

## ILSR October 2013 Survey Results: Community-Based Composters

- 43 sites identified to survey in US
- 24 sites responded
- Another 2 sites participated in shorter survey via BioCycle Community Composting Forum registration, plus input from other registrants

12 different states:

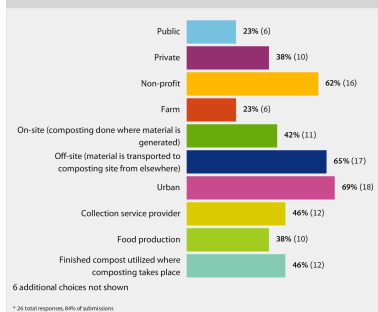
NY (9) MA (2) PA (2) AZ (2) OH (2) WI (2) MN  
IL OK UT VT CA KY



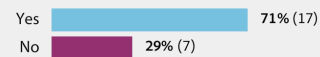
NAME	City	BEGAN
Northern Arizona University	Flagstaff, AZ	2011
Roots Composting LLC	Flagstaff, AZ	2013
The Compost Club	Healdsburg, CA	2003
Resource Center	Chicago, IL	1983
Eco-Reps at University of Louisville	Louisville, KY	2010
City Soil (proposed)	Boston, MA	
Pedal People Cooperative	Florence, MA	2007
Eastside Food Co-op	Minneapolis, MN	2010
BIGCompost	Queens, NY	2010
Empire Zero	Castleton, NY	
Farmer Pirates Cooperative	Buffalo, NY	2012
GrowNYC, Office of Recycling Outreach & Education	New York, NY	2011
Myrtle Village Green	Brooklyn, NY	2012
NYC Compost Project in Queens	Flushing, NY	1993
NYC Compost Project, Lower East Side Ecology Center	New York, NY	
NYC Compost Project/Brooklyn Botanic Garden	Brooklyn, NY	1983
Red Hook Community Farm	Brooklyn, NY	2003
Green Scoop 'Pet Waste Recycling & Removal'	Columbus, OH	
We Compost	Akron, OH	
Commonwealth Urban Farms	Oklaoma City, OK	2010
Philly Compost	Philadelphia, PA	2011
The Dirt Factory	Philadelphia, PA	2012
Wasatch Community Gardens	Salt Lake City, UT	1989
Grow Compost of Vermont LLC	Waterbury, VT	2008
Community Action Coalition for South Central WI, Inc.	Madison, WI	2004
Growing Power, Inc./The Farms Composting	Caledonia, WI	1993



Type of Compost Operation (Check all that apply):



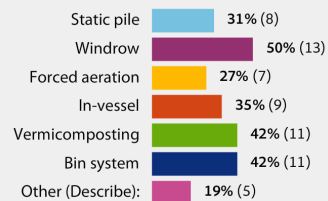
### Did you design your own customized compost system?



\* 24 total responses, 77% of submissions



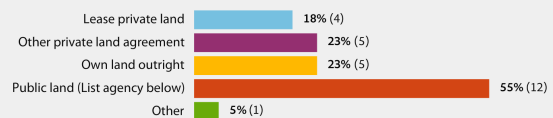
### Composting method used (check all that apply):



