

THE PEOPLE'S DEPOT

2025 Canner Survey Results



The People's Depot (TPD) is a can and bottle redemption site that is run by and for workers who collect and redeem cans and bottles for income, otherwise known as canners. TPD is a program of Ground Score Association, a democratic waste picker organization based in Portland, Oregon. TPD was born out of the COVID-19 pandemic, when Oregon state stopped enforcing its Bottle Bill (Deposit Return System) and retailers stopped accepting cans and bottles for deposit redemption. The City of Portland started funding Ground Score to operate the depot as a way of maintaining redemption opportunities for canners, as well as to generate opportunities for canners to advance into stable, formal work through the operation of the depot. The depot is currently funded by the Oregon Beverage Recycling Cooperative.



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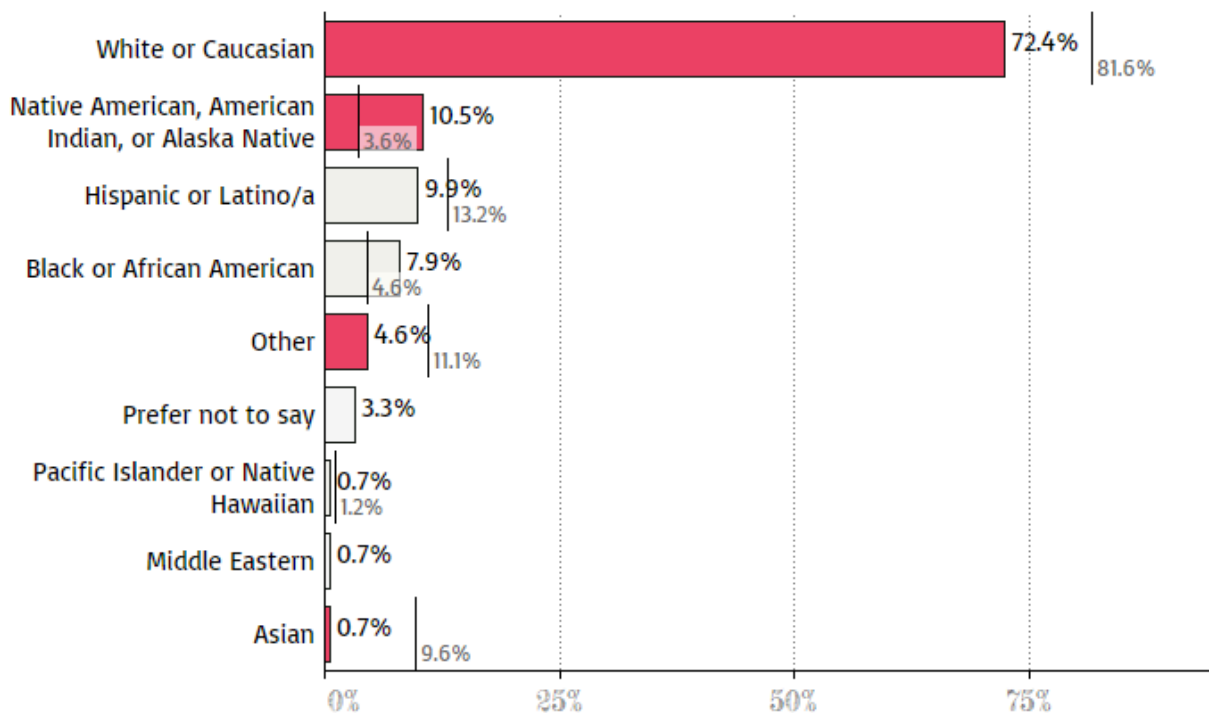
In March of 2025, Ground Score Association received support from the Oregon Beverage Recycling Cooperative, DHM research firm, Nick Hara, and volunteers from the City of Portland, to survey 152 canners who frequent The People's Depot. Canners were surveyed verbally while visiting The People's Depot, and were not compensated for their participation in the survey. The results from this survey, which may help dispel common misconceptions about canners, are summarized in this report.

Canner Demographics

Race: Compared to the Portland Metro population, canners frequenting TPD are more likely to be Native American, American Indian, or Alaska Native. Asians, Some Other Race, and white people are less likely to be canners frequenting TPD.

