Planning for Compost: A Checklist

Step-by-Step Guide to Leveraging BioResources for Resilient Communities and Economies

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Project Information

This checklist is a part of a greater Planning for Compost paper published by the People, Food and Land Foundation.

The full paper was created to provide insight and guidance to city and regional planners on how to better plan for compost as a resource development strategy rather than linear strategies that maintain only a waste diversion lens.

To view the full Planning for Compost paper and additional resources that support developing place-based composting markets for climate, economic, and cultural resilience; please visit:

peoplefoodandland.org

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STEP 1

Assessing Community Needs & Resources

Center your community's specific goals before planning the types of compost operations and products that would support those goals. Here are some considerations to guide the preliminary assessment:

1.1 Evaluate Available Feedstock:

- ☐ Material Type
- ☐ Volume by Type
- ☐ Seasons Available
- ☐ Stakeholders/Permissions Involved

1.2 Identify Existing and Potential Stakeholders:

- ☐ Haulers
- ☐ Community Composters
- ☐ Agricultural Community
- ☐ Schools
- ☐ Parks
- ☐ Community, Private, or Institutional Prep Kitchens
- ☐ End-users

1.3 Consider Public Education & Engagement Opportunities:

- ☐ Public Events
- ☐ Education Programs
- ☐ Youth Programs
- ☐ Source Separation

1.4 Identify New Opportunities to Improve Food Access:

- ☐ Food Security Assessment
- ☐ Existing/Potential Community Garden Networks
- ☐ Urban or Peri-urban Farms and Agricultural Producers
- ☐ Government, Citizen Groups, and NGOs Working on Farm-to-School Food Programs

1.5 Identify Environmental Justice Concerns:

- ☐ Water Contamination
- ☐ Air Quality Issues
- ☐ Urban Heat Island Effect
- ☐ Access to Green Space

1.6 Identify Brownfield Remediation Potential:

- ☐ Brownfield Location and Ownership
- ☐ Ecological Restoration Projects
- ☐ Soil Erosion Issues
- ☐ Local Ecological Advocacy Groups

1.7 Consider Composting for City or County Parks:

- ☐ Potential Municipal Uses for Compost
- ☐ Municipality Wastewater and Climate Goals
- ☐ Municipal Landscaping Costs Associated with Water, Fertilizer, and Compost Purchase
- ☐ Tree Plantings and Open Spaces

1.8 Identify Job Creation Goals & Potential Partners:

- ☐ Jurisdictional Green Job Goals
- ☐ Existing Community Composters
- ☐ Labor Groups

1.9 Identify and Evaluate Existing and Potential Markets & End Uses:

- ☐ Parks
- ☐ Golf Courses
- ☐ Landscaping Businesses
- ☐ Agriculture
- ☐ Natral Landscapes
- ☐ Erosion Control
- ☐ Fire Remediation
- ☐ Conservation
- ☐ Roadside Maintenance
- ☐ Other Municipal Projects

STEP 2

Evaluate Key Considerations

Focus on the following main considerations that will influence the logistics and overall success of composting programs:

2.1 Mapping Feedstock Availability:

☐ Collect data on seasonal feedstock availability in your area to estimate necessary processing capacity and help determine ideal size and type of composting operation(s)*
☐ Take stock on the feedstock materials available in your area:
- ☐ Food scraps, food processing & post-consumer food materials
- ☐ Green materials
- ☐ Other woody biomass
- ☐ Agricultural materials

2.2 Building Stakeholder Support:

☐ Engage with and connect existing and potential stakeholders
☐ Collate individual stakeholders' goals and concerns
☐ Collaborate with/involve stakeholders at each stage of the compost lifecycle:
- ☐ Generators
- ☐ Haulers
- ☐ Composters
- ☐ End users
- ☐ Relevant governmental/regulatory agencies

☐ Consider supplemental options for composting sites:
- ☐ Community gardens
- ☐ Schools
- ☐ Parks
- ☐ Farms
- ☐ Other: _____

2.3 Planning For End Use Compost Application:

☐ Understand ecologically relevant projects that could be supported through compost application
- ☐_____
- ☐_____

☐ Ensure technical assistance and equipment availability for spreading compost
☐ Tap into existing organizations and communities that are experienced in composting application
- ☐_____
- ☐_____

☐ Support consistent and sustainable funding for application

2.4 Building Stacked and Circular Economies:

☐ Consider industries and markets that could be complementary to compost creation and application:
- ☐ Food industries
- ☐ Fiber industries
- ☐ Plant nurseries
- ☐ Agricultural industries
- ☐ Farmers markets
- ☐ Landscaping companies
- ☐ Other: _____

*See Appendix C for more guidance on Feedstock Assessments.

