



# Sparking a National Culture Shift to Reduce Plastic Bag Waste

**HOW 160+ RETAILERS CAME  
TOGETHER ACROSS TWO  
CITIES TO SUPPORT THEIR  
CUSTOMERS AND DRIVE  
CHANGE**

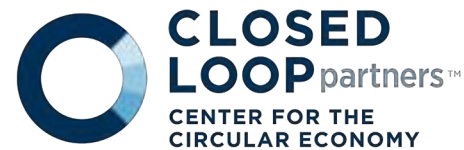


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# Meet us



## The Center for the Circular Economy at Closed Loop Partners

The Center for the Circular Economy (“the Center”) is the innovation arm of Closed Loop Partners. The Center executes research & analytics and unites organizations to tackle complex material challenges and implement systemic change that advances the circular economy. The Center brings together designers, manufacturers, brands, recovery systems operators, trade organizations, municipalities, policymakers and NGOs to create, invest in and support scalable innovations that target big system problems.

## The Consortium to Reinvent the Retail Bag

The Consortium to Reinvent the Retail Bag is a pre-competitive collaboration amongst retail brands that aims to identify, test and implement innovative new design solutions that serve the function of today’s single-use plastic retail bag. Closed Loop Partners’ Center for the Circular Economy launched the Consortium’s Beyond the Bag Initiative in 2020 with Founding Partners CVS Health, Target and Walmart, and it grew to a partnership with sixteen retail partners, alongside Environmental Advisory Partners Conservation International and Ocean Conservancy.

# The challenge

**Plastic bag waste harms people, the planet and businesses, yet cultivating a habit of bringing your own bag is hard**



In spring 2023, we brought together 160 retailers to tackle this challenge and better support customers to bridge this intention-action gap by implementing solutions together.

# Our story

**In the U.S. each year, we use 100 billion single-use plastic bags. Together, we can change this and reduce plastic waste.**

In 2023, the Center for the Circular Economy at Closed Loop Partners and the Beyond the Bag Consortium launched in-market campaigns in Denver and Tucson to drive a cultural shift, supporting customers to build the habit of bringing their own reusable bag or opting to go without a bag.

Together, we engaged over 160 retailers, from mom-and-pop shops to national retail chains, to implement near-term bag reduction strategies, including signs to encourage customers to bring their own bag, prompts at checkout to inquire if customers need a bag and citywide advertisement campaigns to help customers prepare to bring their own bag. We engaged millions of customers across diverse contexts: Denver, featuring a bag fee, and Tucson without one. This exploration of various contexts enabled us to tailor our strategy, supporting customers at different stages of their bag reduction journeys.

Over the course of three months, we deployed strategies together that resulted in the potential to **save up to 9.5 million single-use bags annually across the two markets**. This powerful testament to the strength of collaboration inspires us to continue uniting forces, emphasizing the profound impact that collective action can have on reducing plastic bag waste and fostering a more sustainable future for all.



# Our strategy

Retailers can decrease their use of single-use bags and support customers in adopting reusable bags, saving money and reducing plastic waste



These reduction strategies come from our Consortium's [Playbook](#) for Retailers

## Signs

Designed and placed signs in the parking lot and in store to support customers to bring a bag or go without one



## Prompts

Asked customers "do you need a bag?" at checkout rather than handing out single-use bags automatically



## Media Amplication

Launched out-of-store marketing to help customers to prepare to bring a bag



**“I think that if you’re buying one or two items, you really don’t need a bag. If they ask me, ‘Do you need a bag?’ that’s when I don’t take one because [I have tons at home and] I don’t really need it.”**

