

# ZERO WASTE EVENTS

## Planning Guide



# ABOUT ZERO WASTE EVENTS

Zero Waste Events minimize harmful impacts and maximize efficiency and waste reduction, while having a positive effect on the community. SB150 events are opportunities to educate participants in sustainability principles and demonstrate that South Bend is investing in a strong future.

There are two overarching themes found in a successful, educational, zero waste event. Engagement of Participants – Events designed to engage and educate participants will increase awareness of sustainability issues and behaviors in the South Bend community. Procurement of Goods and Services - Thoughtful procurement of goods and services can reduce waste, limit emissions, and even benefit the local economy.

## QUICK START TIPS

### Transportation

- Encourage and incentivize walking, bicycling, carpooling, and taking public transit to your event.
- Use hybrid, electric, or natural gas vehicles / machinery.
- Consider teleconferencing or broadcasting events online.
- Enforce a no-idle policy (weather permitting).

### Waste

- Provide easy-to-use waste separation – including food waste and compostable items, recyclable items, and trash. Clearly label trash as destined for landfill.
- Promote a clear recycling/composting/anti-litter message at your event. For example, have emcee make frequent announcements.

### Printing & Advertising

- Distribute physical handouts and marketing material only to those with true need. Post and electronically distribute event guides/agendas/programs online.
- Print materials double-sided on 100% recycled-content paper, using vegetable-based inks. Print signs/posters/banners without a date so that they may be reused.
- Ensure that event giveaway items are reusable and recyclable (reusable bags, water bottles, coffee mugs, etc.) and/or locally made and/or of sustainable materials.

### Food Service

- Offer healthy, locally grown/produced, in-season, or organic food options and always include vegetarian/vegan options.
- Select vendors that use locally sourced products and environmentally-friendly materials.
- Avoid single-serving containers and individually wrapped items.
- Avoid products that cannot be recycled or composted (plastic wrap, Styrofoam, plastic utensils, plastic coated cups).

### Energy & Water Use

- Encourage staff to turn off and unplug electric equipment when not in use.
- Keep doors closed when heat or air conditioning is in use.

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# A SUSTAINABLE SB150

## SUSTAINABILITY FOR OUR COMMUNITY

Sustainability is an approach to planning and problem-solving that minimizes negative environmental, economic and social impacts from the actions of the community. This approach not only manages negative impacts, but also maximizes the benefits in these three areas.

Sustainable choices create benefits across the City. Communities that commit to sustainability have stronger economies, bounce back more easily after disasters, are inclusive of all types of people, and are enjoyable places to live and work. Working together towards sustainability will promote investment in the South Bend community, celebrate and preserve local assets, and cultivate parks and open spaces – all values shared by SB150.



## ZERO WASTE EVENTS

Community events are an excellent opportunity to practice making sustainable choices. SB150 events will be highly visible indicators of South Bend's values as a community. Zero waste events will educate the South Bend community in sustainability principles and will send a message to the region that South Bend is investing in a strong future.

### Definition of Zero Waste Event

An event designed to minimize harmful impacts and maximize efficiency and waste reduction, while having a positive effect on the community.

Events, ranging from meetings to festivals, impact the environment and the surrounding community in several ways, including;

- Transportation – traffic congestion, parking, air pollution
- Waste – huge quantities of disposable products and food waste
- Printing & Advertising – increased paper and banner use, promotional items
- Food Service – lack of healthy, vegetarian, or local options
- Energy & Water Use – generators, temporary lighting, audio systems

With early commitment and careful planning, organizations planning SB150 events can reduce impacts in each of these areas using the strategies and resources in this guide.

# GETTING STARTED:

## COMMITMENT AND COMMUNICATION

A successful zero waste event requires a clear and early commitment by the host organization. Working closely with staff, event partners, and vendors before the event is essential to meeting zero waste goals during the event.

**Strategy:** Select vendors committed to sustainability practices to support the organization's efforts.

**Strategy:** Prepare a written statement of commitment to zero waste events. Connect to the organization's mission and values.

**Strategy:** Work with event-planning staff to assign clear roles and responsibilities related to zero waste activities.

Communicating the host organization's commitment to holding a zero waste event is essential to its success.

**Strategy:** Share the written statement with all your staff, vendors, suppliers, and volunteers as early as possible. Incorporate desired behaviors into event trainings and guidelines. Emphasize the organization's values and goals with all vendors.

