

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA ZERO WASTE EVENT GUIDE

Simple Steps For A Waste-Free Event



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Office of Sustainability
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WHAT IS ZERO WASTE?



"Zero Waste is a goal that is ethical, economical, efficient and visionary, to guide people in changing their lifestyles and practices to emulate sustainable natural cycles, where all discarded materials are designed to become resources for others to use.

Zero Waste means designing and managing products and processes to systematically avoid and eliminate the volume and toxicity of waste and materials, conserve and recover all resources, and not burn or bury them.

Implementing Zero Waste will eliminate all discharges to land, water or air that are a threat to planetary, human, animal or plant health." - Zero Waste International Alliance

HOW TO PLAN A ZERO WASTE EVENT

The key to a successful zero waste event is planning! Use this guide to help you through each step of the planning process.

BEFORE THE EVENT

BUILD A GREEN TEAM

Engage your event planning committee in sustainability discussions! Create a Green Team subcommittee and appoint a recycling coordinator to lead your waste reduction efforts.



CHOOSE A VENUE

When selecting an event location, give priority to venues that offer comprehensive recycling and/or composting services and can accommodate your event's sustainability needs.

Talk with your venue about:

- How many recycling/compost/landfill receptacles will be needed?
- Who will provide them?
- Who will set them up and take them down?
- Who will empty them and how often will they be emptied?
- Where should the contents from the receptacles be taken?
- Does a waste hauler need to be hired to haul materials from the event to a recycling facility, compost facility, or landfill?
- What will each service cost?

RESERVE EVENT SPACES ON CAMPUS

<https://imu.uiowa.edu/event-services/reservations/>

IDENTIFY YOUR WASTE

Identify the types of waste materials that will be generated by your event. Then, determine if each item is recyclable or compostable. If you identify materials that can only be landfilled, look for alternatives that can be recycled or composted. Look for opportunities to reduce or reuse whenever possible.

Think about waste generated by:

- Food and beverage offerings
- Registration and check-in tables
- Meeting or presentation handouts
- Information and vendor tables
- Merchandise sales

WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR EVENT'S WASTE

RECYCLING

Place recyclables in any dumpster on campus marked "Recycle." Most buildings have a recycling dumpster at the dock.

COMPOST

Contact a compost vendor to haul your compost away at the end of the event, or self-haul compostables to the Iowa City Compost Facility.

LANDFILL

Place landfill waste in any dumpster on campus marked "Trash Only" or "Landfill Only." Most buildings have a trash dumpster at the dock.

ENGAGE VENDORS

Let vendors know that you are planning a zero waste event. Share your sustainability goals and be clear about what you expect from them.

- Specify in vendor contracts that all products used or sold at the event must be reusable, recyclable, or compostable.
- Provide a list of products that are acceptable and not acceptable for use, and include supplier contact details.
- Ban vendors from using Styrofoam, bottled water, and plastic bags. If possible, assess a penalty for using banned items.
- Coordinate with donors to ensure the donated products (and packaging) can be recycled or composted at the event.

✓ CREATE A WASTE STATION SITE PLAN



WHAT IS A WASTE STATION?

A waste station is a centralized area where recycling, compost, and landfill receptacles are co-located.

Placing bins together increases recycling and composting while reducing contamination.

- Walk through your venue to identify the types of activities that will take place in each area. Using your event's site map, mark waste station locations.
- Strategically place waste stations near food and beverage service areas, conference rooms, high traffic corridors, main entryways or exits, food preparation areas, and other identified spaces.
- If there are more landfill receptacles than recycling and compost receptacles, plan to remove the extra landfill bins, or cover them with trash bags or cloth so they can not be used.
- Calculate the number and type of bins needed.
- Borrow waste station bins if the venue is not providing them.
- Begin recruiting staff and volunteers. Remember, if composting, you must have at least one person at each waste station at all times to help attendees sort their waste properly.

