

## ATTACHMENT A: CHICAGO METRO REO PROJECT NARRATIVE

**Overview:** The Chicago Metro Recycling Education and Outreach (REO) Campaign will leverage a strongly collaborative culture among local governments and partners to increase the collection of recyclable materials and decrease contamination of the recycling stream in hundreds of communities in northeastern Illinois.

The Metropolitan Mayors Caucus (MMC) unites [275 municipalities and 7 Illinois counties](#) serving some 8.6 million residents to safeguard and revitalize communities. The MMC leads environmental initiatives that improve environmental outcomes at the regional level by supporting coordinated local action. This collaborative action to tackle the climate crisis and advance environmental justice is guided by the Greenest Region Compact (GRC) which is the largest regional sustainability collaborative for municipalities in the US. It aligns the unique strengths of communities with state, and national goals, notably the National Recycling Strategy.

The Caucus and its member municipalities achieve these consensus recycling objectives with the invaluable partnership of solid waste agencies and counties. The Chicago Metro REO Campaign brings together the extraordinary expertise of the Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County (SWANCC), the Solid Waste Agency of Lake County (SWALCO), DuPage, Kane, Will, and McHenry Counties to advise a comprehensive strategy to increase collection and reduce recycling contamination in the recycled materials stream. These partners have been working together since 2018 on the Illinois Task Force on Recycling Contamination Solutions to create unified and clear messaging around the quality of recyclable materials. The Task Force has produced thoughtful and strategic outreach materials that will be fundamental to this campaign.

Our broadly collaborative approach will benefit all 275 diverse communities in the region. While the campaign will be broad-reaching, we will intentionally seek to serve disadvantaged communities, communities that do not have robust recycling services available today or staff to guide recycling education, and areas where recycling participation is low and contamination rates are high. The region includes [741 disadvantaged census tracts according to CEJST](#).

Recycling is deeply rooted in the Chicago region. The universal “chasing arrows symbol” was created in 1970 for the first Earth Day, as the result of a contest hosted by a Chicago-based shipping company. Illinois’ longest, continually operating recycling drop-off and the first curbside recycling program are both in the region. MMC will lead a broadly inclusive and highly strategic REO campaign built on a strong foundation of political will, evidence-based messaging, and strong knowledge of what is needed to increase recycling and reduce contamination.

**Problem to be Addressed:** In recent years, communities with long-established recycling programs across the Chicago metro region have seen residential diversion rates stall in the 30-35% range. While this is on par with the national average rate of 32.1% reported by EPA in 2018, it is not sufficient to meet either the National Recycling Goal of 50% by

2030 set forth by EPA or the Metro counties' individual diversion goals described in their respective Solid Waste Management Plans (SWMPs).

County SWMPs all identify contamination in the recycling stream as a significant problem that increases the cost of recycling borne by municipalities and residents. Contamination has the potential to reduce the marketability of recyclable material, which is a critical component of a circular economy. An informal survey of private material recovery facilities (MRFs) serving the Metro region indicated a typical contamination rate of 20-25%, slightly higher than The Recycling Partnership's national estimate of 17% contamination by weight. Contaminants can range from the relatively benign, such as unmarketable plastics which simply pass through the MRFs, to hazardous, such as tangles and lithium ion batteries, which can damage equipment and jeopardize worker safety. Consistent with regional observations by counties and waste agencies, the [2014 Illinois Commodity/Waste Generation and Characterization Study Update](#) found that, while many commodities showed increased recovery between 2008 and 2014 statewide, recycling overall remained stagnant. The study also reported that there was a 20% increase in waste generation in the same span, reflecting the need to drastically increase the amount of collection in order to increase recycling rates and reduce dependence on disposal.

**b. Scope of Work:**

This project will support the following objectives of the [National Recycling Strategy \(NRS\)](#):

- a) improve markets for recycled commodities,
- b) increase collection and improve materials management infrastructure,
- c) reduce contamination in the recycled materials stream,

Further, NRS objectives align with waste and recycling goals of the Greenest Region Compact, which have been adopted by municipal resolution in 161 communities representing 6.6 million residents. These GRC goals are: 1) Recycle materials across all sectors, and 2) Engage the community in waste reduction and recycling.

The proposed Chicago Metro REO Campaign supports the NRS and local GRC objectives by developing a comprehensive and cohesive messaging strategy for the region that will:

1. Increase recycling participation in areas that have not historically had funding for marketing or outreach; in particular, disadvantaged communities may provide recycling services but resident communication about its availability and proper use has been absent.
2. Improve the quality of materials placed into the recycling stream throughout the region, resulting in a less contaminated, more marketable stream of recyclables.
3. Include "buy recycled" messaging throughout the campaign. This item will encourage citizens to seek out products made from and products packaged in post-consumer recycled content. It will also encourage local manufacturers to buy and use recycled commodities, strengthening markets for post-consumer materials.

