

Zero Waste Event Guide

Zero Waste is a philosophy. It is not something you can simply tack onto the end of an event planning process, but something that has to be part of the plan from the very beginning. Knowing that you'd like to make an event zero waste will affect many decisions you make along the way, so switching course at the end of the process is really tough - it will probably end up with waste in the landfill still, while having cost you extra money and stress along the way.

→→ FOOD ←←

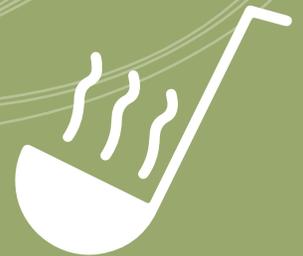
Food is a great place to start. If you are serving food at your event, this is the easiest and most obvious place for you to integrate zero waste philosophies into your planning.

China or Disposable? This has got to be the first question you ask around food. The best option is to use reusable items to prevent the creation of waste in the first place. However, most events will default to using disposable materials due to budget, size, or other restrictions. If this is the case for you, we recommend ensuring all of your event waste is compostable. This means being very intentional with every decision you make: for example, using pitchers and cups for drinks instead of cans or bottles or choosing bulk-purchased items served in bowls/plates rather than individually wrapped items.



Your caterer is going to play a major role. Flavors Catering, DU's catering service by Sodexo uses all compostable materials in their catering jobs. This means that going with Sodexo can make it very easy to make your event zero waste. However, we recognize that not all events are catered by Sodexo. When you find a caterer you like, call and ask if they can provide compostable materials with the order. Keep looking until you find one that can, or be prepared to provide your own compostable materials (we'll get to this later).

Don't forget about the servingware! It can be easy to forget about the materials your caterer uses to pack and deliver your food. These are often made of plastics that are not recyclable. You can ask your caterer whether they will reuse the delivery materials, or whether they are recyclable or compostable. This is particularly important if you are choosing to do boxed lunches, as these tend to come with a lot of materials that must go to the landfill. For what it's worth, we recommend trying to find ways to avoid boxed lunches for your event.



Signage is really helpful! While the ideal situation is to remove the "choice" your attendees have about where to put their waste (by making everything compostable), sometimes you will need your attendees to sort their waste. The best way to make sure that they do this properly is to put out adequate signage around the bins and at the serving tables. The Center for Sustainability can provide signage upon request.

Don't forget to order the (proper) bins! Bins should be ordered through Conversions for all campus events that will have more than 10 people and food. You should be very clear about the types of bins that you would like, and how many you will need in your request. Please note that there is a small charge associated with ordering bins for your event, but that it is essential for the success of your zero waste endeavor.



➡➡➡ ORDERING COMPOSTABLE MATERIALS ⬅️⬅️⬅️

If you are a student group, there are options! For events that expect 100 or fewer attendees, you can get compostable materials from the USG Sustainability Committee. You just have to fill out a small request form with details about anticipated attendees and what materials you need. Then, arrange a time to pick them up, and you're all set! Contact SusCom at suscomm@du.edu to get the request form and answers to any questions you have!



Bigger Events, Staff/Faculty Events, and Grad Student Events do not have access to the SusCom materials. For these events, if your caterer will not provide compostable materials, you will have to purchase your own. We recommend going with EcoProducts, as it is a local company with a huge inventory that should meet all of your needs. Several companies carry compostable materials, just make sure they are labeled compostable or BPI certified compostable, since natural, plant based, or biodegradable do not mean compostable

➡➡➡ BEYOND FOOD WASTE ⬅️⬅️⬅️

Food is only the beginning. Ensuring that your meal waste gets diverted away from the landfill is a great first step to reducing the environmental impact of your event. What else can you do to reduce the waste created by your event? Can you distribute materials electronically or reuse them year over year? Can you skip the cheap disposable decorations and go for reusable or compostable ones (live plants make for great center pieces and continue to brighten spaces long after the event has ended). What about giveaways? Can you be intentional about giving items away that are useful and durable? Staff at the Center for Sustainability would be happy to chat with you about ideas to reduce waste across all aspects of your event.



➡➡➡ BEYOND ZERO WASTE ⬅️⬅️⬅️

Events are a great way to showcase your organization's commitment to sustainability in ways that go far beyond diverting the waste generated there.

Help us with our mission as an anchor institution. DU is committed to using its purchasing power to grow the local economy and empower local, sustainable, women- and minority owned businesses across the Front Range. You can do this by choosing a local business to cater your event, choosing vendors who are based in Colorado and who use sustainable materials, or by purchasing materials from small businesses. DU has been working with the Denver Anchor Network to develop lists of great local vendors.



Consider how people are getting to your event. Are you able to encourage people to take the light rail to campus instead of driving? Can you provide directions to ample bike parking? Can you help attendees find carpools to the event from their neighborhoods? There are so many ways to get to campus without a car - these should be used for all visitors to campus as well, not just those of us who come here every day!

Consider a vegetarian meal. Reducing meat consumption is one of the most effective ways to reduce carbon footprint. By opting to leave meat out of your meal, you are taking huge steps to reduce our environmental impact. Plus, it helps to shift the notion that all American meals should include a meat centerpiece. Not ready to omit all meat? Consider offering a sustainable seafood option instead of beef or pork.

