

# Chapter 8 | Recycling at Events



Residents in the Twin Cities love to attend the wide variety of events held in the metro area. Large crowds turn out for big multi-day events like the Minnesota State Fair, the Uptown Art Fair, and the Hopkins Raspberry Festival. Sporting events and conventions take place daily. There are also numerous homebuyer, job, and home and garden fairs. Farmers markets are held throughout the region on a weekly basis in the summer, and businesses, neighborhood organizations, apartment complexes, churches, and families host picnics, weddings and birthday parties.

Without thoughtful planning, a considerable amount of waste can be generated at events, no matter the size.

Although event organizers may know a lot about coordinating volunteers, presenters, or vendors, they may not know much about setting up a successful waste reduction and recycling program. They may also benefit from someone taking the lead on creating a successful low-waste event.

## Included in this chapter

- Before the event
- During the event
- After the event
- Helping to make events low-waste

## Before the event

It's never too early to start the planning process for preventing and recycling waste at an event. Start by reviewing what materials can be recycled, consider the barriers to recycling for the specific event, and evaluate opportunities to prevent waste.

Learn about previous recycling and waste prevention efforts the event or organization have taken on, if applicable. Set realistic goals for the event. Start with waste reduction activities that are relatively easy. This is especially important if it is the first time the organizers or the event have developed a waste reduction or recycling plan. You can build on your successes and lessons learned to implement more advanced strategies for future events.

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### Recycling coordinator role

Recycling coordinator is a good role for CRAs at events. If the event is large, it may be best to have more than one CRA participate.

Duties of the recycling coordinator may include:

- Training volunteers
- Working with vendors and exhibitors before and during the event
- Communicating recycling information to the public before, during, and after the event
- Tracking recycling rates
- Supervising waste audits
- Making signs or picking up signs from Hennepin County
- Monitoring recycling stations
- Troubleshooting during the event
- Sorting bins for contamination
- Transferring recyclables from bins to collection points



## Make a waste prevention plan

Eliminating a waste material means you don't have to collect or recycle it. This can result in significant financial savings and environmental benefits. For example, eliminating the "box" in boxed lunches will mean less waste.

An event waste reduction plan should help maximize waste reduction opportunities from both public areas and back-of-house preparation areas, such as kitchens or food prep spaces. Determine what types of materials vendors may be using and how you might work together to reduce waste generated at the event.

Consider the following tips when developing an event waste prevention plan:

- Choose decorations, props, and displays that can be reused. For example, if the event occurs annually, make signs where you can write or post the new date for every year instead of creating entirely new signs. Consider seasonal decorations, like flowers in the summer or pumpkins in the fall, that you can give away to participants.
- Rent or borrow equipment.
- Use technology to reduce paper waste. Use online registration, advertising, documents, and press kits.
- If printed materials are needed, use recycled paper, vegetable-based inks, and print on both sides of the paper.
- Plan for what to do with leftover edible food. Learn about agencies that collect food for people at [hennepin.us/businessorganics](http://hennepin.us/businessorganics).
- Eliminate packaging as much as possible. Use bulk condiments for jams, honey, sugar, ketchup, and mustard rather than individually packaged servings. Serve snacks like chips, crackers, popcorn, or trail mix in bulk.
- Use refillable or reusable containers and serving products. Serve drinks in pitchers or punch bowls rather than in cans or bottles. Provide reusable cups and mugs for drinks or instruct participants to bring their own.
- Encourage food vendors to use appropriate portion sizing to minimize food waste.
- Use reusable plates, silverware, linens, and cloth napkins.
- Avoid containers that are not recyclable or certified compostable containers. Keep the container options simple to make it easier for attendees to sort later.
- Use edible garnishes or no garnishes.
- Have attendees register to get a head count for meals. Source organic, seasonal, fresh, and local foods and provide vegetarian options.



## Plan for organic waste

Organic waste (food and food-soiled paper) is often the most abundant waste material at events. Take the following steps to ensure organics collection at events is done successfully:

- Communicate with vendors about your organics recycling plans and require the use of BPI-certified compostable plates, utensils, and cups (unless the event is using reusable options).
- Create waste stations by co-locating trash, organics, and recycling containers. Use signs, labels, and posters to ensure everyone knows which materials go in each container. Use photos of the materials accepted, or have the actual items affixed to the signs.
- Staff waste areas with trained volunteers to educate attendees on what goes where. This helps to significantly reduce contamination.

