



How to Build a Municipal Food Waste Strategy

A Toolkit for New York State Municipalities

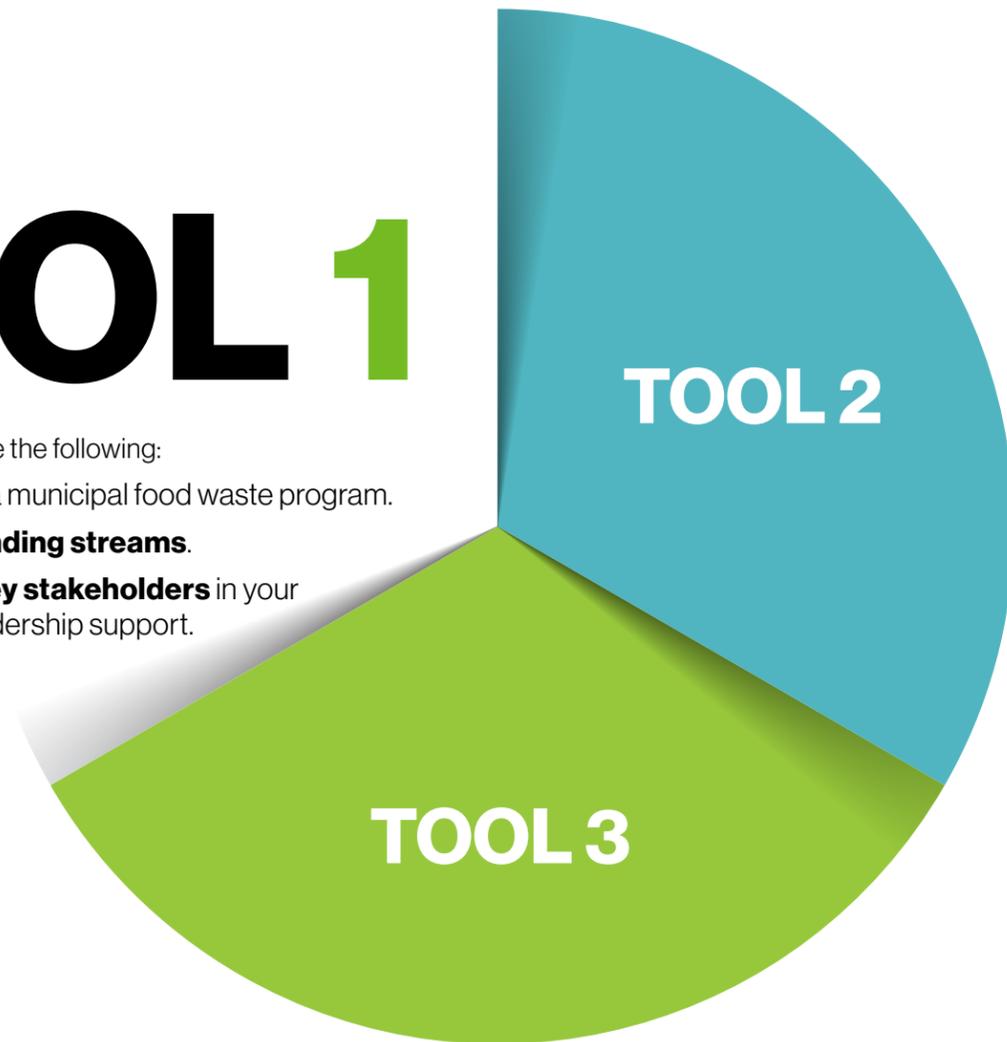
Tool 1: Getting started — defining your goals



TOOL 1

Designed to help you achieve the following:

- Set realistic **goals** for a municipal food waste program.
- Single out possible **funding streams**.
- Identify and engage **key stakeholders** in your community to gain leadership support.



What this **tool** will help you **achieve**

If you're reading this, it's probably because you are concerned about wasted food in your community. We think the best part about that is that it also means that you're looking for ways to address it.