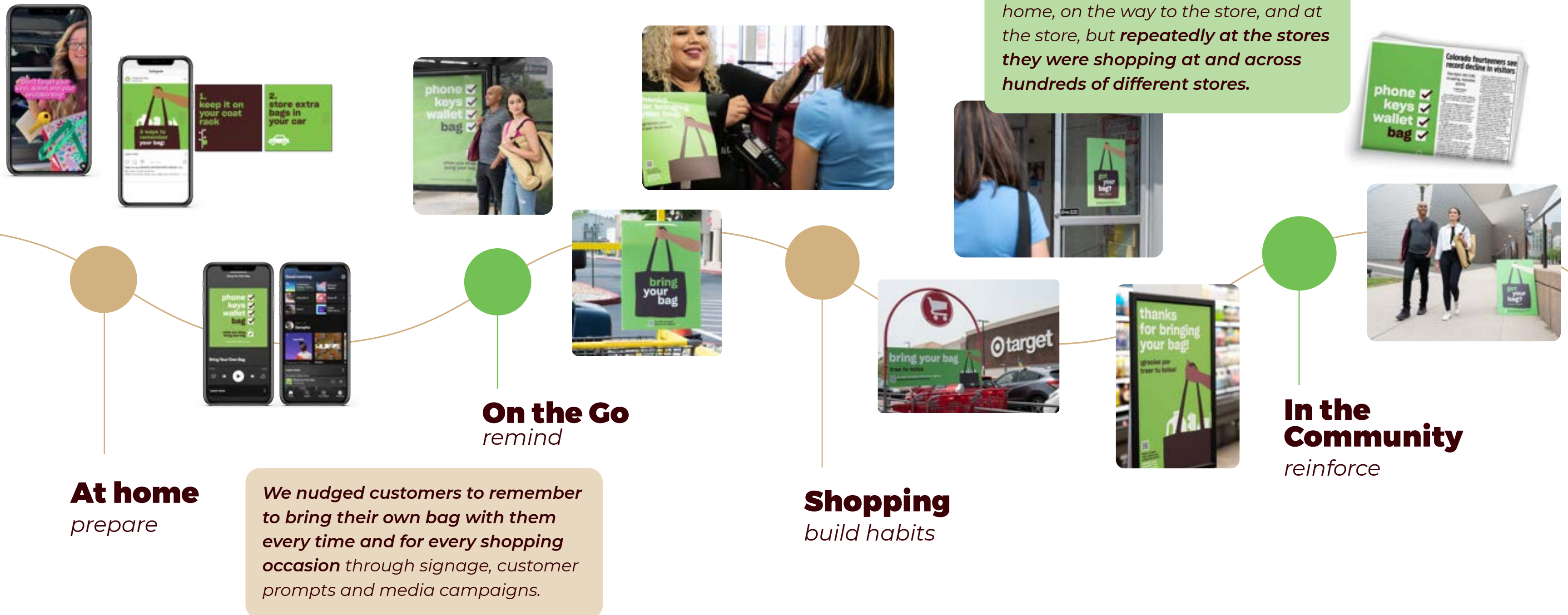
*Quotes from customers impacted by our tests in-market*

**“I noticed a big sign in the parking lot that’s like ‘Did you remember your reusable bag?’ There’s one thing that a store is doing to encourage people. It’s actually good and I appreciate it.”**



# Customers bringing it across two cities

Together, we influenced citizens at every point in their shopping journey across hundreds of stores in Denver and Tucson



# Collective action

We mobilized 160+ retailers and engaged local communities to help amplify our impact and the shared effort to end plastic waste

## PARTICIPATING BEYOND THE BAG CONSORTIUM PARTNERS



## COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS



To bring these pilots to life, we brought together more than 160 retailers, across 375+ stores, including retailers big and small. We also partnered with members of the community from city government, local business groups and nonprofits to reach even more members of the community and increase our influence on shopping habits.

By implementing strategies together, we:

**Built greater awareness** among citizens who saw signage, prompts and media over and over

**Increased opportunities** to build habits each time a customer shops regardless of what store they are going to

**Engaged and empowered** citizens and communities to minimize waste, reshape behavioral norms and inspire others

## LOCAL INDEPENDENT STORES



# In-field measurements

We measured our impact by comparing customer behavior before and after our campaign

Over the course of the campaigns, we spent time on the ground to answer key questions:

## Customer impact

- Do customers increasingly bring their own bag or go without one?
- Is the customer experience neutral or positive?

