Organics Management Guide Submission

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Select the Primary Entity Type Please identify the category that best represents your project: Local, State, or Federal Government

Questions:

1. **Background: Provide context for the program, project, or policy — why it was developed, when it began, and the problem or opportunity it addresses.**

The Housatonic Resources Recovery Authority (HRRA) began developing its regional organics management initiative in 2013 in direct response to the State of Connecticut's long term solid waste goals. At that time, Connecticut had established an ambitious target of achieving a 60% waste diversion rate by 2024, a benchmark that required significant shifts in how municipalities and residents managed the materials in their waste stream. Recognizing that organics represented the single largest portion of municipal solid waste, approximately 32% of the total MSW stream, with food waste alone accounting for roughly 25%, HRRA identified organics diversion as both the most impactful and the most immediately achievable opportunity for progress. Because of the material's volume, weight, and recoverability, organics were viewed as "low hanging fruit" with strong potential to help the region contribute meaningfully to statewide diversion goals.

In the years following the program's initial development, Connecticut experienced an emerging solid waste capacity crisis, most notably marked by the closure of the Hartford Waste to Energy facility, the state's largest. As disposal capacity tightened and costs increased, the need to build local and regional organics infrastructure, expand access to diversion programs, and reduce overall waste generation became even more urgent. HRRA's organics initiative was therefore developed both proactively, to help meet statewide diversion goals, and reactively, as infrastructure challenges underscored the necessity of sustainable, region based strategies for managing food scraps and other

organic materials. The project continues to evolve as a central component of the region's long term waste reduction, sustainability, and resilience planning.

2. **Summary: Briefly describe the initiative, including its goals, location, and primary outcomes.**

The Housatonic Resources Recovery Authority (HRRA) launched its regional organics initiative to expand access to food scrap diversion services and demonstrate that municipal organics programs can be both financially sustainable and operationally replicable. The initiative spans nine participating communities with transfer station drop off locations established in Bridgewater (2013), Newtown (2015), Redding (2015), Ridgefield (2015), New Fairfield (2017), Bethel (2023), Kent (2023), Weston (2024), and Wilton (2024). Together, these sites form a coordinated regional network that provides residents with convenient opportunities to divert food scraps from the waste stream.

The central goal of the project has been to prove that municipalities can operate organics programs sustainably by reducing or eliminating the largest cost drivers, primarily transportation and disposal fees. HRRA's work has shown that when municipalities pair Pay As You Throw (PAYT) programs with local composting infrastructure, they can meaningfully lower operational costs. Two towns, Newtown and Ridgefield, demonstrated this model successfully after HRRA secured grant funding (a CT DEEP grant for Newtown and a USDA grant for Ridgefield) to build solar powered aerated static pile (ASP) municipal composting systems. By managing material locally, both communities were able to reduce hauling needs and avoid tipping fees, resulting in measurable cost savings and long term financial stability for their programs.

Another major component of the initiative is focused on strengthening regional collection capacity. Because transfer stations often have limited hours, some open only two days per week or for partial days, HRRA invested in MetroSTOR satellite collection bins to provide residents with 24/7 access to food scrap drop off. These bins also made it possible for municipalities without their own transfer stations to participate in the program by offering convenient, stand alone collection points. As a result, the regional network expanded to include two additional municipalities, Brookfield and the City of Danbury, significantly increasing access and participation across the region.

To address municipal concerns about the cost of collecting and transporting these materials, HRRA applied for and secured funding for a regional collection truck. This shared asset enables HRRA to service satellite bins across multiple towns and delivers material directly to a municipal composting site, reducing costs and demonstrating how regional collaboration can enhance program effectiveness and long term viability. Overall,

the initiative has expanded organics access, improved regional infrastructure, reduced municipal disposal costs, and created a scalable model that other jurisdictions can replicate to support local and statewide diversion goals.

3. **Percent of Overall Diverted Material: If available, include data or estimates on the portion of the community or organization's total diverted material no longer associated with the waste stream that this program or policy addresses.**

I can provide this but I will need some time to put it all together to be comprehensive.

