

Introduction To Zero Waste Events Guide

A Georgia Tech Office of Sustainability
Program

Meet The Speaker



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Presentation Objectives

Zero Waste Concepts

- Understand core concepts of zero waste and its importance in reducing environmental impact

Introduction to Zero Waste Guide

- Clarify the role of the Zero Waste Events Guide
- Understand how to incorporate zero waste principles into your event planning strategies

Georgia Tech Zero Waste Events Guide

Checklists, Templates, and Campus Resources
for Planning and Hosting Sustainable Events



Office of
Sustainability

GT Zero Waste Events Guide



Welcome to the GT Zero Waste Events Guide, created by the Georgia Tech Office of Sustainability to help students, staff, and faculty plan environmentally responsible events. By following zero waste principles, you can reduce your event's environmental impact and support Georgia Tech's sustainability goals.

This guide highlights how to apply [zero waste guidelines](#), use the [Zero Waste Event Planning Checklist](#), and explore eco-friendly food and material strategies. It is designed so that you can use the full guide or parts of the guide, depending on your time and available resources.

WHAT IS ZERO WASTE?

Zero waste is defined as diverting 90% or more of materials from the landfill through reuse, recycling, or composting. It is a set of principles aimed at minimizing waste and increasing landfill diversion.

WHY HOST A ZERO WASTE EVENT?

The purpose of hosting a zero waste event is to reduce waste, conserve resources, and minimize our environmental footprints. Events provide a platform to educate attendees about sustainability practices and resource efficiency, which can inspire them to adopt similar practices in their own lives. Hosting a zero waste event contributes to a more sustainable future, sets a positive example, and creates a meaningful experience for everyone involved.

NAVIGATING THE ZERO WASTE GUIDE:

TEMPLATES & RESOURCES

View the [Templates and Resources page](#) to access ready-to-use templates, forms, and event planning tools that help streamline communications and planning. These resources include [email templates](#), [checklists](#), and the [Zero Waste Guidelines](#) designed to support your sustainability goals and ensure a smooth planning process.

EVENT PLANNING CHECKLIST

Don't miss a step. Plan your event using our [Zero Waste Event Planning Checklist](#) and support your sustainability goals.

CERTIFY YOUR EVENT

[Apply](#) to have your event certified as eco-friendly or zero waste and earn an official badge to showcase your commitment to sustainability.

FULL ZERO WASTE GUIDE

Use the full guide for detailed directions on planning a zero waste event.



What Is Zero Waste: Definition and Its Benefits

Zero Waste Event Definition

Zero waste is about keeping materials out of landfills and incinerators by using strategies like reducing, reusing, composting, and recycling. To achieve zero waste, you must divert at least 90% of event from the landfill.

Environmental Benefits

Zero waste conserves natural resources, reduces pollution, and minimizes landfill waste.



ZERO WASTE EVENT PLANNING CHECKLIST

- The guide includes a detailed planning checklist to guide you through the event planning process.
- Use this list alongside the Georgia Tech [Event Planning Guide](#).
- The list covers key steps such as setting zero waste event goals, working with vendors, sharing event goals with guests, preparing waste stations and evaluating success.

INITIAL EVENT PLANNING (1-12 MONTHS BEFORE THE EVENT)

- Establish sustainability and zero waste goals for your event. (e.g. 50%, 90%, 100% landfill diversion)
- Meet with potential vendors and caterers. Talk to your foodservice providers about food and packaging options and outline needs and expectations for your event.
- Send attendee invitations that share your event's sustainability goals and encourage actions like bringing reusable bottles or mugs to avoid plastic waste.
- Begin your event marketing. When creating durable printed marketing materials like banners, design them without the year printed on them, so that banners can be reused for future similar events.
- Purchase supplies and decorations, prioritizing items that are reusable, compostable, or recyclable.
- Estimate waste and diversion needs and order bins and bags for compost, recycling, and landfill. For bin ordering information, check the [resource page](#) or visit sustain.gatech.edu/zero-waste-resource-hub
- Select an event venue that is accessible by walking, biking, or public transit.

ONE WEEK BEFORE THE EVENT

- Train staff and volunteers to support your event's zero waste goals.
- Prepare and print [zero waste bin signage](#) to be posted on the day of the event.
- Send zero waste event reminder email to guests that includes zero waste event goals and sustainable transit options.
- Contact food recovery networks such as Klemis Kitchen, Green Forks, or The Campus Kitchen Project to donate leftover food.

