



How to Build a Municipal Food Waste Strategy

A Toolkit for New York State Municipalities

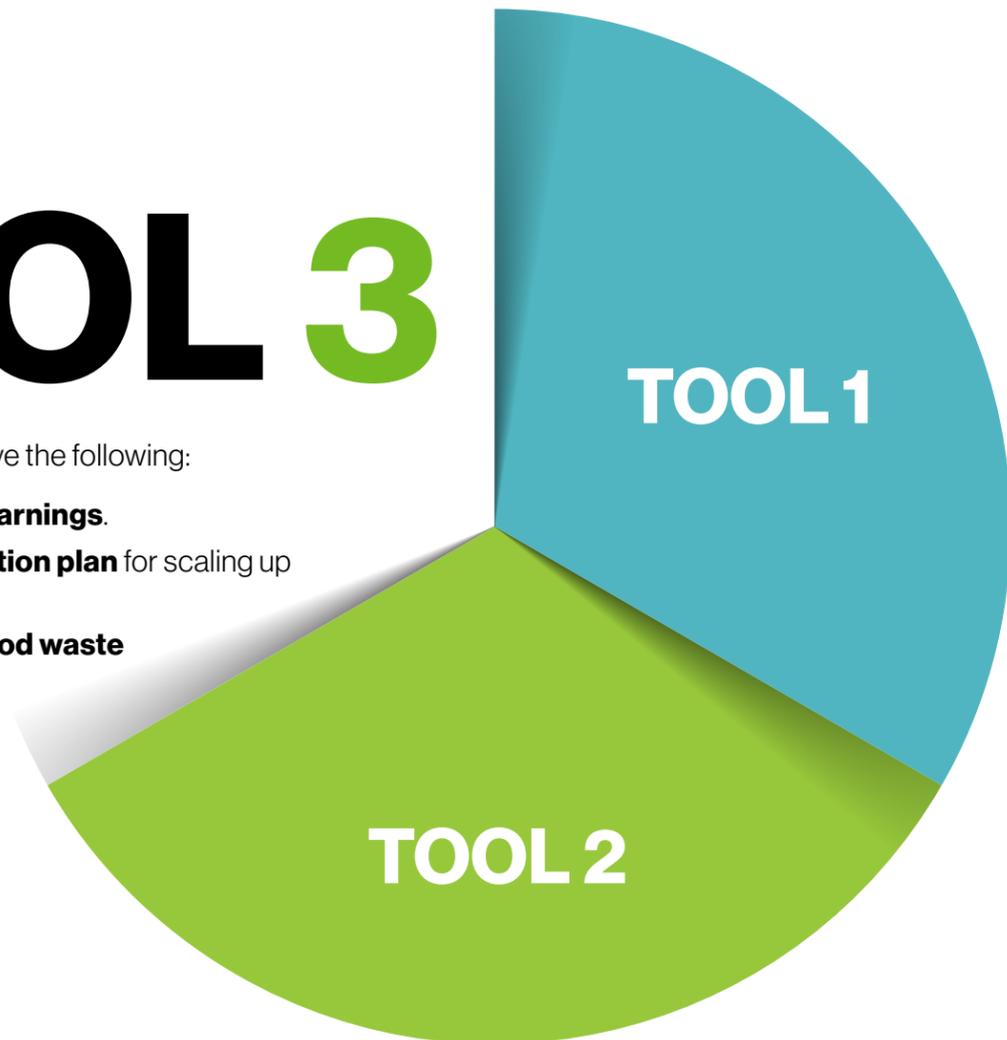
Tool 3: Scaling up your pilot into a long-term program



TOOL 3

Designed to help you achieve the following:

- Make use of the **pilot learnings**.
- Create an **implementation plan** for scaling up from a pilot.
- Launch and sustain a **food waste program**.



Wait! Before using this tool, make sure you have completed **Tool 2** of this toolkit.

Before beginning you should have

- **A strong sense of the size and scope** of your plan to address food waste,
- **Relationships** with core decision-makers and connected stakeholders in your community, and
- **Results** from a pilot program that you designed and launched to help you build a more permanent food waste program.

