


# Zero and Reduced Waste Event Planning





February 2023



*When we reduce, reuse, recycle, and compost,  
We are Sustainable, Cleveland.*

*ZeroWasteNEO is a network of businesses and individuals interested in the principles of zero waste working to maximize resource recovery and landfill diversion in Northeast Ohio.*

**zerowasteneo**   **ZERO WASTE**  
SUSTAINABLE CLEVELAND 2019

*Together, we're building a thriving green city on a blue lake.  
LEARN MORE, DO MORE AT [SUSTAINABLECLEVELAND.ORG](http://SUSTAINABLECLEVELAND.ORG)*

**zerowasteneo**

 **SUSTAINABLE CLEVELAND**



**Cuyahoga County**  
**SOLID WASTE DISTRICT**  
[CuyahogaRecycles.org](http://CuyahogaRecycles.org)

# Workshop Overview

- What is zero waste\* & other definitions
- Planning a zero waste event
- Operations and logistics
- Communications
- Day of event execution
- Measuring impact & celebrating success
- Appendices
- Resources

\* “zero waste” in this presentation also refers to reduced waste

# What is zero waste?

Zero waste refers to the diversion of all non-hazardous waste from the landfill through reducing, reusing, recycling, composting, and upcycling.

An event or operation is typically thought of as zero waste if it diverts 90% or more of its non-hazardous waste from the landfill.





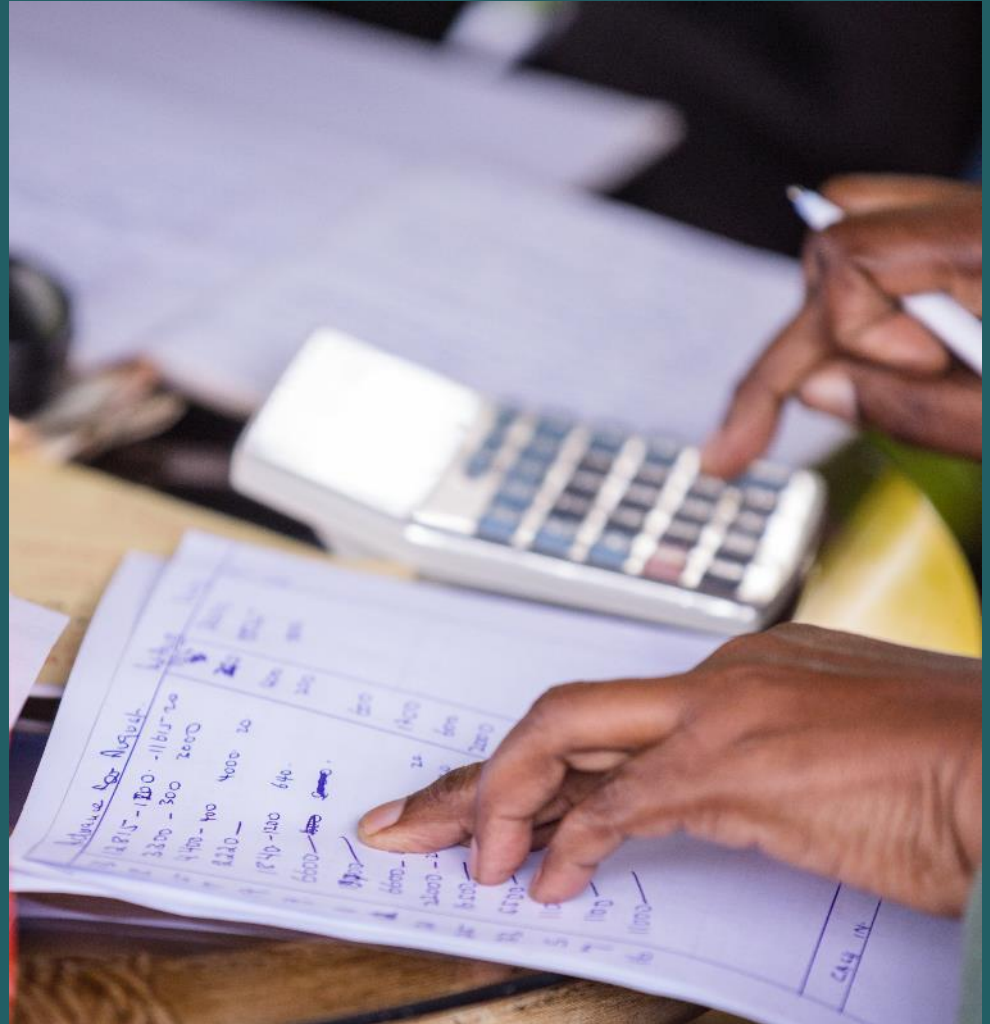
# Waste Reduction

- Source reduction
- Food rescue/recovery
- Composting
- Reuse
- Recycling/Upcycling



# Economic Benefits

- May lower your event costs
- Creates a market for green event products and services
- Cost savings from right-sizing your event
- Creates jobs