\* 26 total responses, 84% of submissions

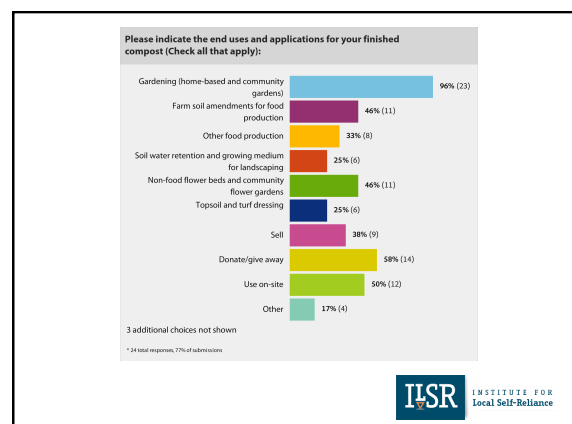
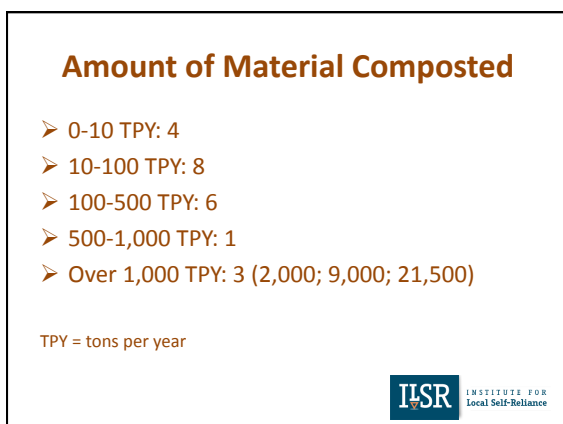
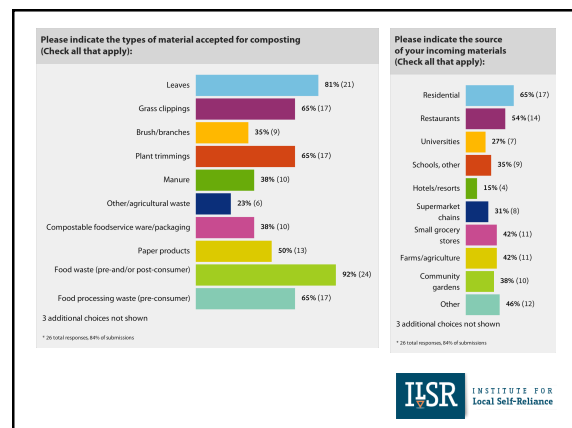
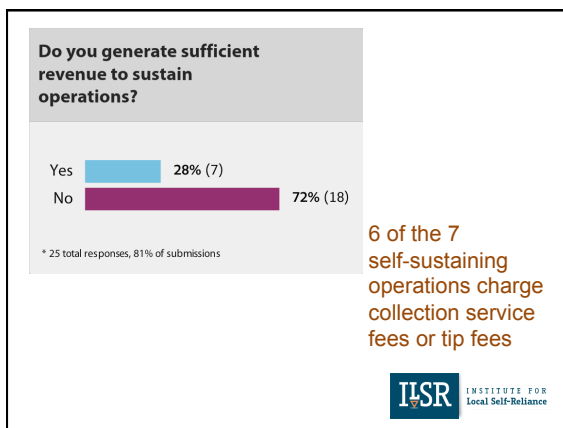
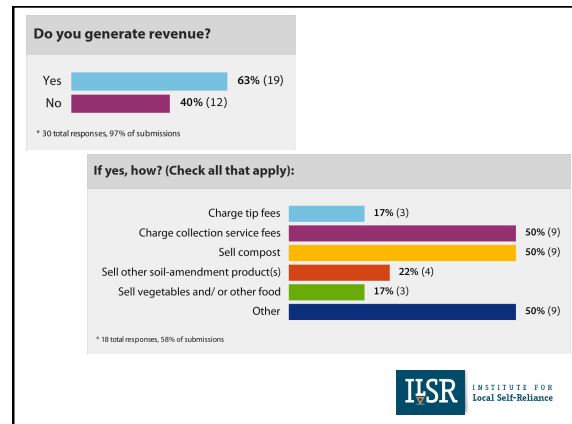
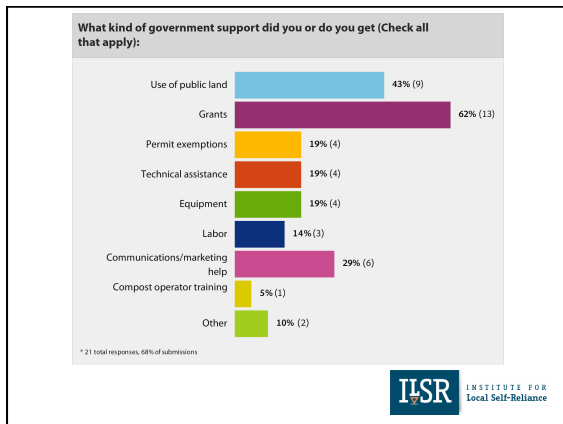