This tool is the third and final part of a toolkit that was developed by the [New York State Pollution Prevention Institute \(NYSP2I\)](#) to help municipalities large and small.

In **Tool 2**, you set the foundation for a food waste program, and then designed and planned a pilot based off it. **Tool 3** is designed to translate your pilot experience into a full-scale implementation of your program.

This will be done by completing three steps:

- **Step 1:** Wrap up your pilot.
- **Step 2:** Communicate your pilot outcomes.
- **Step 3:** Launch your program—and keep it going.



Congratulations!

If you're reading this, you recently completed a pilot program for addressing food waste in your community. That's a mammoth task achieved—pat yourself on the back!

Maybe you were pleasantly surprised when an idea you tested during your pilot worked well. Or maybe you ran into unexpected challenges. But, even if little went according to plan, that's still okay. The purpose of the pilot is to learn and discover, to test out your new plan in the real world so that you can make it better.

So, what's next?

Tool 3 will help you transform insights from your pilot into the practices that will form your long-term, full-scale food waste program. Your pilot provided you with real-world evidence—what you observed, learned, and discovered will serve as evidence to key decision-makers in your community about the benefits your food waste program can realize.

Step 1: Wrap up

- Complete pilot.
- Learn and discover from pilot results.
- Set best practices.

Step 2: Communicate

- Communicate learnings and next steps.
- Create scale-up plan.

Step 3: Launch

- Launch and sustain long-term program.



Step 1:

Wrap up your pilot.

The next phase in your food waste program will be different from a pilot in a few important ways.

It could be open-ended.

Your pilot had a definite start and end date, but a full-scale program will probably run for a much longer period of time. While this depends on your specific goals (you may solve the problem you are tackling, after all), the majority of successful food waste initiatives operate over many years, often evolving and adapting to new priorities. For this reason, it's helpful to imagine the full-scale version of your food waste program as a *living thing*.

It will be larger and more complex.

Hopefully, the scope of your pilot was appropriate and you were able to successfully manage it from start to finish. One purpose of the pilot was to work with a diverse but limited group of stakeholders. In your next phase, you will likely work with many more stakeholders, as well as other participants. This will call for greater levels of coordination and resource allocation.

It will require a bigger budget.

The budget you secured for your pilot was, most likely, clearly bounded by the project. The full-scale program described will need sustainable funding source(s) to ensure long-term operation. As a part of your work following **Tools 1 and 2**, you should have identified potential funding sources to meet your scale-up plans.

Anticipating these differences as part of your food waste program implementation plan will help get it off to a good start. This is the **scale-up process**, which serves as a bridge between your pilot and the launch of a larger, scaled-up program.

Implementation planning is an opportunity to build on what you learned during your pilot program. Your first step should be to go to any data, feedback, and/or observations you collected during your pilot and then to compare what they tell you to your original expectations. The following is a walkthrough of what you should review ahead of creating your implementation plan.



Revisit your plan strategy.

Equipped with what you need to gain a fresh perspective on your plan (information and experience from your pilot), return to some of the fundamental activities you completed in **Tools 1 and 2** of this toolkit.

Goal statement

Now that you've got your hands dirty, it can be easy to forget about the more visionary purpose behind your project. How does your goal statement match up with what you now know? Does it need to be updated?

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)]**.

SWOT analysis

Take a look at the strengths and weaknesses you identified in **Tool 2**. Did your pilot experience more or less match these? Or did you discover new strengths or weaknesses that should be addressed in your long-term plan?



Project scope

Consider the scope you set for the pilot. Was this adequate or were you surprised by unexpected challenges? Was there a key detail you missed that should be added?

See what, if anything, has changed by revisiting the scoping questions from **Tool 2**.

- **Who are the potential participants?**
- **What general geographic location will the program cover?**
- **How will food waste be collected?**
- **Where will the food waste be managed?**
- **How long do you foresee the program running until positive results are seen?**

Check in on your baseline.

Your next step should be to determine how your pilot performed next to the baseline metrics and control group(s) you set in **Tool 2**. This means looking at your metrics for any events, actions, or changes in behavior that might be a consequence of your pilot.