## Operational impact

- Is the employee experience and process neutral or positive?
- Are employees implementing consistently?

## Financial impact

- Does it drive cost savings?

## Environmental impact

- Does it drive positive environmental impact?

**38,000+**  
checkout observations

**4,950+**  
customer intercepts & surveys

**200+**  
employee surveys

**30**  
in-depth customer interviews

# Impact

We supported habit building that could result in up to 9.5 million fewer single-use bags used across Denver and Tucson



## 9.5 Million

Up to 9.5 million fewer single-use bags used per year based on pilot results\*

**Customers found the signs easy to understand and helpful**

“ [It] reminded me to go back and get my bag in my car.”

“ When I saw the sign, I remembered to bring my bag in with me.”

“ I’ve noticed signs in other stores. I think it’s a good idea.”



## 190

Up to 190 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent avoided



## 187,148

Up to 187,148 lbs of materials reduced

**This positive experience continued out of store**

“ I’ve been hearing more commercials on my **Spotify** about using your own bags and how the environment will thank you for it.”



## 375+

Stores participated across Denver and Tucson



## 58%

of employees reported no change to or decreased checkout time

\* Based on pilot results of a nearly 5% statistically significant reduction in customers using single-use bags on a shopping trip across the two markets

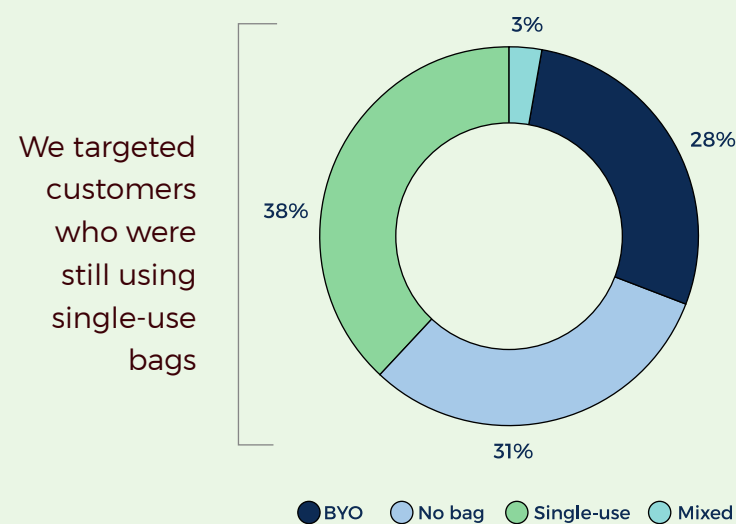
# Tale of two cities

How behavior changed in Denver and Tucson

## Denver

In 2021, Denver implemented a 10c fee on single-use bags which sparked customers to bring their own bags or choose to go without one. Our pilot built on this momentum. We targeted and supported customers in Denver who were still using single-use bags.

