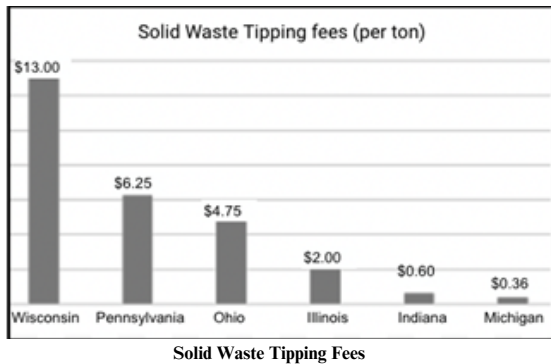


# TIPPING THE SCALE ON RECYCLING IN MICHIGAN: A STATE OF THE STATE SURVEY POLICY BRIEF

Jayla C. Simon , Senior Research Assistant: CCED

In the fall of 2023 with the leadership support of the Circular Economy Institute Network partners, including CCED Director Dr. Rex LaMore, Research Assistant Jayla Simon, Ecological Economist at the White House Office of Management and Budget, Dr. Robert Richardson, and Amcor Endowed Chair in Packaging Sustainability, Dr. Rafael Auras, jointly applied for the Michigan Applied Public Policy Research Grant to research Michigan’s recycling rates and policy issues, such as waste importation, household recycling behaviors, and the interplaying impact of statewide disposal surcharges and recycling infrastructure.



## METHODOLOGY

The team conducted a review of literature and baseline data to develop a conceptual framework for analyzing a specific meaningful policy issue. Key findings included that Michigan recycles only 18% of its waste, well below the national average, while importing over 22% of its trash due to low disposal fees, and may overtime face landfill capacity issues with a tipping fee significantly lower than the regional average.

Subsequently, the team established and proposed various research questions aiming to understand Michigan households’ recycling behaviors, barriers to recycling, support for importing solid waste, and willingness to support higher disposal surcharges, as well as relevant implications on public policy.



Landfill Dumping

After receiving the grant, the team conducted additional research, which suggested that to improve recycling rates, policies informed by citizen needs and prioritizing more comprehensive outreach are essential. In support of additional research, the team conducted secondary surveys and interviews with landfill operators and waste management industry experts, as well as reviewed past State of the State surveys to identify gaps and patterns in research.

Informed by such research and analysis of past data, reports, and publications on recycling behaviors and barriers in Michigan, the team was able to develop six questions, purchased through grant funding, for the State importing solid waste, and support for increasing the statewide disposal surcharge for varying reasons.

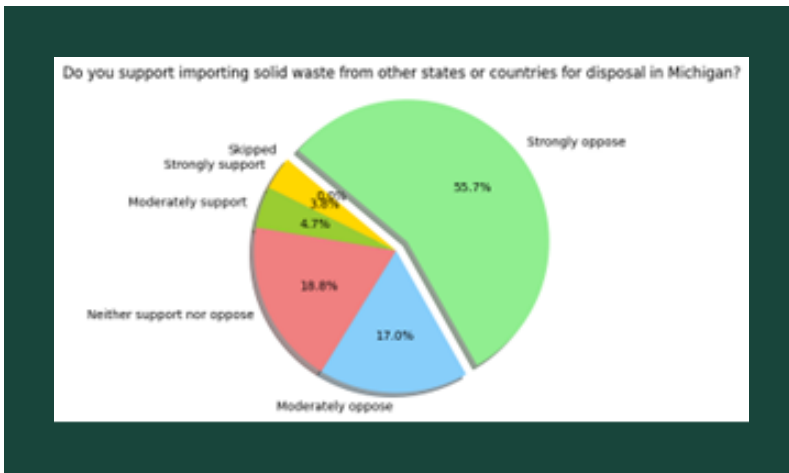
These questions were included in the 2024 SOSS. The survey was distributed via email to respondents who were asked to participate by clicking a link and answering the questions to the best of their ability. Following the distribution of survey questions, the team analyzed the raw data to conclude the following findings. The team identified key variables used to indicate response themes as well as conduct various cross tabulations regarding demographic characteristics. These included: ‘attitude about recycling,’ ‘knowledge about recycling,’ ‘always recycle,’ ‘should recycle more,’ and ‘number of barriers.’ The data analysis also used the responses to categorize popular infrastructural changes to encourage recycling by categorizing responses into three groups: Individual, Corporate, and Public Infrastructure. Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Software, the team consolidated the options of the question asking about methods to encourage recycling based on research and past survey data. Key findings from the top seven chosen options categorized accordingly included the need for better community support, more information from manufacturers, and increased public education.

## FINDINGS

Most interestingly, the survey revealed significant opposition to waste importation and mixed opinions on increasing disposal surcharges to fund recycling programs. For example, respondents indicated that a discrepancy exists between the support for raising fees to reduce waste importation and the support for increasing recycling programs.

The analysis of such complexities has highlighted the importance of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programs and the need for public education on the benefits of policy changes to enhance recycling rates and sustainable waste management practices.

That being said, sustainability and circularity influence every aspect of an individual’s life and the urgent need to change how the game is being played is evident in empirical evidence and the theme seen throughout the data collected from the MAPPR survey taken by various Michigan residents. There are revolutionary ways to modify Michigan’s current progression. Some suggestions that would revive recycling within communities are:



**Percent of People Supporting the Importing of Solid Waste to Michigan**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implementing policies for businesses to design products with easier recycling options;
- Increasing public education to communities about recycling systems that enhance understanding and support for sustainability initiatives, and;
- Encouraging accountability in the public and private sectors.