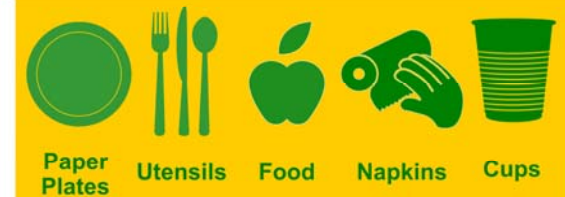
BORROW BINS FOR FREE

The UI Office of Sustainability and the Environment loans recycling, compost, and landfill bins free-of-charge to UI students and employees. Please fill out the online request form at least one week before your event <https://sustainability.uiowa.edu/campus-initiatives/recycling-and-waste-reduction/how-recycle/recycle-events>

RECYCLE



COMPOST



LANDFILL



Download the signs above from the Office of Sustainability website

<https://sustainability.uiowa.edu/campus-initiatives/recycling-and-waste-reduction/download-resources/posters>

✓ LABEL YOUR BINS

Ensure that recycling bins are well marked to make it easy for people to understand what goes where.



- **Color Coordinate:** Use different colors for each waste type. Typically, recycling is blue, compost is green (or yellow), and trash is black (or brown)
- **Clear Wording:** Signs should be easy to read. Specify each bin as "Recycle," "Compost," or "Landfill."
- **Photos and Images:** Include pictures of items that you want to go into the bin. If possible, use pictures of the specific items that will be generated at your event.
- **Placement:** Signs should be placed at eye-level where possible and on all accessible sides of the bins.
- **Reusable:** Make your signs weatherproof, lightweight, and durable so they can be used again at future events.



ENGAGE YOUR PATRONS

Let your visitors have fun while making a difference. Include information in your marketing materials encouraging attendees to take sustainable actions.



- Ask them to bring a reusable bag.
- Ask them to bring a refillable coffee mug or water bottle.
- Encourage them to walk, cycle, carpool, or bus to your event.
- Offer incentives to attendees who complete your requested actions.



COMMUNICATE AND PROMOTE

Having an event that prevents waste from going to the landfill is something to be proud of. If properly communicated, it can attract both patrons and sponsors to your event, so it's worth telling the world!

- **Press Release:** Issue a press release and promote your zero waste goal.
- **Endorsement:** Ask campus leaders and local celebrities to publically acknowledge your zero waste efforts.
- **Promotional Giveaways:** Limit purchases of promotional items. If you do offer giveaways, select products that are reusable and/or made from recycled materials.
- **Electronic Media:** Highlight your recycling and composting efforts on your website and social media networks.
- **Print Materials:** Publicize your sustainability efforts in all print materials (e.g., brochures, tickets, pamphlets, schedules, programs).
- **Word of Mouth:** Talk about your sustainability goals every chance you get. Soon, others will start talking about it too.

MAKE SUSTAINABLE PURCHASES

The best way to achieve zero waste is to not produce waste in the first place. Look for ways you can reduce the amount of materials brought to your event so you'll have less waste to manage.

- Choose products that can be recycled (or composted) and that are packaged in recyclable or compostable materials.
- Choose products with the least amount of packaging.
- Avoid buying items that can't be reused, recycled, or composted (e.g., balloons).
- Buy in bulk. Avoid individually packaged items (e.g., condiments, dressings, chips).
- Use post-consumer recycled paper for all print materials.
- If buying compostable items, work closely with your compost facility to ensure the items are actually compostable.
- Limit purchases of promotional giveaways and select items that are reusable and made from recycled materials.
- Purchase from local suppliers if possible.

DURING THE EVENT

MONITOR VENDORS

Check in with your vendors upon arrival and throughout the event to ensure they have met their obligations.

- Ensure they have brought only permitted materials to the event
- Advise them on how recycling/compost collection will work
- Show them where the recycling/compost bins are located
- Ask them to help educate attendees about recycling/composting



MONITOR BINS

Welcome your bin monitor volunteers as they arrive. Explain how important their role is and how they are helping your event reach its sustainability goals.

- Train staff/volunteers on-site. Let them know what can be recycled and composted.
- If composting, assign at least one person to each waste station to help attendees sort their waste.
- If recycling only, check each bin often and remove contaminants as needed.
- Stock waste station supplies:
 - Gloves
 - Extra bags
 - Hand wipes or sanitizer
 - Sunscreen (if outdoors)
 - Complimentary food/beverage if possible

COMMUNICATE WITH GUESTS

Be sure your attendees are aware of your zero waste goal and encourage them to help you reach that goal.

