

Draft Albuquerque Citywide Composting Initiative

City of Albuquerque Sustainability Office and FUSE Corps

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Introduction

Welcome to the draft Albuquerque Citywide Composting Initiative! Our mission is to revolutionize waste management in Albuquerque by transforming food waste from a problem into a sustainable solution. By working together as a community, we can create a more environmentally friendly and resilient city for generations to come.

Issues of climate and sustainability are central to the livelihoods of all Albuquerque residents. To effectively guide the fight against the climate crisis for years to come, community members, city staff and policy experts came together to develop the 2021 Albuquerque Climate Action Plan. This plan was both a response to City Resolution R-19-187’s declaration of a climate emergency, and an update of the City’s 2009 Climate Plan. Based off of the results of a city-wide survey and later task force consensus, the plan’s policy recommendations were organized into 7 major groups:

**Sustainable Buildings
Waste & Recycling**

**Renewable Energy
Economic Development
Climate Conscious Neighborhoods & Resources**

**Clean Transportation
Education & Awareness**

Food waste and composting are directly related to a few of these groups, and indirectly related to all of them. Foremost, food waste decomposes in landfills, producing methane, a potent greenhouse gas. The remaining decomposed material is no longer able to be reused or recycled. Diverting food waste from landfills to composting facilities prevents methane emissions, keeps more of the carbon in the compost, and unlocks nutrients that can be used for plants and creating healthy soils - all of which supports the 2021 CAP Goals and the stated priorities of Mayor Keller’s administration.

To further food waste reduction and composting goals, theCity of Albuquerque’s Sustainability Office, in collaboration with FUSE Corps, is developing an equity-focused citywide composting initiative. This document is a draft version of the initiative, designed specifically to garner input from community members, who will shape the final initiative.

Background

A series of stakeholder interviews and listening sessions were conducted earlier this year to guide this draft initiative.

Stakeholder Interviews	Listening Sessions (Date Location # Participants)
<p>Prior to the first meeting and continuing throughout the listening tour, interviews were conducted with local experts, representatives of major institutions, division heads of other City and State programs, and other composting stakeholders. These interviews were to gather initial information on implementation constraints and to refine the plan as public feedback was collected. An initial meeting with Mayor Keller was also conducted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compost and Food Waste Collection Expert: 8 ● City and County Employees and Representatives: 12 ● Local Business: 15 ● Local Major Institutions: 4 ● Community, Food, and Environmental Nonprofits: 6 ● Local Subject Matter Experts: 5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 11/16 SVEDC 8 ● 12/3 First Unitarian Church (Drop-in) 15 ● 12/5 International District Library 6 ● 12/8 University of New Mexico 22 ● 12/10 Albuquerque Friends Meeting (Drop-in) 6 ● 12/14 SVEDC 11 ● 12/18 Westside Community Center 0 ● 12/19 Virtual Session (via Zoom) (97 views) ● 12/19 International District Library 0 ● 1/3 Cherry Hills Library 9 ● 1/4 Central and Unser Library 2 ● 1/9 Erna Fergusson Library 5 ● 1/10 Tony Hillerman Library 3 ● 1/18 Main Public Library 2 ● 1/18 South Valley Library 2 ● 1/23 Lomas Tramway Public Library 5 ● 1/25 Rudolfo Anaya North Valley Library 2 ● 1/29 Open Space Visitors Center 4 ● 1/31 Matt’s Mushroom Farm 8 ● 2/6 International District Library 2 ● 2/7 Central and Unser Library 3 ● 2/6 Castle Coffee 8 ● 2/9 Tamaya Hilton 7 ● 2/11 First Unitarian Church 9

The initial public engagement also included a feedback survey, which was open for over a month. A total of 74 survey responses were collected, and the results indicated a strong preference for curbside pickup of food waste, with a local drop-off point being the second most favored option. Other preferences expressed were for the program to be either free to participate or less than \$11 per month, and for there to be some sort of compost buy-back and reuse component to the program.

Based on the stakeholder interviews and survey results, this initial, two-phase initiative seeks to strike a balance between the most favorable public option of implementation and the greatest feasibility of the pilot plan.

Possible Implementation Models

To address food waste effectively, Albuquerque can consider various models for citywide composting. Below are four potential models, each with its own set of pros and cons.

