



ReThink Disposable Strategic Plan

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1. Executive Summary

The data is clear. Single-use disposable food and beverage packaging items are the most common items found on beaches and inland waterways. To respond to this crisis, Rethink Disposable was established by Clean Water Fund in 2011, with a mission of stopping trash before it starts. The program works with restaurants and other food service establishments (FSEs) to reduce the use of plastics and other litter-prone items. To date, ReThink has assisted more than 380 restaurants and thirteen institutions (corporate and academic campuses) in making the switch to reuse-centric food service. Cumulatively, the program replaces 23 million pieces of packaging every year and its reuse champions — the FSEs it works with — collectively save more than \$750,000 each year. ReThink has primarily operated in California, with some work in Washington State, Colorado, New Jersey, and Minnesota.

The long track record of this program provides an opportunity to dramatically increase its impact. This strategic plan (the Plan) has been developed to assess the current program, and to identify needed changes and potential improvements that will allow that expansion to take place. Developing that plan involved research, interviews with representative stakeholders, and meetings with a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Clean Water staff. The TAC provided input on the program's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and provided direction on program expansion. A significant focus of the TAC's discussion was about ways to incorporate CWF's values, particularly justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI) into the program.

How it Works

ReThink uses a seven-step process to recruit and provide assistance to FSEs:

- identifying specific restaurants to target in a given area;
- making contact with the owner or manager;
- providing a consultation to share details of the program and identifying single-use items for replacement;
- ordering and delivering reusable items;
- training staff to incorporate the new items into the operation of the establishment;
- conducting a follow up visit a few weeks after delivery to ensure that the items are in use and address any problems that have arisen;
- if the establishment has been selected as a case study for the program, collecting and analyzing information from the business.

Strategies for Growing ReThink

The following basic strategies are considered core to ReThink's expansion:

- Centering the program in Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI);
- Building partnerships with local governments, businesses associations, community-based organizations and academia;

- Expanding outreach strategies to include volunteers and Clean Water’s canvass infrastructure;
- Expanding the program to other Clean Water Fund offices;
- Expanding the program to areas not served by Clean Water offices;
- Developing criteria for prioritizing outreach efforts;
- Expanding communications efforts to better publicize the value and success of the ReThink program;
- Improving or expanding metrics collected and reported.

These strategies were evaluated for cost, applicability and how they fit into the program values.

Funding

The current San Francisco Bay Area program works in 4 counties and has an annual budget of \$500,000, almost all provided through government contracts. An expansion funded through a 2-year NOAA grant and private donations provides for new ReThink staff in 6 additional states (MA, CT, RI, NJ, PA and MN) and has a budget of \$445,637 over 18 months. A robust national program capable of getting to scale will require significant new resources. ReThink’s work touches on many separate and sometimes intersecting issues — litter, incineration, environmental justice, water, pollution, Zero Waste, climate change. The intersectionality of the work lends itself to multiple funding sources, including foundations, government grants, and private funding. All of these options will need to be used to expand the program to \$2 million annually within 5 years.

Implementation: Short-term Goals (2023-2024)

In the near term, ReThink will focus on 1) supporting the ReThink program in the 6 states funded through the NOAA grant beyond the NOAA grant’s end date; and 2) laying the groundwork for future expansion to additional states as well as continuing development of the California ReThink program. Total cost for this program through December 2024 is \$1.9 million, of which approximately \$850,000 has been raised to date.

Establishing the program in new states. The 2-year grant awarded to CWF’s ReThink program by NOAA jumpstarts the establishment of the ReThink program in New England (Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut), New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Minnesota. CWF has already raised 2/3 of the matching funds required under this grant. Continuing beyond the expiration of NOAA funding (10/1/24) and increasing staff to full-time in each state will require additional fundraising at both the local and state levels.

During this two-year period, the program will convert between 200 and 300 businesses in the U.S. to reusables; achieve diversion of an additional 10 million pieces of trash annually, broadly advertise the program

ReThink currently collects metrics for 10% of businesses converted, including:

- Annual number of disposables avoided per business
- Weight of disposables avoided
- Dollars saved by converting from single-use to reusable items
- Aggregated totals for the program

ReThink might consider collecting additional data on:

- How long restaurants maintain the program
- Job creation information (type, number, wages)
- Greenhouse gas savings
- Dollars saved in trash-hauling costs
- Amount of trash and litter in an area before and after ReThink programs are instituted

and its benefits at the local, state and national level; engage in policy development and advocacy that is informed by the program's data collection; improve database capacity; and implement pilot projects to explore the potential contribution of the canvass and the potential of concentrated outreach to business associations.

Laying the groundwork for further expansion. Expanding ReThink to Michigan, Texas, Maryland, the District of Columbia and western Pennsylvania is less expensive due to the presence of Clean Water offices and staff in these locations. The development of national infrastructure under the NOAA grant makes expansion to these locations simpler and more cost-effective.

Expansion through partners into areas where Clean Water Fund does not have offices is also a priority. CWF has partnered with two for-profit entities, APTIM and OKAPI, to implement the program in Los Angeles and Oregon Metro area (pending). In addition, ReThink will continue to provide guidance to interested jurisdictions and nonprofit organizations through its monthly "office hours" and will explore ways to license the program to more NGOs.

Expanding the program in California. In the Bay Area, the ReThink program will investigate options for program expansion in counties outside of its current program; raise funds to work with FSEs outside of areas where it currently holds contracts and to pursue policies directed by ReThink's robust data; investigate program expansion to takeout containers and cups; and investigate market and other factors that inhibit FSE adoption of reusables. ReThink's California program will also provide outreach to the State Parks system that will expand the program's reach and measurably reduce litter in some of the most significant open spaces in California, expand the program in LA County, and expand sources of non-government funding to allow more diversity and flexibility in program implementation.

Implementation: Medium-term Goals (2025-2027)

ReThink will implement the next phase of its expansion, working with its partners and funders to reach its goal of avoiding 22.3 million pieces of disposable foodware annually by the end of 2027. Offices in New England, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Minnesota will continue program implementation; and the program will expand to all Clean Water offices, including Texas, the District of Columbia, Baltimore, Maryland, Michigan and Pittsburgh. The program will also be licensed to NGOs in up to 6 additional states. The program will use lessons learned in the short term to expand the use of volunteers, implement a self-certification program for businesses and expand its policy advocacy efforts. The cost of this expanded program (including CA, the 6 NOAA states and 4-6 offices in an additional 3+ states) is estimated at \$2 million annually.

Key activities in this three-year period include raising funds to open new and maintain existing offices, develop and implement a national outreach and communications strategy, identify key areas for ReThink expansion outside of states in which Clean Water operates, develop and implement a robust volunteer recruitment and training program as well as a business self-certification program; and implement research projects using ReThink proprietary data.

At the conclusion of five years, the program will be operating with 12+ offices in at least 9 states. ReThink will have exceeded its goal of diverting at least 22 million pieces of trash annually through implementation in states with Clean Water offices. Additional diversion will occur through partnerships with nongovernmental partners and consultants to implement the ReThink program in other states and through business self-certification.

2. Background

ReThink Disposable (ReThink) has been working with restaurants and food service enterprises (FSEs) since 2011 to stop trash before it starts.

Rethink Disposable is a data-driven source reduction initiative that works with restaurants and other food service establishments to reduce the use of single-use items, such as cups, utensils, plates, and more. ReThink uses a source control approach to the ever-increasing problems of solid waste, microplastics, and the toxic impacts of single-use disposables. The program focuses on reducing plastics and other litter-prone items, and the harm across their life cycle — from extraction of resources, transport, and non-essential uses, to incineration, ocean leakage and other end of life issues. It creates win-win opportunities for businesses and the environment by identifying cost saving practices to reduce single-use food and beverage packaging. To date, ReThink has assisted more than 380 restaurants and thirteen institutions (corporate and academic campuses) in making the switch to reuse-centric food service. Cumulatively, the program is reducing 23 million pieces of packaging every year and its reuse champions — the FSEs it works with — collectively save more than \$750,000 each year.