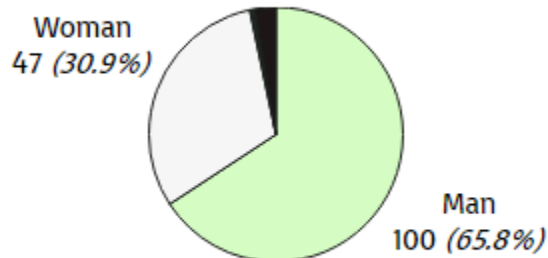
RESPONDENT RACE & ETHNICITY

Reference line is 2020 Portland Metro General Population. Pink bars indicate a greater than 5 percent difference between respondents and general population.



Gender: About two-thirds of the canners surveyed are men (66%), just under a third are women (31%), and 3% identify as non-binary or gender non-conforming.

GENDER

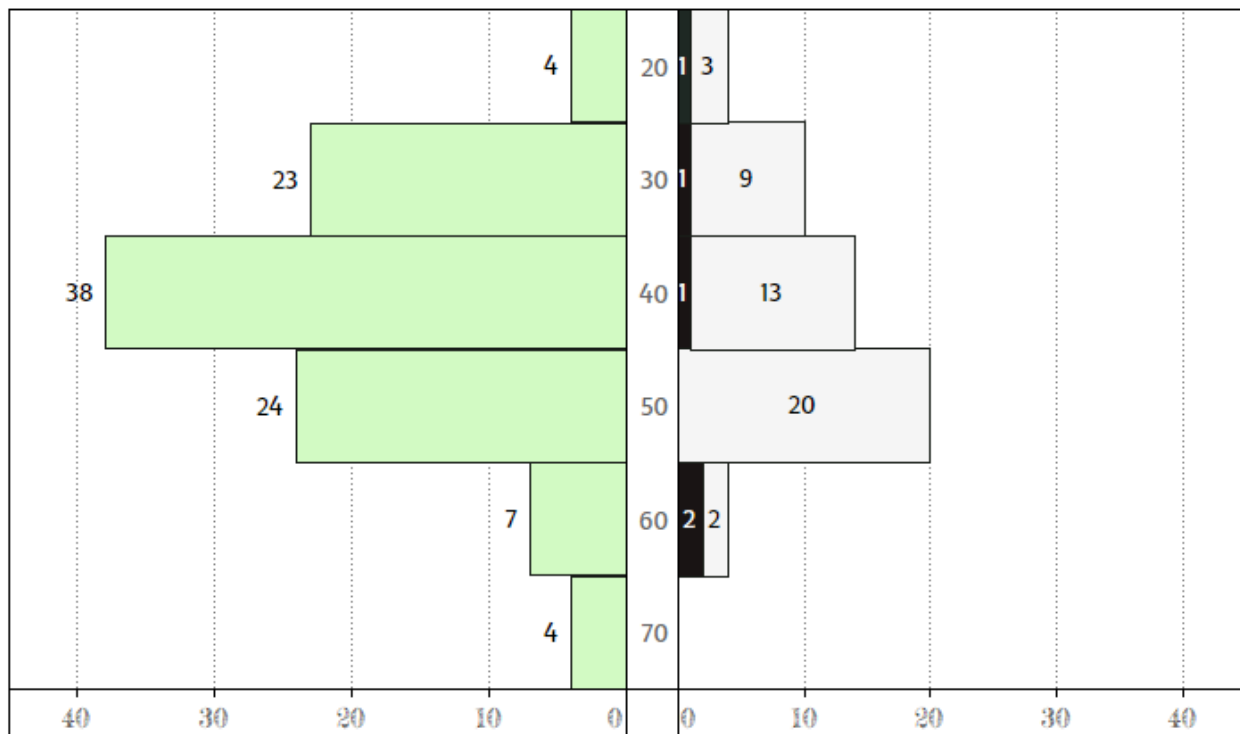


1 (0.7%) No response

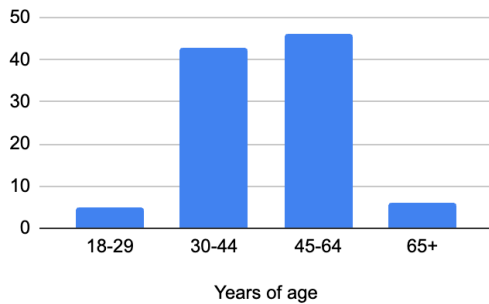
4 (2.6%) Non-binary or gender non-conforming

