

metroSTOR Webinar Summary and Transcript

Empowering Communities to Compost:

02.27.25

Summary pages **2-4**

Transcript pages **5-16**

metroSTOR Webinar **Summary**

Empowering Communities to Compost:

Breaking Barriers: How Community Drop-Offs Make Composting Accessible

02.27.25

Overview

The 'Empowering Communities to Compost' webinar brought together experts Tim Steckel, Domingo Morales and Nigel Deacon to explore effective strategies for expanding community composting initiatives.

The webinar highlighted the critical need to divert organic waste from landfills and emphasized the role of accessible and well-managed composting programs, particularly in underserved communities. Through case studies, practical advice and innovative solutions like metroSTOR bins, the speakers demonstrated how communities could overcome challenges, promote sustainable waste management practices and actively contribute to a more environmentally conscious future, while creating more sustainable and resilient communities.

Tim Steckel

Composting Marketing Agency

Tim Steckel focused on the importance of organic waste drop-off stations as a starting point for effective composting programs. He emphasized that too much organic waste was ending up in landfills and causing environmental problems, meaning that collecting organics properly was crucial. He highlighted the following key points:

Drop-off Stations as Infrastructure and Education: Tim stressed that drop-off stations were not just collection points but also valuable touchpoints for community education and awareness. They help people learn and reinforce proper composting habits.

SWACO's Success in Central Ohio: He shared the successful example of the Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio (SWACO) and their food waste drop-off program. SWACO collected a significant amount of food waste through these stations.

Key Considerations for Implementing Drop-off Programs: Tim provided practical advice for setting up successful drop-off programs, including intentional naming, strategic placement near existing infrastructure (like recycling), participant registration, providing compostable liners and exploring sponsorship opportunities.

Resources from SWACO: He recommended exploring SWACO's "Save More Than Food" campaign for templates and guidance on starting a drop-off program.

Domingo Morales

Compost Power

Domingo Morales shared his personal journey and the mission of Compost Power, focusing on providing composting access and education in New York City public housing. He discussed the challenges and innovative solutions he implemented:

Compost Power's Mission: Domingo emphasized the importance of addressing waste management in public housing to achieve zero-waste goals in New York City and other dense urban areas.

Challenges in Public Housing: He outlined the specific challenges of implementing composting programs in public housing, including inconsistent resident schedules, contamination of bins with regular trash and issues with pests.

Introduction of metroSTOR Bins: Domingo highlighted the benefits of using metroSTOR bins for 24/7 food scrap drop-offs, noting their rodent-proof design, increased capacity and ability to reduce contamination.

Positive Results and Future Plans: He shared positive results from pilot programs using metroSTOR bins in public housing, including increased participation and reduced contamination. He noted that the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) planned to install more bins due to the success of the demonstration.

Need for Funding and Recognition: Domingo emphasized the need for more resources to scale these solutions citywide and highlighted the importance of recognizing the potential of public housing communities in sustainability efforts.

Nigel Deacon

metroSTOR

Nigel Deacon provided a strategic perspective on the role of drop-off programs in composting and how these may be scaled up. He compared drop-off and curbside collection methods and shared case study examples across the US and in Europe, with a focus on public housing.

Drop-offs vs. Curbside Collection: Nigel acknowledged that curbside collection could divert more material overall, but drop-offs offered better control over contamination.

Cost-Effectiveness and Scalability: He emphasized that drop-offs were a low-cost option that could be scaled as needed, making them suitable for various communities.

Manchester, Connecticut Example: Nigel shared the example of Manchester, Connecticut, where drop-offs were chosen for their educational value and community accessibility.

Factors Influencing Behavior Change: He discussed the key factors that influenced behavior change related to composting: knowledge, motivation and ease of use. He highlighted the importance of clear communication, incentives and convenient infrastructure.

Questions and Answers

The webinar concluded with an engaging Q&A session, where participants actively shared their thoughts and questions. The discussion highlighted key insights and opportunities for information and resource sharing. Participant questions included:

Q: How can Domingo's journey from germophobe to composter be applied to help the general public get past the "yuck factor" of food scrap collection and composting?

A: The right infrastructure; secure, purpose-built and clearly labelled units are crucial. Domingo overcame his germophobia by developing a clean, meticulous composting process that prevents odors, rats and anaerobic conditions. His system includes the Rodent Reduction Rubric to avoid rodent and smell issues.

