WA Ecology Use Food Well Pilot: Questions and Answers

Introduction

The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) is seeking up to three pilots to participate in the Use Food Well Business Technical Assistance (TA) Pilot Program. Through the pilot, the project team (Ecology, BERK Consulting, and Resource Synergy) will provide hands-on technical assistance to businesses in participating communities while working with cities to inform the development of a statewide technical assistance playbook. Below are answers to questions asked during and in advance of the virtual information session on July 22, 2026.

Q&A

1. Are we eligible if we are not currently in a Business Organics Management Area (BOMA)?

No. Because this pilot is designed to support implementation of Washington's Organics Management Law, only cities currently within a BOMA are eligible. (View BOMA Map)

2. If our city already has a technical assistance program, are we still eligible?

Generally, communities that already have an active business organics management technical assistance program would not be the intended audience for this pilot. However, if there are any program and funding nuances or existing community led partnerships and programs, we encourage you to reach out to Cullen Naumoff (Cullen.Naumoff@ecy.wa.gov) and Olivia Carros (Olivia.Carros@ecy.wa.gov).

3. Does our city need to have a minimum population to qualify?

The RFI includes a general guideline of 25,000 residents, but this is not a strict threshold. We are primarily looking at business density and whether there are enough eligible businesses to support a six-month pilot. Existing local champions, such as chambers of commerce and other community partners,

are also an important consideration. Partnerships across neighboring cities is encouraged if it increases business density or leverages additional local champions and relationships that can help connect with businesses.

4. Will Ecology or the project team request additional information during the selection process?

The RFI is intentionally short to minimize effort required from applicants. We have built time into the review process for potential follow-up conversations to better understand a community's unique circumstances, if needed.

5. Will participating cities need to sign a formal contract?

There will not be a formal grant agreement because no funding will be provided directly to cities. Instead, Ecology has contracted directly with the consultant team (BERK Consulting and Resource Synergy). To ensure clarity and alignment, participating cities will receive a document outlining the scope of work, roles, and expectations for cities, Ecology, and the consultant team. The RFI also includes a summary of this information.

6. What does the technical assistance look like in practice?

The technical assistance follows a structured process:

- Identify businesses to engage using a statewide list of businesses that Ecology is currently developing. Business selection will prioritize larger food waste generators before moving to smaller businesses.
- Begin outreach through phone calls and emails, followed by in-person visits. Experience has shown that face-to-face outreach is an effective way to engage businesses. Inform businesses about the law, compliance requirements, options for compliance through a prevention, rescue, recovery framework, and available support.
- If a business chooses to participate, conduct staff training and provide bins, signage, and other educational materials.
- Coordinate with local haulers and identify opportunities for food donation and waste prevention through community partners.
- Follow up to address contamination or other implementation challenges and help businesses successfully adopt new practices.

7. How do you get businesses to make time for trainings?

We begin by securing support from business leadership, who are often responsible for compliance. Once leadership is on board, we work with managers and staff. Every business operates differently, so training is tailored to each businesses' structure, operations, and waste streams rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach.

8. How many businesses will receive technical assistance in each city?

As part of the technical assistance, we will reach out to hundreds of businesses. Based on past experience and in line with available resources for this pilot, we expect to help dozens of businesses per participating city reach compliance or begin initial steps toward compliance with new organics management laws.

9. Will technical assistance include food rescue and donations?

Yes. The project team will use tools and resources such as Ecology's food rescue map, many partner hunger relief organizations, and other tools like food recovery apps to support development of food rescue programs. The specific approach and potential organization partnerships will depend on the selected communities and existing local partnerships, with details to be determined after cities have been selected.

10. Are there resources available for schools or other sectors?

Ecology has already developed materials for restaurants and other food service businesses (See Ecology Resource Library). If cities and participating sectors identify gaps in available resources, we can develop additional statewide materials as part of this pilot.

11. Is there a specific focus on schools?

The pilot will work with participating cities to identify where technical assistance will have the greatest impact, taking into account largest generators, existing relationships, and community priorities. We hope that schools will be part of the technical assistance and it will likely depend on the city's existing partnerships.