DAY OF THE EVENT

- Group waste bins together to create zero waste recovery stations.
- Clearly label recovery station bins with matching [zero waste bin signage](#), such as recycling, compost, or landfill.
- Remind attendees of zero waste goals in your welcome announcements.

AFTER THE EVENT

- Evaluate event success and calculate waste diversion rate using this formula: $((\text{weight of compost} + \text{weight of recycling}) / (\text{weight of compost} + \text{weight of recycling} + \text{weight of landfill})) \times 100$
- [Compost](#) or [donate](#) any food leftovers.
- Thank event participants and report event landfill diversion success

TEMPLATES & RESOURCES

Supporting Materials

- The Templates and Resources page has a lot of supporting materials to help you set your zero waste goals, work with vendors, share your sustainability goals with guests, and successfully manage waste.

[ZERO WASTE EVENT RESOURCES AT GEORGIA TECH](#)

Use this tool as a directory to quickly find campus resources for your event. This centralized list of vetted resources is organized by key categories including venues, catering, waste recovery, and more. Each section includes direct links and contacts to help streamline your planning process.

[SUSTAINABLE EVENT GUEST INVITATION EMAIL TEMPLATE](#)

Use this template to inform event guests how they can contribute to your event's zero waste goals.

[SUSTAINABLE EVENT VENDOR GUIDELINES EMAIL TEMPLATE](#)

Use this template to send to vendors/caterers regarding the zero waste plans and to initiate the event vendor agreement. It outlines the benefits of zero waste, expectations, and guidelines for vendors participating in the event, emphasizing the importance of source reduction and waste minimization.

[THANK YOU & EVENT SUCCESS SUMMARY EMAIL TEMPLATE](#)

Use this template to share your zero waste event success and thank your guests for their participation.

[CATERING MATERIALS CHECKLIST](#)

Use this checklist as a tool to work with your vendor to ensure proper disposal of items at your event.

[ZERO WASTE EVENT CERTIFICATION](#)

Register your event to have it certified as a [Zero Waste](#) or [Eco-Friendly Event](#). Once certified, showcase your certification in event communications to highlight your commitment to sustainability.

[WASTE SIGNS](#)

Use these waste signs to learn proper waste sorting practices and display them on waste recovery bins to help guests correctly identify and sort their waste into the appropriate bins.

[ZERO WASTE EVENT GUIDELINES BY CATEGORY](#)

Choose sustainable actions from this curated list to plan your event with confidence. This guide provides practical tips on venue, catering, waste recovery, and more to make sustainable planning simple and effective.

ZERO WASTE EVENT RESOURCES AT GEORGIA TECH

Resources at Tech

- The Resources document is designed to support most questions you may have about communication methods, decoration, materials waste, food, venues and transportation

COMMUNICATIONS

SHARING ZERO WASTE EVENTS TIPS

Want to share tips on campus resources, venues, and more? The **Zero Waste Events Community Board** is a go-to hub for sharing sustainable event resources and discovering innovative ideas.

View board: [Zero Waste Events Community Board.xlsx](#)

Add to board: <https://forms.office.com/r/NW4FwCKp5E>

MARKETING AND ADVERTISING

Use digital signage ads, tabling, flyer displays, or sidewalk chalk ads at **Student and Campus Event Centers (SCEC)** facilities.

Visit: <https://www.studentcenter.gatech.edu/advertise-our-spaces>

Submit Your Event to the **Georgia Tech Campus Calendar**.

Visit: <https://contact.gatech.edu/submit-your-event>

DECORATIONS, MATERIALS, AND GIVEAWAYS

FIND RENTAL OPTIONS

For table and linen rentals, audio/visual equipment, off-campus event vendors, tent rentals, and more, visit **Special Events**.

Visit: <https://specialevents.gatech.edu/resources/rental-equipment>

WASTE RECOVERY STATIONS

BIN RENTALS

Fill out the **Request Containers Form** to request recycling containers.

Visit: <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?>

[id=u5ghSHuuJUuLem1_Mvqgg2PnNx_gMlxHvdy_0-0bnJRUMzRKQTdVS0I0RFIYSTAyVIJQUzJYNk85Vi4u](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=u5ghSHuuJUuLem1_Mvqgg2PnNx_gMlxHvdy_0-0bnJRUMzRKQTdVS0I0RFIYSTAyVIJQUzJYNk85Vi4u)

ZERO WASTE EVENT RESOURCES AT GEORGIA TECH

FOOD, DRINK, AND CATERING

CATERING OPTIONS

Tech Catering Services is the preferred caterer for all campus venues. They specialize in zero waste events and offer compostable and reusable dining ware options. View menus, place orders and find a variety of serving options as well.

