

NORTHERN ARIZONA EDITION

ZERO WASTE EVENT PLANNING GUIDE

UPDATED 2021

The Azulita Project is proud to partner with the **Sustainability Alliance** to bring its **FREE** Zero Waste Events program to Northern Arizona.

This guide is an adaptation of the “Zero and Reduced Waste Event Planning Guide” compiled by the Zero Waste Northeast Ohio working group (ZeroWasteNEO). The mission of this group is to maximize resource recovery and landfill diversion in Northeast Ohio. The Sustainability Alliance is deeply grateful to them for allowing us to reduce, reuse, and recycle their excellent work; any errors are probably ours.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>What is zero waste?</i>	2
<i>Where does waste go?</i>	2
<i>Why should I bother?</i>	3
Economic	3
Environmental	3
Social	3
<i>Even my unique event?</i>	3
<i>So what's the plan?</i>	4
Decide to host a zero waste event	4
Review event operations and logistics	4
Communicate, promote, plan	5
Execute!	8
Measure and celebrate success	8
<i>Appendix A: Organizations accepting extra food</i>	9
<i>Appendix B: Rental services</i>	10
<i>Appendix C: Collection services</i>	11
Earn your zero waste events badge.....	13



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WHAT IS ZERO WASTE?

Zero waste refers to the diversion of all non-hazardous waste from the landfill by refusing, reducing, reusing, recycling, composting, and upcycling. Moving toward zero waste requires thinking about how items can be eliminated from the waste stream and how the remaining waste can be converted into a resource.

A zero waste event or operation strives to reduce waste generated and capture as much as possible for diversion, to minimize the amount discarded to landfills. Eliminating it all can be difficult, so an event or operation is traditionally thought of as “zero waste” if it diverts 90% or more of its non-hazardous waste from the landfill. But our goal should not be any specific percentage; rather, it should be to avoid and divert as much as possible and to constantly improve. **If your event is committed to that challenge, it’s a zero waste event in our book.**

WHERE DOES WASTE GO?

Flagstaff events use the following methods to handle and reduce waste:

- **Source reduction** refuses, reduces, or eliminates waste at its source. To minimize waste, analyze how it could be created—by the planning team, suppliers, exhibitors, and attendees. Seek alternatives and strongly recommend or even require them.
- **Source reuse** seeks to avoid materials that cannot be reused at future events or put to some other use when no longer needed. Practice *product stewardship* and select materials with their best lasting end use in mind.
- **Food recovery**, also known as food rescue or food salvage, is the practice of collecting edible food from caterers, food vendors, and exhibitors that must otherwise be disposed of and distributing it to homeless shelters, food banks, and other emergency food programs.
- **Composting** generates a useful soil amendment that adds nutrients to soil. Plate scrapings and other no longer edible food waste can be collected separately from trash and then composted, as well as some paper, plant-based serving trays, and other natural products. Even meat, bones, and some artificial “biodegradable” items can be composted if managed properly.
- **Recycling** saves resources, energy, and money by making products from previously used materials. Recycling turns waste into a commodity used to manufacture a product. Remain aware of the materials the local recycling center can and cannot accept.
- **Upcycling** continues the life cycle of objects or materials that are not easily recyclable or compostable to create a product of a higher quality or value.
- **Landfilling** waste removes it from use, produces methane (a greenhouse gas far more potent than CO₂), and potentially causes pollution in surrounding areas. Landfilling does not make continued use of commodities, but instead ends their life cycle and begins a useless, destructive cycle that can last decades or centuries.

GETTING TO ZERO WASTE IS A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION

In today's disposable society, it is often easier to throw things in the trash than to take the time and effort needed to properly divert them. Eliminating all waste is a great goal, but any reduction in the amount of waste sent to the landfill is a step in the right direction.

WHY SHOULD I BOTHER?

There are many economic, environmental, and social incentives to planning a zero waste event. Benefits can include:

Economic

- Lower event costs through tighter planning and reuse of materials
- Creating a market for green event products and services
- Reducing the societal cost of pollution

Environmental

- Reducing waste and diverting recyclable and compostable materials from the landfill
- Reducing methane generation in landfills by diverting and composting organic materials

Social

- Promoting a positive image for the event and increasing visibility and participation
- Providing visible leadership in waste reduction, which encourages others to do the same
- Increasing public awareness about zero waste events, general waste reduction, and recycling

EVEN MY UNIQUE EVENT?

