

Inclusive Waste Management Report

Recommendations to Support the Informal Sector in Portland's Waste Collection System

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Executive Summary

As the waste collection system in Portland continuously adapts to rapid shifts in economic and environmental conditions, our understanding of the individuals and institutions that make up the system is also evolving. A traditional analysis includes recognition of only the visible, historically powerful players and fails to acknowledge the informal workers (such as canners, waste pickers and other nontraditional roles) who also perform critical functions within the system. When an equity lens is applied to the Portland collection system, it becomes evident that the informal sector waste collection community is disenfranchised and undervalued. The aim of this report is to provide a comprehensive overview of the informal waste collection sector within global, national and local contexts and to offer recommendations for how the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability can effectively support a more fully integrated waste collection system at the local level that includes all contributing players in an equitable manner.

During the 2017 midterm franchise review, Portland City Council directed the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) to explore and address inequities in the collection system. In response, BPS facilitated a Waste Equity Advisory Group (WEAG) February and June 2020. The WEAG developed a definition of equity within the context of the waste collection system. The definition demonstrates that advancing equity within the system requires a comprehensive, inclusive approach to developing equity strategies and solutions beyond simply the formal residential and commercial sectors.

Equity is taking specific, measurable actions to -

- 1. Offer access, opportunity, and support to underrepresented workers and companies in Portland's waste collection system*
- 2. Address elements of the system that have resulted in disparate outcomes based on identity*

During the WEAG meetings, the informal waste collection sector surfaced as a critical group of underrepresented workers. Conversations on this subject elicited engagement from all players including haulers, community organizations, equity consultants and City staff. Perspectives varied from strong advocacy for informal workers to others concerned about hauler liability and customer privacy.

In June, the WEAG moved in to a small work group strategy, and the Informal Sector Small Equity Work Group was formed. The smaller workgroup used directives set forth by Portland City Council, the WEAG equity definition and the WEAG Work Plan to review barriers to the informal sector and the recommendations set forth in this document. The workgroup acknowledges that the original intent of the City's waste equity work plan was primarily focused on creating more opportunities for underrepresented business owners and workers within the formal franchise and commercial systems and that including a conversation about the informal sector *expands the original scope of this work*. The workgroup is confident a revised approach that includes the informal sector enhances and elevates the City's efforts to create a more equitable system.

Understanding the informal waste collection sector at the global, national and local level is crucial and can inform how the City approaches waste equity efforts moving forward. Beyond providing this general context, the recommendations set forth in this report highlight various opportunities for BPS to integrate and support the informal waste collection sector in their effort to address past harms and create new opportunities for a more inclusive system moving forward.

Recommendations submitted to the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability presented within this report include:

1. Formally expand scope of the Waste Equity Work Plan to include the informal sector.
2. Support and provide resources for outreach and education that both improves the public image of people who collect deposit containers and addresses existing problems experienced by the informal sector.
3. Support and provide resources for further research and identification of gaps in waste collection programs and engage informal workers to explore ways in which they can participate in solutions.
4. Act as an advocate and liaison for the informal sector in the local waste collection system.
5. Support and provide resources for training, skills and access as a means to build pathways from the informal sector to the local waste collection system, potentially by shifting or expanding the focus of BPS' Sustainability at Work program.
6. Provide support in the legislative process for DEQ's Modernizing Oregon's Recycling System by informing discussions to include integration and support of the informal sector.

The research, analysis and recommendations contained in this report should serve as a foundation for further discussions and stakeholder engagement as the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability continues to refine the desired outcomes, objectives and approach to overall efforts to create a more equitable local waste collection system. This document also identifies specific and practical entry points for BPS staff and teams to support this work moving forward. The issues and challenges facing the informal waste sector will continue to evolve and be impacted by other factors and players within the overall waste collection system. What will remain constant is the importance of acknowledging the informal waste collection community as a critical, indispensable faction that cannot be ignored.

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The Informal Economy

The informal economy¹ encompasses a range of economic activities, enterprises, jobs, and workers that usually lack regulation and protection. While the concept was originally associated with small unregistered enterprises, it now includes a range of labor arrangements including unprotected contract, wage and gig work². In more developed countries, the informal economy tends to include the following:³

1. those whose employment is arranged through an employment intermediary: temporary agency workers and contract workers
2. those whose employment is not full-time: part-time workers
3. those whose employment is not long-term: contingent workers
4. those whose employment is not protected: precarious workers

Sixty one percent⁴ of the world's workers earn a living in the informal economy, and that figure is growing, in part due to de-formalization, or informalization, of work through the gig economy and through growing contract and subcontract arrangements. Informalization in developed countries is seeing steady and significant growth over the past forty years⁵, though social protections remain linked primarily to formal employment.

In the US the informal economy is commonly and mistakenly described as a black or shadow economy, defined by people who are trying to evade taxes. This is a very simplistic and often inaccurate interpretation of informality. Not only do many informal workers pay taxes⁶, but informal work is often directly linked with the formal economy, which in many cases relies on informal activities and supply chains. There is perhaps no better example of the intertwined nature of the formal and informal economies than the waste sector.