Visit: <https://catering.gatech.edu/>

For orders exceeding \$600, you must use **Tech Catering** or a **GT approved secondary catering service**. Please contact the caterers directly to confirm if they can meet your recycling or composting requirements.

For a list of secondary caterers, visit: <https://specialevents.gatech.edu/resources/catering/companies>

CAMPUS FOOD WASTE REDUCTION OPTIONS

Contact **Klemis Kitchen** to discuss donating leftover food from your event.

Visit: <https://star.studentlife.gatech.edu/klemis-kitchen/>

Use **Green Forks** to reduce food waste. After your event, Green Forks sends an email blast that will alert subscribers to check the event menu and stop by to fix a plate.

Register your event: <https://dining.gatech.edu/greenforks>

Connect with **The Campus Kitchen Project** to help recover and redistribute unused food to those in need.

Visit: <https://star.studentlife.gatech.edu/klemis-kitchen>

VENUE AND TRANSPORTATION

PARKING & TRANSPORTATION

Visit **Parking and Transportation** for bus routes, campus maps, charter services, A-frame sign rentals, and more.

Visit: <https://www.pts.gatech.edu/>

VENUES

Find local campus venues at **Campus Event Spaces**.

Visit: <https://specialevents.gatech.edu/resources/event-spaces/campus>

Find venue policies for all student and campus event center venues.

Visit: <https://studentcenter.gatech.edu/sccec-indoor-event-decoration-guidelines>

SUSTAINABLE GUEST INVITE EMAIL TEMPLATE

Guest Invite

- This template will help you invite attendees and communicate your event's sustainability goals.
- Customize the invite to fit your event needs, set expectation, and encourage simple actions like asking guest to sort waste and bring reusable supplies.

Greetings,

We are excited to share that **[EVENT NAME]** will be a zero waste event. Georgia Tech's goal is to reach zero waste, minimizing landfill waste through reuse, recycling, and composting.

You will play a vital part in the success of our event through your participation. Zero waste stations consisting of **[recycling, compost, and liquid collection containers]** will be available to participants at numerous locations throughout **[EVENT VENUE]**. Bins will be clearly labeled for your convenience. **[If applicable: All plates, cups, and silverware provided during the event are compostable. We encourage you to bring reusable water bottles and/or to-go coffee mugs.]**

If you have questions about how to properly dispose or divert items, please contact our event staff.

We also encourage sustainable transportation. The best way to get to **[EVENT LOCATION]** is ... **[bus stops, parking etc.]**

Thank you,
[EVENT COORDINATOR]

SUSTAINABLE EVENT VENDORS GUIDELINES

EMAIL TEMPLATE

Vendor Guidelines

- This template will help set expectations and explain your sustainability goals to your vendors.
- Customize template to fit your events needs.

Dear Vendor,

Georgia Tech is committed to sustainability. To support our commitment to becoming a net-zero campus by 2050, **[EVENT NAME]** will be a zero waste event. As a vendor, you can help us achieve this by reducing the amount of waste produced at this event.

In accordance with our zero waste goal, please review the following for **[EVENT NAME]**:

1. Only items that can be reused, composted, or recycled are permitted. Recyclable items include aluminum cans, plastic bottles, and non-wax paper or non-food contaminated paper products.
2. Caterers may not use or bring Styrofoam.
3. Use reusable dishware, cups, utensils, trays, platters, and other serving ware whenever possible.
4. Any compostable packaging and serving ware (e.g., trays, plates, platters, utensils, and cups) must be [BPI-Certified compostable](#).
5. Avoid single-use plastics (e.g., bagged chips, grocery bags, plastic wrap) and plastic-coated paper products, such as paper cups coated with polyethylene to make the paper water- and grease- resistant.
6. If using single use plastics, ensure they are recyclable at Georgia Tech. Plastics labeled with recycling numbers 1 or 2 are accepted on campus.

As a vendor, you agree to the following:

1. Adhere to the above list.
2. Take back any unused, non-recyclable items from your booth or catering setup.
3. Distribute products (if necessary) that are reusable, compostable, or recyclable on campus.

If you have any questions as to whether your items are considered recyclable or compostable, please contact **[event zero waste leader name and contact information]**.