- Include information about recycling and composting in print materials handed out during the event
- Post signs, posters, table tents, etc. throughout the event reminding attendees where and how to recycle and compost
- Make announcements throughout the event letting guest know what and how to recycle and compost



ENJOY & OBSERVE

- Take notes during the event so you'll remember what went right and what could have been improved
- Take photos during the event. Get pictures of your staff/volunteers assisting guests at waste station, snap shots of how much material you recycled/composted, and take a quick pic of problems that arise (e.g., contaminated bins)



AFTER THE EVENT

CLEAN UP & TEAR DOWN

Don't let all of your hard work go to waste during tear down. After a long day (or days) of working your event, everyone will want to tear down and get home as quickly as possible. In the rush, bins can get contaminated.

- Schedule staff or volunteers to monitor bins (and dumpsters if necessary) to the very end.
- Have a plan for tearing down waste stations and transporting full bags of recycling, compost, and landfill waste to a central collection point.
- Donate unused food and other items to local community organizations.
- Gather all items that can be reused at future events (e.g., signs, posters, decorations, leftover supplies).
- Ensure your waste gets hauled away according to plan.

GATHER DATA

Collecting data will help you measure your success and identify opportunities for improvement.

Data to collect:

- Number of patrons at the event
- Amount of recyclables collected
- Amount of compost collected
- Amount of food donated
- Amount of waste sent to landfill

Once data is collected:

- Evaluate and analyze data
- Compare date to previous events (if available)
- Celebrate your successes and identify opportunities for improvement



GATHER FEEDBACK

- Ask staff and volunteers what worked and what could be improved
- Send a post-event survey to attendees to gather feedback
- Hold a post-event debriefing and ask partners and other stakeholders for feedback



GIVE THANKS

- Write "thank you" notes to the guests, volunteers, vendors, etc. for helping to make your event more sustainable
- Post a "thank you" note on your website and/or social media accounts
- Publically praise your partners for their contributions to the event

CELEBRATE & SHARE YOUR SUCCESS

- Share your accomplishments with event staff, volunteers, partners, and attendees
- Post the waste diversion results on your website and/or social media
- Submit a post-event press release that includes information about your waste diversion efforts and other sustainability-related accomplishments



CHECKLIST

BEFORE THE EVENT

- Build a **Green Team**
- Choose a Venue
- Identify Your Waste
- Engage Vendors
- Create a Waste Station Site Plan
- Label Your Bins
- Communicate and Promote
- Engage Your Patrons
- Make Sustainable Purchases

DURING THE EVENT

- Monitor Vendors
- Monitor Bins
- Communicate With Guests
- Enjoy & Observe

AFTER THE EVENT

- Clean Up & Tear Down
- Gather Data
- Gather Feedback
- Give Thanks
- Celebrate & Share Your Success

GO ABOVE & BEYOND

- Use electronic media for marketing, registration, invitations, etc.
- For mailings, print addresses directly onto envelopes
- Replace large print materials with smaller versions
- Avoid unnecessary items such as straws, toothpicks, stirrers
- Serve meals with reusable plates, napkins, cups, etc.
- Serve food in bulk rather than individual packaging
- Provide water refill stations and reusable cups
- Serve finger foods that do not require utensils
- Avoid printed handouts. Ask speakers to provide electronic copies of presentations and offer them to attendees electronically
- Use small plates to serve food. People tend to waste less food using smaller plates
- Serve buffet-style meals and label the food so people take only the food they want
- Print materials on double-sided paper
- Request attendees to RSVP to estimate food more accurately
- Leave dates off signs and displays so they can be reused
- Use decorations made from reused or recycled materials and that can be reused or recycled after the event.
- Rent supplies instead of buying them
- If using nametags on lanyards, ask attendees to return them
- Donate leftover food to local non-profits
- Donate leftover decorations or supplies to local non-profits
- Instruct and remind attendees to bring their own water bottle, coffee mug, tote bag, etc.
- Incentivize alternative transportation usage
- Offer valet bike parking
- Serve locally grown, organics food