



Let's recycle **Right!**®

¡Reciclemos bien!



2018 SWANA Excellence Award Entry



Presented by:

Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation

SWANA Member #: 996203

Rhode Island

Approximate Population: 1.1 million

Cost Per Household: \$1.37

Approximate Budget: \$542,397



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After widespread conversion to automated recycling collection, contamination in RI's mixed recycling reached an all-time high. Resource Recovery's Let's recycle Right!® campaign aimed to simplify and standardized messaging used to raise public awareness about recycling right. We became the first state in the nation to adopt society-wide bin labels, and aligned all tactics and tools used to communicate about the mixed recycling program accordingly. Though other local governments and businesses had adopted the labels, we were the first to do so as a state and the first to use them as part of a creative awareness campaign. With over 26M campaign impressions, 58K labels in place, and an 18% decrease in tons of rejected recycling, it has been called **"the most advanced recycling solution and PSA campaign in U.S. history."** We hope you will consider Let's recycle Right!® for both the Awareness Campaign and Innovation and Creativity Excellence Awards.

BACKGROUND

Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation (Resource Recovery) is the quasi-state agency who owns and operates the state's central waste facilities, including RI's Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) that processes 100% of the state's municipal mixed recycling and much of the commercial mixed recycling. Because of this, RI is lucky to have one unified mixed recycling program; however, RI lacked one unified mixed recycling message.

Back in 2012, RI's then dual-stream recycling program underwent the biggest change in its history when the MRF was renovated into a single-stream facility. With this operational change, Resource Recovery launched a new brand for the program, ("Recycle Together RI"), and with it, a public education campaign that included TV, radio, social media, a new microsite for the web, and a mass mailing to RI households.

THE PROBLEM

Fast-forward to 2015. We saw a steady rise in the number of municipalities implementing automated collection and in the amount of commercial recycling we were receiving—all good, intended consequences of a switch to a single-stream system; however there was an unintended consequence, too. Whether it was confusion over the message to mix materials together or haulers no longer looking inside recycling carts to quickly nip recycling mistakes in the bud (or a combination!), **contamination in our mixed recycling stream rose dramatically.**

To combat this rise in contamination, Resource Recovery launched another awareness campaign, with two key messages: (1) Trash in the recycling costs you money and (2) trash in the recycling puts our workers at risk. Post-campaign, **we saw a 9% dip in contamination, but this simply wasn't enough.** What was missing from our approach? How could we be more effective in communicating the right way to recycle? In the midst of asking ourselves these questions and more, we stumbled on a new national initiative, called Recycle Across America®.

RECYCLE ACROSS AMERICA®



Recycle Across America® (RAA) is a national organization dedicated to the standardization of recycling bin labels in the U.S. Their premise is simple: just like traffic signs, recycling signs should be universally recognizable and understood. While there was a time around the advent of automobiles when individual automotive clubs were figuring

out how to get cars to drive safely on roads together, at some point they got together and agreed on universal signage to ensure road safety. Now, a red octagon is understood anywhere, in any language. At a time when contaminated recycling seems to be a problem nationwide, and at a time when more stringent quality standards are being imposed (e.g. Green Fence of 2013, National Sword of 2018), **RAA puts forth the notion that our industry needs to do for recycling quality what the automotive industry did for road safety.**

RESEARCH

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Rhode Island is lucky to have one unified mixed recycling program; however, RI lacked one unified mixed recycling message.

After reviewing the process that RAA used to come up with their standardized bin labeling system and seeing the results of increased recycling and decreased contamination where the labeling system was already in place, Resource Recovery wanted to be a part of this initiative.

Still, would standardized labeling on bins be enough to significantly affect the contamination problem in RI's mixed recycling? While we firmly believed, after our research, that there was something to this idea of making all bin labels look the same, **we recognized that recycling decisions are informed by other education and communication tools, too.** Resource Recovery has always harnessed the power of TV, print, radio, video, web, social media, etc., to raise public awareness about proper recycling. Luckily, RAA had thought of this too, and was concurrently working on a national, celebrity-fueled PSA campaign to promote the standardized bin labeling solution. The concept of implementing this in RI was becoming increasingly appealing, but there was one more thing we needed to consider before we could move into a planning phase. How would marketing these standardized recycling labels jive with all of our current education and communication materials?