4. **Key Program Elements or Policy Provisions: Describe the structure and main components of your program or policy. Explain the investments origins (who, how much). Please include as many of the following elements as applicable: What types of materials are being managed? (e.g., surplus recoverable foods, food scraps, wasted food. How are these materials managed? Who is responsible for managing them? (Organizations, agencies, businesses, or other entities) What products are generated, and how are they utilized or managed? (e.g., compost, animal feed, energy products) Who funds the management of these materials? (Funding sources, grants, partnerships) Who generates these materials? (Identify the origin: households, institutions, businesses, etc.)**

The program accepts a broad range of food scraps and compostable materials, including:

- Houseplants & flower bouquets
- Flower and vegetable garden clippings
- Fruits & nuts (including pits)
- Vegetables (stickers, bands, and ties removed)
- Bread, pasta & grains
- Sauces, soups & gravies
- Coffee grounds & filters
- Tea bags
- Egg shells
- Meat & poultry (including bones)
- Dairy products
- Fish & shellfish
- Plate scrapings
- Spoiled food
- Refrigerator leftovers

- Paper towels & napkins (free of cleaning products)

In addition, HRRA incorporates surplus recovered foods as part of the USDA funded Ridgefield project and actively promotes food recovery resources on its website.

How Materials Are Managed

1) Initial Hauling to Commercial Processors At program launch, food scraps collected at transfer station drop offs were transported by a contracted hauler to commercial composting facilities. Over time, escalating hauling and tipping fees made this model financially unsustainable.
2) Shift to Local Municipal Composting Systems

In response, HRRA pivoted to local management by building municipal aerated static pile (ASP) composting systems in:

   - Newtown (funded by CT DEEP)
   - Ridgefield (funded by USDA) These facilities allow towns to manage organics entirely on site, eliminating external hauling and disposal costs.

3) Operational Support Model
   - Municipal public works staff operate the ASP systems.
   - HRRA hired consultant Jeff Demers (New England Compost) to design systems, train operators, and provide ongoing mentorship.
   - Third party vendors and HRRA assist with collection logistics.
4) Drop Off and Satellite Collection System Residents deliver materials through:
   - Transfer station drop offs in nine municipalities.
   - 20 MetroSTOR satellite collection bins, providing 24/7 access, especially in towns with limited transfer station hours.
   - These bins enabled participation from Brookfield and the City of Danbury, neither of which operates a transfer station.
5) Regional Collection Truck

HRRA secured grant funding for a regional food scraps collection truck, reducing cost barriers for towns and supporting a shared service model.

Responsible Entities

- HRRA – Program administrator; manages grants, regional logistics, education, procurement, and overall coordination.

- Municipal Public Works Departments – Operate local ASP composting systems and manage site operations.
- Third party haulers/vendors – Assist with collection and movement of materials in select municipalities.
- Consultant (New England Compost) – Provides technical support, training, and mentorship.
- Residents – Primary material generators and program participants.

Products Generated and Their Use The ASP systems produce finished compost, which is:

- Distributed to residents
- Provided to farmers and community groups
- Used by municipalities for landscaping, parks, roadside restoration, and public works projects
- (Future model) Sold by private operators under the planned public/private partnership at the Newtown facility

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Funding Sources

Initial Capital Funding:

- USDA Grant – Constructed Ridgefield's ASP system
- CT DEEP Grant – Constructed Newtown's ASP system
- Recycle CT Foundation Funding – Supported infrastructure, collection equipment, and education
- HRRA Funded and CT DEEP grant purchased of 20 MetroSTOR bins and the regional collection truck

Ongoing Funding:

- Resident drop off fees in some municipalities
- Municipal budget support in others
- Future funding:
    - A public/private partnership is being developed in Newtown.
    - A private firm will operate the ASP system at no cost to the town, collect tipping fees from commercial generators, and sell finished compost to sustain operations.