The Informal Waste Sector

The informal waste economy invokes images of waste pickers and scrap dealers in less developed countries, but in fact the informal waste sector exists all around the world, including within the context of highly modernized waste management systems. Some examples of the informal waste economy in the United States include:

- Informal can and bottle collectors (“canners”) in states with bottle deposit legislation.
- Metal scrappers

¹ <https://www.wiego.org/informal-economy>

² Gig economy definition.

³ Taken from: <https://www.wiego.org/informal-economy/statistics/concepts-definitions-methods>

⁴ <https://www.wiego.org/publications/women-and-men-informal-economy-statistical-picture-3rd-edition>

⁵ Carré, F. 2020. “Informal Employment in Developed Countries.” *From The Informal Economy Revisited*. New York and London: Routledge Explorations in Development Studies.

⁶ <https://www.wiego.org/blog/informal-workers-and-taxes-what-tax-justice-looks-below>

- Secondhand goods vendors who recover materials either through dumpster diving, via online platforms like NextDoor, or otherwise, and sell materials in any number of ways, including: street vending, via pawn shops, via online markets, at flea markets, etcetera.

Contrary to common belief, the informal waste sector does not exist in parallel to the formal waste sector. Rather, the two are inextricably linked and co-dependent. The formal waste sector is heavily reliant on the informal waste sector- often exemplified through the cross-boundary transportation of recyclable materials from wealthy countries to less developed countries where low-cost informal labor and poor environmental regulations or enforcement essentially subsidize the cost of waste management and recycling for exporting countries. But even within wealthy countries, informal materials management economies exist and help to fill critical gaps in waste recovery, reuse and recycling. One example of this is the formal bottle deposit systems throughout the US and Canada, which rely heavily on informal waste pickers to achieve high can/bottle return rates in many places.

The Global North Informal Sector

While waste picker organizations are well recognized and researched in many global south countries, very little has been written about waste pickers and their organizations in global north countries like the United States, Canada and European countries. Lack of research about waste pickers is one of their first barriers to inclusion into the types of plans that inform development and funding. Research is considered a key early step towards Inclusive Materials Management. Occidental College researcher Bevin Ashenmiller’s research on (informal can and bottle collectors) reveals important benefits of deposit redemptions systems for communities, including:

- That petty crime rates in states with bottle bills is on average 11% lower than in states without.⁷
- That bottle deposits enable significant income transfer to low-income households that are traditionally hard to support.⁸
- Bottle Redemption systems reduce the cost of waste streams by diverting materials for recycling.⁹

What research exists on the use of income from informal can and bottle collection for deposit shows that “canners” (informal can and bottle collectors) primarily use this income for subsistence purposes¹⁰ and that “canning” (US term) and “binning” (Western Canadian term) subsidizes and even replaces

⁷ Ashenmiller, B. 2010. “Externalities from Recycling Laws: Evidence from Crime Rates.” Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the American Law and Economics Association.

⁸ Ashenmiller, B. 2011. “The Effect of Bottle Laws on Income: New Empirical Results.” *American Economic Review: Papers & Proceedings* 2011, 101:3, 60–64 <http://www.aeaweb.org/articles.php?doi=10.1257/aer.101.3.60>

⁹ Ashenmiller, B. 2009. “Cash Recycling, Waste Disposal Costs, and the Incomes of the Working Poor: Evidence from California.” *Land Economics*, 85 (3): 5390551.

¹⁰ See:

- Wittmer, J., & Parizeau, K. 2016. “Informal recyclers’ geographies of surviving neoliberal urbanism in Vancouver, BC.” *Applied Geography*, 66, 92–99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apgeog.2015.10.006>.
- <https://cooplesvaloristes.ca/v2/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Rapport-Etude-Valoristes-Consigne-2014-Bordeleau.pdf>

welfare and can contribute to poverty alleviation.¹¹ Much of this research and work done on waste picking in North America emphasizes the importance of waste picking as a means of building self-sufficiency and dignity,¹² and to it leading to positive transformation.¹³ Emphasis is also placed on the need for supporting waste pickers by building social capital to provide opportunities for excluded people to engage in civic life and promote economic inclusion.

Histories of waste picking in North America have been documented by writers like Martin Medina, Carl Zimring, and David Naguib Pellow. Historical portraits of waste pickers in the United States describe the transition from peddler-based collection and resale, to informal doorstep waste collection, to the consolidation of the waste sector and related exploitation of workers starting in the early 1900s. Immigrants have played a central role in both formal and informal waste systems in the United States, and continue to place a key role in the informal waste sector today. Racism is a common theme in the history of waste management in the United States. Black workers and communities in particular have faced extensive structural racism and disadvantage in the realms of waste service contracting, labor organizing as well as the siting of waste disposal facilities.¹⁴ Automation and the global outsourcing of recyclables processing have taken a toll on small businesses and community run waste management in the sector, and waste sector services that specifically benefit low income people and communities are now largely informal or few and far between.