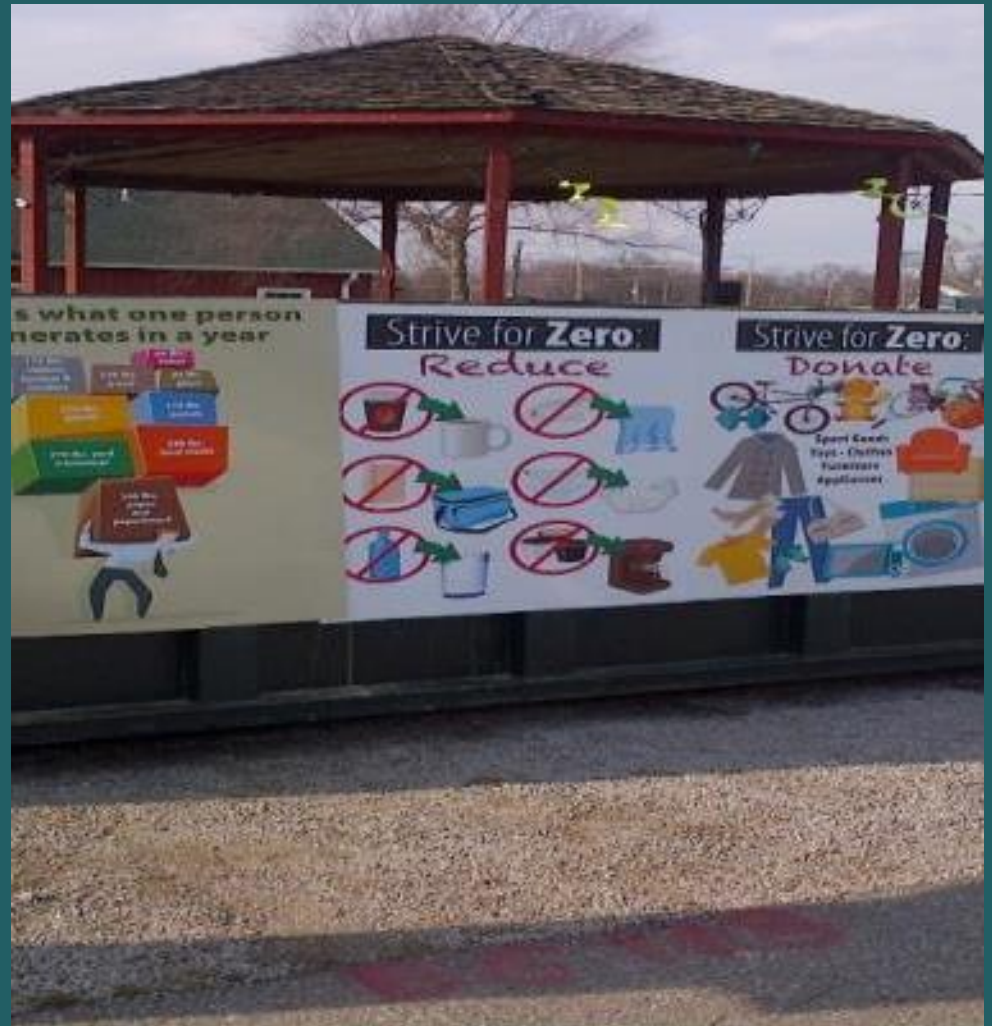
# Environmental Benefits

- Reduces waste and diverts valuable commodities from the landfill and back into the recycling stream
- Reduces greenhouse gas emissions from landfills
- Creates healthy soils through composting



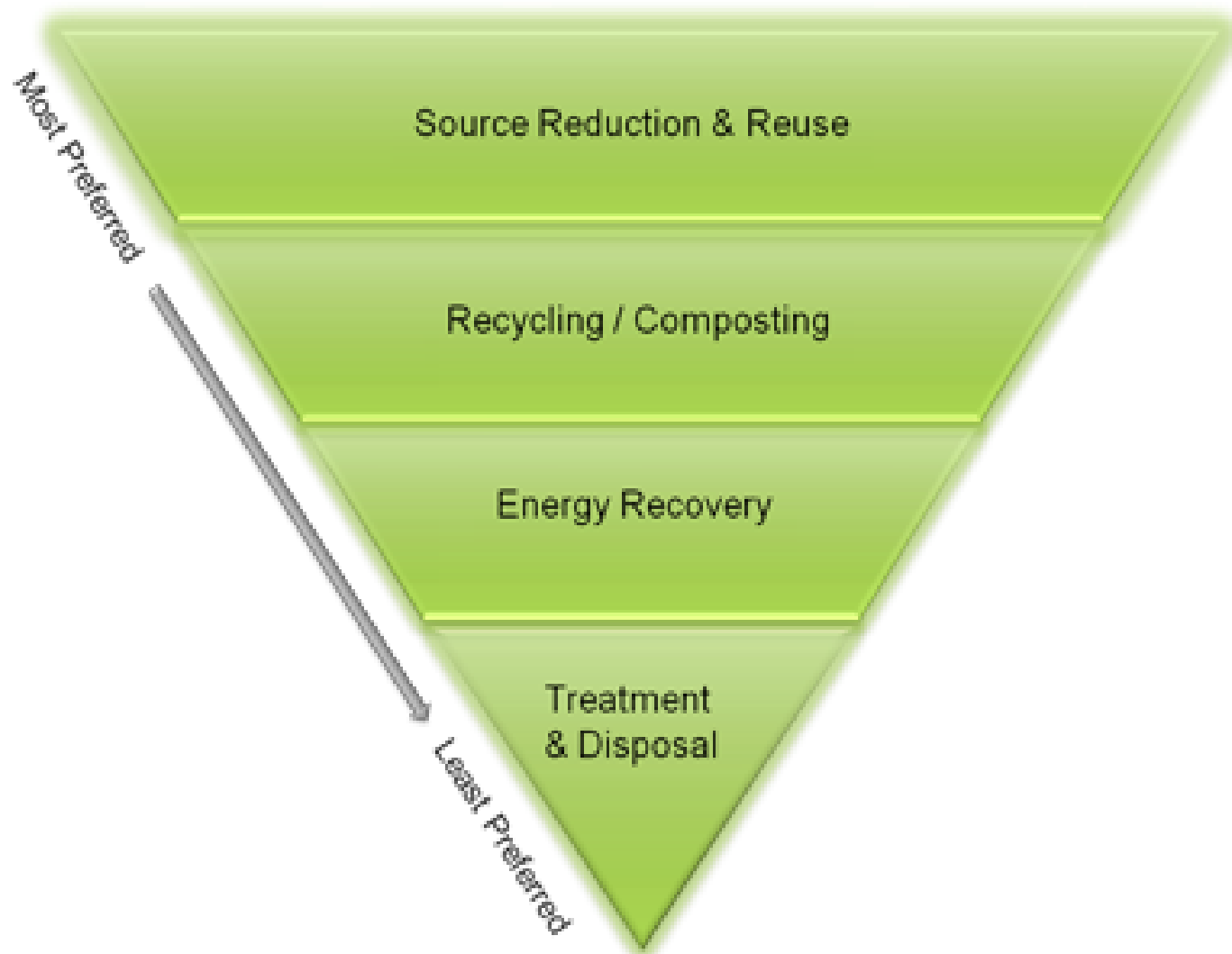
# Social Benefits

- Promotes a positive image for the event, increases visibility and event turnout
- Shows leadership in waste reduction
- Increases public awareness about zero waste events and waste reduction





