



Recycling Refunds Engagement Study DRAFT Report

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Legislative Text

The [Recycling Reform Act](#) directs the Department of Ecology to contract with an independent consultant to conduct two studies on the potential statewide impacts of a recycling refunds program in Washington. The full legislative text for the studies is below (Chapter 70A.208.240 Revised Code of Washington).

“(1) The department shall contract with an independent consultant to conduct two studies on the potential statewide impacts of a recycling refunds program, also known as a beverage container deposit return system, in Washington state. The studies must prioritize equity, accessibility, and community perspectives.

(2) The consultant, in coordination with the department, shall lead a community engagement process in at least three geographically diverse areas of the state with a high concentration of socially vulnerable or overburdened populations, as identified by the department consistent with RCW 70A.02.010. The results of this engagement process must be submitted to the legislature by January 1, 2027. The engagement process must:

- a) Solicit input on access to recycling and redemption services, local infrastructure needs, and community priorities related to convenience and equity;
- b) Assess consumer sentiment, awareness, and perceptions of a recycling refunds program, including perceived benefits, barriers to participation, and potential economic impacts, particularly for low-income households;
- c) Include:
 - i. Community input sessions in overburdened communities;
 - ii. Outreach to local governments, tribal governments, environmental justice and equity organizations, producers, recycling system operators, and other relevant stakeholders; and
 - iii. Engagement with individuals and organizations concerned about the economic impacts of a recycling refunds program, particularly on low-income consumers; and
- d) Develop recommendations to ensure that a recycling refunds program is equitably accessible, convenient, and responsive to community needs across all regions of the state.

(3) In the same three regions required to be identified under subsection (2) of this section, the consultant shall evaluate and model what convenient access to redemption services would look like, with respect to the types of express and full-service redemption sites. The results of this engagement process must be submitted to the legislature by January 1, 2026. This analysis must at a minimum consider:

- a) The availability of suitable infrastructure for redemption services that include reusable packaging;
- b) Accessibility via public transportation;
- c) Co-location opportunities with existing waste or recycling facilities; and
- d) Strategies to reduce transportation burdens on residents in rural, remote, and underserved communities.

(4) The department shall submit the consultant's findings and recommendations to the appropriate committees of the house of representatives and the senate by January 1, 2026, for the study completed in subsection (3) of this section and January 1, 2027, for the study completed in subsection (2) of this section.

(5) Registered producer responsibility organizations under RCW 70A.208.030 are responsible for payment of the department's cost to complete these studies as part of the one-time payment due to the department on September 1, 2026, under RCW 70A.208.030(4).”

Executive Summary

The [Recycling Reform Act](#) directs the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) to evaluate the potential statewide impacts of a recycling refunds program, also known as a beverage container deposit return system, in Washington state. The studies must prioritize equity, accessibility, and community perspectives. Under such a program, consumers pay a refundable deposit on eligible beverage containers and receive it back when containers are returned to an approved collection site. Washington does not currently have a recycling refunds program.

To support the Legislature's evaluation, Ecology conducted two complementary studies. The Recycling Refund Model Study used geographic modeling to evaluate redemption site network designs and recommended approximately 685 statewide redemption opportunities, including full-service centers, express sites, and mobile options. The recommended scenario emphasized service levels tailored to community context, locations near routine destinations, immediate refund options where banking or digital access may be limited, and specialized approaches for overburdened, rural, remote, Tribal, and island communities.

The Engagement Study evaluated the Model Study's assumptions and recommendations through statewide engagement with residents, Tribal Nations, local governments, community organizations, recycling system participants, retailers, producers, and other interested parties. Engagement included a statewide survey, interviews, Community Connector partnerships, Tribal engagement and consultation, outreach, and public review. Phase I received 2,616 survey responses from all 39 Washington counties and included 15 interviews with more than 60 participants. These findings were used to refine the Model Study's assumptions and develop updated preliminary recommendations.

Summary of Engagement Findings

Overall, engagement findings supported the direction of the Model Study while identifying opportunities to strengthen future planning and implementation. The study team organized findings into three categories that reflect the major questions explored throughout the study.

Program Understanding, Access, Convenience, and Participation

Residents consistently identified convenience as a key factor influencing participation, while local governments, community-based organizations, retailers, and recycling system participants emphasized that convenience extends beyond travel distance. Participants described convenience as including operating hours, reliability, wait times, safety, accessibility, ease of use, and the ability to return containers as part of existing daily routines. They also supported multiple redemption site types located near destinations people already visit.

Equity and Community Context

Residents, community-based organizations, Tribal participants, and local governments emphasized that accessibility needs vary across Washington because transportation patterns, geography, service availability, and community priorities differ across urban, suburban, rural, remote, Tribal, overburdened, and underserved communities. Participants generally supported community-specific approaches that maintain statewide accessibility goals while reflecting local conditions, trusted community partnerships, culturally responsive outreach, language access, and reduced participation barriers.

Operational Considerations and Conditions for Success

Implementation feasibility emerged as a recurring theme across nearly every stakeholder group. Participants frequently discussed implementation costs, funding responsibilities, siting, staffing, infrastructure, operational sustainability, governance, long-term program management, and coordination with Washington's existing recycling system. Residents also identified potential environmental and community benefits—including increased recycling, reduced litter, cleaner communities, and improved environmental outcomes—while participants emphasized that these benefits depend on a convenient, accessible, equitable, and well-managed program.

Updated Preliminary Recommendations

Based on these findings, the Engagement Study developed nine preliminary recommendations that validate, refine, and expand upon the Model Study's recommendations while preserving its technical foundation and incorporating community perspectives.

Defining Convenience

Continue using measurable, community-specific accessibility standards as the foundation for evaluating convenient access to redemption opportunities across Washington. Future planning should also consider operating hours, reliability, accessibility, safety, and how redemption opportunities fit into residents' daily routines.

Redemption Site Placement and Management

Maintain a flexible, community-based redemption network with multiple site types to meet differing community needs. Coordinate redemption sites with Washington's existing recycling system to complement current services, reduce duplication, and improve overall system performance.

Ensuring Equity

Continue using community-specific equity strategies that recognize differences in transportation, accessibility needs, and local community priorities. Expand accessibility through trusted community partnerships, culturally responsive outreach, reduced participation barriers, and organizations that communities know and trust.

Planning, Reporting, and Accountability

Evaluate implementation costs, funding responsibilities, and broader system impacts to support informed legislative decisions and future program planning. Clearly define governance structures and the roles and responsibilities of Ecology, producers, retailers, local governments, Tribal Nations, and other implementation partners. Plan for ongoing monitoring and adaptive management by tracking program performance, incorporating community feedback, and making improvements over time.

Public Review

This report presents preliminary findings and recommendations for public review, with Ecology seeking feedback on whether they reflect community experiences, participant input, and additional topics to consider before final recommendations are developed. During public review, Ecology will continue engaging residents, Tribal Nations, local governments, community organizations, industry representatives, and other interested parties through public comment, Tribal engagement and consultation, informational sessions, and Advisory Council review. Feedback will help refine the final legislative report to the Washington State Legislature in January 2027. A Technical Appendix provides additional detail on engagement methodology, supporting analyses, and supplemental materials.

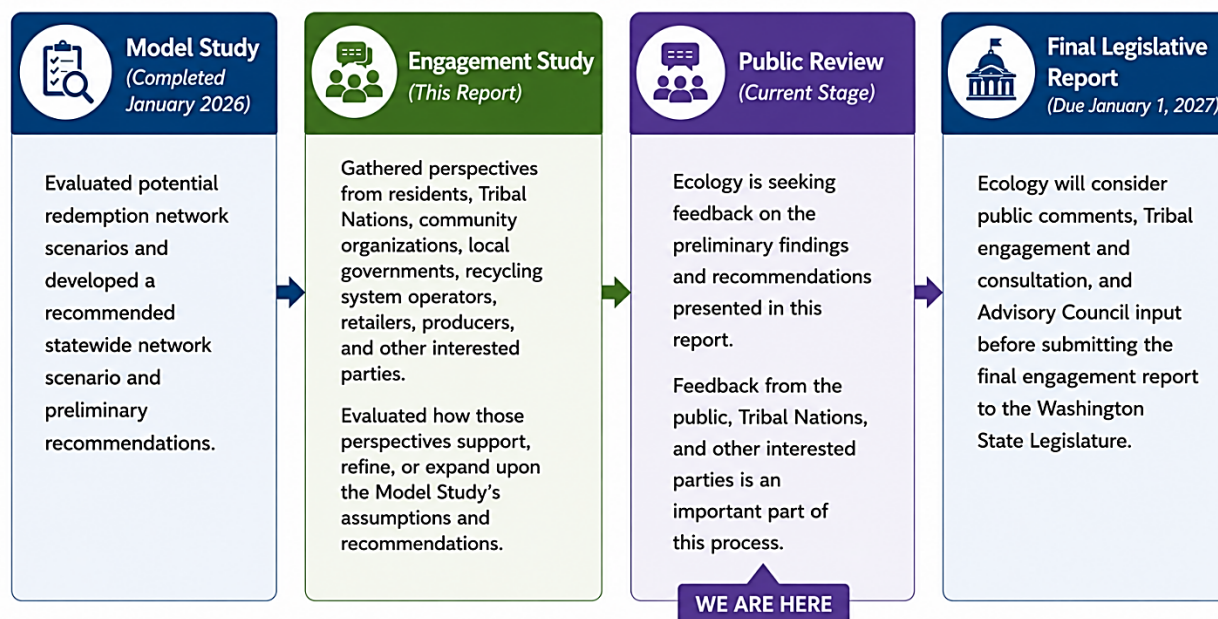
1.0 Purpose and Study Overview

The Recycling Reform Act directed the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) to complete two complementary studies to evaluate a potential statewide recycling refunds program, also known as a beverage container deposit-return system. The Act directs Ecology to prioritize equity, accessibility, and community perspectives when evaluating potential program design options. Ecology retained an independent consultant team led by Eastern Research Group (ERG), in partnership with Cascadia Consulting Group, HDR, Start Consulting, and Resource Recycling Systems (RRS), to conduct the studies.

The first study, referred to as the Model Study, evaluated multiple redemption network scenarios to identify an approach that balances accessibility, convenience, equity, operational capacity, and implementation feasibility. The Model Study examined how different redemption network designs could perform across Washington and developed a recommended statewide network scenario and preliminary recommendations to inform future program planning.

This report presents the second study, referred to as the Engagement Study, which builds upon the analytical framework established through the Model Study. The Legislature directed Ecology to understand how a potential recycling refunds program could be designed to be convenient, accessible, equitable, and practical for communities across Washington. To support that objective, the study team used the Model Study to develop the Engagement Study's surveys, interview guides, community connector activities, Tribal engagement, public comment opportunities, and analytical topic areas. This approach enabled the study team to evaluate key analytical assumptions, design decisions, convenience standards, and preliminary recommendations through public and stakeholder engagement while also exploring broader questions related to equity, accessibility, implementation, operational feasibility, governance, and community priorities that extended beyond the original modeling effort. Together, the two studies provide a more comprehensive understanding of how a potential recycling refunds program could be designed to meet Washington's diverse community needs.

Figure 1. How the Engagement Study Fits Within the Final Legislative Report



Together, the two studies address the topics identified by the Legislature and provide information to inform future policy discussions and implementation planning. Additional analyses related to program costs, operational impacts, and broader policy considerations would be needed if a recycling refunds program were pursued.

Ecology conducted government-to-government consultation with Tribal Nations throughout both studies. As part of the Engagement Study, Ecology also engaged Tribal solid waste directors and other Tribal representatives to better understand how a recycling refunds program could provide convenient, equitable, and accessible redemption opportunities for Tribal communities throughout Washington.

This draft report summarizes findings from the Engagement Study and presents preliminary findings and recommendations for public review. Feedback received during the public review period, Tribal engagement and consultation, and Advisory Council review will help inform Ecology's final engagement report, which will be submitted to the Washington State Legislature by January 1, 2027.

1.1 What is a Recycling Refunds Program?

A recycling refunds program, also known as a deposit-return system or bottle bill program, places a refundable deposit on eligible beverage containers at the time of purchase. Consumers receive the full deposit back when they return eligible containers to an approved redemption site for recycling. Depending on the type of redemption site, refunds may be provided immediately as cash or store credit, or credited electronically to a user account. Redemption networks can include staffed redemption centers, express return sites, express-flex locations, mobile redemption services, and other collection options.

Full-service redemption sites are staffed redemption centers or return depots that offer the widest range of services. They may include bag drop, counting technologies, and immediate refund options, and they can handle larger volumes of containers. Express drop sites are typically unstaffed locations where consumers drop off bags of containers. Refunds are credited to a user account after containers are counted, rather than provided as immediate cash. Express flex sites are similar to express drop sites but include on-site counting options, such as reverse vending machines or hand counting, so consumers can access immediate cash refunds as well as account-based refunds. Mobile and event-based services use vehicles or temporary collection events to bring redemption opportunities to areas where permanent sites may be less practical, such as rural areas, remote communities, or space-constrained urban locations.

1.2 Overview of the Model Study

The Model Study evaluated approaches for providing beverage container redemption sites and services across Washington, focusing on King, Spokane, and Yakima Counties as representative examples of urban, suburban, rural, remote, and overburdened community contexts. Using geographic modeling and scenario analysis, the study team explored how a recycling refunds program could operate in Washington and identified a redemption network that balances accessibility, convenience, equity, capacity, and implementation feasibility. [Table 1](#) summarizes the topics included in the Model Study, as well as several topics outside its scope.

Table 1. Topics included in the Model Study

The Model Study Examined	The Model Study Did Not Examine
- Where potential redemption sites could be located - Whether residents could conveniently access redemption services - Access to redemption services by car, transit, walking, and other travel modes - Opportunities to locate redemption sites near retailers and alongside existing recycling or waste facilities - Ways to improve access to sites in rural, remote, and underserved communities - Potential opportunities to support reusable beverage container systems	- Maintaining existing curbside and other recycling services without adding a recycling refunds program - The cost of implementing a recycling refunds program - Potential impacts (positive and negative) on curbside recycling programs - Potential impacts (positive and negative) on recycling markets and material values - How a recycling refunds program would interact with extended producer responsibility programs and other recycling policies - Broader impacts on recycling activities outside the scope directed by the Legislature

The Model Study evaluated different combinations of redemption site types, including express sites, express-flex sites, staffed redemption centers, and mobile redemption services. [Figure 2](#) illustrates one example of how a recycling refunds program could operate in Washington, from the perspective of the consumer, based on the system evaluated in the Model Study. Final program design would depend on future legislative decisions and implementation planning.

Figure 2. Understanding the Modeled Washington System



Based on the modeling results, the Model Study identified a recommended statewide redemption network designed to provide the strongest overall balance of accessibility, convenience, equity, operational capacity, and implementation feasibility.

Key features of the recommended scenario included:

- A mix of redemption site types designed to provide different levels of service and convenience in different community contexts.
- Placement of redemption sites near existing shopping destinations, recycling drop-off locations, and other frequently visited destinations whenever possible.
- Specialized approaches for overburdened, rural, remote, Tribal, and island communities.
- Immediate refund options in communities where the financial impacts of a deposit may be greatest and where access to banking services or digital payment systems may be more limited.
- A statewide network of approximately **685 redemption sites**.
- A focus on balancing convenience, equity, operational feasibility, and overall system performance.

The Model Study established an analytical framework for evaluating a potential statewide recycling refunds program by developing key design assumptions, convenience standards, a recommended redemption network (Scenario 4), and preliminary recommendations for future program development and implementation. Using geographic modeling and scenario analysis, the study evaluated the characteristics and geographic distribution of a potential statewide redemption network designed to balance accessibility, convenience, equity, operational capacity, and implementation feasibility. The Model Study did not evaluate ownership, financing, governance, or operational responsibility for the redemption network. Those topics were outside the study's scope and would depend on future legislative and implementation decisions.

