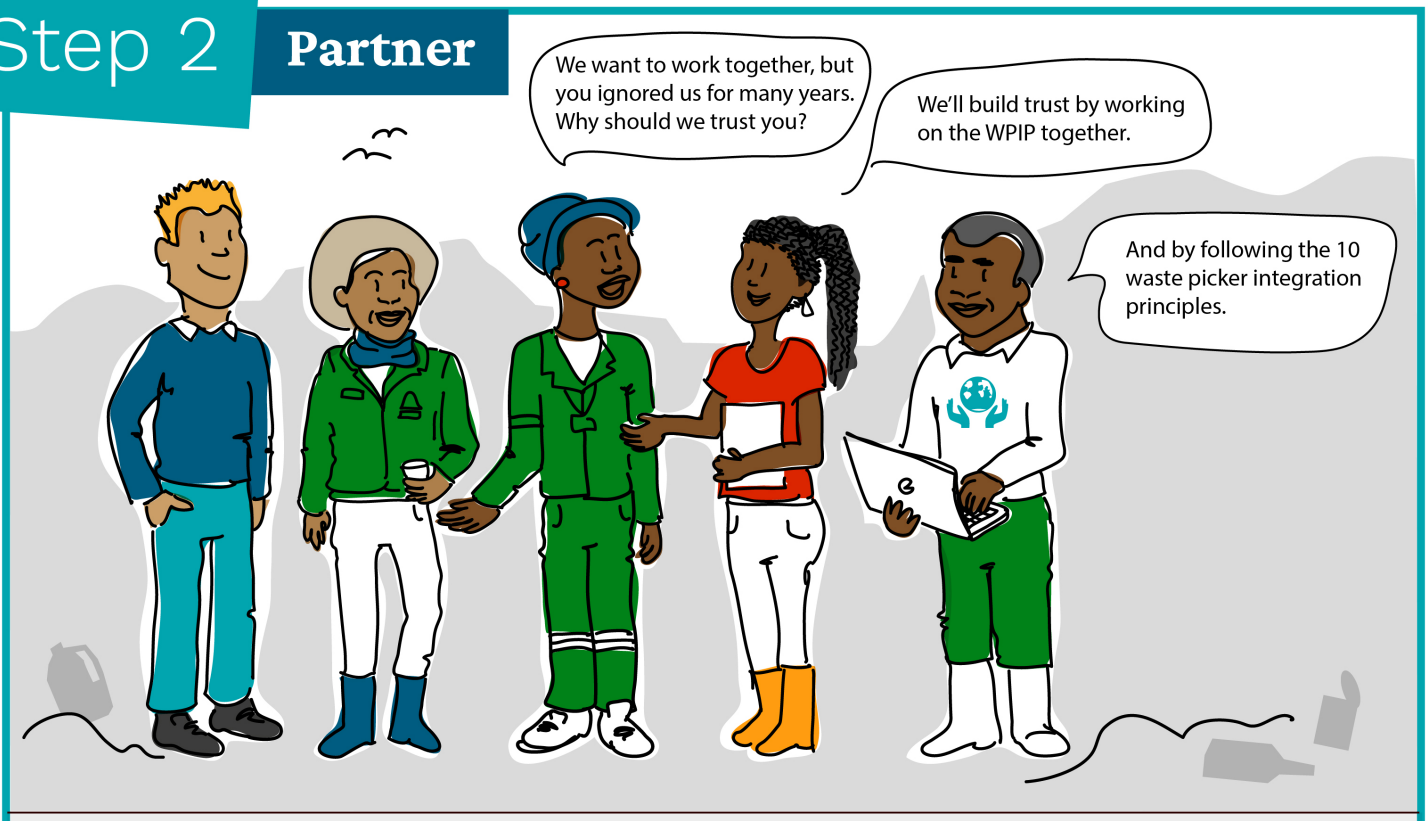
Seven Steps for implementing waste picker integration

Step 2 **Partner**

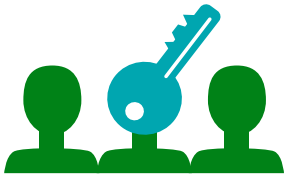


Build trust and agree **to work together** | Support waste pickers to **participate effectively**

The second waste picker integration step for municipalities is to develop a relationship and build a partnership with waste pickers. Key to this step is establishing the conditions and structures for the active involvement of waste pickers as partners for planning and implementation of integration.