If you don't quite know where to start, that's okay. This tool, which is part of a larger toolkit made up of three tools, was developed by the [New York State Pollution Prevention Institute \(NYSP2I\)](#) to help municipalities large and small.

The first and most important step of building a food waste program is defining and communicating your goals. These concepts will provide clear guidance when making subsequent decisions as you design your strategy and implement your program. A successful strategy is built on feasible goals that can be expanded upon over time.

This tool walks you through four steps to achieve this.

- **Step 1:** Know and champion issue(s) surrounding food waste.
- **Step 2:** Write a goal statement.
- **Step 3:** Identify potential funding and build a budget.
- **Step 4:** Win project buy-in from decision-makers.



Step 1:

Know and champion the issues surrounding food waste.

How well do you and your team know food waste?

Your efforts to tackle food waste won't go far without a solid grasp of what food waste is, its impacts, and the benefits of addressing it (e.g., feeding members of your community, saving local businesses money through waste prevention, returning nutrients to the soil, etc.). The better you understand wasted food as a problem and the opportunities for reducing, donating, recycling, or diverting it, the more confident you will be about the goals you set.

Leadership through expertise

Businesses and other organizations in your community—your project's stakeholders—will have varying levels of familiarity with the issues surrounding food waste. Becoming conversant in these will help you better communicate your strategy and its purpose to them. In the end, you will need to become a vocal champion for your plan if it is going to grow and be impactful.

In order to strengthen your working knowledge of food waste, use the questions below as starting points—they are by no means all-inclusive.

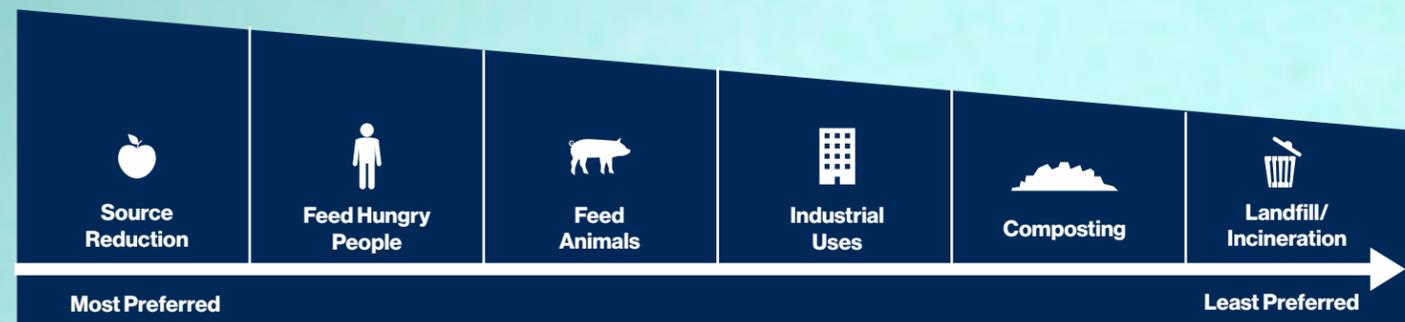
- **What is food waste?**
- **What are the main causes of food waste?**
- **What businesses are most likely to face challenges addressing food waste?**
- **What are the impacts of food waste on your community?**
- **What benefits come with addressing wasted food?** Remember that these can range across a number of issues that may matter to your constituents in different ways, from the environment to food scarcity to better budgeting.
- **How is food waste addressed?**



Need help answering these questions?

