

How-to Guide

Optimize waste reduction at festivals and events

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1. Introduction

There are many social and economic benefits to hosting festivals and events, but bringing hundreds or thousands of people together for a short period of time can also negatively impact the environment. The creation of waste, greenhouse gas emissions, increased traffic, and resource use can impact the sustainability of a region. However, there are small steps that can be taken today to change this outcome.

The ultimate goal of managing waste at any type of event is to end up with as little going to the landfill as possible.

In order to accomplish this goal, a strong waste reduction strategy has to be in place before, during, and after the event. Equipped with this guide, you will be better able to understand how your event or festival can affect the environment and what steps can be taken to lessen that impact.

This toolkit is designed to give you everything you need to run a successful waste reduction program at your next event with the help of some key resources and checklists, as well as many best practice examples from around the region and beyond. After reading through this guide, you will be well on your way to creating your next event with a lighter footprint!

This toolkit contains three sections:

1. Pre-event
2. During the event
3. Post-event

Each section contains:

- A checklist to ensure you are on the path towards a waste-less event
- Helpful resources

2. What Are the Benefits?

Benefits of focusing on proper waste diversion at events

- Less waste going to limited landfill space
- Proper diversion means quick cleanup time following the conclusion of an event
- Proper diversion creates a cleaner event which makes participants feel better
- A percentage of participants will notice the effort and this generates positive “buzz”
- Promoting proper waste diversion at festivals and events can be used as a strategic marketing effort that not only helps promote your event but sets you apart as a leader in this space.

Questions to Consider

1. What are your goals with respect to waste diversion?
2. What types of waste will be generated?
3. Will you offer composting?
4. How much waste do you anticipate generating? If this is an annual event, do you know how much waste was produced previously?
5. What types of packaging do you foresee being discarded (single use plastic/paper cups, ice cream dishes, single-use cutlery, Styrofoam, take-out-boxes, etc.)?
6. Will attendees be bringing their own food or beverages?
7. Will there be bottled water or other refundable beverage containers for sale?

3. Pre-Event

Most events hinge on a solid logistics and communication strategy. To ensure that your waste reduction goals are met, it will be important to communicate with all involved parties, including local government staff, your own team, and volunteers. Following that, you will need to organize your logistics so that on the day of the event, you are ready to go.

Pre-Event Checklist – Part 1: Planning & Preparation

- ☐ Work with your vendors and your team to create a list of all possible waste that will need to be disposed of. Questions to consider:
 - ☐ Will you require that vendors use specific packaging types (i.e. no Styrofoam, no plastic bags, only compostable cutlery, etc.)?
 - ☐ Will you ban certain types of packaging (i.e. Styrofoam) from entering the premises?
 - ☐ Will you be able to mandate that all vendors properly separate out their own waste in their booths?
- ☐ Determine your waste bin needs. Questions to consider:
 - ☐ Where will the bins be located? Obtain a basic venue and event layout plan for this.
 - ☐ How many sets of bins will be required? Will you be able to procure bins of different sizes to encourage better diversion (i.e., smaller garbage bins and larger recycling bins)?
 - ☐ How many volunteers will be needed to maintain coverage at all bins throughout the event?
 - ☐ Who will you contract to haul your waste away and what are their limitations (see [“Commercial Waste & Recycling Services Business Directory”](#) for a complete list of local haulers)
- ☐ Create, print, and laminate clear, simple signage for each bin (see the Resources Section for [Waste Stream Signage examples](#))

- ❑ Recruit a volunteer team and brief them on their responsibilities (*see the Resources Section for [Volunteer Role Document](#)*)
- ❑ Communicate to your community, businesses, etc.
 - ❑ Will you create a press release following the conclusion of your event to share your waste reduction results with your community?
 - ❑ Will you be using social media to talk about your efforts?
- ❑ Consider conducting a visual waste audit at your event to establish a baseline for what types of waste are being generated (for future waste mitigation efforts). (*See the Resources Section for [How to Conduct a Visual Waste Audit](#)*)
- ❑ Consider creating a Waste Reduction Policy as a standard practice for future events that you and other event organizers can adhere to during the planning and implementation phase of future projects. (*See Appendices for Best Practices of other communities who have done this*).
- ❑ Form a Green Team to enhance your waste reduction efforts. *See the Resources Section for the [“Green Team Starter Kit”](#)*

A NOTE ON COMPOSTING

Ideally, a great composting system is able to take all organic matter at your event: food waste, compostable cutlery, paper plates, and napkins. However, there are currently no commercial composting facilities in the RDOS and commercial composting haulers are limited in this region.