ReThink is a program of Clean Water Action/Clean Water Fund. Clean Water is a national organization with offices in California, Colorado, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, and Virginia. ReThink began as a collaboration with the City of San Francisco's Department of the Environment and was supported by a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency. ReThink has primarily been operating in California, with some work in Washington State, Colorado, New Jersey, and Minnesota. Through case studies and metrics, ReThink Disposable has made the business case for reusables.

The success of ReThink has created opportunities for expansion, as well as challenges for how best to replicate the program. This strategic plan (the Plan) has been developed to assess the current program, and to identify needed changes and potential improvements that will allow that expansion to take place. The process that led to this Plan ran from July to November 2022. It involved research, interviews with representative stakeholders, and meetings with a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Clean Water staff.

Data collected from 35 years of International Coastal Cleanups consistently shows that single-use disposable food and beverage packaging items are the most common items found on beaches and inland waterways, comprising eight of the top ten items recorded.¹ Clean Water Fund's (CWF) Taking Out the Trash survey similarly found that the most significant component of trash in urban runoff (67%) was take-out food and beverage packaging² and identified fast food venues, restaurants, cafes, grocery and convenience stores as the major sources (81%) of that trash. A study of worldwide near shore ocean litter found that single-use bags, plastic bottles, food containers and food wrappers are the four most widespread items polluting the seas, making up almost half of the human-made waste.³

Billions of dollars are spent on end-of-pipe solutions to manage trash, such as landfilling and incineration, as well as on recycling. In the U.S., businesses and city governments spend \$6 billion on solid waste management of disposable service ware and packaging.⁴ Meanwhile, U.S. per capita household garbage generation has increased from 2.7 lbs. of garbage per day in 1960 to 4.9 pounds in 2018.⁵ Since the pandemic began, the use of take-out containers has risen 250-300%, pushing the daily average of

garbage generation even higher.⁶ Commitments by governments and industry will reduce the annual volume of plastic flowing into the ocean by only about 7% by 2040 and have not succeeded in stopping growth in the generation of disposable single-use packaging.⁷ The 1 trillion pieces of disposable food ware and packaging used by U.S. food service businesses every year will only increase if current trends continue.⁸

The report, *Breaking the Plastic Wave*,⁹ clearly shows that an integrated system-change approach could result in an 80% reduction of plastic pollution leakage into the ocean by 2040. Source reduction accounts for the largest opportunity for reductions across all approaches at 30%; reusables can replace single-use food and beverage packaging and reduce the amount of waste that ends up harming the environment. In addition, upstream impacts of pollution from making plastics, and toxic chemicals such as PFAS in some compostable paper, can be avoided. As awareness of the upstream and downstream problems with disposables, particularly plastics, is growing, individuals and organizations are calling for restrictions on single (and zero) use plastics, and governments are passing policies such as “skip the stuff” that would require restaurants to only provide utensils and other disposable items upon request.

ReThink Disposable has unique experience creating impactful programs through a collaborative process with food service establishments to move them away from disposables. The time is right for ReThink Disposable to build on the increased awareness, policies, and activism aimed at reducing disposables and expand its reach.

3. Mission, Vision, Values and Goals

The Technical Advisory Committee provided feedback into the mission, vision, values and goals of the ReThink program. With their input, we’ve adopted the following terms.

The **mission** of ReThink Disposable is to stop trash before it starts. The program’s vision is to see reduction and reuse automatically woven into how we dine, so that trash is reduced, our waterways are less polluted, and people and the planet are protected.

We adopted the following program **values**:

- **to care:** for people, planet and businesses by providing viable alternatives to disposables;
- **to recognize:** that the burden of plastic production, litter, and lack of access to more environmentally preferable options has been unequally experienced by poor communities and communities of color;
- **to respect:** the cultural differences in the businesses and communities in which we work and the partners that we work with;
- **to partner:** with those who respect our mission, vision, clients, and communities;
- **to support:** local food service establishments and solutions that are at the core of communities.

In developing a goal for this strategic plan, we looked at the accomplishments of the program over the past decade. To date, the program has worked with restaurants and institutions to avoid 22.3 million pieces of foodware annually. Our 5-year goal is to avoid an additional 22.3 million pieces of disposable foodware annually (i.e., doubling what ReThink has accomplished to date in half the time).

While a numeric goal is important, the ReThink Program also has a goal of changing the culture at a grassroots level, business by business and to support policies that will make these changes happen more quickly.

4. How it Works

ReThink heavily relies on contracts from local governments to achieve its mission. Grants from private foundations provide some program flexibility but have been limited. While ReThink has forged strong multi-year partnerships, the heavy reliance on contracts limits the program's ability to expand into new areas, expand its JEDI role and deliver additional services to the FSEs.

ReThink uses a seven-step process to recruit and provide assistance to FSEs. Zero Waste Specialists are trained to:

1. Develop, on their own or through partners, restaurants and food service businesses to target;
2. Identify a contact at each restaurant and approach them in person or virtually;
3. Consult with the restaurant or food service business to share details about the program and its benefits;
4. Assess the FSE to determine where reusables can be used;
5. Research and order durable items to meet the FSE's specific needs;
6. Train FSE staff to incorporate the reusables into the operation and otherwise ensure a smooth transition;
7. Follow up in 2 weeks to several months later to ensure restaurants are sticking with the program and identify and address issues that have arisen.

Starting with step 4, this process takes about 4-6 hours over a span of 2-4 weeks to transform one food service business.

In all of its outreach contracts, Clean Water Fund includes a community passthrough fund that enables ReThink staff to purchase reusable foodware and infrastructure for newly implemented reuse-centric operations. Being able to offset some of the cost of switching to reusable foodware eliminates barriers to entry and lowers the risk factor of trying something that may not work out for the restaurant.

ReThink has a proven model of making change. Two of the big barriers to expanding its reach are that it only works where it can obtain funding — it is not able to work with restaurants that are outside of contract scopes — and that the work is labor intensive and would require a significant increase in staff and funding to scale it up using its existing model.

ReThink received a grant that began in October 2022 from the federal National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Marine Debris Program. This grant allows ReThink to expand the program into six states where Clean Water has offices. This grant will fund ReThink to, among other things, work with local food establishments and academic institutions; increase understanding of litter impacts on our environment in order to increase public demand for more trash-free businesses; and institute a train-the-trainer program. This contract presents an opportunity for ReThink to work in different areas of the country,

identify unique geographic challenges and test different methods for recruitment, messaging, onboarding and partnership development. Each office has unique relationships — such as schools in Connecticut and New Jersey — that will help expand our understanding of who the program can benefit and how. In addition, other states may have different policy reasons for promoting ReThink; for example, incineration is still a common end-of-life option for trash in many states. ReThink pairs well with an advocacy goal of eliminating incineration.

5. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Through the planning process, the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats emerged. These are used to gain a greater understanding of the ReThink Disposable program and inform program recommendations.

In short, ReThink's strengths include a staff that is knowledgeable, effective, and embraces community driven solutions. It has good case studies and metrics that make the business and environmental case for its work which can be used by government, businesses, and advocates.

ReThink's primary weakness is that the work is time- and labor-consuming, and therefore expensive. ReThink staff, like restaurant staff, is spread thin and turns over. Because the program is largely contract funded, the work is limited to where ReThink has contracts and what the contract requires — interested restaurants outside of those areas don't have access to ReThink services unless they can pay for them. In addition, when restaurants get too busy, encounter hardships like labor shortages, or are dealing with staff turnover, they may shift back to disposables.

There are opportunities that support ReThink's growth. There is increasing awareness about the negative impacts of plastic. There are many local and national organizations in place to support the type of work that ReThink does by raising awareness about disposables, getting more boots on the ground, and also providing funding. There is also more awareness about environmental justice, which should open more funding sources and provide more opportunity to work with communities that have been disproportionately impacted by plastics, pollution, and litter and who traditionally have not had access to environmental programs. ReThink has many aspects to its program — environmental and health benefits associated with durables, environmental justice, economic benefits to communities and businesses — creating the ability to adjust messaging to different audiences to gain more traction and funding.

