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## **2024 Recycling Ambassador Annual Report**

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## Our Mission

To bridge the gap between awareness and action by motivating people to reduce waste in their homes and workplaces.

## Program Background

The Recycling Ambassador (RA) Program provides training on waste reduction, recycling, composting, solid waste and effective communication skills through a six-week course, with one two-hour class each week. Participants receive a training handbook, engage in hands-on demonstrations, hear presentations from regional experts and go on a field trip to relevant sites. Typically, two courses are held per year in the spring and fall, at rotating locations throughout Dakota County. Due to staffing changes, only one course was held this year (spring).

After graduating, Recycling Ambassadors commit volunteering 30-hours help others reduce, reuse and recycle. Volunteers have staffed informational booths, made presentations and worked on special projects in their neighborhoods, schools and workplaces.

## Presentations and Field Trips

The course would not be successful without the support of industry experts to educate program participants.

### Presentations

- Week 1: Class introduction and history of waste
- Week 2: Waste reduction and reuse
- Week 3: Intro to recycling
- Week 4: Deep dive on recycling
- Week 5: Composting and food donation
- Week 6: Graduation and payback

### Presenters

#### Dakota County

Jon Buck  
John Exner  
Michele Tyburg  
Kristi Otterson  
Kirsten Wahlberg

#### Community Members

**The Mulch Store**, Jake Duame

**Reuse Minnesota**, Emily Barker

**Graduated Recycling Ambassadors:** Brian Raney, Kathy Kladstrup and Kandyce Thompson.

## Field trip

One field trip was offered to current and past graduates to the following locations:

- Recycle Minnesota, Lakeville (recycling facility)
- The Mulch Store, Rosemount (compost facility)
- Waste Management Landfill, Burnsville
- The Recycling Zone, Eagan (household hazardous waste)

## Communication

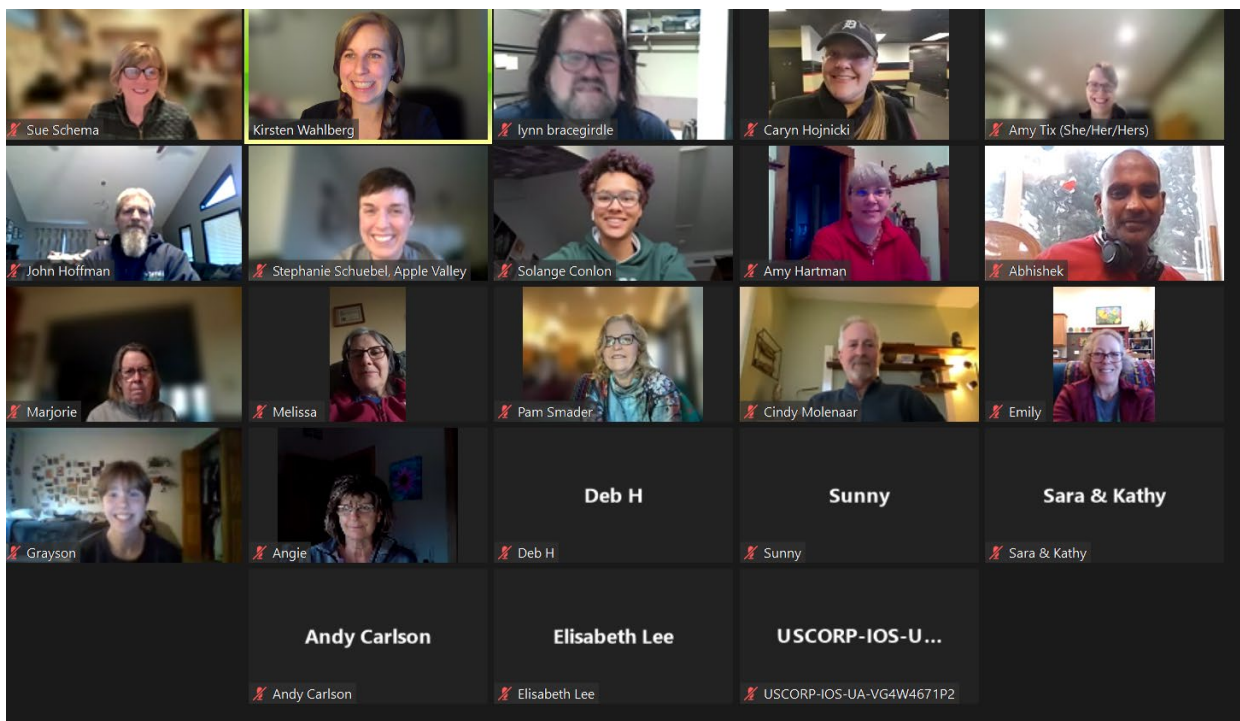
Dakota County provides ongoing support and resources to help graduates achieve their 30-hour volunteer hours. The county communicated reminders, program updates, education and volunteer opportunities through the following channels:

- Monthly e-newsletters
- Current Recycling Ambassador webpage
- Private Facebook group
- Occasional emails directly to RAs for last-minute volunteer needs

## Participants

### Spring 2024

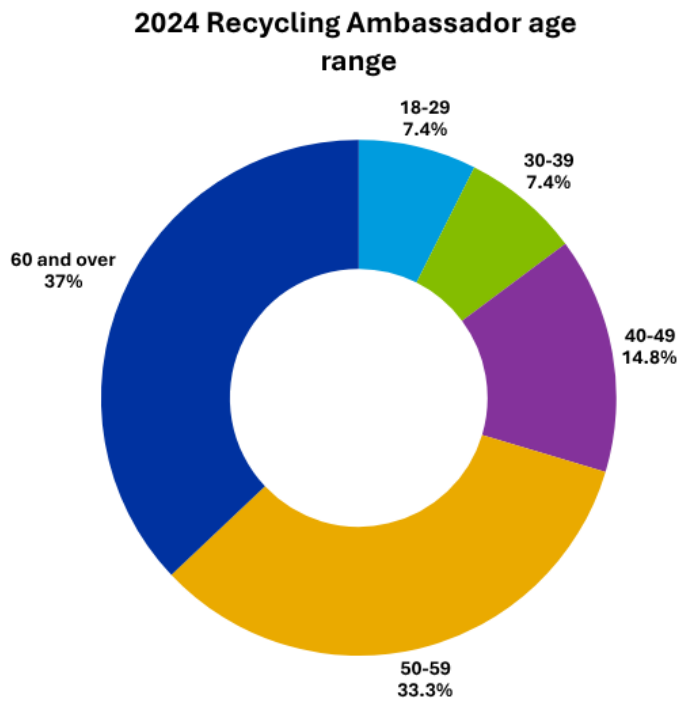
The spring RA course was held Tuesdays, March 19 – April 23 in-person and virtually via Zoom and had 29 participants. Of the 29, 24 graduated the program.