Material Generators

- Primarily residential households throughout the HRRA region
- Small commercial generators allowed on a limited basis
- Future expansion: The Newtown ASP facility will accept commercial generators under the forthcoming public/private partnership model.

Total Grant Funds:

- CT DEEP Grants in 2016 $20,000
- USDA $72,656
- USDA $43,093
- Recycle CT Foundation $15,000
- Boy Scouts $1000
- CT DEEP SMM Grant for Project Manager $152,000
- CT DEEP SMM Newtown PAYT/ASP Composting System $203,000
- CT DEEP SMM Grant Town of Kent PAYT/Organics Collection $55,000 with an additional $24,000
- CT DEEP SMM Grant Town of Bethel Organics collection $42,400
- CT DEEP MMI Grant 2025 (awarded not executed)
- CT DEEP MMI Grant 2025 (awarded not executed) $779,000 which includes funding for additional expansion of composting infrastructure for the Town of Kent
- CT DEEP SSM 2 Grant 2025 (awarded not executed) $1,542,527 which includes funding for additional expansion of composting infrastructure for the Town of Bethel

5. **Regulatory Impact: Describe how laws, policies, regulations, and/or code have affected your program or project. This may include positive, negative, or neutral impacts. Consider noting which regulations apply, how they influenced implementation or operations, any challenges or barriers encountered, and how compliance requirements shaped program decisions.**

1) Regulatory Impact

State laws and regulations have had a meaningful influence on the development and operation of HRRA's regional organics program. While the existing regulatory framework supports organics diversion in principle, several factors have slowed implementation or limited participation. Residential Source Separation Requirements

Connecticut currently does not have strong, enforceable residential source separation requirements for food scraps. Stronger mandates at the household level, similar to policies adopted in states with higher diversion rates, could significantly increase participation in local programs. A more robust residential requirement would create consistent expectations statewide and help normalize food scrap separation as a standard household practice, ultimately improving diversion rates across HRRA member towns.

CT DEEP Permitting Requirements

CT DEEP regulations have played both supportive and challenging roles. While the state's regulatory structure provides necessary environmental protection, the permitting requirements for composting infrastructure are lengthy and complex, particularly for small or mid sized municipalities. This has contributed to slower program rollout, delays in expanding municipal composting capacity, and extended timelines for launching local facilities or modifying existing ones. As a result, HRRA's shift toward local ASP composting systems required extensive navigation of state permitting processes, which added administrative burdens and extended project schedules. Impact on Program Decisions

Compliance considerations directly shaped program strategy. The high permitting thresholds for composting operations encouraged HRRA to:

- pursue grant funding to offset the added costs and delays,
- build municipal scale ASP systems rather than larger regional sites,
- adopt a phased expansion model based on regulatory feasibility, and
- support municipalities with technical expertise, consultants, and permitting guidance.

Despite these challenges, the program has remained fully compliant, and the regulatory environment has reinforced HRRA's emphasis on safe, well managed, environmentally sound composting systems. However, streamlined permitting and stronger statewide source separation policies would likely accelerate future expansion and increase participation across the region.

6. **Measurable Increase in Supply: Include data or qualitative outcomes showing growth in collection, diversion, or reuse volumes if available.**

I will include this as an attachment.

7. **Behavior Change: Describe whether the initiative resulted in measurable behavior change and explain how you determined this. If behavior change occurred, outline the strategies that proved most effective. Please include any available data or evidence that supports your findings.**

The initiative has resulted in clear and measurable behavior change across participating HRRA communities. Prior to the launch of the organics program, residents in the region were not separating food scraps at all. The introduction of transfer station drop offs, 24/7 MetroSTOR bins, and municipal composting systems has led to consistent and growing participation, demonstrated through both resident feedback and tonnage data.

Evidence of Measurable Behavior Change

Behavior change was assessed through two primary indicators:

1) Increased Organics Tonnage Collected

As food scrap drop off sites were introduced, the weight of organics collected increased steadily, demonstrating that households were adopting new separation habits.