### Land arrangement:

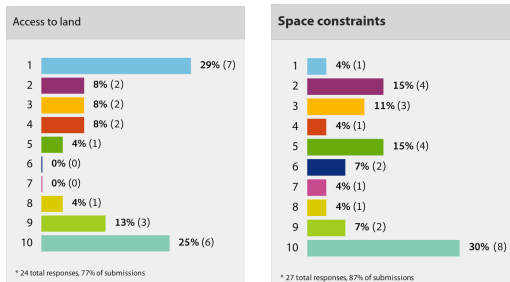


\* 22 total responses, 71% of submissions





### Challenges: Rate 1 to 10 10 = worst challenge

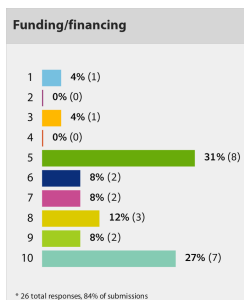


### Government assistance needed to help with SPACE and LAND

- "Partnerships with municipality for access to equipment and land."
- "Making empty and un-used public space available to composting operations."
- "Public land donation/lease nearby."
- "Land - access to public land"
- "Locating vacant land, even if for temporary use is needed."
- "...we have been unable to find anyone, public or private, to lease us one parking space worth of land."
- "Incentivize the conversion of empty and un-used real-estate for composting operations."
- "More access to land"
- "Free land to do this would be very helpful."
- "Designate public areas for compostable drop-offs."
- "Locate land and allocate land for these operations."



### Challenges: Rate 1 to 10 10 = worst challenge



### Government assistance needed to help with FINANCING

- "working capital and political buy in"
- "funded staff"
- "Investment in order to get up to a medium size hauling/ education company."
- "Having time/money/staff to run composting is a challenge. need funding for staff or lots of great volunteers."
- "Financing for more machinery and labor."
- "Need funding to acquire larger facility to accommodate demand."
- "Grant programs designed to encourage onsite site-wide composting for schools and institutions"



### Government assistance needed to help with FINANCING, cont.

- "Increased access to public funding to start pilot programs. This program began as a grant-funded student-led pilot project, with the University adopting it once the techniques were proven successful."
- "More funding"
- "Grants to build more bins. grants to pay people to turn piles and do collection work. grants for slightly larger sites to have machinery to turn. grants for anaerobic digestors."
- "Training, and funding assistance for improved equipment that mitigates odor and vectors is a #1 priority."
- "Define an appropriate scale and a financial structure that allows community-based composting to exist with paid staff."

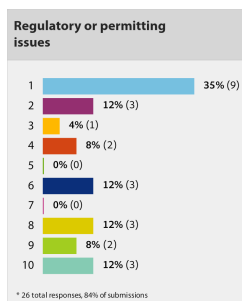


### Government assistance needed to help with FINANCING, cont.

- "Grants to: build more bins, pay people to turn piles and do collection work, for slightly larger sites to have machinery to turn, for anaerobic digesters."
- "SITE PURCHASE and PREPARATION!"
- "Equipment to repurpose solidly built existing buildings for compost production. The facility being totally enclosed allows complete odor and vector control, enabling it to be in urban areas close to where compostables are generated and where compost is needed."
- "Raise funds and build system"
- "Money to pay staff should be made available."
- "testing of product (e.g., a fund to pay for expensive testing that small sites cannot afford, discounts from labs)."



### Challenges: Rate 1 to 10 10 = worst challenge



### Government assistance needed to help with REGULATIONS & POLICY

- "With public regulators, develop voluntary standards for operating a community compost site... avoid passage of unnecessary and potentially hindering new regulation... create a mechanism for distributing and monitoring compliance with standards while at the same time providing needed support and expertise for sites willing to honor the standards"
- "Local and state officials, such as those who regulate hauling of waste and environmental protection, need to interpret their mandates, or have their mandates changed, to actively support rather than impede community composters. Not only are exemptions needed, but active assistance is needed."



