



**DATE:** February 11, 2016

**TO:** Programs & Administration Committee  
Planning & Organization Committee/Recycling Board

**FROM:** Wendy Sommer, Executive Director

**BY:** Justin Lehrer, Senior Program Manager

**SUBJECT:** Assessment Criteria for Product Decisions Activities

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## **SUMMARY**

As part of the mid-term review of the 2020 strategic plan progress, staff has developed proposed criteria for evaluating the efficacy of current or future Agency projects. The criteria will be used to make adjustments to the Product Decision Targets identified in the Strategic Workplan. At the February 11 meetings, staff will review the proposed criteria with the Board.

## **DISCUSSION**

The objective of the mid-term review and recalibration of the strategic plan is to assess our progress and consider the value of the activities we engage in. Today we have information and knowledge that was not available at the time the plan was approved in 2010. Projects have matured, lessons have been learned and applied, and external conditions may have changed. Our goal is to take a thorough look at the project portfolio, assess our progress, advance to new goals where possible, and evolve or course-correct as needed based on current needs and conditions.

In order to have a thoughtful and consistent assessment process, staff developed a set of criteria that can be applied to existing projects or future activities the Agency is considering. These criteria first took shape during strategic review of the eight Product Decisions “targets” projects (Attachment B). Lacking a formalized, consistent approach to how we evaluate the projects we undertake, questions arose of what factors we should consider when setting priorities for existing work and potential future projects. These factors evolved into a Project Assessment (Attachment A) that our teams are utilizing to help determine whether a project aligns with Agency priorities and is an effective use of our limited resources.

The criteria provide an important reality check on the overall achievability of the targets. Effective goals are ambitious, while still attainable. If there are technical or financial barriers, or other factors outside of our influence, we need to identify them and adjust our strategy accordingly.

For example, the food service ware target states that 90% of food service businesses with organics collection will use utensils and food ware considered readily recyclable, compostable, or reusable. However, there are numerous technical issues, varying acceptability by jurisdictions and mixed success with collection, sorting, and processing (recycling or compost) of the wide variety of compostable and recyclable single-use food ware & packaging. In many cases these items get screened out and landfilled, end up as contamination in the wrong stream, or as residual overs bound for the landfill, as in the case with compostable utensils that don't fully decompose. Rather than pushing forward and driving more of these problematic products into the waste stream, we can reconsider our level of influence and best role in this area – including participating in policy and technical dialogues working to address some of the issues, while in the meantime supporting the reduction of these hard-to-recycle products by promoting waste prevention and reusable food service ware as preferable alternatives with technical assistance and outreach to a smaller receptive universe of businesses.

A similar effort to develop evaluation criteria recently took place as part of the planning discussion for the Organics Processing Development (OPD) Reserve. Subsequently, the two sets of criteria were integrated, and we are in the midst of a similar process to merge with criteria utilized for BAYREN and other Energy Council projects. We plan to apply similar criteria to grant proposals we receive.

### **Hierarchy, Priority & Impact Areas**

In addition to the evaluation criteria, the Project Assessment (Attachment A) identifies the project's place in the waste management hierarchy (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rot), and how a project addresses Priority Areas and Impact Areas.

The US EPA's current initiatives and [strategic plan for Sustainable Materials Management through 2022](#) calls out three focus areas for action: Organics, Packaging, and Built-Environment. Just about all of the Product Decisions work already fits within these three focus areas. Organics includes food waste prevention and our recycled content compost & mulch projects; we have several packaging-related efforts such as reusable transport packaging, the reusable bag ordinance, and food service ware; and the built-environment not only pertains to green building materials, but also to operation of the built environment, including energy conservation and efficiency work that the Energy Council is focused on. Adopting these as Priority Areas and structuring our projects around them presents an opportunity to improve our operational efficiency, administratively merging some smaller projects together that can leverage shared effort and resources within a specific priority area. Aligning our priority areas with other agencies such as the US EPA also increases our opportunity to apply for external funding.

Impact Areas represent the (often multiple) expected environmental benefits that will result from a project, such as waste prevention or diversion from landfill, energy conservation, or water savings. Identifying where multiple benefits exist early in the project evaluation process will help staff assess where we can achieve the most impact, or “bang for our buck.”

### **Summary and Next Steps**

The criteria are not meant to be a quantitative exercise; they are a tool for decision-making. Successful projects may not meet all the criteria, and professional judgment plays an equally important role in this

process. The idea is to ensure the right questions are asked, consistently, so that informed decisions can be made.

