



Request for proposals (RFP): Residential recycling & organics (food scraps) message testing and evaluation

Posted: July 30, 2025

Questions and answers

A. Questions about using external research

1. Is the County open to utilizing evidence from the literature on recycling messaging for integration with findings from data collection?
2. Does the County anticipate recommendations to be based solely on findings of the survey and research, or would industry best practices and outside research also be considered when making recommendations?
3. Will messaging development based on research be part of this scope?

Answer: The County's priority is to complete the quantitative research with sufficient results within the project budget. If additional qualitative research that is applicable to our region can also be accomplished with the allowed budget, the County is open to that idea. The role of the Contractor is to test the County's existing messaging and provide recommendations (e.g., different terminology, images or icons) for improvements to ensure it resonates with the most county residents based on the data gathered.

B. Questions about missing contract documents and broken links:

1. There appear to be several important links in the RFP document (attached) that lead to the Dakota County website, but the pages display a "does not exist," message. Can Dakota County please provide active links to the following documents? If it is possible to provide these prior to the posting of responses (July 30), our legal team would like to review these as soon as possible:
 1. Standard Assurances
 2. Sample contract for professional services
 3. Insurance terms
2. Links in the RFP to the Sample Contract and Insurance Terms go to a Page Not Found on the website. Please provide.

Answer: Standard assurances, insurance terms, sample contract, and trade secret form have been reuploaded to the end of the RFP, pages 8-24. These are also reflected in the table of contents.

C. Questions about offering scope of work in different languages:

1. Will the selected contractor be expected to test messages in multiple languages?
2. Does the County anticipate offering the survey in languages other than English? If so, how many other languages are of interest, and which ones?
3. Will the selected contractor be expected to test messages in multiple languages?
4. Will the survey need to be offered in a second language such as Spanish? If so, is the County able to provide translation services for the survey questions and outreach materials?
5. Are there any equity or inclusion goals for this research project that we should be aware of that aren't explicitly stated in the RFP? And, specifically, what languages or translations have you used in past resident-facing research, and have those approaches effectively reached the communities you intended to engage?
6. Is the county able to provide a Spanish translator for the focus group to decrease barriers to participation?

Answer: The County is open to strategies that test messages in multiple languages, but the County is not expecting proposals to include this. There are no specific equity and inclusion goals for this project. The goal of the RFP is to obtain data that is generally representative of the demographic makeup of Dakota County residents using stakeholder engagement methodologies. If testing in multiple languages is part of the Contractor strategy, the County prefers that any translation services and coordination should be part of the proposal and reflected in the budget.

Last year Environmental Resources surveyed residents in Spanish as part of the public engagement process to inform revisions to the Solid Waste Management Plan. This effort yielded minimal results.

D. Questions about representative samples:

1. For the purpose of the requested scope, how is the County defining "representative sample"? A truly representative and statistically valid survey can only be achieved through randomized sampling (e.g., random-digit dial telephone/text-to-online surveys) or approximated through panel surveys. With the current scope of work, randomization is not possible with the methodologies requested, such as internet and social media. Please provide clarification as to the County's definition of representative sample.
2. Regarding the survey, does "representative sample" refer to statistical representativeness for certain demographics, or to a sufficient number of completed surveys?
3. Does Dakota County have a targeted response level?

Answer: Our goal is to achieve overall survey responses that are as close to our actual demographic classifications as possible, to limit weighting the response data in order to make the survey response demographic factors match those of the County as a whole. The

Contractor should propose an approach for achieving a well-represented survey (as described in the RFP or alternative methods) that will achieve the goals of the RFP and are within the project budget. Any service(s) that is/are needed to achieve proposal recommendations should be reflected in the proposed budget for this project.

4. Does the County have data on current recycling rates among residential properties? Are there particular groups of people you would like to engage through focus groups (e.g., groups with low recycling rates)?

Answer: The 2024 recycling rate for Dakota County is 33 percent for residential properties. The County does not have a further breakdown of residential data. The goal of the RFP is to obtain data that is generally representative of the demographic makeup of Dakota County residents.