North America has six waste picker organizations, most of which are members of the [Global Alliance of Waste Pickers](#):

Organization	Location	Mission
The Binnars Project	Vancouver BC	<i>Binnars’ Project fosters social and economic inclusion, builds community resilience and stronger networks, and engages on sustainability issues. Through our programs, we empower binnars as part of the circular economy -- building a community from the bottom up.</i>
Les Valoristes	Montreal	<i>Our mission is to encourage and support the Valoristes in their recovery of refundable, recyclable and reusable materials, involving them by practising an inclusive and participatory approach, as well as promoting the recognition of the important contribution they make.</i>
Calgary Can	Calgary	<i>Our vision is that bottle pickers are valued and compensated for their environmental and economic contributions; and our mission is to create a community-</i>

¹¹ Tremblay, C, J. Gutberlet and A.M. Peredo. 2010. “United We Can: Resource recovery, place and social enterprise.” May 2010Resources Conservation and Recycling 54(7):422-428

¹² Gowan, T. 2010. [Hobos Hustlers and Backsliders](#). University of Minnesota Press.

¹³ Duneier, M. 1999. [Sidewalk](#). Farrar, Straus and Giroux

¹⁴ Pellow, D.N. 2002. [Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago](#). Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

		<i>driven enterprise that involves and employs bottle pickers on their own terms.</i>
Good Sort	Toronto	<i>To create opportunities for bottle collectors that promote social equity, environmental awareness, and economic empowerment through recycling and green initiatives to foster a sustainable urban culture and facilitate a circular economy.</i>
Sure We Can	New York City	<i>SWC’s mission is to support the local community, particularly its most vulnerable residents, and to promote social inclusion, environmental awareness and economic empowerment. SWC has evolved into a recycling center, community space and sustainability hub.</i>
Ground Score Association	Portland OR	<i>Ground Score is collectively organized and seeks to be radically inclusive, prioritizing work opportunities for those facing work and housing insecurity. Ground Score seeks to build a more environmentally and socially aware community, while also changing society's perceptions of what and who is considered valuable.</i>

The Value of the Informal Waste Sector

Waste being one of the most accessible and widespread resources around the globe, it serves as a critical source of income and resilience for some of the world’s most impoverished and marginalized workers. Informal work is particularly important to marginalized groups that may experience higher barriers to formal employment for a range of reasons, including racial or gender discrimination, mental and physical health challenges, need for a flexible schedule due to home care duties, health conditions, or due to other unpredictable employment. Informal waste work is a common stopgap for people needing temporary or periodic income due to crises or erratic employment.

Women and other groups that have historically and/or presently been marginalized from the formal waste sector are disproportionately represented in the least formal, least secure roles in waste management¹⁵, and all but disappear from the sector as it formalizes¹⁶. Despite their invisibility,

¹⁵ See:

- Aidis, R. and D. Khaled (Banyan Global). 2019. “Women’s Economic Empowerment and Equality (WE3) Gender Analysis of the Waste Management and Recycling Sector.” Women’s Economic Empowerment and Equality Technical Assistance Task Order under the Advancing the Agenda of Gender Equality (ADVANTAGE) indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity (IDIQ) contract. Washington D.C: USAID.
- Samson, M. 2020. “Lessons from Waste Picker Integration Initiatives: Development of Evidence Based Guidelines to Integrate Waste Pickers into South African Municipal Waste Management Systems Technical report: Integrating reclaimers into our understanding of the recycling economy.” Pretoria, South Africa.
- GA Circular. 2019. The Role of Gender in Waste Management Gender Perspectives on Waste in India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam. Report commissioned by Ocean Conservancy. Available at: <https://oceanconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/The-Role-of-Gender-in-Waste-Management.pdf>

¹⁶ See:

informal waste actors like waste pickers¹⁷ contribute significantly to material recovery and reuse, subsidizing¹⁸ the cost of waste collection and processing, and in some parts of the world managing 50-100%¹⁹ of waste that would otherwise end up in the environment.

Locally, we are just starting to scratch the surface of the potential that informal workers can (and already) bring to our garbage and recycling system. Many are already familiar with the most obvious way informal workers support the system by participating in Oregon's Bottle Return program, creating cleaner recycling streams by diverting cans and bottles from the trash. Through [The People's Depot](#), from May-August, Trash for Peace determined that over 52% of the cans and bottles redeemed originated from the ground (litter) or were pulled from public trash cans. By leaving public trash cans unlocked, a cleaner waste stream is supported while also providing economic benefits for canners that seek redeemables that have been thrown away.

People who live and work in the margins often have often had to survive from being incredibly resilient and are able to respond quickly in emergency situations - the creation and management of The People's Depot is a perfect example of this. When COVID-19 began impacting the state of Oregon March of 2020, OLCC allowed grocery stores to suspend their bottle and can redemption service. The same people who were relied on to support an 85% recovery rate for cans and bottles across the state of Oregon in 2019, had needs that were not considered when faced with a pandemic. The decision to reduce access to bottle return had devastating effects on individuals who rely on that income to survive. Informal workers self-organized to provide a return service for their peers quickly and effectively through the formation of this depot.

Challenges in the Informal Waste Sector

Waste pickers and their organizations have identified several challenges to both independent and organized waste pickers, including:

- Lack of research on the informal sector makes building evidence for their inclusion challenging.
- "Containerization," or the locking of public trash cans, is a growing trend across North America and the world. Similarly, growing restrictions on the amount of material that can be returned for a deposit is limiting earnings for canners and binners, or is forcing people to spend more time and money on transportation.

