

July 31, 1998

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO: SAN JOSE ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

**FROM: PAUL GOODWIN  
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GLS Research**

**RE: Summary of Findings from Focus Group Research: Composting  
Focus Groups**

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**METHODOLOGY**

On June 29 and June 30, 1998, GLS Research conducted focus groups with residents of the city of San Jose. Participants were recruited from lists developed by San Jose Focus, a private facility located in Santa Clara. Participants were not informed in advance of the subject of the groups.

The groups loosely followed a discussion guide, which is attached with this memorandum. Written transcripts of the proceedings are also attached.

As with all focus groups, participants were not randomly chosen. The results of these groups are therefore not representative of a larger population (i.e., participant attitudes cannot be said to reflect the views of a majority of similar people) as would be the case with a quantitative methodology. Nevertheless, focus groups are of value in exploring the range of issues and concerns people have about an issue. They are also useful for understanding how people react, both intellectually and emotionally, when presented with information.

The purpose of the focus groups was to explore attitudes about and understanding of composting. The groups were used to test interest in particular responses to the city's involvement in encouraging composting and in selling compost bins.

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are two key findings from the focus groups:

- First, that San Jose residents are likely to be at least open to an appeal to compost as a way of protecting the Bay and improving the environment, and
- Second, that persuading people to compost is likely to be a hard sell, one limited to a relatively small fraction of the population unless the city embarks upon a widespread public education campaign to prepare and motivate residents to compost.

Participant interest in and enthusiasm for efforts that might help protect the San Francisco Bay was remarkable. This is, of course, consistent with what we have seen in countless previous focus groups and in many surveys we have conducted for the Department.

Notably, protecting the Bay and, to a lesser extent, reducing the need for landfills was seen as the best reason to compost. People seemed to be less interested in the benefits of composting for their gardens. Concern about the Bay was so pronounced that in both groups interest in composting went from the mild to enthusiastic after we began to discuss the potential effects of loose yard trimmings on the Bay.

To be sure, the potential impact of loose yard trimmings on the Bay is a complicated and difficult concept to convey, especially given the ongoing controversy about loose versus containerized yard trimmings collection.

Moreover, protecting the Bay was not a “top-of-the-mind” benefit of composting (i.e., it did not spontaneously occur to participants). In the first group, one person who was very knowledgeable about stormwater issues mentioned it well into the discussion. In the second group, I had to lead them through a thought process that took several minutes to complete before the group began to see what I was talking about. Hardly anyone will make the connection between composting and protection of the Bay without considerable assistance via some kind of public education effort (similar to what the city did in the water flow campaign).

The way people talked about why they liked to garden and the potential impact of composting on the garden also supports the notion that the city might successfully couch its appeal to compost in more global, environmental terms. People expressed a strong, personal connection to their gardens. Participants said they liked the sense of accomplishment and completeness that gardening offered them. Some said that the flowers and vegetables in their garden felt like "*family*" to them. One said that she "*loved the dirt.*" In similar terms, participants also began to talk about how composting helped recycle organic material in the garden. Some talked even more globally about how composting helped connect people to the earth, and helped individuals become part of a larger cycle of the earth.

Sentiments like these suggest that composting, like recycling, can be viewed and promoted as something that an individual can do to make a difference and help the environment. One participant aptly called composting a "*baby step*" forward from recycling, requiring more work, but also promising more rewards.

Despite all this, my sense, as noted above, is that composting will be a hard sell. Several considerations lead me to this view. Perhaps most fundamentally, initial reactions to composting indicated limited familiarity with the subject matter. Several people in each group had no idea what the term composting means (even the term "mulch" was unknown to a number of participants). In addition, many did not know why you would want to compost or what it involves, including what goes in it, how it is made, or what you would do with it.

Second, what they did know or think about it was generally quite negative. They were concerned about smells, rats, disease, hassle, and lack of room. The recent problems with viruses at the city's Guadalupe compost facility was well known to many people, and filled them with concern.

Perhaps because of that negative publicity, many people, and especially the women in the groups, felt concerned about the safety of compost. They did not want to touch it, some due to the possibility of disease (or even maggots) and some because they felt it would be somehow gross and icky (some did not care for gardening or getting their hands dirty in general). This was especially the case, at least for a few women, when it came to the use of worms. (There was also confusion about when you would use worms and when you would use a regular composter.)

