Waste picker integration is a new responsibility for municipalities and industries. It often requires municipal officials and industry representatives to understand and work on social issues that are very different from their areas of expertise.

Because so much is new, it is important that the municipality and relevant officials deepen their knowledge and develop new skills before they engage waste pickers and work with them on integration.

This is why the first step in the waste picker integration process is “Prepare”.

**Seven Steps for Waste Picker Integration**

**Step 1: Prepare**

- What is waste picker integration?
- What do we already do? Let’s check our policies, plans and programmes.
- What plans do we have that affect waste pickers?
- Who are waste pickers?
- And what contributions do they make?
- How do our systems relate to theirs?
- Have existing programmes harmed waste pickers?
- Waste pickers are the experts! We’ll partner with them to develop a Waste Picker Integration Plan (WPIP).
1. Establish an internal Task Team to oversee the municipality’s role in implementing waste picker integration.

2. Strengthen team members’ understanding of integration and capacity to work on it.

3. Make an official municipal commitment to waste picker integration.

4. Analyse existing municipal plans, policies and programmes that impact on waste picking with a view to aligning these with the new commitment to integration.

Each key action is discussed below. The Guideline provides a more extensive discussion and more concrete ideas of what you can do in Step 1 and all of the other Steps.

### 1. Establishing an internal municipal Task Team

One of the first things that a municipality needs to do is to identify which department will lead waste picker integration. It also needs to decide which departments should be involved in waste picker integration.

REMINDER: Waste picker integration means the integration of waste pickers’ work and ensuring that their conditions and incomes improve as a result of integration.

It also means integrating waste pickers into the municipality’s political, economic, social, legal and environmental plans and programmes.

Most importantly, integration means respecting waste pickers, valuing their expertise and ensuring that waste pickers are partners in all phases of integration.

It could be easy to assume that waste picker integration is the domain of waste management departments. But integration is not just about waste. It is also about economic and social development and transformation.

Integration requires community engagement and facilitation of participatory processes. Officials in waste management departments are not trained to conduct these activities, but they are part of the core work of local economic development departments.
In addition, integration requires input from all municipal departments that interact with waste pickers, which include waste management, local economic development, urban planning, policing, parks, roads, social development and possibly others.

In short, waste picker integration requires skills, knowledge and types of authority that waste departments don’t have. So it is necessary for the municipality to create a multi-departmental Waste Picker Integration Task Team to oversee the municipality’s integration work. The success of waste picker integration in the municipality will be bolstered by ensuring that all relevant departments are part of the Task Team.

**IF YOU DON’T KNOW, NOW YOU KNOW**

When Luiz Inácio Lula was president of Brazil he created an inter-ministerial committee to oversee waste picker integration.

In addition, Waste and Citizenship Forums were established at local, state and national levels (Dias 2020).

The Task Team should be led by someone with decision-making authority. It also requires political and administrative support. From the very beginning, municipal officials need to engage with their political counterparts.

**Tool 1** provides useful tips on how to create a Municipal Waste Picker Integration Task Team. on establishing an internal municipal Task Team for tips on how to do this!

Here is how one official in a South African municipal waste management department explained how their municipality initiated work on waste picker integration:

“So, what we did was we put together a concept note, which is just really a very introductory document about the problem statement, what we think the approach should be, what the policy instrument is we think we should use and who needs to be involved. So I presented it to our policy committee, most of which I don’t know, because they’re from other departments who I’ve never worked with. I presented that on Monday. And now I’m going to get comments from all the different members, and they are going to hopefully allocate representatives from their departments to be part of this process.’

(Municipal Official interviewed 2021)
QUESTIONS FOR THE TASK TEAM
What mechanisms will ensure the internal Task Team remains accountable for developing and implementing the WPIP?

2. Strengthen capacity, deepen understanding

In order to strengthen their capacity and deepen their understanding of integration, officials should draw on and learn from their own experiences. They should also learn more about waste pickers, the work that they do, and their role in waste management and recycling systems before they begin meeting with waste pickers and their organisations.

Sharing and reflecting on experiences with waste pickers and waste picker integration
Although the Guideline is new and most municipalities do not have official waste picker programmes, a wide range of municipal officials have years of experience interacting with waste pickers (see the resources on Municipal Officials and Integration for more discussion of this issue)

Some of these experiences will have been positive. Others will have been negative. Some of them may have been very confusing.

It is important for officials on the Task Team to share their experiences, the successes they have had, the challenges they have faced, the fears that they have, and the lessons they have taken from their experiences.

