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Recycling in America is hitting a critical inflection point. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is redefining how recycling is funded and operates across seven states. Emerging tariffs are injecting new uncertainty into already fragile market dynamics, with unclear implications for recovery and investment.  And backsliding on sustainability pledges is making one thing clear: we need data-driven action, backed by policy, and executed through collective effort.

The system is too complex, and too interconnected, for any one player to do it alone.

That’s why we launched *Recycling in America: What’s Working, What’s Not, and What We Do About It* —a discussion series anchored in the [**State of Recycling Report’s**](https://recyclingpartnership.org/residential-recycling-report/) Five Requirements of an Effective Recycling System. We’re bringing together leaders from every corner of the recycling value chain, from packaging design, local recycling programs, and MRFs to end markets and policy, to face the realities head-on. Thousands showed up. And not just to listen. They got real about what it will take to fix the system.

If you missed it, we’ve pulled five unflinching insights from national leaders who live this work every day:

**1.Partnerships make or break recycling.**

“Recycling is not just about collecting the materials…we have to find strong partners to buy it, to sort it, as well as to process the materials that we collect. **That’s why you can’t just flip a switch to bring recycling services back on – it really does take a sustainable partnership and creative ideas to make it happen.”** - The Honorable LaToya Cantrell, Mayor of New Orleans, Louisiana ([**Part 1, 25:35**](https://youtu.be/NidxTsvLPag?t=1532))

**2. Trust hinges on transparency and accountability.**

“When we build a recycling facility in a community, then it’s an obligation, it’s a commitment that we have with that city, with their residents... **we have the commitment and the obligation to make sure that if a resident puts something in the bin, they can trust that recycling is real**.” – Brent Bell, Vice President of Recycling, WM ([**Part 2, 28:22**](https://youtu.be/e1IIztLR6ho?t=1671))

**3. Brands must be buyers too.**

"The natural HDPE market is over a dollar per pound today. Mixed color HDPE, used in many brand packages, is worth a fraction of that. For the market to develop, brands need to commit to using the containers they create."  – Scott Saunders, General Manager, KW Plastics Recycling ([**Part 3, 21:45**](https://youtu.be/aD1djaii42o?t=1256))

**4. Upstream design decisions have downstream consequences.**

“If you’re a supply chain manager you don’t say ‘Anything goes, just send it to me, I’m going to make it into something valuable...’ but, that is literally our recycling infrastructure today… **the system’s not linked up, it’s broken**.” – Erin Simon, VP & Head of Plastic Waste and Business, World Wildlife Fund ([**Part 4, 15:10**](https://youtu.be/O07AtOxJkZA?t=911))

**5. Policy works when everyone helps build it.**

“Good policy looks like coming to the table, rolling up your sleeves, and saying this is how my business operates, this is what my county needs, and working towards solutions…practical, achievable, and flexible” - Kate Bailey, Chief Policy Officer, Association of Plastic Recyclers ([**Part 5, 28:50**](https://youtu.be/wxev4CL6dGE?t=1748))

These quotes aren’t just soundbites; they’re system-level truths. Our recycling system’s issues are complex, but the path forward doesn’t have to be. Here are the next steps depending on where you sit in the system.

* **Communities** – Operationalize [**best practices**](https://community.recyclingpartnership.org/home). Build stronger local programs with proven tools.
* **Policymakers** – Advance well-designed policy solutions including [**EPR**](https://recyclingpartnership.org/extended-producer-responsibility-101/) and pass a [**national recycling infrastructure investment tax credit**](https://recyclingpartnership.org/the-recycling-partnership-applauds-epas-release-of-recycling-needs-assessment-urges-congress-to-enact-tax-credit-for-recycling-infrastructure/).
* **Companies-** Back smart policy. Invest in the system. [**Join The Partnership**](https://share.hsforms.com/1PcOAuzwDSpayFCQMCrRP1Achah6)to lead alongside top brands and retailers. Your commitment powers [**infrastructure**](https://recyclingpartnership.org/recycling-carts-and-education-for-fort-collins-colorado-case-study/) [**upgrades**](https://recyclingpartnership.org/recycling-carts-and-education-for-fort-collins-colorado-case-study/)**,** [**drives innovation in consumer recycling behavior**](https://recyclingpartnership.org/case-study-personalized-recycling-education/)**,** [**invests in MRF**](https://recyclingpartnership.org/new-recycling-facility-in-alabama-will-be-catalyst-for-expansion-baldwin-county-alabama-case-study/) and [**end market improvements**](https://recyclingpartnership.org/a-sustainable-drainage-solution-using-film-and-flexibles-pittsburgh-pennsylvania-case-study/), and scales impact where it matters—from city streets to supply chains.

We’ve seen what’s possible when the right pieces come together, and we’re just getting started. The first five webinars sparked honest dialogue, shared hard-earned lessons, and proved there’s real momentum for change. Now it’s time to go deeper.

[**Join us for the upcoming sixth Recycling in America webinar session focused on polypropylene**](https://share.hsforms.com/1qxtSg8t8R6SAKxTk0-mfBgchah6?__hstc=89980932.6fb757b88b0a166beb3bda850d4bb0df.1750702847883.1754954270096.1755002695689.50&__hssc=89980932.1.1755002695689&__hsfp=1357915682)**, the material behind everyday items like yogurt cups and butter tubs on August 20th.** We’ll explore what’s still standing in the way across all five system requirements, including participation and capture, and how behavior change through effective education and outreach can lead to increases in both. Together, we’ll unpack the challenges and build on the wins to move this critical material forward. Let’s keep pushing. Let’s keep building. Let’s turn what’s working into what’s next.