Public-private partnerships are essential to help cities provide the necessary service that improve the safety, health and quality of life for citizens. When Mayor Michael A. Nutter took office in 2008, Philadelphia’s recycling rate was less than 8%. The Mayor knew that in order to follow through on his goal of making Philadelphia the greenest city in American by 2015, that statistic would need to change. In 2009, he launched *Greenworks Philadelphia*, the City’s comprehensive sustainability plan, which includes a target of diverting “70% of solid waste from landfill.” Conversely when the plan was released, only 53% of solid waste was being diverted. Philadelphians would need to embrace recycling for the City to reach its goal. By partnering with Recyclebank to create “Philadelphia Recycle Rewards,” City government saw the potential to engage residents and raise the recycling rate.

In 2012, Philadelphia currently diverts 72% of waste from landfills in large part because the recycling rate is nearly 20%. To put this in another perspective, the City collected 45,000 tons of recyclables in FY 2007 and collected 118,500 tons in FY 2012.

Residents who sign up for Recyclebank earn rewards points for each week they recycle. These points can then be redeemed for offers and discounts at local businesses, restaurants and cultural institutions. This program benefits several groups:

- Residents save money as the average Philadelphian in the program sees $130-$200 in reward value annually through annual recycling efforts;
- Local businesses benefit as over 50% of reward redemption is redeemed locally, from neighborhood to neighborhood;
- The City collects more recyclables, which they then sell like commodities for an average of $56 per ton in FY 2012. The amount is based on recyclables market index prices, which were strong in FY 2012. In contrast, the City paid nearly $69 a ton to landfill trash last year, a $123 differential per ton. In FY 2012, recyclables revenues earned were $6.6 million, another record year.

Numbers and programs demonstrate Philadelphia Recycling Rewards’ impact. More than 185,000 households are signed up for Recyclebank. Rewards points earned totaled about 217 million in FY 2012, and there were 102,000 redemption transactions. Recycling presentations
take place at civic and neighborhood meetings throughout the city to educate residents. Recyclebank also participates in more than 30 community events each year, work with Councilmembers in their specific districts and is a partner in the Annual Philly Spring Cleanup. Recyclebank’s Green Schools Program allows residents to donate their rewards points to school beautification projects. The company then donates money to make those beautification projects a reality.

This past year, Recyclebank also partnered with the City for the first ever Recyclebank Sweepstakes. Residents were entered to win a number of prizes, including free groceries for a year, just by recycling and redeeming points. The company has consistently partnered with the City to engage residents on a number of levels and make Philadelphia a greener, cleaner and healthier place.

This partnership has an economic impact as well. According to the EPA, recycling creates about 10 times more jobs on a per-ton level than regular disposal. The process of turning what was once landfilled into a new stream of collected materials creates a chain of economic activity that can result in business expansion, jobs and community growth across all of Philadelphia. Recycling businesses earn profits and reinvest in plants and further infrastructure and job growth and labor market. There is also an increased need for material collection and sorting jobs and an increased need in manufacturing sector as recycled materials turn into new higher skilled labor opportunities.