Bag use **before** the pilot



### OUR IMPACT

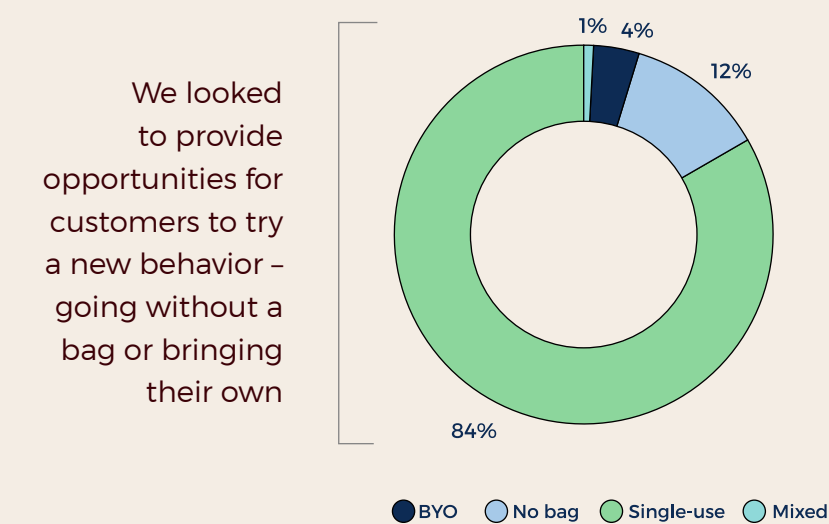
We observed greater and faster behavior change in Denver, where customers are further along on their zero waste journey.

- Over **11% decrease in trips** where customers used single-use bags
- More customers observed choosing to **go without single-use bags in the first 3-8 weeks of pilot**
- The highest levels of change were seen in stores **where customers don't routinely bring their own bag**

## Tucson

In Tucson, single-use bags are free and readily accessible. This means customers are earlier on their bag journey and the concept of bringing a bag or going without one is newer. And many stores in Tucson automatically provide bags at checkout, giving customers less of an opportunity to consider alternatives.

Bag use **before** the pilot



### OUR IMPACT

While customers in Tucson took longer to adopt new practices, we saw early signs of some behavior change.

- Nearly **2% decrease in trips** where customers used single-use bags
- More customers observed bringing their own bags and **opting to go without a bag 9-12 weeks into the pilot**
- The most change was sparked in **stores where customers most commonly associate bringing a bag**, for example at their grocery store

# Together we can scale

How the power of collaboration can spark a national culture shift to reuse

**In just three months in market together, we paved the way to reduce millions of bags.**

Going forward, together we plan to scale this work nationally to:

**Accelerate behaviour change**

**Support customers**

**Implement together**

This allows us to support these communities to:

**Drive positive environmental impact**

**Save money**

**Solve operational challenges for retailers**

## ► Join Us!

If you are interested in joining other leading retailers to tackle your single-use bag waste, reach out to our team at [beyondthebag@closedlooppartners.com](mailto:beyondthebag@closedlooppartners.com)



# Thank you

**This work illustrates the power of collective action.** Thank you to all those who played an integral role in bringing this to life.

## **Consortium to Reinvent the Retail Bag**

Thank you to the sixteen retailers who came together to identify, test, and scale strategies to end bag waste. A second note of appreciation to the eight Consortium retailers – CVS Health, Target, DICK’S Sporting Goods, Dollar General, The Kroger Co., The TJX Companies, Inc., Ulta Beauty, and Dollar Tree & Family Dollar – who shaped the strategy of this pilot and implemented in their stores.

## **Local Retailers**

Thank you to the 160+ retailers – from mom and pop shops to national brands – who joined us to implement in Denver and Tucson alongside the Beyond the Bag Consortium retailers.

## **Community Stakeholders**

Thank you to the City of and County of Denver and the City of Tucson, Tucson Clean & Beautiful, Local First Arizona, and many other local nonprofits and business organizations for their support of this effort to engage the community, recruit local businesses and accelerate our impact.