Fig. 1 – Recycle Across America labels

Historically, Resource Recovery has produced recycling guidelines for distribution to the public via direct mail and direct provision during our free educational programs (e.g. facility tours, school assemblies, event tabling opportunities and speaking engagements). They've also been available for download on our website. **Our recycling guidelines have taken on many looks since RI became the first state in the nation to pass mandatory recycling back in 1986, but there was one thing that most of them had in common: they were heavily-detailed.** In fact, after soliciting and incorporating feedback from municipal recycling officials around the state on the last set of guidelines we produced at the launch of the "Recycle Together RI" single-stream program, there were two pieces of feedback that felt near-impossible to address. These were: "people don't like to read," and "there are too many rules." Anyone who has ever read the detailed specifications provided by a recycler, laying out what materials they do and don't want, knows that being a perfect recycler is actually quite tough. So, we asked ourselves, should we continue to aim for the moon in the hopes of landing among the stars? Or should we just aim for the stars? That's when we caught wind of the latest research coming out from The Recycling Partnership.

THE RECYCLING PARTNERSHIP



**THE RECYCLING
PARTNERSHIP**

The Recycling Partnership (TRP) is a national organization dedicated to improving residential, curbside recycling. Based on recent research, development, and pilot projects to combat contamination, TRP recommends a "1:5:50" tiered approach to messaging. The "1" is that one basic message to hit the largest number of people with. The "5"

is the slightly more detailed message that you're likely to hit the next largest number of people with (e.g. the five things you wish everyone could know). The "50" is the highly detailed information that is going to be taken up by the fewest number of people (e.g. detailed guidelines with 50+ items, rules, tips, etc.). **Historically, we'd been using the "50" approach too broadly.**

So, was it possible to take the research coming out of these two national recycling organizations and integrate them into an awareness campaign that would standardize messaging across the board and also be appropriately detailed? Could best practices formulated at the national level still play well to a unique Rhode Island audience? We knew we needed to answer these questions and come up with a solid plan to pitch to our municipal recycling officials.

SECURING LOCAL BUY-IN

We encountered our very first target audience during the planning process, itself. **We could not be successful without buy-in from our municipal recycling officials**, and we were cognizant of the fact that we'd probably run into a bit of "awareness campaign fatigue," after trying two approaches over the course of four years. In addition, our proposed approach based on national programs might be viewed as the imposition of something too generic being brushed on Rhode Island with broad strokes. To prepare for that, we worked directly with RAA to formulate a plan that would preserve the integrity of the standardized system, while giving the campaign a unique Rhode Island flair. In addition, because we took this as seriously as the aforementioned process of standardizing road signs across America, we needed our municipal representatives to see this as the new approach to end all new approaches. We will elaborate more on this under IMPLEMENTATION.

MUNICIPAL PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

In terms of a target audience for the campaign, itself, our MRF processes 100% of the municipal mixed recycling (in addition to some commercial mixed recycling) from across the state. That being the case, **the new awareness campaign targeted every person presently participating in a municipal mixed recycling program**. We hoped the campaign would reach further than that (and it did; see RESULTS), but because municipal mixed recycling programs deliver the majority of tons to our MRF, participants in those programs had to be our core focus. **Specifically, our goal was to decrease the amount of mixed recycling that was rejected from our MRF upon delivery, due to high contamination**. We would **measure** this by tracking tons of MRF-rejected mixed recycling, and compare pre- and post- campaign launch figures. Because we had previously (2013) implemented a public awareness campaign regarding the contamination of mixed recycling, which resulted in a 9% decrease in MRF-rejected tons, we felt that an **attainable** goal would be to further decrease MRF-rejected tons by the same amount. With China's National Sword and its more stringent quality specifications looming in the not-too-distant future, the focus on the problem of contamination of mixed recycling was more **relevant** than ever. Our **timetable** would have us wrapping up the official campaign and analyzing results by the end of 2017.