### Government assistance needed to help with REGS & POLICY, cont.

- "If farmers could get more subsidies for [them] to benefit from land application compost"
- "change legislation so that we could accept more off-site materials."
- "Regulatory lenience from hauling agency (BIC) is needed." [BIC is in NYC]
- "DEC regulations are nearly impossible to navigate in dense urban settings." [NY]
- "Allowing composting in more places"
- "either mandatory %composting of organic wastes in grocery/restaurants, or a tax benefit for those that do compost."
- "Creating more demand for finished product."



### Government assistance needed to help with REGS & POLICY, cont.

- "Perhaps property tax abatements for undeveloped real estate converted to community compost operations."
- "Some kind of small-medium community composting ordinance. We would likely be shut down if we were called in for a code violation due to undefined language in municipal code."
- "Laws requiring the composting of all organic waste in cities and towns. Laws that paid composters."
- "Make it easier to have compost transfer centers without having to be 'site-assigned.' It seems like the laws and public health safeguards are set up with big trucking operations in mind, so it can be hard for low-volume, very localized, bike-based businesses to have to go through the same regulatory process."



### Government assistance needed to help with REGS & POLICY, cont.

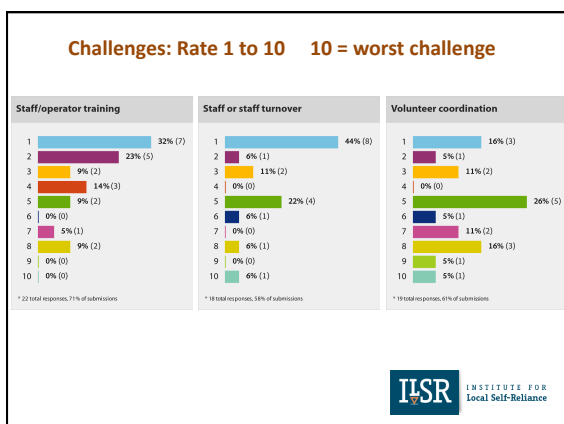
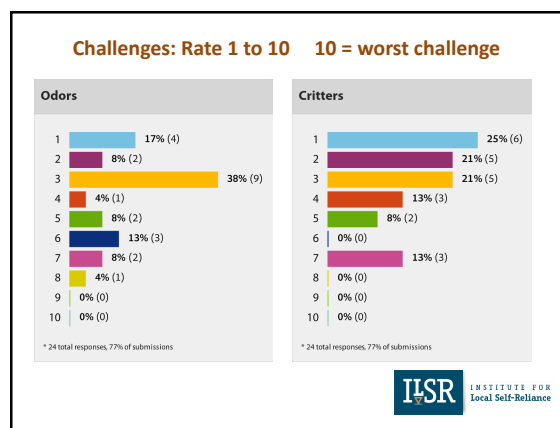
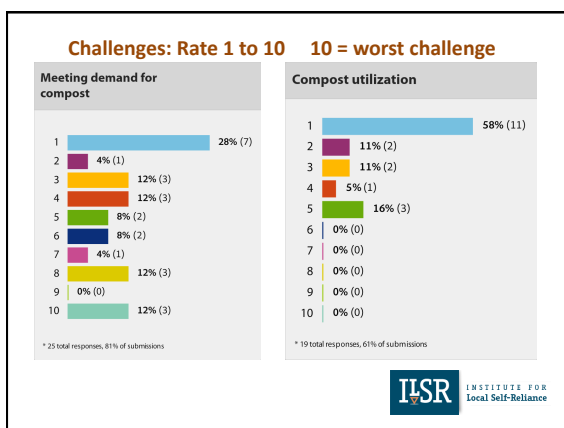
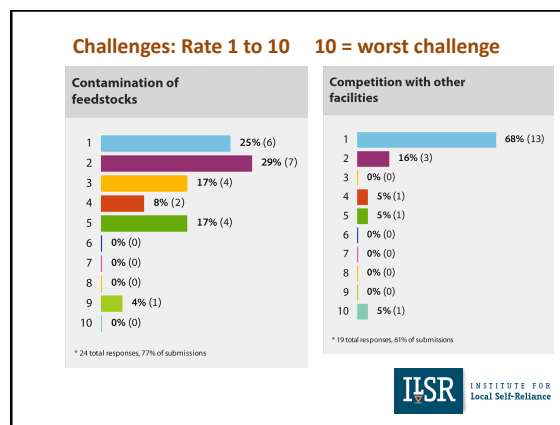
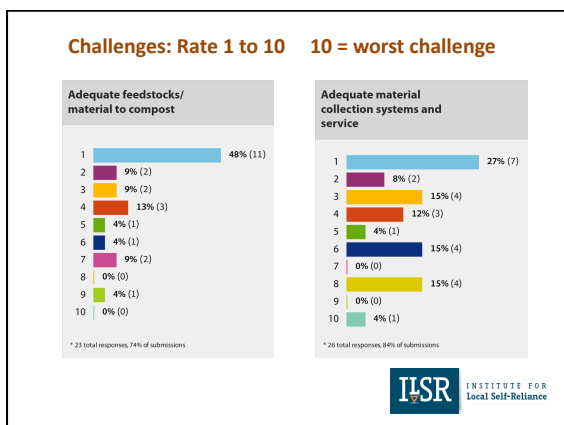
- "A permitting option for this type of operation."
- "There should be a designation and specific regulations for composting operations that fall between 'farm' and 'backyard'. Funding systems for this size and style of operation would also be helpful."
- "...requirements for recycle bins and commercial food waste pickup in areas not yet seen (ex: gas stations); incentives and tax breaks to promote anaerobic digestion of organic waste"
- "appropriate permits for med scale operations"
- "Policy to implement tax benefits for businesses to compost."
- "great to see categories for smaller-scale operations. ... City-owned land more open to being transfer centers for small volumes of compost."



