

Council bin basket program guidelines 2026-2027



Contents

Overview	2
Program timeline	4
Application process	5
Bin basket types	6
Supply and install of baskets	7
Promotion	7
Auditing and program reporting	8
FAQs	9
Contact us	10



Return and Earn bin basket program

The problem

In NSW, a significant number of recyclable drink containers end up in public waste-to-landfill bins, such as those found in parks and on beaches, when they could have been recycled.*

When recycling bins are full, missing, or inconvenient, people who are unwilling to carry containers home or to another recycling bin tend to use a nearby rubbish bin instead.*

This results in lost recycling opportunities and increased landfill waste. Councils play a key role in helping reduce litter and improve recycling rates in public spaces.

The solution

Return and Earn bin baskets are a small, metal basket fixed to public place general waste bins. They work by providing a place for people to leave their used eligible drink container if they don't want to carry it home, and someone else - maybe a community group, volunteer organisation or another resident - can collect the container to take to a local return point for the 10c refund without needing to rummage in the bin itself.

*Brumley, L., Macklin, J., & Tull, F. (2025) Understanding and reducing beverage container missed capture in public place settings: Final Report. Prepared for Exchange for Change by BehaviourWorks Australia, Monash University.

Proven results

The first round of the Return and Earn Bin Baskets for Councils program launched in late 2025 and saw 31 councils participate with more than 1,200 bin baskets and almost 60 cradles distributed and installed on public waste bins in parks, beaches and other public spaces.

Initial results from round one has shown the bin baskets are very effective at reducing landfill, with an average 69 per cent reduction in drink containers ending in the public place bins and ultimately landfill, following their installation. These results build on the findings of an initial trial with Eurobodalla and Sutherland councils, which achieved reductions in eligible containers in their red bins of 82 per cent and almost 50 percent respectively.

Other benefits councils have reported include reduced litter around bins featuring the baskets and reduced instances of bins being damaged from people trying to access containers as they're now readily available in the bin baskets.

Councils have provided feedback that the bin baskets are easy to install and maintain. While the community's response has been very positive, with strong engagement on council communications promoting the program and local placement of the bin baskets.

Applications are now open for the latest round of the Return and Earn Bin Baskets program, providing all NSW councils with the opportunity to expand public place recycling and further reduce litter and landfill in their community.

“The bin baskets are a visual clue to separate out recyclable bottles and cans, reduce landfill and give containers a second life. The baskets have been warmly received by the community, generating encouraging feedback and positive social media coverage.”

- Ku-ring-gai Council.

Why participate?

Join the 31 NSW councils who have already participated in our Return and Earn bin baskets program and experienced the below benefits:

Environmental benefits

- reduce waste to landfill
- reduce litter in public spaces

Social benefits

- create cleaner, safer public spaces
- encourage community participation in the Return and Earn scheme
- support initiatives that deliver tangible benefits to residents, charities and community organisations

Financial benefits

- reduce costs associated with litter clean-up and landfill disposal
- implement cost-effective waste solutions
- leverage partnerships to help with the maintenance of the baskets
- reduce costs associated with bin vandalism

You can also learn how Wollongong City Council led the way with the success of their bin basket litter reduction initiative for local parks and beaches. [HERE](#)

Application process overview

- Apply for baskets through our program [HERE](#)
- Commit to promotion and reporting activities
- Install baskets in high traffic areas

For more information, please refer to the application process on page 5.

Credit: Sutherland Shire Council



How your council can get involved

The rollout of bin baskets across NSW local government areas is planned to continue in 2026.

All NSW councils are invited to apply for the next round of the Return and Earn bin baskets program.

Deployment of bin baskets

- Applications open for bin baskets on 15 July 2026
- Applications close on 31 August 2026
- Councils are notified of application outcomes by 7 September 2026
- A letter of agreement is executed between Exchange for Change and individual councils by 20 October 2026
- Councils conduct a pre-installation public general waste bin audit at bin basket sites before installing the baskets
- The bin basket supplier and councils liaise directly to coordinate labelling and delivery of baskets in November 2026
- Councils coordinate the installation and ongoing maintenance of bin baskets from November/December 2026
- Following installation, councils promote Return and Earn and the bin baskets
- Councils conduct post-installation audits of public general waste bins at basket sites towards the end of the agreement period, for inclusion in the final evaluation report, due by 1 May 2027.