5. What is the County's desired statistical viability percentage?

Answer: The County would like a 95 percent confidence interval or margin of error for the overall survey. For differences in respondent characteristics, the Contractor could indicate a "p-value" of 0.05 or less indicating that there is less than a 5 percent probability that differences observed between groups are due to chance.

6. What types of data correlation is the County anticipating? Meaning, is the County looking to see the specific data variables and their relationships (e.g., the analysis of answers about messaging as related to age/income/zip code/etc.).

Answer: As stated in the RFP section II. Scope of service, Dakota County staff will provide a draft list of cross tabs for analysis. The County would like to cross tab for the standard demographic/socio-economic categories (age, city, gender, race/ethnicity, average annual household income, etc.) as well as housing situation, with the understanding that running cross tabs means the margin of error for the population subgroups will be higher than for those in the overall survey results. The County will rely on the expertise of the Contractor.

The County recognizes it is difficult to field a sample that will yield results that are a good match for the County's actual population for every one of those categories. We accept that the margin of error will increase when we do crosstab analysis by specific demographic factors.

E. Questions about compensating participants:

1. Community Compensation Policy: Does Dakota County have a policy or preferred practice around compensating community members for their time and expertise when participating in surveys, focus groups, or other engagement activities associated with this project?
2. Budget Allocation for Engagement Incentives: Should any community compensation or engagement incentives be included within the total budget allocation, or are such expenses considered separately (or ineligible)?

3. Incentives for surveys and focus groups can increase participation. Does the County have budget for providing monetary rewards (e.g., gift cards, tickets to exclusive event, etc.)? And can we confirm any type of incentive is outside of the project budget and the direct responsibility of the County?

Answer: The County's policy does not allow monetary incentives for public engagement participation in this research project. Proposals can budget for healthy food options to be distributed at in-person events related to this research.

F. Questions about timeline:

1. What is the anticipated schedule and/or end date of this project?
2. What is the County's desired completion date? Is there an expected range from start to finish (e.g., 9 months) or are you open to what the consultant suggests?
3. Noting the anticipated Sept 10 start date, are you able to share any additional timeline expectations about key milestones, particularly expectations for when results and recommendations should be delivered?
4. What is the anticipated contract period? September 10 to?

Answer: The County has not identified a specific timeline for this project, and there is no event or meeting dictating its completion date. That said, the County would like to receive the final report by early 2026 to use for 2026 planning. Contractors may suggest a timeline in the proposal and describe reasons why it will take longer (e.g., different methodology), if needed.

G. Questions about methodology

1. Does Dakota County want an online survey and/or a phone survey? Or to have both options?
2. Is the County open to forgoing a survey in favor of doing comprehensive qualitative community-based data collection or other methods?
3. Focus group(s) – can the focus groups be conducted virtual (i.e., via Zoom meeting) or are they required to be in person? Virtual focus groups can allow for people to easily join from their home/office/etc., however not all residents will be comfortable with or have access to the necessary technology (i.e., computer or cell phone). Virtual groups are easy to record and transcribe, and can provide the ability to conduct more focus groups within a given budget. However, you lose some of the interactive nature of an in-person focus group meeting and virtual participants can get distracted by family/pets/activities at their location.
4. How do you envision the focus group information contributing to the research overall? Should it serve primarily as exploratory input to inform survey design, as context for interpreting results, or as a follow-up to help explain findings?

5. Are you specifically looking for focus groups, or are you open to other qualitative approaches that might be better suited to your goals? And is there a particular reason the RFP specifies one group — for example, to satisfy a minimum requirement or to test feasibility?
6. They mention a possible mailer – is the cost of print production and postage assumed as part of the \$90K budget or is the direct responsibility of the county (meaning - not in the project budget).
7. The RFP mentions a preference for a community-based social marketing approach. How do you expect to see that reflected in this research project? Have you used community-based social marketing strategies in past research related to recycling or organics messaging? If so, which approaches like prompts, commitments, incentives, or community partnerships have been most effective in gathering insights?

