

# REDISCOVERING THE CIVIC AND ACHIEVING BETTER OUTCOMES IN PUBLIC POLICY

## Policy Briefing Number 5

**Title:** The Use of Feedback to Enhance Environmental Outcomes: a Randomised Controlled Trial of a Food Waste Scheme

### Brief Description of the Project:

- This randomised controlled trial tested whether giving people feedback on their street recycling rate compared to other nearby streets promotes participation in a kerbside food waste collection scheme. Feedback is expected to encourage pro-social behaviour by letting people know the prevalence of recycling on the street and signalling that the social norm is to recycle.
- Household waste bins, on average, contain 17% food waste. Weekly kerbside food waste collections can encourage citizens to dispose of their food waste in a caddy, separate from their household's residual waste. This can benefit society by: reducing the amount of waste going to landfill; reducing costs (food waste disposal is cheaper than landfill); and re-use through the production of organic fertiliser.
- Recycling participation rates for 9082 households in 318 streets were measured by observing bin set out rates over a three week period.
- After the initial participation monitoring, the 318 streets were randomly assigned to either a treatment group or a control group. Each household in the treatment group received postcards giving feedback on the recent recycling performance of their street. The postcards featured a smiley face 😊 if participation of the street was above average and a frown face ☹️ if it was below average for the neighbourhood. The postcards were delivered twice: once after the first monitoring and then again a month later. The

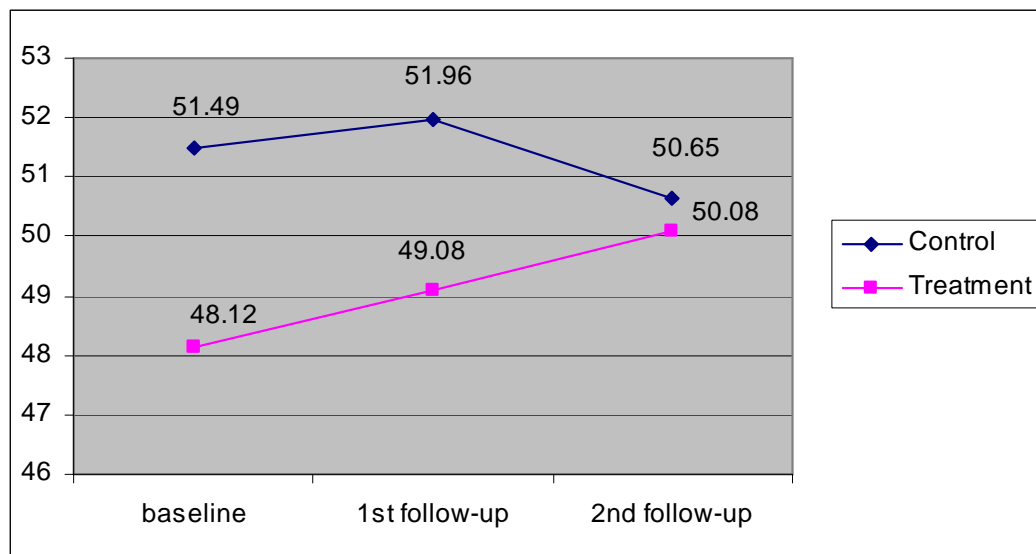
households in the control group received no special attention.

- Recycling participation rates for all households were measured again after delivery of each of the two postcards.
- The study was undertaken in collaboration with Oldham Council (who provide the food waste collection scheme) and EMERGE Recycling (who carried out the participation monitoring and delivered the feedback postcards)

### Key Findings:

- Providing feedback cards to households on their street's performance raised participation in the food waste scheme by 3 percentage points, compared to a control group ( $p < 0.01$ ), an overall effect size of 6%

Figure 1. Proportion of households recycling food waste



- Both smiley and frown feedback were effective: positive feedback encouraged those in high performing streets to carry on making the effort, while negative feedback persuaded those in low performing streets to join in with the food waste collection scheme.
- Feedback was most effective with households who were not currently recycling their food waste; it did not work well on households who were already participating
- Feedback was more effective on smaller streets than longer streets.

- Feedback was most effective when given more than once, to re-iterate the message. Households who received two smiley cards or two frown cards were more likely to respond than those who received mixed messages.

### **Policy Relevance and Implications:**

- A feedback campaign can successfully raise participation in a kerbside food waste recycling scheme by 6%.
- Both smiley and frown face feedback is effective.
- Feedback campaigns are likely to be most successful:
  - With households that are not currently participating
  - On small streets (8-30 households)
  - If feedback is given at least twice and the messages are consistent.
- Feedback is not effective with households that are already recycling their food waste.

### **Further information available from:**

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