TIMELINE AND BUDGET

Due to the need to gain buy-in from municipal representatives, the approvals required from RAA at various stages of planning, and the sheer number of elements that would eventually make their way into this comprehensive campaign, the initial planning began in early 2016. Various stages of this planning, as well as the nascent stages of implementation of certain campaign elements lasted right up to the launch event in April 2017. A detailed timeline of the entire Let's recycle **Right!**® campaign follows on page 4, and a narrative of these tactics can be found under IMPLEMENTATION. The total budget was **\$542,397**, or **\$1.37/household**. We were able to leverage a great deal of resources from RAA throughout the process, including their staff time, a photographer, and free advertising space. We also relied on the growing suite of resources that TRP provides to communities working to reduce recycling contamination.

PLANNING AND GOAL SETTING

The standardization of labels for bins is crucial to promote recycling by reducing confusion and simplifying the process. Rhode Island is the first state in the nation to adopt the society-wide standardized labeling and I applaud Recycle Across America and Rhode Island Resource Recovery for partnering to implement labels that will help us conserve resources by improving recycling across our state and country.

— Congressman Jim Langevin (RI)

Budget At-A-Glance

Public Sector Licensing Agreement (RAA)	\$72,000
National RAA PSA photoshoot in RI	\$28,842
Private Sector Licensing Agreement (RAA)	\$28,842
Private Sector Expansion (RAA)	\$7,500
Direct Mail to Struggling Municipalities (2)	\$29,631
Bi-lingual How-To Video Production	\$10,976.50
Statewide Mailer	\$112,978.10
Let's recycle Right! ® Media Buy	\$159,288.49
Let's recycle Right! ® Media Buy Production	\$4,346.35
Statewide Single-Issue Mailer	\$91,834.50

Total Budget | \$542,397

	Planning and Soft Launch								“Let’s Recycle Right!” Campaign							
	Jan '16	Jan - Apr '16	Apr '16	Apr '16 - Jul '16	Jul '16	Jul '16 - Feb '17	Feb '17	Feb - Apr '17	Apr '17	Apr - Jul '17	Jul '17	Aug '17	Sep '17	Oct '17	Nov '17	Dec '17
Pitch to municipalities	✓															
New rirrc.org website development	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Coordination with RAA, RI label development		✓														
Public-sector licensing agreement signed with RAA (1st state in nation)			✓													
National RAA PSA photoshoot includes RI			✓													
Free label distribution to public entities			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Private-sector licensing agreement signed with RAA (1st state in nation)					✓											
Free label distribution to private entities					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Planning, RI campaign asset development					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Direct mail #1: Two struggling municipalities							✓									
Launch photoshoot recruiting and planning								✓								
Launch photoshoot									✓							
New rirrc.org launches, new bilingual recycling guidelines and videos available										✓						
Direct mail #2: all RI households (≤6 units)											✓					
Radio ads run										✓						
Outdoor billboards up										✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Online ads run											✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Paid social media posts											✓	✓		✓	✓	
Direct mail #3: all RI households (≤6 units)														✓		
Earned media coverage		✓		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Campaign analysis																✓

Table 1 –Let’s recycle Right!® awareness campaign timeline

LETTING GO IS NEVER EASY

One of the biggest challenges we faced during this campaign and continue to face while working to get labels in place on every recycling bin in Rhode Island, is just how difficult it is to get individuals to give up the designs they've *personally* created to label their recycling bins and/or educate their city, town, building, etc., residents on how to recycle right. We went through this same painful process ourselves, having gone through many design iterations over the years including a huge redesign project just four years before the start of this initiative. Adopting these labels and aligning all materials to their look and feel requires you to seriously **swallow your design pride, let go of any ego, and give up the reins to RAA for the greater impact.** The defining moment for us was seeing the chaotic collage of recycling bins with different labels that RAA uses in their marketing. Looking at it makes one thing very clear: **It's no wonder why people are confused about recycling. We each present it to them in a totally different way—even in cases when we are trying get across the exact same thing.** If we (Resource Recovery) were in charge of coming up with the national label, it would look different from the RAA label. If we asked the recycling coordinator in each of our 39 municipalities to come up with it, we would have 39 more renditions. If we asked the members of SWANA's CEM Technical Committee to each come up with one...you get the point. **It's not to say that our individual designs do not have merit, rather the problem rests in the fact that they are all different.** That alone, is enough to create unnecessary confusion about recycling right.



