

# Zero Waste Event Checklist

## **Pre-Event Planning**

- Decide to host a zero or reduced waste event and get support from event stakeholders.
- Review the [Zero Waste Event Guide](#) to become familiar with zero and reduced waste event concepts and benefits.
- Identify a zero waste team leader and team.
- Determine zero or reduced waste goals, setting goals that are bold, but achievable.

## **Event Planning**

### **Venue & Catering**

- Choose a venue that will work with you to meet your zero waste goals and, as necessary, document this in the contract.  
**TIP:** Select a venue that offers recycling and reusable event materials (table cloths, serviceware, decorations, etc.).
- For food and beverage services, select a caterer that is familiar with sustainable event practices and/or zero waste events. Communicate your zero or reduced waste goals, and as needed, document these in the contract. Please visit [www.sustainablecleveland.org/ZWNEO](http://www.sustainablecleveland.org/ZWNEO) for an example agreement letter to caterers, exhibitors, and vendors.

### **Operations & Logistics**

- Review event logistics to evaluate all potential materials in the event waste stream, and determine how you will measure waste from the event (lbs/tons vs. # of bags).
- Identify ways to reduce unnecessary waste, including:
  - Using reusable serviceware (plates, cups, utensils, etc.)
  - Serving finger foods to reduce or eliminate the need for utensils
  - Serving beverages in pitchers instead of individual servings
  - Serving food buffet-style
  - Serving tap or filtered water instead of bottled water (see Appendix 5 of the [Zero Waste Event Guide](#) for more info)
  - Ensuring appropriate ordering and serving portions to avoid leftover food
  - Serving condiments in bulk instead of individual packets (ketchup, sugar, creamer, etc.)
  - Limiting giveaways that could introduce unwanted waste streams into the event
  - Provide giveaways that are resource or energy efficient products (cloth bags, reusable water bottles, etc.)
- Once waste streams have been identified, select compost, recycling, and waste hauling companies to service the event (if not provided by venue).
- Determine how many zero waste stations will be needed for the event.  
**TIP:** Zero waste stations should be located where waste is generated, such as food service and eating areas. Limit the number of waste stations to help control where waste is disposed and reduce the number of zero waste volunteers needed (a diagram is helpful).

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## Operations & Logistics (cont.)

- Recruit zero waste volunteers based on the number of zero waste stations needed for the event. One volunteer is needed per station, with shifts ranging from 2-4 hours in length.
- Order all necessary food and beverage service items, or provide caterer with a list of acceptable items and food guidelines.
  - TIP:** When composting, be sure to use ONLY BPI-certified compostable products and ask caterer to do the same. See Appendix 4 of the [Zero Waste Event Guide](#) for a list of compostable serviceware suppliers.
  - TIP:** Ask caterer to pack food in bulk, reducing packaging brought to the event.
- Order any necessary zero waste supplies (compost, recycling, and trash bins and liners), unless provided by the venue.
- When applicable, utilize reusable name tags and collect them at the end of the event.
- Make arrangements BEFORE THE EVENT to donate or sell leftover food.
  - TIP:** Coordinate with a local food bank/church/shelter ahead of time to accept leftovers from the event. See Appendix 1 of the [Zero Waste Event Guide](#) for more info on food rescue resources.
  - TIP:** Provide recycled/recyclable take-home containers if leftover food will be sold or given to guests to take home.
  - TIP:** Forecast the headcount to avoid any unnecessary food waste.

## Communications & Promotions

- Communicate zero waste guidelines to event staff, exhibitors and vendors.
- Electronically distribute invitations and flyers (or mail them on highest possible 'post-consumer recycled content' paper).
  - TIP:** Promote the event electronically through social media and existing newsletters (i.e. to reduce paper waste, do not use a separate mailer).
  - TIP:** Include zero waste information and other sustainable practices in all invitations and announcements and request event attendees' cooperation.
  - TIP:** If RSVPs are required, provide a phone number, email or social media site instead of RSVP cards.
- Make any poster, banner or signage from recycled materials and plan to reuse it at future events - don't include a date so signs can be reused.

## Day-Of Event

- Set up compost, recycle, and trash bins into "zero waste stations" and remove all standalone containers. Make sure containers have correct liners.
  - TIP:** Provide a bag/box/container for volunteers to collect unexpected waste or items they are unsure of.
  - TIP:** Provide a bucket to liquids. Limiting liquids from your compostables will lighten the weight of each bag, keep each station clean, and it will be easier for your compost service provider to handle.

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## **Day-Of Event (cont.)**

- Utilize signage to clearly label each container for proper disposal.
- Designate an area for zero waste volunteers to check-in and receive their station assignments.
- Provide resources and/or training for zero waste volunteers on what items are recyclable, compostable or landfill trash. See Appendix 8 of the [Zero Waste Event Guide](#) for a zero waste quick reference guide and visit [www.sustainablecleveland.org/ZWNEO](http://www.sustainablecleveland.org/ZWNEO) for additional volunteer training resources.
- Assign zero waste volunteers to each zero waste station to educate and ensure proper use of containers by attendees.  
**TIP:** Provide support for volunteers and ensure all zero waste stations are being monitored carefully to avoid re-sorting contaminated bins.
- Plan announcements throughout the event to educate attendees on zero waste goals.  
**TIP:** If an unexpected landfill item is circulating during the event, try to eliminate the source of the waste, if possible, and make special announcements about the concern.

## **Post-Event**

- Measure results by collecting the volume, weight, or number bags of compost, recyclables, and trash bags and document the results. See Appendix 7 of the [Zero Waste Event Guide](#) for tips on measuring waste.
- Ensure all vendors pick-up recyclables, compost, landfill trash, and/or food for donation.
- Take notes or pictures of what worked and didn't work as a reference for future zero waste events.
- Determine if goals were achieved. Document any "lessons learned" to improve the next zero waste event.
- Celebrate your success! Communicate accomplishments with event guests, sponsors, and other stakeholders.

## **Other Event Considerations**

- Choose a venue that is near public transportation and/or close to hotels for attendees from out of town. Be sure to provide instructions for getting to the event using public transportation.
- When marketing the event, encourage carpooling, biking and walking (door prizes can be awarded to those who carpool, bike, or walk).
- If possible, hold the event at an outdoor location, a venue with natural lighting or in a LEED-certified facility. If lighting is used, make sure it is energy efficient.
- Sustainably source a percentage of the menu to include local, organic, vegetarian or vegan, and/or certified fair trade food options.

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## **Other Event Considerations (cont.)**

- Order signage and menu cards to identify sustainable practices and food sources to educate event attendees.
- Order printed materials including posters that state the percentage of 'post-consumer recycled content' to educate attendees.
- Consider using reusable, sustainably-made centerpieces that can be given away as door prizes or reused for other events.
- Make arrangements for all presentations to be electronic.
  - Coordinate with presenters and arrange for overhead and necessary equipment.
- Conduct an exit survey about zero waste for participants. This can be done electronically or onsite, or incorporated into an existing exit survey.
- Calculate the carbon footprint for the event.

Developed by:



[www.sustainablecleveland.org/ZWNEO](http://www.sustainablecleveland.org/ZWNEO)

216-664-2455



[www.cuyahogarecycles.org](http://www.cuyahogarecycles.org)

216-443-3714



[www.sustainablecleveland.org](http://www.sustainablecleveland.org)

216-664-2455