Age & Gender

Age is separated by gender and bucketed into decades (e.g. 20 is 20-29)



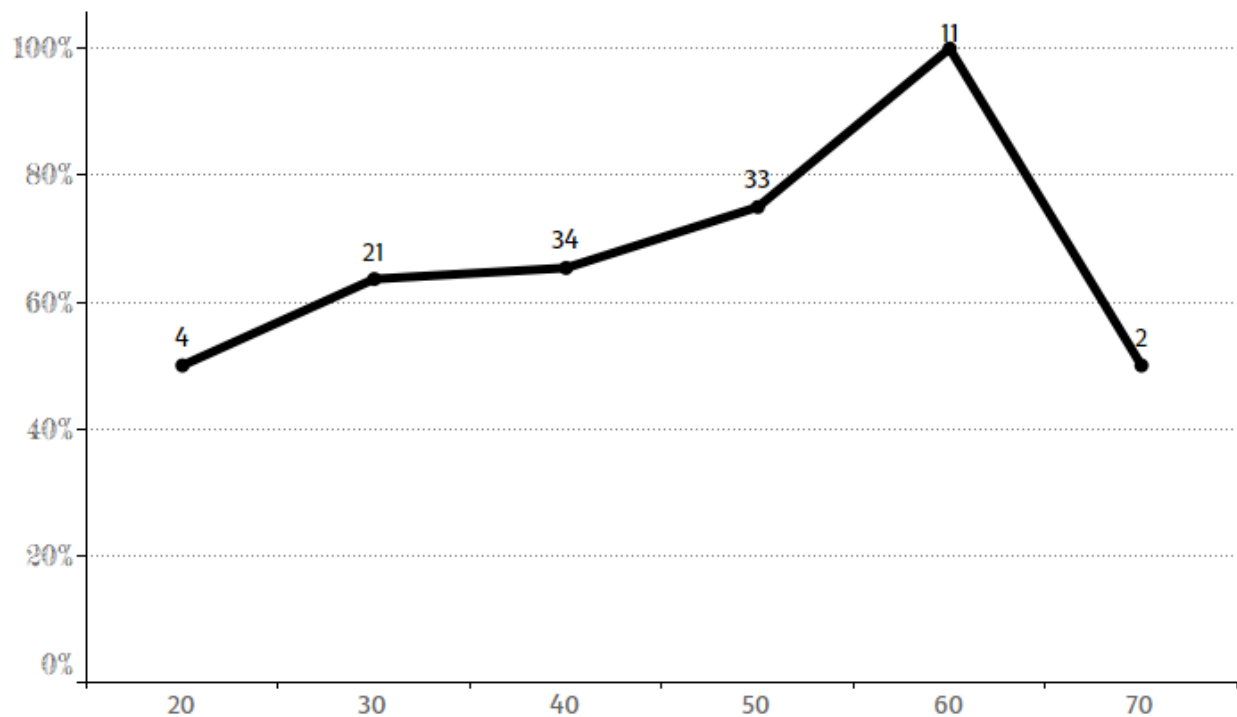
Age: Most canners surveyed are ages 30-44 (43%) or 45-64 (46%).



Disability Status: Nearly 7 in 10 of the canners surveyed have a physical or mental disability (69%), despite that only 14% receive SSI/SSDI/Disability benefits.

