



## CUSTOMER STORY | Nashville, TN

From combating high percentages of contamination to finding ways to reach its 110,000 households with information, the Metropolitan Government of Nashville, Tennessee, is making great strides in its waste and recycling work, reaching its goals and preparing for even more success in the future.



Throughout the city of Nashville and its surrounding county (known as the Metropolitan Government of Nashville – Davidson County), Metro's Solid Waste Services provides several ways for people to dispose of their trash and recyclables. This includes weekly, monthly and quarterly curbside collections for trash, recycling and brush, respectively, for people living in the Urban Services District of Nashville, as well as multiple drop-off sites for food scraps and other materials for composting, electronics and household hazardous waste.



But resources such as these are only valuable if the community knows they're there. Nashville discovered that many people in the community simply weren't taking advantage of their programs, and city leaders had not yet found the best way to communicate with the people they serve.



That all changed in March 2021 when Nashville rolled out its suite of digital tools for waste and recycling communication while reinvigorating other modes of education and outreach. Jenn Harrman, Zero Waste Program Manager for Metro Nashville Services, first implemented ReCollect's [Collection Calendar](#), the Metro's new [Waste Wizard](#) and a [Mobile App](#). Later they added a convenient list of drop-off sites and a [Waste Sorting Game](#), which they called "[Get Rowdy Recycle!](#)"



"ReCollect's tools give everyone in Nashville access to recycling info."

Jenn Harrman  
Zero Waste Program  
Manager for Metro  
Nashville Waste Services



“The Waste Wizard will tell you what's recyclable and how to actually recycle it.”  
Jenn Harrman  
Nashville

### Enlisting the right tools for the job

Harrman says a number of issues led Nashville to seek help providing robust program communications to the people they serve. “There's been a lot of changes in the recycling industry” for starters, Harrman says, from the items that may be recycled to the places in which the recycling actually takes place. But the Metro is using those changes “as an opportunity to start communicating with people in a more transparent way.”



They also needed to communicate about what goes in and what doesn't. “As many times as we say we only accept bottles, jars and jugs, people still ask about plastic tablecloths,” she says.

Taken together, industry changes and the need for more information provided an opportunity to double down and be “very clear that we only accept materials that actually are getting recycled with confidence in the markets that are currently available,” Harrman says.



**46%**  
Meanwhile, the Metro also faced a 46% recycling contamination rate in 2020.

All of this combined became the catalyst for Nashville to create a resource “we knew residents wanted,” Harrman says. It was all about “meeting residents where they are while still being able to provide accurate information.”

Nashville explored a variety of tools to provide its community with a materials search function and more. “It was something that my colleagues had wanted for longer than I've been here,” Harrman says.



Harrman says the other options Nashville was finding didn't have the functionality they needed. That changed when the team found the suite of ReCollect tools — and made the tools their own.

The app and suite are “very tailored toward Nashville,” Harrman says. “Even though it's a third-party product, it is a Nashville product,” she says. The interface includes a list of drop-off sites, information about what materials can be recycled in Nashville, and more.

### A winning combination

In addition to adopting ReCollect's suite of digital tools for waste and recycling communication in the spring of 2021, Nashville also focused on a number of other education and outreach efforts for its community, from a Facebook group and social media posts to mailers, webinars and workshops.

“We started off with making sure all of our materials were consistent,” Harrman says, including Metro's branding, images and the language they used to talk about the services. Metro Waste Services was sure to include a multi-language aspect in its messaging as well, Harrman says, adding that ReCollect allowed them to provide its materials in Spanish as well as English.



“By the middle of the summer of 2021, we had reduced that 46 percent contamination rate down to 28.6%,” Harrman says. “That was huge for us.”



"Even though we can't attribute the change directly, we know that ReCollect was part of it because of everything the tools enabled us to do in terms of outreach and education efforts combined," she says.

People throughout the district say the app and tools are quite helpful, especially when it comes to keeping track of the once-monthly recycling curbside collections. For instance, if you're a resident whose collection date is the first Monday of the month, it's easier to keep track of, Harrman says. "But if you're the third Thursday of the month, that gets really confusing for people."

Now people can sign up for reminders or simply access their schedules from wherever they are, versus relying on antiquated printed calendars, she says.

Metro Waste Services was also excited to introduce the Waste Sorting Game, Harrman says. They previously had used another game, but the Waste Sorting Game seamlessly fit with Metro Waste Services' other tools and efforts.

### A one-stop shop



Having multiple tools and modes of communication at their disposal has changed the game for solid waste and recycling communications in Nashville.

Before rolling out the tools, Harrman says they pushed the categories of bottles, jars and jugs to teach folks what could be recycled. Now, with tools such as the Waste Wizard, people can just look it up.

In addition to the Waste Wizard, Harrmann says the Collection Calendar "has been huge for folks because of the reminders."

These tools also integrate well with [hubNashville](#), a comprehensive customer service system that helps community members learn more about their city-county services, ask questions and find answers.

"We're able to send people to one place and know that they're going to be able to really get the information that they need," she says.

Harrman also enjoys the Metro Waste Sorting Game, which is "very Nashville," she says. "It looks like Nashville. We put our Ghost Ballet (public art installation) sculpture in there. I love that we have the game, and people love playing it, too!"

The community also seems to enjoy the app as a whole, says Nashville Metro Water Services Public Information Coordinator Kevin Schmidt. "It's been extremely helpful," he says.

In the event that someone isn't comfortable using the app, Schmidt says Metro Waste Services points them to the website to find the same information.



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For people without web access, they can call, and our staff will use the tools to look it up for them.”

Kevin Schmidt  
Nashville



Kevin explains, “as we go through all of our ways to reach people, the app is important for us to be able to meet people where they’re at, and I think that’s probably one of the biggest advantages for us (in) diversifying how we reach everybody that we serve.”

The Metro has also enjoyed the reporting capabilities of the tools, which help them quantify the success of their work. They can see how many website visitors and app users they’ve rallied and easily access this information to keep the city council and other entities informed.

## We’re all in this together

No matter the challenges a municipality or organization may face, Harrman says diversifying resources can go a long way. While the app is a “huge part” of the Metro Waste Services’ education and communication efforts, not every demographic has the technology or is comfortable using it to benefit from the tool.

“Don’t put all your eggs in one basket; make your resources as robust as you possibly can,” she says.

She also suggests looking for grant money as well as external partners and others “that can help you amplify your message or implement these kinds of resources.”



In the future, Harrman says, “we’re really trying to push toward more frequent, every-other-week recycling collection, which hopefully will happen in the near future.”

Using the app to convey that change in 2023 will be Nashville’s first chance to really see how the Collection Calendar and reminders can help communicate big service shifts. “I’m really excited about that,” Harrman says.

She’s is also excited to share information about Nashville’s work and their processes with other municipalities and organizations in the industry through conventions and organizations, such as the Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA).

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“Every municipality is different, and there are a lot of different ways to reach people. I’m happy to share our lessons learned with others, and it’s exciting to hear what other people are doing, as well.”

Jenn Harrman  
Nashville

### About Routeware

Routeware has been digitally transforming the waste and recycling industry for over 20 years. Our mission is to help waste and recycling leaders use technology to delight customers, improve operations, and protect our planet. Routeware solutions are used by smart cities and haulers in every US state, across Canada, and in the United Kingdom, benefiting over 100M people.

Routeware has acquired a number of leading waste and recycling technology companies in recent years including ReCollect Systems, Core Computing Solutions, EasyRoute, Webaspix, RouteOptix, and Andrews Software Inc.

Find out more at [www.routeware.com](http://www.routeware.com)



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