The threats to ReThink's success are that disposable plastics are cheap, light, see-through, and culturally accepted. The pandemic has hit restaurants hard and they have fewer staff and less bandwidth to make changes and even to find and fund labor to wash dishes. The pandemic also made people, incorrectly, afraid that the virus might spread through the surfaces of reusables and that fear, combined with labor shortages, caused even some restaurants that used reusable items to switch to disposables; future pandemics or health scares could make this happen again. Finally, climate change has caused severe drought over many parts of the country, raising the cost of water and even requiring limits to use in some places — this ironically can work against durables. And state and local policies and health departments don't always support the use of durables over disposables.

Additional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are identified below:

STRENGTHS	
<p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective, proven track record • Good case studies demonstrating cost savings • Good metrics <p>Business Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships with manufacturers, distributors, and reuse services • Knowledge and experience connecting with businesses • Ability to work with small and large businesses • Free technical assistance • Incentive funding for restaurants 	<p>Organization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility working with partners • Legacy — long standing trust in CWA since 1972 • Enthusiasm and passion for the work • A national field canvass that goes door to door • A phone canvass that can outreach to communities en masse

WEAKNESSES	
<p>Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unclear if restaurants would do this if ReThink didn't pay for durables • Dependency on grants and contracts — lots of work and limited. • Are there enough sources of funding for durables? • Can't work with restaurants outside of work funded by grants/contracts <p>Staffing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment is labor intensive, 1:1; not enough boots on the ground to do this with more businesses • Staff spread too thin, hard to do outreach, education, partnership building, etc, and balance needs of brand with demands of clients/partners. • High turnover possibly related to low wages and high cost of living — at ReThink and at restaurants • Lack of bandwidth to work with larger opportunities outside of grant funding • Need multilingual staff • Program director time/attention spread too thin: on the ground work, strategic planning, managing staff, and fundraising. 	<p>Outside Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ordinances, or lack of them, can be a weakness • Business distrust • Misperceptions in public agencies and from policy-makers about reuse • Lack of public awareness <p>Metrics/Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need more case studies • Challenge getting data from restaurants <p>Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily in CA now • Doesn't address take-out in magnitude to match the problem • Hard to ensure restaurants keep with the program

OPPORTUNITIES	
<p>Increased Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is more awareness about the problems of plastics to build on • Take advantage of more engaged public to spread the ReThink message • A critical mass of restaurants + reuse = culture change/normalizing <p>Creating efficiencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To streamline a time-consuming onboarding process <p>Collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create strategic partnerships to expand reach, while protecting “brand” and ReThink IP • Utilize Green Business and Restaurant Programs as (free) field staff or partner on grants to get funding for them to do reusables specific work • Solid waste and recycling professionals (government and private haulers) could be good partners • Vendor and distributor training re: reusables; potential sponsor of ReThink • Need training and accountability tools if work with partners 	<p>Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tie-in to infrastructure/climate bill • Expand funder base- private sector sponsors, foundations, investors <p>JEDI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide sustainability programs to communities that don’t often get them • Help restaurants save money • Take advantage of growing interest and awareness about environmental justice • Bring more people of color and disadvantaged communities to the table to identify opportunities, be advocates, and help with work. • Conservation ethic is part of many cultures. <p>Messaging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ a flexible approach to broaden appeal, e.g., some public agencies and businesses may want less plastic-specific advocacy

THREATS	
<p>Economics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labor constraints in U.S. — for CWF and restaurants • Cheap plastics capacity continuing to come on-line • Restaurants have been hit hard by Covid, lack bandwidth • In Bay Area, local policies no longer are eligible stormwater reduction credits — reduces incentives • Will reusable savings continue to outpace the rising cost of water? <p>Public Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pandemics • Post-Covid one time use trend • To-go culture from pandemic, less dine-in • Some health departments make reuse harder 	<p>Environmental</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heating water for dishwashing = ghgs • Water rights • Competition from compostables • Drought may make it more expensive/less appealing to use durables • Environmental benefits won’t be fully realized unless systems are in place to reduce loss of durables (e.g., from theft, breakage, disposal) • Lack of government enforcement of Skip the Stuff and other related policies <p>Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent local/state legislation introduces uncertainty and lack of standard rules

6. Strategies for Improving and Expanding ReThink

6.1. Centering Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI)

JEDI values are core to the mission of Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund and are a vital component of the ReThink program. Communities of color have been disproportionately impacted by all kinds of environmental injustices, including plastics manufacturing, litter, pollution, and lack of access to environmental services and programs. To build a resilient and successful program, ReThink must engage with JEDI communities. And it must do so in a respectful, thoughtful, and culturally appropriate manner, keeping in mind the distrust that some of these communities may have for those outside their community and for policymakers. As a result, building and maintaining relationships may take time and multiple visits with food service enterprises. Additionally, messaging should be tested to make sure it is culturally sensitive. For example, using messages about waste and being wasteful may be insulting, while talking about conserving resources may resonate with some cultures.

ReThink currently incorporates JEDI principles into its programs in a number of ways. Internally, Clean Water Fund and Clean Water Action implement equitable hiring practices to ensure fair and equal access to employment opportunities. Listings are posted to job boards, shared with partner organizations and sent to listservs that are focused on providing opportunities to communities that are historically and systemically under-resourced and underrepresented. Job announcements encourage applicants to include life experiences in addition to or in lieu of formal education and degrees in application materials, a strategy encouraged by TAC member Melissa Aguayo of Break Free From Plastics. The organization continues to build a ReThink Disposable team equipped with a diverse set of language skills in order to increase participation opportunities for business owners who may prefer technical assistance in non-English verbal and written languages.

Externally, ReThink incorporates various tools to assist in mapping environmental justice communities in order to focus early business engagement in these areas. This is intended to ensure that all communities are reached equitably, specifically bridging access to restaurant owners who systemically lack the bandwidth to access available resources. Such tools include:

- Detailed zip code demographic analysis
- City maps
- Using the “percent low-income,” “overall displacement,” and “segregation” filters
- Census data
- Local impact reports
- Overall history

These efforts appear to be working. A review of ReThink data several years back found that more than 90% of the FSEs it works with are owned or managed by Black and indigenous or other persons of color, women or members of the LGBTQA+ community.

In each project budget, ReThink includes a community pass through fund that allows for the purchase of reusable foodware or supplies needed to support reuse operations. It is ReThink’s policy to double the base amount for each project or contract if the business owners identify as women, BIPOC, or part of the LGBTQ+ community.

In investigating strategies for supporting our JEDI values in expanding the ReThink program, we identified a report published by students from the Evans School of Public Policy & Governance at the University of Washington in June, 2022, “Considering and Addressing Equity Concerns for Foodware Reuse Systems in Seattle.”¹⁰ This report focused on the role Seattle Public Utilities could play in supporting the move to reusable containers for takeout in the Seattle area as it relates to equity. The report provided useful framing and recommendations.

The report identifies two types of equity. **Distributional equity** is defined as “fair access to resources, benefits, and determinants of equity” (King County, n.d.). Recommendations fairly distribute benefits and burdens across all segments of a community, prioritizing individuals or areas with the highest need. This includes policies that highlight government support and infrastructure development. **Procedural equity** is defined as “inclusiveness in the decision process [that highlights] more than just mainstream voices” (King County, n.d.). Recommendations focus on fairness in the political process for resource allocation and dispute resolution by centering representation and inclusion. Examples include stakeholder engagement, government communication and engagement, public outreach, and establishment of trust.

For ReThink, this would mean making sure that FSEs that operate in minority or traditionally disadvantaged communities or are owned or operated by minority or traditionally disadvantaged groups (e.g., BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, women) should have equitable access to ReThink’s programs, as these are areas and groups that face high burdens and have high needs. It also means that these FSEs must have a seat at the table for any discussion about policy or programs that relate to durables in their communities. This could even include decisions about where sidewalk trash bins should be.