Partnering includes the following actions:

Key activities



1. **Connect with waste pickers**
2. **Engage, listen and share**
3. **Collaborate**
4. **Develop a common understanding**
5. **Support organising and strengthening organisations**

1. Connecting with Waste Pickers

Involve waste pickers as key stakeholders
Real partnership between municipalities and waste pickers is fundamental for integration. Municipalities cannot develop plans and implement them without the full involvement of waste pickers.

'I think it was last month, the other waste pickers who are working at the landfill, the municipality didn't ask them what they wanted. They bought them spades, the brooms, but when they arrived at the landfill, those guys, they didn't have safety boots. They don't have work shoes, they don't have gloves. But I think if they started by consulting with them, and talk to them first and say, Okay, guys, we are going to support you. We got budget. But now we want to know first what do you guys want? I think municipalities need to know, before they can do anything, they need to consult with waste pickers so that they can know what is our needs. What do we need, what we want, as waste pickers.'



(Waste picker, interviewed, 2021)

Waste pickers must be key partners in the design, implementation, evaluation and revision of formally planned recycling systems.

Understanding the importance of partnering at the outset will result in a better integration process. It will also ensure good relationships, access to better data and problem solving.

All types of waste pickers must be involved

When municipalities are partnering with waste pickers, they need to be mindful that there is a wide variety of waste picker experiences. Different groups of waste pickers each have experiences that need to be accounted for in the participatory process.

The municipality needs to invite all types of waste pickers and their representatives to work with the municipality to develop a waste picker integration process.

QUESTIONS FOR THE TASK TEAM

- How will we connect with waste picker organisations?
- How will we connect with waste pickers on landfills?
- How will we connect with waste pickers working in the streets?
- How will we ensure that we include women and men, the young and the elderly?
- How will we connect with waste pickers from other countries?
- How will we build trust?

TIP

Reading waste pickers' profiles can provide insight into the differences between different kinds of waste pickers and why it is important to include them all.

SUGGESTED ACTION

Read the profiles of Anna Mabie, Simon Ramohlokane and Nhombizodwa Gcabashe.

LINK TO: TOOL 1

NOTE

It is important to understand that waste pickers may be sceptical and cautious about working with municipalities.

Why might waste pickers be cautious about working with municipalities?

Many waste pickers have had negative experiences with municipal officials and industry and might be wary when approached. And most have not been consulted in the design of recycling and waste picker progammes to date. They have been negatively affected by separation at source programmes as well as other recycling initiatives. And many have tried and failed to secure meetings with local government. This is why it is very important to make the time and effort to build trust and more respectful, equal relationships with waste pickers.



Waste pickers and their organisations have painful experiences of being excluded from processes that affect them:

'As SAWPA we are an organization that came about because of the challenges that we had within our local governments, because of the misunderstanding by officials, even workers in the municipality, in terms of what and why we are in the waste management system. But we as waste pickers are left to the last minute to come on board. And you will find that most of the decisions and most of the work has been done and then waste pickers are asked to come in and rubber stamp or participate. But at the end of the day, waste pickers play an important role within waste management, they are the ones who need to be consulted. They are the ones whose voices need to be heard first because they are in the system.'



(SAWPA Representative, 2021)

Developing waste picker integration plans through a collaborative, participatory process builds trust between municipalities and waste pickers and ensures that real needs are identified and met.

TIP

If the impetus for organising a forum is that waste pickers have approached the municipality with demands, it is important for the internal team to first meet with the waste pickers to understand their concerns.

Some ways to make contact with waste pickers
It can be good to start by contacting:



- local waste picker organisations
- established waste picker organisations like ARO and SAWPA, even if they don't currently work in your municipality.
- waste pickers the municipality has met with
- waste pickers who have participated in municipal projects
- registered waste pickers
- waste pickers who have laid complaints
- waste pickers who have tried to meet with municipal officials in the past
- NGO staff, industry representatives and academics who work with waste pickers in the municipality.



The best people to reach out to waste pickers are other waste pickers. Agree with waste pickers on why and how this should be done and pay them a stipend and cover their transport and communication costs to reach other to other waste pickers to talk about integration.

NOTE

A NOTE ON EXISTING WASTE PICKER FORUMS

Some municipalities have consultative forums where they meet with waste pickers. These may or may not be suited to the work of partnering with waste pickers. It is important to review existing forums:

- Are they appropriate for waste picker integration?
- Are they only for consultation instead of shared decision-making?
- Do they include all types of waste pickers?
- Do they have cooperative or hostile relations with existing waste picker structures?

