

Organics Management Guide Submission

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Select the Primary Entity Type Please identify the category that best represents your project: Nonprofit or Non-Governmental Organization

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.**

Common Ground (CG) is a center for learning and leadership, inviting people across ages and identities to connect to their urban environment, build community, grow into their full potential, and contribute to a just and sustainable world. We work toward this mission through active, authentic learning rooted in justice and our environment: a farm, in a forest, in a city. Our 3 interwoven entities include CG High School, a public charter environmental high school; an urban farm; and an environmental learning center.

The CG Urban Farm is a small scale 1 acre farm which models sustainable agriculture, engages youth, students, and city residents in educational opportunities, and provides healthy produce to the surrounding community. Our dedication to a multi-generational approach to our farming process means that countless individuals across ages play a role in the 13,000lbs of produce we grow annually. An integral part of our farming practice is amending our soil with compost. The CG Compost Program has grown significantly, since 2017 when we built a mid-scale in-vessel aerated static pile (ASP) composting system with the support of a CT Dept. of Agriculture Grant and later, a partnership with the City of New Haven's Food System Policy Division's USDA Community Compost and Food Waste Reduction Grant. We have grown to annually divert 110,391 (2025) of food waste from landfills and incinerators, with our primary sources being our school cafeteria, and a unique, mutually-supportive partnership with the small business, Peels and Wheels, a bike-powered neighborhood-scale operation, and "Pay what you can" community drop

offs. New Haven is CT's 3rd largest city and the 2nd largest waste producer, generating 5% of the state's total. Compostable waste comprises 33% of CT's waste stream and offers the biggest opportunity to reduce waste going to incinerators or landfills (New Haven Food System Policy Division & Abbott-Lum, 2022). CG is committed to the role we play in New Haven's waste stream by minimizing the transportation and decreasing incineration rates of compostable waste, supporting sustainable food production, creating job training and education opportunities, and building community around this environmental justice issue.

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

The CG ASP compost system, in New Haven CT, is a partnership with the small collection business Peels and Wheels. It has the capability to divert over 100,000 lbs of food waste, and produce high-quality finished compost that has the potential to go beyond our own urban farm to school gardens, backyard and community gardeners, and other urban farmers. Streamlining our production has allowed us to deepen educational compost offerings to the community, through our youth and adult training programs and community based outreach materials. To meet these goals, we are working to 1. Increase capacity with new equipment and ongoing maintenance; 2. Support staffing to aid production, education, and job training for youth (our Green Jobs Corps crew) and adults; and 3. To build partnerships focused on increasing citywide composting and general composting enthusiasm including outreach, education and community events like our annual Farm and Garden Conference.

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.

We divert:

- Approximately 110,391lbs of food waste from multiple sources
- Approx. 7884 lbs of animal bedding (CG Farm)
- Approx 18824lbs of dry leaves (landscapers)
- Approx 36572lbs of woodchips

- 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 CG Compost Program has grown significantly, since 2017 when we built a midscale in-vessel aerated static pile (ASP) composting system with the support of a CT Dept. of Agriculture Grant and later, a partnership with the City of New Haven's Food System Policy Division's USDA Community Compost and Food Waste Reduction Grant matched by support from NRCS. We were able to make some minor program investment through the ILSR Community Compost grant in 2024.

We process farm waste, animal bedding from onsite activities, food waste from community drop off, school cafeteria and community pick ups, and leaves and wood chips from local landscapers (free).

We process them (chop, mix) by hand and use the tractor to put them into one of 3 concrete bay of our ASP system.

CG and Peels and Wheels shares training, staffing and systems management responsibilities.

Peels and Wheels is a pay for household service business who's fees pay for their staffing and other business maintenance. Common Ground is a nonprofit that looks for foundation, state and individual financial support, with small contributions from our "pay what you can drop off" members. CG funding covers staffing (including our youth training program) and equipment costs. The loss of federal funding greatly shifted the way we staff and fund the system.

- 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.

They haven't really. We mostly use the compost onsite so as a farm, we haven't had to be responsive to regulations quite yet. We do adhere to environmental and ecological regulations (e.g. 200ft from a waterway and NRCS inspections before construction)

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

pounds of foodwaste diverted:

- 2021 21994
- 2022 42598
- 2023 69562
- 2024 77351.8
- 2025 110391.7

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.

We are able to observe behavior change with our school collection and contamination and notice that there is reduced contamination and increase food waste collection when there is ongoing person to person education at the collection bins. When we are short staffed and this is not possible, contamination increases. We have also found that biannual training in classes with students is effective-we use peer to peer education models-but again, this is only possible when there is staff capacity, and school administration buy in (i.e. requiring all grade levels to sign up for training vs. opting in). We have also decided to forgo asking Peels and Wheels clients to stop using compostable bags in their collection bins-we remove them in the processing phase as we consider them contaminants.

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.

Improvements to our site and equipment fed directly into the education of our Summer 2024 Adult Interns (6 people) and Youth Crew (8 people) who were directly involved in weekly processing and training, including a visit to a local municipal transfer station, and educational experiences with High School students through classroom and hands on activities. The Annual Farm and Garden Conference offered 88 participants 3 workshop opportunities to learn about compost through different lenses (Transformative Trash Talk, Practical Composting, and Work WITH Nature To Grow Nutrient Dense Food).

In October 2024, CG hosted a Pumpkin Smash, where the public enjoyed smashing and composting halloween pumpkins, local refreshments and farm activities. Run with the youth Compost Crew, folks, many of whom had never been to Common Ground before, learned about composting and how they could continue dropping off in the future.

Access to Composting and Compost: The Common Ground compost drop off program expanded to include our Mobile Farmers Market route, which stops at senior residences, libraries, health centers and community centers around New Haven, and prioritizing communities experiencing food apartheid, served as pilot free community compost drop off spots that supported New Haven residents to build comfort using citywide drop-off sites to divert food waste from overflowing landfills, while having fun and buying produce. The drop off spots included the main Common Ground site, which uses a “Pay What You Can” model, supporting the costs of processing, but keeping access open to everyone. Community “Pay What You Can” drop offs diverted 9,570 pounds of food waste in 24/25

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

The collaborations that developed during large community partnership grants such as the first USDA Community Composting Grant, and the process around designing priorities for a large, and now canceled EPA citywide grant, paved the way for partnerships. These grants can be a lot of work to coordinate and manage, but started conversations that led to

connections, ideas for collaboration and awareness of citywide possibilities. The CT Compost Conference was also a great place to meet folks from across the state.

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

While we have had many challenges over the years, the most recent impact has been loss of federal funding which greatly impacted our youth training program and adult summer emerging farmer internship program (which was greatly valued in our weekly operations). We are swiftly approaching a change on the municipal level, where the city is working towards offering free compost collection. This would greatly effect our collection model, as our project is not included within their exciting plans. So we will have to pivot, and are hoping that the city is able to at least recognize this transition.

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

Private/nonprofit or farm collaborations (CG and Peels and Wheels) is an exciting approach, as it makes it more feasible for a small business to find land, and is supportive of the farm/nonprofit to reduce staffing costs. Obviously there have been challenges along the way, but it has enabled us both to have resilient labor needs, support equipment investments through different channels, and ramp up our capacity significantly. It has also been rewarding to have opened up this job training opportunity and entry level work, as folks have been able to develop their skills over time and take on leadership roles in the composting/sustainable ag world.