The report identified six areas of Equity Concern: trust, awareness, accessibility, cost, safety and cleanliness, and participation.

ReThink can incorporate these equity concerns by: creating trust with FSEs to build transparency and communication; raising awareness within the community to increase acceptance of the program; providing robust training and education about the program in underserved communities as well as clear information and necessary equipment to support those making the change to reusables; ensuring that the program is at least cost-neutral; addressing concerns about safety and cleanliness to counter real or perceived public health issues; and recognizing that some FSEs still may not want to participate.

The report contains recommendations to Seattle Public Utilities that either have already been incorporated into ReThink outreach or should be considered including in its approach. Among those are building trust between FSEs and government (including through community organizations), creating a standard vocabulary, connecting FSEs with other service providers that can help their operations and save money, working with service providers to train FSE employees, identifying incentives for service providers that are community-based organizations, mitigating FSEs physical limitations (storage, dishwashing), facilitating placement and servicing of collection bins, coordinating with Health Dept. for guidance and approval, developing educational and marketing materials for customers and establishing feedback channels.

While some of these recommendations are already incorporated into the Rethink program, there should be a more concerted effort to utilize our labor-intensive outreach to provide additional benefits to FSEs. San Francisco’s Environment Now program does this; multilingual fellows are hired to reach out to restaurants to provide information and assistance in implementing multiple city programs, including water and energy conservation, in addition to offering ReThink incentives.

The expansion of ReThink to six states in 2023 offers an opportunity to center the growing program in environmental justice. Clean Water Fund is partnering with Jerome Shabazz and the Overbrook Environmental Education Center in Philadelphia PA to provide a virtual training session for current and new staff and supervisors on the project, focusing on environmental justice issues and principles. The training will help ensure that JEDI principles are embedded in ReThink work in all states and that its services are provided in a culturally appropriate manner in environmental justice communities.

Additional feedback channels and continuing education will be incorporated into the program to make sure the program continues its racial equity focus as it expands. Lessons learned in different locations should be broadly shared among the states and with other project partners.

6.2. Building Partnerships

Partnerships have been an integral part of ReThink Disposable's success since its inception. Working in tandem with government agencies, other non-profits, and businesses is a tenet of the ReThink Disposable program and will continue to be a need as the program expands its scope.

ReThink started testing a new partnership with the group Beyond Plastics in 2022, beginning with a preliminary training of 300 potential volunteers. If each of those volunteers recruited one restaurant in a year, that would be equivalent to what ReThink has recruited in eleven years. Beyond Plastics has 45 chapters, potentially expanding ReThink's geographic reach.

As awareness about the health and environmental impacts of disposable products, especially single-use plastics, has been growing, opportunities for partnerships with ReThink also grow. New and existing partnerships could be a pathway to provide volunteers to help recruit new FSEs as discussed below, fundraising, data collection, policy-support, litter characterization, case study writing, and more.

There are a variety of types of organizations that ReThink can partner with for different aspects of its work, many examples of which are current partners. *(See Table following page).*

While mentioned above, there are numerous ways that colleges and universities can help ReThink expand capacity. Clubs like Net Impact — MBA students (and graduates) committed to sustainability — and environmental clubs can provide interns to work on case studies and data analysis to make the business and policy case for reducing disposables. They can sample past ReThink clients to assess the stickiness of the program to understand why FSEs do or do not stay with it and make recommendations. Students can test different kinds of messages and methods of delivery. Professors are always looking for real world issues to link students to for internships or class projects. Subjects could include business, sustainability, data analysis, media (for training videos), and even hospitality. There is no shortage of discreet projects that classes or interns can do to help ReThink achieve its mission.

As it develops each type of partnership ReThink needs to consider what types of systems or agreements need to be put in place to grow and maintain strong relationships while at the same time holding partners accountable and ensuring that its quality, brand, intellectual property and reputation are preserved. Types of agreements might include contracts, incentives (partners could be given some sort of financial reward or visibility on the ReThink website if they reach certain targets), payments for workers and organizations in JEDI communities, trainings and random sampling of restaurants that others recruit. The type of agreement would depend on the role the partner is playing, such as representing themselves as part of ReThink,

Partner Type	Opportunities for Collaboration	Types of Partnering
Academia	Research to utilize data, link data to policy needs, and generate new tools for the program. Provide student assistance through program credits and internships to expand program capacity; convert dining halls to reuse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint funding • Research projects • Data analysis • Student engagement • Staff recruitment • Large-scale conversion opportunities
Community-based organizations	Assist or lead in outreach to core constituents; provide background on cultural mores of local FSEs; recruit businesses and volunteers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint funding • Sub-grants • JEDI or cultural competency training
Business	Partner with business associations to conduct outreach to specific communities; use business association events to reach out to the greater business community; identify business organizations representing FSEs owned or operated by persons of color, immigrants, LGBTQA+ and women.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach • Advice on communicating with FSEs owned/operated by persons of color, immigrants, LGBTQA+ and women
Government	Contracts for FSE outreach; collaborate to develop outreach tools such as education on new ordinances or public health recommendations; use of government ability to make official contact with FSEs; work to identify and implement policies that advance ReThink’s mission.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding • Ordinance development and implementation • Official outreach to FSEs
Non-governmental organizations	Disseminate ReThink data; partner to develop and implement needed policy change; partner to implement ReThink in new places as appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data analysis and dissemination • Policy advocacy • Implementation partners
Consultants	Possible partner for ReThink implementation; development of new tools to advance program. This could include reuse organizations such as r.Cup, Okapi, Dishjoy that work with restaurants to provide dishwashing services for takeout containers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to government contracts • Ability to analyze data • Expansion beyond Clean Water program areas. • Provide services not provided by ReThink
Funders	Provide support for policy advocacy and development of new tools for data analysis. Help disseminate program accomplishments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding • Communications

what funding or commitments are attached to the relationship and ReThink’s prior relationship to the organization. New tools, such as training and outreach materials, may need to be developed.

6.3. Outreach Strategies

Recruiting food service enterprises (restaurants, cafeterias, etc.) is time consuming. ReThink staff work 1:1 to identify and bring businesses into the program and get them set up and trained to use non-disposable products. This is both a strength and a weakness. In 2019, there were over 490,000 independently owned food businesses in the U.S.¹¹ In its 11 years of existence, ReThink has converted a fraction of these businesses, about 400 restaurants. While the quality of deep relationships over quantity of restaurants that participate in the program equates to sustained reuse practices, the investment in time in converting restaurants can limit staff capacity to reach out to new FSEs and also conduct multiple followup visits to existing ReThink FSEs to ensure a successful transition.

To recruit and convert FSEs, ReThink:

1. Applies for contracts or grants from governments and foundations;
2. On its own or through partners, identifies restaurants and food service businesses to target;
3. Identifies a contact at each restaurant and approaches them in person or virtually;
4. Works with the restaurant or food service business to bring them on board;
5. Assesses areas where reusables can be used and trains restaurant staff how to handle;
6. Researches and orders durable items for the restaurant;
7. Helps restaurants use new items and troubleshoot;
8. Follows up in 2 weeks to several months later to ensure restaurants are sticking with the program and identify and address issues that have arisen.

Starting with step 4, this process takes about 4-6 hours over a span of 2-4 weeks to transform one food service business.

In all of its outreach contracts, Clean Water Fund includes a community passthrough fund that enables ReThink staff to purchase reusable foodware and infrastructure for newly implemented reuse-centric operations. Being able to offset some of the cost of switching to reusable foodware eliminates barriers to entry and lowers the risk factor of trying something that may not work out for the restaurant.

ReThink has a proven model of making change. Two of the big barriers to expanding its reach are:

- It only works where it can obtain funding — it is not able to work with restaurants that are outside of contract scopes and that may be interested; and
- The work is labor intensive and slow and would require a significant increase in staff and funding to scale it up using its existing model.

