

## REDISCOVERING THE CIVIC AND ACHIEVING BETTER OUTCOMES IN PUBLIC POLICY

### Policy Briefing Number 1

**Title:** How to Get Those Recycling Boxes Out: A Randomised Controlled Trial of a Door to Door Recycling Service

#### Brief Description of the Project:

- The first randomised controlled trial (RCT) to study the impact of a canvassing campaign on household recycling over time. A randomised control trial is a robust method for establishing whether an intervention works. It involves: two or more comparison groups that are similar in all respects; the random allocation of households to one or other group; one or more group receives an intervention, but otherwise all the groups are treated the same; observations are made of all members of the groups before and after the intervention.
- Research was done in partnership with EMERGE, a social enterprise organisation which delivers a weekly kerbside recycling service in Trafford.
- Recycling participation rates for 6580 households in two neighbouring inner-city districts of Trafford were measured by observing bin set out rates over a three week period.
- Half of the streets were randomly assigned to be canvassed. Half of the streets were placed in a control group and received no special attention.
- All households in the canvass group were visited by canvassers who were trained to promote and encourage recycling.
- Recycling participation rates for all households were measured after the canvassing campaign and then again three months later to see if the intervention had been effective in raising participation rates.
- Multiple deprivation scores and ethnicity of the 15 super output areas in the research area were used to examine the impact of canvassing on recycling behaviour in different neighbourhoods.

## Key Findings:

- A door-to-door canvassing campaign can raise recycling in the short term by 5%\*, compared to a control group. The effect, however, declines three months later (\*  $p < 0.05$ ).
- Canvassing had less impact on streets where recycling rates were already very high.
- Recycling rates overall were lower in the more deprived super output areas. The canvassing campaign was more successful in the poorer super output areas than it was in the less deprived areas.
- The canvassing campaign was particularly successful in areas with a large ethnic minority population.
- The canvassing campaign cost £24.06 for each additional household that started recycling.

## Policy Relevance and Implications:

- A canvassing campaign can successfully raise participation in a kerbside recycling scheme by 5%.
- The effect is still there three months later, but is reduced to 2%. This might suggest that canvassing and other promotional campaigns be repeated regularly to reinforce the recycling message.
- Canvassing campaigns are likely to be most successful if targeted in:
  - streets with low baseline recycling rates, or
  - relatively deprived areas, or
  - areas with a high ethnic minority population

### Further information available from:

**Email:** Dr Sarah Cotterill, Research Associate  
[sarah.cotterill@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.cotterill@manchester.ac.uk)  
**Telephone:** 0161 275 0792  
**Date of Publication:** February 2009