# Waste Management Hierarchy





# Food Recovery Hierarchy

Most Preferred

## Source Reduction

Reduce the volume of surplus food generated

## Feed Hungry People

Donate extra food to food banks, soup kitchens and shelters

## Feed Animals

Divert food scraps to animal feed

## Industrial Uses

Provide waste oils for rendering and fuel conversion and food scraps for digestion to recover energy

## Composting

Create a nutrient-rich soil amendment

## Landfill/ Incineration

Last resort to disposal

Least Preferred

# Recycling

the process of  
collecting, sorting, and  
remanufacturing used  
items into new products



# Recycling in Cuyahoga County

Materials that can be recycled in Cuyahoga County include metal cans, plastic bottles and jugs, paper, glass bottles and jars, and cardboard.

ALL recycled material should be empty and dry.

<https://cuyahogarecycles.org>





**Compostable** – Made of organic materials and requires special composting conditions to break down into usable compost (soil, mulch) and are usually shredded first before being added to compost piles



**Biodegradable** – Items that can break down and decompose into elements found in nature ( $\text{CO}_2$ ,  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , and biomass) within a reasonably short amount of time when they are exposed to air, moisture and bacteria



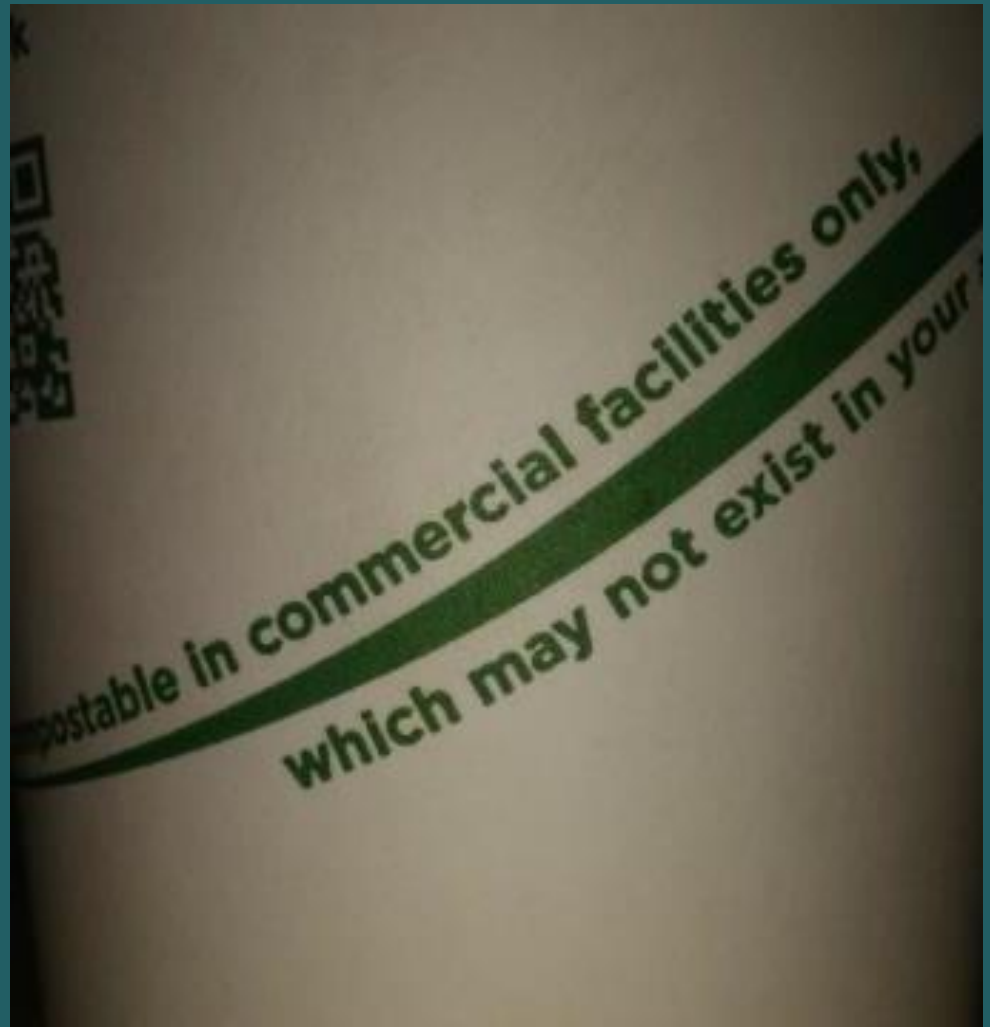
# Composting- BPI Certification

BPI =

Biodegradable Products  
Institute –

a third party certifier of  
compostable materials

Must meet ASTM D6400  
and ASTM D6868  
standards for  
composting in  
commercial facilities



**Compostable** –Made of organic materials and requires special composting conditions to break down into usable compost (soil, mulch) and are usually shredded first before being added to compost piles



