

Environmental Justice and Recycling Refund Programs: A Report

In an era of heightened environmental awareness, recycling refund programs stand as a cornerstone of sustainability efforts. A new report, produced by [Intersectional Environmentalist](#) for the [Can Manufacturers Institute](#), explores opportunities to ensure inclusion and consideration of marginalized communities from policy formation to implementation of [recycling refund programs](#). Addressing the inequities within recycling refund programs is not just a matter of environmental concern but also presents a critical opportunity for dialogue and action on transforming recycling refund programs into drivers of equity and justice.

This report, drawing from research conducted by a taskforce of environmental justice organizers, canner community stakeholders, and experts in sustainability, city planning, policy, and academic research, puts forward recommendations to make recycling refund programs more equitable and inclusive. Policymakers, environmental advocates, and community leaders can utilize these recommendations to reform existing programs and create more sustainable and equitable new programs.

QUESTIONS ADDRESSED

1. Can existing data surveying and studying stakeholder communities sufficiently inform program development, needs, and priorities?
2. What can be done to make people feel welcome at redemption points?
3. Should other services be combined at locations where containers are redeemed?
4. How can learnings from EJ or community-driven programs be applied to recycling refund spaces?
5. How can redemption options be more accessible to ensure equitable ability to redeem? What redemption processes should exist to empower everyone to participate?
6. How specific should convenience standards be to ensure confidence that access will be convenient for all?



KEY CONCLUSIONS

- Promote inclusive practices that widen programmatic success by disrupting historical industry-wide exclusion through existing data on impacted communities
- Partner with local grassroots justice orgs and thought leaders to inform development in key areas
- Leverage local recycling policy and bill goals to advocate for seamless education efforts led by local grassroots organizations who are well positioned to educate community stakeholders about the current effectiveness of recycling refunds
- Gather input and learnings from diverse experts, stakeholders, and case study examples on ways to improve policy, including
 - Inclusive demographic surveying
 - Creating clarity around key definitions
 - Defining where flexibility is needed to accommodate diverse localities
- Create convenient, equitable redemption options for all consumers and create new economic opportunities for traditionally underserved communities
 - Incentivize local retail participation
 - Empower local grassroots organizations to lead efforts
 - Provide flexibilities needed to accommodate traditional and newer recycling participants
- Ensure policy reflects diverse stakeholder feedback by requesting inclusion of key considerations, recommendations, and quotes from experts in this reporting taskforce, and additional organizations identified in target areas, demographics, and professions
- Continue investing in and creating open lines of communication for EJ, equity group, and individual supporters of recycling refund programs to provide feedback on and/or endorse new policy

RECOMMENDATIONS IN ACTION

- The following recommendations from the report have been incorporated into several pieces of recycling refund legislation
 - Regular survey of canners to ensure needs are being met
 - Mobile redemption sites to service those with physical impairments or that do not have transportation
 - Redemption sites in environmental justice areas with instructions in multiple languages, staffed by individuals with training to appropriately service culturally diverse and underserved communities

More detailed, specific recommendations can be found within the full [report](#).