If you want to compost at your event, we recommend you first research composting pick-up options to find out whether or not this will be feasible. If you find an option, you will then have to consider:

- How will you properly divert your compost?
- Will you accept food waste only or compostable containers and paper napkins as well?
- What size of bin(s) will be necessary?
- Who will you hire to help haul your compost away? In some instances, depending on the composition of your organic matter, you may be able to enlist the help of local farmers (i.e., pig farmers) to give new life your event’s organic food waste.

Pre-Event Checklist – Part 2: Doing

- ☐ Set up your waste stations!
- ☐ Prepare your volunteers: schedule an on-site meeting to go over your plan so that everybody is on the same page. Walk through the venue so that all volunteers are aware of where waste stations are located. Make sure each person knows his or her responsibilities at their post and what types of materials are able to be accepted in which receptacle (*see Appendices for a list of “What to Recycle” within the RDOS*).

Pre-Event Resources:

- [Commercial Waste & Recycling Services Business Directory](#)
- [Waste stream signage examples](#)
- [Volunteer Role Document](#)
- [How to Conduct a Waste Audit](#)
- [Waste Station Signs](#)
- [Green Team Starter Kit](#)

WASTE STATION SETUP

When setting up a waste station, it's important to consider the following:

- ☐ Keep the bins consistent visually: use the same color scheme and bin type at each waste station
- ☐ Location, location, location! Find a convenient spot for bins where people will walk or gather, but make sure there is enough room that you are not causing a bottleneck or hazard.
- ☐ Ensure waste stations are easy to spot from a distance - large signage here is ideal so attendees know where to go. Signage should communicate in as few words as possible what your goal is (i.e., “MINIMAL WASTE STATION”).
- ☐ Clearly label each bin, on all sides (or as many that make sense for your situation).

4. During the Event

The biggest impediment to successful waste diversion at any event, large or small, is often a lack of clear instruction. To make sure you effectively reduce waste at your event, you simply *cannot* have unattended waste bins. People will dispose of their waste in the most convenient location possible, so making the process easy and straightforward is crucial. This means clear signage and an army of volunteers!

During the Event Checklist:

- ☐ Place your volunteers: station one volunteer at each waste station during the event to educate event goers about what belongs in each bin and assist in properly diverting waste.
- ☐ Rotate your volunteers: ensure your volunteers take breaks to observe the event on their own, and rotate them through different stations, if applicable.
- ☐ Check in on your waste stations frequently to ensure proper diversion is happening and to fix any cross-contamination issues. Always use gloves when handling waste!
- ☐ If conducting a waste audit at your event, designate one volunteer as your lead auditor, who will assess the volume of waste generated and record it on data sheets.

During the Event Resources:

- [How to Conduct a Visual Waste Audit](#)

5. Post Event

The event might be over, but there are still a few steps to ensure your waste reduction efforts conclude in an organized manner. Key steps here are to ensure that all waste has been brought to a central spot for pick-up by your hauler and that you have collected enough data and evaluation to use in your final report (if this is a requirement for your event) or for your communications strategy.

Post-Event Checklist

- ☐ Ensure all waste has been accounted for when tear-down begins.
- ☐ Dispose of all waste in the correct bin or truck.
- ☐ Draft a final report and evaluation with recommendations to track your progress against your initial goals (focused on future waste reduction).

Post-Event Resources:

- [Vendor feedback form](#)
- [Volunteer/event participant survey](#)
- [Sample media release](#)

6. A Note on Recycling & Additional Resources

A Note on Recycling

For the purposes of event planning, coordinators are encouraged to consult their local municipal bylaws to ensure they are complying with local waste management practices. In most instances, garbage, recycling, depot, and returnable items can be collected on-site and hauled by commercial haulers to the closest landfill and/or depot center. This will vary on the ability of event organizers to procure the necessary bins for proper separation.

In an ideal scenario, waste is diverted at the source (i.e. an event participant discarding their waste) with volunteers monitoring each waste station to ensure proper diversion; waste is bagged and collected in a central location; and a commercial hauler takes away fully diverted bags of refuse (garbage, recycling, depot). Refundable bottles/cans can be collected and taken to a local bottle depot for a refund, the proceeds of which can go towards a future event or donated to a local non-profit or charity.

Best Practice Examples

With more events hopping on board the zero-waste bandwagon each year, there are now myriad best-practice examples being created around the world. Below listed are several events and organizations we have found that have helped guide the creation of this toolkit, both locally and globally.