**NOT ALL PRODUCTS LABELED COMPOSTABLE ARE BPI-CERTIFIED**

**ALL BPI-CERTIFIED PRODUCTS ARE COMMERCIALY COMPOSTABLE**



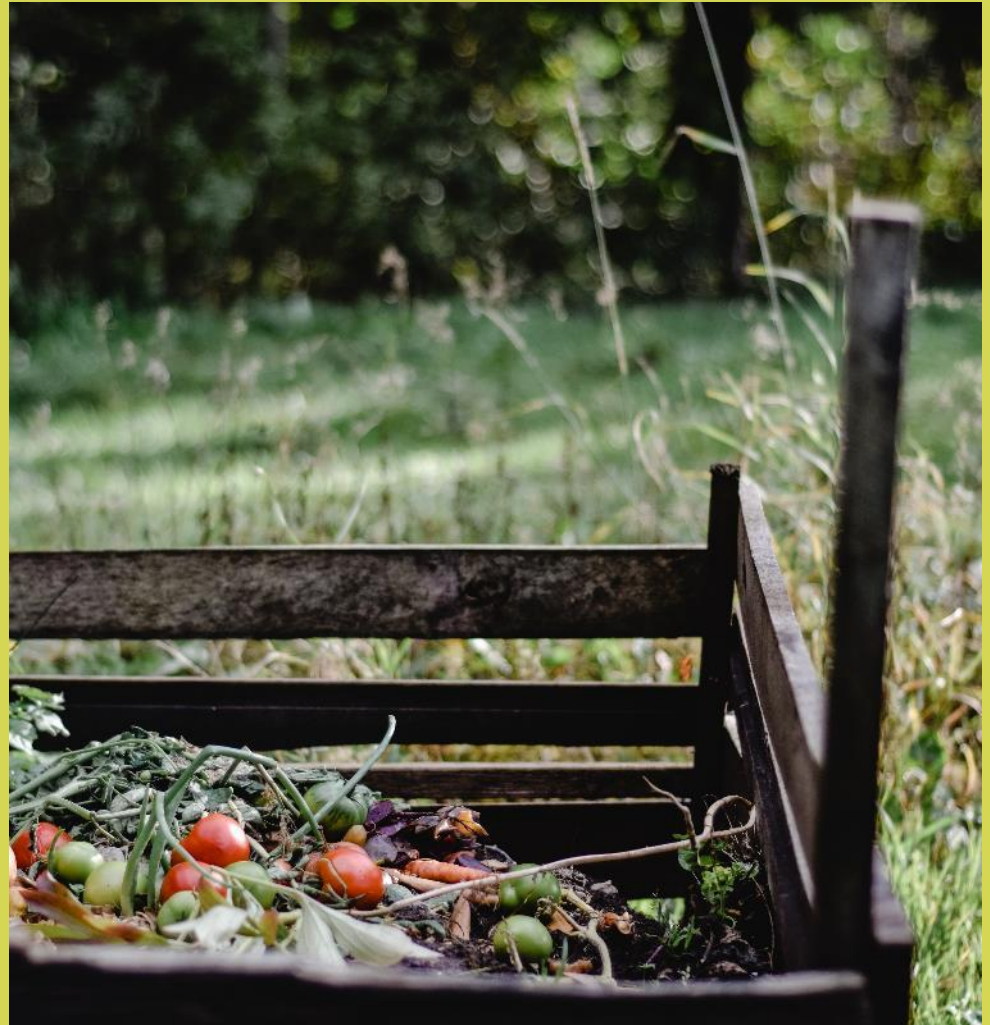
# Backyard vs. Commercial Composting

Backyard composting may be the most convenient and cost-effective for small events

However, backyard composting is not recommended for meats, fish, fats, oils, grease or serviceware

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Commercial composting facilities use grinders and other technologies to ensure all organic waste is properly broken down





# Any Event Can Be a Zero Waste Event



# #1. Commitment

Decide that you would like to reduce or eliminate waste from your event and get buy-in from event leadership/stakeholders

(this is the most important step in the zero waste process)



# Commitment

- Set a goal that is challenging, practical, and easily measured
- Identify a zero waste leader and zero waste team to champion the efforts

(this is VERY important)



# Operations & Logistics

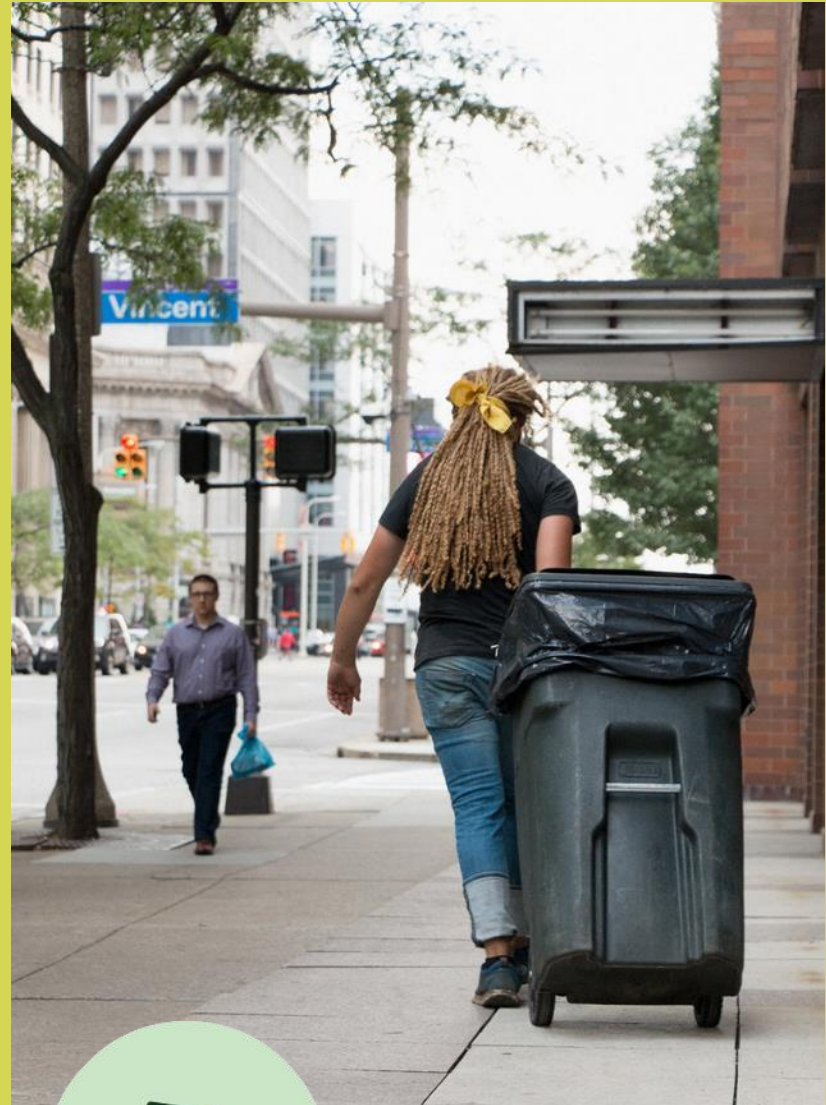
- Venue and vendors
- Determine all materials needed
- Stay within your budget
- Determine # stations and volunteers