Application process

Eligibility criteria

Any NSW council may apply for bin baskets and will be required to meet the following criteria:

- Commit to conducting a pre-installation waste audit to determine the number of eligible beverage containers in the public general waste bins where bin baskets will be installed. A minimum of 10 per cent of bins are to be audited in different locations. A variety of audit methods are accepted (see page 8 for details of accepted audit methodologies)
- Commit to installing and maintaining a minimum of 20 bin baskets on a variety of public place general waste bins in high-traffic areas
- Ensure bin baskets are easily accessible for members of the public to dispose of and collect containers
- Commit to promoting the Return and Earn container deposit scheme and the bin baskets through multiple, local channels (e.g. website, social media, newsletters) and provide copies
- Agree to complete a post-installation waste audit of the same general waste red bins audited prior to installation, and complete a program evaluation report using the template provided
- Commit to the implementation timelines on page 4.

Application

Please submit the bin basket application form [HERE](#) by 31 August 2026 to be included in the rollout.

Assessment framework

Applications will be assessed using the following criteria:

- Commitment to the eligibility criteria and implementation timelines
- Commitment to promote Return and Earn and the bin baskets
- Agreement to conduct pre and post-installation waste bin audits and complete a program evaluation form
- Commitment to install a minimum of 20 baskets or cradles.

Additional criteria may also be used to determine the allocation of baskets, including:

- Details and feasibility of promotional plans
- Location suitability e.g. high traffic areas
- Alignment to the council's sustainability targets or demonstration of a commitment to recycling.

To ensure fair and consistent distribution, a minimum of 20 bin baskets will be guaranteed to all successful applicants. Councils can request up to 100 baskets; however, the actual allocation will depend on the number of baskets requested from all applicants.

Councils will have the opportunity to apply for additional baskets (timing to be advised).

Agreement to participate

To ensure the success and accountability of the program, councils are required to enter into a formal agreement with Exchange for Change (Return and Earn CDS scheme coordinator).

This agreement is required to formalise roles and responsibilities in relation to the supply, installation, maintenance, promotion and reporting of the program.

By formalising these obligations, we can guarantee consistent data collection, effective community engagement, and measurable environmental outcomes.

The agreement template between councils and Exchange for Change for the Return and Earn bin basket program is available to view [HERE](#). It will be circulated for signing following applications being approved.

Bin basket types

Two types of Return and Earn bin baskets are available - an open top basket and a six-slot cradle. Councils can select which bin basket option best fits their local requirements and bin infrastructure.

Both options are easy to install, durable, and encourage community participation in Return and Earn by making it more convenient to access disposed containers.

By selecting the right basket for your area, you can help reduce litter, increase recycling rates, and deliver tangible benefits to your community.

Basket



Materials	White plastic-coated, galvanised steel
Capacity	Approximately 60 containers
Location suitability	Best for high volume, long stay locations e.g. parks, beaches
Benefits	Higher volume capacity
Bin suitability	Best attached to solid bin enclosures or square bin poles
Labelling	Provided by Return and Earn
Order quantity	Minumum 20
Individual basket specs	Width: 420mm Height: 620mm Depth: 320mm Weight: 5.75kgs with fixings

Cradle



Materials	White plastic-coated, galvanised steel
Capacity	6 containers
Location suitability	Best for on-the-go locations e.g. footpaths, transport hubs
Benefits	Reduced risk of contamination, Ease of access with small profile to integrate on footpaths in busy areas
Bin suitability	Best attached to solid bin enclosures or square bin pole
Labelling	Provided by Return and Earn
Order quantity	Minumum 20

For more details, refer to the installation guide [HERE](#).

Supply and install

Shipping and delivery

Following the signing of the agreement between Exchange for Change and each council, baskets will be delivered within approximately 3-6 weeks. This provides enough time for the manufacturer to coordinate directly with the council for necessary labelling, delivery, and any installation support.

Installation and maintenance

It is the responsibility of the council to arrange for the installation and ongoing maintenance of the baskets provided.

An installation guide is available [HERE](#).