Another concern was that the compost bin would be inadequate to handle the volume of yard trimmings that they generate each week.

While we did not hear many complaining that the process sounded like too much work, we did hear people wondering why anyone would go to the trouble of composting. Why not just buy organic compost? Or, more commonly, how would you use it anyhow?

Third, while negative images and concerns about composting were top-of-mind, participants did not talk about the benefits of composting until I prompted them. As noted above, the environmental benefits of composting did spark genuine enthusiasm among participants once the issue surfaced. Even the benefits of compost to the garden captured some attention (two participants had compost bins in their backyard and impressed their groups with the beneficial effects of compost on their flowers and tomatoes, suggesting the power of testimonials in building acceptance). Nevertheless, the benefits of composting were neither top-of-mind nor readily understood, indicating the magnitude of the education effort that will be required to persuade people to compost.

Fourth, several participants expressed suspicion about the city's motivation to encourage composting and sell bins. A constant refrain was that people might feel cheated somehow if they actually reduced their curbside yard trimmings but received no rate reduction from the city. The notion of composting reminded some of their initial reaction to Recycle Plus: the city asked them to do more work, experience less convenience and more hassle, and pay more for the privilege. Six years later, most people seem to have come to accept Recycle Plus as a good thing (several told anecdotes about how they thought they would never be able to fit their trash in the smaller garbage cart when the program started, but now it's "*no big deal*"). Still, their perception that they should not be asked to do more given previous experience could be readily detected in their voices.

A few older men felt that the city's interest in composting was probably due to some snafu or to corruption. One participant suggested that perhaps the city screwed up the yard trimmings collection and can't handle the volume, so they want us to compost to bail them out. Another offered the theory that the composting drive was the result of some closed-door deal between the politicians, the bureaucrats, and the garbage collection companies).

Finally, participants did not recognize that the cost of the composting bin the city sells is a good deal for local residents. The city needs to be explicit in telling people that it is selling the bins at well below the retail price – because the city bought in volume and is selling it at cost – and is not making a "*profit*," as one man accused the city of doing.

All this suggests that composting is going to be a hard sell except to those who are already enthusiastic gardeners or zealous environmentalists. The challenge will be to expand interest beyond these (still relatively small) groups.

To accomplish this goal, the city is going to have to educate residents about what composting is and what benefits it brings. My sense is that this campaign should begin with only two assumptions: people care about the environment; and like to garden. When it comes to knowledge about what composting is, how it benefits the garden, how it can benefit the environment, and what you do with compost, my guess is that 90 percent of local residents will be ignorant.

Two modes of communication with residents will be important:

- Via the mass media to educate people about what compost is and why it is important, and
- Via personal demonstrations at places where people go who are interested in such things (e.g., Home Depot, Orchard Supply, nurseries, etc.).

The mass media would be designed to transmit general and fundamental messages about composting: it's good for the earth, it's good for the Bay, it's good for your garden, it's something you can do personally to make a difference. There is even the possibility of using humor to play off people's sense that the compost is somehow yucky.

The goal of the mass media would be to bring residents to the point where they at least have a basic familiarity with the concept of composting, and a sense of how it might help the Bay and the environment in general, as well as their garden.

The personal demonstrations, obviously, would be designed to help educate people about the next step: how specifically to compost. Presumably, the audience for these demonstrations would be considerably larger if communication of introductory information has reached a sizable segment of the city's population in advance.

In addition to personal demonstrations, the city may also want to consider including more detailed instructions with the compost bins. Indeed, participants had a clear expectation that such instructions would be available. These instructions might be in the form of a video (but don't charge extra for it – that was seen as being nicked and dimed), brochures, a web site, etc. People did not like the idea of bill inserts or mail – they tend to dismiss such materials.

## OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

### City's Trash and Recyclable Collection Program

Respondents were asked their likes and dislikes about the Recycle Plus program. Several participants complained that the bins are too small and that recycling requires too much work. Even worse, according to participants, the introduction of the smaller bins and the Recycle Plus program was accompanied by higher prices (i.e., larger bills):

*"The price went up; the size of the garbage can went down. I got three things that they wanted me to take my time to start separating all my garbage."*

*"I agree with you, too. When we had this time to recycle it, you had to do a lot more work to recycle. We started doing that; then they raised the bill."*

*"I was in agreement with the recycling program. The thing that got my pique was that that I was going to have to pay more to do it."*

While some complained, others were enthusiastic about the Recycle Plus program:

*"I think it's a great program. When we moved here five years ago, it was a week before it had switched over. There was a lot of complaints running around in the neighborhood. I couldn't figure out why they weren't doing it. How ridiculous to throw all this stuff away! I think it works great. I like the bins."*

*"At first when we started the recycling program, we filled like...three, four garbage cans. I couldn't believe this. I said, 'how are we going to fit everything in this one little black can with all the garbage?' But it's amazing how after we started sorting things out, everything fit."*

Another complaint mentioned by several participants revolved around the way the yard trimmings are picked up:

*"Oh, just the yard waste in the road. You sweep it up once, put it in a pile. Then they come by and spread it all over the road. Then you sweep it up again. Half the time the pile is just as big as it was."*

*“Eats up the streets, I guess.”*

*“They just carry it all down the street. Drag it.”*

*“Yeah, it’s just a huge mess and it’s digging up the roads.”*

*“They will take that big scooper and scoop everything in one pile. If it’s in front of your house, you’ve got all the neighbors junk that has to be picked up. It’s very annoying, because I’m sweeping up everybody’s stuff.”*

But again, others appreciated the yard trimmings collection service:

*“It amazes me how clean they do get it. Especially when its grass clippings.”*

*“That’s a great service, because every week you can put all this stuff out.”*

Participants were asked what size garbage cart they had and how full it typically became each week. Most had the small (32 oz.) size cart; about half said their cart was typically three-quarters full, while half said it was usually full.

Participants were asked if they ever bought extra garbage stickers. A couple in each group believed that they had.

Respondents were also asked what percentage of what goes in their garbage cart is food waste and kitchen scraps. Most said 25 percent to 50 percent.

Most participants said they just throw their yard trimmings out in the street, but a couple professed to throw a small amount in their garbage cart.

## **Gardening**

Most respondents said they liked to garden. People pointed to a variety of reasons for liking to garden, including the exercise, being outdoors, making the house look better, etc. But the most common and compelling reasons for liking to garden were more abstract, emotional, and even spiritual. Expressions like the following were typical:

*“Feels like an accomplishment.”*

*“Pride of ownership.”*

*“Soul-satisfying.”*

*“Feel of the dirt.”*

*“Kids can see something grow and eat it,” Like to watch things grow.”*

*“Taking care of the earth.” “Organic.”*

*“Well, it’s something you have to do. You see the end product. It’s a joy when it’s over.”*

*“It’s the achievement. Then afterwards, you get to enjoy it for quite a while, hopefully.”*

*“I like starting to watch the things grow. There is a kind of transference, almost like you have for a pet.”*

*“It’s getting to take on almost like a family member, all these little plants you’re taking care of growing. It’s kind of weird.”*

*“It’s a psychological experience of taking care of the earth and you get something growing. Pretty soon, there is something you can eat or a pretty flower. Watching it go through the seasons.”*

Not everyone loved to garden:

*“I don’t enjoy it. There is nothing about it that I enjoy. It’s just work. If I’ve got the time to garden, I’ve got the time to go hiking or riding or something. I don’t want to be digging in the dirt.”*

*“I had enough dirt as a kid in South Dakota. I don’t like to do it anymore.”*

About half of the participants had a vegetable garden. Most of the respondents shared the gardening tasks with a spouse or child.

## **Composting**

Several respondents attempted to define composting when prompted, but only a handful had a strong understanding of what it involved. Most had only a vague understanding of what it was and how it's done, but almost everyone was reluctant to admit this. One person in each group actually did compost and one person in each group had composted in the past.

Initial reactions to the idea of composting ranged from cool to outright negative. Participants were concerned about the smell, whether there are health risks, insects, allergies, the space required to do it, the amount of work it would require, and the time required to do it. In fact, participants turned out to have many questions and misgivings about composting, which representatives of the San Jose Environmental Services Department answered for them after the groups.