### Government assistance needed to help with REGS & POLICY, cont.

- "pass laws to make composting mandatory, policies"
- "Composting needs to be a 100% agricultural enterprise. Require composting of organic material; support composters by allowing 'right to farm' at compost facilities. Farm smells cannot be illegal if community compost is going to happen on any scale."
- "Require standards to insure quality operation and product."
- "carbon credit incentives to pay schools for composting"





**Assistance needed to help with  
TRAINING & STAFF**

- "Training, and funding assistance for improved equipment that mitigates odor and vectors is a #1 priority. A trained composter knows the need for proper equipment and systems to ensure and odor free, vermin free operation."
- "Compost operator training or other compost educational programs."
- "trainings for community members to ensure they're making quality compost."
- "Technical assistance/community educators"
- "For urban contexts the compost operator trainings have got to be turned inside out and upside down to recognize some realities about how different success looks in an urban context."
- "Statewide Master Composters classes and certification for small scale thermophilic composting assistance and oversight."

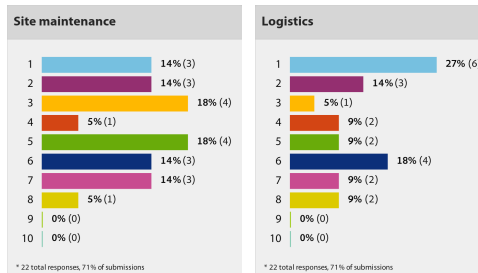
**IISR** INSTITUTE FOR Local Self-Reliance

## Help Needed with Volunteers

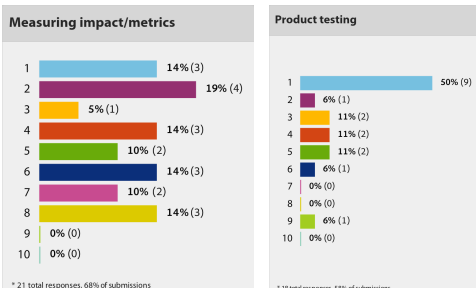
- "Hiring staff to coordinate volunteers"
- "Community garden compost is difficult to manage, with so many people with varying knowledge on compost management - lots of confusion about the composting process"
- "Better volunteer coordination"
- "need funding for staff or lots of great volunteers."
- "Gaining the notice of volunteerism organizations would also help."