**Strategy:** Mention the zero waste nature of the event on all marketing materials. Prepare participants in advance for sustainable features they may see, and for ways that they will be asked to contribute.

**Strategy:** During the event, communicate the "what, why, how" to help all participants contribute to zero waste behaviors and learn the value of those behaviors. Utilize signage, staff, or volunteers to remind attendees and vendors of expectations.

**Strategy:** After the event, debrief on the successes and issues with hosting a zero waste event. Include sustainability in any post-event surveys or evaluations.



## BASIC STRATEGIES

There are two overarching themes found in a successful, educational, zero waste event.

*Engagement of Participants* – Events designed to engage and educate all participants (vendors, staff, volunteers, the press, and attendees) help ensure the event meets its zero waste goals, and also has a lasting impact - increasing awareness of sustainability issues and behaviors in our community.

*Procurement of Goods and Services* - Thoughtful procurement of goods and services can reduce and reclaim waste, limit transportation emissions, and even benefit the local economy.

The specific opportunities to reduce impacts at SB150 events are described in this guide in the following Opportunity Categories:

- Transportation
- Waste
- Printing & Advertising
- Food Service
- Energy & Water Use

### **Managing an Event's Carbon Footprint**

Reducing greenhouse gases is an excellent cross-cutting goal for a zero waste event. By carefully pursuing strategies in other Opportunity Categories, the host organization can dramatically improve the event's carbon footprint.

If the host organization is interested in a “carbon neutral” event, it must estimate the emissions of all activities at the event, minimize emissions when possible, and purchase carbon offsets for the remaining emissions. Several online resources are available to assist in these calculations and identifying low-cost offsets.

# OPPORTUNITY AREAS

## TRANSPORTATION

Travel to and around South Bend for an event will be a significant contributor of greenhouse gases and other air pollutants. With speakers, attendees, and vendors, along with supplies and equipment, all traveling to the site, traffic and parking congestion can also become an issue that diminishes the participants' experience during the event. Strategies to reduce the amount of travel needed, to encourage alternatives to driving, and, if vehicles must be used, to maximize fuel efficiency and reduce environmental consequences can help address the otherwise large impacts from transportation.

### Reduce Travel

**Strategy:** Select locations that are easily accessible by a variety of transportation options.

**Strategy:** Consider live teleconferences or recorded speeches for some speakers.

**Strategy:** Facilitate shared rides from the airport and train stations.

### Support Alternatives to Driving

**Strategy:** Provide ample details on alternative transportation (biking, walking, and transit) in all marketing and participant materials.

**Strategy:** Make biking easy by providing secured bike parking and, if possible, changing areas during the event. Provide information on biking to the event, such as bike maps and bike parking locations. Remind users that TRANSPO buses can carry bikes.

**Strategy:** Encourage people to walk by making it safe and convenient - provide escorts, shuttles, crossing assistance, and well-lighted paths between and to/from event areas.

**Strategy:** Promote the use of transit. Provide TRANSPO instructions specific to the host organization's event. Work with TRANSPO or other appropriate agencies to offer additional service (like later or earlier buses, route adjustments, or shuttles).



## Use Vehicles Effectively

**Strategy:** Use the right-sized vehicle for the job – SUVs and trucks aren't needed for most tasks, and often even a simple golf cart or utility vehicle is sufficient.

**Strategy:** Use hybrid or electric cars or trucks, or those fueled with compressed natural gas (CNG), biodiesel, or ethanol. For rental cars, request alternative fuel or low-emissions options. Encourage smooth driving and inflated tires to reduce fuel consumption.

**Strategy:** Avoid entering grass areas/parks with motorized vehicles to prevent wear and damage. Park nearby and use a handcart to bring in materials.

**Strategy:** Prohibit engine idling by all vehicles.

**Strategy:** Have a volunteer/staff person monitor the load-in and load-out to ensure vehicles are complying with guidelines.

**Strategy:** Encourage staff and attendees to carpool.



## WASTE

Public events produce a huge amount of waste. Traditionally, events rely on disposable items which are transferred to landfills after their single use. The “Three Rs” – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle – are still as meaningful today as they were decades ago. Consider the disposal of any item purchased, and plan for recycling, to cut down on trash created at the event. Food waste composting or a “zero-waste event” are great goals for organizations ready to go even further.

