



West Michigan Materials Management Coalition
Final Report Summary
2022 Materials Management County Engagement Grant

West Michigan Sustainable Business Forum held a grant in partnership with seven counties in the Southwest corner of Michigan. The goal of this grant was to engage stakeholders and identify current needs and gaps for sustainable materials management, prior to the upcoming changes in legislation. Below is a summary of the report from the work done for the grant. Find the full grant report [here](#).

General Findings:

Access to Service in Rural Communities-

Inequitable access for lower-density communities was a common theme in our stakeholder engagement. Generally acknowledged as a failure of both the private and public sector, residents and businesses in the region's rural communities do not have access to the same services as those in higher-density communities. Businesses in rural communities in several counties complained that they were unable to identify a vendor willing to provide recycling service. Curbside residential service is not available in many rural communities, and long drives are required for drop-off sites in counties where they are available. Where curbside service is available, pick-ups can be infrequent as once a month.

Education Needs for public:

- Raise awareness of Current Infrastructure
- Economics of Recycling
- Recyclable Materials- dos and don'ts of recycling

Equity and Justice-

Many urban and rural communities in Allegan, Berrien, Cass, Kalamazoo, Kent, St. Joseph and Van Buren counties meet Justice40 criteria. Justice40 illustrates how materials management should be viewed as an economic development strategy that can create jobs and generate wealth for lower income communities with thoughtful investments. Cultural divides and economic insecurity contribute to recycling contamination

Organics:

Food Waste Prevention is Important to Materials Management According to estimates from the USDA, 30% to 40% of the state's food supply is lost to waste.

Public - Private Partnerships:

The majority of stakeholders across the region expressed frustrations with waste haulers, recycling firms, municipalities and county departments of public works or equivalent authorities. Communication and customer service was a common theme, suggesting that there is more at play than the complicated dynamics of materials management and the circular economy.

Haulers are saying “We don’t have enough infrastructure to accommodate the demand from the public to process recycling,” said the regional sales director for one hauler. “We are moving in the right direction but still have a long way to go. The rural areas especially are a pain point due to the lack of population density.”

Regional Vision:

Managed materials are crossing regional footprints. Nearly all recycling goes to Elkhart In and trash to Berrien County. Orchard Hill Landfill currently has 48 years remaining capacity with current waste trends.

- Supporting local business and collaborating with the private sector is essential.
- No community should be expected to subsidize another, but a moderately centralized “hub & spoke” model will be necessary to meet the needs of the region, and will require ongoing collaboration and coordination.
- Every community should have a sustainable funding source sufficient to support materials management service, education, and economic development at a county or regional scale, appropriate to local needs, including at minimum a resource recovery coordinator.

Van Buren County Specific:

- Van Buren County Community Engagement Event held at the Van Buren ISD Conference Center on February 15, 2023 had 23 attendees.
- Only 24% (7/29) of Van Buren COunty municipalities completed the Municipal Measurement Program
- Van Buren 19.8% People of Color and 8% spanish speakers(highest in coalition counties)

General Comments from county members:

- Residents in the county do express interest in recycling, but the spacing of residences makes it difficult to make the program a priority.
- In Van Buren County, municipal stakeholders were quick to celebrate the contributions of the Van Buren Conservation District. Efforts to modernize the transfer station and make it more inviting for recycling were commended.

Funding:

- Recycling programs funded through the conservation district operations millage, County contribution, State grants, and local municipal contribution
- General support for a new countywide funding mechanism to support sustainable materials management improvements, but apprehension to do so at the municipal level.
- Although stakeholders expressed strong support for increased funding, there was no specific interest expressed in transitioning the cost away from the conservation district millage.
- There was an expressed preference for the conservation district to remain in a leadership role.
- There is stakeholder support and apparent political will for a new millage or fee that would fund recycling and materials management through a separate mechanism.

Materials Management Planning:

The new Part 115 Legislation has established these goals and objectives:

- Triple Michigan's recycling rate to 45 percent
- Cut food waste in half by 2030
- Grow end-use recycling markets
- Build the foundation for a decarbonized and thriving Michigan economy
- Communities meet minimum standards for recycling access
 - 90% of single family households in municipalities over 5,000 receive curbside recycling service for one or more materials by 2028.
 - Counties with population less than 100,000 to host one drop-off recycling per 10,000 residents.
- Communities are working to increase the recycling rate
- Have set local goals and create an actionable plan for sustainable materials management, including organics and food waste.

Requirement of Materials Management Plan:

- Identify all materials management facilities and available capacity
- Focus on utilization capacity
- Determine a MSW recycling rate
- Develop materials management goals for utilization and recycling
 - Organics, recyclables, and other diversion activities
 - Benchmark Recycling Standards

- Contains an enforceable mechanism and responsible parties for implementing the MMP
- Ensures materials management facilities that are needed can be developed and provides avenue for siting of new facilities (MUFs; Waste Diversion Centers; etc.)
- Includes an overview of the transportation infrastructure for all managed materials
- Documents an implementation strategy

Top 5 Needs to Increase Opportunities for Materials Management:

Based on the deficiencies and opportunities detailed in the prior sections and the sections that follow, we have identified the following needs to improve materials management in the region with a goal to meet Part 115 benchmarks and contribute to the statewide expansion of the recycling rate

1. Increased investment in educational programming across all scales and industries, to include matchmaking and directory resources, technical support, K12 education, advocacy and general issue leadership, supported and amplified through collaborations between public and private sector, municipalities and counties, and regional partnership.
2. Empower public sector leadership:
 - a. New or revised funding mechanisms to ensure dedicated resource recovery or environmental services in Van Buren counties, potentially through regional collaboration, and to improve service in Van Buren county.
3. Increase processing capacity for traditional recyclables through new Materials Recycling Facilities in at least Berrien, Kalamazoo, Kent, and Ottawa counties, with transfer stations or MRFs in Allegan, Cass, St. Joseph and Van Buren counties. There is currently no MRF in Southwest Michigan.
4. Improve access to recycling services:
 - a. Develop at least one comprehensive drop-off center or CHARM (Center for Hard to Recycle Materials) in each county.
 - b. Increase drop-off sites for traditional materials as required to meet Part 115 benchmarks.
 - c. Facilitate investment in private sector drop-off, curbside service, and processing facilities through funding, strategic partnerships, publicity and referrals, and technical support.
 - d. Facilitate investment in municipalities to establish new curbside service or drop-off sites.
5. Increase diversion of organic materials through commercial or community composting, anaerobic digestion facilities, and/or Food Loss and Waste Reduction (FLWR).

Van Buren County MMP:

- Benchmark requirements needed to meet goals:
 - One more drop off site
 - Alma, Antwerp, and Paw Paw Townships need curbside access
- Van Buren County MMP funding \$293,943 plus \$10,000 for multicounty plan
- Van Buren Conservation District is eager to partner regionally with other counties, and have engaged County Commissioners and funders on the benefits of partnerships from a financial standpoint.
- They would encourage a siting for a Household Hazardous Waste facility to help serve Allegan, Cass, and Berrien counties.

Recommendations:

1. Establish curbside recycling service in Alma Township and Paw Paw Township.
2. Expand an existing drop-off site to serve a pilot comprehensive drop-off site.
3. Invest in capacity for organics recycling through compost yards and/or anaerobic digestion..
4. Ask voters for a millage to support recycling that will provide municipalities necessary funding mechanisms and protect conservation district millage. As Van Buren County is the best positioned of any in Southwest Michigan, additional resources could allow it to gain momentum toward being Lower Michigan's model community