ReThink received a contract that began in October 2022 from the federal National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Marine Debris Program. This grant allows ReThink to expand the program into six states where Clean Water has offices. This grant will fund ReThink to, among other things, work with

local food establishments and academic institutions; increase understanding of litter impacts on our environment in order to increase public demand for more trash-free businesses; and institute a train-the-trainer program. This contract presents an opportunity for ReThink to work in different areas of the country, identify unique geographic challenges and test different methods for recruitment, messaging, onboarding and partnership development. Each office has unique relationships — such as schools in Connecticut and nonprofit food delivery services in New Jersey — that will help expand our understanding of who the program can benefit and how. In addition, other states may have different policy reasons for promoting ReThink; for example, incineration is still a common end-of-life option for trash in many states. ReThink pairs well with an advocacy goal of eliminating incineration.

The TAC discussed multiple approaches to help ReThink expand its outreach capacity. All come with pros and cons and questions that would need to be answered.

6.3.1. Expand the Use of Volunteers

Cultivating volunteers to help implement parts of the program can have multiple advantages. It activates and engages local community members and creates a following that can raise the program's visibility. On the other hand, volunteers take time and effort to recruit and train. Training in JEDI values would need to be prioritized to ensure that the organization's commitment to racial equity is maintained. While three options are presented below, it is possible that some combination of the three would be used, varying according to the competence and commitment of the individual volunteers.

Use volunteers/restaurant patrons to identify leads. This model would encourage volunteers and patrons to identify FSEs that could benefit from ReThink assistance and provide business names to ReThink for follow-up. Volunteers would not necessarily have contact with restaurant management or staff and would not be authorized to represent ReThink or to make commitments on behalf of ReThink. Volunteers could have a link or carry a card with a QR code that leads to an on-line form they can fill out or leave at the restaurant so that the restaurant can contact ReThink. Eureka Recycling in Minnesota (its director, Lynn Hoffman, was a member of the TAC) used a similar approach in their restaurant compost program.

Train volunteers/other organizations to recruit leads. In this option, volunteers would canvass restaurants to identify those with interest in the program and then turn the leads over to ReThink staff to follow through in converting the restaurant. This would require training of volunteers so that they know who to approach and what to say and are on-message. This has the advantage of increasing the number of FSEs that receive basic information about the program.

Train volunteers to work directly with FSEs. In this option, ReThink would train volunteers to implement the program — from recruitment through conversion and placement of durables. ReThink's role would be volunteer training and coordination, oversight, and troubleshooting. This could be an option for expanding ReThink's reach to parts of the country where it doesn't have offices and staff to run the program. Volunteers could be unaffiliated individuals or those that come through partner organizations. Some questions that would have to be answered are how ReThink's FSE prebate program would be incorporated into the program and ensuring there are sources of funding to purchase durables for the FSEs. This high degree of autonomy raises legal issues related to intellectual property or licensing of the program to others to run would need to be explored. This would be a significant level of responsibility for volunteers and may deter some from joining the program for that reason.

Expand the Use of Volunteers:	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can greatly expand the number of restaurants reached • Cost-effective but not free; requires training, coordination, materials • Restaurants listen to their customers, so empowering customers could create a stronger commitment to the program on the part of FSEs. • Saves time for ReThink staff by reducing the initial labor-intensive outreach. • No concerns about protecting brand/quality • Can be additive to ReThink recruitment, won't jeopardize grants or contracts • Creates a pool of people who could later become ReThink staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we breeding environmental police that just make everyone angry? • ReThink has limited control over a volunteer's presentation of either attitude or language. • High turnover, less reliability with volunteers • Need to develop tools to help volunteers participate. • Need staff, systems and infrastructure to support volunteers — e.g., volunteer coordinator to train, answer questions, create materials, keep focus on JEDI, etc. • Volunteers may have their own agenda that could conflict with ReThink's mission.

6.3.2. Engage Partners Trusted by FSEs

Significantly increase outreach to and engagement with local organizations known and trusted by FSEs. ReThink currently reaches out to local business associations and attends trade fairs and other events that attract local food service establishments in order to spread the word about ReThink and encourage participation. This option envisions a much more intentional campaign to identify and approach local business organizations to educate them and their membership about the ReThink program. Potential partners include chambers of commerce and neighborhood associations who would help promote the program and encourage members to sign up. This would be a recruitment strategy only; ReThink Disposable staff would still implement the program. While local governments generally include some presentations to business associations and participation in events as part of contracts, this option envisions a more intensive program that would include identification of and outreach to local organizations and associations, individual presentations and follow up to ensure the entity incorporates ReThink into its ongoing communication efforts.

Engage Partners Trusted by FSEs:	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaches more restaurants at once • Force multiplier • Trusted organizations are a step above volunteers • Can improve our understanding of unique cultural aspects of different communities • Good to increase awareness/pique interest • Good opportunity to spread the word • May be a source of funding if trusted organizations can pay for training • Can better target specific categories of FSEs (i.e., JEDI) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires trained staff to conduct presentations • Requires prompt follow up to increase chance of action • May not be effective in ensuring DEI in program • FSEs may not take initiative to follow through • Has not been a consistent source of FSE leads in the past

6.3.3. Use Clean Water’s Canvass

Integrate Clean Water’s canvasses into outreach efforts. One big asset of Clean Water Action/Clean Water Fund is its canvass. Staff knock on doors educating the community about priority issues and raising funds for Clean Water’s work. The canvass is an iconic part of Clean Water Action/Clean Water Fund’s activities dating back to CWA’s door-to-door campaign to pass the Clean Water Act in the early 70s.

The canvass was shut down during the worst of Covid and has been gearing back up; its status varies by region. ReThink and the canvass can build a mutually beneficial relationship, with ReThink helping the field canvasses stabilize operations and attract candidates to its operations, and the canvass supporting ReThink’s work by recruiting FSEs, providing feedback from and raising awareness in the community, and seeing if restaurants are staying with the program. ReThink could do this by paying for dedicated canvass shifts; working with canvass directors to come up with a hybrid model, where ReThink would be part, but not all, of the canvass work; or just using the canvass in its current form, going door-to-door to spread the word about ReThink and generate greater awareness of and participation in the program from members and others that they interact with on a daily basis.

Use Clean Water’s Canvass:	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be used to recruit volunteers, restaurants, and raise awareness and support in community • Can help with initial outreach • Provides a consistent presence in the field advertising ReThink mission and goals • Provides accountability to ReThink • Saves staff time of trained Zero Waste specialists, who can focus on FSEs that have been identified as interested. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive engagement of canvass in ReThink tasks requires a funding source • Timing of outreach may not mesh with canvass schedule. The best time to approach FSEs is late morning/early afternoon, while the canvass generally works from mid-afternoon through mid-evening

7.3.4. Make use of college programs and internships.

Expanding outreach to local college campuses and developing an intern program that would provide credit in return for work in the program could allow the ReThink program to conduct research, data entry, website updates, research for new tools, data gathering and analysis and policy research. Engaged students could create a pipeline for new ReThink staff.

Make Use of College Programs and Internships:	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand ReThink’s capacity • Help with development of new initiatives • Provides another outreach tool • Enhance data collection and analysis • Provide new staff opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires supervision and guidance • Need to partner closely with academic supervisors to ensure that workplan benefits students and university as well as ReThink

These options are not mutually exclusive. ReThink’s recent NOAA grant is a big growth spurt. ReThink should take advantage of this opportunity to test different models. It could try a combination of all, using volunteers to fill in staff gaps, or try different models in different states or regions. The first options are heavy on using volunteers. Accountability systems should be put in place and additional staff may need to be added to oversee and support volunteers. Expectations of partner organizations and volunteers should be made clear from the start and necessary accountability structures put into place. Given the importance of JEDI to accomplishing ReThink’s work, extra effort should be put in to identify partners and volunteers in JEDI communities.

6.4. Expand ReThink to Areas Not Covered by Clean Water Fund

Expanding the ReThink program in the 10 states where Clean Water Fund operates is both a financial and staffing challenge but is a relatively straightforward undertaking. Expanding the program in other areas of the country presents a greater challenge. This report proposes two options — neither mutually exclusive — for undertaking that challenge.

