



# A Guide to Hosting a GREENER EVENT AND REDUCING WASTE

Building community and supporting a good cause don't have to be hard on the planet! Is your event unnecessarily sending many bags of waste to landfill? Updating your event planning efforts can change that.

Consider these ideas and examples as you organize your next event. Be a champion for environmental awareness and waste reduction!

“

Everything we consume, from the food we eat to the cars we drive to the houses we live in, is produced from the earth's limited supply of resources. These items nourish us, and support us, and sustain our modern-day existence. But, our human footprint extends beyond the simple buying and consuming of things. The final impact occurs when we dispose of these items.”

■ Oxford County Zero Waste Event Planning Guide

## Idea #1: Reconsider the use of disposable items

With some investigation, you may find several ways to eliminate unnecessary disposable items. Could your event be successful without things that will be used once and thrown away afterwards? Are there ways to reduce how many disposables are used?

Styrofoam and non-recyclable plastics will sit in landfill for hundreds of years, so it's worth avoiding them altogether and striving for something more ecologically responsible. Could you ask your suppliers about more environmentally-friendly options to know what choices are available? (And when you ask, you help to communicate a consumer demand for green products!)

### Ideas for avoiding single-use disposable items:

- Ask patrons to bring their own water bottles, travel mugs, and/or cutlery.
- Enlist volunteers or use a rental service to wash reusable dishes, cutlery, and linens.
- Sell reusable water bottles and provide a water refill station. The City of Stratford's portable "Hydration Station" has fountains and refill taps. It's available free for events in Stratford: 519-271-0250 ext. 315.
- Consider posting central display boards or signs instead of printing individual programs.
- Make banner signs that you can reuse at multiple events.
- Eliminate unnecessary plastic items such as straws, plastic bags, and novelty giveaway items.

### When using disposable items, consider more environmentally-friendly options:

- Use compostable containers over plastic, especially if you can arrange compost collection (see idea #2).
- Use recyclable plastic containers over non-recyclable.
- Consider choosing recyclable items with post-consumer recycled content.
- See "5 Products to Avoid at Your Next Event" at the end of this guide.

## Green Events in Action

Pancake lovers at the **Winterfest Breakfast** enjoy their meal with cutlery and kitchen plates thanks to volunteers who wash dishes... and with that effort, the sponsoring group, the Civic Beautification and Environmental Awareness Committee, stays true to its name!

For the Alzheimer Society's 2018 **Soup's On** soup tasting fundraiser, a social media campaign and prize draw encouraged people to bring their own spoons to the event. As a result, approximately 1,000 fewer disposable spoons were distributed than the year before. They also provided cutlery spoons, water jugs, and glasses for the judges' table.

## Idea #2: Arrange for recycling and compost bins

Contact your venue or the City of Stratford about recycling pickup and make sure you will have enough blue bins on site for recyclables. Consider how you will make the bins visible and if signs are needed.

As of 2018, the City of Stratford does **not** collect organic waste for compost (food waste, paper cups, wooden stir sticks, etc.). If you foresee a significant amount of food waste and/or paper cups, investigate options for compost pick up by an industrial compost facility. For a reasonable cost, compost facilities will deliver large green bins for collection and then pick up the full bins after your event. One such facility is [Davidson Environmental](#).

## Green Event in Action

The Alzheimer Society's 2018 **Soup's On** fundraiser secured just over \$200 in funding from the City's Civic Beautification and Environmental Awareness Committee to have six 96-gallon green bins delivered to the Rotary Complex by Davidson Environmental.

Paper cups, cardboard cup trays, napkins, and discarded soup were all collected for compost and sorted by volunteers at waste sorting stations. Arranging for green bin pickup at this event diverted 480 gallons—the equivalent of 30 garbage bags—from landfill to an industrial bio-gas compost facility. Many items were recycled as well and **only 7 bags of garbage** went to landfill from this event where almost **4,000 people** attended.

## Idea #3: Sort waste

Having blue and green bins at your event is not enough to make sure items are recycled or composted. Bins that are too contaminated with the wrong kind of waste may not be accepted and items can end up in landfill.

The best way to make sure your recycling and/or composting gets results is to have specific locations for waste disposal and people to help your patrons sort

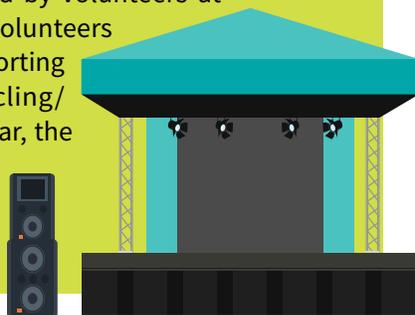
waste effectively. Rather than placing waste bins here and there throughout in the venue, add waste sorting stations to your site plan. Draft a schedule for the event that assigns volunteers to sort waste for patrons at the stations. A surprising number of Stratford citizens are keen to be “Green Team” volunteers to collect and sort waste at events. They are motivated to make sure that compostables and recyclables are not tossed in the garbage and that recycling and compost bins are not contaminated.

For a list of items currently acceptable for recycling collection in Stratford, visit [stratfordcanada.ca/recycling](http://stratfordcanada.ca/recycling).

## Green Event in Action

The **River Rock Music Festival** is a day-long, 10-hour event near St. Marys that welcomes about 800 music lovers, plus musicians and vendors, and has a mandate for zero landfill waste.