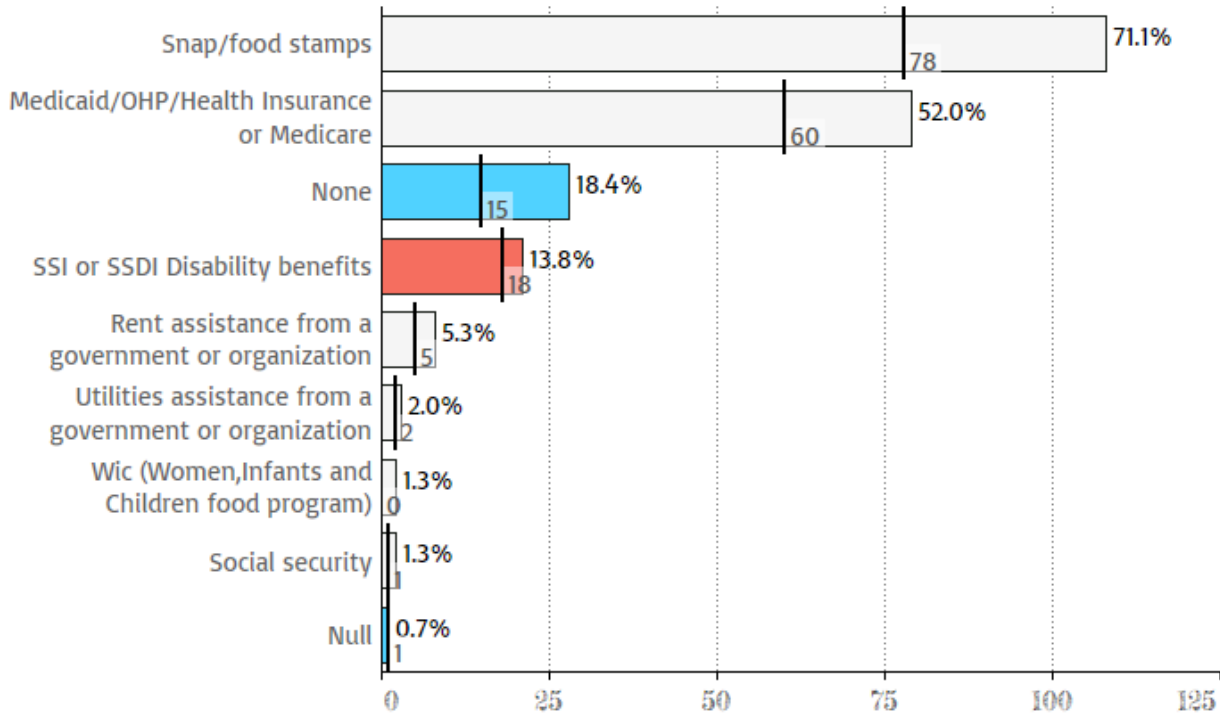
DISABILITY & AGE

The likelihood a canner is disabled increases with age. **All canners** in their 60s reported a disability. *For canners in their 70s, there were only 4 total responses.*



SOCIAL BENEFITS RECEIVED

Responses add up to more than 100%; respondents could choose more than one. Reference lines indicate number of respondents with a disability.



Housing status: More than half of the canners surveyed are without housing (55%, including those who live in a tent or outside, those who live in their vehicle, and those who answered “homeless” to the “other specify” response to this question). Nearly 1 in 5 (18%) live in a shelter or transitional housing or stay with others without paying rent. About 1 in 3 (35%) rent an apartment, house, room, or shared room, own a home/apartment, or live in a tiny house. Canners who are People of Color are more likely to be without housing than those who are white alone (59% vs. 50%, respectively), as are those ages 18-44 (average of 77%) compared to ages 45+ (average of 27%).

Poverty Experience: Two-thirds of the canners surveyed report having experienced poverty while growing up (66%). This is more likely to be true among canners who are People of Color (72% vs. 64% among those white alone; highest among Native American/Alaska Native canners at 81%) and those with physical or mental disabilities (72% vs. 53% among those without disabilities).

Social Benefits: The canners surveyed are most likely to receive SNAP or food stamps (72%) or Medicaid/OHP/Health insurance/Medicare (52%) as social benefits. About 1 in 5 or less receive SSI/SSDI/Disability (14%) or nothing (19%). Despite the stereotype that canners use SNAP benefits to buy bottled water to obtain bottles for redemption and generate income for drug use, canners with SNAP benefits are less likely than all canners surveyed (5% compared with 7%) to spend their earnings on drugs.

Canning Habits & Behaviors

Years of Canning Experience: On average, the canners surveyed have collected cans and bottles for redemption for 10 years. This contradicts a commonly held stereotype that canning, and Oregon's Bottle Bill, has fueled the fentanyl drug use crisis, which did not start in Oregon until 2020.

Those who redeem beverage containers at the People's Depot and Official OBRC Bottle Drops have been collecting for longer than those who redeem primarily at retail stores such as CVS, Safeway, or Fred Meyers (*an average of 10 and 9 years vs. 6 years, respectively*).