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- Dias, S. & A.C. Ogando. 2015. "Rethinking gender and waste: exploratory findings from participatory action research in Brazil." *Work Organisation, Labour & Globalisation*, 9. 51. 10.13169/workorgalaboglob.9.2.0051.
 - UNEP-IETC and GRID-Arendal. 2019. "Gender and waste nexus: experiences from Bhutan, Mongolia and Nepal."
 - Rudin, V., S. Van den Berg and L. Abarca. 2014. "Gender and Recycling: Tools for Project Design and Implementation Regional Initiative for Inclusive Recycling." Inter-American Development Bank publication.
 - <https://publications.iadb.org/publications/english/document/Gender-and-Recycling-Tools-for-Project-Design-and-Implementation-Regional-Initiative-for-Inclusive-Recycling.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.wiego.org/informal-economy/occupational-groups/waste-pickers>

¹⁸ Chikarmane, P. (2012) "Integrating waste pickers into municipal solid waste management in Pune, India." WIEGO Policy Brief (Urban Policies) No. 8. http://www.inclusivecities.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Chikarmane_WIEGO_PB8.pdf

¹⁹ <https://unhabitat.org/solid-waste-management-in-the-worlds-cities-water-and-sanitation-in-the-worlds-cities-2010-2>

- Because the informal sector is not well understood in North America, it can be challenging to find funders willing to provide the kind of flexible funding that is useful for organizing informal workers.
- Lack of inclusive, participatory planning in most cities and within most waste management systems.
- Most cities have not developed inclusion and equity standards for their waste management systems, or those standards lack attention to the informal waste sector.
- Waste pickers that source material from dumpsters and garbage cans face particular stigma, much of which is based on stereotypes that are largely debunked by the research. De-stigmatization campaigns are important to the development of inclusive materials management systems.²⁰
- Policies in North America primarily prohibit picking from public and private waste bins and lack language to prioritize the inclusion of marginalized stakeholders like informal workers.
- NGOs, government, researchers and the public lack capacity in engaging informal workers.
- Informal workers and their organizations lack organizational capacity, as well as clear understanding of the broader waste system. Resources that make learning about the waste system accessible are lacking.
- Growing privatization, consolidation, outsourcing, de-formalization, and automation within the waste sector are reducing low-barrier work opportunities. Similar issues include the reliance on volunteerism for low barrier waste management opportunities like litter collection and producer responsibility schemes that don't cover the full cost of collection and processing.
- Lack of formal funding opportunities for organizations engaging informal waste workers within Extended Producer Responsibility policies, including Oregon's Bottle Bill.
- Lack of affordable land and infrastructure for building the social capital to engage, organize, and support informal waste workers.

Local Gaps and Challenges in the Informal Waste Sector

There are many gaps that exist within the local waste collection system from service delivery, to operations, to land management & cleanup projects, or even disaster resilience initiatives that could benefit from collaborating with self-organized informal workers. In the city of Portland, garbage collection is not a right, it is a privilege and our current hauling system does not require haulers to provide service for folks who cannot afford it. Self-organized workers, like Ground Score, are eager to provide peer-led engagement and litter collection to houseless camps located in parks, bioswales, and neighborhoods where haulers and volunteer-based organizations are not able to serve or have not had success serving.

Another gap that exists in the local system that could benefit from collaboration with workers from the informal waste sector is garbage and recycling collection to multifamily housing. These spaces often suffer from a lack of opportunities to reduce waste, as well as, barriers to proper disposal of bulky waste, and recycling. Bulky waste collection and diversion is another [well-noted](#) issue and gap in current

²⁰ See:

- Masood, M., and C.Y. Barlow. 2013. "Framework for integration of informal waste management sector with the formal sector in Pakistan." *Waste Management and Research*, 31(10), 93–105. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0734242X13499811>
- Samson, M. 2015. "Forging a new conceptualization of "the public" in waste management." WIEGO working paper number 32. <https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/Samson-Public-Waste-Management-WIEGO-WP32.pdf>

service where initial pilot programs that involve informal workers in implementation have seen immense success.

Barriers to Entering the Formal Sector for Informal Workers

Social protections like health care and pension schemes are traditionally designed for the formal rather than the informal economy, so informal waste workers often also lack access to adequate social protections as well as occupational health and safety measures. Informal waste work also subsidizes social benefits like welfare and rent assistance, as many informal waste pickers in the global north and south alike describe the importance of waste picking income for covering essential costs like housing, transportation, communications, food, laundry, and medicine. Despite their contributions, informal waste pickers typically receive little to no recognition or legal status for their work, and are rarely prioritized for inclusion into formal waste management systems.

Creating low barrier opportunities that are flexible and supportive will set up both informal workers and the formal sector for success. Examples of topic areas that need to be carefully examined and addressed when it comes to building pathways for informal workers to join the formal waste collection workforce include:

- The need for a flexible schedule to accommodate childcare, other jobs, fluctuations in physical or mental health, etc.
- The need for cash payments (many informal workers lack access to the formal banking system),
- The need for income that won't undercut social security or other social service benefits (often workers are independent contractors, meaning they are not eligible for workers compensation or unemployment benefits).
- Physical and mental challenges experienced by workers in the informal sector, including conditions like anxiety, OCD, PTSD.
- Workers in the informal sector often have difficulty trusting others, especially those in power roles (ie 'bosses'), due to past trauma.
- Lack of labor options in which workers feel ownership and control over their working conditions.
- Training on issues like technology use, workplace codes of conduct, financial management, effective communication.

