

Green event checklist

With all the food, packaging, decorations and giveaways, events of any size – from small gatherings to large parties – can generate a lot of waste. But with a little bit of planning, you can make your event low- or no-waste. The following checklist will help green your efforts before, during and after your event. Hennepin County can also help event coordinators develop waste-reduction plans, educate vendors, train volunteers and find collection options. Learn more at www.hennepin.us/eventrecycling.

Before the event

Planning:

- Select a person or committee to coordinate and implement the zero-waste efforts.
- Evaluate all materials that will be at the event (packaging, giveaways, decorations, banners), and try to eliminate as many disposable materials as possible.
- Assess the waste that will be generated to identify recycling and/or composting opportunities. If food waste makes up a significant portion of the waste generated, consider collecting food waste for composting.
- Plan to serve food items that have little or no packaging.
- Make sure to use reusable, compostable or recyclable foodservice ware and make sure to have a matching disposal method.
- Avoid use of single-serving beverages or bottled water with large beverage dispensers or jugs and filling compostable cups.
- Choose reusable linens, centerpieces, decorations, etc. If your event is held annually, plan for reuse of banners and signs, etc.
- Use decorations that can be reused in future years or consider borrowing decorations from a friend that has thrown a similar party. Consider using alternatives to balloons, such as fresh-cut flowers from your garden, or look for biodegradable balloons.
- Plan to collect plastic bags – gather plastic bags into one bag and place in recycling container.
- If you are making your own food, consider using local food, such as from a farmers market or your own backyard garden. Many local farmers can provide local food items in the wintertime. If food for your event is being catered, talk to your catering company about how they can incorporate local food into the menu.
- Provide condiments in bulk instead of individually wrapped servings. For example, provide a sugar bowl instead of individually wrapped packets.

Communication and education:

- Inform vendors of waste-diversion efforts as early as possible to ensure they have adequate time to prepare for the event.
- Inform the public about your waste-diversion efforts in social media, news releases, event programs, promotions, and advertising and registration materials.
- Consider contacting Hennepin County to schedule a recycling booth at the event. These are usually staffed by Master Recycler volunteers who provide recycling information to the public.
- Provide information on bike and transit routes to your event, or encourage your guests to carpool when possible. Consider offering to shuttle guests from transit stops to your event.
- Consider distributing invitations electronically to reduce paper waste. If you prefer paper invitations, purchase invitations made from a minimum of 30% post-consumer content recycled paper.

Waste stations:

- Plan to place recycling, composting and trash receptacles together to form a waste station. This will help ensure that materials end up in the correct container.
- Determine the number of waste stations needed. One waste station can serve between 200-300 people depending on the area of the event.
- Make sure you have access to recycling, composting and trash containers prior to the event. Hennepin County also offers free portable recycling containers to reserve for events.
- Make sure waste stations are placed in a convenient location. Place larger stations in areas where high volumes of waste are generated. Meet with maintenance staff to determine exact locations of waste stations.

- Label all containers with large, clear and specific signs. If possible, include pictures or post examples of what goes in each container. Hennepin County offers free signs for recycling containers. Be sure signs on the waste containers are visible. Also consider having banners, signs or flags to help attendees find the waste stations.

Volunteers:

- Recruit volunteers to be waste monitors. Consider using schools, scout groups, churches, businesses or Hennepin County Master Recyclers volunteers.
- Create a volunteer schedule and plan for one volunteer per waste station. You may need to plan more than one shift if the event lasts more than three hours.
- Gather waste monitor supplies for volunteers, including:
 - Plastic gloves
 - Waste pickers
 - Hand sanitizer
 - Event waste information
 - Buttons, t-shirt, etc.
 - Extra compost bags
 - Scale to weigh waste and report results

At the event:

- Greet each vendor and exhibitor during set-up and provide clear instructions for recycling their materials, such as flattening cardboard boxes for recycling, bagging plastic bags that can be recycled at drop-off locations, etc.
- Keep waste stations staffed at all times to help event participants place their waste in the correct container. If this is not possible, assign someone to check the area periodically.
- Provide a break for volunteers during their shift, if possible.
- Empty bins often, especially during the summer when odors and/or insects can discourage recycling.

After the event:

- Weigh the recycling, organics and trash separately. Calculate your diversion rate by using the following formula: $(\text{amount recycled} + \text{amount composted}) / (\text{total waste or, recycling} + \text{organics} + \text{trash})$.
- If it is not possible or practical to weigh each waste stream, weigh only the trash.
- Share your green event success with your sponsors, vendors, participants and volunteers.