Every event has unique challenges, of course, and as an event planner, you certainly worry about your budget, the needs of your audience, and the constraints you must deal with. **But just including zero waste goals among your planning priorities is an important first step.** And with the right planning, just about any event, conference, seminar, convention, or meeting can be a zero waste event. Be mindful.

Smaller events like meetings or seminars are a great opportunity to showcase zero waste initiatives to colleagues and peers. It's also possible to encourage and achieve group participation in meeting diversion goals. Even before the event, you could ask attendees to bring their own water bottles or mugs for hot beverages. At the start of the meeting, attendees should be reminded about zero waste efforts; how to properly dispose of food, beverages, refreshments, and service ware; and the positive impact of their cooperation.

Larger events require more planning and effort to execute. The potential for waste is much greater, but there are also greater opportunities for positive impact in waste diversion and promoting awareness to more people.

And don't forget that your zero waste efforts won't end when your event does. The example you will set for your audience, vendors, suppliers, and everyone who participates in some way with your event can multiply many times over, long after your final tear down. Your impact will be bigger than you will know.

DID YOU KNOW

Making a new aluminum can from recycled aluminum uses **95% less energy** than making a can from raw materials.
Recycling makes a difference!

SO WHAT'S THE PLAN?

1) Decide to host a zero waste event

- Set zero waste goals that are challenging, but also practical. A Zero Waste Event Coordinator from the Sustainability Alliance will be happy to provide a complimentary initial consultation to help with this (ZeroWaste@SustainabilityAllianceAZ.org).
- Begin with an honest assessment of your current capabilities, opportunities, and limitations, to arrive at your zero waste baseline. Then set goals that move that baseline higher. **Be sure those goals can be measured during the event (i.e., pounds of waste diverted or number of recycling containers collected).**
- Identify a leader and zero waste team to champion zero waste efforts and keep everyone on track. This role is crucial to both planning and executing a successful zero waste event.

2) Review event operations and logistics

- Choose a venue that will help you achieve—and not work against—your zero waste goals. Does the event venue provide all the waste removal services you will be needing (trash, recycling, composting)? If not, find vendors to provide those services. (See the Appendices.)
- **Identify the reusable, recyclable, and compostable materials needed for the event, from all sources (exhibitors, vendors, caterers, etc.).** Where possible, eliminate or reduce the materials that aren't necessary. For the necessary materials, choose suppliers who will support your goals; make sure they understand your zero waste needs and expectations.

BIODEGRADABLE? COMPOSTABLE? RECYCLABLE?

There is a lot of confusion about the difference between biodegradable, compostable, and recyclable products.

The term “**biodegradable**” means that a product is capable of being broken down by bacteria or other living organisms. This is not the same as “**compostable**,” which means a product is composed of materials such as vegetable matter, paper, cardboard, and plastic that meet standards to decompose at a rate equal to or faster than the material with which it is composted under equivalent conditions.

Many products marked biodegradable are compostable only at an industry-grade facility, where sufficient heat can be applied. They might also appear to be recyclable, but because they are organic, they would contaminate your recycling. Check with your local recycler or composter before purchasing or approving any items you aren't sure of.

- **Work with the event budget if achieving your zero waste goals adds to your costs.** Although many zero waste supplies can be borrowed or reused, funding to purchase zero waste separation station bins, bags, gloves, and other items should be considered in the event budget, including any fees for compost or recycling collection. **Can costs be saved elsewhere to make room for these expenses?** Maybe offer a named zero waste sponsorship or partnership to cover the added cost, providing the donor with recognition in exchange. Consider the impact of a zero waste surcharge on your exhibitor fee or general admission cost.
- **Identify the number of waste separation stations and zero waste volunteers needed.** Each waste separation station should have at least one easily identifiable, trained volunteer at all times to help attendees sort waste. Clear, instructive signage is great, but constant monitoring is essential to avoid mistakes and carelessness, and the personal contact will reinforce the importance of the goal.
- **Think about where the most waste will be generated.** This will vary by event, but wherever there is food, there will be waste. Also, the types of materials used will determine how the waste separation stations are set up. For example, if most items are compostable, with a few recyclable cans or bottles, it would make most sense to have more compost receptacles.