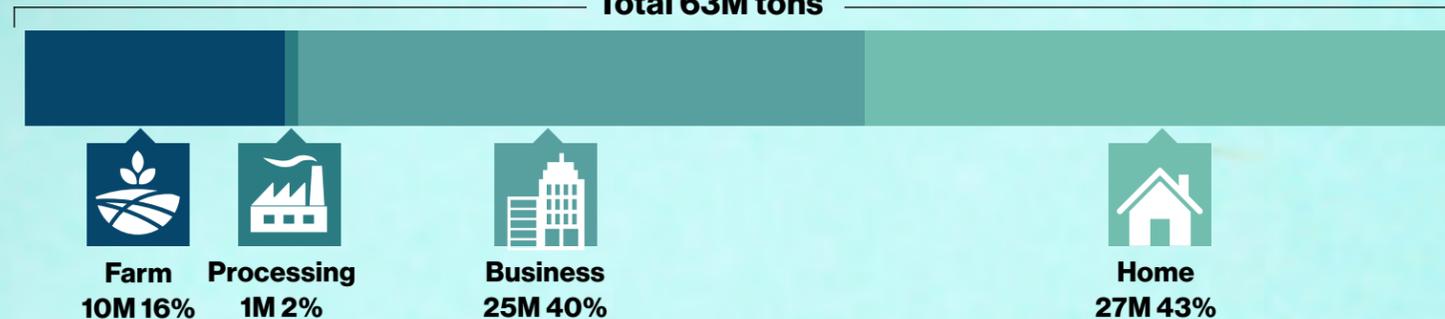
Our "A Q&A Guide for New York State Businesses, Municipalities, and Communities" is a helpful and shareable primer on the basics of understanding and addressing food waste as a municipality or business.

Methods for addressing food waste



Sources of food waste in the U.S.

Total 63M tons



Step 2:

Write a goal statement.

A thought-out, concise goal statement is the foundation of an effective strategy for addressing food waste. It serves as a guide to focus planning efforts, helping you to see what resources and relationships need to be developed to build a successful strategy.

Setting a goal statement at the outset of your planning is useful because it allows you to translate general ambitions into something concrete and actionable. You most likely began this process with a desire to curtail food waste entirely. But, well intentioned as that may be, it is easier said than done. A goal statement sets boundaries, and chunks an ambitious idea down into a project that is achievable and can be built upon in the future.



Goal statement template

Use the template below to begin drafting your goal statement. Each variable is described in more detail to assist you. This shouldn't be interpreted too strictly—feel free to adjust to suit your needs better.

In order to **[larger strategic initiative]** of/for **[target population]** in **[region]**, we aim to address food waste by **[tactic(s)]** to **[desired outcome(s)]**.

Template terms:

Larger strategic initiative:	Target population:	Region:	Food waste tactics:	Desired outcome(s):
Tie your food waste initiative into any wider sustainability or community efforts your municipality has in place (e.g., carbon footprint reduction goal, commitment to eliminate hunger).	Identify the specific group or members of your community that will participate in the initiative or program (e.g., restaurants, multi-family residences, or small food businesses).	Define the geographic limits of your program, whether it's a town, city, or a county.	Set out what tactic(s) addressing food waste you will use (e.g., backyard composting, outreach and education, or donation).	Establish what you hope to achieve through your program. This may be general, such as "healthier communities" or "significant reduction in food waste," or it may be a specific metric, like "reduce food waste by 50%." Alternatively, this could simply point to a future, expanded strategic initiative (e.g., "to develop a larger, county-wide composting program").

Goal statement sample

In order to **reduce the environmental footprint of businesses in our city**, we aim to address food waste by **establishing a food waste collection and composting program for local businesses** to **create the foundation for a future program that will allow residents and all businesses to participate**.

Step 3:

Identify potential funding and build a budget.

No strategy for tackling wasted food will be successful without adequate funding. Once your vision for your plan is clarified (Steps 1-2 of this tool), you are ready to determine potential funding sources and begin outlining a project budget. At this point you won't be able to create a detailed budget, but it's important to have an educated budgetary estimate when you start talking with key decision-makers (Step 4).