Please note that you will be asked to remove any non-recyclable or non-compostable items that you bring to the event. By replying "Yes, I agree to abide by these terms," you confirm your commitment to following our zero waste guidelines and requirements.

Thank you,
[EVENT COORDINATOR]

CATERING MATERIALS CHECKLIST

Working With Food Vendors

- Use the materials checklist with your vendor to understand how to properly dispose of items in your order.

Tableware	Reusable	BPI Compostable	#1-2 Plastic Recycling	Paper Recycling	Aluminum Recycling	Trash
Bowls						
Cups						
Cutlery: Forks, Spoon, Knives						
Lids						
Napkins						
Packaging:						
Plates						
Straws						
Stirrers						
Toothpicks						
Tableware	Reusable	BPI Compostable	#1-2 Plastic Recycling	Paper Recycling	Aluminum Recycling	Trash
Beverage Containers:						
Beverage Containers:						
Chip Bags						
Condiment Packets:						
Condiment Packets:						
Meal Containers:						
Meal Containers:						
Take-Out Bags						
To-go Meal Containers						
Tableware	Reusable	BPI Compostable	#1-2 Plastic Recycling	Paper Recycling	Aluminum Recycling	Trash
Bakery Bags						
Basket liners						
Deli Wax Paper Wrap/Bags						
Deli Paper Wrap/Bags						
Plastic Deli Sheets						
Plastic Bags						
Plastic Food Wrap & Cling Film						
Insulated Foil Wrap/Bags						
Foil						

THANK YOU & EVENT SUCCESS SUMMARY EMAIL TEMPLATE

Thank You & Event Results

Use this template to thank participants and vendors for their contributions to sustainability.

Measure your waste diversion and share results with stakeholders to maintain transparency and celebrate achievements.

Greetings,

We are thrilled to share that **[EVENT NAME]** was a tremendous success, thanks to your participation and commitment to sustainability. Together, we achieved our goal of making this a zero waste event!

Key Highlights:

- Waste Diversion: **[We successfully kept at least 90% of all waste generated out of landfill bins.]**
- Resource Recovery Stations: **[Your diligent use of the recycling, and compost containers made a significant impact.]**
- Materials: **[All plates, cups, and silverware provided were compostable, and many of you brought reusable water bottles and to-go coffee mugs.]**

Your efforts have contributed to Georgia Tech's mission of creating a sustainable campus. We could not have done it without you! If you have any feedback or suggestions for future events, please reach out.

Thank you once again for your support and dedication to sustainability.

Best regards,
[EVENT COORDINATOR]

ZERO WASTE EVENT CERTIFICATION

Certify Your Event as Eco-Friendly or Zero Waste

- Commit to a list of actions you'll take at your event.
- Submit your events application to apply.
- Then earn a Zero Waste or Eco-Friendly badges to put on your event flyers to demonstrate your sustainability commitment



STEP 1

Review the Zero Waste Events Guide and all supporting materials. Then, use the [Zero Waste Event Guidelines](#) to identify the sustainable actions your event will implement and choose the certification type that best aligns with your event goals.

1. **ECO FRIENDLY CERTIFICATION** – A flexible, beginner-friendly option that recognizes efforts to reduce environmental impact across areas such as transportation, energy, and materials.
2. **ZERO WASTE EVENT CERTIFICATION** – For events aiming to divert at least 90% of waste from landfills through reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting.
*** Note: You'll be required to weigh and report your waste diversion metrics after the event. Scale rentals can be requested in the registration form.**
3. **ZERO WASTE VIRTUAL EVENT CERTIFICATION** – Events that are 100% virtual and do not require travel automatically qualify for Zero Waste Event Certification. No additional reporting is required, as these events inherently eliminate physical waste and transportation emissions.

STEP 2

[Complete the Event Certification & Registration Form](#) by selecting all sustainable actions that apply to your event. Each event must include a minimum of two sustainable actions per category to qualify for certification. Review the categorized list of sustainable actions below to help streamline your application.

SUSTAINABLE ACTIONS CHOOSE AT LEAST 2 PER CATEGORY

COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING

- Communications will inform attendees of zero waste event goals prior to the event.
- Communications will encourage attendees to bring reusable items such as water bottles, containers, pens, and notepads to reduce the use of disposable materials when applicable.
- Minimize Printing – Any necessary printing will be double-sided, printed on half or quarter sheets, or on recycled paper.
- Digital communication tools, such as email, social media, campus screens, electronic invites, RSVP, and online sign-ups, will be used where applicable.