Building on this work, the Engagement Study gathered perspectives from residents, Tribal Nations, community organizations, local governments, recycling system operators, retailers, producers, and other interested parties to explore how a recycling refunds program could best meet the needs of Washington communities. The Engagement Study was intentionally designed to evaluate many of the Model Study's key analytical assumptions and design decisions through public and stakeholder engagement while also exploring broader questions related to equity, accessibility, implementation, operational feasibility, governance, and other issues beyond the original scope of the Model Study. [Table 2](#) illustrates how the Model Study's analytical framework informed the topics explored through the Engagement Study.

Table 2. Model study recommendations and related engagement study topics

Model Study Analytical Framework	Engagement Study Explored
Convenience standards and accessibility assumptions	How participants define convenience, travel expectations, accessibility needs, and preferred redemption locations.
Community-specific network design	How needs differ across urban, suburban, rural, remote, Tribal, and overburdened communities.
Redemption site placement and site types	Preferences for redemption site locations, co-location opportunities, and different redemption pathways.

Model Study Analytical Framework	Engagement Study Explored
Network performance and participation assumptions	Participation motivations, anticipated barriers, perceived benefits, and conditions supporting participation.
Equity considerations	Barriers beyond geography, including language access, disability access, trusted organizations, and culturally appropriate outreach.
Issues outside the original modeling scope	Governance, implementation feasibility, operational sustainability, costs, coordination with existing recycling systems, and other implementation considerations.

1.3 Engagement Study Approach and Study Limitations

The Engagement Study was designed to build upon the Model Study by incorporating perspectives from people and organizations that may participate in, be affected by, or help implement a potential recycling refunds program. The engagement process had three primary objectives:

1. Ensure broad and inclusive participation, particularly among communities that may face barriers to accessing redemption services.
2. Evaluate how community and stakeholder perspectives relate to the analytical assumptions, design decisions, and preliminary recommendations developed through the Model Study, while identifying opportunities to refine future modeling and implementation.
3. Identify opportunities and challenges that may inform future program design and implementation.

The Engagement Study includes two phases. Phase I gathered information through surveys, interviews, community-based engagement activities, and Tribal engagement. Findings from Phase I provide the basis for this draft report. Phase II is occurring concurrently with public release of this draft report and includes public review, Tribal engagement and consultation, and refinement of the findings and recommendations before Ecology submits a single final Engagement Study report to the Legislature in January 2027.

Consistent with legislative direction, the study team focused engagement activities in King, Spokane, and Yakima Counties while also conducting statewide outreach and engagement. Particular emphasis was placed on reaching communities that may face barriers to participation, including overburdened communities, rural and remote communities, and Tribal Nations. Additional information about the study design, engagement methods, participants, and engagement phases is provided in [Section 2](#).

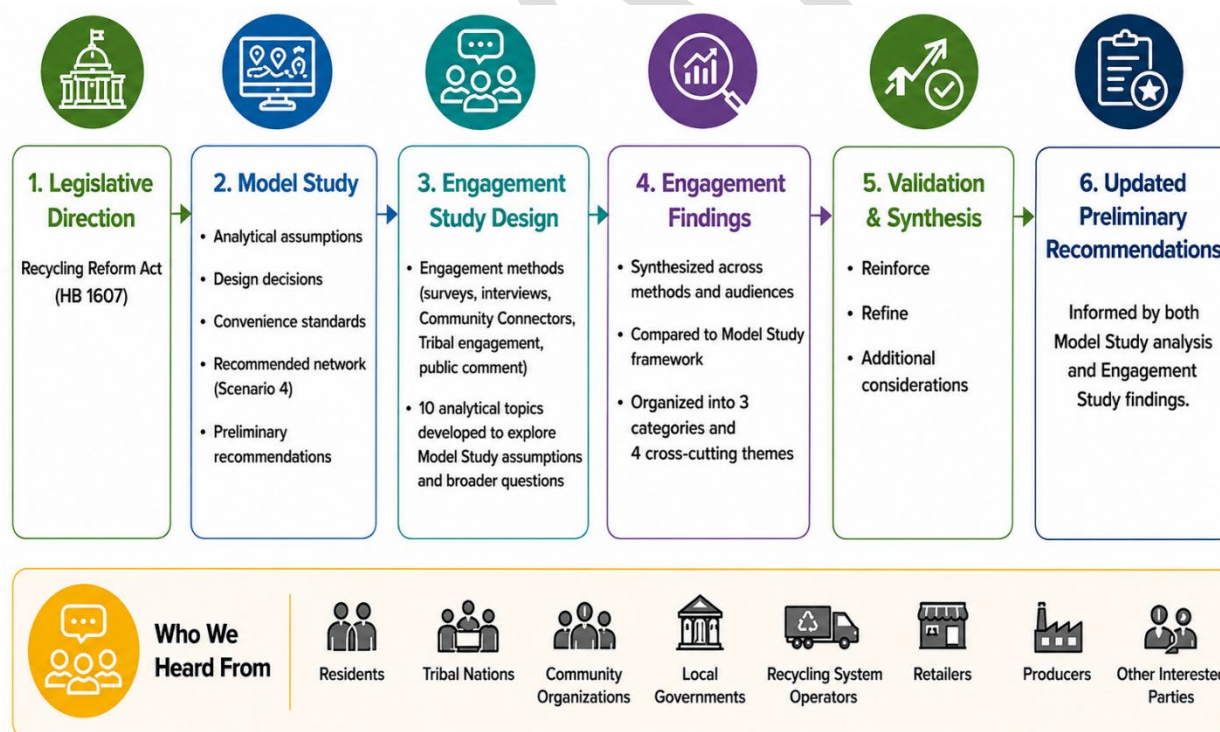
The Engagement Study did not evaluate implementation costs, funding mechanisms, engineering or infrastructure plans, or whether Washington should adopt a recycling refunds program. Nevertheless, participants consistently emphasized that implementation costs and funding approaches would be important considerations if a recycling refunds program were pursued. Participants also frequently raised other topics outside the study's scope, including impacts on existing recycling services, interactions with producer responsibility programs, infrastructure needs, workforce considerations, and overall recycling system performance. Although these topics were not evaluated directly, they informed the key themes, validation findings, and draft recommendations presented in this report.

1.4 How this Report is Organized

The Recycling Reform Act directed Ecology to evaluate how a potential recycling refunds program could be designed to be convenient, accessible, equitable, and practical for communities across Washington. The Model Study established the analytical foundation for this work by developing key analytical assumptions, design decisions, convenience standards, a recommended statewide redemption network (Scenario 4), and preliminary recommendations using geographic modeling and scenario analysis. Building on that foundation, the Engagement Study was intentionally designed to explore many of the Model Study's key assumptions and design decisions through statewide engagement while also examining broader questions related to equity, accessibility, implementation, operational feasibility, governance, and community priorities that extended beyond the scope of the original modeling effort.

Together, the Model Study and Engagement Study provide complementary lines of evidence to inform future program development. The Model Study evaluates how alternative redemption network designs could perform across Washington using quantitative modeling, while the Engagement Study brings forward the perspectives of residents, Tribal Nations, community organizations, local governments, recycling system operators, retailers, producers, and other interested parties. Findings from both studies are synthesized to identify where engagement reinforces the Model Study, where refinements may strengthen future modeling and implementation, and where additional considerations emerged through engagement. [Figure 3](#) illustrates how the two studies work together to inform updated preliminary recommendations for a potential statewide recycling refunds program. Additional technical information supporting the Engagement Study is provided in the accompanying Technical Appendix.

Figure 3. How the Model Study and Engagement Study work together



1.5 Questions for Public Review

Ecology is seeking public input on the preliminary findings and recommendations presented in this report. As you review the report, please consider the following questions:

- Do the preliminary recommendations appropriately reflect the engagement findings and community priorities identified through this study?
- Should any preliminary recommendations be modified, expanded, combined, or removed?
- Are there additional considerations that should be reflected in future program planning or implementation?
- Are there specific recommendations that may affect certain communities, geographic areas, or stakeholder groups differently?
- Are there additional implementation considerations that should be evaluated before final recommendations are developed?

2.0 Engagement Design and Methodology

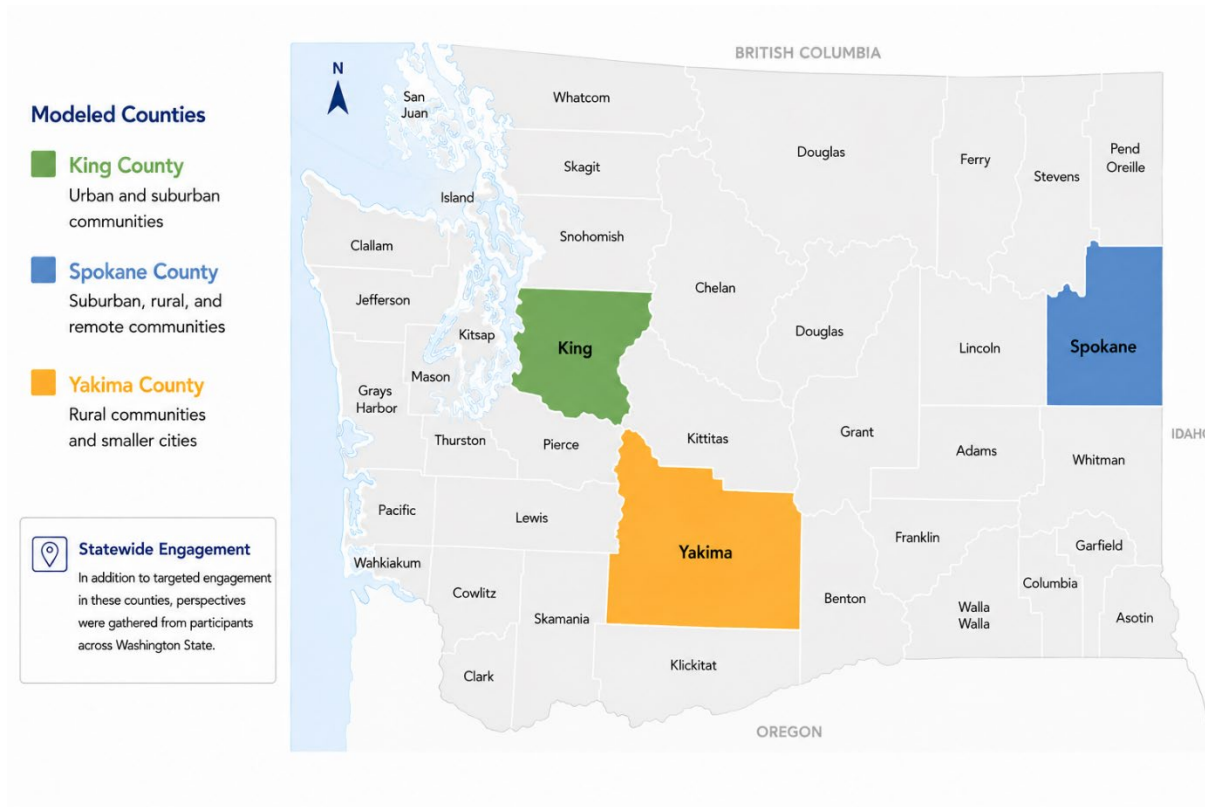
This section describes the Engagement Study methodology, including the geographic scope, engagement audiences, guiding engagement principles, analytical framework, engagement methods, and approach used to analyze and synthesize findings. The methodology was guided by the Recycling Reform Act, Ecology's public participation goals, and the Engagement Plan developed at the outset of the project. A summary of the Engagement Plan is provided in Appendix A of the Technical Appendices.

2.1 Geographic Scope

The Engagement Study gathered perspectives from across Washington to better understand community priorities, accessibility, convenience, equity, and potential implementation considerations related to a recycling refunds program.

Consistent with the Recycling Reform Act and the geographic focus of the Model Study, the study team conducted targeted engagement activities in King, Spokane, and Yakima Counties (see [Figure 4](#)). These counties were selected because they represent a range of urban, suburban, rural, and remote community contexts, as well as diverse demographic and transportation characteristics. Focusing engagement in these counties allowed the study team to compare community perspectives with the assumptions and redemption network scenarios evaluated in the Model Study while also collecting perspectives from participants statewide.

Figure 4. Geographic Scope of Engagement



2.2 Engagement Audiences

The Engagement Study sought perspectives from people and organizations that may be affected by, participate in, or help implement a recycling refunds program. Because different groups interact with the recycling system in different ways, the study team designed engagement activities to capture a range of experiences, priorities, and implementation considerations from communities and interested parties across Washington.

The study team engaged residents, community-based organizations, Tribal Nations and Tribal community members, local governments, recycling system operators, retailers, producers, and other interested parties. Together, these audiences provided perspectives on accessibility, convenience, participation, equity, operations, governance, and implementation considerations related to a potential recycling refunds program. [Table 3](#) summarizes the primary audiences engaged and the purpose of their participation.

Table 3. Primary engagement audiences

Audience	Primary Areas of Input
Residents and Community Members	Awareness, convenience, participation, access needs, and perceived benefits and concerns based on lived experience.
Community-Based Organizations	Community priorities, barriers to participation, and community-specific considerations, particularly among priority populations.
Local Governments	Local services, infrastructure planning, implementation

Audience	Primary Areas of Input
	considerations, and potential community impacts.
Recycling System Operators	Operational considerations, system interactions, infrastructure needs, implementation challenges, and potential impacts on existing recycling systems.
Retailers	Customer experiences, redemption site considerations, operational impacts, and implementation challenges.
Producers and Producer Organizations	Program design, administration, performance, implementation considerations, and producer responsibilities.
Other Interested Parties	Potential program benefits, challenges, and other implementation considerations.
Tribal Nations, Tribal Organizations, and Tribal Community Members	Accessibility, participation, implementation, sovereignty, and opportunities and concerns related to a recycling refunds program.

Tribal engagement is discussed separately in [Section 4](#) to reflect the unique role of Tribal Nations, Ecology's Government-to-Government consultation responsibilities, and the ongoing nature of Tribal engagement.

2.3 Equitable Engagement

Consistent with the Recycling Reform Act and Ecology's public participation goals, the study team designed the engagement approach to support broad, inclusive, and equitable participation across Washington. Six principles informed outreach planning, engagement activities, and interpretation of findings throughout the study ([Figure 5](#)).

Figure 5. Six principles that guided engagement



The sections below describe how each principle was incorporated into the engagement approach.

Inclusive outreach. The study team focused outreach on overburdened communities, socially vulnerable populations, rural and remote communities, Tribal Nations, and other groups that may face barriers to participation. The team used demographic information and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) as one of several tools to help identify communities for outreach and guide engagement activities.

Community partnerships. The study team partnered with Duwamish Valley Sustainability Association, Latino Community Fund, and Nuestras Raíces as community connector organizations in King, Yakima, and Spokane Counties. These organizations helped build awareness of the study, share information through trusted community networks, provide local perspectives, and encourage participation among community members who may not otherwise have participated. Additional information about Community Connector activities and participation is provided in [Section 2.6](#).

Table 4. Community connector partners

Organization	County Focus
Duwamish Valley Sustainability Association (DVSA)	King County
Latino Community Fund	Yakima County
Nuestras Raíces	Spokane County

Accessible and culturally responsive engagement. The study team translated outreach and survey materials into multiple languages and offered both online and community-based participation opportunities. Engagement approaches were adapted to accommodate different communication preferences, schedules, transportation needs, and accessibility considerations. Community connector organizations also helped ensure outreach materials and messages reflected local community contexts.

Respect for Tribal Nation sovereignty. Ecology conducted Government-to-Government consultation with Tribal Nations throughout the study. The study team supplemented these efforts through Tribal outreach, coordination with the Tribal Solid Waste Advisory Network (TSWAN), survey promotion, and opportunities for Tribal representatives, organizations, enterprises, and community members to participate in interviews and other engagement activities. [Section 4](#) provides additional information on Tribal engagement and preliminary Tribal perspective.