# Venue & Vendors

- Find a venue and vendors willing to work with you
- Look for venues that offer recycling/composting collections
- Find caterers that offer reusable or compostable serveware and bulk food service
- Coordinate with your compost hauler as early as possible





# HarvestOwl™

- Designed for businesses, office, and residential buildings
- Healthy, fresh and energizing food options
- Affordable
- Contact free delivery in reusable packaging
- Boxed lunch catering

<https://www.harvestowl.com/>

Scott Himmel, Founder

(216) 672-0655



# Materials Needed

- Determine the reusables, recyclables and compostables needed for the event
- Identify vendors
- Choose reusable when you can
- Use only BPI-certified compostables
- Confirm with your compost hauler what they can take



**BPI®**  
**Compostable**  
Cert #891051

# Food Waste Streams

- Select foods that require little or no serveware
- Offer condiments in bulk containers
- Only use BPI-certified compostable serveware
- Consider donating uneaten food
- Be prepared with takeout containers for leftover food





# Food Donations/ Rescue

- Coordinate food donations ahead of time
- Donor's liability covered under the Good Samaritan Act
- Do not donate
  - Bulging or dented cans
  - Spoiled or rotting food
  - Food that has been altered
  - Food that has not been in your control



**HUNGER**   
**NETWORK**

# Waste Stations

- Identify the number of stations and volunteers needed
- Look at the flow of the event
- Limit the number of stations
- Receptacles can be donated
- Use buckets to collect liquid



# Waste Station Signage

- Signage should be clear, concise and consistent
- Use text, photos and/or actual examples of materials
- Have an “I don’t know” bin for volunteers



# Considering Compostables?

- Limited number of local haulers
- May be an increased cost
- Commercial haulers are strict about contamination rates
- Reminder: biodegradable is NOT equal to compostable





# Volunteers

- Start recruiting long before the event
- Tap into local schools, places of worship and other volunteer organizations
- Prepare educational materials
- Limit the number of stations to reduce the number of volunteers needed



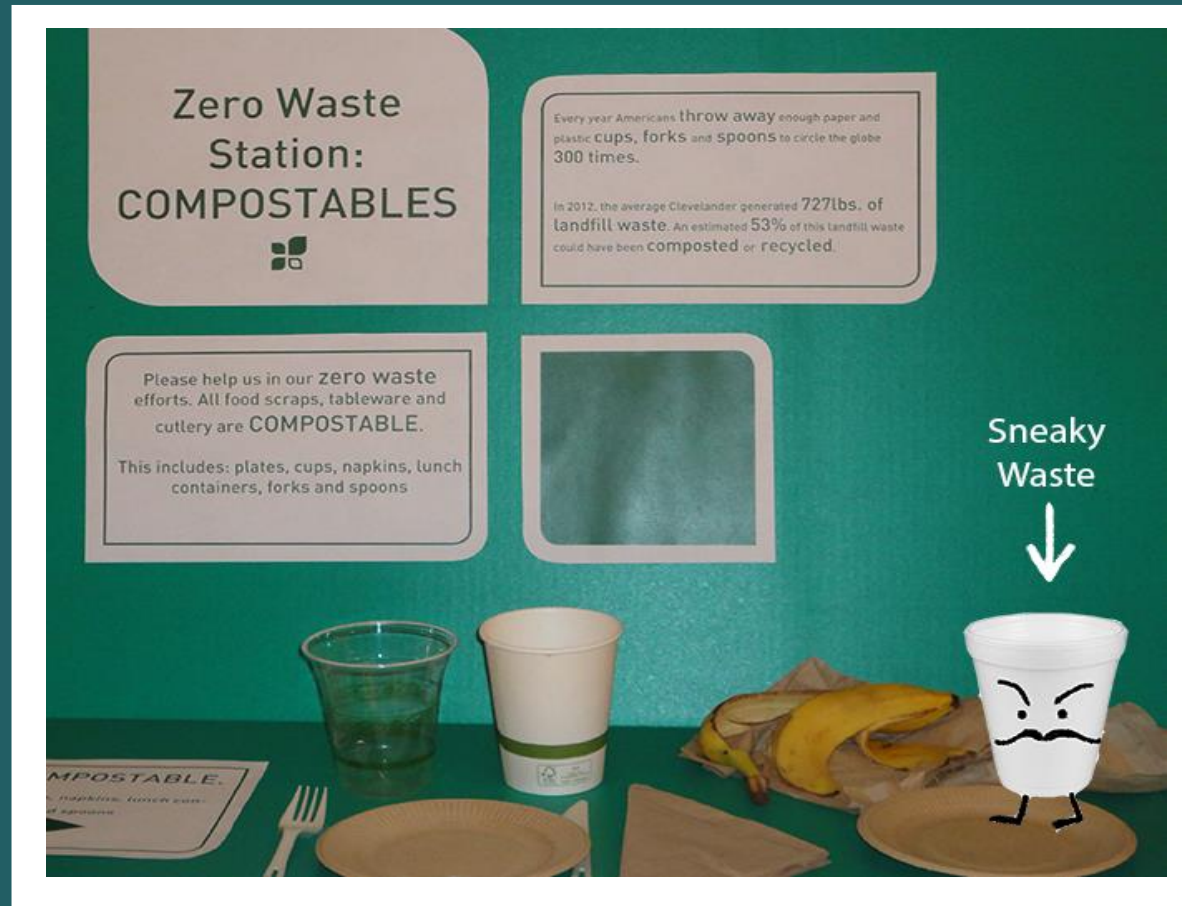
# Communication

- Consider using electronic invitations
- Communicate with vendors and caterers – if necessary confirm in an agreement
- Update event marketing materials
- Include reminders throughout your planning and day of event