### **c. Project goals and objectives**

The Chicago Metro REO Campaign has two goals that align with the objectives of the NRS - to increase recycling and reduce contamination. The project includes an effective, easily understood plan with well-reasoned steps and milestones to meet the stated objectives.

#### **Goal #1: Get residents of the Metro region excited about recycling again!**

Tasks under this goal will result in the creation of a new, instantly recognizable regional recycling brand which will be implemented in a diverse, wide-reaching, multi-media advertising campaign across the Chicago Metro region.

#### **Specific steps include the following:**

1. Engage project advisory committee to oversee brand development and campaign implementation including but not limited to representatives of the county governments and solid waste management districts that have provided letters of support.
2. Engage contractor assistance to develop baseline recycling and contamination rates
3. Engage MMC Environment Committee community leaders around REO needs
4. Hire and annually train an outreach manager to work across the region
5. Develop and release RFP for comprehensive marketing services
6. Assess proposals and select marketing contractor
7. Draft potential brand logos, taglines/short-form messaging
8. Solicit community feedback on drafts
9. Finalize brand logo and taglines
10. Deploy outreach coordinator to community events
11. Develop longer-form messaging to appear on regional/project website
12. Design website with access to downloads of social media messages, explanations for products that cause confusion that offer alternative reuse and composting when applicable
13. Prepare branded assets for various ad formats (billboards, transit, social media ad buys, cart tags, movie theater pre-shows, church bulletins and publications in other languages )
14. Launch website and begin ads
15. Run ads
16. Solicit/synthesize public feedback from around the region
17. Monitor and report key data metrics, including recycling rates and contamination

Most Metro area residents have had access to convenient recycling for decades, and many counties or municipalities require residents and businesses to recycle. Despite widespread access to recycling, recent national news stories with sensational headlines like “Recycling in America is Broken” have shaken public confidence, and many no longer feel like what they do with their household waste individually or collectively makes a difference. Additionally, some portions of the Metro area, including more rural communities and disadvantaged communities primarily in southern Cook County, do not

have curbside recycling programs because it is economically infeasible, or participation was historically poor.

The development and wide distribution of a regional advertising campaign focused on recycling will rekindle public interest and rebuild citizen trust that recycling the right materials is still a valuable thing to do for successful recovery of resources and for a better world. Working with an expert marketing consultant, branding and messaging will be designed to clearly communicate the right ways to recycle and build public support and recognition of the many ways in which they can engage in waste reduction and recycling activities. Ads will be deployed across multiple media formats and reach residents throughout the region, at locations they frequent for social and community engagement, social media, and direct connection and feedback at their home or cart.

All ads and materials utilized in the regional campaign will include a long-term QR code linked to the campaign website. The website will be populated, and updated regularly, with current, easy-to-understand, regionally applicable information about the continued importance of recycling and how to recycle correctly. The site will also include an interactive sorting game, modeled after a game previously developed by Will County that is in need of updating and reprogramming. MMC will also work with the Illinois EPA to incorporate data and tools it plans to develop as part of a state-wide recycling mobile app and other regional and statewide recycling tools as may be available during the campaign.

A significant amount of regionally applicable information has already been developed through earlier partnerships among MMC, local governments, and private recycling companies, such as the Illinois Task Force on Recycling Contamination Solutions (Task Force). The Task Force formed in 2018 as a volunteer group of recycling stakeholders from across Illinois to develop clear, simplified guidelines for what materials are recyclable in curbside programs and discuss methods to reduce contamination. The Task Force also serves to communicate the status of recycling markets and the changes needed to improve the value of recovered commodities.

To facilitate completion of tasks under this goal, a designated recycling education and outreach manager will be hired by MMC and made available to serve all communities willing to collaborate to educate their residents about recycling right. The REO Manager will be equipped with an engaging exhibit, activities, and with the consensus message produced by the Chicago Metro REO Campaign. The REO Manager will be available to support environmental justice communities and other communities by staffing community events and sharing recycling information with these target communities who often lack dedicated solid waste and recycling staff. When possible, materials will be loaned to partners for use in local outreach efforts.