Answer: Proposals should recommend methods (as described in the RFP or alternative methods) that will achieve the goals of the RFP and are within the project budget. Any service(s) that is/are needed to achieve proposal recommendations should be reflected in the proposed budget for this project.

The Environmental Resources Department has used various aspects of the community-based social marketing (CBSM) model. Proposals that take a CBSM approach should detail reasoning behind the recommended methodologies.

8. They mention the County staff being responsible for drafting the set of survey questions – do they know how many questions will be in the survey?

Answer: Survey length and questions will be finalized by the County in collaboration with the Contractor based on the Contractor's recommendations.

H. Questions about similar, past projects:

1. What methods for sampling, outreach, or data collection have worked well in past research you've conducted or commissioned? Would you like us to continue using any of those methods to support comparability with earlier research? If so, please describe.
2. What has made supplier partnerships successful in past research projects you've commissioned? Are there specific ways of working or communication practices that have been especially effective with your team?

Answer: The Environmental Resources Department (Department) conducted research in 2019 to assess residential sentiments towards recycling in Dakota County and 2023 to understand reuse behavior among residents. Methodologies included surveys (phone, online) and focus groups (online). Both efforts yielded 600 respondents.

Both projects were led by the expertise of the Contractor with support from the County and included a variety of recruitment tactics.

The County has not yet surveyed residents on organics (food scraps) messaging.

Proposals should recommend methods (as described in the RFP or alternative methods) that will achieve the goals of the RFP and are within the project budget. Any service(s) that is/are needed to achieve proposal recommendations should be reflected in the proposed budget for this project.

I. All other questions:

7. The RFP details the roles of both the County staff and the selected contractor. Does the County anticipate that the selected contractor will provide input regarding solid waste messaging or program details? Or will the contractor's work focus on implementing outreach/surveying to evaluate messaging?

Answer: The Contractor is expected to assist in the development/finalization of survey questions and implement outreach/surveying of our current recycling and organics (food scraps) messaging and recommend any changes to our messaging based on the data collected.

8. Who will be the project manager for the County? Has this individual implemented/overseen similar projects on behalf of the County previously?

Answer: The County's project manager for this project is Environmental Specialist Rachel Kennedy. She is the staff lead for waste abatement communications and leads current standardized messaging for recycling and organics (food scraps) but has not participated in a similar research project on this topic. Environmental Resources staff will be the lead for this project with input from the Office of Communications and Public Affairs and the Office of Performance and Analysis staff.

9. Does the County have past experiences partnering with libraries to conduct focus groups? Will County staff be able to provide direct contact information for library staff to the contractor in order to collaborate on focus group promotion, recruitment, and/or hosting?

Answer: The County's Environmental Resources Department (Department) conducted research in 2019 to assess residential sentiments towards recycling in Dakota County and 2023 to understand reuse behavior among residents. Neither project involved partnering with the libraries for the focus groups because they were online. If in-person focus groups with the library staff or other county departments is recommended by the Contractor as part of the research strategy, this engagement will be facilitated by Environmental Resources staff.

10. Regarding recycling and organics collection, does Dakota County have existing partnerships or agreements in place with cities located within the County? What is the level of coordination with city staff related to messaging and communications for these services?

Answer: The County has partnerships and agreements with each suburban city to provide waste abatement messaging and services to their residents. Cities are required to use Dakota County's standardized recycling and organics (food scraps) messaging.

11. Acknowledging the invoicing requirements laid out in Section VII, would the County be open to fixed-fee billing, as an alternative?

Answer: Section VII. Budget of the RFP outlines the determined billing process. All invoices submitted need to reflect the actual services performed and the cost associated with them.

12. Is there additional guidance for how points will be allocated during proposal evaluation, more detailed than what is laid out in Section VI of the RFP?

Answer: No.

13. Given that the messaging to be tested comes from MN statewide standardizations, is there any expectation that messages should be tested with audiences outside of Dakota County?

Answer: The standardized messaging referenced in this RFP was developed by Dakota County. The messaging aligns with recycling and organics outreach guides for Minnesota. Messages need only be tested among Dakota County residents.