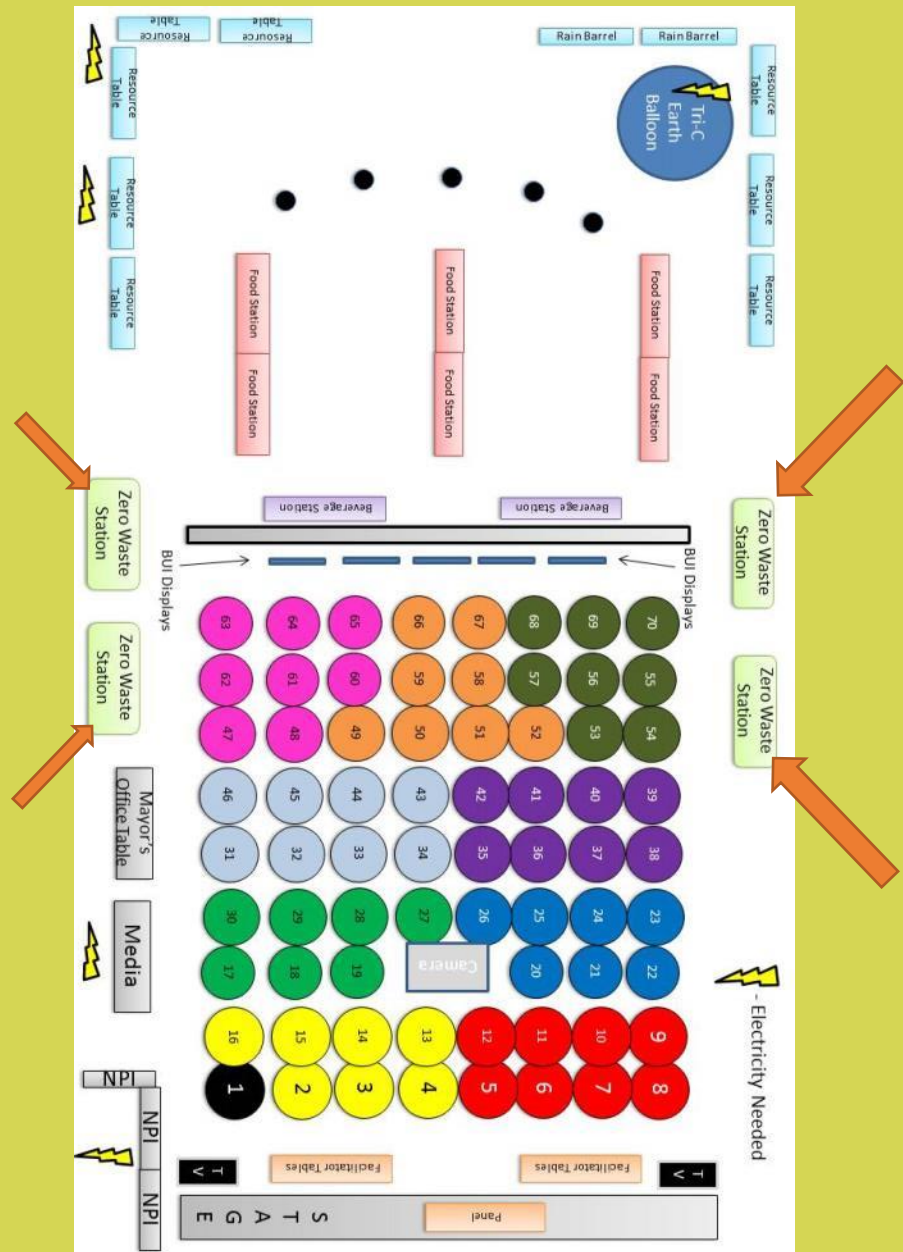
# Day of Event

- Set up stations and signage
- Bucket for liquids
- Check in station for volunteers
- Check in with vendors and caterers
- Be prepared for “sneaky” waste



# Day of Event

Locate stations near areas where waste is generated and consider limiting the number of waste stations to maximize volunteer coverage





# Day of Event

- Keep extra bin liners and gloves at the waste stations
- Identify a location for collecting full bags/bins
- Measure and record amounts collected
- Make announcements throughout the event



# Day of Event

- Plan for volunteer training
- Identify opportunities to train catering and/or housekeeping staff
- Refer to the ZW Volunteer Training Guide
- Understand COVID-specific safety protocols



# Challenges & Solutions

**We were expecting 20 zero waste volunteers, we only got 5 – what do we do?**

- Don't panic
- Consolidate /eliminate stations
- Place stations close to heavy traffic
- “Deputize” all event participants as volunteers



# Measure

- Measure compost, recycling, and waste generated
- Determine contamination rates
- Record and document
- Contact haulers for data





# Celebrate

- Compare actual results to goals set
- Communicate accomplishments
- Learn for next time
- Give yourselves a pat on the back
- Share



# Follow UP & Next Steps

- What worked and what didn't
- Build off of your success
- Identify areas for improvement
- Take notes and photos
- Share with ZWNEO





# Large Outdoor Events

- Unplanned waste is certain
- Communication is critical
- Attend all event planning meetings
- Discuss zero waste goals with vendors and exhibitors
- Have waste bins emptied beforehand
- Know who the waste hauler is
- Have enough volunteers
- Don't forget about Mother Nature



