

City of Flagstaff Sustainability Office

ZERO-WASTE EVENT PLANNING GUIDE

Use this guide when planning any event from an office meeting to a large public event.

What is a Zero-Waste Event?

The goal of minimal waste being created from planning process, implementation, and clean up for an event. This is achieved by redesigning event planning by finding ways to reduce the number of materials used in the first place and to reuse or recycle materials at the event.

Step 1: Identify the waste issues that are significant to your event.

- food waste
- paper waste
- aluminum cans
- packaging waste
- beverage bottles, etc.

Step 2: The best way to deal with waste is not to create it in the first place. Clearly define the specific actions you can realistically take to reduce these waste issues.

- Ex: Event planners can eliminate paper waste by replacing mailing lists with electronic marketing and communication or encourage participants to bring reusable bottles and refill water onsite.

Step 3: Work with your vendors to incorporate the waste reduction actions into the event. Include these priorities in the contract.

- Ex: Recycling hauler, event site managers, presenters, vendors, caterer, etc.

Step 4: Assign waste reduction tasks to staff and volunteers. Implement your waste reduction actions.

- Ex: Two volunteers will monitor the recycling bins to be sure items are separated properly, etc.

Step 5: Assess the waste reduction goals with the actual actions taken. Brainstorm ways to improve the system for your next meeting or event.

TIPS:

- Plan ahead! Communicate to all involved of your waste reduction goals.
- Use reused materials or materials with recycled content.
- Provide reusable items instead of disposable items when offering food.
- Use easily recyclable items.
- Be sure recycling containers are clearly marked at your event.
- Monitor recycling containers and trash cans during the event.

ZERO-WASTE EVENT PLANNING CHECKLIST:

Reducing Waste

Planning

- Avoid direct mail and use websites, email, newspaper, newsletters for marketing the event.
- If you have to use direct mail, purge mailing lists to eliminate invalid addresses or duplicates.
- For any printed event materials consider the following: print double-sided, print on recycled paper, use a printer that offers soy or vegetable inks, use removable or erasable dates when making signs and posters for reuse
- Market sustainable behaviors to registrants and attendees, such as bringing their own fork, spoon, cup, cloth napkin, food container, and reusable shopping bag, as well as bike or use public transit to get to the event, etc.

Presenters, Exhibitors, and Vendors

- Encourage speakers, exhibitors, and vendors to prepare interactive exhibits and use posters, PowerPoint presentations or other visual displays instead of handouts.
- Offer resources, such as maps or copies of presentation materials via email or downloadable off of a web site.
- Offer online registration, if requiring pre-registration.
- At events where vendors are participating, encourage them to use reusable serving items and communicate to them what recycling options will be available to encourage them to only distribute those items. Ex: sampling in paper cups if composting is available, beverages in cans if recycling is available, etc. Avoid Styrofoam at events.

At The Event

- Display agenda, festival schedule, maps, and other lists enlarged on easels rather than printing handouts.
- For events such as conferences that use name badges, use reusable badge holders and collect them afterwards for reuse.
- Use centerpieces that are reusable or can be taken home, such as plants in pots.
- Offer reusable event swag instead of one-time-use items such as: reusable mugs, grocery bags, etc.

Food & Recycling Waste

- Forecast the number of attendees to avoid ordering too much, wasting food and money.
- Serve finger foods that require no utensils or serve buffet-style in large containers verses over-packaged box lunches (ex: self-serve pasta in a large bowl or party sub sandwiches).
- Encourage food vendors to provide reusable items such as silverware, cups, mugs, plates and cloth napkins that can be washed instead of paper. If no kitchen is available, someone might be willing to take them home to wash instead.
 - One option for eliminating waste from food containers at festivals is to use a token system, where attendees purchase a token that is then exchanged for plates and utensils at food

vendors. After eating, attendees return plates and utensils to staff for washing and receive their token back to be reused throughout the festival.

- ❑ If using paper for food serving and eating, consider offering plates, cups and silverware made of recycled content. For small events, a volunteer may be willing to take paper ware home to compost.
- ❑ Compost food scraps. If it is a small event, see if you can find someone to take the organic material home afterwards or drop at the CSA. If it is a very large event, contact Roots Composting.
- ❑ Request and offer clearly labeled recycling and compost bins for your event. Make sure to utilize the 90-gallon recycling bin toppers if utilizing City services.
- ❑ If serving box lunches, ask if they can be wrapped and/or packaged in recyclable containers or wraps.
 - Ex: foil is recyclable versus plastic wrappings Provide free drinking water to fill up reusable water bottles and help eliminate plastic beverage containers. Sell reusable cups that can be used at all vendors to replace that replace the hundreds or even thousands of cups that typically end up in either the trash or recycling bin.

Event Location

- ❑ Look for a location that is near bus lines to avoid excess driving.
- ❑ Offer directions by bus to make it easier to utilize mass transportation.
- ❑ Seek out meeting rooms with natural light to conserve energy.
- ❑ Seek out a location that already offers recycling services.

RESOURCES

Flagstaff Sustainability Office:

- [ReThinking Waste](#)
- [Food Waste](#)
- [Plastic Recycling](#)

Community Support:

- [Azulita Project:](#)
 - [Zero Waste Events Planning Guide – Northern Arizona Edition](#)
 - [Communicating your Zero Waste Intentions](#)
 - [Twelve quick tips for a zero waste/ sustainable event](#)
 - [Zero Waste Events calculator](#)

Recycling:

- [Recycle by City:](#) Everything you want to know about recycling in Flagstaff.
- [City of Flagstaff Solid Waste:](#) If using City services for event trash and recycling, make sure to advantage of the recycling bin toppers that fit on top of 90-gallon recycling bins to avoid contamination.

Compost Providers:

- [Corbin Composting](#)
- [Compost Crowd](#)

'Green' Caterers:

Use caterers that offer reusable items for serving and eating food such as silverware, glasses, mugs and plates and cloth napkins that can be washed instead of paper. Also consider caterers that use local, seasonal and organic foods.

Recycled content food serving items:

Consider using paper food wares and garbage bags that are made of recycled content and are not whitened with chlorine bleach. Some brands to look for are [Seventh Generation](#) and [Natural Value](#). They offer napkins, plates, cups, silverware, sandwich bags, and garbage bags made from recycled content. Consider using reused materials for event invitations, décor or workshop materials.

If you have any questions or need any assistance with planning for zero waste, please contact Kaeli Wells, Sustainability Specialist at kaeli.wells@flagstaffaz.gov.