APPENDIX F: ZERO WASTE EVENT CERTIFICATION

FOOD & BEVERAGE *(if being served at event)*

- Event will serve food buffet-style or offer shared platters instead of individually packaged or boxed meals.
- Reusable, recyclable or compostable plates, cups, utensils, and food containers will be provided.
- Food containers and packaging will be recycled or composted.
- Food will include options for plant-based, vegetarian, and vegan choices and/or feature organic, minimally processed, and locally sourced seasonal foods.
- Food scraps and leftovers will be composted.
- Attendees will be encouraged to take leftovers in compostable or reusable to-go containers.
- Leftover food will be donated through Green Forks, Klemis Kitchen, or another method.
- Beverages will be provided in bulk (e.g. coolers, pitchers) to reduce packaging.
- Condiments, sauces, spreads, chips, and other items will be served in bulk to avoid unnecessary waste.

DECORATIONS, MATERIALS, AND GIVEAWAYS

- Giveaways will be sustainable and practical, such as reusable utensil kits, refillable water bottles, or apparel made from natural fibers.
- Giveaways will include any of the following: locally made or grown items, minimally packaged products, repurposed gifts, or gifts made from recycled materials.
- Giveaways will focus on experiences rather than physical products, such as event tickets, e-books, subscriptions, or engaging activities.
- Giveaways such as t-shirts and tote bags will be designed without specific dates or event details, allowing leftover items to be reused or distributed at future events.
- Event will not have promotional items, prizes, or giveaways.
- Durable promotional materials, like signs and banners, will be designed without specific dates or event details, ensuring signage can be reused for future events.
- Event decorations and materials such as tablecloths, centerpieces, and name tags will be rented, borrowed, repurposed, or reused.
- Event will not have decorations.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

- Recycling bins will be available or provided.
- Composting bins will be available or provided.
- Zero waste station bins will be clearly labeled (landfill, recycling, compost, etc).
- Volunteers will help guests sort waste correctly.
- Volunteers and/or event staff will be trained in how to divert event materials.

APPENDIX F: ZERO WASTE EVENT CERTIFICATION

VENUE LOCATION & TRANSPORTATION

- Attendees will be encouraged to use sustainable modes of transportation, such as walking, biking, scootering, public transit (train or bus), and ride sharing.
- Video conferencing/webinar options will be provided to reduce emissions and the need for long distance travel.
- Event location is centrally situated and easily accessible via MARTA, Georgia Tech Stinger buses, bike lanes, or walking paths.
- Available modes of sustainable transportation will be shared with attendees prior to the event.

STEP 3

Complete and submit your registration form to receive a certification seal.

Please allow up to 5 business days for the Office of Sustainability to review your submission and issue the certification seal. If you selected Zero Waste Certification, you will also receive a mandatory waste tracking worksheet and survey to report your event's success metrics. You may use the certification seal on event flyers, digital promotions, and other event materials.


[REGISTER EVENT](#)

WASTE SIGNS

Guest Invite

- Use these waste signs to learn proper waste sorting practices and display them on waste recovery bins to help guests correctly identify and sort their waste into the appropriate bins.
- Use the GT [Zero Waste Resource Hub](#), for campus-specific guidelines for recycling, composting, and waste.

Compost



Food containers must be BPI Certified.



GT Georgia Tech. Find a full list of recyclable items and drop-off locations at [recycle.gatech.edu](#).



Landfill



Not sure? Put in landfill.

GT Georgia Tech. Find a full list of recyclable items and drop-off locations at [recycle.gatech.edu](#).



Empty Aluminum



No liquids. No tin cans.

GT Georgia Tech. Find a full list of recyclable items and drop-off locations at [recycle.gatech.edu](#).



Mixed Recycling



Containers **must** be empty and clean.

GT Georgia Tech. Find a full list of recyclable items and drop-off locations at [recycle.gatech.edu](#).



Empty Plastic
Types 1 & 2



No liquids. Leave caps on. Check packaging for number:  

GT Georgia Tech. Find a full list of recyclable items and drop-off locations at [recycle.gatech.edu](#).



Closing: Key Takeaways

- Zero waste events reduce environmental impact and support Georgia Tech's sustainability goals.
- Use the guide, checklist, and templates to streamline your planning process.
- Visit sustain.gatech.edu for the Zero Waste Guide and other resources.



- Email sustain@gatech.edu for zero waste event questions or support.

Any Questions?