They sell souvenir reusable hot/cold beverage containers and offer free potable water on-site. Disposable water bottles are banned—attendees can’t bring them and vendors can’t sell them. Food vendors must have compostable or recyclable containers and reusable plates are donated for the event and washed by volunteers at washing stations. Volunteers also ensure proper sorting of waste at recycling/garbage stations. So far, the event has produced **less than one bag of garbage each year!**



## Idea #4: Communicate your goals and measure success

People are motivated by seeing the difference they are making. Identify a few ways you could track and calculate your impact.

For example:

- gallons/litres of waste diverted from landfill to compost/recycling
- the number of paper plates not used
- the number of people who brought their own reusable water bottles

Reward “green” patrons with reduced admission or entry into a prize draw. Measure the reduced amount of garbage that goes to landfill and set a new goal for future events. Post the numbers as things happen and after, share results on social media, and include details in your final reports. Celebrate and publicize your success!

## Idea #5: Develop a sustainability policy for your events

Any small waste reduction action is important! And in fact, increasing awareness about the waste generated at your events is a huge step forward. Once you see how that awareness can generate positive initiatives and concrete results, you might be energized to do more. Think about how the values behind your event and your organization relate to caring for the environment. Could values for health, for example, or for a positive future for young people, or social responsibility, and even administrative effectiveness, better inform how you minimize the waste and environmental impact of your fundraisers and events?

Inspired by your values, a sustainability policy would set goals and identify tools for green initiatives and environmental awareness at all your events. Your policy might address the waste reduction activities outlined above as well as venue selection, transportation, overall carbon footprint, and supporting small business and local suppliers. A policy would help you to find new ways to follow through on your environmental commitment, track progress, and celebrate successes.

## Green Event in Action

The **Stratford Kiwanis Garlic Festival** invites **Cycle Stratford** to offer a bike valet service each year, encouraging people to ride their bikes to the event by providing easy, secure bike parking and an entry discount for those who use the service.

## But what about...

### the expense to try these ideas?

There are usually ways to work around new costs and find some savings. For example, could you get a discount on more environmentally-friendly disposables by buying in bulk (perhaps even in collaboration with another organization's event)? Might one of the many environmentally aware local business owners become a new sponsor and cover some additional expense?

A brief application describing your plans and new budget items may secure funding from an environmental grant program such as the [TD Green Fund](#) or from the City Community Grants program (contact for deadline details: [stfdbudget@stratford.ca](mailto:stfdbudget@stratford.ca)). You might delegate a volunteer for the application legwork.

### finding enough new volunteers?

Ask! And let people know why you are making this effort. Some people are itching to volunteer if they can have a tangible impact on the environment and promote environmental awareness. If recruiting is a challenge, try asking local groups with environmental sensibilities to distribute a request for volunteers or come on board. Service club members, gardeners, naturalists, cyclists, and high school students in environmental student groups may be eager to help in various ways.

Reaching out to community Facebook groups can also be very effective to connect new people to your event by offering them an opportunity to have a positive environmental impact.

### frustrated and inconvenienced patrons?

It's good to be prepared for some resistance to change since most people are used to throwing something away and not thinking about where it ends up. Take this opportunity to increase environmental awareness by briefly explaining why these efforts are important and how they will make a difference.

Awareness is growing about the increasing amount of waste we produce, the limited lifespan of our landfill facilities, the impact of pollution, and the energy consumed to produce items we use just once. More and more people support and are grateful for events that demonstrate a commitment to the environment. Kids know that more sustainable living is overdue and the way of the future. You could win over more fans!

### health concerns?

Changing to more environmental food containers or sorting waste usually does not raise any health issues, but you if you are unclear on the food safety requirements for any of your plans, consult the [Perth District Health Unit](#).



### Further resources for information and inspiration:

- [Oxford County's Zero Waste Event Planning Guide](#)
- [A Guide to Green Festivals](#)

### Send us your successes and best practices!

We will post them at [cfuwstratford.ca/waste-reduction](http://cfuwstratford.ca/waste-reduction).  
E-mail us at [cfuwstratford@gmail.com](mailto:cfuwstratford@gmail.com).

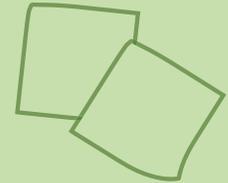
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## Products to avoid at your next event

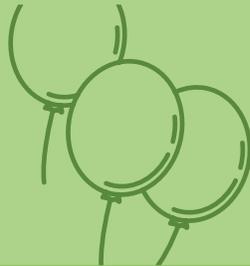
Avoid

### Laminated materials and heavily-dyed paper

These items are generally not accepted by recycling centres, so opt for reusable or recyclable items.



5+ years to decompose



### Balloons

Latex balloons will decompose after 5 years, but are riddled with harmful chemicals that can leach into the soil.

Mylar balloons (helium-filled and shiny) will take even longer to decompose.

Instead try decorating with reusable kites, garden spinners, and local flowers - or rent decorations from a party supply store.

75 years to decompose

### Food Wrappers

Food wrappers, like chip bags, can take up to 75 years to decompose. Skip the individually-wrapped portions and buy in bulk instead!



100 years to decompose



### Polypropylene Items

Items like drinking straws and water bottle lids can easily be avoided by opting for reusable containers.



500 years to decompose

### Styrofoam plates, cups and containers

Whenever possible, opt for reusable dishware at your event. If this isn't possible, choose compostable products over throw-away items. It may cost more, but will dramatically reduce your clean-up costs, and your impact on the environment, in the end.



### Common Roadblocks

Zero waste events aren't for everybody, so be prepared to encounter some unenthusiastic guests who may not understand your waste separation system, or why you are doing things this way. Have a few simple statements prepared for staff and volunteers to explain why this is important and why everyone should participate.