- **Develop a plan for tracking and measuring waste generated at the event.** Determine whether waste will be measured by weight (pounds) or volume (gallons, cubic feet, etc.). In general, the collection methods for waste, recyclable items and compost will dictate how they are measured. If you'll be relying on weight, have a scale available at the venue or ensure that your collection service can and will supply you with weights collected. Familiarize yourself with the Zero Waste Event Calculator, which can be used to record your waste collections during the event, so you don't lose track of anything.
- Make a greater impact by evaluating the waste stream. For example, bulk condiments can be substituted for individually packaged condiments such as ketchup, mustard, cream, or sugar. Water filling stations for your guests' reusable bottles allow you to avoid providing bottled water.
- Single-use cups, plates, and utensils can be replaced with reusable items. If single-use items must be used, determining the base material with the least environmental impact can be complicated. In general, however, items made with recycled content are best, followed by recyclable and then compostable items.
- Consider renting or borrowing serving ware for food service. Check with local party and event rental companies. Plates, mugs, utensils, and other items are also available through a shared equipment lending library that's available to you (ask at ZeroWaste@SustainabilityAllianceAZ.org).

3) Communicate, promote, plan

- **Communicate with vendors and caterers that the event has a goal of zero waste and work with them to source the right materials.** Consider the items or practices you require, recommend, or are willing to accept in keeping with your goals. For example, should you ban plastic water bottles, but allow recyclable sample cups?
- **Update event marketing material to indicate that it aims to be a zero waste event, inviting attendees to help reach zero waste goals.** As with vendors, consider the items or practices you require, recommend, or are willing to accept in keeping with your goals. Always encourage attendees to bring their own reusable mug and/or water bottle for water and hot beverages; consider incentives, such as a raffle or a discount.
- **Evaluate printed material needs.** Consider electronic marketing alternatives to printed materials. Don't print more invitations, flyers, posters, rack cards, programs, etc. than you need. Insist that they be printed on recycled paper with plant-based ink, and include a "please recycle me" statement on printed pieces.
- **Recruit and educate volunteers.** Identify a lead person for your zero waste planning efforts. Assign volunteer roles and work shifts in advance, and consider a training session so volunteers know what goes where. Recruit everyone involved in the event to assist in reducing waste.
- **Prepare signage that is easy to understand and clearly communicates which items go in which receptacle.** Including both words and the physical items on the sign is a great idea. Signs and containers may be available for loan (ZeroWaste@SustainabilityAllianceAZ.org).
- **Have a day-of-event trouble shooting plan for any potential issues that may arise during the event.** Waste can always find a way to sneak into an event, and the more prepared you are ahead of time, the less stress you'll feel on event day.

- **Consider donating leftover food.** Consider limiting or even avoiding food service, if possible. Then coordinate with a local food bank, church, or shelter before your event, as not all places can accept prepared food from events. See Appendix A for a list of organizations that may be able to accept your leftovers.

COLLECTING RSVPS?

If invitations must be mailed, consider having guests RSVP through a website, phone call or email instead of RSVP cards.

HOW MANY VOLUNTEERS WILL I NEED?

To understand approximately how many volunteers you will need, **consider the number of waste separation stations, how frequently they will need to be emptied, and the length of shifts and need for breaks.** Keep in mind the need for setup and takedown, as well as any delivery of collected materials to their final destination.

DEALING WITH UNEXPECTED WASTE STREAMS

If an unexpected waste stream pops up during the event, try to find a way to collect it separately so it can be properly disposed of after the event. Be sure to communicate to zero waste volunteers what to do if they come across unexpected waste and make an announcement to attendees if it is widespread.

4) Execute!

- **Set up waste separation stations and signage.** Each waste separation station should have clear signage. Trash should be labeled “Landfill,” and the recycling and landfill containers should always be next to each other. Particularly for large and/or outdoor events, a landfill bin must be available, or an unattended recycling bin can easily become a trash can.
- **Each waste separation station should have one volunteer at all times to help attendees sort waste.** Volunteers are especially important by compost bins, as they must be the most closely monitored. If you are short on volunteers on the day of the event, try to group waste separation stations close together so that one volunteer can oversee more than one station. Be sure to staff the waste separation stations with the heaviest traffic first, then as many other waste separation stations as volunteer numbers allow.
- **Make announcements throughout the event** about your zero waste goals and any instructions that may need to be repeated, based on compliance as reported by the volunteers.
- **Deliver the goods.** At the end of a major event, you and your staff and volunteers will be exhausted. But don't neglect the important task of ensuring that the recycled materials, compost, and leftover food get transported appropriately and promptly to their intended destinations. Many a time, a venue's cleanup crew, trying to be efficient, has shown up early and cluelessly carted off all an event's carefully separated materials to their dumpster. **Don't let that happen to you!**

