



Why Statewide Needs Assessments Are Needed Before EPR Programs

Understanding the Current State of a Recycling System is Key

Key Takeaways:

Before an EPR program is considered, states need to do a needs assessment. These studies help states better understand the current state of their waste and recycling system. Starting with a needs assessment study also helps states avoid unintended consequences.

What is a Statewide Needs Assessment?

Needs assessments have the potential to look at all different aspects of **how a state manages recycling and waste**. That can include information on:

- Existing recycling, compost and disposal infrastructure
- Access to curbside recycling
- The state of urban and rural recycling
- State compost standards
- Current recycling rates for paper, plastic, metals, glass and other materials
- What is and is not considered recyclable
- How much recyclable material goes to landfills

This data helps states understand **what's working well** within their recycling system. They also **identify issues** the state needs to work on in the future.

States can also do waste characterization studies. These help states discover how much paper, food, metal and more is ending up in their waste streams by reviewing the material collected.

This is helpful but **doesn't look at the full picture of a state's entire infrastructure** like a needs assessment does.

Why Are Recycling and Waste Systems So Complex?

Waste and recycling management in a state is complex because of things like:



Geographic region:

An urban area might have access to curbside recycling, trash and organics disposal while a rural area might have drop-off access only. Transportation distances between homes in rural areas can make curbside more challenging.



Difference in waste management companies:

The companies who haul away trash and recyclables are different depending on location. What they collect can differ as well.



Materials processing facilities:

The place where your recycling is sorted. The technology can differ between these facilities as can what they accept.



Housing type:

Collection from single-family neighborhoods differs from condos and apartments, also known as multi-family housing.

Why Do These Things Make Recycling Complex?

A home inside city limits might have a contract with a specific waste management company. That company has a list of items that they're willing to collect based on what they can sell on the recovered materials marketplace.

A home outside of city limits in the county uses a different waste management company. The list of what they collect is different from what is collected inside city limits. The frequency that they run collection routes can differ too.

This is just one example of how the list of what's accepted for recycling can differ across city and county lines.

It's also one of the reasons why states need to understand the current system **before they make changes.**

Why Should a State Complete a Needs Assessments Before Implementing an EPR Program?

Needs assessments are useful tools and **help states develop data-based solutions.**

A study might show opportunities to improve certain parts of the system. Then, states can focus on solutions to strengthen those areas.

The needs assessment could **highlight areas** where the **system is working well.** That allows the state to build in flexibility and reproduce solutions that already work.

EPR programs are costly for states to implement. Using data from a needs assessment helps states focus their resources.

Starting with a needs assessment study also **helps states avoid unintended consequences** such as:



Negatively affecting recycling rates for easy-to-recycle materials like paper



Impacting already established end-markets



Increasing costs for residents



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