



Washington Recycling Refunds Study Draft Engagement Report Recycling Reform Act Advisory Council

September 17, 2026



Purpose of Today's Presentation

1

Summarize the completed study

Highlight the final engagement findings, cross-audience findings, and study limitations.

2

Explain what changed

Show how engagement and public review informed a revised site design scenario from the Model Study and the final recommendations.

3

Support Advisory Council review

Identify the questions on which Advisory Council feedback would be most useful.

Study Timeline



Modeling established a planning framework • Engagement gathers perspectives, tests assumptions and adds practical context

A Potential Recycling Refunds Program Would Enter a Changing WA Recycling System



Existing recycling services

Curbside, multifamily, and drop-off collection already rely on contracts, material recovery facilities, transfer stations, commodity revenue, and local investments.



Recycling Reform Act implementation

Producer responsibility, service planning, curbside expansion, education, and infrastructure investment are changing the future baseline.



Potential recycling refunds program

A separate redemption network would add deposits, refund services, site hosts, operators, and new material flows.

Study Scope and Limitations

What the RRA directed the studies to examine

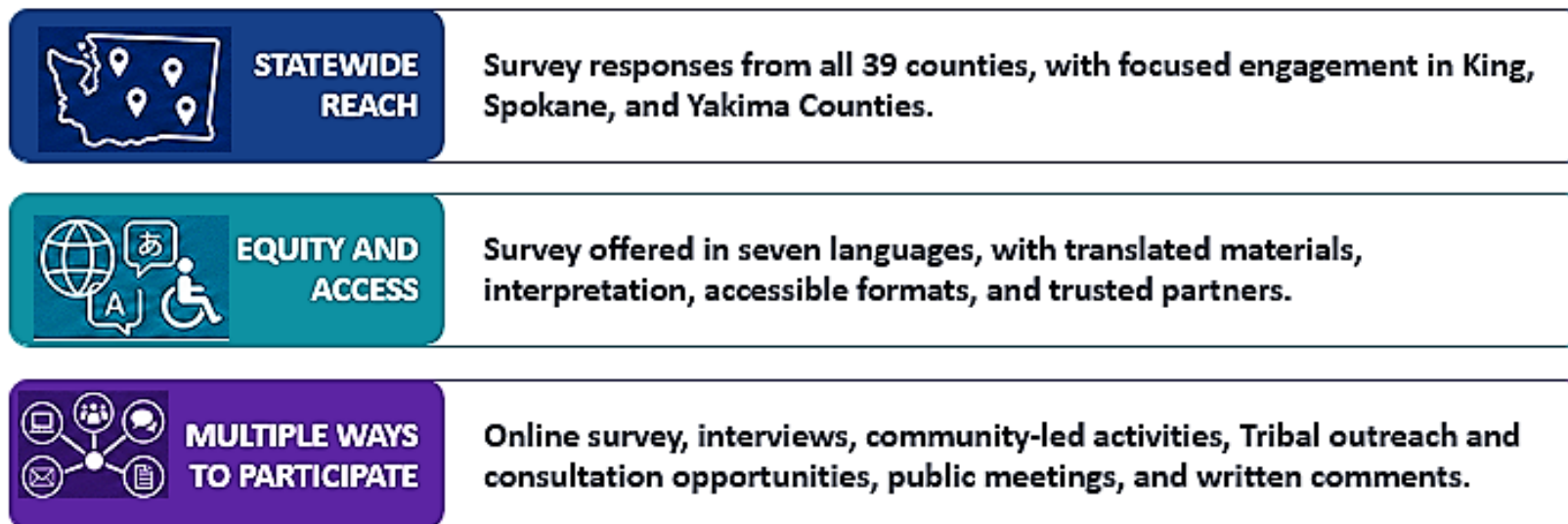
- **Convenient, accessible redemption**
Including geographic access, service quality, and fit with daily routines.
- **Equity and community perspectives**
Including affordability, transportation, language, disability access, and local context.
- **Recommendations for potential design**
Drawing on both geographic modeling and statewide engagement.

What the studies do not determine

- **Whether to adopt a recycling refunds program**
Design feedback should not be interpreted as support for adoption.
- **Net costs or benefits**
The work did not conduct a full cost-benefit, fiscal, greenhouse-gas, market-impact, or material-flow analysis.
- **Final implementation decisions**
Governance, funding, requirements, and site commitments would require future decisions and analysis.

Overview of Engagement Numbers

Engagement: January - June 2026 | Public review: July - August 2026



Participation counts are shown by method; people could participate through more than one activity.

