

Promoting Environmental Health in Leimert Park through Improved Solid Waste Management and Air Quality Education

Project Link: <https://thrivingearthexchange.org/project/leimert-park-ca/>

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Acknowledgment:

This work was conducted in collaboration with the American Geophysical Union through its Thriving Earth Exchange program. All findings and recommendations are developed on behalf of the Ezrach Brain Trust Association to directly support its community-based environmental and equity-focused initiatives.

1. Project Overview

The Leimert Park Clean Campaign was implemented as part of the Thriving Earth Exchange, a highly selective initiative led by the American Geophysical Union that partners communities with scientific expertise to address pressing environmental challenges.

Ezrach Brain Trust Association was one of a limited number of organizations selected to participate in this program, recognizing its leadership in environmental justice and its commitment to advancing community-driven solutions in Leimert Park. This selection reflects both the urgency of the environmental challenges facing the community and Ezrach's demonstrated capacity to lead impactful, place-based initiatives.

The project was designed as a community-centered effort to address environmental and public health concerns stemming from improper waste disposal and limited waste management infrastructure. Through collaboration with scientists, local stakeholders, and residents, the initiative aimed to both generate actionable data and lay the groundwork for long-term systems change.

Specifically, the project focused on:

- Conducting a “Keep Leimert Park Clean” campaign, including a Trash Action Day to collect baseline data on waste patterns and engage residents
- Identifying gaps in recycling, composting, and general waste infrastructure in public spaces
- Developing community-informed recommendations to improve environmental health, reduce landfill waste, and enhance air quality
- Building partnerships necessary to secure funding, approvals, and long-term maintenance strategies for sustainable waste solutions

This initiative represents a critical step toward transitioning from short-term cleanup efforts to a sustained, systems-level approach to environmental stewardship, positioning Ezech and Leimert Park as a model for community-led sustainability.

2. Key Findings (Litter Assessment Data)

Waste Type	Count
Plastic	67
Paper	40
Metal	6
Tobacco	5
Other Litter	5
Food Waste	2
Glass	1
Cloth	1

Expanded Insights

The data reveals several important trends:

- Plastic and paper waste dominate the waste stream, indicating that a significant portion of litter is recyclable but currently not being diverted due to insufficient infrastructure or access. This suggests an immediate opportunity to increase recycling capture rates.
- The presence of tobacco waste and other litter highlights behavioral patterns and the need for targeted public education, as well as more strategically placed disposal options in high-traffic areas.
- Low recorded food waste does not necessarily indicate low generation, but rather a lack of composting systems, meaning organic waste is likely entering general waste streams and contributing to landfill burden.
- Minimal glass and cloth waste suggests that certain materials are either less prevalent or already being managed through informal reuse systems.

Overall, the findings point to a systemic gap in waste sorting, infrastructure accessibility, and consistent servicing, rather than a lack of community willingness.

3. Key Challenges Identified

At the outset and throughout the project, several structural and operational barriers became clear:

- **Infrastructure Gaps:** There is a lack of accessible, recycling and compost bins in key public spaces in Leimert Park. Without these, environmentally conscious behaviors are difficult to sustain.
- **Inconsistent Waste Collection:** Variability in trash pickup around businesses, and in Leimert Park, leads to overflow conditions, which contribute to littering and discourage proper disposal.
- **Community Awareness and Engagement:** While there is strong community pride, there is limited access to consistent education and engagement around proper waste sorting and environmental practices.
- **Resource Constraints:** Sustaining clean environments requires ongoing investment, both financial and human capital, which is currently limited.

These challenges reinforce that lasting impact requires coordinated systems, not isolated interventions.

4. Strategic Recommendations

A. Community Infrastructure & Systems

Ezrach is well-positioned to lead a coordinated infrastructure strategy by:

- With the proper support, facilitating the education and awareness for the installation of recycling and compost receptacles in high-traffic and high-need areas, ensuring bins are clearly labeled, culturally relevant, and paired with education.
- Working with City sanitation departments to address service gaps, including increasing pickup frequency in priority zones and ensuring timely maintenance of bins.
- Developing community-based waste hubs, which serve as centralized locations for sorting, education, and engagement, creating visible anchors for sustainability.
- Piloting innovative solutions, such as monitored or smart bins, to track usage patterns and optimize placement and servicing.

This approach shifts the focus from reactive cleanup to proactive waste management systems.

B. Workforce Development

A key opportunity lies in aligning environmental goals with economic empowerment:

- Ezrach can establish a Green Workforce Development Program that trains local residents in waste management, recycling operations, and environmental stewardship. These roles can include community ambassadors, sanitation coordinators, and data collectors, creating employment pathways while improving neighborhood conditions.

- Partnerships with workforce agencies and educational institutions can create career pipelines into sustainability sectors, particularly for youth and underrepresented populations.

This model ensures that environmental solutions also deliver economic and social impact.

C. Policy Recommendations (City & Council Offices)

To support long-term sustainability, local government can:

- Invest in preventative infrastructure, reducing the need for costly reactive cleanups by addressing root causes of litter.
- Expand equitable access to recycling and composting, particularly in historically underserved communities.
- Fund community-led initiatives, recognizing organizations like Ezrach as trusted implementers with deep local knowledge.
- Integrate data-driven decision-making, using localized insights to guide resource allocation and program design.

Cost-Saving Implications

- Reduced emergency sanitation responses
- Lower landfill and disposal costs through diversion
- Increased efficiency in city service delivery

D. Alignment with LA 2028 Olympics

With the upcoming 2028 Summer Olympics, there is a unique opportunity to position Leimert Park as a model of sustainability:

- Ezrach can support clean corridor initiatives that enhance the visitor experience while benefiting residents.
- Ezrach can pilot zero-waste or low-waste event strategies that align with global sustainability standards.
- Community members can be trained as environmental ambassadors, showcasing local leadership on an international stage.

This alignment creates a pathway for investment, visibility, and long-term legacy impact.

E. Additional Policy Opportunities

Further opportunities include:

- Advocating for extended producer responsibility (EPR) policies to reduce plastic waste at the source.

- Supporting zero-waste pilot programs within the community
- Advancing environmental health and justice policies that ensure equitable distribution of resources
- Expanding youth engagement initiatives to build the next generation of climate leaders

5. Funding Opportunities

To scale this work, Ezrach can pursue:

- Government grants focused on sustainability, environmental health and justice, and workforce development
- Philanthropic funding targeting climate resilience and community health
- Partnerships aligned with community driven and ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) goals
- Place-based investment initiatives tied to the Olympics and urban development

Funding can directly support:

- Infrastructure deployment
- Workforce programs
- Community education and engagement
- Data systems for tracking impact

6. Impact & Next Steps

This initiative demonstrates the power of community-led data to drive systemic change.

Next Steps

- Launch partnerships with more community aligned organizations
- Formalize partnerships with city agencies
- Launch pilot recycling and composting infrastructure
- Secure funding for workforce and program expansion
- Continue longitudinal data collection to measure progress

7. Closing Statement

The Leimert Park Clean Campaign represents more than a cleanup effort. It is a blueprint for equitable, community-driven environmental transformation.

Through strategic partnerships, targeted investment, and sustained leadership, Ezrach Brain Trust Association is positioned to advance a model of sustainability that is not only effective, but also inclusive, replicable, and rooted in community priorities.