Fig. 2 – Collage of various recycling bin labels (Source: RAA)

MAKING IT WORK FOR RHODE ISLAND

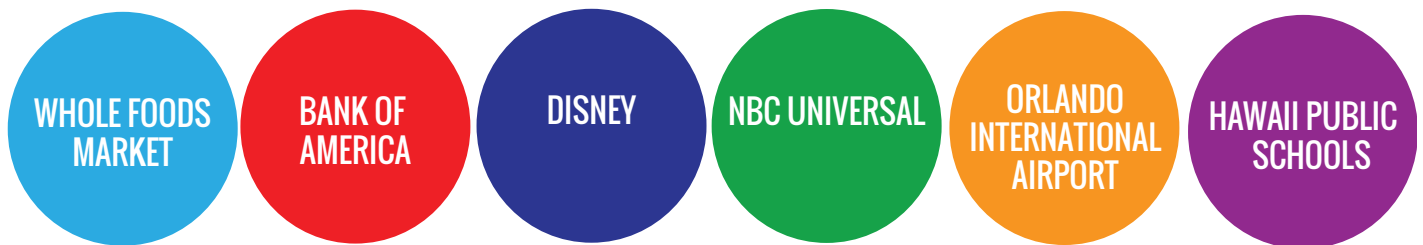
You might be asking yourself, “How can there possibly be a universal system for America, when recycling programs are different all across America?” This was another obstacle we faced. The idea of making a standardized bin label the centerpiece of an awareness campaign sounded great, but how could it work in RI? We had just expanded the materials accepted in our program a few years prior. When we looked at RAA's national mixed recycling label, it was reflective of some, but not all of the items we accept in our program. It showcased what you might call the “least common denominator” for mixed recycling program: paper and cardboard, metal cans, glass bottles and jars, and plastic bottles and jugs. In RI's mixed recycling program, we accept all of these, but in addition, accept cartons, metal lids and foil, and other plastic containers. Resource Recovery talked this through with RAA and learned that **we could start with the national label, and add (or subtract) items, while preserving its universal look and feel.** In order to accomplish this, we would need to enter into a licensing agreement with them, and as part of that agreement, provide up to 100 free labels to each of our public schools. The licensing agreement would allow Resource Recovery to provide free labels to any government entity in RI—state offices, municipal buildings, public parks—in addition to those schools. **Our ability to gain support for this initiative relied heavily on our ability to make the label fit Rhode Island, and to provide these labels free.**



Fig. 3 – RAA's standardized mixed recycling label (L) and Rhode Island's standardized mixed recycling label (R)

THE FIX TO END ALL FIXES

Another obstacle we had to overcome was the fatigue that comes from constantly redesigning materials for new awareness campaigns. If we were just pitching yet another different way of presenting the information on how to recycle right to the public, we probably would have gotten much more push back. The beauty with RAA's initiative was that, if we got on board, our days of designing recycling guidelines would be over. We'd be adding the state of Rhode Island to a growing list of towns, counties, school systems, and businesses across the country who had already taken the plunge, too. **On Earth Day 2016, Rhode Island entered into a government licensing agreement with RAA, and become the first state in the nation to adopt the labels.** We joined the ranks of Whole Foods, Bank of America, Disney, NBC Universal, the Orlando National Airport, Hawaii Public Schools, and many others. Since our adoption, Subaru, the U.S. National Parks, and the NFL have all joined the movement; in fact, the standardized labels were at U.S. Bank Stadium for Super Bowl LII, the first-ever zero waste Super Bowl.



INVOLVING THE PUBLIC SECTOR

On the heels of our government licensing agreement and our nascent label distribution efforts, we knew that we would raise more awareness if we could **reach people wherever they lived, learned, worked and played.** Because of our longstanding relationship with many private businesses and institutions through existing educational and technical assistance programs, we wanted to make it easy for them to get involved, too. In July of 2016, we entered into a first-of-its-kind private sector licensing agreement with RAA, allowing Resource Recovery to provide the standardized labels free of charge to any RI business or institution.