It is critical to understand and take into consideration the unique barriers and challenges that exist for many individuals across the informal sector that can make it difficult for them to successfully transition from their current circumstances into the formal labor force. The community members that make up the informal sector face stigma and barriers due to institutionalized discriminatory attitudes and practices that limit their opportunities based on race, class, gender and ability. It is important to note that in many cases, folks in the informal sector face multiple layers of discrimination because they fall into more than one category of marginalization - for example, a person of color who identifies as queer and who also experiences homelessness or mental illness. These individuals and communities deserve to be

recognized as valuable members of the system and we must be intentional about approaching the complexities of the intersectional identities of folx who have been marginalized by a system that does not recognize or value them.

Reimagining A More Inclusive Waste Collection Sector

Global institutions like the United Nations and the World Bank²¹ increasingly advocate for the formal inclusion of waste pickers in waste management development. Inclusive waste management is a concept describing systems that can advance waste pickers in recycling and reuse value chains- adding value to discarded materials while also securing more decent work conditions and social protection for workers. Within this concept, integration or inclusion should be viewed as a pathway and an ongoing process rather than as a one-time activity to absorb informal workers and thereby eliminate informality within the sector. The informal sector is proving to be a persistent feature of modern cities and waste management systems, including in systems that are considered highly developed and formalized. Thus, inclusion is a pro-poor process of integrating informal workers into better working conditions while also identifying and filling gaps in waste management.

Inclusive waste management looks different in different places, but there are some common features of an inclusive versus exclusive, or exclusionary, waste management system. Inclusive systems work towards waste management systems that benefit people in need by providing low-barrier entry points to formal or improved work and social protections. Inclusive systems resist global trends towards the consolidation of wealth in waste management systems, which are increasingly being monopolized by one or a few powerful waste actors. In many parts of the world, the waste sector is dominated by multinational conglomerates that work in a range of sectors, often with dismal labor records and ties to corruption. Exclusionary systems, as have become the norm around the world, are seeing a growth in the automation of waste management, which furthers the undercutting of labor unions and other basic social and labor protections for workers. Waste systems like those in the United States, for example, are witnessing a de-formalization of the sector as private firms or governments seek to cut costs by subcontracting to companies with poor labor practices or by relying on the gig economy to fill gaps in waste management.²² Exclusive systems also tend to lack transparency in financial flows, material flows and in broader planning processes. Entry into exclusive systems thus traditionally requires a very high capital input to be able to compete, and often also a reliance on a workforce that lacks adequate labor rights or social protections.

Inclusive systems by contrast reserve formal opportunities like contracts, infrastructure and social protection for waste sector actors like waste picker cooperatives that are committed to maintaining low-barrier but decent opportunities in the waste sector over time. These groups tend to be committed to the distribution of profits within their associations, to establishing more universal social protections systems, to opening up planning processes such that excluded workers have a voice, and to orienting

²¹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/brief/solid-waste-management>

²² Chen, M. and F. Carré. 2020. *The Informal Economy Revisited*. New York and London: Routledge Explorations in Development Studies.

their work around environmental and labor justice issues.

Within an inclusive waste management system, informal workers are more likely to be able to find low-barrier pathways to formal, stable work within the system, ideally by participating in workers cooperatives and associations. Waste picker organizations are increasingly common around the world and are recognized for their role in securing decent work for informal workers as well as psycho-social support, access to social and labor protections, capacity development, etcetera. Waste Pickers in organizations and cooperatives are more likely to have access to leadership opportunities, equipment and protective gear²³, better and safer working conditions (like childcare, equitable pay, and freedom from harassment)²⁴, access to benefits like insurance and credit, and the ability to support girl children with upwardly mobilizing benefits²⁵.

Recommendations

The challenges facing the informal sector are complex and have resulted from a long history of exclusion and lack of support, particularly in the Global North. Locally, there are many exciting opportunities to support the informal sector within the waste collection system. Supporting informal workers is an important step for creating pathways to stability and dignity for the most vulnerable members of our communities. This type of investment also supports outcomes related to workforce equity goals within the BPS Waste Equity Work Plan while also contributing to an effective and efficient waste reduction and recycling system.

It is worth reiterating that the workgroup responsible for this report took special care to ensure that the proposed recommendations were relevant to the existing Waste Equity Work Plan goals. Specifically, the following areas of the Work Plan would be positively impacted by the suggestions set forth in this document:

City Council Directives

- *Increasing participation of women and minority workers*
- *Reducing barriers to economic opportunities for women-owned and minority-owned companies*

Diverse Workforce

- *Partner with workforce development organizations and Metro to implement best practices for increasing workforce diversity, including connecting employers to pools of qualified job*

²³ Lobo, S., M. Marin, V. Rudin, and F. Salas. 2016. "Analysis of the Challenges in the Development of the Recycling Value Chain in Central America." Washington D.C: IDB report.

²⁴ Dias, S. & L. Fernandez. 2013. "Wastepickers: A gendered perspective." In *Powerful Synergies: Gender Equality, Economic Development and Environmental Sustainability*, New York: UNDP.

