

## Organics Management Guide Submission

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**Select the Primary Entity Type Please identify the category that best represents your project:** Owner of Infrastructure\*\* (composting, anaerobic digestion, depackaging, etc.)

### **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 Hillside Foundation Fund is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit established to address systemic gaps in Nebraska's waste and agricultural systems. It was developed to tackle Nebraska's escalating nitrate crisis, where conventional tillage and synthetic fertilizers lead to significant nitrate leakage into drinking water. Launched as a mission-driven arm of the Hillside Solutions family, the program addresses the 400,000 tons of organics lost to Omaha landfills annually and the corresponding soil collapse caused by chemical-heavy farming.

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

The initiative is a circular-economy program in Omaha and Southeast Nebraska centered on the Hub & Spoke Composting Model. The primary goals are to divert urban organic waste from landfills and revitalize soil health through On-Farm Organics Management (OFOM). Key outcomes include reducing agricultural dependency on synthetic fertilizers, mitigating nitrate pollution in groundwater, and cutting methane emissions.

**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.**

Omaha landfills receive approximately 400,000 tons of organics annually. The pilot programs across four farms have already processed over 3,000 yards of material, proving the scalability of the decentralized model. The program aligns with the Omaha Climate Action Plan goal of increasing organics diversion by 5.3 times by 2035.

**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.)**

Materials Managed: Residential and commercial organic waste (food scraps, yard waste), ag-waste, manure, and carbon-rich wood/biochar.

Management Method: An inverse Hub & Spoke system where "City Hubs" collect and mix urban organics, and "Spoke Farms" receive the material for on-site composting and land application.

Responsibility: Led by the Hillside Foundation Fund in collaboration with Soil Dynamics (hauling/mixing) and partner farmers.

Products Generated: Nutrient-dense compost used as a soil amendment to replace synthetic nitrogen.

Funding: Supported by corporate sponsorships ("Sponsor a Farmer"), community donations via the Impact Awards Gala, and potential grants from the USDA and NRCS.

Generators: Households in the Omaha Metro (District 3 pilot), schools, restaurants, and businesses like Methodist Hospital and Creighton University.

- 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.**

The program is strategically aligned with Governor Pillen's clean water agenda and NDEE expectations. It navigates complex regulations by advocating for on-farm composting to be classified as an "Ag practice" rather than a commercial solid waste facility, provided the material is used on-site.

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

Pilot results show that a 1% increase in Organic Matter (OM) allows soil to store an additional 20,000 gallons of water per acre. One pilot farm nearly doubled its OM from 1.9% to 3.7% in just four years using these practices.

- 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 utilizes educational normalization through school programs and a "curbside compost service" launch (targeted for April 2026). By providing "Compost Commitment" pledges and simple "Quick Start" guides, the Fund helps residents overcome the "icky" factor and makes sustainable waste diversion a weekly habit.

- 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.**

Economic: Replaces up to \$125/acre in anhydrous ammonia costs, resulting in a net income increase of \$55.16 to \$68.81 per acre for participating farmers.

Environmental: Diverting organics reduces 460 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e per year per 160 acres—the equivalent of removing 100 cars from the road.

Social: Provides rural communities with safer drinking water and creates an equitable system where scholarships allow lower-income families to participate in composting.

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

Buy-in was achieved by forming a coalition of public and private entities, including the Papio-Missouri River NRD and local schools. The Fund hosts high-profile events like the Impact Awards Gala to celebrate "Compost Champions" and align with the 80% of Omaha residents who identified composting as a priority.

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

The program bridges the gap between urban waste diversion goals and rural groundwater protection. It addresses farmer concerns about profit margins (84% of NE farmers work off-farm jobs) by creating new revenue through tipping fees and fertilizer savings.

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

Successes: Decentralized composting effectively manages odors through the use of carbon-rich mulch bio-covers.

Challenges: Plastic contamination remains a hurdle, requiring advanced screening equipment (trommel screeners) to ensure quality.

Recommendation: Focus on "soil health" as a universal value and utilize a "tiered" participation system (Tier 1-3) to let farmers choose their level of operational involvement.