

# Zero Waste Event Guide

## What is a Zero-Waste Event?

A zero-waste event is one that has a goal of sending as little waste as possible to the landfill. Instead of producing large amounts of trash, zero-waste events focus on reducing, reusing, composting, and recycling materials to keep them out of the waste stream.

Zero doesn't mean absolute zero. The aim isn't perfection — it's progress. A zero-waste event seeks to get as close to zero landfill waste as reasonably possible. This means thoughtful planning, collaboration with vendors and guests, and having systems in place to divert waste.



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# What to Expect from a Zero-Waste Event

Realistic expectations are key to success. Here's what you can generally expect:

**Waste Diversion Goals:** Most zero-waste events aim for 90 percent or more of total waste to be diverted from the landfill through recycling, composting or reuse.

**Strategic Planning:** Thinking about and understanding what type of waste your event will generate, removing or replacing unnecessary wastefulness from the front end. This includes using digital tickets, reusable décor, bulk water stations, and compostable or reusable tableware.

**Waste Stations:** Clearly labeled bins for recycling, compost, and landfill waste grouped together, often with volunteers or event staff helping to guide sorting.

**Vendor and Guest Education:** Everyone involved should understand the goals and how to contribute — this includes suppliers, food vendors, volunteers, staff, and attendees.

**Remember:** it's not about being perfect — it's about being intentional and minimizing environmental impact wherever possible.



**Compostable**



**Reduce**



**Recycle**



**Biodegradable**

# What Kinds of Events Can Be Zero-Waste?

Almost any type of gathering can be designed with zero-waste principles in mind. Here are a few examples:

**Festivals and Fairs:** Think music, art or cultural festivals — where large crowds mean large impact and large opportunities to reduce it.

**Weddings:** From reusable tableware to decor rental, couples can choose zero-waste weddings to align with their values.

**Corporate Events:** Conferences, retreats, and meetings can go green with thoughtful food service, digital materials, and minimal or intentional swag.

**Community Events:** Local cleanups, fundraisers or block parties can easily incorporate zero-waste principles with the right planning.

**Educational Gatherings:** School fairs, university events and workshops can model sustainable practices for attendees of all ages.

**Sporting Events:** Hydration is crucial for the athletes and spectators alike. Recycling all those plastic bottles will send a clear message of environmental stewardship.

## Why It Matters

Events — especially large ones — can generate a surprising amount of waste. By moving toward zero-waste practices, we reduce our environmental footprint, keep our local communities clean, encourage sustainable habits, and often save money by reducing unnecessary consumption.

Planning a zero-waste event is a commitment, but it's one that's meaningful, impactful, and totally achievable with the right mindset and tools.

# Step-By-Step Guide

Below is a comprehensive guide to help you create a zero-waste event. This framework provides direction from initial planning through on-site implementation, so you can host an experience that's not only memorable, but also environmentally responsible. Whether you're organizing a small gathering or a large-scale event, these steps can help you make informed, conscious decisions and demonstrate a strong commitment to responsible event management.

## Step 1: Plan and Prepare

- ☐ **Assign a Coordinator**
  - o Oversees waste collection, volunteer outreach, education, vendor communication and tracking outcomes.
- ☐ **Identify Waste Streams**
  - o Recyclables: Plastics, metals, glass, paper and cardboard
  - o Compostables: Food scraps, organics and BPI-certified compostable products
  - o Food Waste: Plan to donate leftover food when possible
  - o Specialty Items: Plastic wrap, ice bags, mylar, snack wrappers, clothing
  - o Look into services like [NexTrex](#) or [TerraCycle](#)
  - o Landfill Waste: Minimize and have a plan for remaining materials
- ☐ **Know Local Guidelines**
  - o Consult your community's waste management department about a accepted materials and recycling requirements.
- ☐ **Estimate Attendance**
  - o Determine areas that will be densely populated.
  - o Helps determine the number and placement of bins.
- ☐ **Identify Event-Specific Needs**
  - o Think about what makes your event unique, such as concerts, outdoor layout and food trucks, that could affect waste planning.
- ☐ **Get Venue Approval**
  - o Ensure the venue understands and supports the zero-waste strategy.