Multiple ways to participate. The study team used surveys, interviews, community-based engagement activities, community connector partnerships, Tribal engagement activities, and public comment opportunities to provide multiple avenues for participation. Offering multiple engagement methods allowed participants to engage in ways that best met their needs and preferences.

Adaptive outreach. The study team monitored participation throughout the study and adjusted outreach strategies as needed to improve representation across audiences, geographic areas, and priority communities. This included conducting targeted outreach to groups with lower participation and working through trusted community partners and networks to increase awareness of engagement opportunities.

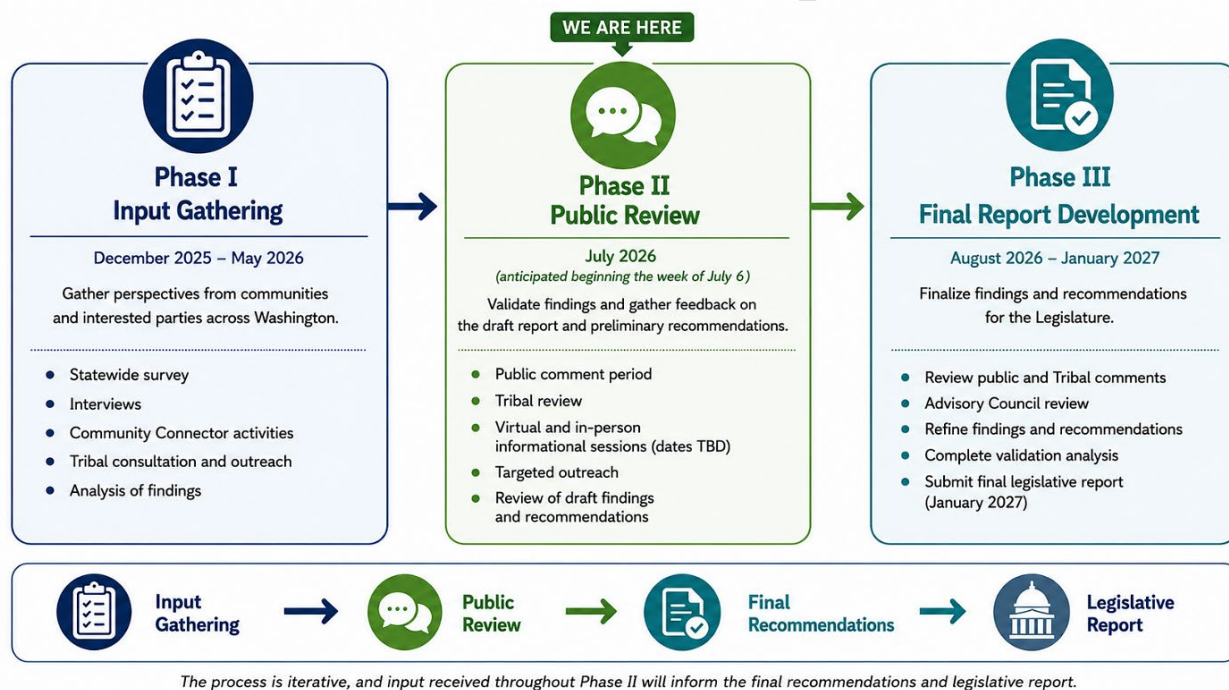
2.4 Engagement Phases and Methods

The Engagement Study was conducted in three phases to gather input, validate findings, and prepare the final legislative report ([Figure 6](#)). Phase I focused on gathering perspectives from residents, Tribal Nations, community organizations, local governments, industry representatives, and other interested

parties across Washington. Phase II focuses on public and Tribal review of the draft findings and recommendations presented in this report. The final phase incorporates feedback, refines recommendations, and prepares the final report to the Legislature.

To support broad and inclusive participation, the study team used multiple engagement methods, including statewide surveys, interviews, community connector activities, Tribal engagement, and public review opportunities. Using multiple methods allowed the study team to gather both broad statewide input and more detailed perspectives on accessibility, convenience, participation, equity, system operations, and implementation considerations.

Figure 6. Engagement phases and methods



The Engagement Study used multiple engagement methods to gather complementary information from different audiences across Washington. [Table 5](#) summarizes each engagement method and its contribution to the study.

Table 5. Primary engagement methods and participation

Engagement Method	Participation	Primary Contribution
Statewide Survey	2,616 responses from residents, community organizations, Tribal participants, local governments, recycling system operators, retailers, producers, and other interested parties representing all 39 Washington counties.	Broad statewide perspectives on awareness, convenience, accessibility, participation, benefits, and concerns.
Interviews	15 interviews involving 62 participants representing community organizations, local governments, retailers, producers, distributors,	In-depth perspectives on implementation, operations,

Engagement Method	Participation	Primary Contribution
	recycling system operators, industry associations, and other interested parties.	accessibility, convenience, and governance.
Community Connector Activities	Partnerships with three community connector organizations serving King, Yakima, and Spokane Counties.	Community-based outreach, survey promotion, information sharing, and local engagement within priority communities.
Tribal Engagement Activities	Government-to-Government consultation offered to all federally recognized Tribal Nations, supplemented by outreach through TSWAN, Tribal survey promotion, interviews, and ongoing engagement opportunities.	Tribal perspectives and ongoing Government-to-Government consultation.
Public Review (Phase II)	Public comment period, informational sessions, targeted outreach, and review of draft findings and recommendations.	Validate findings, refine recommendations, and gather additional public and Tribal feedback.

2.4.1 Statewide Survey

The statewide survey was the primary tool for gathering broad input from residents and other interested parties across Washington. The survey was open from April 10 through May 31, 2026, and collected information on accessibility, convenience, participation, travel behavior, site preferences, equity considerations, and implementation issues related to a potential recycling refunds program.

The survey used a modular design that tailored questions to different respondent groups, including residents, community-based organizations, Tribal participants, local governments, recycling system operators, retailers, producers, and other interested parties. The survey included both closed-ended and open-ended questions and was offered in multiple languages to support participation across Washington.

The study team combined broad public outreach with targeted recruitment to encourage participation from communities that may face barriers to public processes, including overburdened communities, Tribal communities, and rural and remote communities. [Figure 7](#) provides an overview of the survey participation. Additional information about survey design, recruitment, language access, respondent characteristics, and survey distribution is provided in Appendices B and C of the Technical Appendices document.

Figure 7. Survey design and participation at-a-glance



Survey findings were analyzed alongside information gathered through interviews, Community Connector activities, Tribal engagement, and public review. Using multiple engagement methods allowed the study team to compare perspectives across audiences, identify areas of agreement and difference, and provide a stronger basis for evaluating the Model Study assumptions and recommendations.

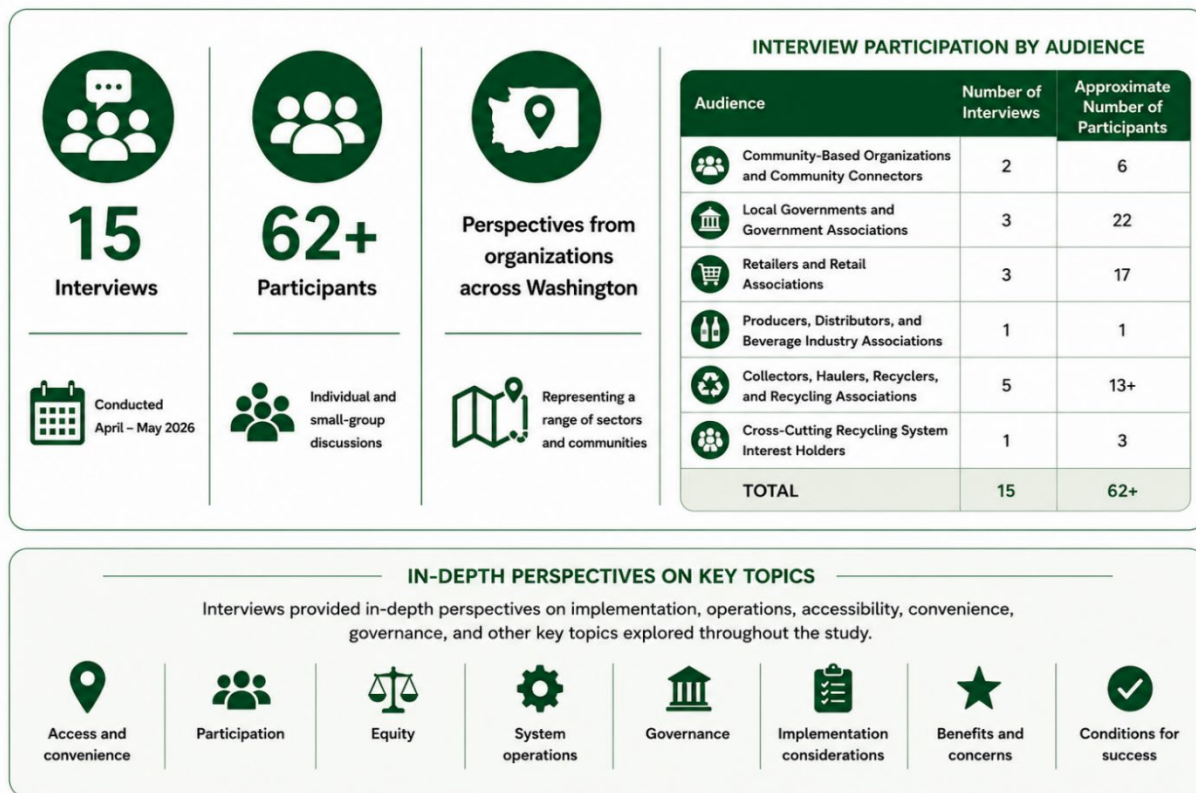
2.4.2 Interviews and Qualitative Engagement

Interviews and other qualitative engagement activities complemented the statewide survey by providing more detailed perspectives on topics that could not be fully explored through survey responses alone. These discussions helped the study team better understand community needs, implementation considerations, operational challenges, governance questions, and other issues related to a potential recycling refunds program.

The study team identified interview participants through audience mapping, referrals from project partners and Community Connector organizations, existing professional networks, Tribal outreach efforts, and direct outreach. The team also identified additional interview opportunities as new organizations and perspectives emerged during the engagement process. Interview guides were tailored to each audience while maintaining consistency across the key topics explored throughout the study, including access and convenience, participation, equity, system operations, governance, implementation considerations, benefits, concerns, and conditions for success.

[Figure 8](#) summarizes interview participation by audience. Additional information about interview protocols and audience-specific discussion guides is provided in Appendix D of the Technical Appendices to this report.

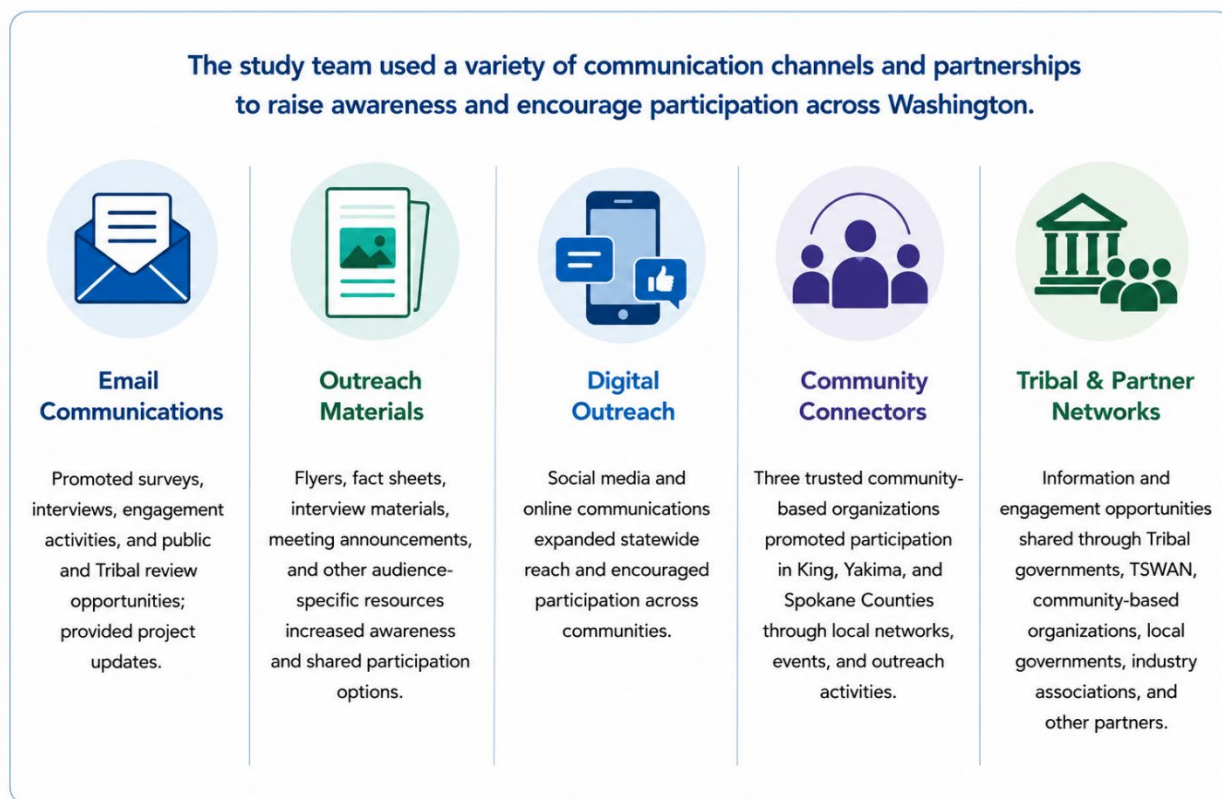
Figure 8. Interviews at-a-glance



2.4.3 Outreach and Communications

The study team developed an outreach strategy to build awareness of engagement opportunities and encourage participation across Washington. The strategy combined statewide communications with community-based outreach to help reach audiences that may face barriers to participating in traditional public processes, including overburdened communities, rural and remote communities, Tribal communities, and underserved populations. Participation was monitored throughout the engagement process, and outreach strategies were adjusted as needed to improve geographic, demographic, and community representation. [Figure 9](#) provides an overview of the study's outreach at-a-glance. All materials were written in plain language to ensure clarity and accessibility and outreach materials were translated into multiple languages to reduce language barriers and support broad participation in the study.

Figure 9. Outreach at-a-glance



Community-Based Outreach

Community-based outreach was a central component of the engagement strategy. The study team partnered with three Community Connector organizations—one in each of the three counties modeled in the Model Study (King, Yakima, and Spokane Counties)—to strengthen local outreach and improve participation within those communities.

The organizations were selected because of their established relationships, trusted community networks, and experience engaging populations that are often underrepresented in statewide public processes. Working with one organization in each modeled county allowed the study team to tailor outreach approaches to local community needs while maintaining consistency across the geographic areas evaluated in the Model Study.

Community Connectors provided input on outreach messages, communication strategies, and culturally appropriate engagement approaches. They also promoted the survey, shared engagement opportunities through trusted local networks, and supported community conversations and other engagement activities.

Outreach Materials and Communication

The study team developed a suite of outreach materials to support participation throughout the study, including informational flyers, social media graphics, email communications, meeting announcements, interview materials, and audience-specific outreach resources. Materials were written in plain language and translated into multiple languages to reduce language barriers and broaden participation across

Washington communities. [Figure 10](#) provides examples of outreach materials used throughout the study.

Figure 10. Examples of outreach materials used to promote participation in the Engagement Study

The study team translated outreach materials to help ensure engagement opportunities were accessible to diverse communities across Washington.

EXAMPLE: SURVEY FLYER

English (Original)

Spanish

AVAILABLE IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES

The Residential Survey module of the Engagement Study was available in multiple languages to reduce language barriers and support broad participation.

- ES** Spanish Español
- VI** Vietnamese Tiếng Việt
- RU** Russian Русский
- UK** Ukrainian Українська
- KO** Korean 한국어
- ZH** Chinese 中文

Culturally Appropriate and Community-informed

Community Connector partners and Tribal partners helped review materials and provide input to ensure messages were culturally relevant and reflective of community needs.