FULL ALIGNMENT OF TOOLS AND TACTICS

In preparation for an official campaign, Resource Recovery needed to align all related tactics with the look and feel of the standardized labels. This process alone took many months. It included erasing all previous design work that did not coordinate. We worked with RAA to ensure we were preserving the universal look and feel of the labels in everything we did. This process was integrated into an ongoing redesign of Resource Recovery's entire website. It required that our recycling guidelines be made to match the labels, and we worked to implement TRP's 1:5:50 rule for messaging, by developing new basic guidelines (the "5") with only the most mission-critical details that we needed most Rhode Islanders to know. We coupled these with detailed guidelines (the "50") that would only be downloadable from our website, for that smaller number of Rhode Islanders who seek out detailed information on how to recycle *exactly* right. We also redid our how-to videos, presentation decks, scripts, tabling supplies (e.g. banner stands, example items) all to coordinate for the campaign.

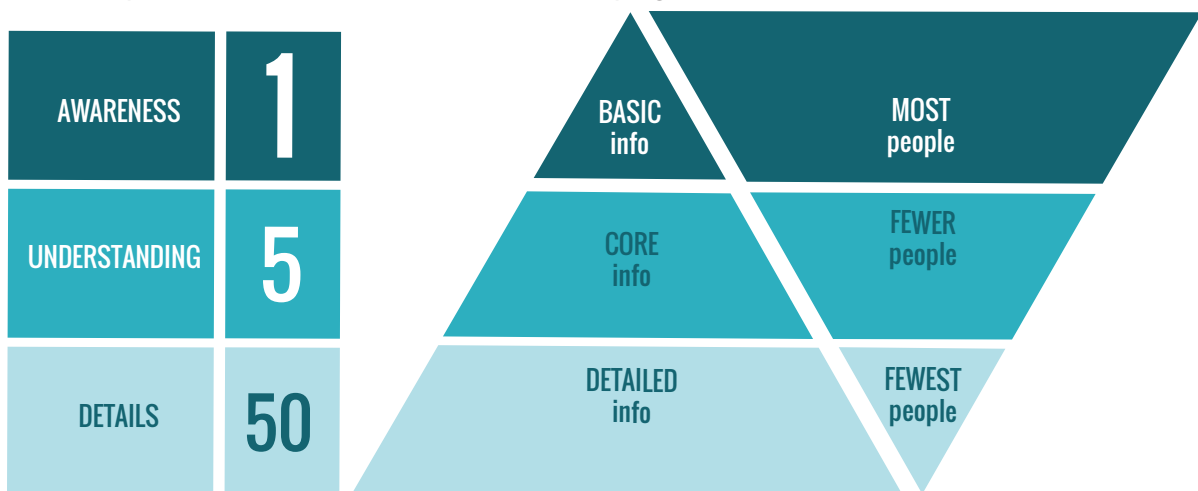


Fig. 4 – The Recycling Partnership's 1:5:50 rule (Source: The Recycling Partnership)

¡RECICLEMOS BIEN!

In the last decade, RI has experienced a robust influx of Spanish-speaking residents. In fact, over 105,000 Rhode Island residents speak Spanish or Spanish Creole at home—almost a 10th of our state's population! In addition, our capital city of Providence, where nearly 34% of residents speak Spanish, has the highest rate of contamination in their mixed recycling. In order to address this, the vast majority of tools and tactics used in this campaign were developed in both English and Spanish.

LET'S RECYCLE RIGHT!® - A NATIONAL PSA CAMPAIGN



In order to promote the standardized labels nationwide, RAA launched a celebrity-fueled Let's Recycle Right!® PSA campaign, featuring stars like Kristen Bell, Anthony Mackie, Angie Harmon, Gabrielle Reece, Alanis Morissette, and many others. The campaign kicked off with a photoshoot that was live-streamed on billboards across the nation. Rhode Island was honored to be recognized at this event, and had a representative photographed as part of the national campaign.