Equity Was Built Into the Engagement Design

Trusted Community Connector partnerships

- **Duwamish Valley Sustainability Association** — King County
- **Latino Community Fund** — Yakima County
- **Nuestras Raíces** — Spokane County

Multilingual outreach and participation

- Residential module of the survey offered in 7 languages: English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Russian, Ukrainian, and Korean.
- Spanish materials, a Spanish report summary, and interpretation supported engagement.

Multiple accessible ways to participate

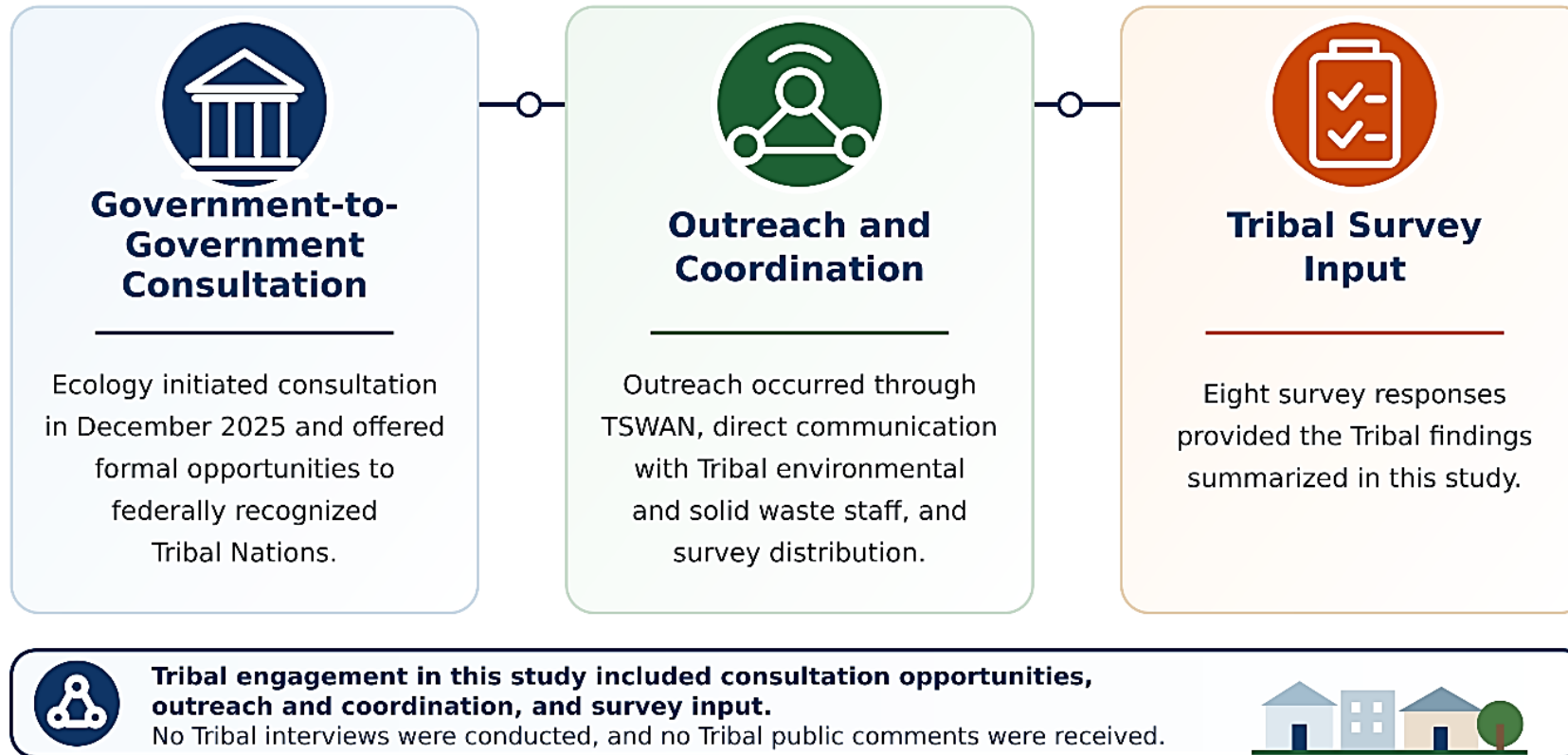
- Online survey, interviews, community-led activities, Tribal outreach and consultation opportunities, public meetings, and written comments.
- Accessible formats and participant compensation reduced barriers.

Focused engagement

- Focused outreach included overburdened and underserved communities in the three modeled counties.
- Government-to-Government consultation and broader Tribal outreach were conducted separately from public engagement.

