The City of Seattle has created a sustainable recycling system that decreases landfill disposal, creates good jobs, and delivers a more effective, lower cost system. Seattle’s rising recycling rate of 55 percent is the result of increasingly aggressive efforts to expand programs and opportunities to divert trash from landfills. All recyclable materials and food scraps are banned from commercial and residential trash containers. The city is particularly focused on increasing participation at multi-family buildings and has developed extensive outreach campaigns for institutions like schools, businesses, and immigrant communities. Subsidy programs that assist with the cost of collection services are also available for low-income residents. Seattle also has banned certain construction materials from landfills.

These comprehensive programs are supported by a strong management system that enables the city to set environmental and job quality standards, and promote growth in the recycling sector. The city is divided into two service area contracts, each serviced by one private company. The contract requires that haulers earn a prevailing wage and also allows employees to be covered by a collective bargaining agreement. All processing contractors are also required to pay a living wage and provide health care benefits at recycling facilities. These requirements have created more than 1,000 family-sustaining jobs for Seattle residents. Service contracts have also empowered the city to more accurately track the amount of trash diverted from landfills and direct trash to certain facilities to create a more efficient system.

Sources:
Seattle Solid Waste Management Plan
Zero Waste Resolution
Interview with Seattle Public Utilities - Solid Waste Division