The study team used a broad network of communication channels, including Community Connectors, Tribal networks, community-based organizations, local governments, industry and professional associations, and Ecology communication channels. Participation was monitored throughout the engagement process, and the study team adjusted outreach strategies as needed to improve geographic, demographic, and community representation.

The team used translation services throughout the engagement process to support broader participation and help ensure engagement opportunities were accessible to diverse communities across Washington.

2.4.4 Public Comment Opportunities

This public review draft marks the beginning of Phase II of the Engagement Study. During this phase, Ecology will invite residents, Tribal Nations, local governments, community-based organizations, industry representatives, and other interested parties to review the draft findings, validation analysis, and preliminary recommendations and provide feedback before the report is finalized.

The public review period builds on the Phase I engagement activities by allowing participants to validate the study's conclusions, identify issues that may warrant additional consideration, and share perspectives that may not have been captured during earlier engagement. In addition to accepting written comments, Ecology will conduct informational sessions and targeted outreach to encourage broad participation throughout the comment period.

Comments received through the public review process, Tribal engagement, informational sessions, and other Phase II activities will be reviewed and considered during preparation of the final report. The final report will summarize key themes raised during Phase II and describe how public and Tribal feedback informed revisions to the findings, validation analysis, and recommendations.

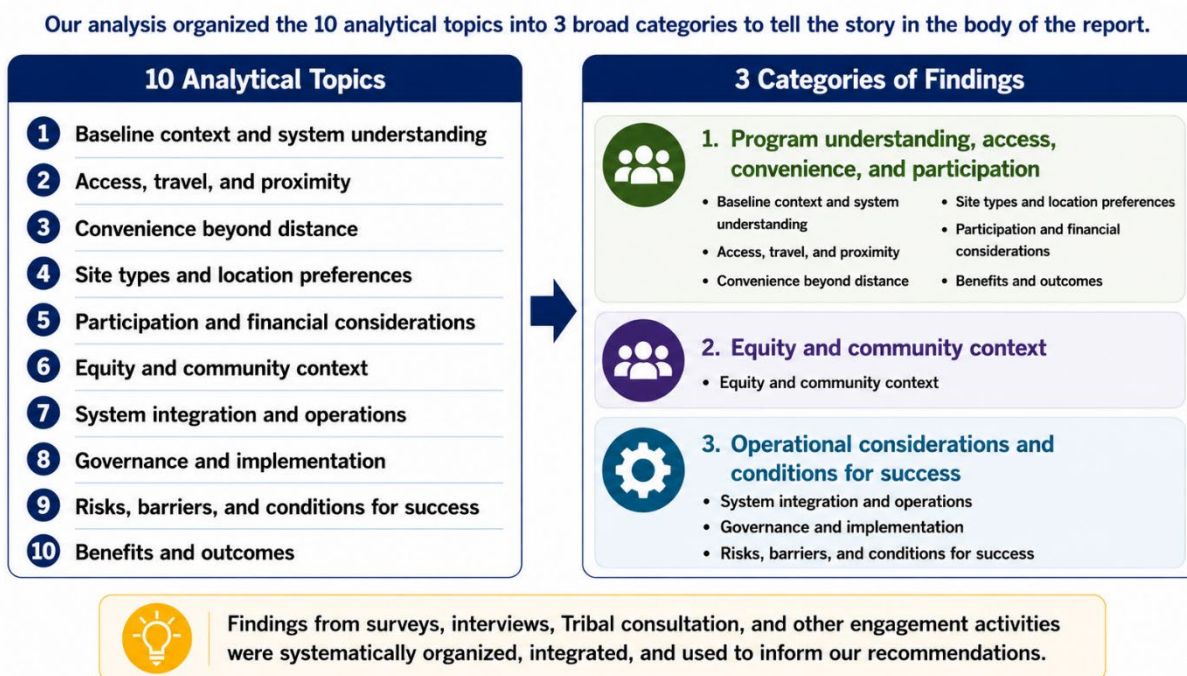
2.5 Analytical Topic Areas

The Engagement Study sought to understand how a potential recycling refunds program could provide convenient, accessible, and equitable participation opportunities across Washington and how engagement findings aligned with the assumptions and recommendations from the Model Study.

The study team organized engagement activities around 10 analytical topic areas. These topics informed survey questions, interview guides, Community Connector activities, Tribal engagement, outreach materials, and data analysis. Together, they provided a consistent framework for evaluating accessibility, convenience, participation, equity, implementation, governance, system integration, benefits, and conditions for success.

[Figure 11](#) shows how the study team organized the 10 analytical topic areas into three broader categories of findings used throughout the report.

Figure 11. 10 Analytical topic areas were Grouped into 3 Categories



Additional information on the analytical topics and as well as detailed findings is provided in Appendix E to the Technical Appendix to this report. Together, these analytical topics provided a consistent framework for organizing engagement activities, synthesizing findings across multiple engagement methods, and evaluating how community perspectives informed the analytical assumptions, design decisions, and preliminary recommendations developed through the Model Study.

2.6 Analysis and Synthesis of Findings

The study team maintained an engagement tracker throughout the study to document outreach activities, interviews, Community Connector activities, Tribal engagement efforts, and other participation opportunities. The tracker helped monitor participation across audience groups and geographic areas and identify opportunities for additional outreach and engagement.

The study team analyzed findings from surveys, interviews, Community Connector activities, Tribal engagement activities, and other outreach efforts using the 10 analytical topic areas described in [Section 2.5](#). These analytical topics provided a consistent framework for organizing information collected through different engagement methods and participant groups while evaluating how community and stakeholder perspectives related to the analytical assumptions, design decisions, convenience standards, and preliminary recommendations developed through the Model Study.

For reporting purposes, the study team grouped the 10 analytical topic areas into three broader categories of findings:

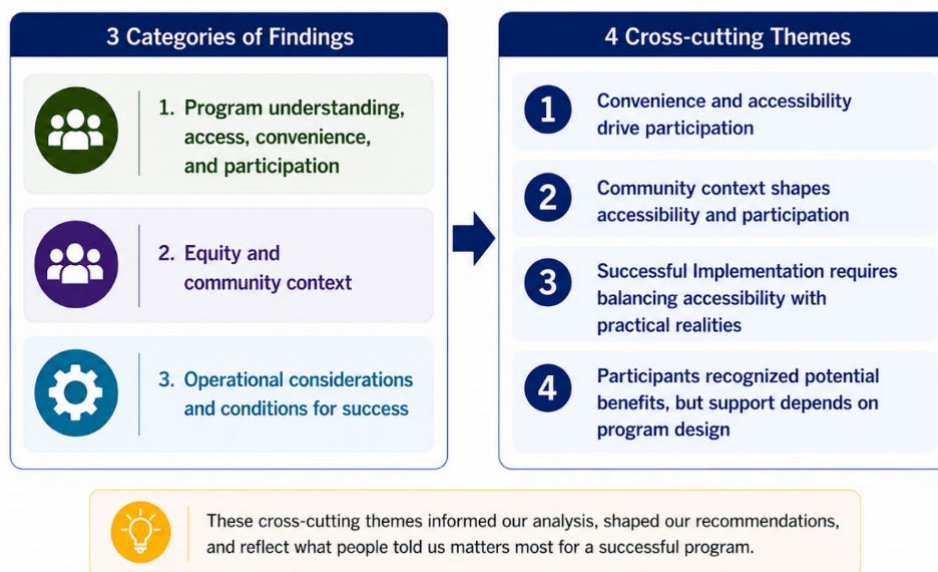
1. **Program Understanding, Access, Convenience, and Participation** – How participants understand, access, and participate in a potential recycling refunds program, including awareness, convenience, travel expectations, redemption site preferences, financial considerations, and perceived benefits.
2. **Equity and Community Context** – Barriers to participation and how accessibility, convenience, and program design considerations vary across community types, geographic areas, and populations.
3. **Operational Considerations and Conditions for Success** – System integration, governance, implementation, operations, administration, and other factors that may influence successful long-term program implementation.

These three categories provide the organizational framework for the findings presented in [Section 3](#). [Section 4](#) presents Tribal engagement findings separately to reflect Ecology's Government-to-Government consultation responsibilities and the distinct perspectives and considerations shared through Tribal engagement activities.

The study team then synthesized findings across engagement methods, participant groups, and analytical topic areas to identify broader patterns and recurring issues that extended across multiple topics. This synthesis resulted in the four cross-cutting themes presented in [Section 5](#).

Figure 12. Cross-Cutting Themes Emerging Across Engagement Findings

The study team synthesized findings within each category to identify key cross-cutting themes that span the system and inform the draft recommendations.



Finally, the study team compared the engagement findings with the analytical framework established through the Model Study to evaluate how community and stakeholder perspectives informed future program development. Specifically, the study team assessed where engagement findings:

- **Reinforced** the Model Study's analytical assumptions, design decisions, and preliminary recommendations;
- **Suggested refinements** that could strengthen future modeling, program design, or implementation; and
- **Identified additional considerations** beyond the original scope of the Model Study, including governance, implementation planning, system integration, monitoring, and long-term program management.

These findings informed the validation analysis presented in [Section 6](#). Building on that analysis, the study team developed the updated preliminary recommendations presented in [Section 7](#), which validate, refine, and expand upon the Model Study's recommendations by incorporating community and stakeholder perspectives.

The study team will also consider feedback received during the public comment period, Tribal engagement, Advisory Council review, informational sessions, and other Phase II engagement activities when preparing the final report and recommendations.

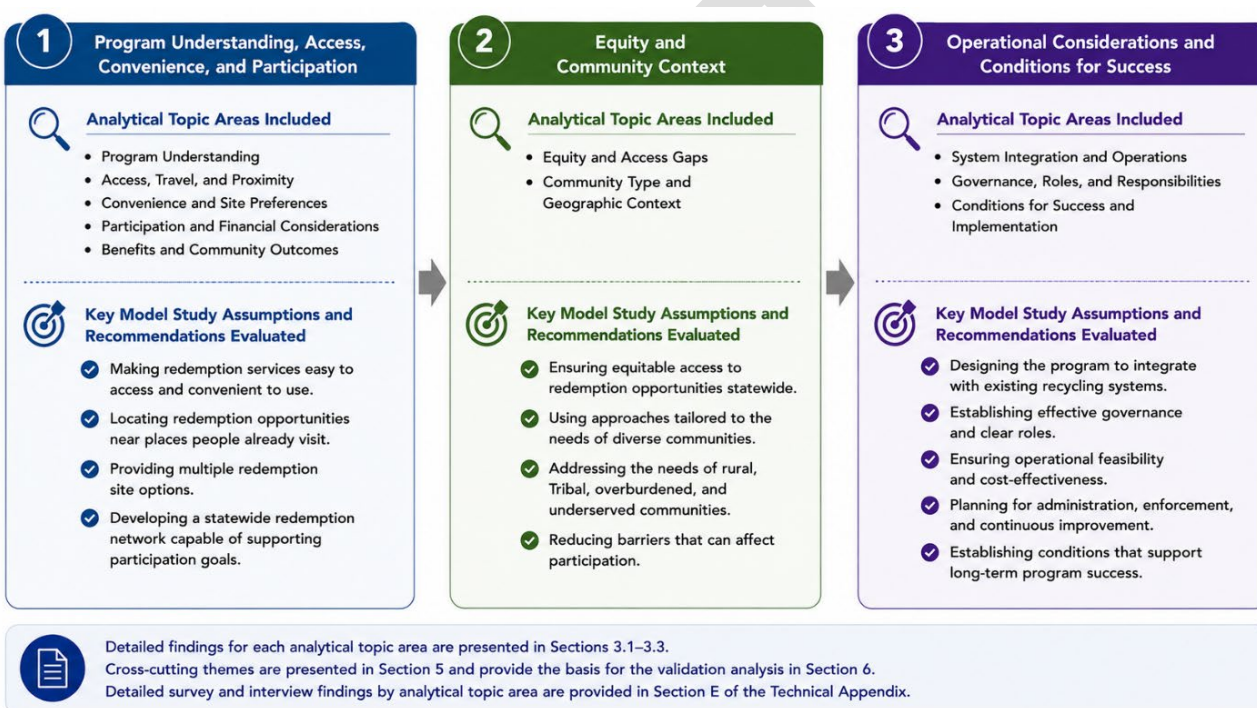
3.0 Summary of Engagement Findings

This section summarizes findings from the statewide survey, interviews, Community Connector activities, Tribal engagement, and other Phase I engagement activities. As described in [Section 2](#), the study team organized engagement around 10 analytical topic areas. For reporting purposes, these analytical topics are grouped into three broader categories that align with the primary areas of the Model Study and the key assumptions and recommendations evaluated through the Engagement Study.

[Figure 13](#) illustrates how the three categories, associated analytical topic areas, and corresponding Model Study assumptions and recommendations are organized throughout this section. Together, they provide the framework used to summarize engagement findings and evaluate how participant perspectives align with the Model Study.

Unless otherwise noted, percentages presented in this section reflect responses from resident survey respondents. Findings from interviews, Community Connector activities, Tribal engagement, and other qualitative engagement methods are identified separately to distinguish them from survey results and provide additional context. Detailed findings organized by analytical topic area are provided in Section E of the Technical Appendix, while [Section 5](#) synthesizes findings across engagement methods to identify cross-cutting themes and [Section 6](#) compares the engagement findings with the assumptions and recommendations from the Model Study.

Figure 13. Overview of Categories, Topics and Key Questions



3.1 Program Understanding, Access, Convenience, and Participation

This category summarizes findings related to participant awareness and understanding, access, convenience, travel expectations, participation considerations, financial motivations, and perceived benefits associated with a potential recycling refunds program. Together, these findings provide insight into how residents and other participants evaluate whether a recycling refunds program would be practical, convenient, and worthwhile to use.

To evaluate the Model Study assumptions and recommendations described in [Figure 14](#), the Engagement Study explored a series of questions designed to better understand how participants may experience and use a recycling refunds program in Washington. These questions examined participant familiarity with recycling refunds programs, expectations for accessing redemption services, preferred redemption locations, factors influencing participation, and perceived environmental and community benefits.

Figure 14. Key Questions Explored Related to Program Understanding, Access, Convenience, and Participation



Across the five analytical topics within this category, participants consistently emphasized that a successful recycling refunds program should be easy to understand, convenient to use, and fit into existing daily routines. While many participants were already familiar with recycling refunds programs and expressed strong support for recycling, they also identified a need for additional information about how a Washington-specific program would operate. Accessibility, convenience, participation, and perceived benefits were closely connected throughout engagement activities and collectively informed evaluation of several key Model Study recommendations.

[Figure 15](#) summarizes the principal findings across the five analytical topics. Key findings include:

Program Understanding: Most resident survey respondents reported actively recycling and reducing waste (75%) and were familiar with recycling refunds programs (83% were either very familiar (50%) or somewhat familiar (33%)). However, participants across interviews, Community Connector activities, Tribal engagement, and open-ended survey responses consistently requested more information about how a Washington-specific program would operate, particularly regarding redemption locations, eligible containers, refund processes, program administration, and interactions with existing recycling services.

Access, Travel, and Proximity: Most resident survey respondents (72%) expected to travel to redemption locations by personal vehicle. Across interviews, Community Connector activities, and Tribal engagement, participants consistently emphasized that accessibility depends on how well redemption opportunities fit into existing travel patterns and daily routines—not simply travel time or distance.

Convenience and Site Preferences: Convenience emerged as one of the strongest and most consistent findings across engagement activities. Among resident survey respondents, 74% preferred redemption locations near home and 54% preferred locations near places they already visit. Across engagement methods, participants emphasized that convenience also includes operating hours, wait times, reliability, accessibility, safety, and ease of use.