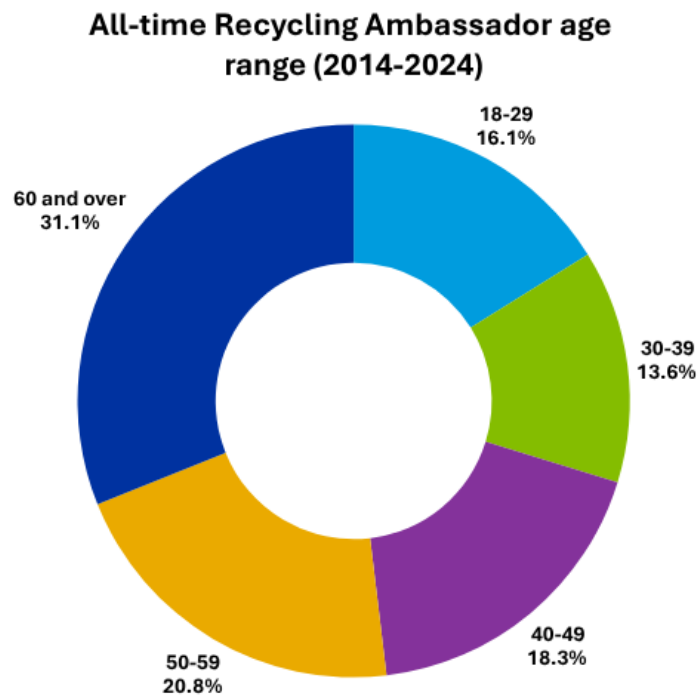
## Demographics

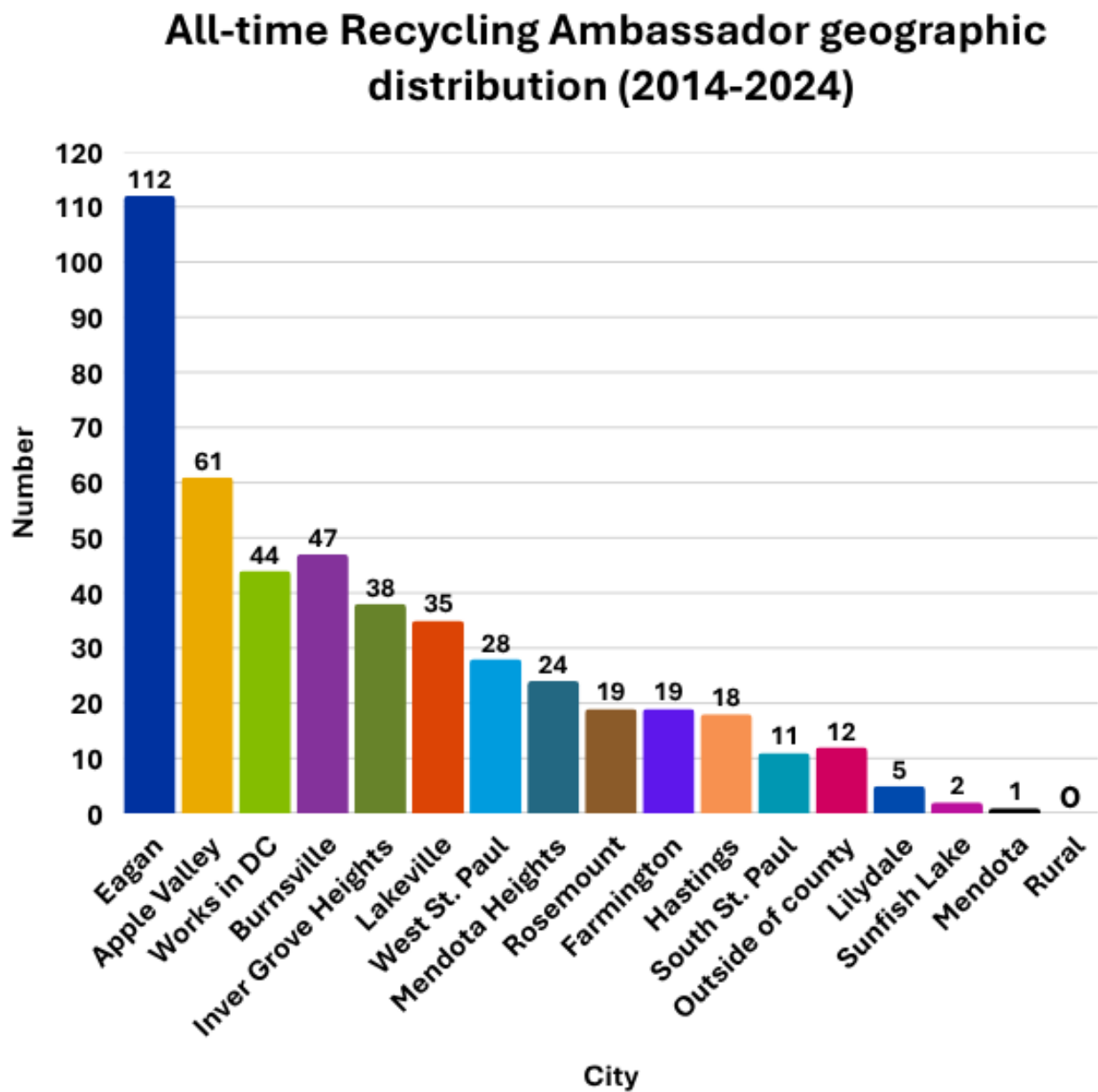
The participants in the 2024 RA program varied by age, background and where they live in Dakota County.

