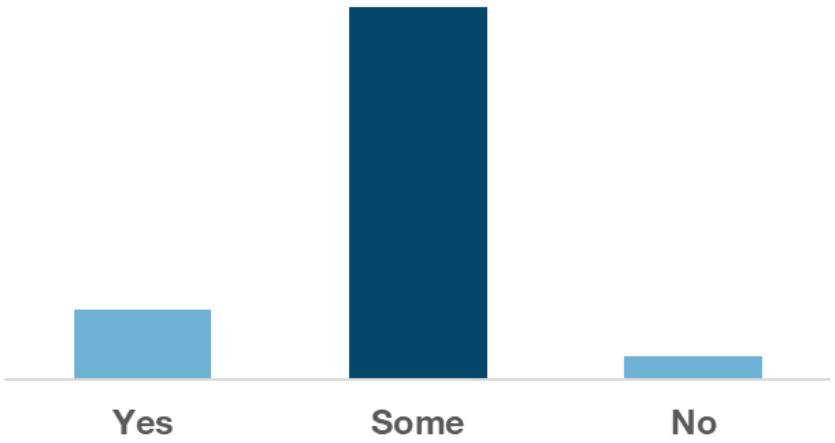
1. Yes
2. No

Please note, the above are not poor questions, they are just not action-informed.

What will we do with the responses?

Ex #2: Do you feel you have the info. you need to recycle effectively?

How will this information inform ***action*?**



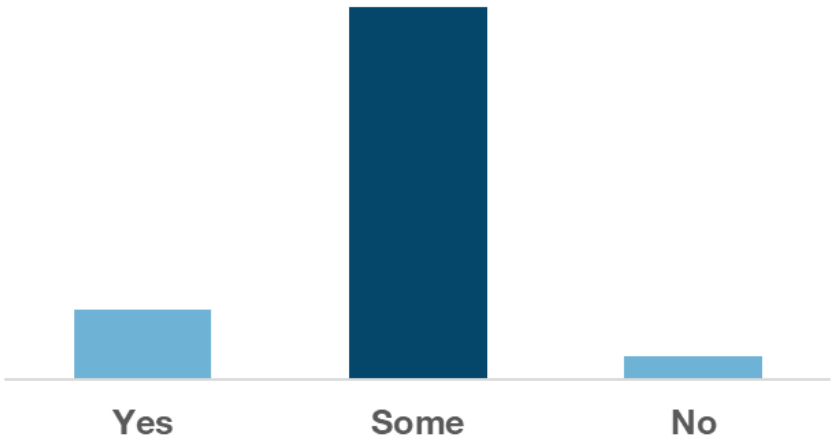
This information can be helpful for exploratory reasons, however, if most people, for example, report having SOME information they need to recycle effectively, how does that address the purpose of identifying barriers to recycling? What about if they all said “Yes” – is THIS the reason they do not recycling? It’s still unclear.

What will we do with the responses?

What are the barriers to recycling?

Ex #2: Do you feel you have the info. you need to recycle effectively?

What will it take for this information to be ***actionable?***



To rework the question, we asked ourselves, “What will it take for this information to be actionable”?

What will we do with the responses?

What are the barriers to recycling?

Ex #2: Do you feel you have the info. you need to recycle effectively?

What will it take for this information to be ***actionable*?**

1. What type of recycling are we referring to?
2. What information would someone need to recycle this way?
    1. Do they have it?
3. Is there a way to get info. to people who need it?

We need to know the follow:

1. What type of recycling are we referring to?
2. What information would someone need to recycle this way?
3. Do they have it?
4. Is there a way to get the info to people who need it?

What will we do with the responses?

Ex #2: **When placing an item in the recycling bin, should you do the following practices?**

