

CIRCULAR NIJMEGEN

1A: PROBLEM

- 🌱 Nijmegen already recycles 74% of its waste. However, while materials such as plastic are often separated correctly, organic waste is still underutilized. (Pruijssen & Bureau Strategie en Onderzoek, gemeente Nijmegen, 2024)
- 🌱 By 2050, Nijmegen aims to become a fully circular city, where waste is reused whenever possible. Organic waste is essential for achieving this goal, as it can be transformed into compost and biogas. (Circulaire Stad, 2025)
- 🌱 Young adults (under 30 years old) are among the least environmentally friendly age groups and rate their own sustainable behavior at only 6.2 out of 10. Therefore, this intervention focuses on improving organic waste separation among people under the age of 30. (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2024)

1B: UNDERLYING PROBLEM

Pluralistic ignorance:

- 🌱 Many young people believe that separating organic waste is important (injunctive norm), but assume that their peers do not do so (descriptive norm). By showing that more and more young people in Nijmegen separate their organic waste, the campaign corrects this misperception and encourages participation. (Milieu centraal, 2023)

Diffusion of responsibility:

People often feel like their behaviour doesn't make much of an impact on its own. By addressing the behaviour on a personal level, the responsibility is shifted back to the individual. (Tedaldi et al., 2024)

2: INTERVENTION

Goodie bag:

Free goodie bags will be distributed to the mailboxes of student houses and apartments. These will include:

1. GFT-bag (a biodegradable bag to separate organic waste)

2. A sticker



3. A flyer (the smaller version of the poster)

Poster:

For the poster (and flyer) we plan to include quotes like:

- "Steeds meer jongeren scheiden GFT, doe jij met hen mee?" (More and more young people are separating their organic waste. Join them!)
- "Kleine moeite, grote bijdrage aan circulair Nijmegen!" (Small effort, big impact for a circular Nijmegen!)
- "Jouw bijdrage maakt een verschil!" (Every contribution makes a difference)

These posters will be hung on lampposts close to the Radboud, the city centre and other places that attract a younger audience.

Advice to the local authority of Nijmegen

- Place more green bins in Nijmegen (around student houses) and communicate where they are.

3: PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLANATION

Goodie bag: Reciprocity

- 🌱 Young adults receive free organic waste (GFT) bags from the municipality and/or their neighborhood. This makes the campaign feel less like an obligation and more like a cooperative effort.
- 🌱 According to the principle of reciprocity, people are more likely to give something back when they first receive something valuable (Vermijmeren, 2026). The free GFT bags act as a small gift, rather than a reward for desired behavior.
- 🌱 This distinction is important: gifts feel voluntary and social, whereas rewards can feel like a transaction. Therefore, the message is not "Separate your organic waste and receive free bags," but rather "We make organic waste separation easier by providing free GFT bags." (Cialdini, 2009)
- 🌱 By helping young adults first, the intervention encourages them to reciprocate by separating their organic waste more consistently.

Poster: social-proof

- 🌱 Young adults are encouraged to separate organic waste by showing that others around them are already doing so. Messages such as "More and more young people in Nijmegen are separating their organic waste" and "An increasing number of residents in your building participate" are used.
- 🌱 This approach relies on descriptive norms, which communicate what others are doing. This also tackles the problem with pluralistic ignorance. It also uses dynamic norms, which highlight that the behavior is becoming more common over time. Dynamic norms are especially useful when the desired behavior has not yet been adopted by everyone.
- 🌱 This strengthens social proof by showing that others are also participating. In addition, it makes the impact of the behavior more tangible, making organic waste separation feel less like an individual action and more like a collective contribution to a circular Nijmegen (Geislar, 2017).
- 🌱 According to the principle of social proof, people are more likely to engage in a behavior when they see similar others doing the same. This effect is strongest when the reference group consists of peers, housemates, or neighbors.