Participation and Financial Considerations: Resident survey respondents indicated they would be likely to participate if redemption opportunities were convenient and easy to use, with 58% reporting they were very likely and 27% somewhat likely to participate. The most frequently selected motivations were recovering deposit money (66%), supporting recycling and environmental goals (65%), and reducing litter and keeping communities clean (56%), suggesting that both financial and non-financial benefits influence participation.

Benefits and Community Outcomes: Resident survey respondents most frequently identified increased recycling (57%), reduced litter (57%), and cleaner neighborhoods and public spaces (51%) as important potential benefits. Interview participants and community organizations also described broader environmental, community, and material recovery benefits associated with higher collection and recycling rates.

Figure 15. Program Understanding, Access, Convenience, and Participation — Summary of Key Findings



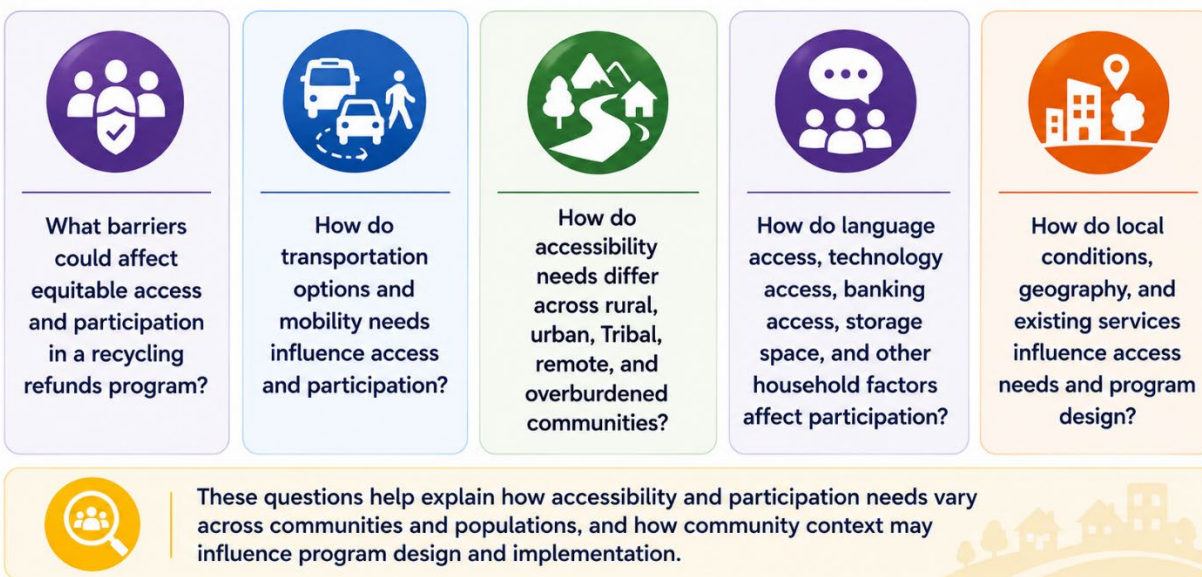
3.2 Equity and Community Context

This category summarizes findings related to barriers to participation, accessibility, transportation needs, and how participation preferences vary across urban, suburban, rural, remote, Tribal, and overburdened communities. Together, these findings provide insight into how community context may influence equitable participation in a potential recycling refunds program.

To evaluate the Model Study assumptions and recommendations described in [Figure 16](#), the Engagement Study explored a series of questions about barriers to participation, differences in transportation and travel patterns, community-specific accessibility needs, and approaches for ensuring equitable access across Washington.

Figure 16. Key Questions Explored Related to Equity and Community Context

Engagement activities explored the following questions to understand how accessibility and participation needs may vary across communities.



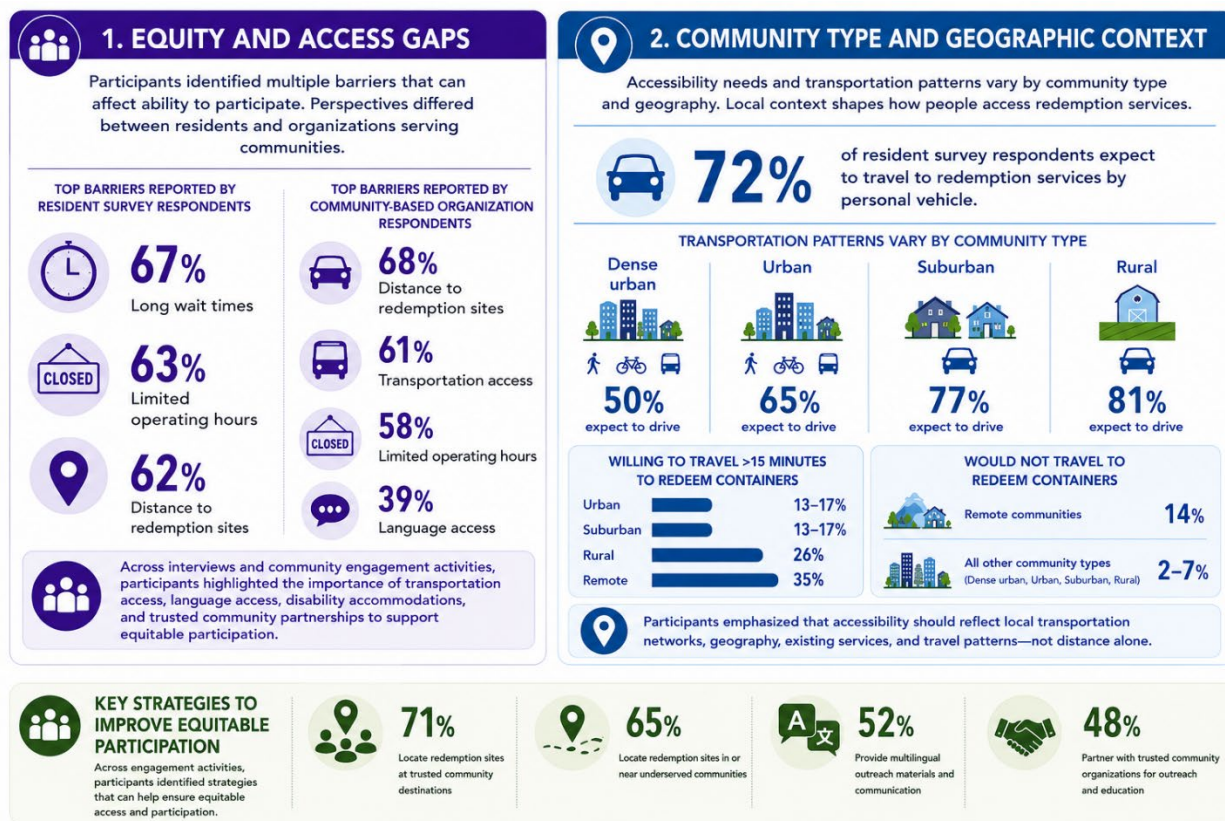
Across the two analytical topics within this category, participants consistently emphasized that equitable participation depends on more than proximity to a redemption location. Participants described accessibility as a combination of transportation options, convenience, operating hours, language access, physical accessibility, trusted community partnerships, and how well redemption opportunities fit within existing community infrastructure. Findings also demonstrated that accessibility needs and travel expectations vary across Washington, reinforcing the importance of flexible implementation approaches that respond to local conditions. [Figure 17](#) summarizes the principal findings across the two analytical topics. Key findings include:

Equity and Access Gaps: Among resident survey respondents, the most frequently identified barriers to participation were long wait times (67%), limited operating hours (63%), and distance to redemption sites (62%). Resident respondents less frequently identified transportation access (12%), mobility-related accessibility needs (7%), and language barriers (4%) as barriers. In contrast, community-based organizations, community connectors, local governments, and interview participants consistently emphasized that transportation access, language access, disability accommodations, limited storage space, and culturally appropriate outreach present more significant challenges for many of the communities they serve. Community-based organization survey respondents most frequently identified distance (68%), transportation access (61%), limited operating hours (58%), limited storage space (55%), and language access (39%) as important barriers.

Community Type and Geographic Context: Accessibility needs varied across community types. Among resident survey respondents, 72% expected to travel to redemption locations by personal vehicle, although transportation patterns differed by geography. Respondents in dense urban communities were more likely to expect to walk, bicycle, or use public transit, while respondents in suburban (77%) and rural (81%) communities were more likely to expect to drive than respondents in urban (65%) and dense urban (50%) communities. Travel expectations also varied by geography, with 26% of rural respondents and 35% of remote respondents willing to travel more than 15 minutes to redeem containers, compared with 13% to 17% of respondents in urban, suburban, and dense urban communities. Across interviews, Community Connector activities, and Tribal engagement, participants consistently emphasized that

accessibility should reflect local transportation networks, geography, and existing community infrastructure while maintaining equitable access statewide.

Figure 17. Equity and Community Context — Summary of Key Findings



3.3 Operational Considerations and Conditions for Success

This category summarizes findings related to system integration, governance, implementation considerations, operational challenges, administration, and long-term program success. Together, these findings provide insight into how a potential recycling refunds program could operate alongside Washington's existing recycling system and what participants identified as important to successful implementation over time.

To evaluate the Model Study assumptions and recommendations described in [Figure 18](#), the Engagement Study explored questions about integrating a recycling refunds program with existing recycling systems, defining governance structures and organizational responsibilities, supporting operational sustainability, and identifying implementation approaches that could function effectively across Washington.

Figure 18. Key Questions Explored Related to Operational Considerations and Conditions for Success



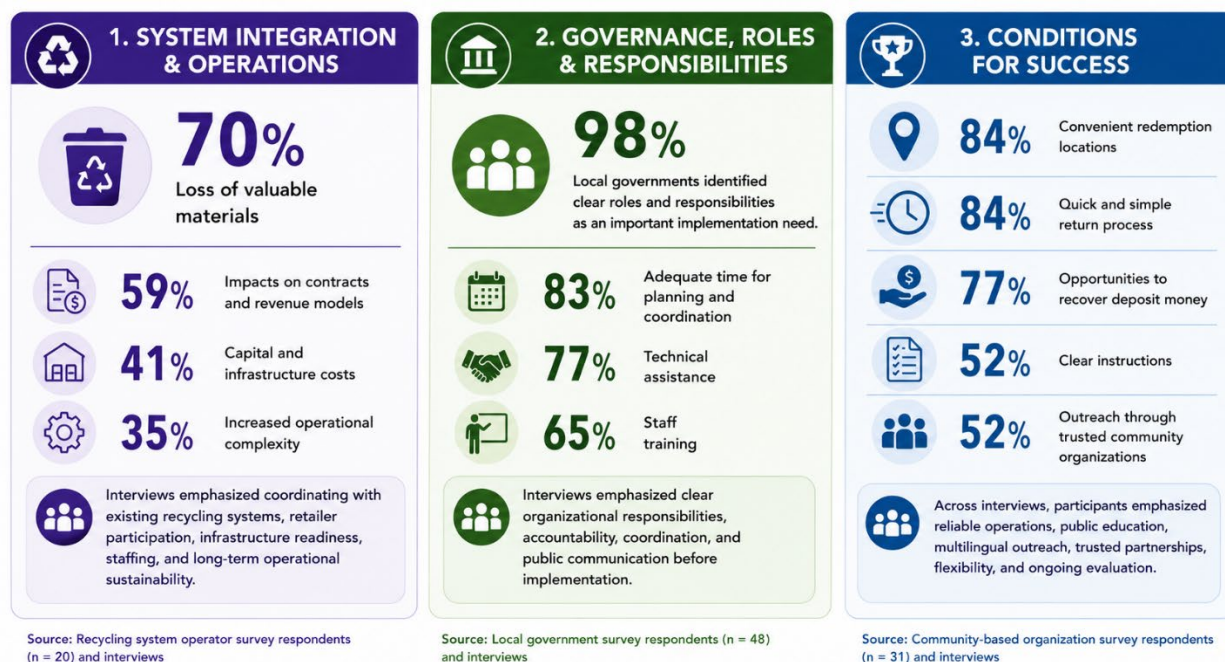
Across the three analytical topics within this category, participants consistently emphasized that successful implementation depends on more than convenient redemption opportunities. Participants across engagement activities identified the importance of coordinating with existing recycling systems, establishing clear governance and organizational responsibilities, providing adequate implementation support, and maintaining reliable operations over time. While perspectives varied among audience groups, there was broad agreement that clear communication, coordination, and operational feasibility will be critical to long-term program success. Key findings are summarized below and in [Figure 19](#).

System Integration and Operations: Recycling system operator survey respondents most frequently identified potential impacts on existing recycling systems, including the loss of valuable materials (70%), impacts on contracts and revenue models (59%), capital and infrastructure costs (41%), and increased operational complexity (35%). Interviews with recycling system operators, retailers, producers, and local governments similarly emphasized the importance of coordinating with Washington's existing recycling system, including implementation of the Recycling Reform Act, while balancing accessibility goals with operational feasibility, staffing, infrastructure, and long-term sustainability.

Governance, Roles, and Responsibilities: Nearly all local government survey respondents (98%) identified clear guidance regarding roles and responsibilities as an important implementation need. Eighty-three percent identified adequate time for planning and coordination before implementation, 77% identified technical assistance, and 65% identified staff training as important supports. Across interviews with local governments, retailers, recycling operators, producers, and other stakeholders, participants consistently emphasized the need for clearly defined organizational responsibilities, transparent decision-making, coordination among implementing organizations, and ongoing public communication.

Conditions for Success: Community-based organization survey respondents most frequently identified convenient redemption locations (84%), a quick and simple return process (84%), opportunities to recover deposit money (77%), clear instructions (52%), and outreach through trusted community organizations (52%) as important factors supporting participation. Interviews with Community Connectors, Tribal participants, local governments, retailers, recycling operators, and producers similarly emphasized reliable operations, convenient hours, public education, multilingual outreach, trusted community partnerships, flexibility, and ongoing program evaluation as important elements of long-term success.

Figure 19. Operational Considerations and Conditions for Success — Summary of Key Findings



4.0 Tribal Perspectives and Considerations

Tribal Nations are sovereign governments with their own priorities, decision-making processes, and implementation considerations. Consistent with Ecology's Government-to-Government responsibilities and the legislative direction for the Engagement Study, Tribal engagement activities were conducted separately from broader public engagement efforts. These activities included consultation opportunities, Tribal-specific outreach, interviews, and survey participation.

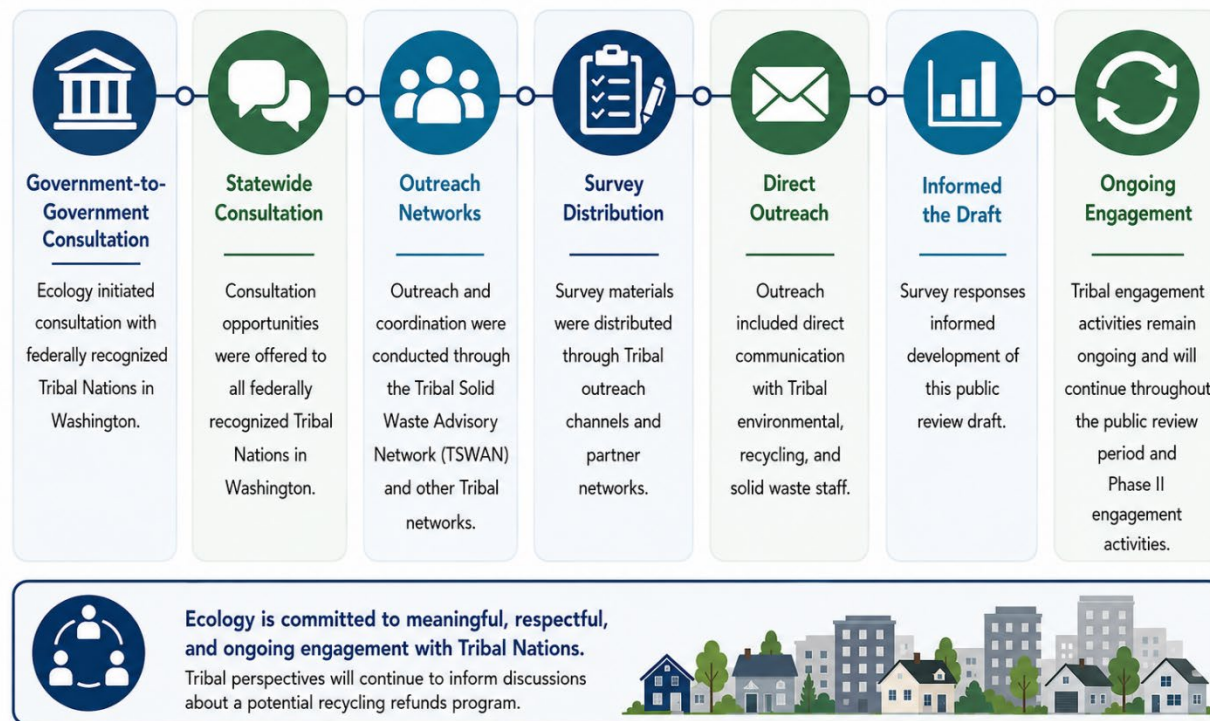
This section summarizes preliminary perspectives shared through Tribal engagement activities completed during Phase I. Participation remains ongoing, and additional Tribal input received through consultation, public review, and Phase II engagement will be considered in the final report. The observations presented here reflect the perspectives of participating Tribal representatives and should not be interpreted as representing the views of all Tribal Nations in Washington.