Be sure to review these datasets in parallel in order to clearly delineate changes that were caused by your pilot efforts from those that outside factors may have set in play. For example, a local school's food drive may have contributed to a spike in donation alongside your outreach efforts. Once you see where positive change was achieved, you can make those tactics a part of your long-term program along with the data you collected.

Negative or neutral changes you notice are also useful, as they may indicate red flags. For instance, did you overestimate how much pilot participants knew about food waste? If so, your long-term program could incorporate more education about the impacts of wasted food. Unexpected results, in this way, can be just as enlightening as those that confirm your original assumptions.

Your review may lead to significant questions about your program—that's okay. Evaluate each question carefully. For those that touch on important matters, like cost implications or participation,

consider running an additional pilot or a smaller trial to learn more before moving forward. Once you have reviewed your original strategic approach, you will be able to better evaluate your pilot's successes and opportunities for improvement. Any metrics you collected during the pilot should be closely aligned with your original planning to make this as effective an evaluation as possible.



Organize your pilot outcomes.

Having reviewed your foundational strategy, gone back to your baseline research, and collected quality feedback from everyone who took part in your pilot, there's a good chance that **you have a lot of information on your hands**. Now it's time to organize it.

Organizing everything you've learned and collected into a sensible format will help you to draw conclusions. These will be the changes, if any, you will make to your program in its full-scale version. Putting your pilot outcomes into a single document will not only be useful to you and your team, but it will be especially helpful when communicating the outcomes of your pilot to others (more about this in **Step 2**).

At a minimum, the document should contain the following:

- **Key pilot metrics** (e.g., total volume of food waste mitigated) as compared to the baseline and control group(s)
- **Any changes or updates** during the course of the pilot as a result of feedback or observation
- **Summaries of participant feedback** collected throughout the pilot and after it was completed
- **Notes of what worked well and what needs to change**

Translate your findings into next steps.

A pilot lessens the risks that come with launching a large, complex program all at once. It's an opportunity to adjust course early on and to scale up practices that work. Once you have organized your pilot's findings and reviewed them with your decision-making team, it's important to take time to draw conclusions from the data, be it numerical or anecdotal, or both.

Best practices

One goal of your review should be to set any best practices you can extract from your pilot results into writing. Setting best practices is a chance to formalize incidental learnings, unexpected successes, or lessons learned from sudden challenges.

Some common examples of best practices that you might develop from your pilot are listed below.

- **Making routine phone-call check-ins with core stakeholders**
- **Assigning specific duties to team leaders to promote ownership**
- **Sending text or email updates to participants**
- **Writing and sharing schedules**
- **Systematizing repeat processes**
- **Listening to feedback and adapting**
- **Sharing and promoting successes and other project outcomes**
- **Positively reinforcing desired behaviors of participants and stakeholders**

Necessary changes

In addition to best practices, your review should suggest any changes you will make in the scale up from the pilot to a long-term program. As stated above, some of these may benefit from a follow-up pilot to determine if they adequately address the issues you hope to overcome. Such changes might resemble the examples below.

- ***You piloted a model where participants would dump their own food waste buckets at drop-off sites, but you received a lot of complaints from participants about cleaning their own buckets. You decide to shift to a bin-swap model instead before scaling up.***
- ***There were several instances where the truck driver was not able to find a participant's bin that they claimed they put outside. You therefore decide to standardize this process by requiring participants to place their bin on their front porch on collection day.***
- ***During your pilot, you found that many businesses didn't have their food waste ready for pickup at the time you set (between 1:00 and 2:00 p.m.). This meant a lot of waste wasn't collected by the food hauler you worked with, which diminished the pilot's results. To avoid this in the future, you decide to assign full days for pickup. Businesses can leave their waste out on a certain day of the week, like other refuse or recycling collection, allowing more flexibility and improving success rate.***

Step 2:

Communicate your pilot outcomes.

Communication with stakeholders, decision-makers, and the wider public will be an ongoing process throughout your food waste program. At the post-pilot stage, your focus should be on conveying outcomes—which includes successes and opportunities for improvement—in ways that speak to the needs of your different audiences.

Sharing pilot outcomes with pilot stakeholders and participants

The first audience to whom you should bring your pilot findings and conclusions should be the people who helped make it happen. If your pilot was fairly small, a direct, more personal conversation with each participant is ideal. But if that is not feasible or if you prefer a more formal framework, a workshop-style meeting with all stakeholders and participants might be better.