### 2024 age range



All-time age range (2014-2024)





## Knowledge

One of the main purposes of the RA program is to provide participants with the tools and knowledge to be successful volunteers. Participants fill out a pre- and post-class test to see if they gained basic recycling knowledge.

**2024 participants answered 83 percent of the answers correctly after the course compared to 74 percent correctly before.**

Recycling certain paper and plastic items are the most challenging for residents to understand based on anecdotal outreach by Dakota County staff and statistically significant surveys of residents. Two questions in the pre- and post-

class test focused on these items. Participants were asked to choose items in two categories that would go in a home recycling cart or dumpster.

**Most notably, in the pre-class survey, 41-percent of participants answered that shredded paper could go into the recycling carts. The post class survey showed 100-percent of participants understood that shredded paper cannot go into the recycling cart.**

Reuse is the first section of the Recycling Ambassador class. Participants learn that waste reduction and reuse come first on the waste management hierarchy, which describes how waste should be handled in ways from most favorable to least favorable.

**In both pre- and post-class surveys, majority of participants selected a recycling or disposal as an option for a couch instead of donation (reuse).**

While graduates demonstrated an increase in recycling knowledge, the results from this question may indicate that the curriculum needs adjustments to its waste reduction and reuse sections.

## Volunteering

A key component of the RA program is volunteering. RAs help support city and county staff expand programs and run events smoothly. This chart breaks down the yearly value of RAs in Dakota County. Hour is valued at \$34.79 (estimated by the [Independent Sector website](#)).

Year	RA Volunteer Hours	Hourly cost value	Total value	# Of Residents Engaged
2014	502.75	\$ 27.20	\$ 13,674.80	10,229
2015	637.5	\$ 27.20	\$ 17,340.00	10,451
2016	769	\$ 27.20	\$ 20,916.80	11,134
2017	716.75	\$ 27.20	\$ 19,495.60	7,812
2018	1087.18	\$ 27.20	\$ 29,571.30	10,290
2019	1244.26	\$ 27.20	\$ 33,843.87	12,345
2020	514.08	\$ 27.20	\$ 13,982.98	7,729
2021	562.5	\$ 29.95	\$ 16,846.88	3,140
2022	710.73	\$ 31.80	\$ 22,601.21	4,929
2023	1110.48	\$ 33.49	\$ 37,189.98	4,531
<b>2024</b>	<b>867.37</b>	<b>\$ 34.79</b>	<b>\$ 30,175.80</b>	<b>5,621</b>
<b>All time</b>	<b>8,722.60</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$255,639.21</b>	<b>88,211</b>

## 30-hour volunteer commitment

There is no deadline to complete the 30 payback hours. Dakota County staff recommend achieving those hours within a year of graduation, with the understanding that not all will be able to achieve 30 hours within the first year. Of those who graduated in 2024, 30-percent of 2024 graduates reported some hours, while three graduates completed their 30-hour payback commitment:

- Deb Holmen
- Sara Krotter
- Michelle Walsh



Eleven RAs from previous classes also met their 30-hour commitment:

- Mary Cunnien (2019 graduate)
- Sara Goodman (2018 graduate)
- Laura Grevas (2021 graduate)
- Candice Hojan (2022 graduate)
- Lindsey Hubred (2022 graduate)
- Mike Kawalek (2022 graduate)
- Sam Krahling (2023 graduate)
- Brenda Lawrence (2022 graduate)
- Jenelle Masterson (2022 graduate)
- Brian Raney (2023 graduate)
- Michele Tyburg (2023 graduate)