Table 1. Best practice examples

Name of Event	Type of Event	Location	Website	Best Practice
Shambhala Music Festival	Music Festival	Salmo River Ranch, BC	https://shambhalamusicfestival.com/info/#health-and-safety-services	Free water refill stations throughout the festival grounds
Knoxville EarthFest	Earth Day Festival	Knoxville, Tennessee, USA	http://www.knox-earthfest.org/food-waste	Zero Waste Policy
Common Ground Country Fair	Organic Living and Farming Fair	Unity, Maine, USA	http://www.mofga.org/The-Fair/Areas/Composting-Recycling	Garbage & Compost Separation
Shambhala Festival: Adventures In Utopia	Music Festival	Northamptonshire, UK	https://www.shambhalafestival.org/esential-info/sustainability/managing-stuff-waste-recycling/	Effective waste management and communications strategy
Downtown Kelowna Association Summer Block Party	Neighbourhood Festival	Kelowna, BC	https://www.downtownkelowna.com/block-party/	Volunteer Coordination; Green Team Educational Opportunities; 90% waste diverted by GreenStep Solutions, Inc.
Building SustainABLE Communities Conference	Cross-Sector Sustainable Living Conference	Kelowna, BC		95% waste diverted by GreenStep Solutions, Inc.
Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association Summit	Regional Tourism Industry Conference	Osoyoos, BC	https://totabc.org/participate/events/agm-summit/	94% waste diverted by GreenStep Solutions, Inc.
Zero-Waste Toolkit for Event Coordinators	Recycling Council of Ontario and partners	Ontario, BC	https://rco.on.ca/Our-Work/zero-waste-toolkit-for-event-coordinators/	Comprehensive, collaborative Zero-Waste Toolkit Development – online resource
Zero Waste Events New Zealand	Toolkit for Event Organizers	Aotearoa, NZ	https://zerowasteevents.org.nz/	Zero-Waste Event Toolkit Guide

Additional Ideas for Events

Conferences / Indoor Events

- Ensure that all name badges be returned and reused. Consider using FairWare for lanyard rentals. www.fairware.com
- Offer teleconferencing options to eliminate the need to travel.
- As often as possible, replace disposables, such as cups and cutlery, with reusable items. Replace paper napkins with cloth napkins or 100% recycled paper.

Emissions

- Communicate with attendees that all events held in public spaces are idle-free, and to turn off their cars completely when not needed.
- Provide incentives and/or discounts for alternative transportation to events, to mitigate the amount of single-occupancy vehicles on the road.
- Offset emissions created during the event:
 - Offset venue energy use through www.offsetters.ca
 - Bullfrog Power your event by purchasing Renewable Energy Credits for BC projects at www.bullfrogpower.com

Food

- If serving seafood, require that it must all be Oceanwise or Seachoice certified.
- Mandate that vendors only serve local food, or that a certain percentage of ingredients must be locally sourced.
- Commit to including vendors that offer organic, vegetarian/vegan, and/or gluten-free offerings.
- Serve condiments in bulk, i.e., allow attendees to self-serve, rather than pre-portion in single-use plastic condiment cups.
- Aim for only reusable items used as serviceware (more typical for indoor conferences with sit down meals). Donate any leftover food to the food bank or other local organizations.

Merchandise

- Create event and promotional merchandise with environmentally responsible products, manufactured locally, without the use of sweatshop labour, and Fair Trade certified if available.

Paper Products

- Use a paperless ticketing service.
- If using paper, choose recycled or Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-certified papers with plant-based, non-toxic inks. Check out www.greenprinter.ca if your local printer does not have these options.
- Consider virtual methods of communications vs. traditional paper.
 - Email, internet, and social media marketing vs. print or direct mail

Policy

- Consider enacting a zero-waste policy – absolutely no disposable items that are not recyclable.
- Aim for 90-100% of the waste created at the event be diverted from the landfill.
- Mandate the use of natural/biodegradable cleaning products for all vendors.
- Ensure that all decorations be locally sourced or reusable, recyclable, and/or biodegradable.

Water

- Work with the local municipality to bring in free water-refill stations, to cut down on the amount of bottled water consumption at the event. Encourage attendees to bring their own bottles to refill. If this is not possible, offer refundable bottle bins at all waste stations.

Venue / Vendors

- Choose a venue with a sustainability strategy and that has made changes to lighting, electronic products, chemicals, water conservation, and waste collection.
- Help the event venue reduce their impact on the environment for your event. Suggest 100% post-consumer waste toilet paper, recycled or bio-plastic garbage bags, tree-free paper items, organic/locally made soaps in the bathrooms, unbleached coffee filters in the kitchen, organic and fair trade coffee, paraffin free candles on the tables, local flowers, and much more!
- Encourage sponsors and vendors to join you in your mission. Issue a letter that outlines simple ways that each company can reduce their impact as it relates to the event.
- Offer booths to non-profit partners for no charge or at a discount.