On the issue of health risk, one respondent in the first group mentioned health problems that had occurred at the Guadalupe dump due to composting. Three participants had heard of the incident. This issue also surfaced in the second group during the discussion of the city's campaign to encourage composting. The following exchange occurred:

*"I know living close to Guadalupe landfill, there was a problem with the...air, was that right?"*

*"I think that was right. I think...people were having problems with respiratory and everything else."*

*"Airborne pathogens."*

*"Right. They were testing people when we first moved here. It was a big concern. The smells and everything. Now, if everybody starts to do something like this, how does that raise that type of a risk if you're having it right there in your yard?"*

Also raised was a recent incident of a woman who contracted flesh-eating bacteria while working in her garden.

Several respondents were concerned about the amount of space required for the compost bin:

*"It just plain takes up space."*

*"I think space is the big thing. There is no way we could do that in our place. ...I think to do it properly, I think you need a good sized area to do it."*

*"For me, I'm not that interested, because of the size of the yard we have...If I had more land and we have two dogs...that already get into everything...So it just doesn't seem viable."*

*"I would rather do that (buy it) than having it cook in my backyard. I wouldn't want to dedicate part of the yard to that. The yard is not that big."*

After I defined composting for them and the subject was discussed a bit, the following comments were typical:

*"Yeah, it's sort of yucky. I wouldn't do it. I mean to add the food to it. But as far as the trimmings and stuff, I guess if we had to, I would."*

*"Is it a breeding ground for insects like cockroaches and things like that?"*

*"Will pets be attracted to it and drag it all over the yard."*

On the subject of what compost would feel like, respondents said the following:

*"Warm but not fuzzy."*

*"I see mush."*

*"I wouldn't want to handle it. Let's put it that way."*

*"I guess it's something you don't want to play in."*

*"Wet and soggy."*

*"Mulchy."*

Most participants (especially the women) did not express a high degree of fondness for worms or for the use of worms in composting:

*"It sounds disgusting to me."*

*"As long as my kids don't go play in them (the compost bins)."*

*"I have lots of them (worms in my garden), but I don't like them."*

*“Just regular worms don’t bother me...but I have visions of like maggots. We’re talking flies...We’re talking garbage. The flies lay eggs. That could be a concern.”*

*“For me, worms, I wouldn’t handle them. So I myself wouldn’t do it.”*

*“So what do you do with all these extra worms that multiply.”*

Some respondents were skeptical about the benefits of composting and the costs of doing it:

*“It’s something that I wouldn’t be using maybe for a year so I’m not seeing any immediate benefits coming from it. So I’m not strongly motivated.”*

*“You don’t know the difficulty and the problems don’t seem to outweigh the benefits. At least that’s my view...My question is what is the benefit of doing it? If you get your garbage down to where you really don’t need to have it picked up for a week, I’m still paying for it. So why should I bother doing it?”*

*“...you (the city government) are benefiting from the dollars that come from that recycling. You recycle more, but it costs us more.”*

## **Reasons to Compost**

Having expressed their initial reactions to composting and having gained a better understanding of composting and the process of doing it, participants were asked to turn their attention to considering the potential benefits of composting. Top of mind mentions by the first group included:

- Less garbage goes into landfill
- Benefits your yard (*“more natural”, “can use it to fertilize”*).
- Benefits the Bay (*“Well, you’re sending a lot less down the garbage disposal, too, which is going into our sewer system. That’s a real problem right now for the South Bay”*).
- Reduces what goes into storm drains and, consequently, flooding.
- Might lower the garbage rate (bill) — (*“They’re collecting less and processing less. I know it’s not going to happen, but...”*).

Top of mind mentions by the second group were:

- Benefits your yard (*"My garden would be healthier"*).
- Less garbage (could use smaller can and save money).
- Help the environment (wouldn't have to use as much fertilizer; save on gas if trucks don't have to pick up the yard trimmings).

The discussion of the first group centered primarily on the issue of how yard trimmings, chemicals, and other foreign matter make their way to the Bay.