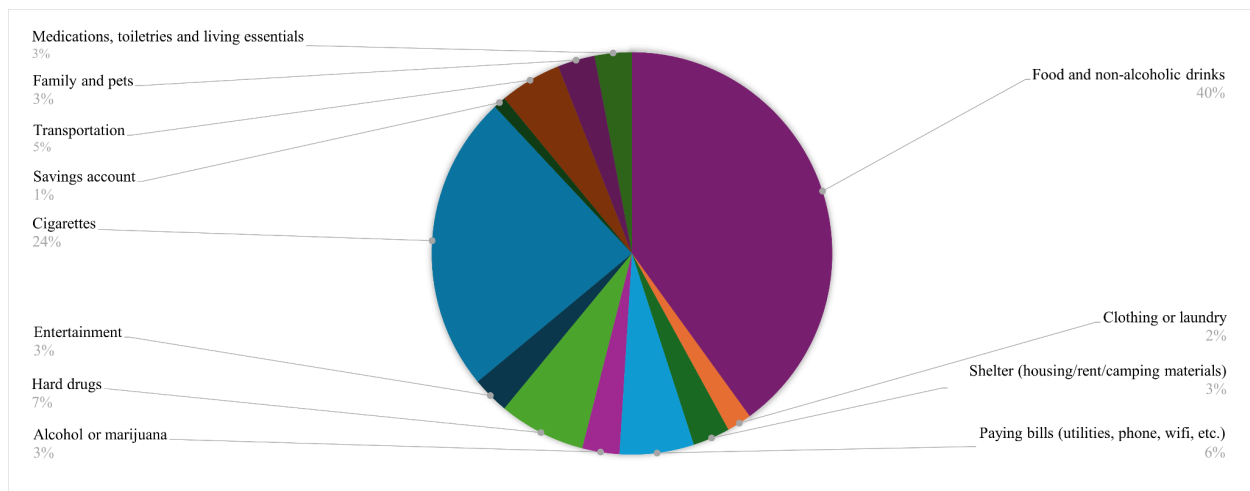
Native American/Alaska Native canners report more canning experience than all other races/ethnicities (*13 years vs. 8 - 10 years, respectively*).

Canners ages 30-64 have the most canning experience (*10 - 11 years vs. 8 years, respectively*).

Those who report physical or mental disabilities have more years of experience canning than those without disabilities (*12 years vs. 7 years, respectively*).

Canning Purchases, Income, and Employment

Top Items Purchased with Canning Income: Canners are most likely to spend the money they earn redeeming bottles and cans on basic essentials (64%), including food and non-alcoholic drinks (40%), bills (6%), transportation (5%), shelter (3%), medication and toiletries (3%), clothes/laundry (2%), family needs (3%) and savings (1%). About a quarter spend their money on cigarettes (24%). Three percent spend their income on entertainment, like music.



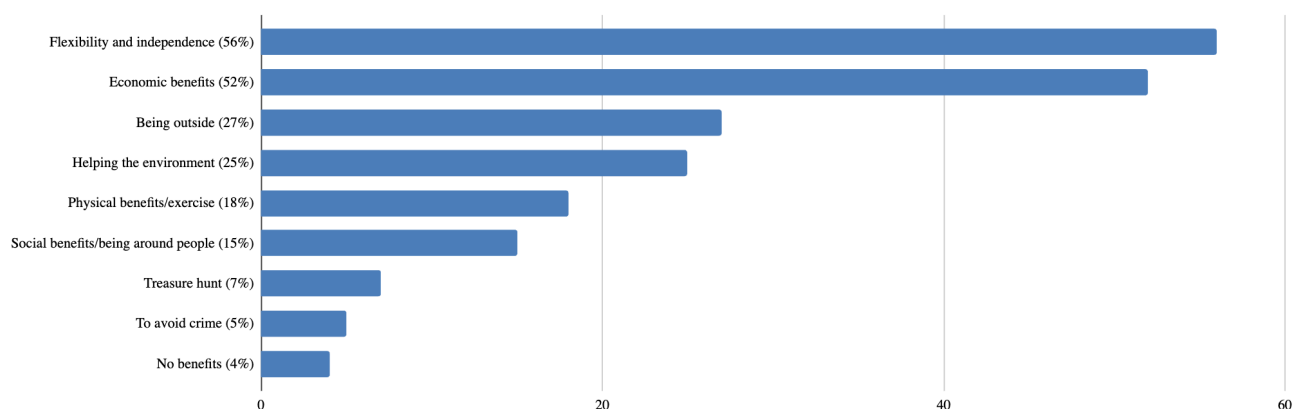
Dependence on Canning Income: Most canners surveyed report that canning is their only source of income (59%). About 1 in 5 (19%) cite social benefits as an additional source of income. Most canners do not have others relying on their income from canning (64%). Though among those who do (36%), most have 1-2 people who rely on their income (69%, with 43% having 1 person who relies on their income).