Q: Since there's no cost for people to drop off their food scraps, is this program making a profit?

A: In public housing areas, composting programs reduce cleanup and pest control costs. Prior to installation, all food scraps are currently part of the trash stream, which costs the City Sanitation Department a significant amount for transport and disposal.

In private areas, a small fee may be possible if demand grows, but the program's goal is community benefit over profit.

Q: What are the challenges of implementing food scrap collection in suburban versus urban environments?

A: Suburban areas face challenges in determining bin numbers and minimizing travel distances. The goal is to place bins as close to communities as possible, regardless of location.

Area-specific examples were discussed, with participants asking for advice on individual challenges such as existing infrastructure, trash practices and even local wildlife or pests in certain municipalities.

Q: What happens to the finished compost from the program?

A: The finished compost is donated to farms and community gardens throughout NYC. Residents who participate may receive compost if available.

Q: How long does it take to set up a metroSTOR container once you have a location?

A: There are several steps involved, such as resident engagement and communication. However, from a logistical perspective, it is usually possible to set one up within one to two months.

metroSTOR Webinar **Transcript**

Empowering Communities to Compost:

02.27.25

Tim Steckel:

Welcome to everyone who's already joined this morning for our talk on empowering communities to compost. We have Domingo Morales with us and Nigel Deacon of metroSTOR. I'm Tim Steckel and I'm really happy to discuss this. Organic waste drop-off stations are one of my favorite topics.

We have some stories and data to share and we'll have a small presentation, a conversation and an opportunity for you to ask questions. That's the plan for today's meeting. Let's dive right in and talk about how we can make compost happen, collect clean organic waste and separate it properly.

Currently, there's way too much organic waste in our regular trash. It doesn't belong there. It shouldn't end up in landfills, where it's causing problems. Collecting organics properly is really the starting point of the whole process. Only 12% of U.S. households have access to a food waste service. We need to build up composting infrastructure—not just collection, but also transportation. Today, we're focusing on the first part of that equation: collection.

Landfilling is still often the cheapest option, but we need to make organics collection convenient and get the infrastructure in place. It's also critical that collected organics are clean and not contaminated with plastics or non-compostable materials. That starts in every household.

One thing I like about these organic drop-off stations is that they're not just infrastructure. They are also touchpoints for education and awareness. For a lot of people, composting is a new habit and it takes time. We need to remind people what can and can't go in.

I want to share a program from Ohio, where I'm based. SWACO, the Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio, has created a food waste drop-off program that's been quite successful. The Franklin County Landfill currently receives almost one million pounds of organic waste every day. SWACO has been slowly growing their program and they've collected about one million pounds of food waste, though there's still plenty of room to expand.

Drop-off stations are often easier to implement than curbside collection. They also serve as educational touchpoints and once they're established, it's easier to move towards curbside collection. With drop-off stations, you can collect data and show you're diverting waste from the landfill.

From this program, we've learned you should name your program intentionally. Some communities call them "organic waste drop-off stations." Others call them "compost stations," but it's not compost yet. So be intentional with labels and stay consistent across neighborhoods.

Look at existing infrastructure to place these stations. For example, if there's already paper recycling in an area, that might be a good place for organic waste stations. Choose locations along busy roads to make participation convenient.

Most successful programs require participant registration. This helps track numbers and reduces contamination. Providing compostable liners can also make the process easier and cleaner, depending on your composting facility's capabilities.

SWACO has also explored sponsorship opportunities, using the surface area of drop-off stations for local business advertisements to help fund the program.

If you're looking for a template or guidance to start a drop-off program in your community, I highly recommend looking into SWACO's "Save More Than Food" campaign. They have resources on bin labeling and case studies that you can present to city councils. Jane Boom from SWACO has been instrumental in this program. She's part of the Ohio Organics Council and would be happy to help you access those resources.

With that, I'll hand it over to Domingo Morales, who will share more about what he's working on in New York.

Domingo Morales:

Thank you, Tim. Hello, everyone. Good morning.

Just to give you some background, I'm Domingo Morales, founder and CEO of Compost Power. I grew up in New York City, mostly in public housing. Growing up in that environment, there wasn't much focus on sustainability. Our priorities were making sure there was food in the fridge and that everyone got to school. Sustainability and composting weren't things we were taught as kids.

