



Recycle Here!

Community Recycling Program

Case Study

Project Snapshot

Recycle Here! is a rapidly growing recycling drop-off program with over 65,000 visits in 2012, both at the main facility at 1331 Holden Street and at mobile and neighborhood drop-off stations around the City of Detroit. The main location has become more than a busy recycling center. It is now also a community gathering place that grew from the influence of the art community that was first attracted to the location by affordable studio space. Keith Haring-inspired artist Carl Oxley III, who had a nearby studio, created a cheerful bee mural that became the official logo of Recycle Here! After that, artists converged on the building, creating murals large and small. Soon after, music was added to the mix, and the Saturday drop-off center became something of a party.

Timeline and Implementation Process

- **2005** – The City of Detroit was the largest city in North America with no recycling program and a small, energetic group of Wayne State University students set out to fill that void for the Midtown neighborhood. They started with a dumpster in a bar parking lot once a month but quickly realized there was more to the project, as the creation of the simple program was inspiring significant growth in neighborhood social interaction and a sense of community.
- **2007** – The Greater Detroit Resource Recovery Authority began funding the program as the City's official recycling center.
- **2011** – Through a partnership with Detroit Synergy, Midtown Inc. and the Michigan Council on Arts and Cultural Affairs and a successful Kickstarter funding campaign, the property became home to the Lincoln Street Art Park, an outdoor gallery of art created primarily from spray paint and found objects. The park was previously an unkempt, underutilized area, but since the gallery was created it has become a gathering point for the neighborhood, hosting frequent bonfires, musical performances and other events. The Park (and some of its sculptures in residence) has an active social media presence and has been profiled on numerous websites and in newspapers.
- **2012** – Recycle Here! had over 65,000 citizen visits and became the first recycling center in the State of Michigan to receive the *Detroit Free Press* Green Leader award. The for-profit arm had over \$2 million in sales.



Recycle Here!
Detroit, MI
2005-Present
Public-private partnership

Challenge:

How to create a culture of cool around something as mundane as recycling in a community with little history of recycling success

Budget:

\$240,000 per year

Funding:

None

Participants:

City of Detroit, Greater Detroit Resource Recovery Authority, Detroit Public Schools, citizens of Detroit

Inspiration:

Detroit's tradition of community and family gatherings on Saturdays at Eastern Market

Results

- The program has grown by over 50 percent each year since opening and spun off additional programs. There are now mobile and neighborhood drop-off stations around the City, a non-profit educational arm, Green Living Science, and a for-profit arm, Green Safe.
- Green Living Science has educated over 50,000 students through a partnership with Detroit Public Schools.
- GreenSafe now provides cups for the Detroit Lions.
- Dramatic reduction of illegal dumping and vandalism on the property.
- Increased foot and vehicle traffic on the block.

Advice for Communities Considering a Similar Project

- ***Give every citizen the opportunity to do the right thing*** – In this case, there was an unmet demand for an alternative to landfilling or incinerating waste. Therefore, despite skepticism about the potential success of a Detroit recycling program, Recycle Here! has seen enthusiastic responses since its early days.
- ***Get people excited, get their attention, & connect with artists*** – Recycle Here! accomplishes this through its now ever-present bee logo and mascot, as well as other eye- and ear-catching art.
- ***Just because it's a place where waste goes, it doesn't have to look like it. If you dress up the facility, people will take care of it*** – Recycle Here! chose early on to embrace and celebrate quality graffiti rather than trying to fight it. They found that graffiti writers respect others' work and will not deface it if it's well done. The same was found for the outdoor art at the Art Park once the fence was removed and the public space was created.
- ***Start with the kids...it's like putting an agent of change in every house*** – A tangible uptick in recycling rates has been witnessed in neighborhoods where the Green Living Science program has educated school children.
- ***Make recycling feel like a special event and provide an experience***
- ***Shorten hours of operation, create a concentration of people*** – This may go against the conventional wisdom that an accessible program should be open as many hours as possible, but Recycle Here! could never have generated such success without the limited access it provides, creating the social atmosphere.
- ***Embrace the traditions of your community*** – The program's Saturday success story builds on the Detroit tradition of family visits to Eastern Market on that day of the week.
- ***Track progress*** - Staff have an impressive list of statistics that represent the program's growth from its launch in 2005 that can be broken down by geographic area of the City.
- ***Wisdom begins in wonder. When things are weird, it disarms people and puts them on a level playing field*** Create a non-profit organization early on if a government or non-profit entity does not already host the program. This allows for more aggressive pursuit of funding options.
- ***Be friendly*** - Focus effort on customer relations and creating a welcoming empowering atmosphere.
- ***All employees should be volunteers first*** - Focus on incremental behavioral change versus changing the world overnight.

Additional Information

- Similar projects: Recology Waste Transfer Stations in [San Francisco](#) and [Portland, Oregon](#) and [Eco-Art Lab in Wayland, Massachusetts](#)
- More information/advice is available from Matthew Naimi at matthew@recycleheredetroit.com



Michigan Green Communities is a network of local government and university staff in the state of Michigan that collaborate with one another, through peer learning and information sharing, to promote innovative solutions and move sustainability initiatives forward at the local, regional, and state level.

For questions or information, visit mml.org/green or contact Michigan Green Communities (migreencommunities@gmail.com).