Models for a Citywide Compost Program	Pros	Cons	Best Fit
<p>Curbside Food Waste Pickup by City of Albuquerque Solid Waste Department</p> <p>This model involves the City of Albuquerque Solid Waste Department providing regular curbside pickup of food waste for residents.</p>	<p>Convenience: High participation rates due to the ease and convenience for residents.</p> <p>Consistency: Uniform service standards and reliability as managed by the city.</p> <p>Scalability: Easier to integrate with existing waste management systems and gradually expand.</p>	<p>Cost: High initial investment in additional bins, collection vehicles, and staff training. May require a service fee to fund the program long-term.</p> <p>Operational Complexity: Increased logistical challenges in scheduling and managing routes.</p> <p>Education Required: Significant effort needed to educate the public on proper sorting to minimize contamination</p>	<p>Medium to large-sized cities with strong public waste management infrastructure and higher budgets.</p>
<p>Curbside Food Waste Pickup by Private Hauling Company</p> <p>A private hauling company is contracted to provide curbside pickup of food waste.</p>	<p>Flexibility: Private companies can often adapt quickly and offer tailored services.</p> <p>Potential Cost Savings: Competitive bidding can potentially lower costs compared to city-managed services.</p> <p>Innovation: Private companies may employ advanced technologies and practices.</p>	<p>Accountability: Potential variability in service quality and reliability.</p> <p>Coordination: Requires careful contract management and oversight by the City.</p> <p>Profit Motive: Private companies may have operational constraints based on what is and is not profitable.</p> <p>Budgeting: Requires a different funding mechanism.</p>	<p>Cities looking to leverage private sector efficiencies and innovations without expanding municipal operations. Cities with one or more existing private sector companies that have necessary expertise and experience.</p>
<p>Food Waste Drop-off Site at Local City-Operated Building</p> <p>Residents bring their food waste to designated drop-off sites at city-operated buildings like community centers and libraries.</p>	<p>Low Cost: Minimal investment in infrastructure compared to curbside programs.</p> <p>Community Engagement: Fosters a sense of community involvement and responsibility.</p> <p>Flexibility: Easier to pilot and scale based on community response.</p>	<p>Inconvenience: Lower participation rates due to the effort required from residents to transport waste.</p> <p>Limited Coverage: May not be accessible to all residents, particularly those without reliable transportation.</p> <p>Potential Contamination: Higher risk of improper waste disposal if not monitored closely.</p> <p>Compliance: Additional State regulatory requirements may apply.</p>	<p>Initial pilot programs and communities with budget constraints or those looking to test composting initiatives before scaling.</p>

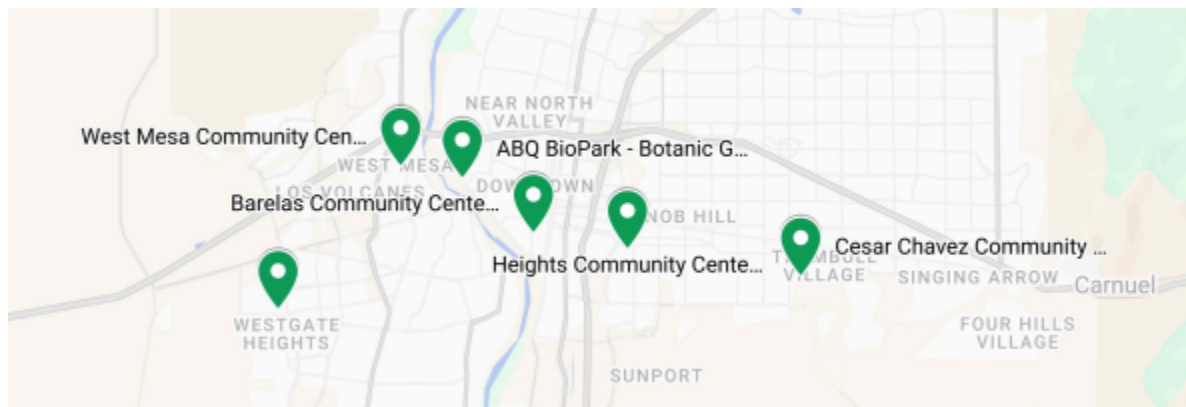
Models for a Citywide Compost Program	Pros	Cons	Best Fit
<p>Food Waste Drop-off Site at Local 'Green Hub'</p> <p>Establish 'Green Hubs' that integrate food waste drop-off with other sustainability services like community gardening, food aid, recycling, and more.</p>	<p>Holistic Approach: Combines multiple sustainability efforts, promoting a broader environmental impact.</p> <p>Community Support: Provides additional benefits to frontline communities¹, increasing community buy-in.</p> <p>Resource Sharing: Efficient use of resources by consolidating various services at one site.</p>	<p>Complexity: Requires significant planning and coordination across different programs and services.</p> <p>Cost: Higher initial investment to establish and maintain multifunctional sites.</p>	<p>Communities committed to comprehensive sustainability initiatives and looking to create multifunctional community resource centers.</p>

Each model offers unique advantages and challenges. Albuquerque can start with one or more pilot programs to test the feasibility and community response to each model, and assess a multimodal approach. By evaluating outcomes of the pilot(s), the City can select the most effective, equitable, and sustainable approach to managing food waste and promoting composting.