LET'S RECYCLE RIGHT!® - A RHODE ISLAND PSA CAMPAIGN

Though the star power behind RAA's national campaign was impressive, and Resource Recovery was afforded access to all the campaign assets as a condition of our licensing agreement, we needed to make sure that our awareness campaign would resonate with Rhode Islanders. Could we get local celebrities involved, the way RAA got national celebrities involved? Could we recreate their Hollywood photoshoot event here in Rhode Island? Could we use the photos from that event to replicate their PSA campaign and make it uniquely Rhode Island? Should we take it as a sign that renowned celebrity photographer Timothy White, who had donated his time to RAA for the Hollywood photoshoot, was a Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) alum? The answer to all of these questions was "yes." On Wednesday, April 26, 2017, Timothy White returned to RI for a **live-streaming, local celebrity photoshoot that was broadcasted on digital billboards across the U.S.**, thanks to a generous donation from Lamar Advertising Company. The following are local celebrities from RI government, arts, entertainment, sports, and business that were photographed that evening for the Let's Recycle Right!® campaign:

- **Dan McKee**, RI Lt. Governor
- **Nellie Gorbea**, RI Secretary of State
- **Timothy J. Babineau**, CEO, Lifespan
- **Jonathan Stone**, Executive Director, Save the Bay
- **Ed Tarbox**, Owner, Tarbox Toyota
- **Neil Steinberg**, President and CEO, RI Foundation
- **Narragansett Brewing Co.**: 'Gansett Girls
- **Erika van Pelt, Singer**, American Idol Finalist
- **Shura Baryshnikov**, Dancer/Actor/Educator
- **Chachi Carvalho**, Rapper
- **John Zox**, Drummer, Zox
- **Alex Eaves**, Filmmaker
- **Gabe Toro**, Head Coach Men's Soccer, CCRI
- **Rhody the Ram**, University of Rhode Island Mascot
- **MaxMan**, RI's Recycling Superhero



CAMPAIGN ASSET CREATION

Using RAA's standardized labels and TRP's 1:5:50 guidelines as inspiration, we put together a suite of campaign assets using, among other things, the photographs taken at our event. These were used between July and December of 2017, according to the timeline on page 4. They are described in more detail, below.

Trilingual mailer: This mailer was a part of a soft-launch, specifically for our two municipalities that needed to start getting the new, simplified information contained on the labels to their residents sooner, rather than later. Though we were not yet ready to launch the campaign, we needed to be flexible and give these municipalities help in their time of need. These mailers contained the label image in three languages (English, Spanish, and Portuguese) as well as information on cities' plans to inspect carts in the near future.

Bilingual mailer: This mailer was designed for the statewide campaign. It was English-Spanish, featured local celebrities, and displayed the label's matching, basic recycling guidelines. These guidelines contain a bit more information than the labels, and represent the "5" in TRP's 1:5:50 approach.



Fig. 5 – Front cover of trilingual mailer



Fig. 6 – Front cover of bilingual mailer



Fig. 7 – Basic guidelines (Spanish)



Fig. 8 – Basic guidelines (English)

Single-issue bilingual mailer: As further research was coming out TRP's work helping communities to fight recycling contamination, it had been noted that direct mailing of basic recycling guidelines often still required a second direct mailing targeting the single biggest issue a community was facing. As the campaign was being implemented, plastic bags remained the number one contaminant in the mixed recycling. We developed a bilingual post card mailer that addressed this issue, specifically.



Fig. 9 – Front cover of single-issue mailer

Bilingual Radio Ads: We recruited RI's Lt. Governor and Secretary of State to record radio ads for us in English and Spanish. The scripts for the radio ad were written with the labels in mind. Rather than spend :30 on some catchy jingle or abstract inspirational message, the ads literally contained the information on the label.

Let's recycle Right!® :30 English

You recycle, right? But are you recycling RIGHT? Use your recycling bin or cart for everything accepted in Rhode Island's mixed recycling program—but nothing more. That means paper, cardboard and cartons (pause) metal cans, lids and foil (pause) glass bottles and jars (pause) and plastic containers. Keep plastic bags out, and never place recyclables in plastic bags. This will make you a great recycler—just like me—**Lt. Governor Dan McKee!** Learn more at recycletogetherri.org.