The second group had to be prompted on the benefits related to less landfill and the Bay. However, once they grasped the issue of how composting could reduce pollution in the Bay, they demonstrated concern about the issue. After one knowledgeable participant explained how yard trimmings travel to the Bay, other people began asking why the city wasn't doing something to prevent this. On the issue of landfill, one participant was of the view that the waste would breakdown anyway over the long-term. But others had their doubts:

*"I have my doubts they're going to get rid of the compost."*

*"You worry about other contaminants that are in there. You could be breeding super bacteria or something. Who knows?"*

Participants were asked if saving money that would otherwise be spent on commercial soil amendments was a benefit of composting. In general this was not seen as a major benefit. Several said that they did not spend all that much on soil amendments. One woman noted that when she tried to compost in the past, friends asked her why she didn't just go out and buy fertilizer for five bucks. A couple of participants answered that there would be environmental reasons (ecological, recycling nitrogen back into the soil) for composting rather than buying fertilizer.

The one respondent in the first group who had composted noted that he used the compost to keep weeds down. Others were not generally aware of this benefit (in fact, a couple of people thought compost would make your weeds grow higher), but seemed impressed by this.

Participants were asked if they saw in composting a benefit to not having to take their yard trimmings out to the curb the night before trash collection. A few people suggested that this would be a welcome benefit, but, in general, reaction to this idea was somewhat ambivalent. One person objected:

*“Then the other part I can’t imagine is this huge thing of yard waste. Like I said, every week I have a garbage can full that I dump out. How fast does it break down? How many am I going to have of those?”*

## **Reactions to Reasons to Compost**

It was clear that the most powerful reason to compost was to protect the Bay from pollution rather than to improve one’s own garden. Participants admitted that they would have been unlikely to accept or understand the argument that composting would help protect the Bay without the benefit of the proceeding discussion. After engaging in the discussion, however, most felt that they understood the connection.

Having considered reasons to compost, respondents were not charged up to go out and compost, but several expressed an interest in trying it. One said that composting is more natural (*“It seems more of going back to nature, so in that I guess my interest is piqued.”*). Another said he already planned to do it. A third said she was *“interested in learning more”* and was *“concerned about the environment.”* One respondent said:

*“The real reason why I do so much recycling, I believe that they want to make a better world for my children and grandchildren.”*

## **City Program**

Participants were asked why they think the city is interested in encouraging people to compost. Several pointed to a desire to reduce costs and work:

*“I would say it’s the money and processing”*

*“Less work for them.”*

*“They’re (the city) just collecting a lot more yard waste and clippings than they ever planned on when they started the program. They’re having a hard time handling it. So they would like us to keep it in our yards, let it build up in our yards.”*

*“Again, what’s our benefit for doing it? Are they going to lower prices on garbage (so that) you don’t have to have a pick up each week if you don’t need it?”*

However, others focused the discussion on the Bay and environmental reasons:

*“If you don’t find a way to do something about the Bay, then you’ll have to find an alternative way to do something about it. It might be more cost prohibitive...there is probably a law or something that the Bay has to be this X clean by a certain date...so we can do it by composting in our yards or we can find another way to do it.”*

*“The city is under a mandate, not just the city but the county, to reduce the volume amount of liquid that’s going into the Bay. Every time you turn your garbage disposal unit on, you have to turn the water on. So you’re wasting water in addition to all the vegetation matter that you’re shipping down.”*

*“...the population is going to increase by a lot of people. Just maybe they want to try to educate the people now to start controlling it in case it really gets out of hand.”*

*“I would like to think it’s on the positive way that people take responsibility in our environment. What we’re doing is just like the step toward recycling. Now we’re one more step, taking those baby steps instead of let’s do all this. To educate people slowly and this is the next step.”*

*“Yeah, San Jose might be a leader in something, doing something about it.”*

On the issue of what would actually motivate people to compost, one participant suggested that she would need to know more than the benefits; she would need information on how to do it. Other respondents also pointed to the benefits and education as possible motivators:

*“...I think everybody wants detail. They really do care about the environment. They want to do their part. I think education (is the key)...Tonight I think it’s an education for us to say it is important for those reasons.”*

*“What would be motivational to me would be if the city just came out and said, ‘everybody compost, no matter what’. Our trash volume would be cut by 25 percent or something like that. That would be real motivational to me. So maybe I wouldn’t want to get out of composting, because I would know it was doing some overall good. I have no idea whether this will reduce my waste products.”*

Participants of the first group felt that \$45 to \$60 was an excessive price for a compost bin. People were suspicious of the city's motivation and felt the city was trying to profit. Some reiterated their displeasure of having to pay more for their good citizenship and the extra work that recycling entails. They felt that they would end up having to pay more if they composted. Reactions included:

*"I would be interested in buying one but not at those prices."*

*"Yeah, make your own. There's all different ways to make your own."*

*"Because it's government driven, you're suspicious."*

*"I wondered who was getting paid off with the city to push this. What manufacturer paid to move the city to start this?"*

*"If they want to propose it as a win-win...make it affordable."*

*"They're not going to lower your garbage bill."*

*"I don't want to pay anymore."*

*"Well, they asked you to recycle which I like doing. Plus it makes me feel good that I'm doing something for the environment. But if I'm lowering my amount of garbage, why am I still paying (the same as if) I wasn't recycling? I don't think that's fair."*

The \$45 to \$60 price was viewed as more expensive than what it would cost to buy the bin retail at a place like Home Depot. A couple of people felt that \$20 would be a more appropriate price. However, resistance to having to spend any money on it was strong in this group. A few participants suggested that the bin should be free or that people should be given an opportunity to use the bin (compost) on a trial basis.

The second group was told that you could buy compost bins from the city for about \$25. Upon looking at the city's brochure, several suggested they might be interested in buying one and trying to compost.

Participants in the second group felt that the brochure was informative, although it was suggested that education (*"like we did tonight"*) would probably be necessary to get someone to call the phone number on the brochure. Participants in the first group, however, were not at all satisfied with the information on the brochure and still had a lot of questions about the cost of the bins and about composting in general. These included:

- Whether the worms cost extra.
- Whether you can pay for the bin in installments.
- Whether there was some “kind of catch”.
- How do you compost?
- What goes in the worm bin?
- Brochure doesn’t say anything about the benefits of composting.
- Why should I want the worms?
- Cost is not clear.
- How much space do the bins take up?
- How long does it take before it starts to smell?

Participants were asked to suggest the most convenient ways for them to receive information about composting. Reasons given included:

- TV.
- Public service TV.
- From your kids (they learn about it at school)
- The Internet (information about where to go could be provided in bill or in radio or TV adds).
- Demonstrations at a Fair.
- Newspapers/magazines.
- A stand at Orchard Supply or Home Depot.
- Nurseries.
- Workshops conducted by the city.
- Neighborhood demonstrations.

Some respondents did not feel that mail would be an effective vehicle for getting the word out, because there is too much junk mail already. People were somewhat receptive to the idea of a video, but thought it should be included in the price of the bin, *“so people do not feel like they’re being nickel and dimed.”*

## Marketing Exercise

Participants of each focus group were divided up into two groups and asked to come up with a marketing campaign for encouraging people to compost. Specifically, participants were to come up with a catchy slogan and a reason they might use to persuade others to compost. Some groups came up with more than one slogan.

- Be organic, use nature's Miracle Grow.
- Cut the grass and save the cash.
- There is cash in your trash.
- The compost wave will save the Bay.
- Save the Bay the compost way.
- It helps your pocket and your soil.
- Worm your way to a better life.

As the some of the slogans indicate, participants felt that it would help to stress the financial benefits of composting. One group had the idea that people could save money by composting, because they would have less trash and would therefore need a smaller, less expensive bin. Three of the four working groups stressed that saving the Bay was the best reason they would give to compost. One added that emphasizing this to kids in the schools would be an effective way to affect the thinking of both children and their parents.

Finally, one group was asked what would get them off the couch if they were listening to a radio ad and get them interested in composting. One person said he might get motivated if her heard that composting helped with weeds. Another said that mention of both the beneficial effects to the garden and the environmental issues would have the most impact. Several were skeptical that a particular ad spot could have the desired effect.

**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**COMPOSTING FOCUS GROUPS:**

**SAN JOSE ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES  
DEPARTMENT**

Composting Focus Groups  
San Jose ESD  
July 15, 1998

- I. Introductions
  - Along with other items, ask if they live in home or apt/townhouse.  
If MFD, ask if they have access to a garden area they can use
  
- II. City's Trash and Recyclable Collection Program
  - A. Tell me what you like and don't like about the way trash and recyclable materials are collected. (Keep discussion brief)
  - B. What size garbage cart do you have? (32 gal, 64, gal, 92 gal?)
  - C. How full is your garbage cart most weeks: overflowing, full, three quarters, half, less than half? (Go round table and record)
  - D. Do you ever buy extra garbage stickers?
  - E. How much (what percentage) of what goes in your garbage cart is food waste and kitchen scraps?
  - F. How much (what percentage) of what goes in your garbage cart is yard trimmings? (Make sure they know what I mean by yard trimmings).
  