I didn't learn about composting until I joined an AmeriCorps program in 2015 called Green City Force. Green City Force teaches young adults in public housing about farming, composting and solar energy. It introduces them to the green economy.

Before joining, I was a germaphobe. I thought germs could kill me and was very cautious. When I entered the program, I was excited to work in solar energy. That was my goal. However, they placed me on the farm team because it was a longer program and my background in building maintenance, plumbing and electrical was useful there.

I started working at the Red Hook Composting Site, the largest compost site in the U.S. that didn't use fossil fuels. At first, I was worried about germs, but my mentor, Domingo Buckel, was also a germaphobe. He taught me how to work safely with compost. Over time, I learned the science behind composting and realized we were actually generating beneficial microbes that support our health.

Once I understood that good compost can strengthen your immune system, I became focused on creating high-quality compost. From 2015 to 2020, I worked at Red Hook. We processed 200 tons of material each year and hosted 2,000 volunteers annually. We staffed food scrap drop-offs and trained new AmeriCorps members.

In 2020, due to the pandemic, New York City cut funding for community composting. My job was eliminated, along with many others and community composting programs were halted. It was a difficult time.

Eventually, I returned to volunteer with Green City Force and realized one of the compost systems needed rebuilding. They allowed me to do it and I built my first three-bin system in Canarsie during the pandemic. While most people stayed home, frontline communities like mine continued working.

After building that system, I submitted it as a proof of concept for the Domingo Prize, which awards \$200,000 annually to five New Yorkers. I originally had an idea for a “compost gym” called Motion with Meaning, using exercise to power composting. But after the pandemic hit, I shifted my focus to simply building more compost sites in public housing.

A few months later, I won the prize and that’s how Compost Power was born. Compost Power’s mission is to provide composting education and access to all New Yorkers, with a focus on public housing communities.

Public housing in New York City consists of around 225 campuses. One in 17 New Yorkers lives in public housing, which doesn’t yet have a robust composting program. Public housing is still catching up on basic recycling.

If we can’t figure out waste management in public housing, New York City will never become a zero-waste city. If we don’t focus on these dense, urban communities, no city will achieve zero waste. That’s why public housing was the first step for me and that’s where we began.

At our sites, we use a few different systems. We have three-bin systems, which are wooden frames wrapped with steel screen. We also use windrow systems, which are pyramid-shaped mounds and a few tumblers. Across the city, we have nine compost sites, eight of which are on public housing campuses.

In the beginning, we had staffed food scrap drop-offs with specific time periods for residents. In dense urban environments like New York City, not everyone works the same schedule. Many public housing residents are frontline workers with unpredictable shifts. There’s no universal schedule that works for every resident. We quickly received criticism: people would come to drop off food scraps, but we’d already left or hadn’t arrived yet. Some residents started leaving food scraps on the ground, which attracts rats. Others gave up and threw them into nearby trash cans, which in New York City are open and also attract pests.

We realized early on that we needed to improve access, so we introduced 24/7 food scrap drop-offs. However, this presented challenges. We noticed people were dropping regular trash into the bins. The increased access created an unintended opportunity for misuse. We tried using totes in certain spots, but they collected more trash than food scraps, creating additional work for our staff to sort and decontaminate.

We looked into the big belly bins the Department of Sanitation uses, but they weren’t large enough and required smartphones for access. Many public housing residents don’t have smartphones, so that option wasn’t equitable. We stuck with regular totes secured with gorilla straps, which helped reduce contamination slightly.

Then we attended a trade show and discovered metroSTOR bins. These had a keypad for access, eliminating the need for smartphones and three times the capacity of big belly bins. They fit a 64-gallon tote, with an option for up to 94 gallons, which is crucial for large NYCHA buildings where we need to empty bins multiple times a week.

We purchased a metroSTOR bin to test it out.

Tim Steckel:

We're showing your bin installed now.

Domingo Morales:

Perfect. Regarding food scrap drop-offs in New York City, the challenges were significant. We serve 300 to 500 families per week. We faced high levels of contamination. Toters can tip over and must be chained and locked. Without chains, toters can go missing. We've even found neighbors using them as personal trash cans. We added signage and started locking them to gates.