STEP 3

Utilize Existing Planning Tools to Support Composting Programs

Determine what planning tools are at your disposal:

3.1 Zoning Codes:

☐ Determine whether "composting" is an approved land use in your zoning code:
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

☐ Determine cost of Conditional Use Permits in your region
- ☐ $_____

☐ Modify municipal codes to allow small-scale low impact operations "by-right" approval

☐ Consider zoning changes that integrate composting into the landscape

3.2 Funding Opportunities:

☐ Advise potential composters and land stewards on upcoming grant opportunities
- ☐_____
- ☐_____
- ☐_____

☐ Apply for grants that support goals that could align with composting:
- ☐ Emissions Reductions
- ☐ Brownfield Remediation
- ☐ Water Quality Improvement
- ☐ Economic Development
- ☐ Other: _____

☐ Leverage SB 1383 procurement requirements to support diverse, locally produced compost products

☐ Consider public-private partnerships that support multiple goals
- ☐_____
- ☐_____
- ☐_____

3.3 Community Collaboration:

☐ Use your expansive planning network to build support for prospective composting projects

☐ Connect composters to potential community allies, permitting resources, and relevant government professionals:
- ☐_____
- ☐_____
- ☐_____
- ☐_____

☐ Advocate to local, regional, and state agencies to facilitate permitting processes for composting operations:
- ☐_____
- ☐_____
- ☐_____
- ☐_____

3.4 Access to Utilities:

☐ Support composters, particularly those in rural areas, in accessing utilities
- ☐ Water
- ☐ Electricity
- ☐ Gas

☐ Provide public resources

☐ Indicate potential funding avenues

STEP 4

Consider Community, On-Farm, or In-Park Composting

Tailer the development of decentralized composting to meet your community's priorities.

4.1 Harness Benefits Unique to Community, On-Farm, and In-Park Composting:

- ☐ Community Engagement and Education
  - ☐ _____
  - ☐ _____
- ☐ Increased Accessibility
  - ☐ _____
  - ☐ _____
- ☐ Activation of Public Space
  - ☐ _____
  - ☐ _____
- ☐ Cleaner Compost Products
  - ☐ _____
  - ☐ _____
- ☐ Improved Community
  - ☐ _____
  - ☐ _____
- ☐ Connectivity During Disasters
  - ☐ _____
  - ☐ _____
- ☐ Activation of Local Composting Markets
  - ☐ _____
  - ☐ _____
- ☐ More Affordable Compost
  - ☐ _____
  - ☐ _____
- ☐ Alternative Income Sources
  - ☐ _____
  - ☐ _____

STEP 5

Improve Overall Circular Compost Planning Frameworks

Aligning composting goals, policies and strategies with the following frameworks will strengthen existing or prospective composting programs:

5.1 Shift Compost Strategies from Waste Diversion to Resource Management:

☐ Create new avenues for compost strategies outside of existing waste systems
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

☐ Consider composting strategies that meet multiple community needs and goals
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

☐ Provide increased opportunities for more community members to participate in the creation of compost
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

☐ Plan for the full lifecycle of compost, including compost application to soils
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

5.2 Recirculate Nutrients and Close Nutrient Loops:

☐ Center compost policy around improving soil health
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

☐ Consider the nexus between urban and rural nutrient loops when planning for compost creation and application to soils
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

☐ Leverage regional recirculation of nutrients to support place-based bioeconomies
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

☐ Expand potential compost application projects beyond just urban community gardens.
- ☐ Food Systems
- ☐ Fiber Systems
- ☐ Landscaping Projects
- ☐ Conservation Projects
- ☐ Disaster Prevention Projects
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Compost Language in Planning Documents

This section highlights good examples of goals, policies, and programs in both Climate Action Plans and General Plans.