- III. Gardening
  - A. Anyone like to garden? What do you like about gardening?  
Probe for how it makes people feel, what kind of satisfaction they get out of it?
  - B. (Quickly ask): Does anyone compost or has anyone composted in the past?
  
- IV. Composting
  - A. Ask for definition of composting. If not properly defined say:  
"Composting is where you put yard trimmings and kitchen waste in a bin or pile, and water it and turn it over occasionally. It heats up, and after a few months turns the materials into compost you can use in your garden."
  - B. What is your reaction to the idea of composting?
    - 1. Does it sound like something you would want to do?
    - 2. Why yes, or why not?
  - C. How does composting work? (Probe for level of knowledge and awareness?)

## Compost Discussion Guide

1. What can or should you put in the compost, and what should you avoid putting in the compost?
  2. What kind of work does it involve?
- D. What do you think compost would feel like? Would it be pleasant feeling or not?
- E. What would it smell like? Does it smell good or like rotting things?
- F. Anyone heard of making compost with worms?  
If not, say: You can use worms to break down kitchen scraps and food waste into compost. The worms eat the food and then excrete castings which make excellent compost.”
- Reactions? Would you try using worms to make compost from kitchen scraps, or not? Why?
- G. What’s your reaction after hearing more about it: does it sound like something that is fun, or something that is a hassle?
- V. What are Some Reasons to Compost?
1. Ask for reasons
  2. Probe for: good for garden  
If not mentioned say, “Compost is one of the best materials you can use to improve the soil in your garden. It helps fertilize the soil, hold in moisture so the soil does not dry out, and protect against weeds.”
  3. Probe for: By making it yourself, you don’t need to go out and buy bags of soil conditioner at 3 or 4 dollars each.
  4. Probe for: By composting yard trimmings and kitchen waste, you really cut down in the amount of materials that need to be sent to landfills. This helps protect the environment and land for the future.  
Probe if this is believable: How much would yard trimmings take up in the landfills? Wouldn’t it all break down anyway?
  5. By composting, you don’t have to take your yard trimmings to the curb the night before collection of your trash. Just put it in the bin.
- VI. Review Reaction:
- A. So now that you’ve heard these reasons, would you compost?
- If yes, which reason is the best reason to compost – what moves you?
- If no, why not? What is the biggest problem that stops you?

VII. City Program

- A. It turns out that the city makes a compost bin available to residents for about \$45 to \$60, depending on the model.
  - 1. Would you be interested in purchasing a composting bin from the city?
  - 2. Does that sound like a good price, too much, or too little?
  - 3. It turns out that you can compost by just putting the stuff in a pile, or in a box of chicken wire. It's just a little less reliable takes longer that way. Would you prefer that way, or would you spend the money for one that works more easily?
- B. For people who live in apartments as well as home dwellers, the city has a worm composting unit for sale for about \$60. Interested?
- C. Hand out city brochures, get reaction.
- D. The City wants you to encourage people to compost. Do you feel like you would need help learning how to do this, or not?
  - 1. What would be some ways to get information to you about how to do this?
  - 2. For example, if the city offered classes you could go to, say once a month somewhere in San Jose, would you be interested?  
If yes ask: what about before this discussion? If you had gotten a flyer about this, would you have been interested? If no, ask, what about this discussion got you interested?
  - 3. What about a video explaining how to compost that came with the bin you buy?
  - 4. What about an 800 line you could call with questions?  
Any idea of what those questions might be?
  - 5. Why do you think the city cares about this?

VIII. Marketing Exercise

- A. OK, you guys are in charge of trying to come up with a campaign that would convince your neighbors to compost. Split into two groups and come up with two things: first, a slogan, and second, one-sentence reason why they should compost.

Thanks.

**FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPTS**

**COMPOSTING FOCUS GROUPS:**

**SAN JOSE ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES  
DEPARTMENT**