Making the financial case

Municipalities operate on strict budgets. Public revenues from sources like taxes have to be tied to expenditures that decision-makers consider to be worthwhile and effective. For this reason, making a convincing case to financial administrators through your planning is essential. This becomes especially important as municipalities seek to balance their budgets in the wake of economic downturns, like that following the Great Recession or the COVID-19 pandemic.

Counter possible skepticism or reluctance by highlighting the benefits and savings that a food waste program can realize and by pointing to other communities that have successfully implemented similar programs. If applicable, be sure to show how addressing wasted food can save individual businesses or households money that they can then invest in the local economy. A sustainable food waste strategy can also cut costs for municipalities that collect and process waste because it means less uneaten food ends up in landfills.

Other funding sources

In addition to outlining possible funding within your existing budget, consider grants and other opportunities available from government and foundations.

- **Federal, state, and local community foundations**
- **Federal and statewide grants or other funding opportunities**
- **Loans from sustainability-focused funders** (e.g., the [Closed Loop Fund](#))

Syracuse University's "[Funding Guide for Capital Projects in Sustainable Materials Management](#)" is an excellent resource for building a funding strategy.

Budget design

You should have a high-level budget estimate before approaching decision-makers and other key stakeholders. The cost and funding options of your proposed plan will depend on the specific tactics you employ and the outcomes you want to achieve (which you set in your goal statement).

Strategic considerations

Start with securing funding for a pilot program. Long-term funding is often not immediately available. For this, and several other reasons, we recommend beginning with a pilot program. A pilot requires substantially less money and resources because it is smaller in scope and limited in time duration. If long-term funding remains a challenge, results from a pilot could support improved strategy design and offer persuasive evidence for continued funding.

Seek long-term funding. You may not be able to gain long-term funding right away, and that's OK. While your focus initially should be on funding your pilot, you also need to keep the long-term plan in mind. The most successful programs are those that can become entirely or almost entirely self-sufficient over time. However, it is common to use a successful pilot as leverage for more funding. Once you can quantify your initial successes, it will be easier to secure funding.

Unsure about how to plan and conduct a pilot program? Don't worry: **Tool 2** will walk you through the entire process, from design to launch.



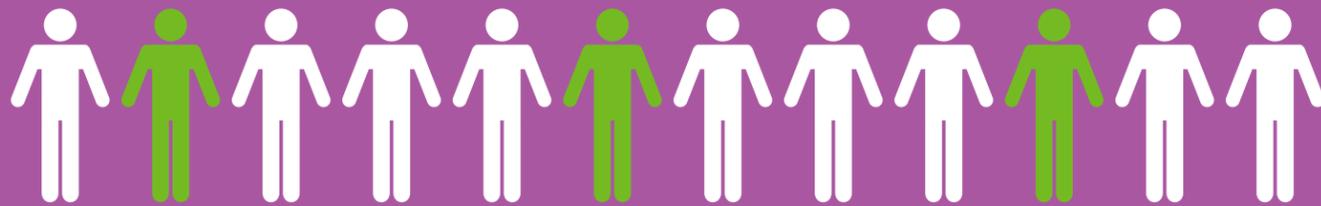
Step 4:

Gain project buy-in from key decision-makers and leaders (stakeholder engagement).

Stakeholders are essential to your food waste strategy, large or small. Without them, your plan will lack the resources and support it needs to be successful.

The early involvement of stakeholders in your planning process, even for a pilot, will help you to address potential barriers (e.g., resource challenges or legal constraints), access resources, or better visualize your objective statement as a finalized plan. It also signals a legitimate effort on your part to incorporate the views and concerns of stakeholders into your project.

It helps to organize potential stakeholders into three basic categories: **core stakeholders**, **connected stakeholders**, and **external stakeholders**. This tool focuses on engaging core stakeholders, since their buy-in informs next steps. Best practices for engaging the two other types of stakeholders are described in more depth in **Tools 2 and 3**.



Core stakeholders

play a fundamental role in designing and realizing your plan. They are typically influential decision-makers within your community, including legislators and community leaders. Their buy-in can also help sway general opinion about the value of your plan.