Participants shared perspectives related to Tribal sovereignty, Nation-specific decision-making, transportation challenges, implementation considerations, environmental stewardship priorities, and the importance of continued Government-to-Government consultation. For these reasons, Tribal perspectives are presented separately from broader engagement findings.

4.1 Tribal Engagement Activities and Participation

The Engagement Study provided multiple opportunities for Tribal participation throughout the study. The engagement approach recognized that Tribal Nations may have unique priorities and considerations related to recycling systems, transportation, economic development, governance, and program implementation.

Figure 20. Tribal Engagement at a Glance



The Engagement Study included formal consultation opportunities and broader Tribal engagement activities. Ecology initiated Government-to-Government consultation with federally recognized Tribal Nations in Washington in December 2025. Ecology and the study team conducted outreach through the Tribal Solid Waste Advisory Network (TSWAN), communicated directly with Tribal environmental and solid waste staff, distributed survey materials, and offered opportunities for interviews and discussions.

Participation has been voluntary and reflects each Tribal Nation's interests, priorities, consultation timelines, and preferred level of involvement. As with all Government-to-Government consultation, each Tribal Nation determines how and when it engages with state-led processes.

At the time this public review draft was prepared, Tribal participation remained limited compared to broader public engagement activities. Participation may have been influenced by consultation timelines, limited staff capacity, competing priorities, and the fact that some Tribal Nations may choose to evaluate participation only if legislation is adopted.

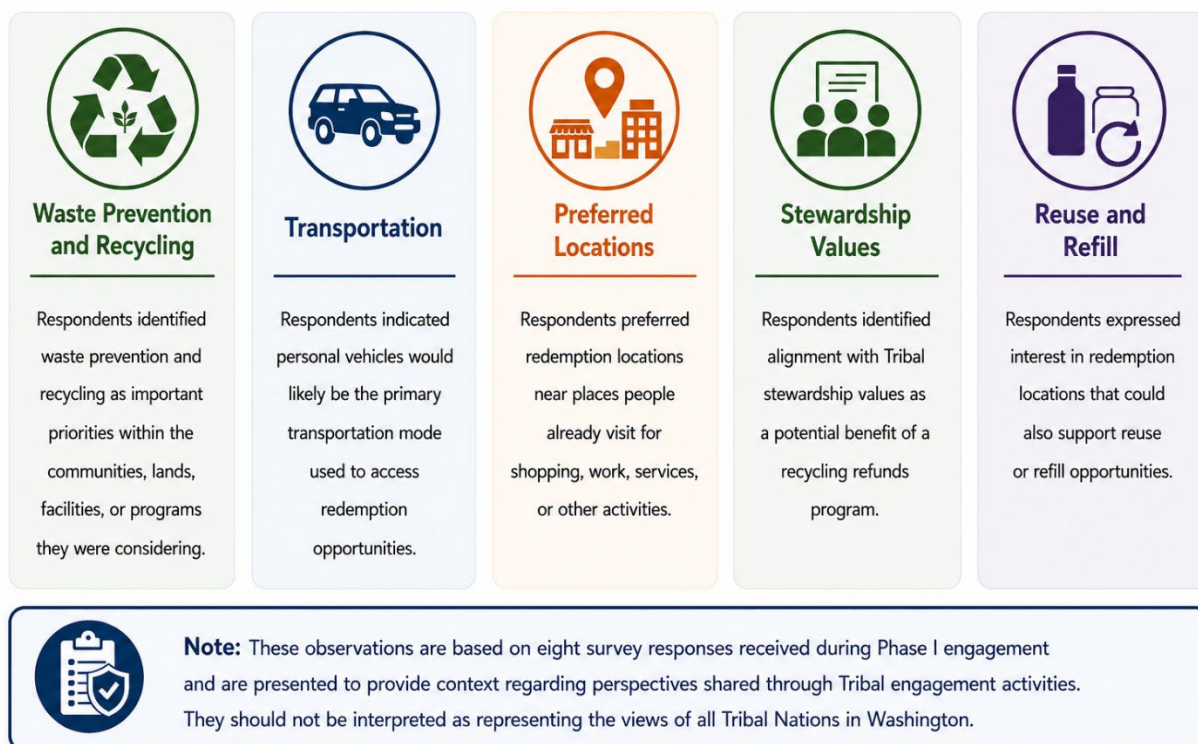
The study team recognizes that meaningful engagement with Tribal Nations often requires longer timeframes and ongoing relationship building. Tribal engagement activities will continue throughout the public review period and Phase II, and additional perspectives will be incorporated into the final report, as appropriate.

Although participation to date has been limited, the information shared through engagement activities provides preliminary insight into how some Tribal Nations may experience accessibility, convenience, implementation, and participation related to a recycling refunds program.

4.2 Perspectives Shared Through Tribal Engagement Activities

Figure 21 summarizes the primary observations that emerged from Tribal engagement activities completed during Phase I. These observations are preliminary because Tribal engagement and Government-to-Government consultation remain ongoing.

Figure 21. Key Observations from Tribal Engagement Activities



Community Context. Participants described a wide range of conditions, priorities, and experiences across Tribal Nations. Several participants noted that assumptions developed for urban or suburban communities may not fully reflect conditions across Tribal Nations. Differences in geography, infrastructure, transportation systems, service availability, and Nation-specific priorities suggest that flexible implementation approaches may be needed.

Transportation and Accessibility. Participants emphasized that distance alone does not determine accessibility. Transportation options, travel patterns, reliability, and convenience all influence access to redemption opportunities and may vary considerably across Tribal Nations.

Environmental Stewardship and Community Benefits: Several survey respondents identified waste prevention and recycling as important priorities for the lands, facilities, and programs they were considering. Participants discussed cleaner lands, increased recycling, improved access to recycling services, and alignment with environmental stewardship priorities as potential benefits of a recycling refunds program.

Trust and Ongoing Engagement: Participants emphasized the importance of trusted relationships, Nation-specific communication approaches, and continued engagement throughout program development. Several participants noted that awareness and participation may depend on whether information is shared through trusted Tribal communication channels and reflects Tribal Nation priorities and circumstances.

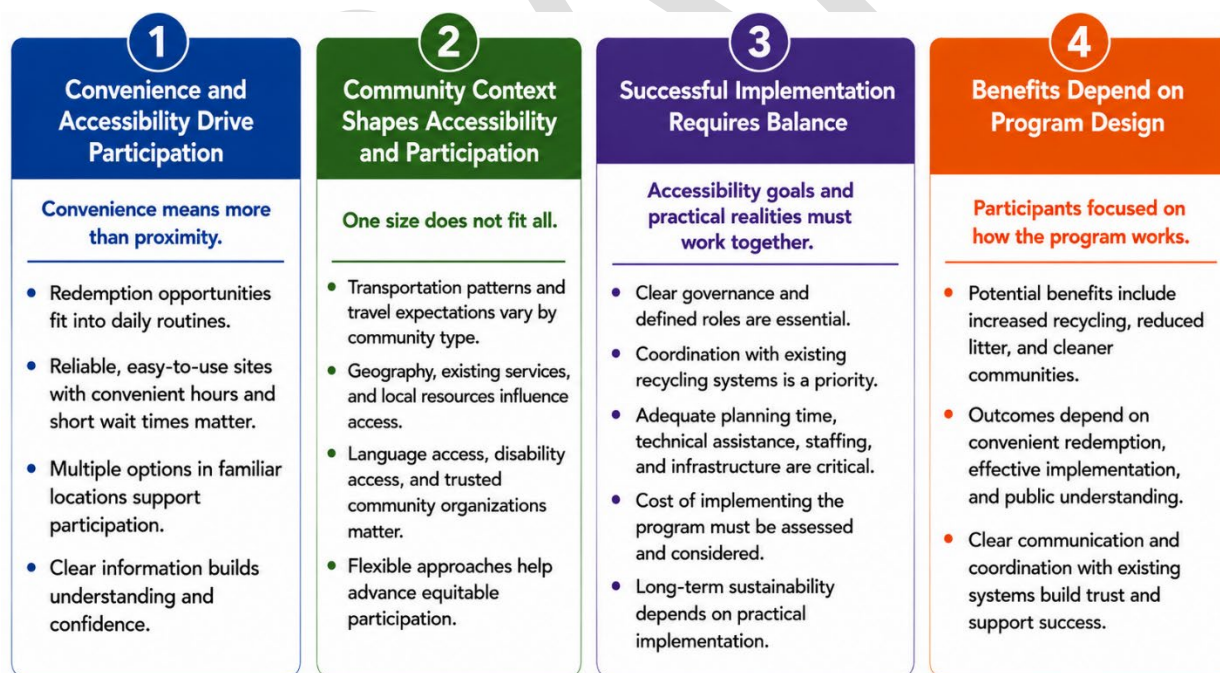
These observations are based on a limited number of survey responses, interviews, outreach activities, and consultation opportunities completed during Phase I and should not be interpreted as representing the views of all Tribal Nations in Washington. The study team will continue Government-to-Government consultation and Tribal engagement activities during Phase II and will incorporate additional Tribal perspectives into the final report, as appropriate.

5.0 Cross-Cutting Themes and Synthesis

The previous sections organized findings by topic area. They summarized what participants shared about access, participation, equity, governance, operations, and implementation. However, many important observations appeared across multiple topics, audiences, and engagement methods.

To identify these broader patterns, the study team reviewed survey responses, interviews, Community Connector activities, Tribal engagement, and other outreach findings. The study team coded interview responses and qualitative feedback using the analytical topics described in [Section 2](#). The team then analyzed findings across topic areas and audiences to identify themes that appeared consistently across engagement activities.

Figure 22. Overview of Four Cross Cutting Themes



The themes below summarize broader observations about participation, accessibility, equity, implementation, system integration, and public perceptions of a recycling refunds program. These themes do not represent the views of every participant. Instead, they reflect patterns that appeared across multiple engagement methods and audience groups. Together, these themes connect the detailed findings presented in [Sections 3](#) and [4](#) with the validation analysis presented in [Section 6](#).

Convenience and Accessibility Drive Participation. Convenience emerged as the most consistent theme across resident surveys, interviews, Community Connector activities, Tribal engagement, and other engagement methods. Participants consistently described convenience as more than proximity to a redemption location. Instead, they emphasized that participation depends on whether redemption opportunities fit naturally into everyday routines, are easy to access and use, provide reliable service, and offer convenient operating hours. Resident survey findings reinforced this theme: 74% preferred redemption locations near home, 54% preferred locations near places they already visit, and the most frequently identified barriers were long wait times (67%), limited operating hours (63%), and distance to redemption sites (62%). Across engagement methods, participants also emphasized that financial incentives alone are unlikely to drive participation if redemption opportunities are inconvenient or difficult to use. Together, these findings suggest that convenience is shaped by location, accessibility, reliability, ease of use, and public understanding—not distance alone.

Community Context Shapes Accessibility and Participation. Participants consistently emphasized that accessibility should reflect local conditions rather than a one-size-fits-all statewide approach. Resident survey findings showed clear differences in transportation patterns and travel expectations across community types, while interviews, Community Connector activities, Tribal engagement, and community-based organizations emphasized that accessibility also depends on transportation options, language access, disability accommodations, trusted community organizations, and culturally appropriate outreach. Although participants generally supported consistent statewide access goals, they also recognized that redemption locations, outreach strategies, and implementation approaches may need to vary to reflect differences in geography, transportation networks, existing services, and community needs across Washington.

Successful Implementation Requires Balancing Accessibility with Practical Realities. Participants generally supported the goals of increasing recycling and providing convenient redemption opportunities but consistently emphasized that long-term success depends on practical implementation. Across surveys and interviews, local governments, retailers, recycling system operators, producers, collectors, haulers, recyclers, Tribal participants, and community organizations highlighted the importance of clear governance, defined organizational responsibilities, adequate planning time, technical assistance, workforce capacity, infrastructure, funding, and coordination with existing recycling systems. Participants also recognized opportunities to improve beverage container recovery and material quality but noted that outcomes will ultimately depend on program design, operational feasibility, and how a recycling refunds program integrates with existing recycling initiatives. Together, these findings highlight the need to balance accessibility goals with practical considerations related to implementation, administration, and long-term sustainability.

Participants Recognized Potential Benefits, but Support Depends on Program Design. Participants across nearly all engagement activities identified potential environmental, community, and recycling benefits associated with a recycling refunds program, including increased recycling, reduced litter, cleaner public spaces, and improved recovery of beverage containers. However, participants rarely discussed these benefits independently. Instead, they consistently linked successful outcomes to convenient redemption opportunities, effective implementation, clear communication, coordination with existing recycling systems, and ongoing public understanding. Across resident surveys, interviews, Community Connector activities, Tribal engagement, and stakeholder engagement, participants emphasized that the benefits of a recycling refunds program will depend less on the concept itself than on how the program is ultimately designed, implemented, and operated over time.

6.0 Assessment and Validation of the Model Study

The Model Study established the analytical foundation for evaluating a potential statewide recycling refunds program by developing key analytical assumptions, design decisions, convenience standards, a recommended redemption network (Scenario 4), and preliminary recommendations for future program development and implementation. As described in [Sections 1](#) and [2](#), the subsequent Engagement Study was intentionally designed to build upon that analytical framework by exploring many of the Model Study's assumptions and recommendations through statewide engagement while also examining broader questions related to equity, accessibility, implementation, governance, operational feasibility, and long-term program success.

This section compares engagement findings with the analytical framework established through the Model Study. Rather than evaluating whether participants simply agreed or disagreed with individual recommendations, this analysis examines how engagement findings **reinforced, refined, or expanded** upon the Model Study's analytical assumptions, design decisions, and preliminary recommendations. This comparison provides a structured approach for understanding how community and stakeholder perspectives can inform future modeling, implementation planning, and development of preliminary recommendations.

Overall, engagement findings strongly supported the direction of the Model Study. Participants consistently reinforced the importance of convenient and accessible redemption opportunities, community-specific deployment strategies, multiple redemption site options, equitable participation, and public education. At the same time, engagement provided additional insight into how convenience is experienced across different communities, identified opportunities to strengthen future modeling assumptions, and highlighted implementation considerations that were beyond the scope of the original technical analysis.

The validation findings fall into three categories:

- **Reinforced findings** confirm key analytical assumptions, design decisions, and preliminary recommendations from the Model Study and provide additional confidence in the overall direction of the recommended approach.
- **Refined findings** suggest opportunities to strengthen existing assumptions or recommendations based on participant perspectives and lived experience. These findings generally support the Model Study while identifying ways future modeling or program design could better reflect community priorities.
- **Expanded findings** identify important considerations that emerged through engagement but were not explicitly evaluated during the Model Study. These findings primarily relate to implementation planning, governance, operational considerations, system integration, education and outreach, and long-term program management.