The design combined statewide reach with focused, trusted, and accessible engagement

Tribal Engagement



Public Comment Period and Informational Sessions

- Two virtual and three in-person informational sessions held with Spanish interpretation services
- Public comment report summary translated into Spanish
- Input included:
 - How this program would interact with curbside recycling and existing systems.
 - Importance of language access, including translated materials with lots of pictures and fewer words.
 - Curious about concerns from industry and retail audiences, and what are arguments *against* a deposit return system
- Community Connectors also submitted feedback on draft recommendations



Written Public Comment Submissions Emphasized Access, Costs, and System Effects

24 of 37

**Convenience, access, participation,
or equity**

Suggested routine destinations, transfer stations, mobile services, curbside credits, and different approaches for rural communities.

19 of 37

Costs, funding, or economic effects

Raised unrecovered deposits, beverage-price effects, travel and storage burdens, business expenses, rates, contracts, and commodity revenue.

15 of 37

**Environmental or material-
management effects**

Cited litter reduction, higher recovery, cleaner material streams, community fundraising, business opportunities, and possible system tradeoffs.

Major findings

1 Convenience includes the full experience

Location matters together with operating hours, wait times, reliability, safety, accessibility, information, and refund options.

2 Community conditions shape access

Transportation, language, disability access, storage, work schedules, and geography affect participation.

3 Recovering the deposit is an equity consideration

A refundable deposit can still burden households that face barriers to returning containers.

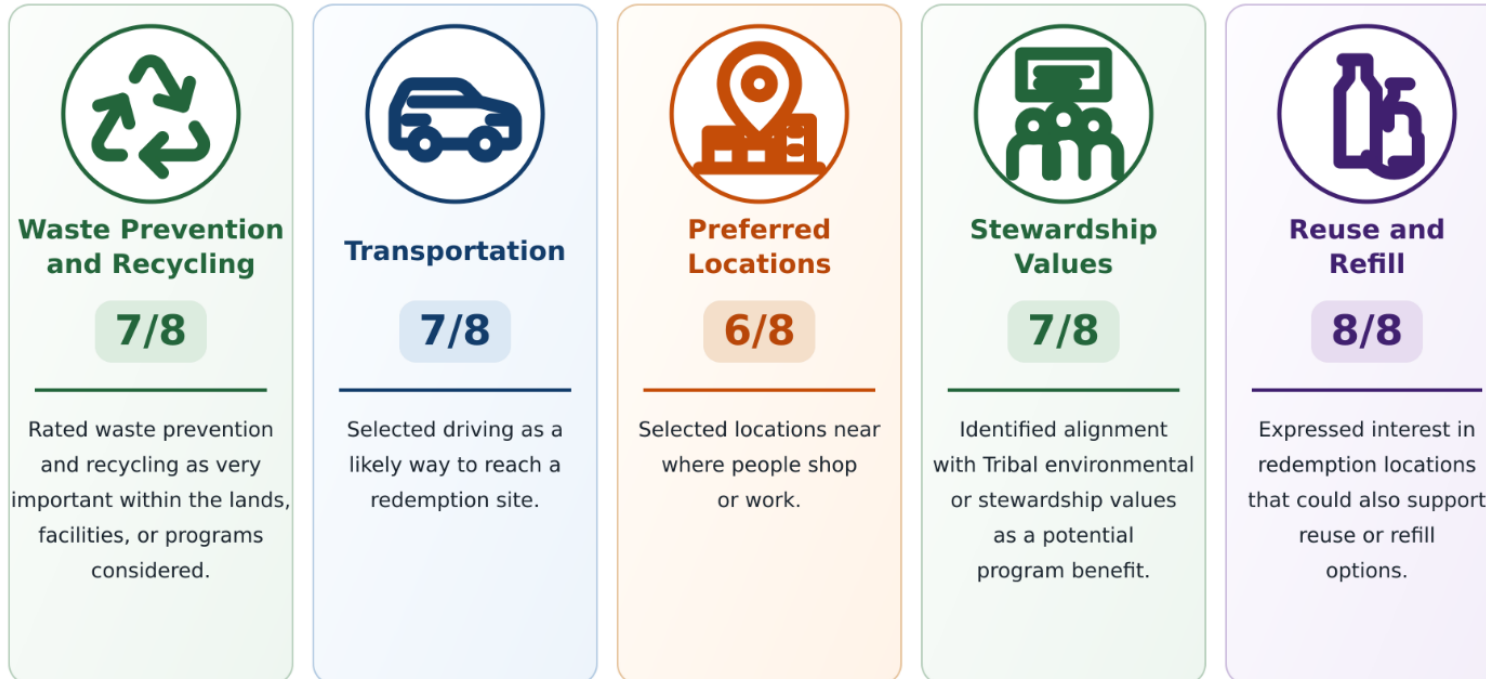
4 Convenient locations must also be operationally feasible

Sites need willing hosts, space, staffing, reliable equipment, servicing, sanitation, security, and funding.