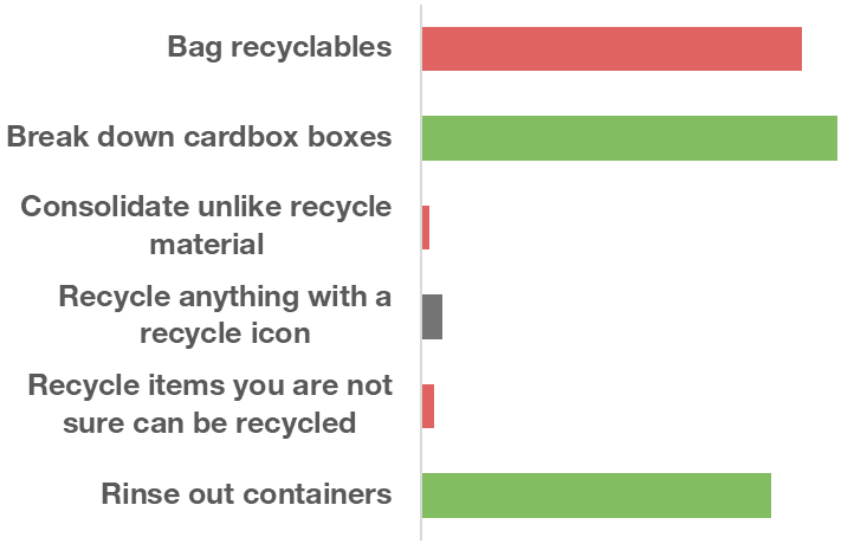
We reworked this question to this.

What will we do with the responses?

How will this information inform ***action?***

1. How are you recycling? ⇨ Curbside
2. What information would someone need to recycle this way? ⇨ All the following
   1. Do they have it? ⇨ Not for → "Bag recyclables"
3. Is there a way to get info. to people who need it? ⇨ Yes → with **MMP**
   1. **Emphasize these pieces of education in plan**

Ex #2: **When placing an item in the recycling bin, should you do the following practices?**



Which this question, we answer:

1. What type of recycling are we referring to? → Curbside
2. What information would someone need to recycle this way? → See responses
3. Do they have it? → With the given theoretical responses, they do not for "Bag recyclables"
4. Is there a way to get the info to people who need it? → Yes, with MMP. (*Another question asked about ways they search for info*)

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Results

Distribution Method & Results

Newsletter as a Survey Distribution Tool

The Ottawa Way – 93.5% of responses

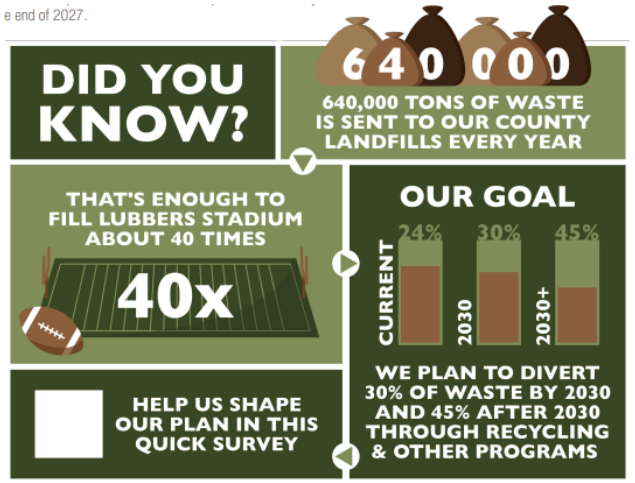
December 31, 2025 – February 11, 2026

Households reached: 115,914

Survey responses received: 1,733

Response rate: 1.5%





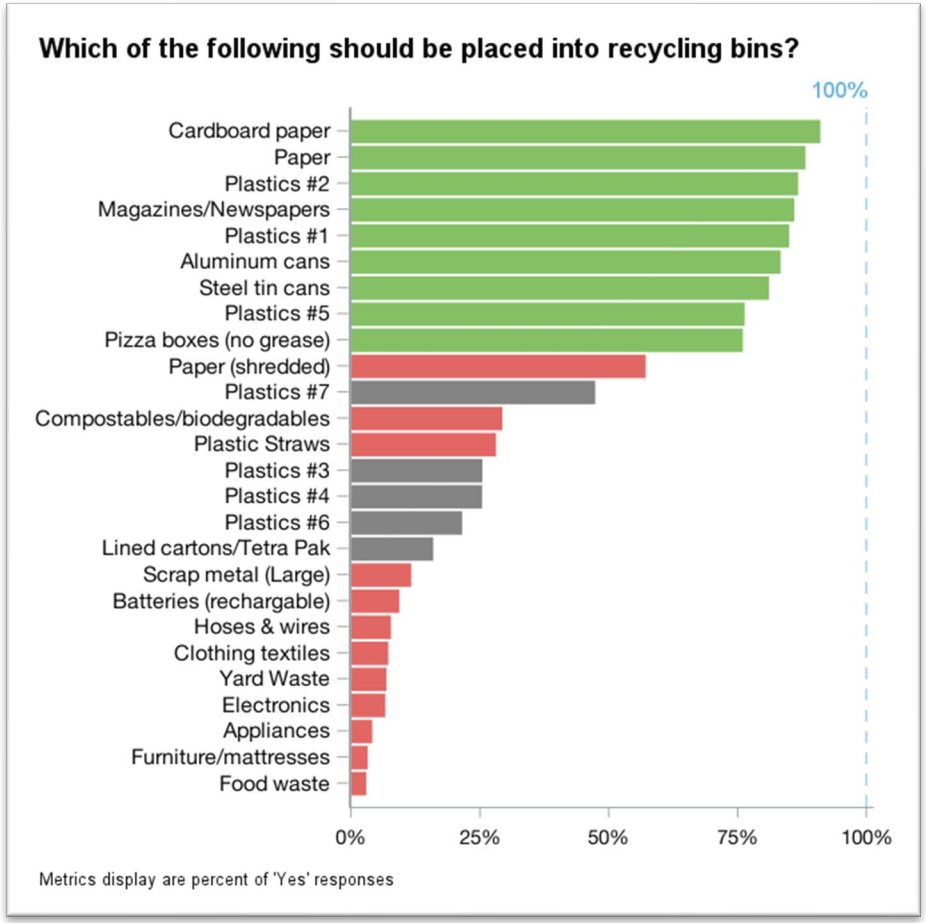
Supplemental Distribution & Promotion:

- Ottawa County Website banner
- Ottawa County Department of Public Health Website banner
- Ottawa County Social Media channels *(~3.5% of responses)*
- A mention on WHTC *Talk of the Town* (January 22, 2026)

The survey was open from December 31, 2025 – February 11, 2026 and primarily distributed through *The Ottawa Way. The Ottawa Way* is a multipage print newsletter distributed twice per year to residents across the county. The Board of Commissioners approved the budget for this publication, with a cost of about **$50,000 per cycle** (or roughly **$100,000 annually**) covering printing and postage. *The Ottawa Way* responses made up just shy of 94% of all responses.

Data Takeaways → Action Plan

Get baseline recycling behaviors *(& retest post MMP)*





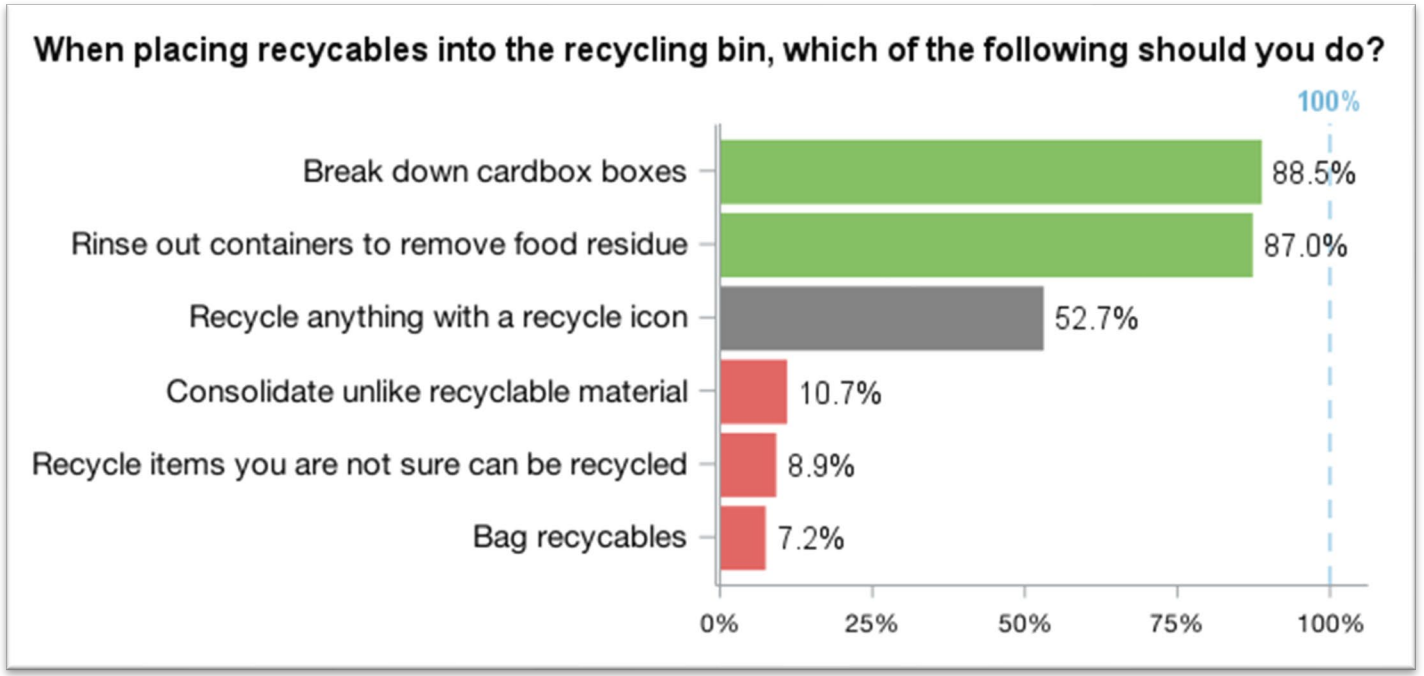
Suggestions for board:

1. Education topics: **shredded paper, compostables, plastic straws**
2. Clear communication which items can be recycled curbside by location & hauler

This prompt asked respondents what items should be recycled curbside. The green bar indicate those items that **can** be recycled curbside universally. The red bars indicate those items that **cannot** be recycled universally, and the grey bars are conditionally accepted items depending on location and hauler. Most people said the green items **should** be recycled and most of, the red items **should not** be recycled except for shredded paper, compostables, and plastic straws. This can be a highlighted point for education for the MMP. Additionally, in an ideal world, we could parse out who had what hauler and where their home is located to determine if the grey items could truly be recycled by the person filling out the survey, but that information was not available. So clear communication as to which items can be recycled is needed.

Data Takeaways → Action Plan

Get baseline recycling behaviors
(& retest post MMP)





Suggestions for board:

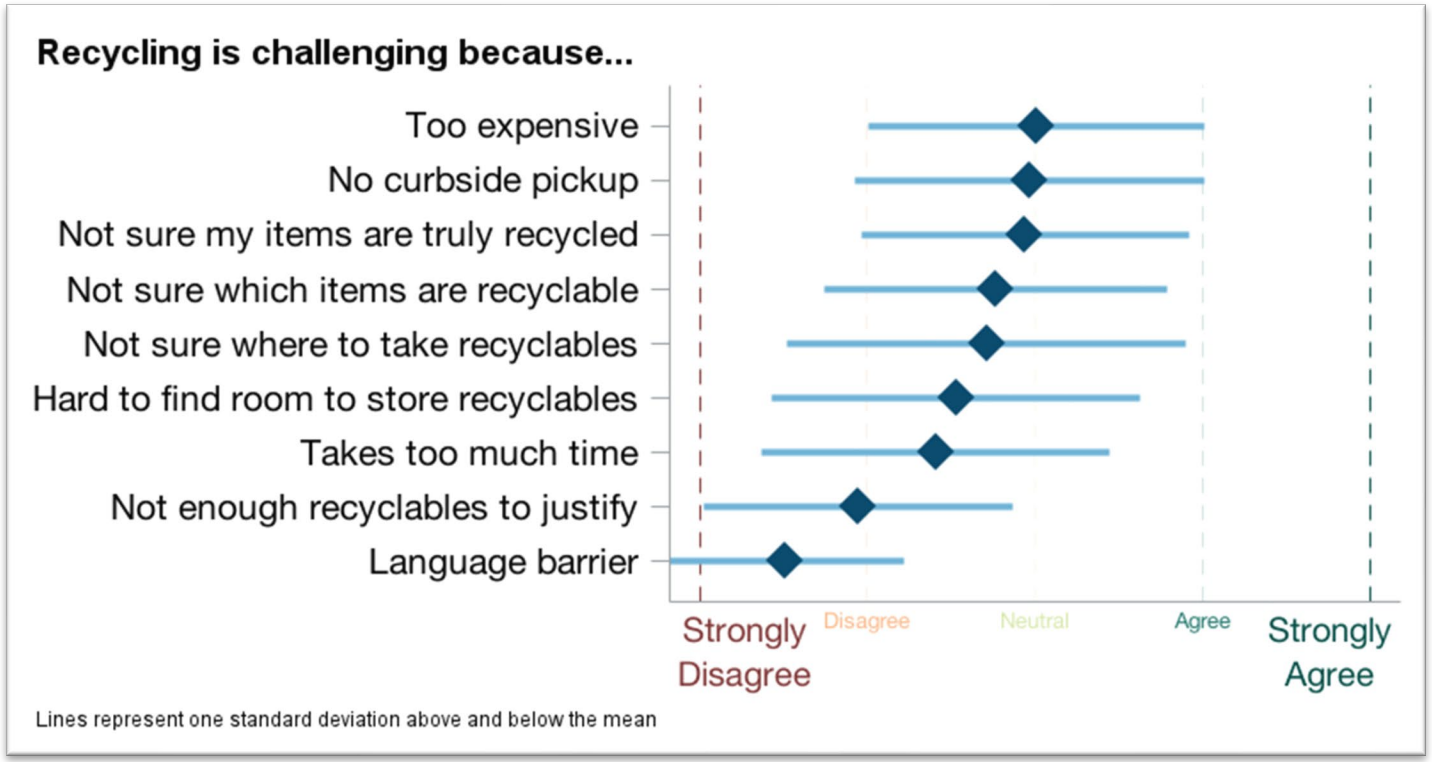
1. Education topics: **Recycle icon ≠ curbside recycling**
2. Clear communication which items can be recycled curbside by location & hauler