We are interested in receiving input from Board members on the criteria and if anything is missing. Staff will use the adopted criteria to adjust the Product Decision Targets, propose organics projects and develop future programs.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Board review and approve the proposed criteria for evaluating targets and programs.



**PROJECT ASSESSMENT**

**Project/Concept Name** (incl. Project #): \_\_\_\_\_

**Priority Area:**    Organics     Packaging     Built Environment (Energy, Green Building, C&D)

**Impact Area:**    Landfill Conservation (Prevention or Diversion)     Energy Conservation  
 Hazardous Waste    Reduce GHGs    Recycled Content / Market Dev  
 Other (Soil, Water, etc.)

**Place in Hierarchy:**    Reduce    Reuse     Recycle     Rot

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Response</b> <i>Yes, No, Maybe</i>	<b>Assessment/Comments</b>
<p><b>Influence</b> Are we positioned to effectively influence the target audience? Can the project be achieved within Alameda County or is broader geographic reach needed (i.e. would this be better suited as a regional, state or federal initiative)?</p>		
<p><b>Technical Feasibility</b> Aside from cost or other factors, can it be done? Is the technology available and the pieces in place to make it work? (e.g., if goal is recyclable/compostable food service ware, are these products acceptable and recoverable in local facilities?)</p>		
<p><b>Timeliness &amp; Leverage</b> Is the project timely given the current societal and political</p>		

<p>environment and/or internal considerations? (Are the stars aligned, are there current opportunities to leverage?).</p>		
<p><b>Criteria</b></p>	<p><b>Response</b> <i>Yes, No, Maybe</i></p>	<p><b>Assessment/Comments</b></p>
<p><b>Member Agency, Partner &amp; Funder Alignment</b></p> <p>Does the project align with or support goals/initiatives of our Member Agencies and other potential partners (e.g., water agencies)? Is there opportunity to collaborate? Is it equitable among member agencies?</p>		
<p><b>Innovation &amp; Leadership</b></p> <p>Is the project innovative or does it experiment with a new concept/idea? Seed for future funding?</p>		
<p><b>Measurability</b></p> <p>Practically speaking, can progress be measured? Note the metric/method.</p>		
<p><b>Budget</b></p> <p>Is current project budget sufficient, or is adequate funding readily available? Is there a plan for funding?</p>		
<p><b>Potential Impact &amp; Cost Effectiveness</b></p> <p>Consider the overall expected magnitude of impact of the project, along with expected costs to determine the overall "bang for your buck." When feasible, use</p>		

metrics such as cost per ton (or other)		
<b>Questions:</b>		
<b>Recommendation:</b>		

**Additional Considerations:**

- **Available Staff** – Can the concept be executed at existing project staffing levels?
- **General Community/Social Impact** – Does the goal provide a benefit/value to the general public? What does the broader community think of this effort? Consider receptivity, need for stakeholder input.

## ATTACHMENT B

The following product decisions targets were approved by the Boards at the end of 2011:

1. **Waste Prevention:**

**A. Institutional Food Service/Commercial Cafeterias**

Institutional kitchens and high volume food service operators located in Alameda County that participate in technical assistance or other support services from the Authority, reduce food and other inputs by an average of 25% or more from an established baseline.

**B. Reusable Transport Packaging**

90% of businesses in Alameda County with appropriate shipping and receiving circumstances are utilizing reusable transport packaging when economically advantageous.

2. **Household Hazardous Waste:**

**A. HHW Alternatives**

90% of stores that sell products destined for HHW facilities will stock and promote non-toxic/less-toxic HHW alternative products.

3. **Recycled Content:**

**A. Bulk Compost**

90% of permitted landscape projects in Alameda County use locally produced or sourced compost.

**B. Bulk Mulch**

90% permitted landscape projects in Alameda County use local, recycled mulch.

**C. Building Materials**

90% of building material supply centers will stock and promote recycled content building materials that support local green jobs.

4. **Hard To Recycle:**

**A. Institutional and Commercial Food Service Ware & Packaging**

90% of customers (institutional and commercial) with separate organics collection purchase and use readily recyclable/reusable/compostable food service ware and packaging.

**B. Packaging Life Cycle Analysis and Recyclability Labeling**

90% of Alameda County brand owner/manufacturers will incorporate life-cycle metrics consistent with the Global Protocol on Packaging Sustainability into their packaging design process to reduce the environmental impact of their packaging, utilize accurate recyclability labeling which is compliant with the Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) Green Guides, and where possible, use the Sustainable Packaging Coalition's (SPC) How2Recycle label.

**C. Single Use Plastic Bags**

Single use plastic bags are strongly discouraged from distribution in retail stores.