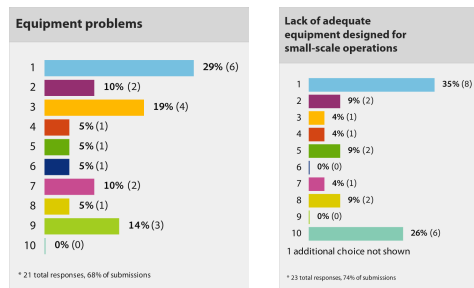
## Challenges: Rate 1 to 10 10 = worst challenge



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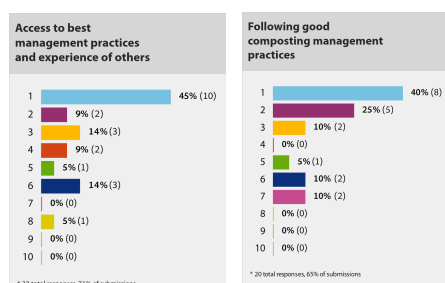


## LACK OF SMALL-SCALE EQUIPMENT

- "Design appropriate technologies for medium scale composting, cost effective, low cost, durable, has capacity"
- "Set up an engineering 'challenge' for new technology (using materials readily available from Home Depot), 60 days or less, no electricity, no moving parts, use in vacant lot until developed, flexible, transportable, 12 months a year, insulated"
- "With the private sector, work with industry partners, to address needs for: more aptly sized and powered equipment (e.g., effective human-powered equipment, smaller and affordable/donated industrial equipment, shared-equipment cooperatives)"
- "We need development of equipment appropriate to our scale, e.g., bicycle-powered sifters and shredders."



## Challenges: Rate 1 to 10 10 = worst challenge

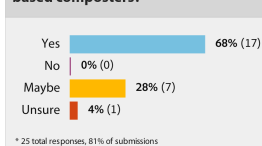


## Networking & Learning Best Practices

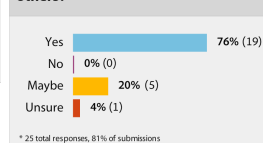
- "Salaried stewardship teams to help set goals, assess operations, and facilitate local networking and cooperation between composters, gardens, waste producers, public infrastructures, etc."
- "Networking/information sharing to connect composters with suppliers of compostable materials."
- "Offering technical assistance for governments and groups seeking to start such operations, share best practices"



### Are you interested in participating in a national network of community-based composters?



### Are you available to share your experiences and lessons learned with others?



## Other ideas to advance community-based composting

- "getting people to DO it! Education, Research & Development"
- "Public education"
- "First the policy argument in favor of community composting should be thoroughly developed for multiple audiences, including the general public, national/state/local electeds, and private funders. That will also require some marketing methods, especially videos appropriate for short presentations in public settings or private Board meetings."
- "Education about importance of composting and using locally made finished product."
- "Grants; Technical assistance; Equipment; Labor; Communications/marketing help"
- "Technical assistance; Communications/marketing help"



## Other ideas to advance community-based composting

- "Decentralized composting onsite with regional information or resource centers to assist with practical needs... Steps: Outreach and educate site; provide technical expertise and track record of results; assemble team of key personnel; design system to handle specific quantity and type of feedstocks; raise funds and build system; implement educational outreach and technical maintenance training; develop farm production calendar and harvest and process on schedule; develop sales and marketing outlets to sell products or develop plan to use it onsite as a nutrient management plane or soil building plan; advertise and communicate about the program to the general public"
- "model systems for urban environment"
- "Quantify benefits"



## Other ideas to advance community-based composting

- "Quantify benefits"
- "Government must establish an empowered local "expeditor" for every municipality, namely a 'go to' person who is familiar with all of the issues confronting community composters and can help get to solutions rather than say it's hopeless. So empowered means someone with some clout, so at least phone calls to regulators or local electeds get answered, and over time ways can be found to grow the community composting movement."
- "Create ad campaigns and tax credits that support community composting. Make community composting the norm at a local government level, rather than commercial, technologically- and resource-intensive systems. Provide outlets for community composting donors to direct the produce of their compostables (soil or food) or to buy them back at a discount."