# Unwanted waste streams

- Waste can be “sneaky”
- Check Local Recycling Resources in Appendix
- Have an “I don’t know” box
- Check <https://cuyahogarecycles.org>





# Challenges & Solutions

**It's the morning of our event and one of our vendors brought in plastic utensils that are NOT compostable or recyclable!**

- Don't panic
- Make all volunteers aware
- Add a separate bag/bin
- Provide gloves to remove contamination



# Decorations

- Plastic and single-use decorations should be avoided
- Opt for reusable decorations or decorations made from recycled or natural materials
- Avoid balloon releases, confetti/glitter, sky lanterns, and other polluting practices
- Try alternatives like bubbles or tree planting to keep your event memorable, without the waste



# Ditch the Plastic Bottle

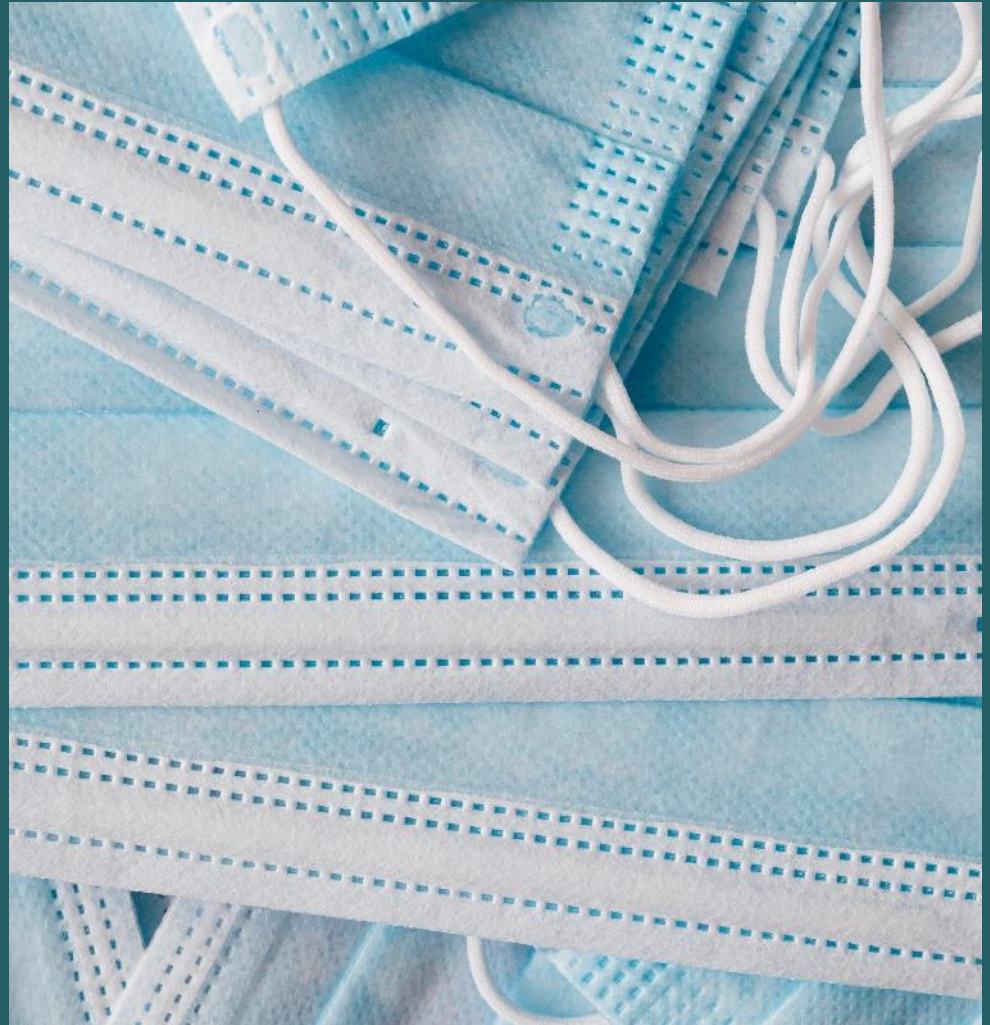
- An easy way to reduce waste at the source is to eliminate single use disposable water bottles at the event
- For larger and outdoor events, consider hiring a water distributor to supply water