- Data will be provided to show this example as an attachment

2) Reduction in Municipal Solid Waste (MSW)

Communities that implemented both PAYT and organics diversion, most notably Newtown and Kent, showed the strongest behavior change. PAYT created a financial incentive for residents to reduce trash generation, and organics diversion provided a clear pathway to do so.

- Data will be provided to show this example as an attachment

Together, these changes demonstrated a shift in daily disposal practices and a willingness among residents to adopt new habits when infrastructure, incentives, and education were provided.

Most Effective Strategies

1) Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) PAYT was the single most significant driver of behavior change. Residents directly saw the economic benefit of separating food scraps rather than placing them in MSW.
2) Convenience Driven Access Limited transfer station hours had been a barrier. Expanding access through 24/7 MetroSTOR bins dramatically improved participation by giving residents flexibility to drop off material on their own schedule.

3) Local Composting Infrastructure Knowing that food scraps were being processed locally, not hauled long distances, resonated with residents and increased buy in.
4) Positive Community Feedback HRRA and municipal staff consistently received positive comments from residents expressing appreciation for the opportunity to compost and reduce trash. These qualitative indicators further validated that behavior had shifted.

8. **Benefits and Impacts (Economic, Environmental, and Social): Describe the economic, environmental, and social sustainability impacts of the program, policy, or initiative. This may include both positive and negative outcomes. You may address impacts such as costs or savings, job creation, waste reduction, emissions, resource conservation, community engagement, equity, or public health. Please include data or qualitative observations where available and note any trade-offs or challenges.**

Environmental Impacts

Reduced Transportation Emissions

Prior to the development of local ASP systems, collected organics were transported to commercial processors located 25 to 50 miles away. Processing organics locally significantly reduces truck mileage, decreasing greenhouse gas emissions associated with hauling and improving the region's overall carbon footprint.

Waste Diversion and Resource Conservation

The program has demonstrated meaningful increases in diverted material, especially in communities that implemented both organic drop off and PAYT. In Newtown, organics collection increased from an average of 2.75 tons per month to over 11 tons per month after PAYT became permanent and onsite composting was introduced.

These increases translate into major reductions in landfilled or incinerated municipal solid waste (MSW), supporting statewide diversion goals and preserving disposal capacity.

Creation of a Local, Circular Resource

Finished compost produced at the ASP sites is used by residents, farmers, community organizations, and municipal departments. This supports soil health, reduces the need for synthetic fertilizers, and keeps organic resources circulating locally rather than being exported to distant processors.

Social and Community Impacts

High Community Engagement

The program has cultivated strong public participation and enthusiasm. Residents consistently report positive experiences, and annual compost give back events create a tangible connection between household effort and community benefit. Behavior Change and Public Awareness

The shift from no organics diversion to widespread participation demonstrates substantial behavior change. PAYT communities, in particular, exhibit clear shifts in disposal habits, driven by both economic incentives and increased program visibility.

Equity and Access

The installation of 24/7 MetroSTOR satellite bins improved access for residents in municipalities with limited transfer station hours and enabled participation from towns without transfer stations, such as Brookfield and Danbury. This broadened the program's reach and reduced barriers to participation.

Stronger Local Capacity and Workforce Skills

Municipal staff gained new operational skills through the implementation of ASP systems, supported by expert training from New England Compost. This internal capacity building reduces reliance on external vendors and strengthens long term sustainability.

Challenges and Trade-Offs

- Early financial losses highlighted the need for structural changes before cost savings could be realized.
- Limited processing capacity in Connecticut initially created economic pressures that slowed progress.
- Regulatory permitting timelines extended project development and required additional administrative resources.
- Increasing participation created higher collection volumes, which temporarily raised costs until local processing infrastructure was built.