Draft Program Plan

The initial program pilot model selected is the **Food Waste Drop-off Site at Local City-Operated Building** implementation model. This model was selected because it represented the easiest and fastest way to get a citywide composting program up and running, while at the same time having a high degree of public support based on the listening session and survey results. It will be implemented in two phases to ensure that the model functions well before expanding it to a larger audience.

PHASE 1: The pilot program will start with six sites: five strategically selected sites at community centers (Barelas, WestGate, Heights, Cesar Chavez, and West Mesa) and the ABQ BioPark.



PHASE 2: Expand sites across the city.

¹ Frontline communities are those that experience the most immediate and worst impacts of climate change and are most often communities of color, Indigenous, and/or low-income

How will the program work?

1. Residents will sign up for the program to receive a comprehensive starter kit, including a food waste collection bucket and educational materials on reducing food waste at home.
2. Program participants will collect food waste in the collection bucket over a 1-2 week period. Based on final program design, there will be scheduled times when the drop-off site is available to bring the bucket over and transfer food waste to the on-site collection containers.
3. Once you've dropped off your food waste, a hauler will take care of the rest. They'll transport it to a professional compost facility, where it will undergo transformation into nutrient-rich compost for use in local parks, gardens, and urban agriculture projects.

Importance of Equity

Equity is central to environmental justice, ensuring that all communities, regardless of race, income, or social status, have fair access to clean air, water, and land. Environmental injustices, such as the disproportionate siting of landfills and polluting industries in low-income and minority neighborhoods, perpetuate inequalities and exacerbate health disparities.

How is equity part of this proposed plan?

Equity has been a deliberate focus during the planning and implementation process. Here are some ways that equity is reflected in this plan, and some possible ways to increase the role of equity in the future.

Inclusive Site Selection:

- **Community Engagement:** The city engaged with diverse community members to identify the best locations for these sites based on their needs and convenience.
- **Equitable Access:** Drop-off sites were strategically placed in underserved and low-income neighborhoods to prioritize access to services for communities historically last to receive benefits and those impacted first and worst by climate change.

Provision of Materials:

- **Free or Subsidized Kits:** Food waste diversion starter kits are planned to be offered at no cost or at a subsidized rate for low-income residents to reduce financial barriers.
- **Multilingual Resources:** Educational materials will be provided in multiple languages to accommodate non-English speaking residents, ensuring they have the necessary information to participate effectively. Our survey text is also available in both English and Spanish.

Community Engagement and Feedback:

- **Listening Sessions:** Listening sessions and stakeholder interviews were conducted in various neighborhoods to understand specific community needs and concerns.
- **Collaborations:** Partnered with local community groups, nonprofits, and advocacy organizations to ensure the program met the needs of all residents, particularly those in marginalized communities.

Future Opportunities for Greater Equity

Addressing Barriers:

- **Transportation Assistance:** Partnerships with local organizations helped provide transportation solutions for residents who struggled to access drop-off sites.
- **Flexible Operation Hours:** Drop-off sites operated with extended and flexible hours to accommodate the varying schedules of working families and individuals with irregular work hours.

Enhanced Outreach and Education:

- **Targeted Campaigns:** Implement more targeted outreach campaigns to further educate underserved communities about the benefits and procedures of composting.
- **Youth Engagement:** Develop programs specifically aimed at educating and involving young people from diverse backgrounds in composting initiatives.

Expanded Access and Support:

- **Mobile Drop-Off Units:** Introduce mobile drop-off units that can travel to different neighborhoods, making composting accessible to residents who cannot reach fixed drop-off sites.
- **At-Home Composting:** Expand the availability of free or subsidized at-home composting kits and resources to more low-income households.

Broader Community Involvement:

- **Community Champions:** Recruit and train community champions from diverse neighborhoods to advocate for and support composting efforts locally.
- **Equity Advisory Board:** Establish an equity advisory board to provide ongoing input and oversight, ensuring that the composting program continues to address the needs of all community members.

Infrastructure and Resource Allocation:

- **Investment in Infrastructure:** Invest in additional infrastructure to support composting in underserved areas, such as more drop-off sites and improved transportation options.

Community Input

Your feedback is critical to shaping the final initiative and ensuring that it is successful and long-lasting. Please support and shape the initiative by completing a short feedback form, to show that our residents care about composting. The survey can be accessed via QR code (below) or by visiting www.cabq.gov/compost.



Imagine a future where composting is as commonplace as recycling – together, we can make this vision a reality for Albuquerque.

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