5) Measure and celebrate success

- **Calculate your diversion rate.** With all the advance preparation you've made, the Zero Waste Event Calculator should make this a very simple task.
- **Take notes and pictures of what did and didn't work as a reminder for future events.**
- **Communicate your accomplishments** with event guests, sponsors, exhibitors, volunteers, and other stakeholders. Let us know how you did, too!
(ZeroWaste@SustainabilityAllianceAZ.org)
- **Give yourself a pat on the back!** A lot goes into planning and coordinating zero waste events. Your zero waste efforts not only lead to less waste generated at the event, but also demonstrate leadership and set an example for others.

DIDN'T MEET YOUR GOALS?

That's OK, too! You should still proudly share your waste reduction efforts and use the experience and lessons learned to help motivate and inform the planning of your future events.

APPENDIX A

ORGANIZATIONS THAT ACCEPT EXTRA FOOD

Leftover food that has been served to guests is usually not suitable for donation and should be composted. Extra food that has simply been prepared for serving, such as catered food, may have to be composted, depending on health department requirements. **But extra food that has not been prepared and has not spoiled can often be given to charities or other organizations that serve those in need.**

Flagstaff Family Food Center

1903 N. 2nd Street, Flagstaff, AZ 86004

(928) 526-2211 www.hotfood.org

Professionally catered food can be donated to the Flagstaff Family Food Center from 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Call to see if a pick-up can be arranged for the day of your event. Potluck-style food or food that is served after the Flagstaff Family Food Center closes at 5:30 p.m. can be donated to area farmers for livestock feed. Please check Livestock Resources for more information. Flagstaff Family Food Center also accepts canned goods and other unprepared foods from events.



The Salvation Army

507 N. Humphreys Street, Flagstaff, AZ 86001

(928) 774-1403 flagstaff.salvationarmy.org/flagstaff_corps

The Salvation Army accepts canned and other non-perishable foods to distribute throughout the community.



Louie's Cupboard

University Union, Room 212, 1050 S. Knoles Drive. Flagstaff, AZ 86001

(928) 523-5181 louiescupboard@nau.edu

Louie's Cupboard accepts canned and other non-perishable foods to distribute to NAU students.



Golden Rule Charities-The Pantry

2573 E. 7th Avenue, Flagstaff, AZ 86004

(928) 440-5375 grcthepantry@gmail.com

Golden Rule Charities accepts all canned, packaged, and processed foods if they are unopened and not badly dented. You can also donate frozen commercial meat (not home processed).

APPENDIX B

RENTAL SERVICES

Reusable Rentals from Azulita Project

www.azulitaproject.org/reusable-rentals

The Azulita Project provides a rental service for cups, plates, and cutlery. Reusable Rentals also provides bins, signs, cup racks, and commercial dishwashing services through this program. Reusable Rentals has clear beverage cups that are preferred by bartenders and licensed venues for alcohol sales. It also provides sanitizer for larger events where staff/volunteers can hand-wash beverage cups on-site. Pricing structure depends on individual event needs.



Zero Waste Friends of Flagstaff's Future

P.O. Box 23462 Flagstaff, AZ 86002

www.friendsofflagstaff.org/zero-waste-event-supplies/

Friends of Flagstaff's Future provides reusable dinnerware sets including plates, cups, bowls, and utensils. Material is made in the USA out of 100% recycled BPA-free plastic and is dishwasher and microwave safe. The nonprofit is willing to loan utensils free of charge but asks for a donation if you can afford it. 200 sets available. Must bring back items washed.



Total True Values Rental

2480 E. Huntington Drive, Flagstaff, AZ 86004

www.totalgrandrental.com/

Total True Values Rental is a local rental service that includes landscaping, party and events, wedding, home and business, contractor, and do-it-yourself rentals. Visit the website for a price estimate of supplies.

