



DATE: October 8, 2020

TO: Programs & Administration Committee
Planning Committee/Recycling Board

FROM: Meghan Starkey, Senior Management Analyst

SUBJECT: Program Evaluation Update

SUMMARY

Recently, during the update to the Countywide Integrated Waste Management Plan, both WMA and Recycling Board members discussed the importance of program evaluation and its challenges. Formal evaluation is valuable, as it tells us whether our programs are having the intended impact. Because StopWaste adopts systemic goals—for example, landfill obsolescence—that are shaped by many forces, and because we emphasize upstream programs delivered through community outreach and public campaigns, there is an inherent difficulty in finding and communicating the right data to illustrate program impact.

DISCUSSION

At the heart of the issue is understanding whether StopWaste is making a difference in the challenging problems we face. To do so, we want to continually improve our efforts to gather and use data of different types to guide policy, select from different program options, prioritize our efforts, and evaluate whether they are having an impact.

Through the program evaluation effort, we seek answers to a set of questions:

1. Are we picking the right programs to run? Do they align with our goals?
2. Are the programs we design likely to work?
3. Are the programs having an impact? If so, how, and how much?
4. How do we learn, adapt and improve?

Our initial approach is from two different angles. Our first priority is doing in-depth program evaluations (“deep dives”) for selected high profile Agency programs: Mandatory Recycling, Food Waste Reduction, Schools Based Education, and Community Based Education. Through this “bottoms up” approach, we plan to ensure our objectives are measurable. Simultaneously, we are starting to think about big picture Agencywide metrics. As part of this, we will consider more general goals, such as landfill obsolescence and upstream priorities, and determine how to align our specific programmatic objectives with them.

At the October 8 meeting, staff will report on progress towards creating a more robust framework for evaluation at StopWaste.

RECOMMENDATION

This item is for information only.