[Figure 23](#) through [Figure 25](#) summarize the principal findings that reinforced, refined, and expanded upon the Model Study. Together, these comparisons demonstrate how the Engagement Study complements the technical analysis by incorporating perspectives from residents, Tribal Nations, community organizations, local governments, recycling system partners, producers, retailers, and other interested parties. These findings informed the updated preliminary recommendations presented in [Section 7](#).

Together, the Model Study and Engagement Study provide complementary technical and community-based evidence to support development of a recycling refunds program that is convenient, accessible, equitable, and responsive to the needs of communities across Washington. The validation findings presented in this section informed the updated preliminary recommendations presented in [Section 7](#).

6.1 Findings that Reinforced the Model Study

Engagement findings consistently reinforced several of the Model Study's principal analytical assumptions, design decisions, and preliminary recommendations. Across engagement activities, participants supported the importance of providing convenient, accessible, and community-specific redemption opportunities while recognizing that different communities require different approaches to achieve equitable participation. Participants also reinforced the value of maintaining multiple redemption site types to accommodate varying community characteristics, travel patterns, and user preferences.

Engagement findings further confirmed that public education and outreach will play an important role in successful program implementation. While participants generally understood the concept of a recycling refunds program, many emphasized the need for clear information about how a Washington-specific program would operate. These findings reinforce the Model Study's conclusion that public education should be an important component of future program development while providing additional insight into the types of information participants will need.

Overall, engagement findings provide strong support for the Model Study's emphasis on convenient, community-specific redemption opportunities and flexible network design. These findings increase confidence that the recommended approach aligns with priorities expressed by residents and other interested parties across Washington.

Figure 23 summarizes the principal Model Study assumptions, design decisions, and preliminary recommendations that were reinforced through engagement.

PHASE I MODEL STUDY <i>Assumption, Design Decision, or Preliminary Recommendation</i>	ENGAGEMENT TAKEAWAY <i>What Participants Told Us</i>	FUTURE DIRECTION <i>How Findings Support Future Program Development</i>
 Provide convenient, community-specific redemption opportunities. Use deployment approaches that reflect the differing needs of urban, suburban, rural, remote, Tribal, overburdened, and underserved communities.	 Participants consistently emphasized that convenient access is essential to participation and supported tailoring redemption opportunities to different community types based on local characteristics and needs.	 Continue using community-specific deployment strategies as a foundation for future program design.
 Provide multiple redemption site types to serve different community contexts. Maintain a mix of site types to support flexibility, convenience, and accessibility.	 Participants generally supported maintaining multiple redemption options to accommodate varying community characteristics, travel patterns, and user preferences.	 Maintain a diverse mix of redemption site types to support flexibility and accessibility statewide.
 Promote equitable participation through community-specific approaches. Prioritize equitable participation as a core program objective.	 Participants consistently recognized that different communities require different approaches to achieve equitable participation and access, including consideration of transportation, language access, disability, and other local factors.	 Continue incorporating community-specific considerations into future program planning and implementation.
 Support public education and outreach. Invest in education and outreach to build awareness, understanding, and participation.	 Participants were generally familiar with recycling refunds programs but consistently requested more information about how a Washington-specific program would operate.	 Develop clear, Washington-specific education and outreach materials to support successful implementation.
 Collectively, these reinforced findings increase confidence that the Phase I Model Study's core program design principles remain appropriate and align with priorities expressed by residents and other interested parties across Washington.		

The findings summarized in [Figure 23](#) demonstrate that engagement generally confirmed the overall direction of the Model Study. Participants consistently supported maintaining multiple redemption pathways to accommodate differing community needs and preferences while recognizing that a single redemption approach is unlikely to serve all communities effectively. Engagement also reinforced the importance of tailoring redemption strategies to local conditions and confirmed that public education and outreach will be essential to achieving broad participation and successful implementation. Together, these findings suggest that the Model Study's core program design principles remain appropriate and provide a strong foundation for future program development.

6.2 Findings that Refined the Model Study

While engagement findings generally supported the direction of the Model Study, participants also identified several opportunities to strengthen future modeling and program design. These refinements do not alter the Model Study's overall conclusions. Rather, they provide additional context that can help future analyses better reflect how residents and communities experience convenience, accessibility, and participation.

One of the most significant refinements relates to how convenience is evaluated. The Model Study used community-specific drive-time standards as a measurable way to evaluate convenient access and determine the size and geographic distribution of the recommended redemption network. Engagement findings generally supported these travel expectations but consistently demonstrated that convenience depends on more than travel time alone. Participants emphasized that operating hours, reliability, safety, ease of use, accessibility, and the ability to incorporate redemption into existing daily routines all influence whether people are likely to participate.

Engagement also refined assumptions regarding redemption site locations. While the Model Study appropriately emphasized locating redemption opportunities near retailers and other common destinations, participants consistently described convenience in terms of destinations they already visit as part of everyday activities. In addition to retailers, participants identified libraries, community centers, transit hubs, schools, and other public facilities as locations that may improve accessibility by allowing redemption to be incorporated into existing trips and daily routines.

The Engagement Study also expanded the understanding of equitable access. The Model Study recognized that accessibility should vary across community types and recommended community-specific deployment approaches. Engagement findings reinforced that overall direction while demonstrating that equitable participation depends on additional factors beyond geographic proximity. Transportation options, disability access, language accessibility, trusted community partnerships, culturally responsive outreach, and community-specific implementation strategies all emerged as important considerations influencing participation across Washington's diverse communities.

Collectively, these findings suggest that future modeling and program planning should continue using community-specific accessibility standards while incorporating a broader understanding of convenience and accessibility informed by community experience. [Figure 24](#) illustrates how engagement findings refined several key elements of the Model Study while maintaining its overall direction. Participants generally supported the Model Study's community-specific approach to accessibility but described convenience as a broader concept that extends beyond travel distance to include reliability, operating hours, accessibility, safety, and integration into daily routines. Engagement also identified opportunities to evaluate a broader range of co-location options, including community destinations beyond retailers, and highlighted additional equity considerations related to transportation, language access, disability accommodations, and culturally responsive outreach. Together, these refinements strengthen future modeling and implementation planning by incorporating community perspectives that could not be fully evaluated through spatial analysis alone.

Figure 24 summarizes the principal findings that refined assumptions, design decisions, and preliminary recommendations from the Model Study.

PHASE I MODEL STUDY <i>Assumption, Design Decision, or Preliminary Recommendation</i>	ENGAGEMENT TAKEAWAY <i>What Participants Told Us</i>	FUTURE DIRECTION <i>How Findings Refine Future Modeling and Program Design</i>
 Travel time is one factor in convenient access. Modeling uses community-specific drive-time standards to evaluate convenience.	 Convenience depends on more than travel time. Operating hours, reliability, safety, ease of use, accessibility, and ability to fit into daily routines all influence participation.	 Broaden how convenience is modeled and evaluated. Continue using drive-time standards and incorporate additional factors that shape people's experience of convenience.
 Locate redemption opportunities near retailers and other common destinations. Co-location helps people incorporate redemption into trips they already make.	 People value a wider range of co-location options. In addition to retailers, libraries, community centers, transit hubs, schools, and other public facilities can support convenient access.	 Evaluate a broader set of co-location options. Assess potential at community destinations beyond retailers to improve access and fit with daily routines.
 Use community-specific deployment approaches to support equitable access. Tailor approaches to the needs of different communities.	 Equitable participation depends on more than proximity. Transportation options, disability access, language accessibility, trusted partnerships, and culturally responsive outreach all influence participation.	 Expand how equity and access are considered in modeling and design. Incorporate additional equity factors into future analysis and planning.
 A convenient network is key to program participation. A well-designed network supports participation.	 Convenience is experienced differently across communities. Local context—such as density, transportation, land use, safety, and geography—shapes what is convenient and accessible.	 Reflect local context in future modeling. Use a broader understanding of convenience based on local conditions and transportation realities.
 These refinements strengthen the Phase I Model Study by incorporating participant perspectives and lived experience. They maintain the overall direction of the Model Study while providing additional context to better reflect what convenience and accessibility mean to communities across Washington.		

6.3 Findings that Expanded the Model Study

The Engagement Study also identified several important considerations that extend beyond the analytical scope of the Model Study. The Model Study focused primarily on evaluating how different redemption network designs could provide convenient and equitable access to recycling refunds opportunities across Washington. It did not evaluate many of the governance, operational, financial, and implementation questions that would ultimately influence successful program implementation. Through statewide engagement, participants consistently identified these issues as important considerations for future program development.

Across engagement activities, participants emphasized that successful implementation will depend not only on where redemption opportunities are located, but also on how the program is administered, coordinated, and integrated with Washington's existing recycling system. Participants discussed governance responsibilities, operational roles, implementation costs, funding mechanisms, retailer participation, coordination among program partners, and long-term system management as important factors that should be considered during future program development.

Engagement also demonstrated that successful implementation will require ongoing communication and collaboration among state agencies, producers, retailers, recycling system operators, local governments, Tribal Nations, community organizations, and other interested parties. Many participants emphasized that implementation should build upon existing infrastructure and community partnerships while minimizing duplication, reducing confusion for consumers, and supporting coordination with existing recycling services.

Although these topics were outside the scope of the Model Study, they represent important implementation considerations that should inform future policy development and program planning. Collectively, they broaden the analytical framework established through the Model Study by identifying practical considerations that may influence the long-term effectiveness, efficiency, and public acceptance of a statewide recycling refunds program.

Figure 25 highlights several implementation considerations that emerged consistently across engagement activities but were not explicitly evaluated during the Model Study. Participants identified governance, operational responsibilities, implementation planning, system integration, funding, public education, and long-term program management as important factors that will influence successful implementation. While these topics extend beyond the scope of the original technical analysis, they provide valuable insight into how a future recycling refunds program could be implemented effectively while reflecting the perspectives of communities and organizations that would ultimately participate in or help administer the program.

Figure 25 summarizes the principal implementation considerations that emerged through engagement and expand upon the Model Study.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATION	WHAT PARTICIPANTS TOLD US	PLANNING IMPLICATION <i>How This Informs Future Program Development</i>
 Governance and Oversight Clear roles, accountability, and oversight are essential.	 Participants want clear roles and responsibilities, transparent accountability, and meaningful stakeholder and community input.	 Define governance structure and oversight processes early and ensure transparency and ongoing stakeholder engagement.
 Operational Roles and Responsibilities Successful implementation depends on well-defined roles and coordination.	 Participants emphasized the importance of clearly defined roles for producers, retailers, redeemers, local governments, and other system partners.	 Clarify operational roles and responsibilities and ensure strong coordination among all program partners.
 System Integration The program should work with—not duplicate—existing recycling services.	 Participants stressed the need to integrate with existing recycling infrastructure and minimize confusion or overlap.	 Design the program to complement existing systems and leverage current infrastructure and community partnerships.
 Funding and Costs Long-term, sustainable funding and cost-effectiveness are critical.	 Participants want a financially sustainable program that is cost-effective, equitable, and transparent about how funds are used.	 Establish a sustainable funding approach and invest resources effectively to support long-term program success.
 Public Education and Partnerships Trusted messaging and partnerships are key to participation.	 Participants highlighted the importance of ongoing, multilingual education and partnerships with trusted organizations.	 Develop comprehensive education strategies and partner with trusted organizations to support outreach and participation.
 These implementation considerations emerged consistently across engagement activities but were outside the scope of the Phase I Model Study. They provide important context for future policy development and program planning to support effective, efficient, and equitable implementation.		

7.0 Updated Preliminary Recommendations for Public Review

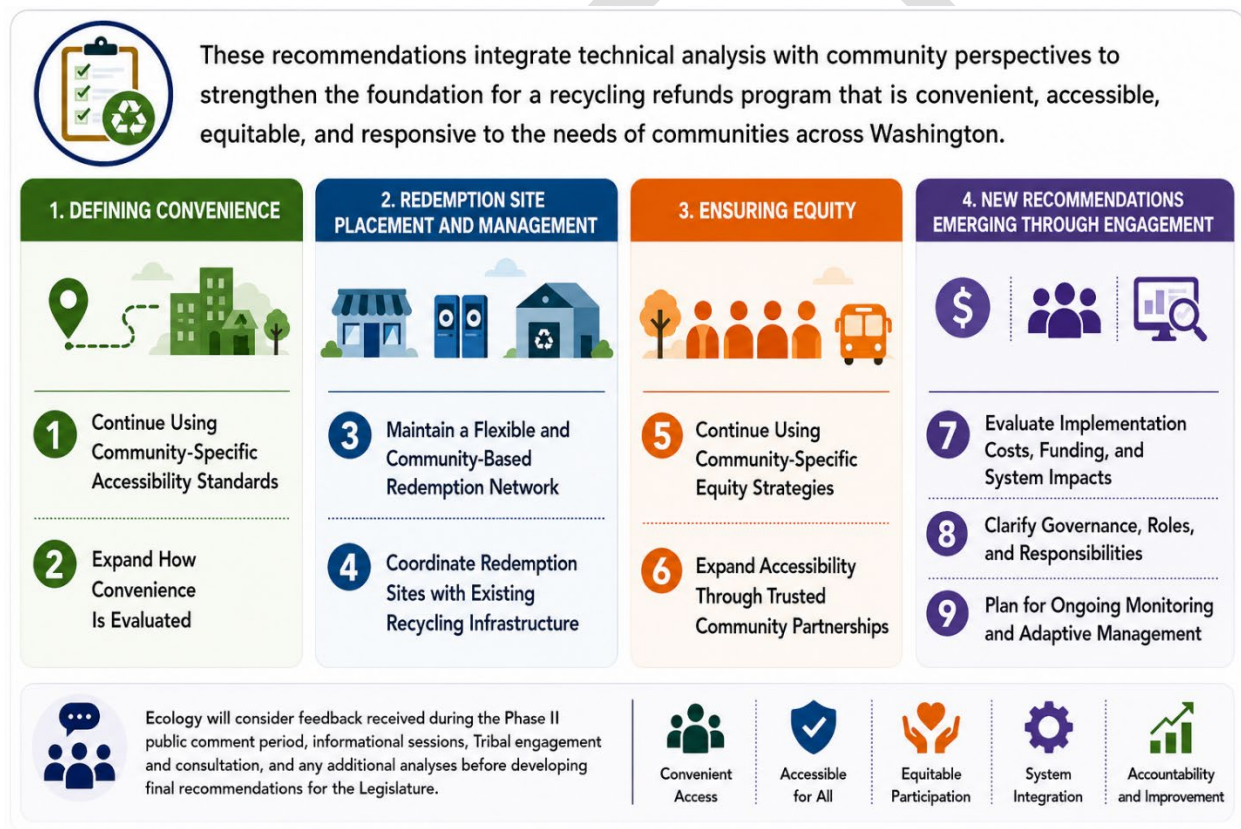
This section presents updated preliminary recommendations for public review, informed by the Model Study, the Engagement Study, and Tribal engagement completed to date. Consistent with the Recycling Reform Act, the recommendations focus on how a potential recycling refunds program could be designed to be convenient, accessible, equitable, and responsive to the needs of communities across Washington. The Model Study established the technical foundation for evaluating a statewide recycling refunds program, including analytical assumptions, convenience standards, a recommended redemption

network, and preliminary recommendations. The Engagement Study built on that foundation by gathering perspectives from residents, Tribal Nations, community organizations, local governments, recycling system operators, producers, retailers, and other interested parties on convenience, accessibility, equity, implementation, and conditions for success.

Engagement findings generally reinforced the overall direction of the Model Study while identifying opportunities to refine several recommendations and address implementation considerations that were outside the original modeling scope. The recommendations in this section retain the Model Study's core principles while incorporating insights from statewide engagement.