**Goal #2: Educate residents to increase recycling and reduce contamination at the community level**

Tasks under this goal will address specific gaps or problem areas in local recycling programs through subawards for education and outreach projects to eligible entities. MMC will provide funds to address specific community needs identified by local

recycling experts according to local capacity and interests. MMC will develop an application process to accept requests for subawards from public agencies and local governments for local projects that address NRS objectives and the Scope of Work of the Chicago Metro REO Campaign, consistent with EPA's Subaward policy. MMC anticipates making multiple subawards totaling \$500,000.

Examples of projects that could be considered for subaward may include:

- Implementing cart-tagging programs to visually inspect recycling carts prior to collection to give residents direct feedback on their specific recycling practices. Cart-tagging efforts piloted in two Metro counties have demonstrated lessening contamination over time (see SWANCC's [Cart Tagging Report](#)). Subawards may support the development of a toolkit to help other communities do cart-tagging. The toolkit may include sample letters to residents, sample cart tags, social media tools, recycling guidelines in English and Spanish (at minimum), outreach suggestions, and a QR code linking to more information.
- Providing targeted outreach to communities with below-average recycling rates based on analysis of hauler tonnage data, and aiming to engage residents in these communities through direct mailings, print ads, and/or highly targeted social media ads.
- Translating new or existing resources to other languages for areas with significant non-English speaking populations to reach linguistically isolated populations.

### **Environmental Justice**

**a. Benefits to EJ communities:** The MMC represents every environmental justice community (EJCs) in northeast Illinois. We provide a forum for chief elected officials to collaborate on common problems and to improve quality of life for residents. Every subregion is represented in MMC's leadership, assuring all communities have a voice. The Chicago metro region served by MMC encompasses more than 700 census tracts that meet at least one of the 8 disadvantaged criteria in the Council on Environmental Quality's Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (see [CEJST regional map](#)). Using IL [EPA's EJ Start](#) tool shows that this area includes 80 EJCs. Of the 80 identified EJCs in the region, half have signed on to the MMC-led [Greenest Region Compact](#) (GRC), which empowers all communities to effectively plan and advance sustainability at the municipal level. The GRC and accompanying Framework have been especially empowering to EJCs facing greater environmental threats with inadequate resources. The 40 GRC EJCs are very engaged and likely to participate in the Chicago Metro REO Campaign to the benefit of their residents.

MMC will strive to direct 40% of the benefits of the Chicago Metro REO campaign to flow to impacted EJCs and the census tracts identified as disadvantaged via CEJST. Under **Goal 1 (Get residents excited about recycling)**, MMC and its marketing consultant will specifically solicit input from representatives of EJCs on the project advisory committee. Further, we will strive to direct 40% of the benefits of advertising towards EJCs. For example, transit ads will be preferentially placed on routes that serve at least one, and preferably multiple, EJCs. We will strive to design visually compelling ads that appeal across cultures and languages and will seek translation services to ensure

that messaging is accessible to residents in linguistically isolated communities. Community advertising will be placed in local newspapers, magazines, event brochures, etc. that serve EJC's. The outreach coordinator hired through the project will seek out appropriate community events hosted in EJC's in which to participate.

Under **Goal 2 (Educate residents to increase recycling and reduce contamination at the community level)**, MMC will require all subaward applicants to specifically address how their proposed project will benefit EJC's and/or the census tracts identified as disadvantaged via the CEJST in their project proposals.

#### **b. Engaging local residents in communities**

MMC has a proven track record of working towards equitable solutions to environment, economic, and housing challenges. Environmental justice communities have been served by our outreach activities for the 2020 Census; our Age-Friendly Communities Collaboratives; and initiatives to integrate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion into municipal government. Further, MMC created the first [Climate Action Plan for the Chicago Region](#) that clearly articulates climate-related hazards and threats to vulnerable, disadvantaged communities. Equity is integrated throughout the plan and is clearly pronounced in the Climate Adaptation goal of "Persistent, equitable climate adaptation." Eleven EJC's joined the planning effort and contributed to the establishment of goals, objectives and strategies, including "Increase the volume of waste that is recycled and composted."

Our commitment to equity and meaningful community engagement will continue through the Chicago Metro REO Campaign. We will utilize these proven methodologies to engage members of the community. MMC's Environment Committee, comprised of 60 local governments including EJC's, will be solicited for ideas and input. This committee also includes citizen commissions, groups of community residents who serve as formal, statutory advisors to local governments. The sustainability commissions are actively engaged in educating their fellow community members, hosting recycling, Earth Day, and other environmental events. They will be valuable connectors to inform the creation of recycling messages and tools.

#### **Performance Measure: Anticipated Outcomes and Outputs**

##### **Goal #1: Get residents of the Metro region excited about recycling again!**

Tasks include creating a new, instantly recognizable regional recycling brand and implementing the new regional brand in a multi-media advertising campaign across the Metro region.

