

Zero Waste Event

A “zero waste event” is an activity that helps to divert some waste from landfills and promotes recycling, upcycling, and composting. We know that the amount of garbage that humans generate is not sustainable for our planet, with one state estimating that its schools alone produce 483,520 pounds of waste per day – the equivalent of 42 adult elephants! How can we make a dent in those numbers? We can take an event and make it zero waste! The key is to start small and look at existing events (holiday parties, school assemblies, dances, field trips, etc.) to consider how your team can collaborate with organizers and volunteer to make them reduced waste events – the goal here is progress (reduced waste), not perfection (zero waste). Small wins are welcome!

- **Area of Care:** Environment
- **Time:** (4 hrs. prep and 1-2 hrs. execution time)
- **Sample materials:** trash bins, garbage bags, signs made from recycled materials, gloves, cardboard takeout containers for people to take home leftovers, etc.



1. **Investigate:** Learn more about “zero-waste” events and think about an upcoming school/community event happening that could benefit.
2. **Prepare:** Get event organizers on board and determine what is possible for your team.
 - Consider potential sources of trash/waste with event organizers. What types of waste and how much waste would this event normally generate? What are ways that the team can eliminate or minimize certain types of trash through recycling, reusing, or composting? Can you recycle/compost at the event or will the team need to coordinate drop-off or pick-up?
 - Will you need more volunteers on the day of the event?
 - Identify ways to reduce unnecessary waste, including: can event supplies be reused from past events, can disposable decorations be replaced with reusable or recyclable items? For example: washable multi-use tablecloths versus paper or plastic ones, create decorations such as paper flowers or chains from upcycled materials). Can finger foods be served to avoid disposable utensils? Can beverages be served in pitchers with reusable bottles or paper cups? Can you avoid plastic and Styrofoam cups/plates?

- Identify how you want to measure trash and trash diverted (e.g., by weight, by number of bags) and plan to take photos of the # of bags of trash/recyclables and compare.
- Example: A Halloween party might have candy wrappers, craft supplies, and food and beverages. What can we reduce, recycle, upcycle, compost? Can students donate old costume materials for other students to wear at the event? Consider holding the party after trick or treating and encourage students to bring leftover candy. Facilitate a "candy trade" event for students to swap their leftovers for others!

3. Execute: On the day of the event, set up multi-sort zero waste stations for attendees to sort waste properly for each type of material your group committed to address (e.g., compost, recycle, and trash bins). Post color-coded signs and reminders for people to "think before you throw." If outside, use chalk drawings to direct people to waste stations.

- During the event, gently remind people to sort properly; designate a "green team" to monitor bins and help guests sort items, including putting "unsure" items in the designated box and draining liquids; and have conversations about recycling with guests.
- After the event, help clean up making sure no trash or materials are left behind; measure the outcomes of your work; and collaborate with staff to ensure that vendors pick-up waste. IDEAS: Create an awareness-raising art project from the trash diverted from the landfills. Document your learnings and put together a zero-waste guide specific to your school so others in the future can transform their events into zero waste too.

4. Reflect

- *Debrief:* As a team, spend 15 minutes discussing how the project went (highs, lows, things you would change).
- *Reflect:* What was the impact on the people who attended the event? What was the impact on you and your teammates? What did you learn (about yourselves, your community)? What leadership skills did you use/improve?

5. Share

- Report your impact. Think about the number of people served and the impact on the beneficiaries. Also, gather quotes and stories when possible.
- Share: Tell others about your project and the impact made, through social media and your school channels.