### Smart Purchasing

**Strategy:** Pursue creative options for sourcing materials, equipment, or supplies, such as borrowing, buying second-hand, or doubling up with another event.

**Strategy:** Reuse name tags, supplies, artwork, and decorations from previous events. Collect name tags or badges at the end of the event for reuse or recycling.

**Strategy:** Request vendors supply quotes for non-disposable, recyclable, compostable, or otherwise sustainable materials.

**Strategy:** Discourage the use of harsh chemicals such as paints, insect sprays, and many cleaning materials.

**Strategy:** Avoid products that cannot be recycled or composted (plastic wrap, Styrofoam, plastic utensils, plastic-coated cups, plastic bags, etc).



## Recycling and Composting

**Strategy:** Communicate waste reduction and anti-litter goals before the event to all vendors and participants. Explain available options and desired behaviors so that participants know what to expect.

**Strategy:** Ask vendors what recyclables, food waste, or grease waste they expect to produce, to determine the types and volume of containers needed.

**Strategy:** Communicate waste reduction and anti-litter goals during the event through signage and announcements. Use visuals to demonstrate desired behaviors. Clarify that “waste” or “trash” goes to the landfill.

**Strategy:** Carefully select waste service providers and incorporate the selected provider early in the planning process. The right provider will advocate for and independently manage a low-waste event. Providers unused to offering recycling and/or composting services will need additional oversight and support.

**Strategy:** Provide clearly marked containers for landfill, recyclables, and compost. Place recycling/compost bins next to trash bins for optimal usage. Ensure bins are readily available and large enough (or emptied often enough) to accommodate expected waste, to prevent litter and contamination of non-trash containers. Station volunteers to educate on proper disposal of waste, recyclables, and compostables.

**Strategy:** Work with your waste service provider to measure, calculate, and celebrate waste diverted from the landfill.

## PRINTING & ADVERTISING

Many special events communications materials, such as invitations, programs, name tags, signs, presentation materials (handouts, booklets, giant easel notepads), can be distributed electronically and/or have reusable alternatives. Other marketing materials, such as signs, banners, and giveaway items can be sourced in ways that conserve resources, benefit the local economy, and protect workers. Being selective with printing and promotional items saves time, money, and the environment and is a reflection of the host organization's commitment to reducing its impact.

### Paper & Printing

**Strategy:** Distribute physical handouts and marketing material only to those with a genuine interest or need.

**Strategy:** Print responsibly to manage impact - double-sided, using high recycled-content paper certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, with vegetable-based ink.

**Strategy:** Use name badges made with recycled materials. Select reusable nametags when reasonable.

**Strategy:** Ensure there is a convenient place for handouts, name badges, and programs to be returned or recycled.

**Strategy:** In group activities, seek out whiteboards and projectors instead of flip charts.

**Strategy:** Provide presentations electronically after an event, rather than providing handouts.

**Strategy:** Instead of printing and mailing, use online event registration and email to manage invitations and RSVPs.

### Zero-Waste Event

Any one-time program, occasion or event that reduces waste by diverting 90% or more of trash from landfills by recycling and composting.

### Marketing and Promotional Items

**Strategy:** Print signs, posters, and banners without a date so that they might be reused. Source recycled and recyclable marketing materials.

**Strategy:** Provide event guides, agendas, and programs are posted online prior to the event or distributed electronically. Consider using a smartphone application to allow participants to access information during the event without having a paper copy.

**Strategy:** Ensure that event giveaways are reusable, recyclable, and of likely value to attendees (reusable bags, water bottles, coffee mugs, live plants, etc.). For special gifts or favors, purchase locally-made items.

**Strategy:** Make sure all event purchases, promotional materials and giveaways are designed to be used multiple times. Purchase items with all of the host organization's events in mind.

**Strategy:** Select T-shirts or other manufactured promotional items are made using sustainable materials and ethical business practices.

## FOOD SERVICE

Food and beverages served at events provide many opportunities for zero waste event hosts. Reducing waste, encouraging fair treatment of farm workers, supporting local farms and businesses, choosing environmentally friendly options, providing healthy options, and educating attendees are all benefits of carefully managing food, beverages, and food service supplies.

### Food

**Strategy:** Offer meal and snack options for vegetarians, vegans, and those with health restrictions.

**Strategy:** Seek out caterers committed to sustainable food and practices. Maximize locally grown/produced, in-season, or organic food options.