5 A potential program would operate within Washington's changing recycling system

Its relationship with existing services and RRA implementation requires further analysis.

Tribal Input Identified Nation-Specific Access and Stewardship Considerations



Note: Based on eight Tribal survey responses received during Phase I engagement. Results reflect participating respondents and do not represent all Tribal Nations in Washington.

Eight responses provide bounded examples—not the views of all Tribal Nations. Continued Government-to-Government consultation and Nation-specific decision-making remain essential.



Areas of convergence



Practical, reliable convenience

Routine locations • manageable travel
Reliable hours • simple refunds



Access that reflects community conditions

Local needs may require different models
Fixed sites • mobile services • events



Clear roles, funding, and capacity

Responsibilities and resources
must be explicit



Costs, benefits, and system effects

Environmental outcomes
Household and business costs
Existing services • consumer prices • RRA

Agreement that effects matter
No agreement on direction or magnitude

These four points appeared across most engagement audiences, although audiences often reached them for different reasons. They concern conditions a workable program would need, not agreement on whether Washington should adopt one.



Areas of differing perspectives



Program direction and timing

Whether to adopt a program
Coordinate with the RRA vs. evaluate it first



How program costs could reach consumers

Hard-to-recover deposits
Possible effects on prices • rates • other costs



Which organizations should host or operate sites

Convenient destinations vs.
willing and feasible hosts



Whether sites should also support reuse, refill, or other recovery

Strong survey interest vs.
operational feasibility

The Engagement Study documents these perspectives but does not resolve them.

How Engagement Informed the Recommended Redemption Site Network Design

Engagement tested model assumptions

- ✓ Drive time
- ✓ Everyday destinations
- ✓ Site capacity
- ✓ Refund options
- ✓ Community needs

Recommended scenario incorporated four refinements

Updated community-specific drive times to sites

10–15 min: dense, urban, suburban • 15 min: rural • 15+ min: remote

Added two new potential co-location settings

Libraries • post offices • Also includes retail locations and existing recycling infrastructure locations

Refined immediate-refund options

Communities ranked 8–10 on the Environmental Health Disparities Map

Increased modeled capacity at some large sites

45 million → 60 million containers per year in densely populated areas

Modeled network changed

Scenario 4

≈686

47 full-service
639 express

Scenario 5

≈582

46 full-service
536 express

Additional analysis can support implementation

- Costs and funding
- Existing recycling systems
- Recycling Reform Act implementation
- Affordability
- Governance
- Education
- Long-term management
- Willing hosts and operators

Recommended site network design is a planning estimate; site-level feasibility requires careful review.

Ten Final Recommendations Address Design, Equity, and Broader Implementation Needs



Convenience, Access, Equity, and Program Design

- 1 Establish clear standards for convenience and reliable service.
- 2 Use clear travel-time and access goals.
- 3 Develop and refine the redemption network in phases.
- 4 Select sites that are convenient, feasible, and supported by the community.
- 5 Use a mix of site types, service approaches, and refund options to meet different community needs.
- 6 Address household affordability and barriers to recovering refunds.
- 7 Establish public reporting and continuous improvement.
- 8 Provide education and outreach before and throughout implementation.



Additional Implementation Recommendations Identified Through Engagement

- 9 Conduct further analysis of program costs and effects on residents and the evolving Washington recycling system.
- 10 Clearly define roles, requirements, and funding.

i The groups are not ranked by importance. They distinguish central program design and equity recommendations from broader implementation needs identified through engagement.

The Final Report Clarifies Both What the Studies Show and What Remains Unresolved

What the combined studies show

- **Convenience is multidimensional**
Distance matters, but so do hours, reliability, safety, accessibility, information, and refund options.
- **Different communities need different approaches**
Comparable practical access may require different site types, services, and partnerships.
- **Recommended site network design is a flexible planning framework**
Actual sites require phased implementation, host participation, feasibility checks, and adjustment.

What requires future analysis or decisions

- **Costs, funding, and consumer effects**
Including startup and operating costs, unrecovered deposits, prices, and service rates.
- **Effects on Washington's recycling system**
Including RRA implementation, contracts, material flows, commodity revenue, and infrastructure.
- **Governance and participation requirements**
Including who is required, eligible, or voluntary—and who carries each responsibility.