Overall Impact

The HRRA organics initiative has demonstrated that a regional, decentralized, municipal scale model can produce meaningful environmental benefits, sustained community engagement, and real economic savings. The positive impacts continue to grow as additional towns add drop off sites, satellite bins, and local processing capacity. Over time, this model may help demonstrate to the state that residential organics source separation is both feasible and cost effective, strengthening support for statewide policy action.

9. **How Stakeholder Buy-In Was Achieved: Explain how the program gained support from key stakeholders (e.g., government agencies, businesses, residents, nonprofits).**

How Stakeholder Buy In Was Achieved

Stakeholder buy in was achieved through a combination of clear communication, demonstrated results, strategic partnerships, and a steady, transparent approach to problem solving over the course of more than a decade. HRRA built support by showing that organics diversion is not only environmentally beneficial, but also operationally feasible and economically advantageous for municipalities, residents, and regional partners.

1) Demonstrating Early Success

The first step toward building trust was proving concept. Early pilots, beginning with Bridgewater's curbside and later transfer station models, demonstrated that residents were willing to participate, contamination remained low, and diversion was achievable. These tangible results gave municipal leaders confidence that the program worked in real-world conditions.

2) Transparent Communication With Municipal Leaders

HRRA consistently communicated program goals, costs, and expected outcomes with town officials, public works departments, and transfer station personnel. By openly sharing data, financial analyses, and operational lessons learned, HRRA built credibility and helped each municipality understand how the model could fit their own needs.

3) Addressing Stakeholder Concerns Head-On

Municipalities were initially concerned about cost, staffing, and operational complexity. HRRA addressed these barriers by:

- securing grants to eliminate upfront capital expenses,
- hiring technical experts (e.g., New England Compost) to train public works staff,
- designing programs that integrated into existing operations, and
- developing regional solutions (e.g., a shared truck) to reduce financial burden.

These efforts reduced perceived risk and helped towns feel supported rather than overwhelmed.

4) Providing Multiple Access Options for Residents

To secure resident buy in, HRRA made the program convenient. Transfer station drop-offs, 24/7 MetroSTOR satellite bins, free compost distribution, and clear education materials all helped residents feel that participating was easy, beneficial, and rewarding. Positive resident experiences generated ongoing word of mouth support within communities.

5) Leveraging PAYT to Reinforce Participation

In municipalities that adopted PAYT, such as Newtown, Kent and Bethel, residents saw immediate financial benefits from separating food scraps. This incentive structure played a critical role in shifting behavior and proving to elected officials that policy tools could accelerate participation and improve waste reduction outcomes.

6) Partnering With State Agencies and Funders

Strong relationships with CT DEEP, RecycleCT, USDA, and legislators helped validate the program and secure funding. This external support reassured municipal leaders that the program was aligned with state and national priorities and grounded in recognized best practices.

7) Building Community Goodwill Through Visible Benefits

Annual compost giveaways, community garden partnerships, school engagement, and the availability of municipally produced compost fostered a sense of local pride. Residents could see and touch the finished product their efforts created, creating a positive feedback loop that strengthened participation.

8) Offering Flexible, Scalable Models

HRRA emphasized that every town could adopt a version of the program that fit its resources, drop-off only, satellite bins, onsite ASP composting, future in-vessel systems, or participation in regional hauling. This flexibility made the program accessible to small rural towns, larger suburbs, and municipalities without transfer stations.

9) Maintaining Consistent Support and Leadership

Finally, long-term consistency in communication, leadership, and program vision helped build trust. As HRRA continued to adapt, pivot, and innovate in response to challenges, stakeholders saw that the organization was committed to guiding municipalities toward workable, cost-effective solutions.

10. **Stakeholders' Perspectives and Dynamics at Play: Highlight collaboration dynamics, challenges, or differing stakeholder interests and how they were addressed.**

Stakeholders' Perspectives and Dynamics at Play

The development of HRRA's regional organics program involved a wide range of stakeholders—municipalities, public works departments, residents, commercial haulers, state agencies, processors, and funders—each with distinct priorities, constraints, and expectations. The success of the initiative required navigating these differing interests and building collaborative dynamics that supported long term program stability.