Damage and Repairs

If a bin basket becomes damaged, Councils are responsible for determining and managing the appropriate course of action, including repair or replacement where necessary. We recommend acting on any damaged bin baskets as soon as possible to help ensure the basket remains safe and functional for community use.

Important!

Deliveries will be sent on a pallet and will require a forklift at the receiving address.

Promotion

A key factor in the success of our Return and Earn bin baskets is communicating to the local community what they are and how they can use them - by leaving their unwanted drink containers or collecting containers left in them to return at a local return point.

To be eligible for bin baskets, councils must commit to promoting the benefits of Return and Earn, including local return points, as well as the bin baskets through communications to your residents and community — such as social media, websites and newsletters.

Please provide copies of your communication activities in your evaluation report.

Following the signing of the agreement, a bin basket promotional toolkit will be shared with councils containing suggested promotional ideas, information, and assets to engage the community.

The Return and Earn councils toolkit can be downloaded now [HERE](#).

Audits and program reporting

Waste audit requirements

As part of the eligibility criteria, councils are required to conduct pre-installation and post-installation bin audits at sites identified for bin baskets.

These audits help measure the effectiveness of the bin baskets in diverting eligible drink containers from the general waste bin and landfill to the Return and Earn scheme.

We understand that each council may have its own preferred approach to conducting waste bin audits, so we are flexible in how these audits are carried out. Councils can use their existing processes or design a method that suits their operations, provided the same approach is used for both the pre-installation audit and the post-installation audit.

Suggestions for completing audits:

- **Standard physical bin audits** - counting the number of eligible beverage containers in each bin. A template can be provided on request.
- **Standard visual bin inspection** – opening the bin enclosure, ‘digging’ through top layers and recording observations
- **Photo inspection** – As per the example shown below, taking photos of the top layer of bins and recording observations.
- **Please note:** Only 10% of bins need to be audited (For example, if you have 20 bins you will only need to audit 2 bins)

This can be supported using an app e.g. [save location GPS](#).

Example of a photo inspection



Program evaluation report

In addition to the audits, councils must complete an evaluation report. This report is crucial for evaluating the overall impact of the program, encompassing waste diversion, community engagement, and operational and identifying any program improvements for future deployments of bin baskets.

To streamline and standardise this process, a standard form will be provided.

The bin basket program evaluation report form will be shared with councils following signing of the program agreement.

FAQs

How do I apply to get bin baskets for a NSW council?

The next round of deployment of bin baskets is scheduled for November 2026 onwards. To be eligible for the rollout, complete an application form [HERE](#) by 31 August 2026.

Ensure you refer to the program guidelines eligibility criteria.

How many bin baskets can each council request?

A minimum of 20 and maximum of 100 baskets per councils can be requested.

The final decision on the number of bin baskets will be made after all application submissions have been reviewed.

Where are the baskets made and what are they made out of?

Made in WA and NSW, the baskets and cradles are constructed from galvanised steel and are coated with plastic.

How much do councils have to pay for the baskets?

Nothing. The supply and delivery of bin baskets is funded by Return and Earn through scheme coordinator Exchange for Change. Councils are responsible for installing and maintaining the baskets.

How quickly will I receive the baskets?

Once your council has signed an agreement, labelling and shipping take approximately 3-6 weeks. Ensure you have a forklift on site at the delivery location.

Where do I get spare labels if they get damaged or graffitied?

The basket and cradle supplier will be able to supply labels.

Are baskets and cradles hard to install?

With each delivery there will be instructions for best practice installation on a variety of settings. With a standard level of expertise, the baskets and cradles are easy to install. Each basket or cradle comes with the highest tac and UV protection labels already applied, all fixings required and instructions.

Who empties the baskets and cradles?

The baskets and cradles are emptied by members of the public who can take eligible drink containers to a return point and collect a 10 cent refund per eligible container.

There is an opportunity for councils to connect with local community groups for them to "adopt-a-basket" or a collection of them. It is a fantastic fundraising opportunity for charities or community groups.

Who do I contact if I have questions?

Please contact:
councils@returnandearn.org.au

This guide is produced by



Proud
scheme
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For questions and support, please contact:
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Return and Earn