Discussion: Advisory Council Review Questions

- 1** Do the final findings accurately reflect the range of perspectives and evidence documented through engagement?
- 2** Do the recommendations follow clearly from the Model Study, engagement findings, and Phase II public review?
- 3** Are any recommendations unclear, incomplete, or in need of qualification?
- 4** Are there additional equity, community, operational, or recycling-system considerations the report should address?
- 5** Does the report clearly distinguish study-supported recommendations from issues requiring future policy decisions or analysis?

Key Finding Area 1: Convenience Means More Than Travel Time

83% familiar with recycling refunds programs*
49% very familiar
+ 33% somewhat familiar

75% actively recycle and reduce waste

72% expect to travel by personal vehicle

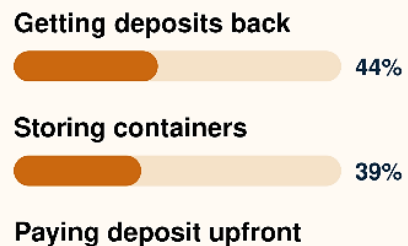
Convenient locations fit daily routines Selected among the most convenient location options



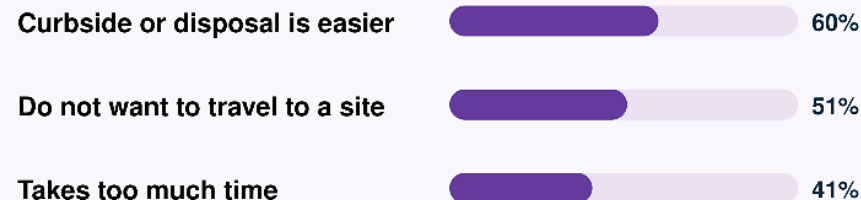
Potential benefits people value Most frequently identified community and environmental benefits



Potential barriers



Why some might not participate†



Practical participation depends on

Routine locations

Predictable hours

Reasonable waits

Reliable service

Accessible and safe sites

Usable refund options

Key Finding Area 2: Community Context Shapes Access, Participation, and Refund Recovery

Barriers differ by perspective

Most frequently identified barriers to returning containers

Resident survey respondents

- 67%** Long wait times
- 63%** Limited operating hours
- 61%** Distance to redemption sites

Community-based organizations

- 68%** Distance to sites
- 61%** Transportation access
- 58%** Limited operating hours
- 39%** Language access

Strategies to improve equitable participation

Community-based organization survey respondents identified:

- 71%** Locate sites at trusted community destinations
- 65%** Locate sites in or near underserved communities
- 52%** Provide multilingual materials and communication
- 48%** Partner with trusted community organizations

Transportation and travel vary by community type

Statewide

Breakout by community type

72% expect to travel by personal vehicle

50%
Dense urban

65%
Urban

77%
Suburban

81%
Rural

Willing to travel more than 15 minutes

13–17%

Dense urban, urban, and suburban

26%
Rural

35%
Remote*

The 13–17% range reflects variation among dense urban, urban, and suburban respondents.

44%

selected difficulty getting deposits back as a top household financial concern

A deposit may be refundable in principle but harder to recover when participation requires more time, travel, storage, mobility support, or a particular refund method.

Key Finding Area 3: A Convenient Network Must Also Be Operationally Reliable and Workable

Operators identified potential impacts to recycling systems

Recycling system operator survey respondents (n = 37)

70%	Loss of valuable materials	41%	Capital or infrastructure costs
59%	Effects on contracts, service agreements, or revenue models	35%	Operational complexity or coordination challenges

Among 18 operators who answered “yes” or “maybe” about potentially operating or supporting a redemption site:

89% cited space or siting, **61%** funding, and **56%** staffing

Cities and counties need clear roles, funding, and RRA coordination

Support identified by government survey respondents

Cities (n = 40) Counties (n = 30)

Clear roles and responsibilities	98%	93%
Funding or grants	70%	93%
Technical assistance	53%	77%
Planning and coordination time*	83%	60%
Staff training	65%	63%

*Cities were asked about time before implementation; counties were asked about regional coordination time

Participation depends on a simple, reliable redemption process

Most important factors CBO respondents said would make community members more likely to return beverage containers for a refund (n = 31)

84%	Convenient redemption sites	52%	Clear instructions
84%	Quick and simple returns	52%	Outreach through trusted community organizations
77%	Opportunity to recover deposit money		

Interviews and public comments also emphasized reliable operations, public education and clear communication, flexible access, and trusted community connections

Conditions for success

Adequate planning time and funding

Coordination with existing recycling services and RRA implementation

Space, staffing, storage, sanitation, and security

Willing and feasible site hosts

Clear roles and requirements

Recommendations 1–2: Convenient and Accessible Service

1

Recommendation 1:
Establish clear standards for convenience and reliable service.