6.4.1. Develop On-line Training and Support Tools

One option for encouraging participation is to provide on-line training and toolkits on the ReThink website that would allow partner organizations to be trained remotely to implement the ReThink program. The toolkit and training would be accessed upon execution of a contract with the partner organization and could be accompanied by either generic or co-branded ReThink printed materials and would need to be part of a contracting process that protects the ReThink brand. The same training and toolkit are being developed to train staff in ReThink states and can also form part of a volunteer training module.

6.4.2. Contract with Consultants and NGOs to Implement ReThink

ReThink is regularly contacted by cities around the globe for advice on how to implement a reusable program and requests that ReThink respond to local solicitations. ReThink already holds monthly office hours to provide in-depth briefings to interested entities about the program. ReThink has also partnered with NGOs and consultants to implement the program in areas of California. In these cases, ReThink has acted as a contractor to conduct trainings, develop co-branded print material and provide on-going advice through project implementation. While this initially expands the ReThink program and fulfills the ReThink mission, it may not provide long-term growth potential for the program, as these entities may spin off their own revamped and renamed version of the program.

6.4.3. Develop self-certification programs

The California Green Business Network (Jo Fleming, Executive Director of the Network, served on the TAC) has a self-certification program that could be a model for the ReThink program. For ReThink, this could include an expansion of the training video and toolkit noted above to include translation into multiple languages, and more specific training for restaurant staff on FSE implementation issues. One advantage is that the program could be used by FSEs to train new staff as they are onboarded and also to retrain current staff. Eureka Recycling made training videos about composting for restaurants due to high staff turnover. It is easy for restaurants to show videos and saves their staff time with ongoing training. ReThink could partner with existing green business certification programs to market this option.

6.5. Identifying Priority Targets

As ReThink plans for its next stage of growth, it should also think about what types of FSEs to target and how it can do so with and without funding. While ReThink prioritizes local FSEs, it does not rule out providing tools to and working with institutions or larger corporate companies.

Criteria for recruiting or working with an FSE include:

- How staff time can be funded, potentially including payment for services (e.g., corporate cafeterias, chain restaurants, hotels);
- Whether the participation of the restaurant could help influence other restaurants to take action by setting an example or by providing leadership or data for a case study that will be helpful to other businesses;
- Whether it supports ReThink’s JEDI goals;
- Whether a FSE is in an area where data and community support can influence policy decisions that reduce the use of disposables;
- Whether the conversion will be high visibility and create ripple effects (e.g., an iconic restaurant, a big cafeteria, a convention center);
- Whether there is funding for services, durable-ware, and dishwashing equipment; and
- Whether trustworthy partners are available to support in areas where ReThink is not working.

Having clear criteria can help ensure consistency of messaging and help FSEs understand whether or not they might qualify for ReThink’s assistance.

6.6. Expanding the Program to Other Areas

ReThink’s NOAA funding covers growth into 6 states, beginning in 2023. Establishing these programs is only the first step; fundraising will be required during the NOAA grant period to ensure continuation of the expanded program. Additional funding will be needed to expand to the remaining states in which Clean Water operates (Michigan, Texas, Maryland and Virginia plus the District of Columbia.)

Considerations for ReThink as it decides how to expand in where there are no Clean Water offices, are:

- The presence of partner organizations that can make introductions to FSEs and funders, provide supportive resources, and potentially perform the 1:1 business engagement;
- Existence of or potential for state and local Zero Waste plans and policies;
- Availability of funding;
- Presence of under-resourced JEDI communities, including environmental justice communities where plastics are manufactured, or landfills or incinerators are present and impact communities;
- Areas where demonstrations of programs like ReThink could help advance policies, plans, and programs or where litter is a clear source of pollution.

ReThink will use these criteria as filters as it considers options for expansion.

6.7. Communications

ReThink has a number of audiences it needs to communicate with about its work. The primary ones are food service enterprises, to help them to participate and stick with the program. Other important audiences are local governments, who currently provide the bulk of funding for the program and other funders that can fund policy initiatives and program improvements. Program expansion and acceptance also depends on broader engagement of community and business groups, the general public and decision-makers.

The ReThink program generates case studies for about 10% of the restaurants it converts, selecting those that provide a relevant example for other businesses, demonstrate the economic and environmental value of the program, or provide support for a proposed or existing reuse policy agenda. When businesses are converted, the program uses social media to advertise the restaurant's story and raise awareness for the ReThink program.

Any messaging to FSEs must be tailored to the specific community and tested before being widely used. Restaurants likely care about saving money first, health secondary, and environment last, but this may vary depending on the restaurant and the neighborhood and background of the owners and staff. Job preservation and creation are something that policymakers or chambers of commerce would care about. Health benefits may be important to some stakeholders, like schools. Development of regionally specific case studies is important — someone in Massachusetts may be dismissive of information from California.

Messages must also be culturally relevant and sensitive, avoiding things that may shame, like pointing fingers for wasting. People should be brought into the story, letting them know they are part of the solution. Restaurants should be engaged in any policy discussions so they are not left behind. Health departments should be brought in so there is clarity on what is expected by restaurants as they make the shift away from disposables.

Moving forward, the NOAA grant provides an opportunity to develop case studies of successful conversions in multiple states. With additional communications capacity, the program can consider new ways to present case studies and the data they provide in a manner that generates public interest and is persuasive to local FSEs.

6.8. Metrics

ReThink is one of the few organizations collecting establishment-specific data about the impacts of switching from disposables. This puts the program in a good position to continue to be a trusted source of good quality data about reuse vs disposables.

ReThink's data is rigorous; it won't assume data that can't be verified. Some of the challenges to obtaining metrics, depending on the type being collected, are that FSEs don't always know how many disposable items they purchase in a year or how much they are spending on them. It can also be very difficult to contact the business owner or manager that has access to the data, requiring multiple phone calls and visits. The representative data collected to date indicates that about 2/3 of restaurants stick with the program. However, ReThink doesn't have a consistent practice of checking back with restaurants a year or more after conversion.

Data is important because it can help make the business case to restaurants about why they should join

the program (of the case studies ReThink has done, all except one show a savings to the food service enterprise and the one that didn't broke even). Data can also illustrate the case to policymakers that policies supporting durables won't add costs to food service businesses and will improve public health and the environment StopWaste in California, Alameda County's Zero Waste agency, is developing a model reuse ordinance that member communities can use, using ReThink's metrics to help estimate impacts. Data can help educate the general public about the value of reuse over disposables and contribute to broader cultural change on the issue. Data also shows ReThink whether or not it is achieving its goals and can help identify which models and messaging are most effective.

After reusables are implemented, ReThink goes back to the restaurant to see how much the purchase of disposables has declined, and calculates the impact per item and payback period.

All of ReThink's data and assumptions are transparent. ReThink currently collects metrics on:

- Annual number of disposables avoided per business;
- Weight of disposables avoided per business;
- Dollars saved — accounts for upfront costs, ongoing expenses (labor, water), payback period;
- Overall, average annual number of disposables avoided, total weight, and total savings across all businesses;
- Number of ReThink Disposable participating FSEs.

ReThink formerly collected data from every business it worked with. Now in its contracts with funders it agrees to gather metrics for ten percent of businesses converted. This provides a representative sample of the specific regional program and provides information that may vary based on geographic differences and across different types of food service enterprises. It will help inform and support assumptions that ReThink makes to fill in gaps in data that it doesn't have or can't afford to get.

Additional metrics that ReThink might consider collecting are data on how long restaurants maintain the program and what factors encouraged them to stay with or leave the program; information on job creation (type, number, wages); Greenhouse gas saving (see EPA's [WARM](#) calculator), dollars saved in trash hauling costs, and the amount of trash and litter in an area before and after ReThink programs are instituted. A litter study in Philadelphia¹² found that the worst litter seemed to be in the lowest income areas (a JEDI issue). Tracking this metric could advance ReThink's JEDI goals.

