

TALKING TRASH AND CHANGING MINDS



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In 1986, after 65 years of collecting refuse from residents' backyards, the City of Berkeley was initiating curbside pickup – and meeting significant opposition (including negative publicity and even a threatened City Council recall). The city called Fern Tiger Associates to clean up the mess through a public education campaign that would highlight the many social benefits of the change.

To learn about the issue and understand the challenges, FTA interviewed residents, not only on their concerns about trash collection but also about their attitudes toward the city. Comments about placing a high value on the greater good, combined with skepticism of government, helped determine the communication approach about trash collection: as an issue that affects real people – most notably, the reality that refuse collectors were at great risk of harm and that curbside collection would aid garbage collectors. The campaign, *Curbside Collection: The Responsible Solution*, included a Q&A booklet, postcards for anyone seeking an exemption, and door-hangers providing a hotline number for questions. Letterhead and envelopes were printed on recycled paper.

FTA documented the physical challenges of the job and the materials included photos of workers and Berkeley residents. Workers hosted the press for truck ride-alongs, leading to more positive media coverage and a resident participation rate of 86%, surpassing all expectations.

THE CITY OF BERKELEY, home to approximately 100,000 residents in 1986, transitioned to curbside garbage collection in order to reduce taxpayer costs, promote recycling, and prevent worker injuries.

The Curbside Collection message – as a more responsible alternative to backyard refuse collection – resonated so strongly with Berkeley residents that one 90-year-old woman told the city she didn't want an exemption, which was automatic for seniors. "I want to do the right thing and take my trash to the curb," she explained. "I know I can do it."

