

Iowa Sustainable Materials Management (SMM) – Next Steps
Iowa Recycling Measurement and Reporting Stakeholder Meeting
August 11, 2026

During this stakeholder event, facilitators asked ten questions pertaining to how recycling data could benefit integrated solid waste management planning in Iowa, who had access to this type of data, and how data could be submitted and managed. Below are the questions and a summary of responses received from participants.

7j What decisions should Iowa be able to make with better recycling data?
With better recycling data, Iowa will gain a baseline understanding of the industry's infrastructure, service areas, markets, consumer participation, and contamination rates. Iowa will then be able to focus on infrastructure investment, market development, service gaps, and consumer education.

8j Which types of recycling data would be most useful for Iowa to collect?
especially in an initial phase?
Participants identified total recycling tons received by material type, tons processed as recyclables, and tons landfilled as residue/contamination as the most useful information in the near term. Additional items discussed were geographic service coverage, usage/capacity of existing infrastructure, revenue generation, program participation, airspace saved with diversion, and purchasers/destinations of Iowa's recyclables.

9j Who has the most reliable access to the information Iowa is trying to collect?
and how should that shape the reporting universe?
Stakeholders concluded that facilities receiving recyclables, such as material recover facilities (MRFs) and recyclables transfer stations, would provide the most complete and reliable recycling data. Haulers would be the next appropriate source, but recycling tonnages may be difficult to track, especially if the hauler is mixing communities/customers during collection services.

0j What information could your organization or organizations like yours?
reasonably provide through a voluntary reporting effort?
Stakeholders representing MRFs and Solid Waste Planning Areas which manage the processing of recyclables indicated they already have access to the necessary data since they collect, process, and sell recyclables in individual categories. Landfill managers are accustomed to reporting solid waste data to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) quarterly and, in the past, recycling facilities voluntarily shared this information with the State. A step further would be to request that recycling facilities share their recyclable material characterization studies for market value (weighed value commodity approach).

- ❶ What would make the reporting request feel manageable rather than burdensome?

Intelligent survey/database design to keep the reporting process simple and straightforward was the most mentioned quality. Stakeholders requested a standard template with industry term definitions (i.e., processor vs broker, residential vs ICI) and a clear explanation of how data is to be reported (by material type, inbound/outbound, etc.). The State should avoid requesting data that is too detailed, such as customer names, specific end-market pricing, and route-level data since that information may be seen as too sensitive or burdensome to collect. Quarterly reporting was suggested as a middle ground to ensure data is timely without being as burdensome as monthly reporting.

- ❷ What confidentiality protections would need to be in place for stakeholders to feel comfortable sharing data?

While the State currently has a confidentiality clause in the state code, the DNR should explicitly explain what data is to be collected and how it will be shared with the public. To protect stakeholder clients and end-markets, only aggregated results should be made available to the public. Reiterate that the DNR is not interested in proprietary information, but rather simply understanding how many tons are being recycled in the state.

- ❸ What would make voluntary participation more likely?

It was suggested that the DNR show how they will use the collected data, focusing on how it will create a positive feedback loop for the stakeholders. More reporting and data collection may lead to better communication of recycling's success and economic value for the state of Iowa. This in turn may improve consumer confidence in recycling, followed by increased participation and decreased contamination from consumer education, and ultimately, more business for the recycling facilities, haulers, and end markets.

The DNR could showcase the collected data on websites, online dashboards, and annual reports, connecting how that information is informing the State's investment in grant-funded projects, consumer engagement, service gap reductions across the state, infrastructure capacity expansion, and overall recycling system improvements.

It is recommended to request and utilize feedback from the "early adopters" of the voluntary program prior to launching the data collection program statewide. Whatever data collection strategy is selected, consideration should be given to entities that may be more reluctant to participate. The DNR should identify and assist entities that may not have the capacity to self-report.

4. What should Iowa resolve during a voluntary phase before considering required reporting?

Participants discussed the importance of the DNR finding solutions that limit demand on the State employees, given the budget issues facing the legislature in the next few years. Related to this issue is the suggestion to research AI tools for data compilation, verification, and analysis.

5. If Iowa could only collect five data elements in the first year, what should they be?
1. Tons collected by material types
 2. Tons marketed (i.e., processed recyclables sent to end-user markets)
 3. Tons landfilled due to contamination and/or residuals
 4. Geographical service areas
 5. Current industry capacity and expansion possibilities

Other data elements mentioned included program access, public participation, end-user market locations, and qualitative data from the pilot project

76. What would success look like after the first year of voluntary reporting?

Success was defined as building a holistic picture of the recycling industry in Iowa with data we can trust. This data can then be compared with future material characterization studies to gauge program participation and success. Utilize pilot program feedback to design a simple, online reporting system that can be easily expanded to include diversion beyond traditional recycling materials, such as textiles, mattresses, C&D, electronics, and scrap metal.

The DNR should communicate next steps clearly with stakeholders and the public to show how they are using the data to support communities, planning areas, MRFs, and landfills with solid waste diversion. Specific action items could include program evaluation, success reports, service area gap elimination, plans for expansion of collected data, and interest in testing technology-based solutions.