Other Work: When asked about other income sources outside of canning, 1% report having a full time jobs with an employer; 7% report having part time work with an employer; 13% report having gig/contract/day labor work including 3% working in other forms of waste picking like metal scrapping and selling second hand goods recovered from dumpsters; 19% report income from social benefits (including food stamps); and 59% report having no other income source.

Challenges to Non-Canning Employment: The top challenges that make it hard for canners to find or hold on to work other than canning include physical or mental health issues (30%); being without a home or homeless (including frequent moving or sweeps, inability to maintain hygiene, and social stigma against people like them (22%); lack of ID (14%), or criminal history (11%). About a quarter say they don't have difficulty holding on to other work (24%).

Perception of Canning as Work: Most canners surveyed consider canning to be work (77%). At the same time, 74% would prefer to be doing work that is not canning.

Reasons to Like Canning: When asked the open-ended question of what canners like about canning, 56% mentioned Flexibility/Independence, 52% mentioned economic benefits, 27% mentioned being outside, a quarter (25%) appreciate helping the environment, 18% cited physical exercise and 15% mentioned social benefits such as being around other people, 7% appreciate the art of the treasure hunt, and 5% appreciate canning because it enables them to avoid crime for making money. Four percent reported not finding any benefits to canning. This is consistent across all demographic groups.





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Days Per Week Canners Spend Collecting:

Canners collect and redeem bottles and cans an average of 5 days per week for 6 hours per day, equivalent to a 30-hour work week.

- Black/African American canners spend slightly longer per day canning than those of all other races/ethnicities (*an average of 8 hours, with 33% reporting more than 8 hours*).

Amount of Money Canners Make:

The canners surveyed make an average of \$48 each time they redeem cans and bottles. Canners on average redeem cans and bottles 4.8 times per week- meaning that, assuming a 30 hours work week as reported above, their hourly income is about \$7.68.

- Those who redeem cans and bottles at The People's Depot and the official OBRC Bottle Drops make more per transaction on average than those who redeem primarily in other places (*\$44 - \$96 on average vs. \$27 - \$31 from other places, respectively*).
- **Black/African American canners make less on average than those of all other races/ethnicities** (*an average of \$21 \$31 - \$54*), despite that they report working longer hours.

Locations Canners Collect From: About half of canners surveyed collect cans from public (49%) and private trash cans at apartments or houses (51%). Most canners surveyed also find containers for redemption in public (51%) or private recycling bins at private apartment buildings or houses (74%); littered in the street or sidewalk (66%); and from business owners, friends, neighbors, or others who save the containers for them (66%).

Transportation Methods Canners Use When Collecting: Most canners surveyed collect cans and bottles on foot (64%). A quarter collect them by bike (25%). Car/truck and public transportation are less common methods used for collection (15% and 13%, *respectively*). Canners also reported collecting cans on a skateboard (3%) and in a wheelchair (1%).

Distance Canners Travel When Collecting and Redeeming:

More than half of canners travel more than 5 miles each day to collect and redeem cans and bottles (56%). They travel an average of 11 miles each day when collecting and redeeming.

Area of Portland Canners Most Frequently Collect From: Given that The People's Depot is currently located in SE Portland, it is not surprising that most canners (70%) report collecting beverage containers in SE Portland. But canner customers also collect in NE (38%), SW (30%), North (24%) and NW (26%) Portland.