¡Reciclemos Bien! :30 Español

Usted recicla, ¿cierto? ¿Pero está reciclando BIEN? Utilice su contenedor o cesto de reciclaje para todo lo que esté aceptado en el programa de reciclaje mezclado de Rhode Island, pero nada más que eso. Eso significa que puede incluir papel, cartón y cartones, [pausa] latas, tapas y papel de metal, [pausa] botellas y tarros de vidrio [pausa] y envases de plástico. No incluya bolsas plásticas y nunca coloque material reciclable en bolsas plásticas. Y así es como se convertirá en un reciclador excelente, como yo. **Nellie Gorbea, secretaria de Estado.** Para obtener más información, visite www.reciclemosjuntosri.org

Online Ads: We used three popular online display networks to target English and Spanish-speaking Rhode Islanders. These ads generated a whopping **5,341,937 impressions** (i.e., interactions with a piece of content) and averaged a click-through rate (CTR) of .14%. The industry benchmark for click-through rates ranges from .05% to .09%, so our ads performed about **three times** as well as the industry standard.



Fig. 11 – 728 x 90 pixel banner ad

Paid Social Media: With over 11,500 followers, Facebook is Resource Recovery's most popular social media network. We decided to spend all of our social budget on this platform. We had two flights that appeared as newsfeed ads. The first flight was created to drive traffic to our website, while the second focused on video views. Both ads were extremely successful with high click-through rates, impressions and actions. Industry performance is about .25% and our ads came in as high as 1.42%.



Fig. 12 – Newsfeed image (English)



Fig.13 – Single video ad (Spanish)

Industry Standard CTR
= .25%

Our Campaign CTR
= 1.42%

Billboards: Billboards were an important part of our campaign. We spent about 38% of our media buy budget to place billboard ads in high traffic areas around the state. During the duration of the campaign, there were always two billboards up (one digital version and one static version) with rotating creative: (1) Let's recycle Right!® celebs (See fig. 14) , and (2) the mixed recycling label. Billboards resulted in 15,729,476 impressions.



Fig. 14 – Let's recycle Right!® celebs billboard

RESULTS

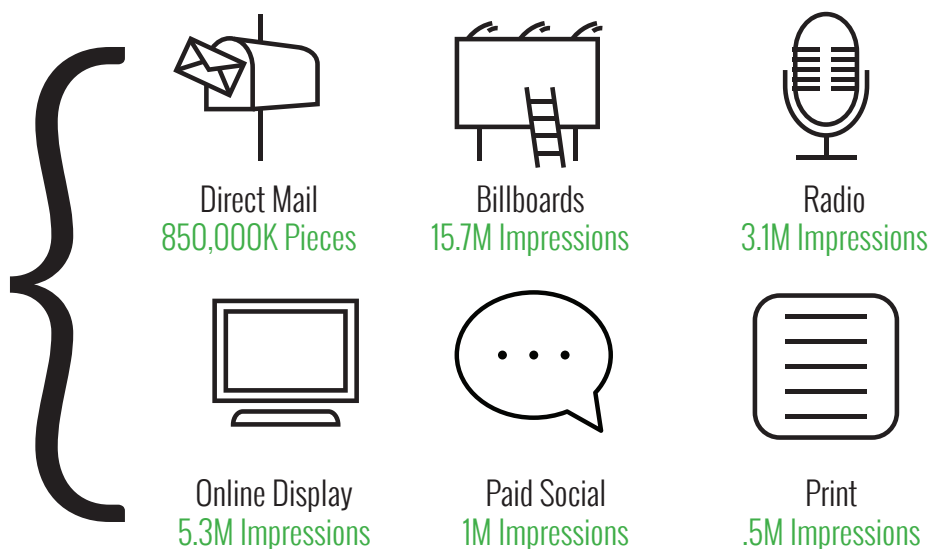
MUNICIPAL OFFICIAL BUY-IN

We successfully gained the support of all our municipal officials to move ahead with the standardized labels and accompanying Let's recycle Right!® campaign. It took a series of presentations over the course of the first year of planning to show them how all the moving pieces should work together. They were able to amplify the campaign's reach locally by updating their own websites and sharing social media content. They also played (and continue to play) a key role in the labels' uptake across the state (more information below).

REACH

In total, 850,000 pieces of direct mail were sent during this campaign, and we garnered over **26,000,000** impressions, as follows: Billboards (15.7M), radio ads (3.7M), online display ads (5.3M), paid social media (1M), and print (0.5M). The campaign also earned local media coverage, culminating in a front page story in *The Providence Journal*, Rhode Island's newspaper-of-record.