Convenience includes more than travel time.



Predictable hours and reasonable wait times



Accessible and safe locations



Clear instructions and language access



Reliable equipment and servicing



Usable refund options

2

Recommendation 2:
Use clear travel-time and access goals.



Near home or routine destinations



10–15 min
Dense, urban, suburban



15 min
Rural



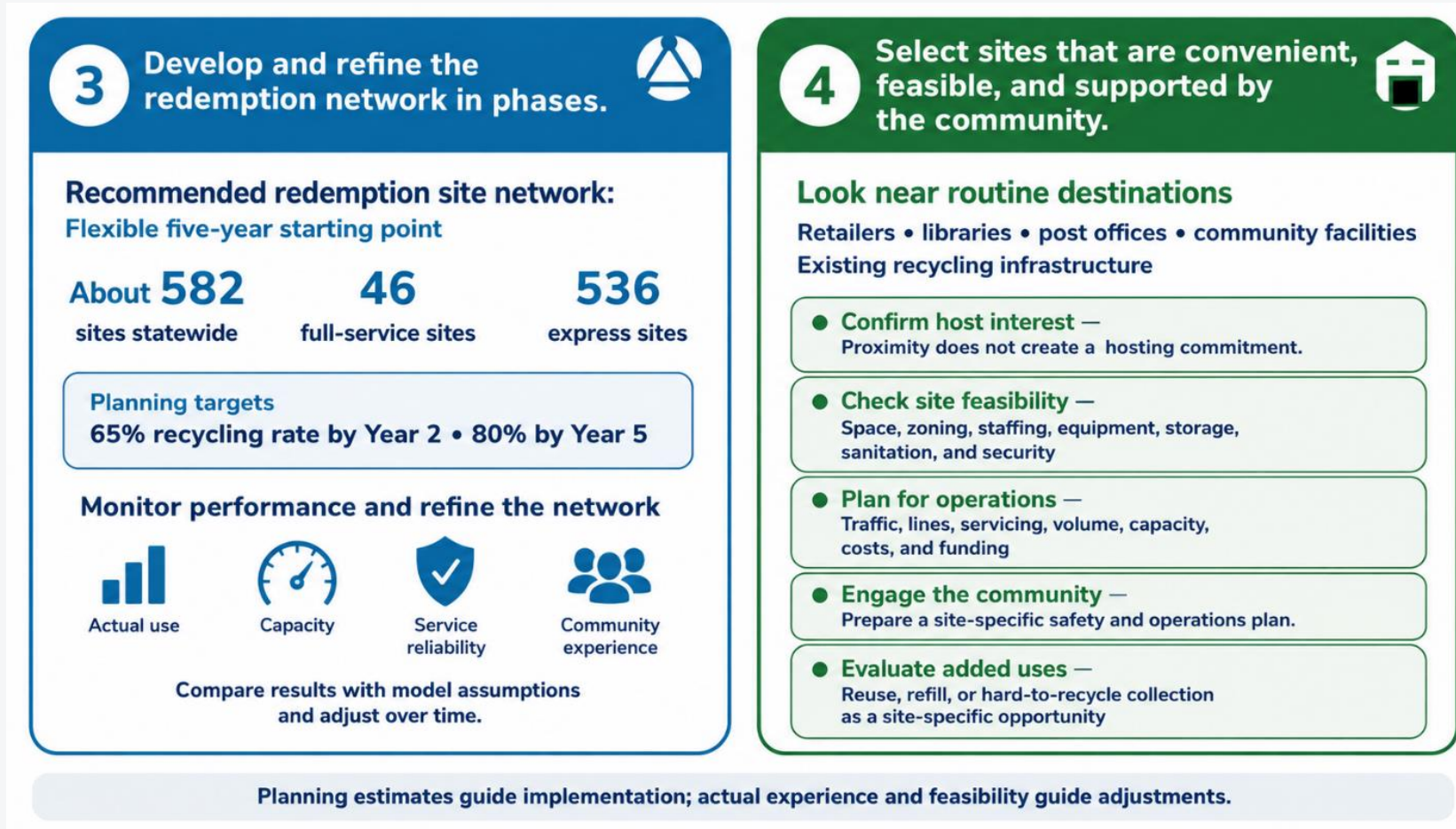
15+ min
Remote



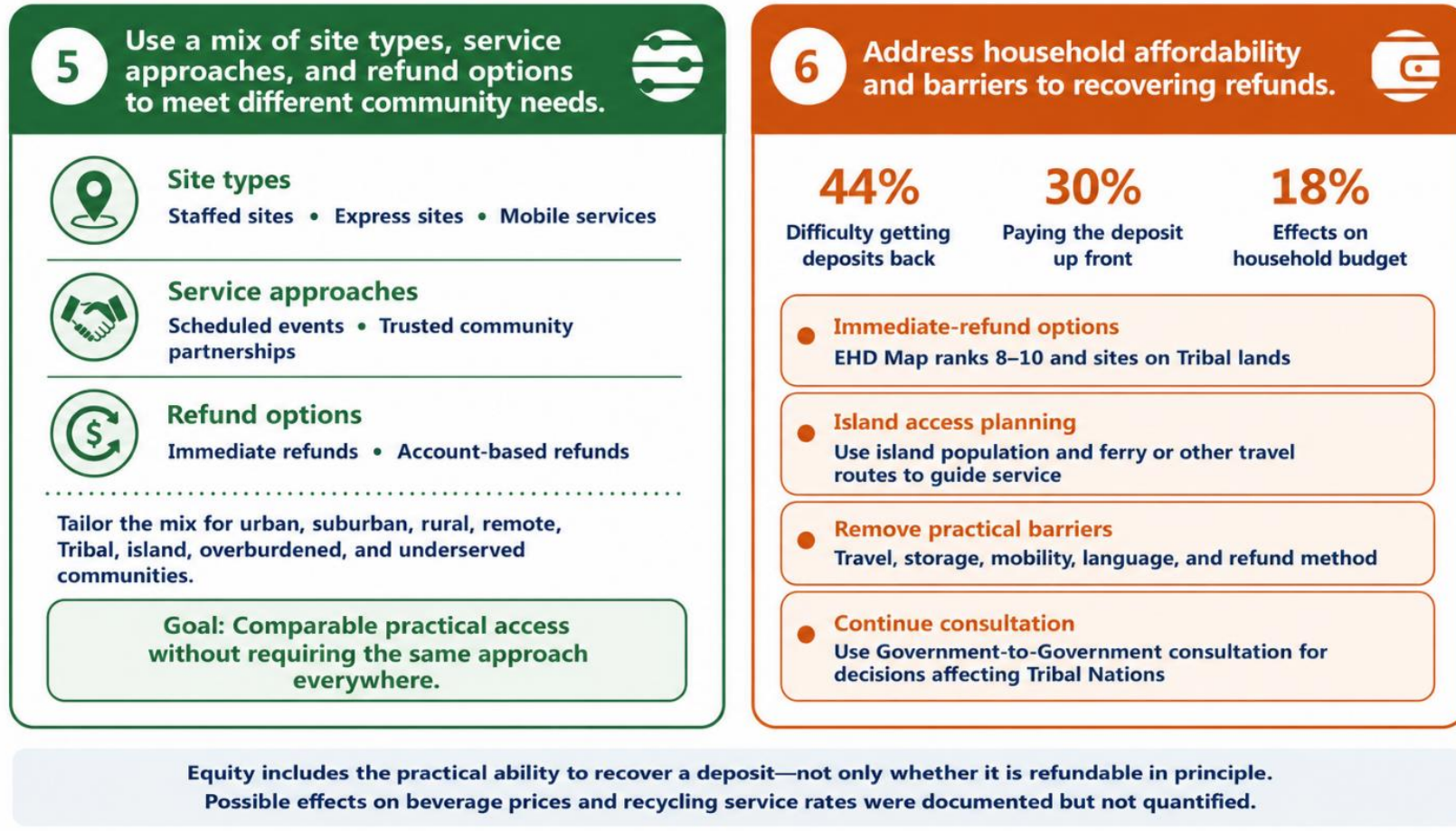
Public transit
Consider where available

i Planning goals describe practical access to redemption. They do not compare redemption with curbside or multifamily recycling.