Whether you choose to talk directly to each participant, give a presentation to a group, or develop a written document, the content of your communication should clearly summarize the following:

- **Thank yous:** Remember that even the most willing participants took a chance on your pilot and devoted their time and energy to participating. Acknowledge their dedication by thanking them.
- **Key learnings and observations:** Offer a high-level look at the pilot as a whole, tying your original vision and goals into a narrative of the project.
- **Notable achievements:** This is a chance to positively reinforce the efforts of pilot participants. Highlight any successes that might build connection with the program and encourage continued participation.

- **Summary of relevant outcomes:** Share results (such as impactful metrics) that are meaningful to your participants. Different results may be more interesting to some audiences than others.
- **Opportunities for improvement:** Unless your pilot was perfect, there were probably areas where improvement is needed moving forward.
- **Best practices:** Be sure to highlight the role that pilot participants played in the development of best practices through the insights and feedback they shared. Reiterate how these practices are essential to onboarding and training new program participants.
- **Next steps:** Outline the changes you will be making, if any, as you implement the full-scale version of your program. This may also be a good place to introduce your plans to scale up, even if you don't have a solidified plan or funding in place yet. It will also serve as an opportunity for informing participants of what will be required of them as you move forward.

Taking the time to keep pilot participants in the loop with how it went may help sustain enthusiasm for the program among stakeholders.

Using pilot outcomes to secure further funding

Core stakeholders make up an important audience to consider in your post-pilot communications. Their support may be critical when it comes to funding for your full-scale program. Through your work in **Tools 1 and 2**, you should have already developed a relationship with these decision-makers, whether they are civil officials, community leaders, or members of another organization.

You can build upon the content framework in the previous section to prepare for your conversation with funders. Likewise, it can be used to structure a written proposal, if appropriate. However, you will need to add specific budgetary estimates using your post-pilot data.

Consider the following as you build budget estimates:

- **Was the budget you set sufficient? Did you go over budget? Or was there an excess?**
- **Where will your post-pilot changes result in more costs? Will any costs decrease?**
- **Try to time-bound your estimation: Offer a monthly, quarterly, and annual view.**

Step 3:

Launch your program — and keep it going.

Hopefully, you've experienced firsthand the value of planning through your pilot experience. Now, as you move from the post-pilot phase into implementation of a long-term program, it will be helpful to return to that original plan.

Creating an implementation plan

You can use the plan you created ahead of your pilot as a skeleton for planning out the full-scale implementation of your program. In fact, much of what you developed in it might carry over. Three strategy-related sections will most likely need to be carefully updated or even redrawn altogether: **scope, measures of success, and timeline and budget.**

However your implementation plan evolves, be sure that the final version is reviewed and vetted by your core stakeholders. Doing so provides them with transparency, which will strengthen their commitment to the success of the program.

Announcing your program's launch

Members of the wider community will find value in your initiative as a whole if it's going to improve their lives in some way or covers a topic that matters to them personally or professionally. For this reason, develop key messages from your pilot results that tie to what you hope to achieve moving forward. These should speak directly to the concerns and experiences of stakeholders you hope to appeal to. What genuinely motivates them? Try to make abstract goals more relatable and practical. For example, if you were looking to change household behavior around wasted food, consider replacing "reducing waste going to a landfill" with "saving money at the grocery store."

Say you found in your study that home-based composting removed 40 percent of the household waste that went into the landfill among participants. This may reflect the goals you set at the outset of planning, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The key message you could extract might be:

"The composting initiative aims to reduce how much waste goes into our landfill by 40 percent. This will significantly reduce the amount of potent greenhouse gases like methane that go into the air. It will also save the town money that would otherwise be spent on waste management and offset landscaping and other purchases by providing locally made compost."

Once you have a set of key messages, find ways to share them with your community. Setting an official launch day may provide an excellent platform for doing so. Below are some common elements of a publicity media kit that you could use to get the word out.