The municipality should meet with waste pickers to examine whether it is necessary to create a new forum rooted in the Waste Picker Integration Principles. If waste pickers do not think that the existing forum aligns with the principles, then the municipality and waste pickers should design a new one that is fully inclusive of different types of waste pickers and is designed to be a participatory decision-making forum.

2. Engage, listen and share

Given the distrust that can exist, it is important for the internal municipal Task Team to take time to reflect on and answer

?

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- How will we start or improve discussions with waste pickers?
- How can we work together with waste picker organisations, NGOs and academics to do this?
- What form should meetings and exchanges take?
- How can we transform power relations?
- How will we ensure that we meet with all types of waste pickers?
- How can we ensure that women participate fully and raise their own issues?
- What information do we need to share with waste pickers about the waste management system, waste picker programmes, recycling programmes, the recycling value chain, local and national government policies, and industry plans?

Establishing positive relationships at the outset is **critical for a successful waste picker integration programme**. As one waste picker pointed out:

> *'Municipalities need to know that for them to integrate waste pickers, they need to work hand in hand with them. They can't just say they can integrate waste pickers without them being part of whatever that is happening. Because waste pickers are the cornerstone of waste picking, they are the ones who do all the work'*



(Waste picker Representative, interviewed 2021)

Before a formal meeting is held, municipal officials should meet with waste pickers and with representatives of industry, academic organisations and NGOs to gain an understanding of the key skills, experience and knowledge that other parties have that can facilitate integration as well as concerns that other parties may have around the integration process.



SOME IDEAS ON HOW TO ENGAGE WASTE PICKERS

1. Start meeting with waste pickers and waste picker organisations on a regular basis.
2. Agree with waste pickers and waste picker organisations on how they would like to engage with the municipality.
3. Listen to and understand waste pickers' concerns and proposals.
4. Acknowledge that waste pickers have been mistreated in the past and commit to changing this.
5. Acknowledge the unequal power relations between your organisation and waste pickers. Be conscious of the power you hold and consciously work to relinquish it and create equitable relations with waste pickers. Listen to waste pickers about how this can be done and reach agreements with waste pickers on how to create an equitable space.
6. Ensure that you meet with all different kinds of waste pickers.
7. Be sure to meet women and men in each of these groups and create spaces for women to identify and share their needs, concerns, demands and proposals.
8. Share all relevant information with waste pickers, as well as NGOs and academics who support them.

3. Collaborate

Effective partnering requires a safe space for dialogue where all actors take an active role in the process.

Hold a first official meeting on integration

Municipalities and waste picker organisations (or waste picker representatives when there are no organisations) should work together in planning and running the first official meeting. This process will not be the same in every municipality and will depend on how organized the waste pickers are.

The focus of the first formal meeting should be to hear from waste pickers what problems they face, what their needs are, how these could be met, and how they would like to approach integration. Conclude the first meeting by agreeing on an inclusive Working Group that will develop the integration plan.

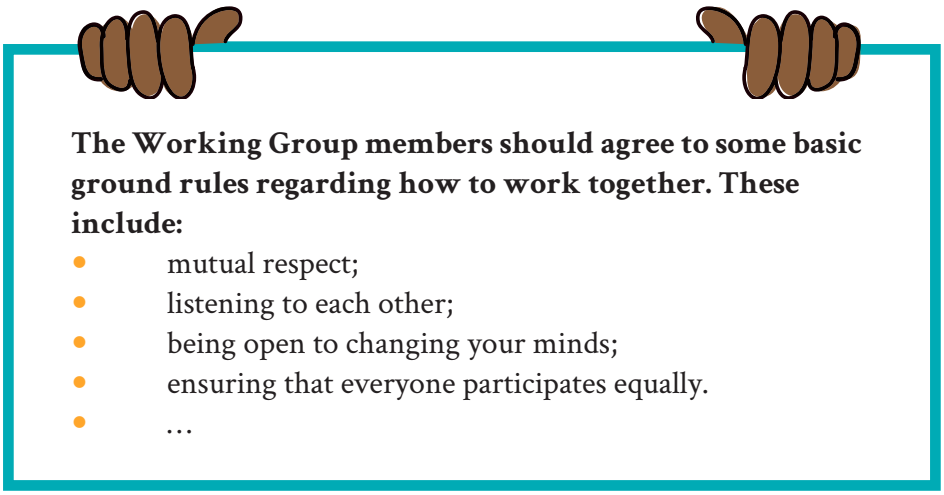


It may be useful to have external facilitators to assist in this step if municipalities and waste pickers feel this would be preferred.