²⁵ Chikarmane, P. and L. Narayan. 2005. Organizing the Unorganized: A Case Study of the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (Trade Union of Waste-Pickers). <https://www.wiego.org/resources/organising-unorganised-case-study-kagad-kach-patra-kashtakari-panchayat-trade-union-waste->

candidates and providing technical support and training to prospective job candidates.

Public Trash Can Program

- *As the program expands within existing districts and citywide, work with Procurement to structure contracts for public trash can collection services to provide access and opportunity for COBID-certified companies. Pursue pilot programs that can provide learning experiences for the City as well as for COBID-certified companies to build capacity.*

Multifamily Service Equity

- *Engage property managers, tenants, current and prospective service providers to identify ways to improve multifamily recycling performance, improve equitable service to tenants, and provide equitable access to M/WBE companies.*

Recommendation 1

Formally expand scope of the waste equity work group to include the informal sector.

First and foremost, the purpose of this report is to formally recommend the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability Waste Equity Work Plan include informal waste collection as part of the official scope of work. According to the most recent draft of the work plan, the Waste Equity Advisory Group is set to review the document on a yearly basis - the next review should include formal adoption of this focus area. Formalizing the informal sector as part of the overall scope of waste equity work solidifies the importance of these previously invisible stakeholders and creates opportunities for BPS teams to support efforts to create a more equitable and sustainable waste system overall.

Recommendation 2

Support and provide resources for outreach and education that both improves the public image of people who collect deposit containers and addresses existing problems experienced by the informal sector.

The City should improve recycling collection by promoting the setting aside of deposit containers. There are current concerns that reaching into recycling carts is dangerous for workers and breaches privacy for owners. Meanwhile, separating deposit containers from the mixed recycling provides a recycling stream with less contamination. An education campaign to inform residents on best practices that create better conditions for informal waste collectors can limit the need for waste pickers to reach into containers while maintaining the positive impacts of a cleaner waste stream.

Beginning with hauler education, the city may consider negotiating a plan regarding containers that didn't get harvested - determine if haulers prefer to leave uncollected deposit items or empty the bucket; this agreement could potentially be included in the next franchise review. Outreach to residential customers could utilize existing community engagement tools such as the City Sorting Guide,

tabling at events, BPS Curbsider, social media as well as developing new community tools such as stickers and might include:

- Messaging that encourages the public to support informal workers; example slogans: *“Support your local canner, help make harvesting for cans and bottles safer for everyone. Don’t want to hassle with bringing bottles and cans back for their redemption? Consider putting them out for someone else to collect.”*
- Messaging that encourages residents to use their own bucket for bottles and cans.
- Messaging requesting that residents not use plastic bags.
- Messaging enforcing the best practice of always placing glass in the yellow bin
- Messaging suggesting different sorting methods to be used by residents: for example, one container for mixed recycling, one for glass, one for deposit cans and bottles.

Recommendation 3

Support and provide resources for further research and identification of gaps in waste collection programs and engage informal workers to explore ways in which they can participate in solutions.

The City should continue to identify opportunities to integrate and consider the informal sector in short- and long-term planning, project development and budget processes. There are many programs and potential collaborations beyond producer responsibility redemption initiatives that could benefit from collaborating with informal workers. The workgroup identified this list of key areas where BPS should consider further scoping and investing resources:

- Research and document the history and current conditions of the local informal waste collection sector; formalize ongoing data collection standards.
 - Research should ideally be participatory and involve an enumeration and social profile of waste pickers (disaggregated by type), including gender, ethnicity, material impact, motivation, habits, methods of collection and sale, histories of practice, alternate sources of income and support, benefits and challenges, needs, occupational histories, housing status, ways of organizing and profile of organizations, as well as other issues that waste pickers themselves identify as useful.
- Identify opportunities to support peer-led recycling/waste reduction education and outreach initiatives.
 - Informal workers don’t just have shared experience with people experiencing houselessness, they are also people who have a lot of experience practicing waste reduction and thinking outside the box within multifamily dwellings.
 - These models are based on grassroots and popular education methodologies and ensure that a more diverse audience is reached in culturally responsive ways, which greatly improves the success of these initiatives.
 - Examples: [Environmental Promoter](#) and Community Based Master Recycler programs.
- Identify opportunities and set aside funding to support peer-led/grassroots initiatives related to garbage, waste reduction, and recycling (especially improving diversion rates).

- Organizing workers who have shared lived experience to lead this work with peers ensures a safer and more positive experience for everyone involved.
- Example: Create a budget to support litter clean-up led by informal workers and/or underrepresented organizations with experience in this field.
- Related: In 2021, Metro’s Community Stewardship team will be embarking on a pilot camp steward program with Trash for Peace and Ground Score, intended to support the success of [Metro’s bag program](#) while also reducing the burden to outreach workers and other service providers who don’t have the bandwidth to engage the full spectrum of people currently living outside in the region.
- Investigate modifications of specific regulations/policies that could support informal workers.
 - Example: Unlocking public trash bins.
 - Example: Allowing workers access to bulky waste items for diversion.
 - The public right of way containers remain unlocked and (when available) include signage that encourages people to put deposit containers only in recycling cages for the canners.
- Dedicate a space (either in the current or future committees) for informal workers to inform future waste equity plans and processes.
- Support funding models that allow social protections for informal workers as well as pathways to formal employment.
 - Example: Build in buffers to contracts with organizations to support healthcare and transportation costs of informal workers.