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1) Municipal Leaders: Balancing Cost, Capacity, and Risk

Perspective:

Town administrators and elected officials needed confidence that organics diversion would not create unmanageable costs or burdens on municipal staff. Concerns included equipment expenses, staffing capacity at transfer stations, permitting hurdles, and the long-term financial sustainability of managing food scraps.

Dynamics and Resolutions:

- HRRA addressed these concerns through transparent financial modeling, demonstration pilots, and communication of real-world cost outcomes.
- Grant-funded infrastructure (ASP systems, MetroSTOR bins, regional truck) removed upfront financial barriers.
- Offering flexible participation models—drop off only, satellite bins, ASP onsite processing, or regional hauling support—allowed each town to adopt an approach aligned with its capacity.

These strategies increased municipal confidence and led to expanding participation across the region.

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2) Public Works Departments: Operational Practicality and Training

Perspective:

Public works staff were concerned with day to day realities: workload, equipment, site logistics, and ensuring contamination did not undermine processing efforts.

Dynamics and Resolutions:

- HRRA hired New England Compost to provide hands on training, mentorship, and troubleshooting support.
- ASP systems were intentionally designed to integrate into existing workflows rather than create entirely new responsibilities.
- Staff input was incorporated into site layout, equipment selection, and standard operating procedures. This collaboration helped foster ownership and ease operational concerns.

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3) Residents: Convenience, Trust, and Tangible Benefits

Perspective:

Residents wanted a program that was easy to participate in, affordable, and meaningful. Many residents were new to food-scrap separation and hesitant about odors, cost, or routine changes.

Dynamics and Resolutions:

- Transfer station drop offs were supplemented with 24/7 satellite bins, reducing barriers created by limited hours.
- Free compost giveaways offered visible, immediate rewards tied to participation.
- Consistent messaging, clear signage, and simple instructions built trust and comfort. As a result, resident engagement grew steadily, and community sentiment became a strong driver of ongoing program support.

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4) Commercial Haulers and Processors: Capacity and Economics

Perspective:

Haulers initially played a key role in transporting material to commercial processors, but the financial model was strained by long distances and rising costs. Processors limited by geography and capacity also influenced program feasibility.

Dynamics and Resolutions:

- As the cost of hauling and processing increased, HRRA pivoted toward local, municipal-scale composting systems, reducing reliance on external processors.
- HRRA maintained open communication with haulers to ensure ongoing collaboration in towns not yet ready for onsite processing.
- The future public/private partnership planned for Newtown further integrates private-sector strengths with municipal infrastructure. These shifts helped align economic incentives for all parties.

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5) State Agencies and Funders: Regulatory Alignment and Proof of Concept

Perspective:

State agencies such as CT DEEP prioritize environmental protection, compliance, and responsible operation of composting facilities. Funders (USDA, RecycleCT Foundation, CT DEEP grants) sought evidence that investments would produce measurable benefits.

Dynamics and Resolutions:

- HRRA worked closely with CT DEEP to navigate permitting, ensuring environmental safeguards while advocating for more efficient processes.
- Grant funders were given data demonstrating cost savings, diversion increases, and system scalability.
- HRRA's program has now become a proof of concept that municipal organics infrastructure can operate safely and cost-effectively. This strengthened relationships and positioned the program as a model for statewide policy advancement.

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6) Differing Interests and How They Were Bridged

Throughout the program, stakeholder interests sometimes diverged:

- Municipalities wanted cost certainty
- Residents wanted convenience
- Haulers needed clear roles and stable revenue
- State regulators needed compliance and environmental safeguards
- Funders required measurable outcomes

HRRA bridged these interests by:

- offering flexible models tailored to each stakeholder's capacity,
- demonstrating outcomes through clear data (tonnage, cost changes, contamination rates),
- providing regional solutions where towns lacked individual resources,
- and creating a system where benefits were shared across the region.