See Tool 2 for tips on how to convene the first official meeting.

LINK TO: TOOL 2

Establish the Stakeholder Waste Picker Integration Working Group
Establishing an inclusive and accountable Stakeholder Waste Picker Integration Working Group will ensure the sustainability of the process. It must incorporate all role players including all groups of waste pickers, and if required, relevant academics and NGOs.



The Working Group members should agree to some basic ground rules regarding how to work together. These include:

- mutual respect;
- listening to each other;
- being open to changing your minds;
- ensuring that everyone participates equally.
- …

The Working Group will also need to agree on how decisions will be made, and what the group will do if agreement cannot be reached.

This Working Group is not a permanent body – its job is to develop the WPIP through a **collaborative process.** A permanent body will be established at the end of the process, as by that point the different parties will understand each other better and have established ways of working together.

Timeline: The Working Group is established specifically to develop the WPIP. It must decide upfront on a timeline for developing the WPIP.

It would be helpful if the timeline is in synch with the **municipal financial year cycle** to ensure that WPIP approvals and funding proposals become part of the municipal system.

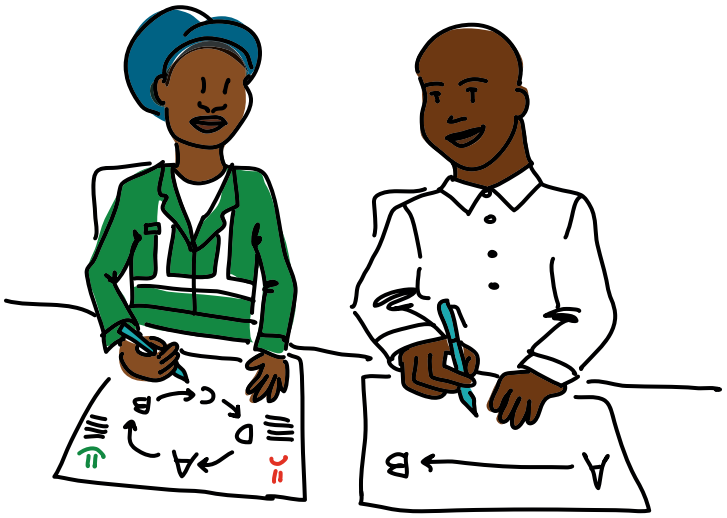
Important **logistical issues** to be discussed about the Working Group include how meetings are organized, who the group members are, how they will communicate with each other and how they will be chaired.

TIP

When thinking about meeting logistics also consider the logistics of what it takes for waste pickers to attend the meeting including timing, venue, lost income and transport costs. Waste pickers cannot subsidise the integration process and must be compensated for lost income, transport, and air time/data related to participating in all WPIP activities.

4. Develop a common understanding of what exists

Municipalities, waste pickers and other parties in the Working Group likely have quite different understandings of the formal and informal recycling systems and how they relate to each other.
This makes forging a common understanding extremely important at the outset.



In order to reach this common understanding, the Working Group should discuss

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- What work do we each do, and what are our respective priorities related to recycling?
- What are the main challenges and problems we each face related to recycling?
- What does the entire recycling system in our municipality or industry look like?
- Who are all of the key actors and how does it work?

It will be very important for waste pickers to explain, in detail, how they work and how they are affected by the existing waste management system and recycling programmes.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY:

At the first meeting, get each group (municipal officials, waste pickers, academics etc) to draw a picture of how they think recyclables are collected in the municipality and the roles that waste pickers, the municipality, industry and government play.

TIP

It can be very helpful to have an external facilitator lead this process.

5. Support organising and strengthening organisations

When waste pickers are organised, they are better able to represent themselves and it is easier for municipalities and industry to partner with them on waste picker integration.

The case studies on Johannesburg, Mangaung and Vaal Park highlight the importance of waste pickers being organised.

"The vast majority of waste pickers in South Africa are not organised. This makes it even more important for municipalities, national government, industry, and other organisations to support them to organise.

LINK TO: THE CASE STUDIES

LINK TO: THE PHOTO ESSAYS

QUESTIONS FOR THE WORKING GROUP

- What do waste pickers identify as their key needs to support organizing?
- What kind of financial support can be provided to support waste picker organizing?
- What kind of infrastructural support can be provided to support organizing (access to meeting spaces etc)?
- What information and analysis should be provided?
- What human resources does the municipality need to support waste pickers to organise?
- How can the municipality become more accessible to waste pickers?