Recommendation 4

Act as an advocate and liaison for the informal sector in the local waste collection system.

The City should actively build bridges and address barriers to job growth for the informal sector through existing relationships. The City currently maintains relations with the local hauling companies, OBRC, reuse and repair communities. The City should play an active role in highlighting the value of the informal sector to these partners and identify specific ways to connect them better. Useful examples include the People’s Depot, and Washington Counties use of their garbage day pick up app for connecting people with reusable bulky waste for the Community Warehouse. The City should also aid the informal sector organizations in identifying new funding resources and potential partners such as local business districts who might like to tap the informal sector in litter control.

Recommendation 5

Support and provide resources for training, skills and access as a means to build pathways from the informal sector to the local waste collection system, potentially by shifting or expanding the focus of BPS’ Sustainability at Work program.

Creating opportunities to include informal workers provides safety net income/resilience in the face of emergencies (such as COVID-19 and natural disasters), and an option for workers who may not be able to find/maintain formal work. This in turn relieves strain on social welfare systems and enables workers to help themselves and feel a sense of dignity in providing for themselves. This then opens the door to the possible reality of these workers entering into more formal work opportunities sustainably.

The City is currently rethinking the mission and vision of the Sustainability of Work program to better serve goals of equity. The program model currently services mostly white-owned businesses who are driven and interested in sustainability operations. A program designed around operations drives the program to focus on business owners and does not necessarily serve workers, small businesses, entrepreneurs, organizations serving the informal sector or informal sector workers (all parts of the workforce in Portland).

To more equitably serve sustainability where people work, it is recommended the Sustainability at Work program shift focus to training workers and potential work force in collections, bulky waste, disaster waste management, repair and reuse, deconstruction, outreach and education and other aspects of sustainable work. This would broaden the number of people who are practicing sustainability at work. It is further recommended that Sustainability at Work build partnerships with Informal Sector workers organizations such as Ground Score and [Voz](#).

Recommendation 6

Provide support in the legislative process for DEQ's Modernizing Oregon's Recycling System by informing discussions to include integration and support of the informal sector.

The City should advocate for the proposed legislation during the upcoming legislative session. The core goals of transparency and infusing additional resources will both be beneficial for the informal sector.

- The City should advocate that the new product stewardship laws place the State responsible for managing the new funding rather than industry. It is recommended that the City compare and contrast the models of product stewardship that currently exist in Oregon to see if one system provides more transparency in what happens with funds raised by the programs. The Oregon E-Cycles program places the State in the role of managing the funds and programs. The bottle bill, on the other hand, places the management of funds in the hands of a collective of bottle distributors. The City should explore if the bottle bill model provides a less transparent system. Currently the proposed legislation is to "Form and join a nonprofit producer responsibility organization to meet obligations, develop and implement stewardship plans."
- As new funds and programs begin to form out of the legislations, the City should include the Informal sector in their design and prepare the informal sector so that they can play a role.

Conclusion

It is important to acknowledge that many informal workers are already contributing a great deal to our recycling and waste system and already see themselves as environmental stewards. Many of these informal workers self-identify as women and/or minorities, while also living with a visible or invisible disability. Almost all of these workers most self-identify as low-income. Providing support to these individuals within BPS' waste equity efforts should be part of a multi-faceted approach to addressing the root causes of systemic oppression and exploitation of some of the most disenfranchised members of our society.

The workgroup is hopeful and excited to receive feedback on the above recommendations and looks forward to continued conversations with the larger WEAG regarding the essential contributions made by the informal players within the waste collection system. Adopting the recommendations detailed in this report would allow BPS's waste equity efforts to include discussions about the informal sector and lays the foundation for those doing this work to find solutions that benefit a broader portion of historically marginalized communities.

IMPACT STATEMENT

Legislation title: Amend Solid Waste and Recycling Collection Code to update definitions and add exceptions to the residential franchise to allow special items collection, bottle bill container collection and junk removal services (Ordinance; amend Code Sections 17.102.020 and 17.102.150)

Contact name: Pete Chism-Winfield

Contact phone: (503) 250-2081

Presenter name: Pete Chism-Winfield

Purpose of proposed legislation and background information:

Collection services for solid waste, recycling and composting have evolved over the years and City Code needs to recognize services established outside the residential collection franchise. Proposed additional exceptions to the franchise will increase recycling and reuse options for residents, without raising collection rates on all Portlanders. Allowing additional exceptions to the franchise will also create economic opportunities for small businesses without the high barriers to obtaining a franchise and purchasing expensive collection trucks and equipment.

When Portland City Code Chapter 17.102 was first established in 1991, there were nine exceptions to the requirement to obtain a franchise. Those exceptions included collection of waste materials generated through contracted services (landscaping and construction), an allowance for a person to self-haul solid waste to a transfer station, and collection of reusable containers through the bottle bill.