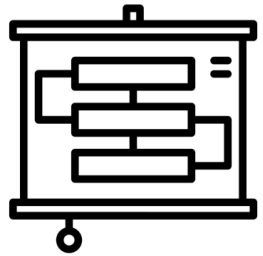
For each one of these pieces of data, before we knew the results, we had **contingency action plans** for each.

Data Takeaways → Action Plan

What are the barriers to recycling?

Among the **23%** that report not using curbside recycling:





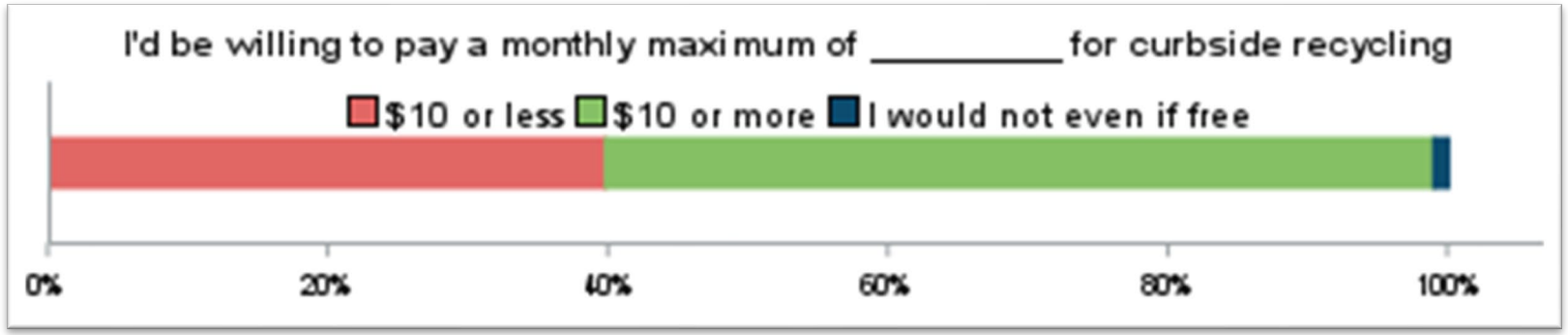
Suggestions for board:

1. Expanding access to curbside for select locations
2. Clear communication which items can be recycled curbside by location & hauler
3. Consider “feedback report” for how much of their curbside was recycled

Most people did not agree with most of these responses as you can see most swayed toward neutral, and most respondents mentioned that being unsure which items to recycle and that their items are truly recycled were the main challenges. However, among those that do not recycle (23%), **cost** and **no curbside access** were the top responses by a hair. The contingency plan here is to suggest expand access and increase communication. A feedback report may also be helpful for residents to know if they’re behaviors are truly resulting in increase diversion, although this may be difficult to implement.

Data Takeaways → Action Plan

What are the barriers to recycling?