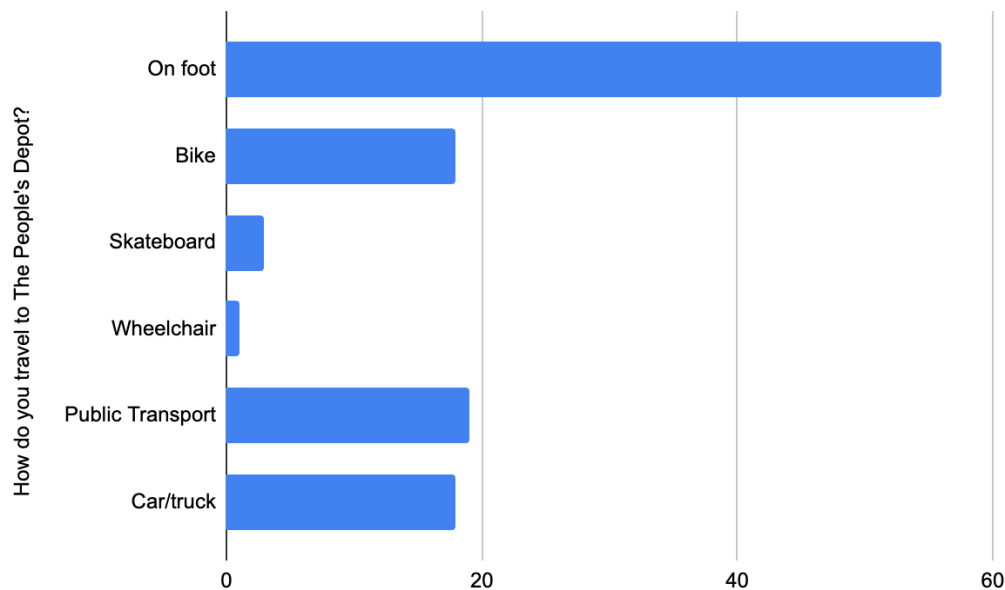
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Most Frequent Redemption Center: Most report going to The People's Depot most often to redeem cans and bottles (78%), which is not surprising given that the survey was conducted at The People's Depot. About 1 in 10 (11%) report going to the Official OBRC Bottle Drop most often. Canners who frequent The People's Depot more are more likely to be People of Color compared with canners who frequent other redemption options.

Canners and The People's Depot

Transportation Methods Canners Take to The People's Depot: Most travel to The People's Depot on foot (56%) and are much less likely to use other forms of transportation (18% - 19% *by bike, car/truck, or public transportation*). One percent travel to The People's Depot by wheelchair, and 3% travel by skateboard. Those who travel to The People's Depot by car/truck or public transit report higher approximate distances between where they stay and The People's Depot.



Distance Between Place of Residence and The People's Depot: Canners report The People's Depot is an average of 3 miles from where they stay, with most saying it is 5 miles or less from where they stay (82%).



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Reasons for Redemption Center Preference: Canners go to The People's Depot most often for redemption because of the convenient location (68%), fast service (56%), and welcoming environment (54%). Canners are more likely to mention a higher redemption limit as a reason for choosing The People's Depot (41%) than they are among those who choose the Official OBRC Bottle Drop (12%). Those who go to the Official OBRC Bottle Drop most often do so for its convenient location (65%). These canners also report a higher approximate distance between where they stay and The People's Depot.

Safety in Line at The People's Depot: Nearly all canners feel safe when waiting in line, accessing, and approaching The People's Depot when it comes to vehicle traffic in the immediate area (87%).

When canners are finished redeeming containers at the People's Depot, most leave the area (64%), though about 1 in 3 (36%) remain nearby for a while. There is no indication that those who remain in the area are more likely to spend their income on hard drugs, but they are more likely to spend their income on food and non-alcoholic drinks (49% compared with 40%), shelter (4% compared with 3%), or medication and other living essentials (4% compared with 3%).

Ground Score Association (GSA) is an association of informal recyclers, canners, dumpster divers, and other waste pickers who create and fill low-barrier waste materials management jobs in Portland, Oregon. Ground Score is collectively-organized and radically inclusive, prioritizing work opportunities for those facing work and housing insecurity. Ground Score seeks to build a more environmentally and socially aware community, while also changing society's perceptions of what and who is considered valuable. groundscoreassociation.org