Toters don't increase curb appeal. Even though they don't look terrible, they require daily monitoring to prevent overfilling and tipping over. We place toters on pallets to prevent rats from burrowing underneath. We move the pallet about five feet monthly to avoid creating habitats.

With the metroSTOR bin, we started noticing real benefits. They're keypad-enabled and rodent-proof. After nearly a year of use, rodents haven't been able to get in, under, or over them. We secure them to the ground with four-inch Tapcon screws in concrete. They don't budge, even when I nudged one with my car. They're also safe for public spaces. We added yellow paint around them to alert kids on scooters and decorated them with a Pac-Man game design. Kids love it and it slows them down.

Residents feel proud to have access. Many treat it like a secret society and protect the bins. If someone tries to put trash in the bin, other residents intervene. We've seen a 20% increase in participation at our site, with people asking how they can get the access code, particularly those who prefer dropping off scraps without social interaction.

Contamination dropped by 60%, mostly eliminating plastics, metal and paper. What remains are small household contaminants like fruit stickers, twist ties and rubber bands. We address these through community education and signage showing items we don't accept. Over time, residents improve.

We once pulled a toter weighing about 350 pounds from a metroSTOR bin after a holiday week. Although we handled it, we recommend emptying at around 75% capacity to keep it manageable. metroSTOR bins also come with optional sensors to alert when they're getting full.

Cleaning is straightforward. The large opening lets scraps go directly into the toter. If anything falls to the side, we can easily pull the toter out and rinse the interior with a hose. Everything is sealed and water-resistant, so there's no damage risk.

After four months at our Williamsburg location, contamination reduced by 85%, with only minor items like fruit stickers remaining. The New York City Housing Authority now plans to install more metroSTOR bins thanks to this demonstration.

Public housing is often underestimated in sustainability efforts, but we're constantly trying to innovate and organize waste. What holds us back is funding. We need more resources to scale solutions like these citywide. Anyone who knows of infrastructure funding opportunities should share them with communities like ours.

These bins don't just reduce contamination and rodents; they also reduce labor costs. For example, we once had staff delayed due to transit issues. With traditional staffed food scrap drop-offs, that's a big problem. But

with smart bins, residents still have a place to drop scraps anytime. At sites with smart bins, we maintain staffed hours, but when we're not there, residents don't feel forced to throw scraps in the trash.

This reduces staff stress and ensures consistent service. We've even seen the Department of Sanitation use this model successfully. They've transitioned some staffed drop-offs into smart bin-only sites and the community has embraced them.

Public, permanent infrastructure like this sends a message that the city is serious about composting. When public housing campuses visibly support recycling and sustainability, it signals that sustainability is for everyone.

Food waste is one of the most effective ways to slow climate change. If we all composted our food scraps, we could reduce climate change by 30%, which has a bigger impact than switching every gas-powered car to electric. Composting is one of the easiest and most impactful ways to create a more sustainable world.

Nigel Deacon:

Great points, Domingo. That's really inspiring, the partnership you're achieving with NYCHA. I completely agree that reducing the food waste going into landfill is one of the biggest wins in reducing emissions.

I want to touch on the role of drop-offs from a municipal perspective. When you compare the two common methods of collection—curbside and drop-off—curbside will divert more material overall because it's more accessible. However, you don't have as much control over contamination. Cities often say they can't commit the funds to set up a curbside program. It's expensive and in areas like public authority housing or densely developed areas, curbside collection is limited.

Drop-offs have a role to play, whether or not curbside exists. They're low cost to set up and can scale as needed. Drop-offs engage people who are motivated to separate food scraps. With the right equipment, you can control contamination. This works well in communal settings like multifamily or downtown areas. You might start with lower diversion rates, but the material is much cleaner. Most of us would prefer less material that's clean and compostable over lots of contaminated waste that ends up in landfill.

An example is Manchester, Connecticut. We've been working with them for about a year. They selected drop-offs for their educational value and community accessibility. Their system requires residents to register, which helps control contamination. The 24/7 access has been very successful. We'll be hosting an event soon where they'll share their progress. I've added a link to a podcast we did with Rachel from Manchester and we'll also share it in the chat.

