

Recycling at Special Events

Recycling at special events can provide opportunities for communities to demonstrate environmental leadership. Increased recycling and waste minimization efforts send a positive public message and can help lower trash disposal fees. Venues could include festivals, fairgrounds, block parties, and convention centers.

Re•think



Re•do



Re•new



Mid-America Regional Council
Solid Waste Management District

Who's in charge?

- Identify a primary coordinator to implement recycling efforts.
- Consider multiple coordinators to manage different aspects of the program, such as education, vendors, and hauling logistics.

What will be collected?

- Figure out what materials will be generated at the event.
- Consider potential end-markets for your recyclable and compostable material when determining targeted materials.
- Event organizers can influence waste stream composition by collaborating with vendors.

Assess local markets for recyclable materials

- Identify materials to be recycled and ensure end-markets exist for those materials.
- Work with your waste hauler to see if they provide recycling services. Make sure they can guarantee materials are reaching proper end-markets.
- Some haulers may provide recycling containers.
- Some items may generate income; others are revenue neutral or require a tip fee.
- If tip fees for recyclables are required, they may offset tip fees for disposal.

Design a user-friendly collection and sorting system for patrons

- Collection stations are areas where recycling, trash and composting containers are placed together for convenience.
- Recycling containers should be located next to a trash container whenever possible.
- Clearly mark collection stations/containers.
- Keep collection stations neat and attractive.
- Locate collection stations near vendors, restrooms, and at event entrances and exits.
- Staff at collection stations can assist in preventing recyclables from entering the waste stream and contamination of recyclables.

Vendor recycling

- To minimize waste, encourage or require vendors to use recyclable products.
- Make it convenient for vendors to recycle.
- Designate one or more collection points away from foot traffic.
- Consider separating vendor recycling from public recycling areas and assign staff or volunteers to regularly collect material from vendor areas.
- If vendors are expected to generate significant waste, consider supplying each vendor with the materials necessary to recycle within their booth, such as clear bags that allow for easy identification of contamination.
- Assign staff or volunteers to regularly collect recyclables from vendors to encourage participation.

Education is key to success

- Organizers should ensure that vendors, recycling crews, and attendees are well-informed of the recycling efforts and procedures.

Vendor education

- Use contracts with vendors as an opportunity to set standards for recycling and use of recyclable materials at the event.
- Organizers may distribute recycling information to vendors as they arrive at the venue or circulate among booths before the event begins.

Public education

- Use every opportunity to publicize recycling efforts.
- Display recycling information on outdoor signage.
- Include recycling information in event advertisements (e.g. newspaper, website, etc.).
- Include recycling information in pre-registration packets.
- During events, make recycling as convenient as trash disposal.
- Collection stations should clearly marked and easy to use.
- Delegate staff and volunteers at the collection stations to provide one-on-one information to patrons.

Partnerships and volunteers

- Sufficient staff or volunteers are important to the success of event recycling.
- Potential volunteers may be available through a variety of civic groups in your community.
- Have volunteer roles in place prior to the event, and delegate specific tasks as appropriate.
- Consider employing short shifts to avoid volunteer burnout.
- Reward volunteers so they will be encouraged to volunteer at future events.

Local governments can establish special event recycling programs and policies

- Pass a local ordinance requiring special event recycling or require a recycling plan to be a part of the special event permit application.
- Use contracts to discourage the use of materials at special events for which recycling markets are weak or do not exist.
- Provide incentives for special event organizers to offer recycling such as refunding, reducing or waiving required deposit or permitting fees.
- Purchase recycling containers and make them available for rental or loan to event organizers.

Additional Resources

- Bridging The Gap in Kansas City, Mo., has a loan program for recycling containers. They also have a useful guide on special event recycling, available at www.bridgingthegap.org
- The city of Kansas City, Mo., loans containers for special events. Contact the Kansas City Solid Waste Division at 826-513-3470.
- Wyandotte County loans containers as well. Contact Livable Neighborhoods at 913-573-8737.
- The city of Lenexa has had great success with event recycling, particularly with outreach and recruiting volunteers. Contact the Lenexa Public Works Department at 913-477-7500.
- Samples of special event recycling ordinances can be found at www.marc.org/Environment/SolidWaste.