# Health & Safety

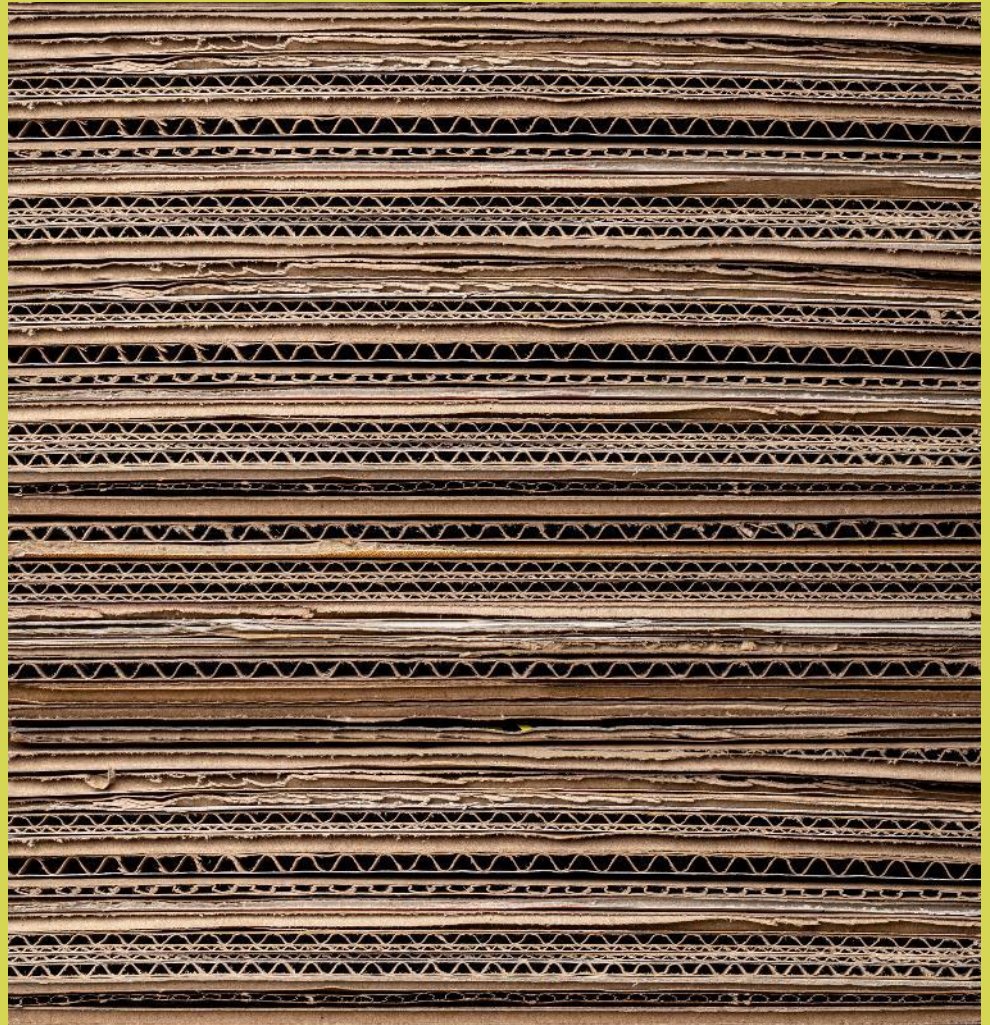
- Check CDC website for updates
- Consider safe activities
- Include gloves and masks as a waste stream





# Limited Time and Funds?

- You don't have to do it all!
- Pick one or two items to recycle as “low-hanging fruit”
- Borrow free recycling stations from CCSWD
- Review this Guide for more ideas
- Celebrate your successes
- Plan to eliminate more waste at your next event



# Challenges & Solutions

**We have a limited budget and can't afford to pay for recycling or compost hauling? Can we still reduce our event waste?**

- Crunch the numbers
- Reach out for sponsorships or partnerships
- Explore wholesale or discount pricing with your compost hauler



# APPENDICES

1. Local Composting and Food Recovery Resources
2. Local Recycling Resources
3. Compostable Serviceware Vendors
4. Water Suppliers
5. Sample Agreement Letter for Partners
6. Zero Waste Volunteer Roles
7. Printable Waste Tracking Sheet



# Connect with the ZeroWasteNEO Working Group for zero waste event support

Join the ZeroWasteNEO Working Group and/or email list  
to stay connected on all-things waste reduction in  
Northeast Ohio.

Doreen Schreiber ([dschreiber@cuyahogacounty.us](mailto:dschreiber@cuyahogacounty.us))  
Cathi Lehn ([clehn@clevelandohio.gov](mailto:clehn@clevelandohio.gov))

Be sure to check out **SustainableCleveland.org/ZWNEO**  
for information and resources to help you plan your zero  
or reduced waste event, including a printable checklist and  
volunteer training tools.





# Resources

[www.CuyahogaRecycles.org](http://www.CuyahogaRecycles.org)

[www.SustainableCleveland.org/ZWNEO](http://www.SustainableCleveland.org/ZWNEO)

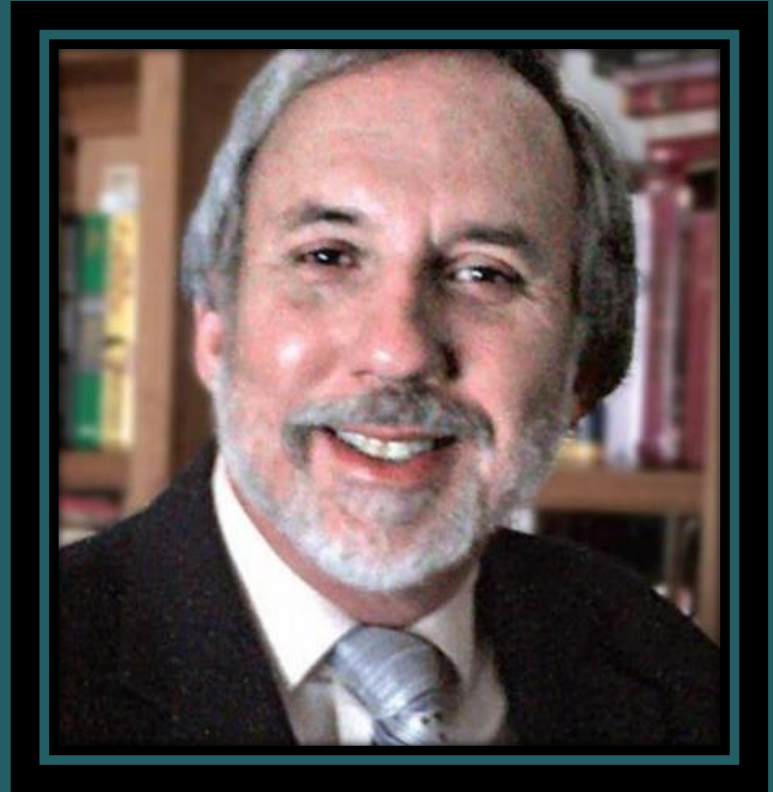
[www.bpiworld.org](http://www.bpiworld.org)

Zero and Reduced Waste Event Planning Guide

[www.sustainablecleveland.org/ZWNEO](http://www.sustainablecleveland.org/ZWNEO)

[https://www.cuyahogarecycles.org/zero\\_waste\\_goals/](https://www.cuyahogarecycles.org/zero_waste_goals/)

# Why Zero Waste?



If you're not for zero waste, how much waste are you for?  
- Gary Liss

# THANK YOU!!!