There's growing experience with projects like this. Our goal is behavior change, which comes down to three factors: knowledge, motivation and ease. Knowledge is about communicating why composting is important and exactly how to do it. Motivation matters too—people need to see the benefits, whether that's cleaner buildings, a better environment, or incentives. Making it fun also helps. For example, the units in Washington, D.C., feature creative graphics that engage the community.

Most importantly, the infrastructure has to make it easy. People won't go out of their way. From the kitchen to the drop-off, they need caddies, liners and accessible deposit points. It's basic, but it's crucial.

Here's an example from London, where they worked across public authority housing with about 500 apartments. They placed drop-off points outside each building and used disruptive graphics that interrupted people's habits and made them pay attention. Their motivation was cleaner buildings, less odor and pest control. Waste analysis showed organics in the trash dropped by 45% and they collected two to three pounds of organics per household per week. I'll share their detailed report, which may be helpful.

Another example is Fife Council in Scotland, which worked with high-rise buildings. They provided caddies, liners and easy deposit options. Their motivation was eliminating odor and pests and residents responded positively. They collected over 100 pounds of organics per building per week.

Communication is important. In Europe, we link composting to benefits people care about, like powering communal heating networks. We also give feedback to residents, showing how their building is performing. For instance, one metric was "one ton equals 20 bags of coal," which resonated locally.

The takeaway is that any community can be empowered to divert food scraps and reduce harmful emissions. That's the key message I wanted to share. Now, let's move into Q&A.

Tim Steckel:

Thanks, Domingo, for sharing your story and Nigel for the insights. Domingo's work is really inspirational and there's much more ahead. Composting and organics recycling are very contextual. We have to meet people where they are and consider their behaviors and living circumstances.

There's a big difference between dense housing projects and rural areas like Ohio, but the common ground is that everyone eats and produces food waste. As we begin the Q&A, please add your questions in the chat. If you're facing a challenge in your community, let us know. We might be able to connect you with resources or someone who's been through it.

Nigel, I'll hand it back to you to kick off the Q&A.

Nigel Deacon:

Thanks. One question from Nick is for Domingo. How can your journey from germophobe to composter be applied to help the general public get past the "yuck factor" of food scrap collection and composting?

Domingo Morales:

People call me the Gordon Ramsay of community composting. Our compost is very clean and I have zero tolerance for odors, rats, or anaerobic conditions. I'm meticulous about our composting method. We're one of the only community composters in the city that can break down meat, dairy and bone in three weeks because we have a strong process. We even reuse 25% of our finished compost to reinoculate new batches.

I don't like smelly sites or sites with rats, which is why we created the Rodent Reduction Rubric. It's a guide for building compost sites without odors and rodent issues. That's how I overcame my own concerns. Some sites still trigger my germophobia, but our process works.

Tim Steckel:

Another question came in. Someone asked if there's a difference between the green and brown toters.

Domingo Morales:

They're the same. The brown toter came from an earlier curbside program where the Department of Sanitation allowed gardeners to put garden waste in it for weekly pickup. This was before Compost Power arrived. In 2020, the program was abandoned, so we continued using the brown bin.

The gardener at this site is now one of my staff members. He's a guerrilla gardener who took over an abandoned garden. When the city stopped picking up the waste, I told him we'd process it on-site.

Eventually, the brown bin was too small for the residents, so we got a larger bin. Now, all three bins at the Wagner Houses site—the brown bin, the black bin and the smart bin—are still used. Seniors like the brown bin because it's low to the ground. Some people prefer the black bin with the strap. The smart bin is there for secure, larger collection. We started in 2020 with just the small brown bin and now it's a multi-bin system. If we removed the brown bin, some residents would be upset. There's a visual reassurance when it's present.

Nigel Deacon:

Thank you.

Tim Steckel:

Yes, it's a step-by-step process. You can upgrade over time, balancing consistency with flexibility. Nigel, could we get a photo of the access door someone requested? Maybe you can pull that up.

Another question came in. Since there's no cost for people to drop off their food scraps, is this program making a profit? Domingo?

Domingo Morales:

One of these sites is serving public housing. Our goal is not to make a profit from public housing residents. However, the site we have in Williamsburg is still free at the moment. Due to the high number of users, we are considering implementing a \$20.00 monthly fee to use the smart bin there.