## **BBMG and WonderIn Group**

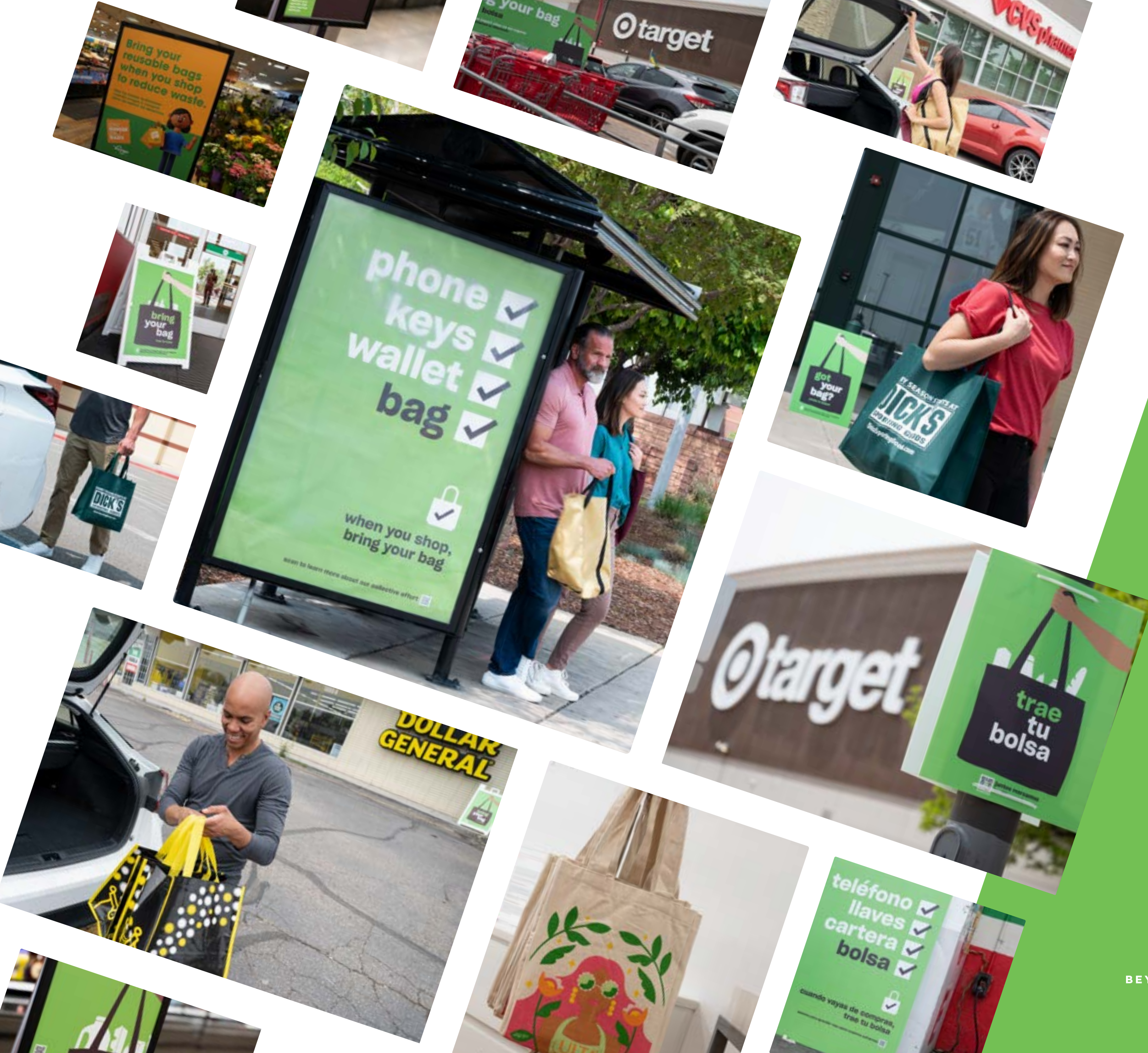
Thank you to the BBMG team for their work to design the creative campaign for this pilot and the WonderIn Group for their work to activate our broader marketing efforts.

## **The Behavioral Insights Team**

Thank you to the Behavioral Insights Team for their support in shaping the research design for this effort, capturing data in-field and analyzing impact.



To learn more about Beyond the Bag and our work, please visit us at:  
**[www.closedlooppartners.com/beyond-the-bag](http://www.closedlooppartners.com/beyond-the-bag)**



BEYOND THE BAG

CLOSED  
LOOP partners  
CENTER FOR THE  
CIRCULAR ECONOMY