##### Output Category: Outreach Campaigns and Projects Implemented

- Number of feedback responses received during brand development
- Number of website visits and page views
- Number of social media ads/promoted posts run
- Number and duration of transit ads run
- Number and duration of billboard ads

- Number of community events attended by outreach coordinator and project partners
- Number of print ads placed in community sources (newspapers, event brochures, etc.)
- Number and duration of entertainment venue ads run
- Number of feedback responses received during campaign implementation

Output Category: Communities Reached

- Total number of communities and number of disadvantaged communities served by transit routes where ads are run and estimated ridership during ad-runs
- Total number of communities and number of disadvantaged communities receiving community event participation by outreach coordinator and trained partners
- Number of direct resident interactions during community events
- Number and population size of communities targeted by community source ad-buys
- Number and population size of communities targeted by entertainment venue ad-buys
- Number and population size of communities represented by feedback received during brand development and campaign implementation
- Number of resulting social media impressions, interactions, and follows
- Number and location of unique website visitors via analytics

Output Category: Jobs Created

- Number of FTEs paid using grant funds

Outcome Category: Change in Recycling Volume

- Increase in recycling tonnage across the Chicago metro region (goal of 15% increase)
- Reduction in GHG emissions associated with increased recycling

Outcome Category: Jobs Created

- Increases in MRF staffing hours associated with recycling tonnage increase

Outcome Category: Participation Rate

- Increase in number of communities with curbside recycling (goal of 5 starting, restarting, or expanding service)
- Increase in per-capita recycling tonnage (goal of 15% increase)

Outcome Category: Contamination Reduction

- Reduction in percent contamination (i.e. % of the total volume delivered to MRFs that is contaminated) from residential streams reported by MRF operators from facilities serving the metro region (goal of reaching 10% contamination from a baseline of ~20-25%)

**Goal #2: Educate residents to increase recycling and reduce contamination at the community level**

Tasks will address specific gaps or problem areas in local recycling programs through subawards for education and outreach projects to eligible entities. Subaward projects will be defined, and MMC will institute a compliant application process for eligible entities to

request funds. MMC will require all subawardees to report quarterly and at the conclusion of the grant, or as required based on the Output and Outcome categories above for their individual projects.

### **Project Sustainability and Replicability**

The Chicago Metro REO Campaign will design messaging with longevity and sustainability in mind, enabling MMC and its partners to continue using the materials beyond the end of the grant period to the extent that alternative funding sources allow. The MMC, Metro region counties, and solid waste agencies are committed to continually developing and implementing solid waste management plans and programs that are reflective of both local needs and broader state and national priorities regarding effective management and recycling of post-consumer materials. These plans are based on adaptive management principles and are updated frequently (every five years by state mandate) in order to build upon successful efforts and address shortcomings and emerging challenges. Collectively, these regional efforts reflect a sustained push towards increased recycling quantity and quality and increased diversion of material from landfills.

To support replication of the project, MMC will prioritize funding subawards for local projects that are transferable to other communities (i.e. cart-tagging toolkit described above). Chicago region messaging and materials will also be relevant to metropolitan municipal recycling programs across the country and suitable for replication by other communities and regional collaborations. Our collaboration will share our knowledge, strategies, successes, and lessons learned both during and after the conclusion of the grant project.

### **Effective Partnerships**

**a. Quality partnerships:** MMC and its county and waste agency partners routinely collaborate on recycling education efforts including through the work of the Task Force on Recycling Contamination Solutions and participation in state-level organizations such as the Illinois Counties Solid Waste Management Association (ILCSWMA), Illinois Recycling Foundation (IRF), and Illinois Chapter of the Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA). MMC and its partners also value the contributions of the Illinois EPA as they expand within the REO space. The partners will support MMC through participation on the Advisory Committee and provide local-level connection with organizations and outlets through which the Chicago Metro REO Campaign may be promoted. The partners will also lend their expertise in recycling and collection practices to MMC's contractors as needed to provide input on technical content and feedback on the campaign messaging and tools based on their 30+ years of experience.

**b. All organizations involved are located in the community for which benefits will occur:**

MMC and its partners are located throughout the Chicago metro region, with offices situated within each of their respective county or waste agency boundaries.

- Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County- 23 member communities, Wheeling, IL



- Solid Waste Agency of Lake County, 43 member communities, office in Gurnee, IL
- DuPage County - County seat in Wheaton, IL
- Kane County - Headquartered in County seat of Geneva, IL
- McHenry County - County seat in Woodstock, IL
- Will County - 38 communities with the County Seat in Joliet, IL
- Illinois County Solid Waste Management Association - statewide
- Illinois Recycling Foundation - statewide

### **Incorporation of Evidence-Based Outreach and Messaging**

MMC's partners have collaborated to develop evidence-based materials that will provide the core content for the regional advertising campaign through their work on the Task Force for Recycling Contamination Solutions. An initial task of the group, which was formed in 2018, was to utilize [The Recycling Partnership's Survey](#) to solicit feedback from all Illinois MRFs on which consumer waste materials are recyclable based on, a) MRFs having the technology to sort them from the single stream, and b) markets existing to purchase the commodities for remanufacturing. The survey was used to identify items that should never be put into the curbside recycling cart due to the hazards posed when handling those materials at MRFs, which was then compiled into a *Dirty Dozen* (sample materials attached) list of least-wanted contaminants and a series of articles for municipal newsletters to inform residents about proper disposal of the twelve items. Additionally, the Task Force developed printed *Curbside Recycling Guidelines* (attached); a related video, [Recycling Can Be Easy!](#); and a social media campaign for Earth Day 2020 and beyond. As MRF operators reported that contamination levels continued to be on the rise, the Task Force produced a video for Earth Day 2022 called, *Contamination - Was This YOU?* in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) to highlight the negative impacts of [Wishcycling](#).

### **Leveraging**

Our collaboration will leverage staff, resources, and programs to extend the reach of the Chicago Metro REO Campaign throughout the region, with the added benefit of consistent messaging. These existing staff and outreach expenditures would all be utilized to support this project:

- DuPage County contracts with a non-profit, SCARCE, to provide recycling education in schools, businesses, and at community events. DuPage also has a social media presence through @CoolDuPage and an email newsletter with more than 10,000 subscribers.
- Kane County staff write a frequent recycling and waste reduction column for the Kane County Connects blog and e-newsletter (22,800 subscribers) and produces a semi-annual Recycling Green Guide (20,000 print copies and 10,000+ online views). Additionally, Kane staff presents to school and community groups and attend community events.
- McHenry County Health Department staff lead county solid waste planning and recycling activities; prepare messaging and social media blasts; and are a liaison to the McHenry County Council of Governments. The non-profit Environmental Defenders of McHenry County has been active for 50+ years, providing recycling opportunities and waste reduction and recycling education and outreach including

environmental education for Latino communities. McHenry County College's Sustainability Center produces the County Green Guide and hosts an annual Green Living Expo.

- The Solid Waste Agency of Lake County (SWALCO) was formed in 1991 as a Municipal Joint Action Agency (MJAA) and is a unit of local government. Its members include 43 municipalities, the County of Lake, and the U.S. Naval Station Great Lakes. The Agency develops and implements programs to divert materials from disposal and educates its residents, businesses, and institutions on why and how to be better recyclers, composters, and environmental stewards. SWALCO's full time educator coordinates public information and outreach including social media, website, and newsletter content.
- The Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County (SWANCC) is a MJAA formed in 1988 representing 23 member municipalities and approximately 800,000 residents. SWANCC strives to facilitate the delivery of effective and environmentally sound resource management services to reduce the volume and toxicity of waste disposed. It provides education, and resources, and sponsors special collection programs. On staff at SWANCC is both a full-time and part-time educator who visit schools, conduct workshops and seminars, and presentations, and use social media platforms, produce newsletters - one for residents and another one for educators, and hosts website resources including educational videos, activities, and a *Reuse and Recycling Directory*.
- Will County hosts [Will County Green](#), a website-based education program with recycling and composting education for both children and adults. Will employs two full time staff, one dedicated to community-level outreach and recycling programming and the other provides children's education. Outreach occurs through a monthly on-line newsletter (13,000 subscribers and 54% open rate), a website (40,000 visitors/yr), collection events, and social media (6,000 Facebook followers; 55,000 impressions). Will regularly partners with its municipalities and townships to host collection events or perform outreach.
- The Illinois Counties Solid Waste Management Association (ILCSWMA) is a not-for-profit organization with over 80 member organizations throughout the State. Formed in 1993, ILCSWMA provides a forum for local solid waste management professionals and other interested parties to network, train, and exchange information promoting sustainable solid waste management practices, and regulatory compliance.
- The Illinois Recycling Foundation (IRF) offered educational forums to inspire and replicate across the state for over 40 years. They offer speakers at their annual conference where professionals learn from one another. IRF offers many free webinars on a variety of waste reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting topics geared to industry, government, and institutions, along with catering to interested citizens. The non-profit works with all of MMC's partners and the Illinois EPA to bring current issues to the forefront and address them for the benefit of all.