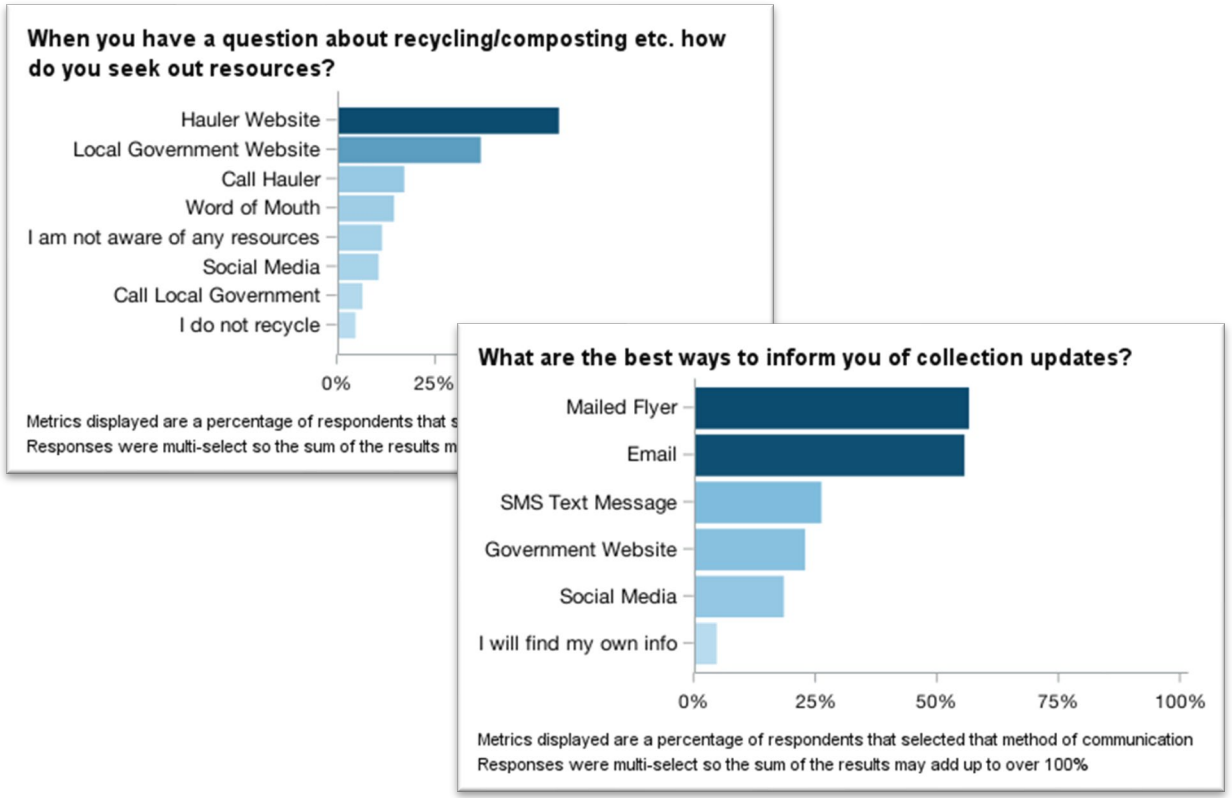
Suggestions for board:

1. Most people (65%) do not want a cost burden, or they'd prefer that cost burden to be less than $10.

Lastly, another takeaway requested from the board was the price range people are willing to pay for curbside recycling. 65% of people were willing to pay $10 or more *maximum* for curbside. This includes 14% that were not willing to pay anything. A small percentage stated they would recycle even if it was free. This may not be information that is directly actionable, but it would inform the board on how much financial burden to shift to the resident if proposed plan involved increased cost.

Data Takeaways → Action Plan

Logistic information





Suggestions for board:

1. Reach out to people via mail or email
2. Post reference material on hauler or local government websites

We did ask about logistics as well and found most people preferred to be communicated with via email and mail flyer. Most people also preferred to have reference material on hauler and LHD webpages.

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Conclusion

Purpose → Takeaways

Get baseline recycling behaviors
(& retest post MMP)

What are the barriers to recycling?

Logistic information
(location, preferred communications, household type etc.)

Suggestions for board:

1. Education topics: **shredded paper, compostables, plastic straws, recycle icon ≠ curbside recycling**
2. Expanding access to curbside for select locations
3. Clear communication which items can be recycled curbside by location & hauler
4. Consider “feedback report” for how much of their curbside was recycled
5. Reach out to people via mail or email & post reference material on hauler or local government websites

We can review our purposes and see if we accomplished our task with the take-aways we developed. We see that our purposes were to get baseline data, and although we’re going to retest later, we learned that at baseline there are areas of improvement that can be addressed with the MMP. The barriers to recycling seem to be “no curbside” for some of those not using curbside, there may be a misunderstanding of specific items haulers do not recycle curbside, and residents may be interested in finding out if their items were truly recycled. Lastly, for reaching out to residents and posting information, mail and email is most requested and if people want to seek information out themselves, hauler and local government websites are generally the platform to do so.

Questions?

Thank you to:

Kimberly Wolters, EPH Sustainability Supervisor
Faith Lundberg, EPH Sustainability Technician
Derel Glashower, Senior Epidemiologist

Ottawa County

Contact information:

Dan Galanto, Epidemiologist
dgalanto@miottawa.org