Overall Dynamic

The initiative succeeded because HRRA served as the regional convener, listening to concerns, adjusting program design, and advocating for solutions that balanced environmental goals, operational realities, and financial sustainability. By cultivating trust, adapting to feedback, and showing results, HRRA created a collaborative environment where diverse stakeholders became partners in building one of Connecticut's strongest community based organics programs.

11. Lessons Learned: Share what worked well, what didn't, and recommendations for others seeking to replicate your approach.

What Worked Well

1) Secure Executive and Operational Buy In at the Start Engaging chief elected officials (e.g., First Selectmen/Mayors) early, and keeping them informed with clear goals, costs, and outcomes, created top down support that helped move projects through budgeting, siting, and policy decisions. Equally important, transfer station operators were brought in from the outset to shape site layout, workflow, and signage. Their practical insights improved day to day operations and built pride of ownership.
2) Start Small, Prove Success, and Scale Up Modest pilots, first curbside, then transfer station drop offs, demonstrated viability and built confidence before larger investments.
3) Onsite Municipal Composting Is a Game Changer Local ASP systems eliminated hauling/tip fees and established a path to true cost savings.
4)
5) PAYT Significantly Accelerates Participation Where PAYT was implemented, organics tonnage rose sharply, aligning household behavior with program goals. Convenience Is Critical 24/7 MetroSTOR satellite bins addressed limited transfer station hours and broadened access, including in towns without transfer stations.

6) Strong Training and Technical Support Build Confidence Hands on design, training, and mentorship (e.g., New England Compost) set operators up for success and consistent quality.
7) Visible Community Benefits Reinforce Engagement Compost give backs and municipal use of finished compost created a tangible, local return on participation.

What Didn't Work

1) Offering Programs for Free When They Can't Stay Free Launching a free service and later adding fees led to a drop in participation and unrealistic expectations. Sustainable pricing should be in place from day one.
2) Operating Without Operator Buy In At times over the 12 years, transfer station operators who disliked the program or did not want to help manage it hindered progress, through inconsistent messaging to residents, reduced attention to contamination control, or reluctance to maintain collection areas. This underscored that operational staff are not just implementers; they are frontline ambassadors whose buy in directly affects performance.
3) Reliance on Distant Commercial Processors Long hauling distances and rising tip fees made early models financially unsustainable.
4) Limited Transfer Station Hours Constrained Participation Access barriers capped participation until 24/7 options were introduced.
5) Regulatory Timelines Slowed Expansion Permitting requirements extended project schedules and increased administrative load.

Recommendations for Others Seeking to Replicate This Approach

1) Don't Launch "Free" Unless It Will Stay Free If the program must be fee based later, start with a sustainable fee structure immediately to avoid participation shock and trust erosion.
2) Secure Leadership and Frontline Buy In Formally
    a. Obtain written support or a simple resolution from chief elected officials to anchor budgeting, siting, and communications.
    b. Hold a kickoff meeting with transfer station operators to co design workflow, signage, contamination protocols, and feedback loops. Recognize operators publicly as key partners and build in regular touchpoints to surface issues early.

3) Build Access First, Then Infrastructure Use drop offs to establish habits; add onsite processing (ASP or in vessel) for long term economics.
4) Pair Organics With PAYT Where Possible PAYT plus free organics drop off is a proven driver of diversion and behavior change.
5) Prioritize Local Processing for Cost Stability If processors are 15–50 miles away, municipal scale composting will likely yield better economics and reliability.
6) Invest in Training and SOPs Provide operator training, clear SOPs, contamination checklists, and ongoing mentorship to ensure consistent quality.
7) Communicate Often and Share Results Use simple dashboards or quarterly updates to show participation, tonnage, contamination, and cost trends, keeping leaders, operators, and residents aligned.

Overall Lesson

Success hinges on aligned leadership and empowered operators, paired with a financially realistic design from day one. When top level policy support, frontline ownership, convenient access, and local processing come together, backed by transparent data, regional organics programs become resilient, scalable, and cost effective.