The proposed additional exceptions to the franchise include:

1. Bottle bill container collection, which allows for a resident to set out redeemable containers to be collected by waste pickers, or canners. Collection of bottle bill containers directly from the blue carts would not be allowed.
2. Junk removal services to remove bulky waste and garage clean-out materials from areas of a residential property.
3. Special items collection, which is defined as the collection of products that are intended for reuse and materials that are recyclable but are not allowed in the residential recycling service.

Bottle bill container collection. In December of 2020, the Informal Sector Small Equity Work Group identified the need for the City to create an opportunity for canners from the informal sector to collect and transport bottle bill containers to a drop-off site to collect the ten-cent deposit (see the Inclusive Waste Management Report). The work group then requested a code amendment that allows for this activity as an exception to the residential franchise.

Junk removal services. BPS staff recommend formalizing junk removal services as an exception to the franchise. These services have been available to Portlanders for years, but

the existing code does not recognize the service as an exception to the franchise requirement.

Special items collection. In 2017, a small company requested permission to collect materials that were recyclable but could not be included in the residential blue carts because the materials couldn't be sorted by local recycling sorting facilities. These materials included plastic bags, clamshells, and small plastic packaging. BPS granted the request. In October 2020, a second company made a similar request to BPS.

In December 2020, the Portland Haulers Association notified BPS that collecting recyclable materials, not included in residential blue carts, was not explicitly allowed without a franchise in the Portland City Code. BPS staff then initiated community engagement to propose a code amendment to City Council.

In January 2021, Oregon DEQ informed local governments that materials collected for recycling are solid waste and therefore are regulated by the State. DEQ also concluded that it is the decision of local governments to include or exclude special items in each jurisdiction's residential franchise.

The proposal to add an exception to the franchise for special items collection allows for existing businesses providing services currently, residential solid waste franchisees, or any emerging businesses that wish to enter the marketplace.

This would open the door to services that have the potential to collection a small amount of material for reuse and recycling and provide the marketplace to determine costs and demand for the new service of convenience without raising collection rates for all Portlanders.

Financial and budgetary impacts:

Proposed amendments to PCC Chapter 17.102 do not have any financial or budgetary impacts on the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.

Community impacts and community involvement:

According to BPS engagement and research, the proposal to allow for additional exceptions to the residential franchise for special items collection, bottle bill collection and junk removal services will result in the following impacts:

- Keep garbage rates low for Portlanders. Portland's franchised haulers provide a vital community service by removing compostable and recyclable materials for beneficial use and safe disposal of landfill-bound materials. By creating a franchise exception for special items collection, Portlanders who want this service will pay for the service outside the rates established for franchised roll cart collection services for garbage, recycling, and composting.
- Special items collection is a small part of the waste stream. Currently the two businesses that provide special items collection (plastic film, clamshells, foam,

batteries, light bulbs, and textiles) equal approximately 500 tons annually, or .0005% of the waste generated by Portlanders. In a highly unlikely scenario, if special items were collected at a rate of 100%, it would result in approximately 4% of Portland waste, according to the 2016 DEQ waste composition study on Portland residential sources.

- Special items collection creates an opportunity for small businesses. Any business can compete in the marketplace to provide this service. The cost of purchasing a franchise and the trucks and equipment needed to provide that service has a high barrier to entry. Creating an exception for special items collection allows for small businesses to start a service with lower barriers to entry.
- Allow for junk removal services. Junk removal services are also a lower barrier to entry for small businesses, as they also require less expensive equipment to provide the service.
- Recognize the informal sector. Canners have been gleaning bottle and cans designated through the Oregon Bottle Bill for years. By allowing this service, BPS can officially recognize this activity and provide guidance on how residents can set aside these containers for canners to collect as a source of income.

BPS staff have engaged with all interested parties affected by this proposal and gathered their feedback. Summary of the feedback received:

Waste equity advisory group, informal sector subgroup

Initiated the proposed exception for bottle bill container collection and supports creating an exception for this exception. Regarding special items collection, some members have identified this service as a potential for creating ownership opportunities for Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) and women-owned businesses.

BPS has made a commitment to supporting economic opportunities for BIPOC-owned businesses through the public trash can program and other areas of the solid waste system, focused on multifamily services and City-owned facilities.

Portland Haulers Association (PHA)

BPS staff met with PHA on several occasions to discuss this proposal. PHA presented to BPS staff a proposal to include special items collection in the residential franchise. This proposal would provide access to special items collection to all Portlanders and special items would be collected on-call in the yellow glass bin.

Junk removal companies

Supportive of creating an additional exception to the franchise for junk removal services. BPS staff contacted all companies that provide the service and continue to support this exception to the franchise.

Companies that provide special items collection

Supportive of the proposal to create an exception to the franchise. BPS staff contacted both companies providing the collection service for special items. They were informed that the proposal would only allow them to collect recyclables that are not included in the blue roll carts. For example, if new recyclables are added to the blue cart recycling service, and if those materials were previously a part of a special items collection, then those recyclables would no longer be allowed through this exception.

100% Renewable Goal:

These code changes are not related to the City's goal of meeting 100% of community-wide energy needs with renewable energy by 2050.

Budgetary Impact Worksheet

Does this action change appropriations?

- YES:** Please complete the information below.
- NO:** Skip this section

Fund	Fund Center	Commitment Item		Functional Area	Funded Program	Grant	Sponsored Program	Amount