In areas where we serve public housing, we cannot charge those residents because the goal is to provide a benefit. For public housing, the benefit comes from reduced cleanup for NYCHA workers, lower pest control costs by removing food from the waste stream and other related savings.

For private locations, such as in Williamsburg, charging a small fee is possible. For example, if 100 people pay \$5.00 a month, the revenue adds up. Before we even allowed public access, someone offered me \$100 to use the bin. It is important to assess the demand in the area. As participation grows, there may be a need for more bins or alternative solutions. There is potential to create a model that makes this profitable in public areas, but for public housing, we need an environmental study to determine the actual cost-benefit of installing this citywide.

Nigel Deacon:

It is important to remember that this material is currently part of the trash stream, which costs the City Sanitation Department a significant amount for transport and disposal. If we can quantify the reduction in trash costs, that savings could potentially be redirected to support composting operations. I believe that is a key point to focus on. Would you agree?

Tim Steckel:

Yes. There are additional factors to consider. Some states now have organic waste mandates, requiring cities or municipalities to address this material as part of their overall solid waste management. Drop-off programs are often more cost-effective than curbside services, particularly during initial implementation.

The largest cost factor is servicing the bins. When comparing that to the cost of running collection routes, drop-off programs can make more financial sense. In areas with private food waste haulers, drop-off services are consistently more cost-effective than pickup services using buckets. Again, context is very important.

Nigel Deacon:

Roger asked a good question about focusing on suburban environments rather than dense urban communities. Determining the number of collection bins needed in suburban areas is a complex issue.

What I have found is that installing a drop-off site for approximately 100 properties works well. You do not need to install many bins immediately; starting with one is often sufficient. As demand grows, additional bins can be added.

We should aim to minimize travel distances for users. Would someone drive 10 minutes with a bag of food waste? Some people do, but many would not. Placing bins as close as possible to the communities they serve is critical, even in suburban environments. We will explore this topic in more detail in a future session.

Tim Steckel:

There was a question about the importance of education, which is critical. Mailers, such as postcards, have proven very effective in raising awareness. Interestingly, the awareness campaign can sometimes cost more than the actual drop-off stations themselves.

Utilizing all public relations channels is essential, including social media and local newspapers. If you host a ribbon-cutting ceremony, it is important to invite City Council members, key stakeholders and decision-makers. High-profile attendance is beneficial.

Someone also asked whether there is a timeline for installing more metroSTOR bins at New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) campuses.

Domingo Morales:

We were awarded a USDA grant to install additional bins, but the funding is currently paused. We are waiting for that to resume. The plan is already in place, but funding is the primary obstacle. Public housing is currently experiencing disinvestment, so we are working to find solutions to move this forward.

This initiative has been included in NYCHA's 10-year sustainability agenda, which is a positive step. Smart bins were introduced as part of our experimentation with new waste solutions.

We also installed metroSTOR bins at Wagner Houses for standard waste streams, such as trash, paper and metal recycling. After seeing the smart bins, there was interest in incorporating composting at these stations as well.

We are considering building comprehensive waste stations that include trash, metal, paper and composting to simplify the process for residents. Ideally, there would be one centralized location where residents can dispose of all household waste types.

Tim Steckel:

There are a few more questions in the chat. Our time is up, but we can continue answering.

Someone asked Nigel whether municipalities respond differently to food scrap collection programs in multifamily versus single-family settings.

Nigel Deacon:

It is a very interesting question. Multifamily settings are more difficult because there is often less individual ownership and accountability. These settings present greater challenges than single-family homes.

However, we have found that using drop-offs and providing clear communication makes it possible to achieve comparable results. We have reached approximately 35% diversion, which is similar to curbside collection in single-family areas. With the right investment in infrastructure and education, it is achievable.

Tim Steckel:

Someone else asked about suburban areas.

Nigel Deacon:

Domingo has proven this is possible.

Tim Steckel:

A county in Pennsylvania has plans to place drop-off stations but needs funding for secure, locked containers and enclosures. Any ideas for funding?

Currently, the grant climate is unpredictable. It is important to continue applying for grants. We expect the situation to improve in the coming months.