California Climate Action Plans

County of Santa Barbara CAP:

This CAP included plans to pilot a "Compost Application Expansion Program." The program will allow the county to study the application of compost on rangeland and orchards for improved vegetation, soil health, and carbon storage and use the results to guide future planning processes.

The City of San Jose CAP:

San Jose is the first municipality in California to go as far as to add a Natural and Working Lands Element to their CAP. Compost application is called out as a primary regenerative agricultural and urban greening strategy. The strategy is supported by cost assumptions and place-based land management analyses.

City of Fremont CAP:

This CAP highlighted policies that promote the use of locally produced compost in landscape projects to improve soil health, sequester carbon, and manage water efficiently while addressing erosion and weeds. One strategy specified the need to require contractors to meet California's Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance by incorporating compost in new and renovated landscapes. Lastly, the plan calls to establish communal compost hubs to provide free access for urban farms, community groups, and food growers, enhancing flood and drought resilience.

City of Oceanside CAP:

The city plans to expand and support composting programs at all levels, including schools, commercial facilities, and households, while educating landscapers about the cost savings and benefits of utilizing composting facilities. The city also plans to develop food scrap diversion programs with an explicit hierarchy that prioritizes prevention first, feeding people second, converting material to animal feed, and composting as a last resort. The plan calls to promote organics diversion through outreach, incentives, reduced barriers to composting, and development of local composting sites with a focus on urban greening and community gardens and composting centers. Lastly, the plan calls to advance carbon capture and soil health through strategies such as compost-based soil amendments and carbon farming.

City of San Diego CAP:

This plan focuses on catalyzing markets for compost. Through their SB 1383 procurement requirement target, they aim to purchase compost for municipal green space maintenance, including street easements and parks. They note that this endeavor is to "expand the demand and production of high quality compost in the city." They also plan to partner with industries to increase compost and mulch application for uses including landscaping, stormwater, and water conservation.

California General Plans

City of Berkley GP:

"Continue to make the City's composted waste available to community and school gardens… Promote seed distribution, lead testing, and composting programs for community gardens… Provide sites for local farmers' markets and community gardens."

City of Chico GP:

"Support the Chico Area Recreation and Parks District and other local gardening or agricultural organizations that promote community gardens by offering classes such as gardening and composting and by allowing community gardens at their facilities."

City of Culver City GP:

"Expand mulching and composting activities on city land to promote soil health and retain water on irrigated landscapes" A section dedicated to storing carbon in urban ecosystems includes compost application on parks and open spaces and specifies its potential to drive a local market for compost."

City of Los Angeles GP:

"Develop a comprehensive urban agriculture program that removes barriers and supports the development of a local urban agriculture system (including community gardens)... Ensure that processes include criterion for assessing soil and water safety and promotes composting and healthy soil use, water efficiency and allow for innovations in food growing rules and procedures."

County of Los Angeles GP:

"The Environmental Stewardship Program aims to reduce the Department of Parks and Recreations' environmental footprint including, among other impacts, air pollutants that are produced through direct and indirect operations… Increase the use of environmentally-friendly products, and expand its recycling, composting, and mulching programs."

City of Monterey Park GP:

"Mitigate landslide risks in Monterey Hills from increased precipitation associated with climate change by prioritizing the improvement of drainage, reconstructing aging retaining walls, installing netting and vegetation, avoiding clear cutting, and stabilizing the soil after tree clearing with compost and mulch."

City of Richmond GP:

"Adopt guidelines and best practices to enhance long-term fiscal and environmental sustainability in the maintenance, renovation and upgrading of parks, recreational facilities and trails in the City. Include guidelines for the types of vegetation, use of recycled water, composting or in-place decomposition of plant cuttings to minimize environmental impacts."

County of Ventura GP:

"Promote value-added alternatives to solid waste management, such as compost, energy, biochar, and wood products to avoid open burning of agricultural biomass wastes… Encourage farmers to reduce fertilizer application and transition to products that reduce or avoid nitrous oxide (N2O) emissions, such as organic composting and enhanced efficiency fertilizers… Encourage and support the efforts of resource conservation districts, farmers, and other stakeholders to expand carbon farming practices, such as reduced tilling, cover cropping, composting, biochar, and other activities that both reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and increase carbon sequestration and storage, when feasible."