These discussions can help to identify key issues that need to be taken into consideration and addressed.

They can also help to surface and critically reflect on assumptions that may have been made about waste pickers, waste picking, how recycling and waste management work on the ground, how municipalities should or should not work with waste pickers, and how decisions should be made about integration.

If possible, these discussions should be facilitated by an external expert on waste picker integration, so that they can help to locate officials’ experiences within a broader context and connect these experiences with research and knowledge on integration.

These discussions should be seen as part of a learning process. After members of the Task Team have learned more about waste pickers and their work, they should revisit their experiences and assumptions and see if they understand some in new ways that create new openings and possibilities.
The relationship between the formal and informal waste management and recycling systems

Because municipalities have only focused on formal waste management services, it is an important step for officials to deepen their understanding of the relationship between formal and informal recycling systems, the formal and informal waste management systems, and how they all relate to each other.

‘At a minimum, municipal waste officials are meant to have a broader picture of what is going on in their jurisdictions. They need to understand what the regulatory framework is telling them to do. And I think one of the biggest barriers to inclusion of waste pickers in municipalities is that waste officials and people who are in the business of waste don’t have a common understanding’

(NGO official, interviewed 2021).

Understanding this relationship will help officials to better understand the contributions that waste pickers make to municipal waste management, the recycling economy, the city and the economy.

Negative effects of official recycling programmes

Municipal officials should also be aware of how waste pickers can be harmed by formal recycling programmes that don’t take them and their recycling system into consideration.

‘Just the other day, we were on a call with a municipality who were proposing setting up a piloting project, but had no site and no idea of the separation of source guidelines, or guidelines that government had put out – the Waste Picker Integration Guidelines’

(NGO official, interviewed 2021)

Partnering with Waste Pickers

It is also important that municipal officials are clear as to why waste pickers should be partners in the planning, implementing and monitoring of waste picker integration. This is explained in the resource on “Partnership vs Charity”.

LINK TO: RESOURCE

The case studies on this website, the sections on Understanding Waste Pickers and Understanding Waste Picker Integration and the written and visual resources are designed to be used as part of this internal education (as well as other educational programmes on integration).
Other useful resources include the Waste Picker Integration Guideline, publications referred to on the website, and materials from other organisations included in the tab on External Resources.

**SOME SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES**

1. Have a facilitated discussion on Task Team members’ experiences of working with waste pickers, insights they have developed, lessons they have learned, and assumptions and negative beliefs they should unlearn.
2. Invite waste pickers and representatives from waste picker organisations to come and talk with you.
3. Spend a day working alongside waste pickers and learn how their system works.
4. Ask an outside facilitator to run a workshop on waste pickers and waste picker integration.
5. Read the materials on Understanding Waste Pickers and Understanding Waste Picker Integration on this website (wastepickerintegration.org) and discuss them.
6. Read and discuss the sections of the Guideline that provide relevant background (sections A to G).

**TIP**

The section on *Municipal Officials and Integration* provides more insight into officials’ experiences and analysis of waste picker integration. *Tool 1* provides an overview of key issues to be included in the training.

### 3. Commit to waste picker integration

The municipality should make a formal municipal commitment to developing a WPIP and implementing waste picker integration.

This is important because the municipality must ensure it develops the systems and processes to support and resource waste picker integration.

**SOME SUGGESTED ACTIONS**

1. Draft a simple statement that commits to:
   a. integrating waste pickers;
   b. developing and implementing a WPIP that is aligned with the Waste Picker Integration Principles;
   c. deadlines for the completion of the WPIP and commencement of integration programmes.
2. Follow correct procedures to ensure that the commitments are formalised.
Seven Steps for Waste Picker Integration

Step 1: Prepare

Before meeting with waste pickers to start working on integration, it is important to know what the municipality is already doing and what commitments it has made that directly or indirectly affect waste pickers.

The Task Team should gather and analyse information on existing policies, commitments, programmes and projects that affect waste pickers and waste picker integration. This analysis is about developing their own understanding, not developing a fixed position, as the team will need to analyse the information together with waste pickers, who will likely have different insights and analysis. Sharing this information and analysis with waste pickers at the first meeting on integration will build trust and ensure that everyone understands the current context.

QUESTIONS FOR THE TASK TEAM

• What does the data tell us about the current system, programmes and projects?
• What does the data tell us about how waste pickers have been considered?
• What do we think could be changed in order to address negative effects?

Tool 3 – Analysing Existing Policies, Commitments, Programmes and Projects provides a checklist of questions and activities that can help you to develop this analysis.

Reference