## Tips for Replication

- "Start slow, figure it out as you go. Start with at least one other person, work cooperatively and be sure responsibilities and visions are shared and everyone is invested in the success of the project. Try to keep overhead down. It's easier to keep rodents out from the beginning than to get rid of them later."
- "Be very sensitive of where you do your operation. Static pile. Always have carbon on hand."
- "Small scale operation is unsustainable w/o best equipment or with high debt load. Few survive. Our solution: buy equipment after it has served its useful life for others, nurse it back to life, and After 5 or more years of using and rebuilding, it Will operate nearly like new."



### Tips for Replication

- "Have constant oversight of equipment, need onsite help every day, a lot of aspects can go wrong, material coming in (not too wet or dry). People are eager to be a part, people want to drop off and pick up, find a big in-vessel composter, make sure adjacent property owners are amenable, find appropriate location"
- "Set realistic goals"
- "Apprentice at a successful site first to make sure you are not just talk and no action ... it is hard work when it is done right. ... And for urban contexts, be certain you will be able to schedule operational tasks sufficient to control odors and rodents and observe an aesthetic standard far higher than for a rural context – otherwise your impact will be to generate opposition to composting rather than love for it."



### Tips for Replication

- "We only let trained volunteers work the compost, but anyone can bring compost donations to the site. We also employ attractive multi-lingual signs for on-site communication about our compost practices and evolving needs/concerns."
- "As a collection company we found it best practice to work with local governments on the town or village level as well as prominent people. For example, we worked with the town recycling coordinator and the director of a few local farmers markets in order to have our booth at the farmers markets while marketing our programs."



### Tips for Replication

- "integrate composting into community gardens! consider energy costs/benefits of small scale versus large scale composting programs"
- "Start small and work your way up – we began with just a few student volunteers carrying buckets on foot, then a few bike trailers to expand range of collection, and then the full-scale implementation."
- "Start small to gain experience working with the composting process. It's such a context specific, place-based and dynamic process that even beginning with best practices from other sites you will inevitably have to figure out a lot on your own."



### Tips for Replication

- "Know your neighbors but don't make too much noise. Try to keep composting areas hidden or shaded. Seek out partnerships with organic grocery chains and tree trimming company. Wood chip compost can be sorted and reused multiple times. Build a coalition of folks who can spread the labor of grocery store pickup, such as other community gardens, farms, schools, and individuals. Don't wait for the perfect arrangement before starting, just start with what you've got."
- "Just start based on common principles of composting and troubleshoot problems as they develop. There is no magic or secret to composting, it just takes practice, trial and error, like anything else. Also, people are willing to pay to have you pick up their compost, even if it does not save them money. Take advantage of this fact and do not pick up compost for free."



### Tips for Replication

- "Do your homework, talk to the experts, visit other projects to see what works and what doesn't."
- "Plugging in to existing organizations is critical. Ex. BIG! Compost plugged in to existing farmer's markets to provide collection of food waste. Grant money or city funding is a must to secure equipment to transport and process."
- "We support over 65 community compost sites in Brooklyn, NY with education, technical assistance, and small scale funding for bin builds. We recommend that sites reach out to us for assistance in starting small scale or on-site composting operations."



### Tips for Replication

- "Make sure you realize how much time all aspects of processing will take. .... we have volunteer days once per month to help with some labor intensive processing items (sifting, emptying Earth Tubs, bagging finished material)."
- "For schools, start small with a motivated group or section of the campus; don't limit it, however, to a one classroom example of a worm bin; seek to fundamentally change how waste is handled at the institution – our program starts a new school each year"
- "Be sure you have experienced composters as part of the operation. Be sure you understand the systems. Be sure you consider what is already available before you begin purchasing. Resist the temptation to privilege aesthetics. Know all of the rules before you begin. Have resources to connect with the community."





### Tips for Replication

- "Be sure you have state and agricultural buy-in"
- "Start small and grow organically, work with local stakeholders and get people involved/aware of project"
- "Make sure you have the money for equipment, have space and always check regulations with EPA"
- "Once you get going, there is no stopping it. In other words, once you start accepting material, make sure you have ample sources for carbon. ability to actually use/ sell the compost when done labor to continue operations when one person is sick or on vacation."
- "Worms are the best for food scraps. a 1/2" wire fencing doubled in a 3' diameter best for the rest."