- **Press release**
- **Ribbon-cutting style event**
- **Short web video**
- **Website**
- **Posters and flyers**
- **Direct mail**
- **Social media campaign**
- **Stickers**

Communicating the vision and possible impact of your program will build excitement for it among your community, and may even inspire more people to get involved with it. Be sure to include in any messaging an invitation to submit an email or address so that you can build a mailing list for sharing further news and updates about your project.

Sustaining and growing your food-waste program

It might feel like the hardest work is behind you once your full-scale program is off the ground. But making sure your program is successful demands ongoing attention. Below are points to keep in mind as you move forward from launch.

Revisit your strategic goals and milestones on a regular basis.

Schedule regular check-ins with the goals you revised as part of your post-pilot strategic planning. This is useful whatever the sophistication of your planning, whether you have numerical targets (e.g., amount of food waste composted each month), task-oriented milestones (e.g., distribute compost bins to all residences), or both. Also use this time to check in with participants to ensure all aspects of the program are running as expected.

Talk about food waste and the related issues that people care about as much as you can.

The more your community is aware of food waste, the important issues surrounding it, and the program's achievements to date, the more people will be able to appreciate the value of your program and want to participate in it. Maintaining public visibility of your program (e.g., through a steady pace of outreach and messaging) will also help to attract and recruit more participants and other stakeholders (core, connected, and external) to your program.

If possible, dedicate time to ongoing outreach, whether it's through social media or a series

Document strategy and process adjustments.

Your program will evolve over the course of its life. Be sure to clearly document any changes or adjustments in a way that makes it easy to track its progress over time. Use this information to bring a wider perspective to your decision-making process.

of scheduled events. If your resources are too limited for these efforts, consider partnering with other organizations in your community or working with volunteers locally that may already be educating the public about food waste or related issues.

Participants can also bring visibility to the program, whether actively or passively. They can share success stories or take part in interviews. Consider asking them to post window decals, lawn signs, stickers, or to take part in public pledges.



Pro tip: Get the most out of your stakeholder engagement.

Learn more about establishing norms and social diffusion in Doug McKenzie-Mohr's [Fostering Sustainable Behavior: An Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing](#).

Anticipate opportunities for expanding your program.

Staging has been applied throughout this toolkit in order to make the best use of your efforts. After all, an approach based on incremental adjustment and continual improvement is the name of the game when it comes to ensuring the longevity of a municipal program. With this in mind, you will want to anticipate moments—in the shape of definite metrics or milestone achievements—in your progress when expanding the reach of your program makes the most sense.

One strategy that is effective involves setting events that, once they occur, trigger subsequent actions. So, for example, if your weekly goal is to collect enough food to support one food distribution center for a week, but you end up collecting twice that amount, you could explore supporting a second distribution center. Of course, this would mean evaluating any additional costs and resources. But, since you have a well-documented picture of why such growth makes sense, you'll have a more convincing case to present to funders.

Over time, more participants will join your program. While an increase in participation should happen on its own accord, you should also be proactive in recruiting new participants directly, whether those are businesses, residences, or schools. Such direct solicitation is essential if you find that your outreach and messaging efforts are not attracting the numbers of new faces to your program that you expected.

Overall, a planned approach to expanding your program is the best way to balance growth with available resources in a way that ensures effectiveness and longevity.



Don't go it alone!

Launching a food waste program is no easy task, but it's reassuring to know that many municipalities throughout the United States have done so successfully. To learn about what's worked in different regions, consult research reports and feasibility studies. If you find a program that has similar aims as your own, consider reaching out to the team behind it. After all, food waste is a global issue and, in our experience, most people are happy to offer advice or resources to others looking to address wasted food in their communities.

NYSP2I is publicly funded to support New York State municipalities in these efforts. Please feel free to reach out to our food waste specialists if you have questions or would like to be connected with other municipalities operating a similar food waste program to yours.

Contact us by email: nysp2i@rit.edu

Call us: **585-475-2512**



Congratulations—you've completed this toolkit!

Review the checklist items below to make sure you have completed everything in **Tool 3**.

- You have reviewed the results of your pilot to find opportunities for improving your food waste program.
- You conveyed learnings from your pilot to pilot participants and core stakeholders to build a solid foundation for a long-term food waste program.
- You launched your full-scale program and have a plan for ensuring continual improvement throughout its life.