The greater the types of metrics collected, the more time consuming and expensive they are to collect. Where the program depends heavily on government contracts, this can result in less time for business engagement and support, so there are tradeoffs. It may make sense to collect less data from more restaurants, or to only collect additional data where there is demand and funding for it. In a stakeholder interview for this Plan, a representative from the organization MeetGreen said that most clients it works with seem interested in the number of items reduced, a metric already collected by the program.

Types of metrics collected may vary based on regional goals and funder needs where ReThink is operating. Building out a metrics methodology and a dashboard that restaurants can use could be a good intern project.

As the program grows, so does the need for better database management. Future growth needs to be accompanied by an improved system for data collection and analysis. A variety of options are available

or can be developed. San Mateo County maintains its reuse data in Recyclist and San Francisco uses a database developed by Salesforce. Understanding future data needs and analysis is key to selecting the most appropriate database.

6.9. Funding

ReThink's outreach model is based on its understanding of how restaurants are able to absorb new information. Small business owners are tied to their businesses, so need to be approached in their work environment. When looked at simply as a cost per FSE conversion, the cost of this door-to-door outreach is high. However, the goal of the ReThink program is to change the throw-away culture, one business at a time. For every restaurant converted, 3–4 are visited up to 3 times and provided information about the program. Data collected from these restaurants is used to bolster policy discussions and decisions, informs discussions about program barriers and opportunities and is used to generate social media in support of reusables.

The current Bay Area program works in 4 counties and has an annual budget of \$500,000, almost all provided through government contracts. The national expansion funded through the \$200,000 NOAA grant and private donations provides for ReThink staff in 6 additional states and has a budget of \$445,637 over 18 months.

A robust national program as outlined in the strategy discussion will require significant new staff resources including additional outreach capacity, staff to conduct policy advocacy, a communications team, volunteer coordinator(s) and support staff to develop and maintain needed infrastructure. In areas where ReThink serves as a consultant, additional ReThink expertise will be needed.

Funding for reusables is a critical component of the program's success. On average, costs for reusables per FSE run about \$275. ReThink has an NGO partner, Plastic Free Restaurants, which provides subsidies for the purchase of nonplastic reusables that replace plastic single-use items. We expect to utilize that option for a significant portion of the reusable costs generated under the NOAA grant. This can be an important tool particularly for program expansion in areas where local contracts aren't available, but it must be paired with matching funds.

Increasingly, restaurants are requesting initial funding for dishwasher installation and leasing costs, which can increase costs by a few hundred dollars per FSE. Having an additional funding source could help fund this newly identified need.

ReThink's work touches on many separate and sometimes intersecting issues — litter, incineration, environmental justice, water, pollution, Zero Waste, climate change. ReThink's work has mostly been funded by local government contracts, but the intersectionality of the work lends itself to other sources, including foundations, state government, and private funding. Different sources of funding can work together, for example a foundation could provide funding to lay the groundwork for ReThink to grow in new regions, including outreach, while government contracts could fund infrastructure such as durable wear and dishwashers. Or foundations may provide a good source of funding where government has yet to prioritize the issues that ReThink addresses, demonstrating to policymakers the kind of impact a program like ReThink can have and the need for policies and funding to support the work.

The regions that ReThink is already working with or will be expanding to under the NOAA grant may have Zero Waste or waste reduction goals and associated funding. For example, the Commonwealth of

Massachusetts has [Reduce, Reuse, Repair microgrants](#) of up to \$5,000/year that could cover the cost of durable ware and dishwashing machines. This grant is simple to apply for and funds are allocated on a rolling basis. These microgrants won't pay for staff but DEP may be interested in contracting with ReThink to expand its model within the Commonwealth, offering it as a program to municipalities; DEP currently pays another nonprofit, the Center for EcoTechnology, to work on Zero Waste in the private sector (though not in the way that ReThink does), so there is precedent. In Boston, ReThink activities fit into the city's [Zero Waste Plan](#) goals; ReThink could be a valuable partner to the City. Seattle Public Utilities has expressed interest in starting a grant program to reduce disposables for in-house use in restaurants. Environmental agencies already are aware of the link between waste reduction, environmental justice, plastic litter, and climate change and may be looking for successful programs like ReThink that can touch on all topics.

If there is no conflict for CWA/CWF to accept such funds, there may be for-profit sources of funding. For example, trash collection companies and MRFs may be interested in supporting ReThink as a way to promote good will in neighborhoods, and also to reduce contamination in the recycling stream. There may be an interest from private investors in supporting ReThink—again for community goodwill but also perhaps to get a share of restaurant cost savings. Private investment funding was mentioned as a potential option in Philadelphia. Local corporations may have an associated foundation with grant programs to support their communities. Restaurant supply companies may be interested in supplying durable ware for free or reduced cost in exchange for recognition as a supporter of the program.

Sharing cost savings with restaurants for a specified period of time could be a way to raise discretionary funds. There is a history of this kind of shared savings in the energy efficiency sector.¹³

EPA is rolling out a [National Recycling Strategy](#) as part of the Infrastructure Act. It is possible that durable ware and dish washing equipment could be covered as part of this effort. Grants may only be for government entities, but it is worth discussing with regional EPA offices.

As mentioned in the Building Partnerships section, universities may have programs, including work/study programs, to fund interns to work in non-profit organizations. Interns could help ReThink with data analysis; setting up a dashboard for restaurants to track environmental and cost savings; analyzing the cost/benefit from different recruitment models ([Difference in Differences](#) may be a methodology to use) developing outreach materials and tools; recruiting restaurants; researching community groups, state and local policies that may support the work, and funding in target and potential target regions, and more. Additionally, The Switzer Foundation, which runs an environmental fellowship program, has a [Leadership Grant Program](#) to fund Fellows to work for non-profit organizations that are actively addressing environmental improvement. Projects have to be designed collaboratively with Switzer Fellows. Other environmental leadership organizations may have similar programs.

7. Implementation

7.1. Short Term Goals (2023-2024)

In the near term, ReThink will focus on: 1) establishing the ReThink program in the 6 states funded through the NOAA grant, in particular ensuring expanded funding for those programs beyond the NOAA grant's September 30, 2024 end date; and 2) laying the groundwork for future expansion to additional states as well as continuing development of the California ReThink program.

7.1.1. Establishing the ReThink Program in new states

The 2-year grant awarded to CWF's ReThink program by NOAA jumpstarts the establishment of the ReThink program in New England (Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut), New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Minnesota. This includes funding for a half-time ReThink specialist in each state, restaurant incentives and national coordination of training and communications. The matching requirement of the NOAA grant allows CWF to ramp up funding efforts; As of March 31, CWF has raised \$153,000 of the \$245,637 in matching funds required by the grant.

As part of the NOAA grant, CWF will develop on-line training tools that can be used for new staff and potential ReThink partners in other states; and a communications plan that guides all states in how to communicate about the program and its local successes.

In order to ensure the continuing success of this expansion, CWF will identify continued funding sources (government, private) to continue the expanded program beyond the expiration of NOAA funding (10/1/24). To ensure continuing robust programs in each state, CWF will seek funding to increase the current half-time staff to full-time in each of the 6 new state programs. In addition, CWF will seek funding to implement recommendations from this report in three to six more states, including a focus on establishing partnerships with local governments, business associations, local sustainability advocates and others to embed the ReThink program in the local sustainability movement. Finally, ensuring a robust communications component for the program will allow ReThink messaging to expand beyond its current niche and allow messaging to be tailored to local conditions.

Activities in each state will include:

Centering JEDI. CWF has incorporated training on environmental justice and racial equity into the training of new and existing staff under the NOAA grant. The training will be recorded so new staff can receive the same grounding. Each state will develop racial equity and environmental justice goals and reportable metrics.

Policy advocacy and development. ReThink data is already used for policy development and advocacy in California, but the program itself has limited capacity to track the policies that its data supports.

Establishing partnerships. This report identifies outreach to associations and organizations that are trusted by FSEs to augment ReThink's door-to-door outreach.