**Strategy:** Buy in bulk when possible to reduce waste. Serve in bulk to avoid single-serving containers. Avoid unnecessary packaging and plastic bags. Avoid individually-wrapped items. Select food that minimize the need for packaging, utensils, or other waste.



**Strategy:** Educate attendees about the sustainable characteristics of food being served.

**Strategy:** Offer buffets over pre-prepared boxed lunches to reduce both food and packaging waste. Choose smaller buffet plates and less variety of dishes to avoid food waste.

**Strategy:** Consider salads and cold foods instead of hot food to reduce energy used for cooking and heating.

**Strategy:** Choose white meat over red meat: cows and sheep contribute greenhouse gases that other animals do not and have larger impacts on the land. If beef is served, choose grass-fed beef, as grain-fed meat requires three times the fossil fuel input.  
**Strategy:** Donate event leftovers (fresh, cooked, or still-packaged food) to food banks or shelters. Create a plan and a partnership in advance – not all non-profit organizations can take advantage of all types of leftover food.

## Beverages

**Strategy:** Avoid bottled water. Provide drinking water dispensers or pitchers of tap water and encourage attendees to bring their own reusable bottles.

**Strategy:** If disposable cups are provided, ensure they are recyclable or compostable and place appropriate bins near the water dispensers.

**Strategy:** Select soft drinks with a minimum of synthetic ingredients.

**Strategy:** Ensure drink containers and packaging are recyclable before purchasing.

**Strategy:** Serve Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance, locally-roasted and/or organic coffees.

**Strategy:** Choose Indiana, Michigan or other locally grown wine. Wines produced organically typically have less environmental impact than traditional winemaking.

**Strategy:** Serve beer on draught to significantly reduce waste. Borrow keg taps. Source local beer to reduce environmental impacts of transportation and boost the area economy.



## Food Service Supplies

**Strategy:** Minimize the use of disposable service items (straws, cup lids, utensils) and instead opt for durable/reusable service items (such as souvenir cups).

**Strategy:** If disposable serving ware is unavoidable, consider using biodegradable or compostable plates and ensure that appropriate bins are available. Alternatively, specify recycled-content/recyclable service ware and instruct participants to recycle.

**Strategy:** Use unbleached or chlorine-free paper products (like coffee filters and napkins).

**Strategy:** Most venues around South Bend will provide cloth tablecloths and napkins, real glassware, and reusable dishes and silverware when specified by the host organization.

**Strategy:** For casual events, such as those in a home or church, request members of the organization bring reusable items from home.

## ENERGY AND WATER

Conserving resources has many positive environmental benefits, and can also yield cost savings. In addition, many strategies provide educational opportunities for attendees to learn ways to be more efficient at home, or to see innovative energy ideas.

### Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy

**Strategy:** Choose event rooms or outdoor areas that have a lot of natural light. Use only the light that's needed for the space and use energy-efficient LED or induction lights.

**Strategy:** Use simple measures like pulling the blinds closed in summer to avoid excess heat and holding events in naturally warm areas in winter. When holding an indoor event, keep doors and windows closed and encourage use of revolving doors.

**Strategy:** Task staff and volunteers with turning off and unplugging audio/visual, computer, and other electrical equipment when not in use. Provide power strips to easily control many pieces of energy-using equipment.

**Strategy:** Educate attendees on energy-saving features of the selected venue.

**Strategy:** Use biofuel generators instead of diesel or gas. Even better, replace generators with solar panels to power equipment or lighting as a visible commitment to a zero waste event.



### Water

**Strategy:** Choose locations for outdoor events that feature landscaping that does not require much watering.

**Strategy:** Educate attendees on water-saving features of the selected venue.

**Strategy:** Protect the river, streams, and storm sewers from trash and runoff from the event site.

# CONCLUSION

Zero waste events demonstrate a commitment to protecting the environment, growing the economy, and ensuring social equity. Planning a zero waste event as part of SB150 reflects these values, shared by the host organization and the South Bend community as a whole.

This guide provides a basic overview of opportunities for a sustainable SB150 celebration. For assistance with any specific zero waste event topic, contact the **City of South Bend Office of Sustainability** at [sustainability@southbendin.gov](mailto:sustainability@southbendin.gov) or **574.235.5910**. The Office of Sustainability is committed to supporting SB150 community partners.