14. It would be helpful to hear more about County's commitment to "standardized outreach and education," (Section I). Is the expectation here that a single message and approach would be employed countywide? Best practices typically involve distinct, more tailored messages and approaches for certain audience segments (i.e. multi-family vs. single family residents, non-english speaking residents, underperforming recyclers, etc).

Answer: The County developed standardized recycling and organics (food scraps) messaging (including but not limited to terminology, instructions and images) based on pre-2019 stakeholder feedback. The purpose of this messaging was to simplify broadly reach Dakota County residents and to reduce confusion on what is accepted/not accepted in curbside programs. Material yes/no lists were reviewed by all material recovery facilities (MRFs) in Dakota County to affirm standardization. Some examples of our standardized messaging include:

- [Designated list of recyclables](#)
- [Designated list of organics \(food scraps\)](#)
- [Standardized educational messaging](#)

Proposals should include a plan to test the existing recycling and organics (food scraps) messaging among Dakota County residents to understand if our messages are resonating with the population that is representative of the demographic makeup of Dakota County.

15. Is the County targeting responses from residents age 18+ or are they looking to include school-age children?

Answer: The County is only seeking responses from residents ages 18 and over.

16. Is the County willing to utilize their social media channels and community organizations as part of the community-based social marketing strategy?

Answer: It is preferred that the County takes a supportive role on promoting the engagement opportunities of this project.

17. For message validation, would it be helpful to include multiple rounds of creative refinement and testing or are you anticipating a single round of validation?

Answer: Multiple rounds of engagement for creative refinement is not anticipated to be needed for this project. The standardized recycling and organics (food scraps) messaging was developed over 5 years ago and has been used across the county. The purpose of this RFP is to test the existing messaging on residents and offer suggestions for refinement after 5 years of use.

18. Just to confirm, our understanding of the RFP is that Dakota County will provide the messaging and the vendor's role is to evaluate it, not develop new messages. Is that correct?

Answer: Yes. The County has already developed standardized recycling and organics (food scraps) messaging that has been in-use for five years. The role of the Contractor is to test the County's existing messaging and provide recommendations (e.g., different terminology, images or icons) for improvements to ensure it resonates with the most county residents based on the data gathered.

19. To meet Dakota County's digital accessibility requirements for the research deliverables, are there specific standards or formats we should follow?

Answer: The final report and any digital outreach materials developed by the Contractor should comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 at a minimum Level AA conformance, or a more recent version.

20. How do you envision using the findings from this research? Will they primarily inform internal strategy, public outreach, county policy, and/or serve another purpose?

Answer: The findings from this research will inform any recommended improvements to our existing standardized messaging on recycling and organics (food scraps) collection in a way that best resonates with the public.

21. Can you provide a more detailed breakdown of your resident demographics?

Answer: Dakota County demographic information can be found on the [Community Indicators webpage](#).

22. Can you provide a more detailed view of your current outreach strategies, inclusive of tactics?

Answer: The purpose of this RFP is to test our existing recycling and organics (food scraps) messaging using engagement strategies proposed by the Contractor. Proposals should recommend methods (as described in the RFP or alternative methods) of achieving the goals of the RFP within the project budget. Any service(s) that is/are needed to achieve proposal recommendations should be reflected in the proposed budget for this project.

Some examples of how the County disseminates standardized recycling and organics (food scraps) messaging are through:

- Social media (Facebook, Instagram, X, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Nextdoor)
- Printed newsletters
- Electronic e-newsletters
- Targeted mailings
- Tabling
- Public presentations

23. What are your approximate current response rates per outreach method?

The purpose of the RFP is to test existing standardized recycling and organics (food scraps) messaging, not the County's outreach approaches. Response rates vary by outreach method and the County does not have this data gathered at this time. Outreach response rates can be shared with the awarded Contractor, if needed.

Other corrections

Page 4 of the RFP has been updated to reflect a correction to the project contact's email address (Rachel.Kennedy@co.dakota.mn.us). Aside from this change and the changes noted in section A of this document, no other changes have been made to the RFP.