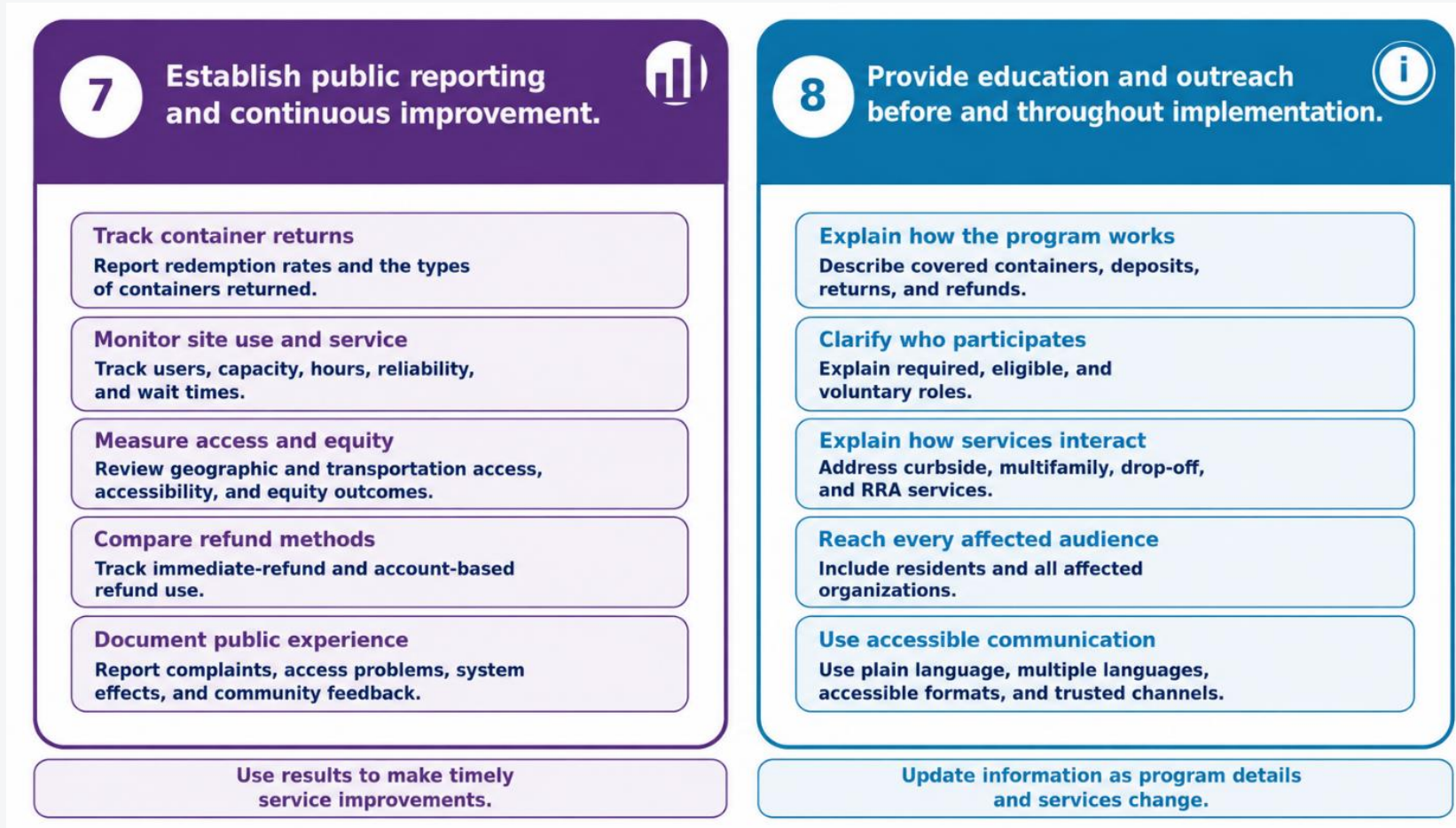
Recommendations 3–4: Redemption Site Design and Management



Recommendations 5–6: Equity and Refund Access



Recommendations 7–8: Reporting, Improvement, and Education



Recommendations 9–10: Additional Implementation Needs

9 Conduct further analysis of program costs and effects on residents and the evolving Washington recycling system.

Estimate program costs

Startup and operating costs • Funding sources

Assess household effects

Beverage prices • Consumer costs • Recycling service rates

Assess recycling-system effects

Curbside and drop-off programs • Contracts • Commodity revenue • Material flows • Infrastructure

Examine RRA coordination

Anticipated curbside investments • Producer responsibility implementation

Sequencing with RRA implementation remains a policy decision.

10 Clearly define roles, requirements, and funding.

Define organizational roles

Ecology • Producers • Retailers • Local governments • Operators • Tribal Nations • Site hosts • Community partners

Clarify participation

Required • Eligible • Voluntary

Assign funding responsibility

Infrastructure • Staffing • Equipment • Servicing • Education • Reporting • Long-term operations

Prepare an implementation plan

Budget • Schedule • Priorities • Partnership process • Participation requirements

Modeled locations do not create host commitments.