The recommendations are organized into four topic areas. The first three refine and strengthen recommendations developed through the Model Study, while the fourth addresses implementation considerations that emerged through engagement. Together, they integrate technical analysis with community perspectives and will be refined based on Phase II public comment, informational sessions, Tribal engagement and consultation, and any additional analysis before Ecology develops final recommendations for the Legislature.

Figure 26. Updated Preliminary Recommendations for Public Review



7.1 Defining Convenience

The Model Study used community-specific accessibility standards to evaluate convenience and develop the recommended redemption network (Scenario 4). These included drive-time benchmarks, transit access considerations, and capacity assumptions to support convenient statewide access.

Engagement findings reinforced this performance-based approach while broadening the definition of convenience. Participants emphasized that convenience includes not only travel time, but also operating

hours, reliability, accessibility, safety, ease of use, and proximity to places people already visit, such as retailers, libraries, community centers, schools, transit hubs, and public facilities.

Future modeling and program design should retain measurable, community-specific access standards while incorporating these additional convenience factors to better reflect participant experiences and support practical, equitable participation.

Figure 27. Overview of Recommendations for Defining Convenience



7.2 Redemption Site Placement and Management

The Model Study recommended a redemption network designed to provide convenient, accessible, and equitable service across Washington. Engagement findings reinforced this direction while emphasizing that sites should be locally appropriate, flexible, community-informed, and well integrated with existing recycling services.

Participants supported maintaining a mix of site types in appropriate commercial, mixed-use, and industrial areas, while tailoring placement and design to local land uses, travel patterns, community characteristics, and operational needs.

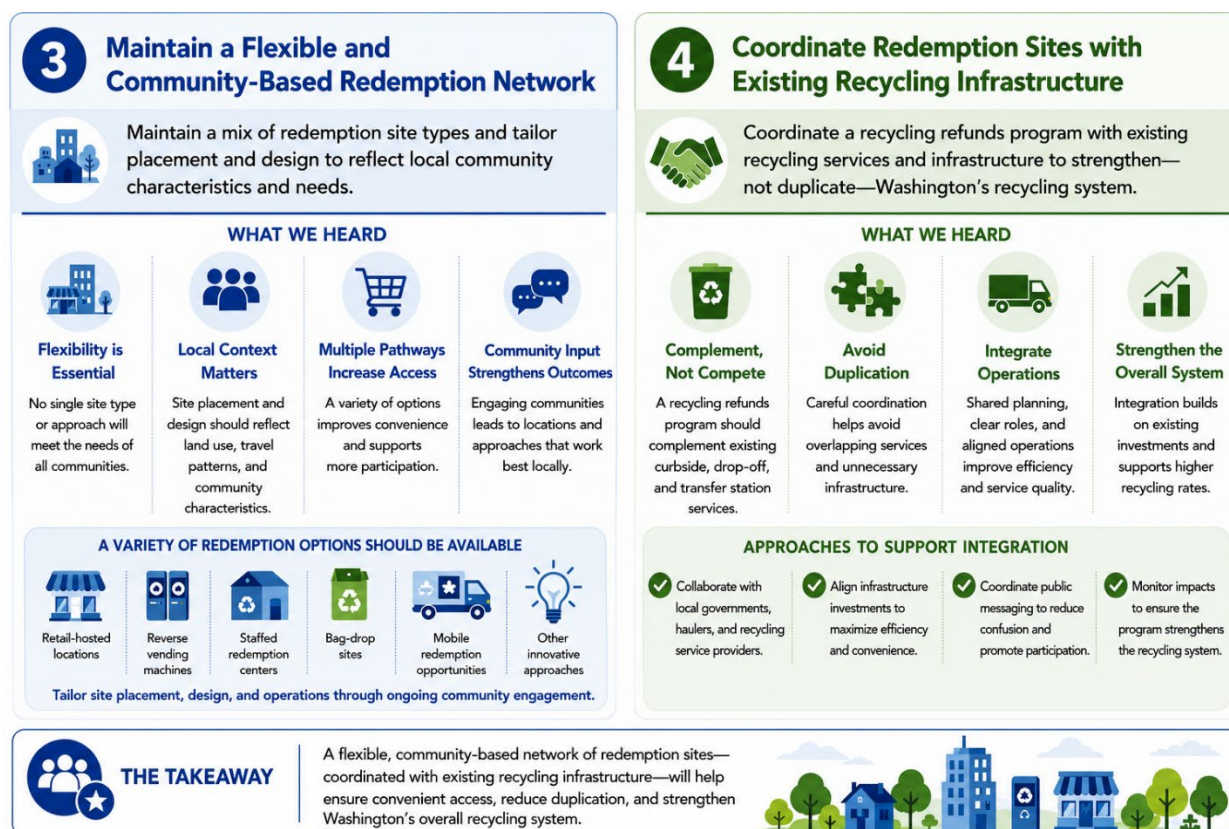
Future implementation should maintain multiple redemption pathways—such as retail-hosted locations, reverse vending machines, staffed centers, bag-drop sites, mobile options, and other approaches—because no single model will serve every community effectively.

Engagement also reinforced the value of co-locating redemption opportunities with existing recycling facilities where appropriate and coordinating any future program with Washington's broader recycling system.

Participants emphasized that a recycling refunds program should complement, not compete with, existing curbside recycling, transfer stations, drop-off programs, and recycling infrastructure. Future planning should coordinate infrastructure investments, operations, and public messaging to strengthen the overall system and avoid duplication.

Figure 28 summarizes two updated recommendations: maintain a flexible, community-based redemption network with varied site types, and coordinate redemption sites with existing recycling infrastructure through integrated planning, investment, and communication.

Figure 28. Recommendations for Redemption Site Placement and Management



7.3 Ensuring Equity

The Model Study recognized equity as a core design principle through community-specific deployment strategies, multilingual accessibility, mobile redemption opportunities, partnerships with community-based organizations, and other measures to improve participation across Washington. Engagement findings reinforced this direction while broadening the understanding of equitable participation beyond geographic proximity.

Participants emphasized that equitable access also depends on transportation options, disability access, multilingual communication, culturally responsive outreach, trusted community partnerships, and implementation approaches that reflect local needs.

Future program planning should continue tailoring redemption opportunities for urban, suburban, rural, remote, Tribal, overburdened, and underserved communities while incorporating these broader accessibility factors.

Figure 29 summarizes two updated recommendations: continue using community-specific equity strategies, and expand accessibility through trusted partnerships, multilingual communication, disability access, culturally responsive outreach, and other supports needed for meaningful participation across Washington.

Figure 29. Recommendations for Ensuring Equity



7.4 Recommendations for Planning, Reporting, and Accountability

While the Model Study focused primarily on evaluating the technical feasibility of a statewide recycling refunds program, engagement findings identified broader implementation considerations that extend beyond redemption network design. Across engagement activities, participants emphasized that successful implementation will require careful planning, clearly defined governance, ongoing evaluation, and transparency throughout program development and operation.

Residents, producers, retailers, local governments, recycling system operators, community-based organizations, Tribal Nations, and other interested parties raised questions about implementation costs, funding responsibilities, organizational roles, accountability, and long-term program management. Although these topics were outside the scope of the Model Study, they emerged across nearly every audience and represent important considerations as Ecology continues developing recommendations for the Legislature.

Participants across nearly every audience emphasized the importance of understanding implementation costs, funding responsibilities, and broader system impacts before implementing a recycling refunds program. Many requested additional evaluation of potential impacts on producers, retailers, consumers, local governments, recycling system operators, and Washington's existing recycling infrastructure to support informed legislative and implementation decisions.

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of clearly defining the respective roles and responsibilities of Ecology, the Producer Responsibility Organization (PRO), producers, retailers, local governments, recycling system operators, Tribal Nations, and other implementation partners. Clearly defined governance structures and transparent decision-making were viewed as essential for effective implementation and accountability.

Participants consistently recognized that implementing a statewide recycling refunds program will require ongoing evaluation and the ability to adjust over time. Engagement findings highlighted the importance of monitoring participation, operational performance, accessibility, equity outcomes, and community feedback while using those findings to improve program performance through adaptive management.

Together, these findings support a broader recommendation to establish a transparent implementation framework that promotes informed decision-making, clear accountability, and continuous program improvement.

Figure 30. Recommendations for Planning, Reporting, and Accountability



8.0 Conclusions

This Engagement Study evaluated assumptions, findings, and recommendations from the Recycling Refund Model Study through statewide engagement with residents, Tribal Nations, local governments, recycling system participants, retailers, producers, community-based organizations, and other interested parties. The study provides an important complement to the technical analysis by incorporating the perspectives, experiences, and priorities of those who would be affected by a potential recycling refunds program in Washington.

Overall, engagement findings strongly support the general direction of the Model Study and its recommended scenario. Across engagement activities, participants reinforced the importance of convenient and accessible redemption opportunities, equitable participation, multiple redemption site options, and approaches that reflect the differing needs of Washington's communities.

Engagement also identified opportunities to strengthen future planning and implementation. Participants consistently described convenience as extending beyond travel time to include operating hours, reliability, safety, accessibility, and the ability to integrate redemption into daily routines. Findings further emphasized the importance of tailoring implementation strategies to differences in transportation patterns, accessibility needs, community characteristics, and geographic context across Washington.

Implementation considerations emerged as a recurring theme across many stakeholder groups. Residents, local governments, retailers, producers, recycling system participants, community-based organizations, and Tribal Nations identified the importance of implementation planning, including governance, funding, coordination with Washington's existing recycling system, public education and outreach, trusted community partnerships, and ongoing program evaluation. Local governments and recycling system operators, in particular, emphasized system costs, siting, operational sustainability, integration with existing recycling systems and regulations, and long-term program management.

Taken together, these findings indicate that a recycling refunds program has the potential to improve recycling and reduce litter while supporting broader environmental goals if it is implemented through a transparent, community-responsive approach that prioritizes convenience, accessibility, equity, and long-term program effectiveness.

8.1 Questions for Public Review

Ecology is seeking public input on the preliminary findings and recommendations presented in this report. As you review the report and technical appendix, please consider the following questions:

- Do the preliminary recommendations appropriately reflect the engagement findings and community priorities identified through this study?
- Should any preliminary recommendations be modified, expanded, combined, or removed?
- Are there additional considerations that should be reflected in future program planning or implementation?
- Are there specific recommendations that may affect certain communities, geographic areas, or stakeholder groups differently?
- Are there additional implementation considerations that should be evaluated before final recommendations are developed?

8.2 Next Steps

This public comment draft represents an intermediate step in the evaluation process established under the Recycling Reform Act. The findings, validation results, and preliminary recommendations presented in this report are intended to support public review and discussion before preparation of the final legislative report.

During the public review period, Ecology will accept comments from residents, Tribal Nations, local governments, community-based organizations, industry representatives, and other interested parties. Feedback received through the public comment period, Tribal engagement, informational sessions, and other Phase II engagement activities will be reviewed and considered in preparing the final report.

The Recycling Reform Act Advisory Council will also review the engagement findings, validation results, and preliminary recommendations and provide input on potential refinements. Together, public comments, Tribal input, Advisory Council recommendations, and any additional analyses completed during Phase II will inform the final report.

The final legislative report will present the completed engagement findings, validation results, and final recommendations regarding a potential recycling refunds program. Ecology will submit the report to the appropriate committees of the Washington State Legislature in January 2027, consistent with the requirements of the Recycling Reform Act.

The engagement process demonstrated broad interest in improving Washington's recycling system and provided valuable insights to help ensure that any future recycling refunds program reflects the diverse needs, priorities, and experiences of communities across the state. Together, the findings from the Model Study and this Engagement Study provide a stronger foundation for legislative consideration by combining technical analysis with the perspectives of the people and organizations that would help implement and participate in the program.

8.3 Technical Appendix

Additional technical information supporting this report is provided in the accompanying *Technical Appendix*. The appendix includes detailed descriptions of the engagement methodology, survey instrument, interview guides, Community Connector activities, analytical framework, supplemental tables, and other supporting materials. The Technical Appendix is available on Ecology's website where the comment materials are posted.

9.0 Glossary

Accessibility – How easy it is for residents to reach and use redemption services. Accessibility may be affected by factors such as distance, travel time, transportation options, operating hours, language access, disability access, and site design.

Analytical Topic Areas – The ten main topics used to organize engagement findings and evaluate assumptions and recommendations from the Model Study.

Beverage Container Deposit – A refundable fee paid when purchasing an eligible beverage container. The fee is returned when the container is brought to a redemption location.

Community-Based Organization (CBO) – A nonprofit or local organization that serves and supports a specific community or population.

Community Connector – A community-based organization that worked with the project team to support outreach, engagement, and participation in specific communities.

Convenience – How easy and practical it is to use a redemption service. Convenience may include factors such as location, operating hours, wait times, safety, accessibility, and how easily container returns fit into daily routines.

Engagement Plan – A document that guided the goals, audiences, methods, outreach strategies, and analysis used during the Engagement Study.

Engagement Study – The Phase II study conducted to gather input from residents, organizations, Tribal Nations, businesses, and other interested parties regarding a potential recycling refunds program.

Environmental Justice – The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people in environmental decisions, regardless of race, income, Tribal affiliation, or other characteristics.

Equity – Making sure all communities have meaningful opportunities to participate in and benefit from a recycling refunds program, while recognizing that different communities may need different approaches.

Express Redemption Site – A redemption location where consumers can return containers and receive refunds through automated or account-based systems, usually with little or no staff assistance.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) – A policy approach that makes producers responsible for helping fund and manage the collection and recycling of their products or packaging.

Full-Service Redemption Site – A staffed redemption location where consumers can return containers and receive refunds directly.

Government-to-Government Consultation – The formal process used by state agencies to communicate and consult with Tribal Nations on policies, programs, or decisions that may affect Tribal interests.

Immediate Refund – A refund provided at the time containers are returned.

Interest Holder – Any person, organization, government agency, business, Tribal Nation, or other group that may be affected by or interested in a recycling refunds program.

Mobile Redemption Site – A temporary redemption service that travels to different locations on a scheduled basis to provide container return opportunities.

Overburdened Community – A community identified by Washington State as experiencing higher levels of environmental, health, or economic challenges than other communities.

Model Study – The technical study completed for Ecology that evaluated different recycling refunds system options and identified a preferred redemption network approach for Washington.

Producer – A company that makes, distributes, or sells beverage products that may be covered by a recycling refunds program.

Producer Responsibility Organization (PRO) – An organization created by producers to help meet Extended Producer Responsibility requirements.

Public Comment Period – A designated period during which the public can review a draft report and submit comments.

Recycling Reform Act (RRA) – Washington State's Recycling Reform Act, which directed Ecology to evaluate a potential recycling refunds program and established broader recycling system reforms.

Recycling Refunds Program – A system in which consumers pay a refundable deposit when purchasing eligible beverage containers and receive the deposit back when containers are returned for recycling.

Recycling System Operator – An organization involved in collecting, transporting, processing, or managing recyclable materials.

Redemption Location – A place where eligible beverage containers can be returned and refunds can be received.

Redemption Network – The collection of redemption locations and services available through a recycling refunds program.

Redemption Rate – The percentage of eligible beverage containers sold that are later returned through the redemption system.

Redemption Site Type – A category of redemption location based on how containers are collected and refunds are provided.

Refund Value – The amount of money returned when an eligible beverage container is redeemed.

Retailer – A business that sells beverages directly to consumers.

Scenario 4 – The preferred redemption network approach identified in the Model Study. Scenario 4 uses a mix of redemption site types intended to balance accessibility, convenience, equity, and implementation feasibility.

Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) – A tool developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that helps identify communities that may be more vulnerable to economic, environmental, or public health challenges.

Tribal Nation – A federally recognized Tribal government.

Underserved Community – A community that may face barriers to services, opportunities, participation, or engagement.

Washington Recycling Reform Act Advisory Council – The advisory group established under the Recycling Reform Act to provide input and recommendations related to implementation of the Act and the Recycling Refunds Program studies.