Connected stakeholders

are not only affected by your plan, they are also involved in carrying it out. Connected stakeholders can and should provide valuable insight into the executability and other nuances related to implementing your plan (e.g., cost or other behavioral constraints.) These stakeholders may include businesses like grocery stores and restaurants.

External stakeholders

are likely to be people, groups, or organizations within your community who will be passively affected by your food waste plan. They are not active participants. This group may include residents and small businesses not directly involved in food preparation or retail. While your immediate plans may not directly affect them, food waste is a community issue, and everyone plays a role.

Find decision-makers to engage as core stakeholders.

How to find the decision-makers in your community

Core stakeholders are the people with decision-making power or who are otherwise influential in the community. They should be the first relationships you build as part of your stakeholder engagement. Their support will be critical to the success of your project.

Before reaching out to members of this stakeholder group, you should spend some time researching what they may have already shown interest in when it comes to wasted food. For example, have they participated in prior projects? Are they involved in current activities that may be tangentially related to food waste, such as sustainability or hunger-focused programs?

Core stakeholders may include but are not limited to the following:

- Elected officials
- Civil servants
- Waste management operators
- Community leaders / influencers
- Heads of business or community associations

How to engage core stakeholders

There are a number of methods for reaching out to decision-makers in your community in order to engage them as core stakeholders. What works best for you will depend on your existing relationships, the size of your community, and the number of potential decision-makers you want to contact. We suggest building your outreach around the following steps:

1. **Build a prospect list.**
2. **Make initial contact to each individually by phone or email.**
3. **Provide a clear, descriptive summary of your proposed plan.**
4. **Schedule one-on-one or group informational meetings.**
5. **Share a proposal plan with interested prospects.**
6. **Get written commitment.**

Keep the following messaging points in mind when crafting written communications or talking points for core stakeholders:

- **Core stakeholders are project partners whose expertise will inform planning and execution activities.**
- **Their feedback on the strategy's goal statement and overall direction is valuable and essential.**
- **The ultimate success of the program depends on their support as leaders.**
- **They may be more invested in your strategy if it aligns with a topic or cause they already care about.**

Communicate your goals.

Once you have the ears of decision-makers in your community, you'll need to convince them of the viability of your proposed plan. Your chances of achieving this are much higher if you have a clear, concise proposal for your pilot program (or full program, if relevant) ready to share.

An effective proposal document should include, at the very least, your vision statement, a summary of how wasted food is impacting your community (tying it to existing initiatives, when possible), and a description of the goals you believe your plan will achieve.

Use this template to get started on your communication plan:

 [Stakeholder Communication Tracker](#)

Obtain buy-in.

Great—you've successfully found decision-makers willing to support and participate in your pilot and possibly a future initiative as core stakeholders. While a verbal commitment is good, a written, formal one is better.

Send each willing core stakeholder a letter quickly summarizing your initiative that also restates their commitment to it. (Pro tip: Include the proposal as a helpful reminder.) This letter should be signed by you and the core stakeholder.

Use these templates to get started on your letters to core stakeholders:

 [Template Letters](#)

The letter shouldn't be the last word before your pilot project begins. The next tool will walk you through development of your pilot outline into a comprehensive plan. Throughout this process, be sure to keep in touch with your core stakeholders. This will help to keep the initiative among their top-of-mind priorities and could even serve to attract more stakeholders. Monthly meetings or calls could achieve this, or even just regular updates through an email newsletter.

Ready for more?

Review the checklist below to make sure you have completed everything you need to move onto **Tool 2** of this toolkit.

- You feel confident about educating others on food waste and how to address it.
- You've written a goal statement for your food waste program.
- You've made high-level budgetary considerations.
- You've begun stakeholder engagement, starting by obtaining commitments from core stakeholders.

Download Tool 2: **"Defining your scope and conducting a pilot"** of the toolkit