Domingo Morales:

One of the programs that has been frozen is the SWACO grant program. I recommend looking into that. I hope it will resume and continue. The SWACO program has been helpful in many rural areas. Setting up these drop-off stations can be relatively inexpensive—under \$2,000 for the enclosure and locked containers. Sometimes it is as simple as using totes with a padlock and combination. It does not need to be very expensive to get started.

Domingo Morales:

For those in Pennsylvania, if you are using a tote, I recommend using a bear strap, since bears often get into trash bins in that area.

Tim Steckel:

Yes, it all depends on context. If you have bears or large predators nearby, you may not be able to keep costs as low as you could in other areas, like Ohio.

There was also a question about whether it makes sense to have a trash bin alongside the compost receptacles. It does make sense to provide a place for regular trash so people have an option to dispose of it properly. However, it is important to make clear distinctions between what is waste and what is compostable to avoid confusion.

Another consideration is placing compost bins near existing recycling drop-off locations. That can be a good strategy to centralize waste disposal options.

There was also a question about what systems you use to compost the material, Domingo.

Domingo Morales:

We use a three-bin system. It is a wooden box structure wrapped with steel screen. We use a thermophilic method, maintaining a three-to-one ratio: for every toter of food scraps, we add three toters of carbon-rich material, such as wood chips and wood shavings sourced from woodworkers.

When mixed properly, the pile reaches around 145°F. By turning it every seven days, we can sustain that temperature for about six weeks, after which the compost is finished.

At our Williamsburg site and some of our public housing campuses, we use windrows. Windrows are large pyramid-shaped piles following the same three-to-one ratio. We use bulk amendments like wood chips and wood shavings. To prevent rodents from accessing the windrows, we cover them with a 12-inch seal of mature material.

I use finished compost as the seal because it contains active microbes that continue breaking down materials like meat, dairy and bones. This process keeps those beneficial microbes within the system.

No matter the location, we use the same process and recipe. The difference is that windrows require more sealing, while bin systems are built to be rodent-proof.

Tim Steckel:

There are, of course, many other composting methods, such as in-vessel composting and windrows. The best method depends on your scale and context.

Domingo, someone asked if you could assist with setting up a program in Washington, D.C. and possibly visit. Perhaps the person interested, John Johnson, could provide contact information and you could connect directly. They were also curious if you offer a training program.

Domingo Morales:

Yes, that would be great. Please share your contact information and I will reach out.

Tim Steckel:

If you would like to contact Domingo, you can also visit his website at compostpower.com or find him on Instagram. While we are on the topic, be sure to check out his song, Scrap, available on Spotify.

Domingo Morales:

Thank you.

Tim Steckel:

Looking at additional questions, someone asked about what happens with the finished compost.

Domingo Morales:

We try to donate all of our finished compost to farms. Green City Force is a key partner. They grow food on public housing campuses and provide it to residents for free. We give our compost directly to support their farms.

Residents who participate in the program can also receive compost if we have enough available. If we run out, they may need to wait until the next batch is ready.

At our Williamsburg site, the finished compost is distributed across community gardens throughout New York City and at New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) campuses. We also provide compost to Domino Park in Brooklyn. Since our landlord operates Domino Park, part of our agreement for using the space along the river includes providing compost to them periodically.

Nigel Deacon:

Thank you for sharing that.

Tim Steckel:

Nigel, would you like to begin wrapping up?

Nigel Deacon:

Yes, I think it is about time to wrap up from my side.

Tim Steckel:

We did have one last question for you, Nigel. How long does it take to set up a metroSTOR container once you have a location?

Nigel Deacon:

There are several steps involved, such as resident engagement and communication. However, from a logistical perspective, it is usually possible to set one up within one to two months.

Tim Steckel:

Thank you. Thanks to everyone who joined us. If you have additional questions, please feel free to reach out to Nigel or me.

If your state has a U.S. Composting Council chapter, I encourage you to connect with them as well. Let us continue working to make composting mainstream.

Nigel Deacon:

Thank you, everyone. Thanks to Domingo and Tim. I appreciate your help with this.

Domingo Morales:

Thank you, everyone.

Tim Steckel:

We recorded this session and will send out the recording and the presentation to everyone who signed up.

Nigel Deacon:

We will send that in the next few days. Thank you, everyone. Have a great day.

Domingo Morales:

Thank you, Tim. Goodbye.

Tim Steckel:

Thank you. Goodbye.