## Work with the event venue

If your event isn't already tied to a specific location, selecting a venue that already has experience with green event practices is one of the easiest things you can do in planning for a green event. You'll still want to talk through all of the waste prevention and waste management goals and actions with the venue – often things get overlooked and they still have room for improvement. Select venues – both indoor and outdoor – that offer recycling of paper, metal, plastic, and glass. If possible, choose a venue that also offers organics recycling in both public and back-of-house preparation areas. Make sure all organizers, staff, and volunteers understand their roles.

If the event venue doesn't provide trash, recycling, and/or organics collection services, materials can be removed by hiring a hauler or self-hauling.

The Hennepin County drop-off facilities in Bloomington and Brooklyn Park accept organics for free. Several cities also have free drop-off locations for organics. Learn more about these options at [hennepin.us/organics](https://hennepin.us/organics).

### If you need to hire a waste hauler for the event, consider the following:

- What will the services cost?
- Will the hauler donate any portion of the service?
- Can the hauler provide the collection containers?
- Is the hauler able to measure and report trash and recycling data?
- What materials will the hauler accept?

## Communicate with vendors

Event organizers can influence waste stream composition by working with vendors and controlling what attendees may bring into the event.

Make initial contact with vendors and exhibitors a few months before the event, if possible, or even farther in advance (six to nine months) if the event is large.

You can include the goals and requirements of the waste reduction and recycling plan in the vendor/exhibitor recruitment information. Or you can prepare an introductory letter to vendors and exhibitors explaining the waste reduction and recycling plan, identifying which items are being targeted, and asking for their cooperation. Find sample vendor letters at [hennepin.us/eventrecycling](https://hennepin.us/eventrecycling).

If you want to avoid certain materials (such as single use items or swag), you could require that vendors not sell certain items or packaging. Provide suggestions for alternatives to common throw-away items, especially if you are banning any materials from the event.

Provide vendors with information on how to recycle materials that they have brought with them, such as cardboard boxes, or ask them to take those materials with them.

## Publicity

Make event attendees aware of your recycling efforts by integrating the recycling/waste prevention messages into all event materials and promotions. Let attendees know what they can do to help reach the event's waste reduction and recycling goals.

## During the event

Maximize collection and reduce contamination of recyclables by adhering to the following guidelines:

### Waste stations

- Set up recycling bins and waste stations the day before the event, if possible.
- Place recycling, organics, and trash containers together.
- Make waste stations highly visible by using a flag or banner on a tall pole, signs, etc.
- Locate recycling stations in convenient, high-traffic areas.
- Limit the number of recycling/waste stations to allow for ease of monitoring. Place larger stations in areas where high volumes of waste will be generated.

- Label recycling and garbage containers with clear, large, and specific wording. Signage should be placed at eye level. If possible, attach a physical sample of the acceptable material to its container. This is especially important for any confusing items, such as recyclable or compostable plastic cups.
- Use clear plastic bags as liners for recycling bins for easy identification and removal of contaminants.



## Volunteers and vendors

- Greet vendors and exhibitors during set up. Provide clear instructions on how to recycle at the event and who to contact (the recycling coordinator) if they have questions.
- Use walkie-talkies to communicate with the recycling coordinator, key volunteers, and event organizers at large events. At least one volunteer per waste station should be recruited.
- Volunteers may need to be scheduled in shifts, depending on the length of the event. A good length for volunteer shifts is two to three hours.
- Staff all recycling stations at all times. If this is not possible, assign a floater to check each area periodically. This staff/volunteer will remind attendees how and where to place materials and remove contaminants from recycling on a regular basis. Provide gloves and grabbers to your waste station monitors so they can easily move items placed in the wrong container.
- Make recycling volunteers easy to identify by having them wear hats, vests, T-shirts, nametags, aprons, or something else that designates them as recycling or green team volunteers.