APPENDIX C

COLLECTION SERVICES

COMPOSTING

Native Americans for Community Action (NACA)

www.nacainc.org

NACA offers limited food scrap (no oil, meat, dairy, eggs, etc.) drop off at the compost bin at the Bonito St. and Izabel St. Community Gardens. The compost will be used in the community garden plots. Please sign up in advance to drop off food scraps.

Corbin Composting

www.corbincompost.com

Corbin Composting is a locally owned, women owned compost business that offers event packages. Pricing varies based on needs and number of people attending. Contact for pricing options.

Refugia

www.refugiagardens.org

Refugia is a local farm that offers compost pickup in the Flagstaff area for residential households and at the Flagstaff CSA. Refugia has a minimum baseline pricing of \$50 for one of its 32-gallon bins at a 5-hour event. Contact for pricing and options for events.

Drop-off Locations:

Flagstaff CSA

116 W. Cottage Avenue, Flagstaff, AZ 86001



LIVESTOCK FEED

Donating your excess food that isn't usable for human consumption to feed animals is another option to achieve zero waste. Check out the below resources to donate food to livestock. Please reach out to resources ahead of time as many of them are private individuals (not businesses) who have agreed to be included in this guide to reduce food waste.

Loyce, Irosell31@gmail.com. Accepts all types of food waste to feed to a variety of animals. It is requested that products with dairy be separated from the rest of the food since some of the animals cannot eat dairy.

Jacqueline, jmmiller11@icloud.com. Accepts all types of food waste to feed a variety of animals.

Julie, Jaedahl58@yahoo.com. Vegan food scraps accepted for backyard chickens. Egg shells accepted for home compost system.

Lisa, Lisa.jane.hardy@gmail.com. Vegan food scraps accepted for backyard chickens and ducks.

APPENDIX C, CONTINUED

CONSULTING SERVICES

REGEN Consulting Services

regenconsultingservices@gmail.com

Regen Consulting Services offers consulting for a range of industries with a focus on waste and recycling, food system development, customer satisfaction, and community engagement. With the motivation to reduce human impact on the Earth, REGEN strives to create systematic and unique solutions to any challenge you may face as an event planner or organizer. Reach out for a tailored approach to your event.

Fox Fire Productions

leslie@cornucopiacomunity.org

Fox Fire Productions offers integrative regenerative systems designs, specializing in zero waste to take clients into being a sustainable ecosystem.



MIXED TRASH AND RECYCLING

JT Waste

carrie@jtwaste.com

JT waste is a trash and recycle disposal service provider in the communities surrounding Flagstaff, AZ. It is a local majority female-owned, and veteran/first-responder operated trash removal company.

Waste Management

csarizona@wm.com

Waste Management is a curbside pickup service for trash and mixed recycling in the Flagstaff area. The company values Environmental Stewardship and tries its best to reduce environmental impacts. Hauling services are provided for events, and a pricing quote can be given via email.



RECYCLING

Northern Arizona Metal Recycling

3525 E. Industrial Drive, Flagstaff, AZ 86004

928-527-3027

Northern Arizona Metal Recycling will buy most recyclable metals, including lead, stainless steel, aluminum, copper, brass, steel, iron, and even old car batteries. Drop-off and pick up services available.

Isaac Recycling

3791 E. Industrial Drive, Flagstaff, AZ 86004

(928) 286-7090

Isaac is a local service which offers payment for recyclable items, such as steel, copper, aluminum, and clear plastic drinking bottles.

APPENDIX C, CONTINUED

Norton Environmental

1800 E. Butler Avenue, Flagstaff, AZ 86001

(928) 556-9900

Norton Environmental is the Flagstaff Municipal Materials Recovery Facility. It is open to the public for recyclable materials drop-off.



See above under “Mixed Trash and Recycling” for other options, if separating your recyclables from trash is not possible.

EARN YOUR BADGE

Complete the Zero Waste Events Checklist (on the Azulita Project website) to:

- plan your event
- be counted as a zero waste event
- Request program assistance



Once you've completed the checklist, your event can earn our Zero Waste Event badge that you can proudly display for your attendees and future customers to see.

**VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO COMPLETE
THE CHECKLIST AND EARN A ZERO
WASTE BADGE FOR YOUR EVENT!**

AZULITAPROJECT.ORG/ZERO-WASTE-EVENTS