Impressions At-A-Glance



LABEL UPTAKE

The standardized labels have been distributed to 100% of RI's traditional public schools, and to each of RI's 39 municipalities for use in their municipal buildings and public spaces, including their recycling centers and transfer stations. Additionally, they are given out with every recycling bin sold by Resource Recovery. To-date we can confirm that **over 58,000 labels** are in place in Rhode Island, at more than 120 locations. As noted earlier, though the target audience for this campaign was current participants in the municipal mixed recycling program, our private-sector licensing agreement meant that commercial program participants were reached, too. Some notable locations where the standardized labels are in use include the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence College, University of Rhode Island, Roger Williams Park Zoo, Save the Bay, ALEX and ANI headquarters, and this month we'll add bins at Lifespan (RI's largest employer) locations around the state. Furthermore, Resource Recovery has pledged to provide labels to any municipality willing to place them on all of their existing residential recycling carts.



Fig. 15 – Mixed recycling label at Roger Williams Park Zoo

MRF-REJECTED TONS

As compared to April-November of 2016, MRF-rejected tons of recycling in April-November of 2017 decreased by 18%. This exceeded our goal of matching the 9% decrease from our previous awareness campaign, two-fold.

↓ **18%**

EVALUATION

A BIG COMMITMENT

From the initial discussions with RAA through the last billboard left standing, this campaign spanned the course of two years. It took longer than any other campaign process in Resource Recovery's memory. Some of the reasons for this were the agreements we needed to make with RAA along the way and the buy-in we needed to get from our municipal officials; however **the biggest factor was the sheer number of tools and tactics that had to be aligned with the campaign to make it comprehensive.** We hadn't processed all the ways the decision to move forward would affect so many other things. From our website and educational collateral, to our YouTube videos and social media content, to the exhibits in our education center and the script our recycling superhero uses in school assemblies, **in order for us to practice what we were about to preach (the need to standardize the way we educate about recycling) we had to make a big commitment.** We've now done this for our largest waste diversion program (mixed recycling) but we can do more. RAA has standardized labels for other waste streams, such as plastic bags, e-waste, and composting. In any attempt to standardize those programs, more attention should be paid up front, to all the physical and virtual places where redesign would have to happen.

CURBSIDE FEEDBACK

Along the way we reviewed more research coming out of TRP's work that showed how awareness campaigns like this need to be tied to timely on-the-ground feedback and enforcement of recycling behaviors—be that reinforcement of good behaviors or enforcement against poor behaviors. As this data has come forth from their pilot programs in cities across the country, we know that a campaign like Let's recycle Right!® can be better timed with commitments from municipalities to provide curbside feedback given to their residents. **We are presently working with our capital city of Providence to do just this—**extend the awareness campaign while doing strategically timed tagging of carts where contamination issues persist.

IMPROVING MEASUREMENT

We feel that a more robust way to gain pre- and post- campaign data on mixed recycling contamination would be to perform load quality inspections on randomly sampled loads coming into the Materials Recycling Facility. This would better represent how the campaign was affecting recycling quality, statewide. More attention could have been given to how we might collect data differently to track results, versus going on data we knew we already collected (tons of MRF-rejected mixed recycling). Furthermore, because loads originating from certain areas are inspected more frequently, random sampling and quality assessment of loads—even those passing inspection and being processed through the MRF—could paint a more accurate picture of quality improvements.

A MODEL TO FOLLOW

Finally, though Resource Recovery followed other local governments and private businesses who had already adopted the standardized labels, we were more than the first state in the nation to do so; we were the first to really look beyond the labels, and use them as part of a larger public awareness campaign about recycling right. We believe the two-year process we went through really blazed a trail for other states who want to follow suit. We learned that it is possible to standardize the way we communicate about recycling in the U.S. while still staying true to our local programs, and we are confident that other states can replicate what we've done. RAA holds Resource Recovery's Let's recycle Right!® campaign up as a model, going as far as to say that Rhode Island has launched "the most advanced recycling solution and PSA campaign in U.S. history."



SUSTAINPVD
MAYOR JORGE ELORZA

”
**The most
advanced recycling
solution and PSA
campaign in U.S.
history.**

— Recycle Across America