Incorporating volunteers. Based on the pilot project with Beyond Plastics, which yielded just 3 volunteers out of a committed group of 300 interested members, CWF will in this period focus on developing a communications program to engage our membership in identifying FSEs for expansion and supporting the program. The cost of this effort will be included in the communications budget.

Integrating the Canvass. Canvasses in 1–2 states will be provided with handouts to share with members at the door providing information about the program. Fundraising efforts will include raising sufficient funds to purchase canvass shifts to conduct initial outreach in new business districts.

Metrics. With the explosion of new data and the potential for new types of data collection and analysis, ReThink will need to establish a better process for data handling and process, potentially through a phone app for associates working in the field and a database that allows better tracking and comparison of different datasets.

Total cost for this program through December 2024 is \$1.9 million, of which approximately \$850,000 has been raised to date.

During this two-year period, the program will provide the following benefits:

- Between 200 and 300 businesses in 6 states will convert to reusables, depending upon the level and timing of fundraising.
- By March 2024, achieve diversion of an additional 10 million pieces of trash annually.
- Double the capacity of the ReThink program, with leadership development in 6 states.
- The program will have sufficient communications capacity to broadly advertise the benefits of the program at the local, state and national levels.
- States will engage in policy development and advocacy that fully utilizes the data generated from the program.
- Improved database capacity will expand the program’s ability to collect and analyze data.
- Pilot projects will explore the potential contribution of the canvass to the ReThink program, as well as the potential of concentrated outreach to business associations to improve program outcomes.

7.1.2. Laying the groundwork for future expansion

Establishing the program in six new states and developing the national infrastructure to support that expansion is a considerable undertaking, but allows CWF to lay the groundwork for additional future expansion:

Expansion to additional states in which Clean Water Action/Clean Water Fund operates. Expanding ReThink to southeast, central and western Michigan, Texas (including Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston, Austin and San Antonio), Maryland, the District of Columbia and western Pennsylvania is possible due to the presence of Clean Water offices and staff in these locations. The development of national infrastructure under the NOAA grant makes expansion to these locations cost-effective should funding be identified. The ReThink program will work with Clean Water staff in these states to identify the potential for program expansion, including potential policy drivers, project partners and interest from local government in funding a program.

Expansion through partners into areas where Clean Water doesn’t have a presence is still a priority, but current capacity will limit those efforts. ReThink will continue to provide guidance to interested jurisdictions and nonprofit organizations through its monthly office hours and will explore ways to license the program to more NGOs. Additionally, CWF has partnered with two for-profit entities, APTIM and OKAPI, to implement the program in Los Angeles and Portland (pending). The ReThink team acts as a consultant, providing team training and consultation on products, data and methods employed. ReThink will continue these efforts as staff capacity allows. As part of this effort, ReThink will have conversations about how to elevate and protect its brand and maintain or share control of data collected.

Expansion of California Program. California’s robust Bay Area program has recently expanded to Southern California, where ReThink is partnering with APTIM to kick off the program in Los Angeles, and

with California State Parks to implement the program in 1-2 parks as part of the NOAA grant CWF will seek funding to expand its work on state parks and will continue its efforts to implement the program in the LA Basin.

In the Bay Area, the ReThink program will investigate options for program expansion in counties outside of its current program; raise funds to work with FSEs outside of areas where it currently holds contracts and to pursue policies directed by ReThink's robust data; investigate program expansion to takeout containers and cups; and investigate market and other factors that inhibit FSE adoption of reusables.

The cost for expanding the CA program will be approximately \$300,00 annually over the program's current \$500,000 annual budget. The goal of the program is to raise 80% of the funding through government contracts and 20% through foundations and private fundraising.

ReThink's California program will provide the following benefits during the two-year period:

- Expanded outreach to the State Parks system will expand the program's reach and measurably reduce litter in some of the most significant open spaces in California;
- The ReThink program will be expanded in LA County, with a focus on environmental justice communities;
- Bay Area expansion will allow the program to serve more communities;
- Expanding the funding base to include non-government funding sources will allow the Bay Area program to experiment with additional methods of outreach and engagement.

7.2. Medium Term Goals (2025-2027)

In the medium term, ReThink will implement the next phase of its expansion, working with its partners and funders so that it will reach its goal of avoiding 22.3 million pieces of disposable foodware by the end of 2027. ReThink will update its goals as needed, and plan for the longer term.

Continue program implementation and growth in existing ReThink states. Offices in New England, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Minnesota will continue program implementation. Key to the success of this continuation is successful fundraising, a robust communications strategy; and the evolution of the program to accommodate local differences in implementation.

Expand to all Clean Water offices, adding multiple programs in Texas, along with the District of Columbia, Baltimore, Maryland, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Clean Water Fund will work to raise the funds necessary for this expansion, hire and train staff, and expand the national ReThink staffing as needed to appropriately train and oversee the new projects.

License ReThink to NGOs in 3-6 states, exploring interest among NGOs in states where Clean Water Fund does not have capacity, developing contractual relationships with the organizations, and training and overseeing their implementation of the program.

Expand the use of volunteers in the ReThink program, incorporating more volunteers in outreach to businesses and in auditing continued reuse strategies by businesses that have participated in the program in previous years.

Implement the self-certification program for businesses. Having developed procedures and systems in the previous period, ReThink will reach out to potential participants to recruit them for the program

and assist them in completing the self-audits and implementing changes. ReThink will monitor the implementation by businesses to ensure that significant changes have been made and that they continue into the future.

Develop and implement policy advocacy initiatives based on data and metrics from ReThink activities that would elevate source reduction as a key element in the Reduce-Reuse-Recycle hierarchy, replacing recycling as the primary strategy for dealing with single-use plastics. Clean Water Fund staff will educate policymakers at the local, state and federal levels about the lack of success of plastic recycling programs, the climate implications of continued/expanded production of plastics, and the success of reuse strategies.

Key activities during this three-year period will include:

- Raise funds to open new offices and maintain existing ReThink program offices;
- Develop and implement a national outreach and communications strategy to expand awareness of the ReThink program and promote expansion in areas outside of states in which Clean Water operates;
- Identify key areas for ReThink expansion outside of states with Clean Water offices; identify and engage key partners in those areas;
- Develop and implement a program to recruit and train volunteers to in multiple states to help implement the ReThink program;
- Develop and implement the self-certification program for businesses to self-audit and make changes, ensuring adequate quality control and guaranteeing that businesses make significant and long-lasting changes;
- Identify and implement research projects using ReThink proprietary data that quantify the program's impact and suggest avenues for program evolution.

The cost of this program is estimated at \$1.5 to \$2 million annually.

The cost of this expanded program (including CA, the NOAA states and 4-6 offices in an additional 3+ states) is estimated at \$2 million annually.

At the conclusion of five years, the program will be operating with 12+ offices in at least 9 states, have licensed the program to NGOs in an additional 3-6 states and have assisted a dozen businesses to self-certify as ReThink Disposable participants.

ReThink will have exceeded its goal of diverting at least 22 million pieces of trash annually through implementation in states with Clean Water offices. Additional diversion will occur through partnerships with nongovernmental partners and consultants to implement the ReThink program in other states and through business self-certification.

The development of policy programs in each state that rely on ReThink's metrics will lead to the expansion of reuse policies and statutes in multiple states. Finally, centering the program in principles of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion will allow the program to address disproportionate impacts of our litter-prone economy on environmental justice neighborhoods.

8. Conclusion

CWF's ReThink Disposable program has, over the past decade, proven its efficacy in limiting the explosion of single-use disposable foodware. This plan lays out CWF's vision for expanding that program's impact over the next five years. Our unique combination of grassroots outreach and data-driven outcomes allows us to make a business as well as an environmental case for reuse. Linking this approach with the development of locally specific policy initiatives will help expand the reach of ReThink. Finally, intentionally centering the program in principles of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion will allow the program to address the disproportionate impacts of our litter-prone economy on environmental justice neighborhoods.

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