## Step 2: Connect with Waste Management Providers

### ☐ Coordinate with Local Services

- o Recycling Providers (Oklahoma examples):
  - Waste Management – [waste-management.com](http://waste-management.com)
  - Republic Services – [republicservices.com](http://republicservices.com)
  - Oklahoma Environmental Management Authority – [OEMAOK.org](http://OEMAOK.org)
  - Muscogee Creek Nation – [MuscogeeNation.com](http://MuscogeeNation.com)
- o Compost Providers:
  - Reach out to both commercial and community-based composting services.

### ☐ Clearly Communicate Needs

- o Confirm providers can handle the types and volume of materials expected.
- o Determine sorting method – single stream vs. separated.
- o Clarify cleaning requirements, such as rinsed containers.
- o Determine if providers have bins for the event, or if you will need to secure them yourself.
  - [Recycle Bin Loan Program - Oklahoma Recycling Association](#)

## Step 3: Arrange Collection and Disposal

### ☐ Coordinate Logistics

- o Schedule roll-off drop-offs and pickups.
- o Confirm location, access, and timing.
- o Work with venue staff to plan placement and transport routes.

## Step 4: Recruit Volunteers

### ☐ Volunteer Outreach

- o Connect with environmental groups, schools, local organizations

### ☐ Provide Volunteer Information:

- o Dates and shift times – overlapping shift times help prevent vacancies during shift turnover.
- o The purpose and goals of a Zero Waste Event.
- o What to expect and responsibilities.
- o What volunteers should bring vs. what will be provided.
- o T-shirt sizes.
- o Insure volunteer safety during event
- o Personal protective equipment (PPE)
- o May include gloves, reflective vests and hydration

## Step 5: Gather Supplies

### ☐ Equipment Checklist

- o Recycling and compost bins
- o Labeled bags for recycling and compost
- o Clear signage
- o Stakes to secure bins
- o Gloves — nitrile and rubber
- o Litter grabbers
- o 5-gallon buckets
- o Sunscreen and bug spray
- o Tent and shade structures
- o Water, Gatorade and snacks
- o Vehicles for transporting materials

## Step 6: Develop Educational Materials

### ☐ Clear and Simple Signage

- o Label all bins with what goes where.
- o Use visuals — pictures help reduce contamination.

### ☐ Zero Waste Guide

### ☐ Create a guide for attendees, volunteers, vendors and staff.

### ☐ Explain:

- o Sorting processes.
- o Bin placement and labeling.
- o Why zero waste matters.

## Step 7: Prepare Volunteers

### ☐ Provide pre-event briefing — email, Zoom, video or guide.

### ☐ Share:

- o Timeline and procedures.
- o What to wear and bring.
- o Meeting location and parking.
- o Food and snack info.

## Step 8: Set Up Zero Waste Stations

- ☐ **Create a central hub for volunteers to meet and manage collected items.**
- ☐ **Place signage and instructions for volunteers.**
- ☐ **Place bins throughout the event:**
  - o In high traffic and food areas
  - o Near existing trash bins
  - o With ADA accessibility in mind
- ☐ **Establish a sorting station for removing contamination.**

## Step 9: Monitor Waste Stations

- ☐ **Assign volunteers to:**
  - o Monitor bin levels and replace full bags.
  - o Sort bins in the field.
  - o Litter picking.
  - o Assist and answer attendee questions.
  - o Sorting collected bags and materials.
  - o Adjust bin placement based on usage during the event.

## Step 10: Evaluate and Report

- ☐ **Track Your Metrics**
  - o Measure volume of recycling, compost and specialty items diverted from the landfill.
  - o Identify contamination rates.
  - o Collect feedback from attendees, vendors and volunteers.
- ☐ **Share Your Results**
  - o Report to stakeholders and sponsors.
  - o Celebrate wins and recognize contributors.
  - o Reflect and Improve
  - o Use feedback and data to enhance future zero waste efforts.