## Waste disposal

- Plan to empty bins often, especially during the summer when wasps and odors can discourage recycling.
- Designate a central collection area for garbage and recycling where drop boxes or dumpsters are staged. This area can serve as a place for recycling volunteers to check in, sort materials if needed, and observe the material flow.
- Use hand trucks, carts, or gators (mini-trucks) to transport material from the recycling stations to the central collection area.



## After the event

### Tear down and clean up

Materials will continue to be generated during cleanup. Assist vendors with tear down. Complete and/or confirm final sorting and pickup of garbage and recycling. Make sure that any uneaten food designated for donation is picked up or delivered to the recipient organization.

### Evaluation

Ask for feedback and suggestions from everyone involved in the event including organizers, volunteers, vendors, exhibitors, and haulers.

### Calculate the recycling rate

The recycling rate is the percent of materials diverted. This is a good measure of the event's success. To calculate the recycling rate, you need to be able to compare recycling with the waste generated. Ensure ahead of time that your process will allow an accurate comparison between the garbage and recycling.

For example, sometimes groups state, "we had one garbage can and three bags of recycling." This statement does not give a clear evaluation because it is unknown how big the garbage can was in comparison with the bags of recycling.

Calculate your recycling rate using the following formula:

Recycling rate = weight recycled/waste generated (weight recycled + weight disposed).

For example, if an event recycled 5,000 pounds of material and disposed of 3,000 pounds of material, the total waste generated was 8,000 pounds, and the recycling rate would be 62.5 percent ( $5,000/(5,000 + 3,000) = 62.5$  percent).

If your hauler/recycler can weigh your garbage and recycling, follow up with them for final weights. If your hauler is not able to weigh your garbage and recycling, you will need another plan for evaluating your recovery rate.

One option is to calculate your recycling rate using volume as your base with the following formula:

Recycling rate = cubic yards recycled/(cubic yards recycled + cubic yards disposed).

1 cubic yard = 201.97 gallons

For example: if an event recycled three 90-gallon roll carts full of cans and bottles ( $90 \times 3 = 270$  total gallons). The hauler provided a 2-yard garbage container and it was half full.

First convert the recycling to yards ( $201.97/270 = .748$  yards of recycling).

Then calculate your recycling rate:  $.748$  yards recycled/ ( $.748$  yards recycled + 1 cubic yard disposed) = 43 percent recycling rate.

Publicize the recycling rate along with the results of waste prevention efforts. Thank your donors, sponsors, volunteers, exhibitors and vendors with a card or a post-event celebration and share the recycling rates and waste prevention results with them.

## Helping to make events low-waste

CRA's can help event organizers make their events greener by creating and implementing a waste reduction and recycling plan. Whether you are organizing a party, wedding, or family picnic or have signed up to help a community organization, the goal of this chapter is to provide the tools, resources and best practices necessary to successfully plan recycling programs and implement other green event practices.

A great use of your CRA knowledge is offering expertise in waste reduction and designing successful recycling systems at events. Some ways to help include:

- Strategizing, organizing, implementing, and evaluating waste reduction and recycling plans for events. This

could include identifying ways to reduce waste, deciding what materials can be recycled, and setting waste reduction and recycling goals.

- Training and supervising volunteers who have been recruited to help with the waste management program.
- Designing outreach materials and messages to participants about why they should recycle and what materials are accepted.
- Monitoring recycling and organics containers (eligible for a maximum of 10 of your 30 payback hours).

Some work that is necessary for a successful event does not fit the educational requirement for CRA payback. Hauling trash is not an appropriate primary role for a CRA. CRA's are also not expected to recruit volunteers – this should be the responsibility of the event organizers.

To ensure a successful partnership, meet with the event organizers to clearly define your role in the event planning. Define the tasks you will and will not take responsibility for. You should also come to an agreement on the recovery goals for the event.

## Resources

- **[hennepin.us/eventrecycling](http://hennepin.us/eventrecycling)**: Resources for event planners, including an event waste reduction and recycling guide, downloadable signs and vendor letters, and links to connect you with portable event recycling containers.
- Print resources
  - Green event checklist: Guide for planning larger green events.
  - Green party checklist: Guide for planning smaller green parties.