

Workshop Recommendations

For the Festivals & Events Recycling Toolkit and zero waste events in the RDOS

Introduction

The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 significantly impacted GreenStep's ability to deliver the RDOS's Business Waste Education Program, especially the Festivals & Events Program Design & Engagement phase. This phase was deferred to the Fall of 2021, because GreenStep wanted to wait for COVID restrictions to end and the events industry to recover from the pandemic. In this phase, GreenStep completed the following:

- Identified key festival- and event-related community organizers, and other stakeholders, and held a virtual workshop over Zoom in November 2021 to review the toolkit, seek input, and make specific goals for zero- and reduced-waste events in 2022.
- Conducted a best practice review for zero waste community events to identify other models (in and outside of the RDOS that could be adopted within the region.
- Based upon these consultations and research, made recommendations for how the RDOS can best support reduced waste events in 2022, including recommendations and costs for bins that event organizers can access.



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Virtual Workshop

GreenStep gathered a list of contacts from parks and recreation and waste management departments of municipalities; event organizers of festivals, marathons, and car shows; downtown associations and chambers of commerce; and conference/events centres and galleries. The contact list was compiled by several online searches of events and venues in Keremeos, Penticton, Princeton, Oliver, Osoyoos, and Summerland. The final list totalled 53 contacts and included some contacts that were referred to by the original contact list; for example, someone from an organization or municipality would let GreenStep know that a colleague might be interested in attending the workshop.

The goal of the workshop was to have festival and event organizers provide feedback on the [Festivals & Events Toolkit](#) specifically and about the event industry in general. The toolkit was designed for setting up and maintaining successful waste diversion programs at festivals and events, and was intended for event organizers, conference coordinators, green teams, local governments, and concerned citizens to use for their events.

The toolkit was included in the workshop invitation, with the intention that the guests would have reviewed the toolkit before attending the workshop. The workshop was held over Zoom on Thursday, November 18th, 2021 for two hours, facilitated by Angela Nagy, CEO of GreenStep Solutions. Ten participants and three GreenStep staff participated in the discussion. GreenStep shared a brief presentation introducing the goals of the workshop, the definition of zero-waste events, and a review of the RDOS Festivals & Events Waste Reduction Toolkit. Following that, participants split into three breakout sessions and were asked a series of questions:

1. What are (or did) you currently do to support reduced waste and recycling at events (think pre, during, post)?
2. What are/were the barriers to doing more?
3. In addition to the toolkit, would bins and zero/minimum waste kits provided by the RDOS support you in running reduced/zero-waste events? What else is needed?
4. Would you be willing to commit to trying to run one or more zero-waste event(s) in 2022? Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would need to make this happen?



The following four sections list the common suggestions and themes from the discussion questions above.

What are you doing to support reduced waste and recycling at events (think pre-, during, and post-event)?

Infrastructure

- Group together similar recycling and garbage bins, with coloured balloons - green for compost, blue for recycling, black for garbage - to improve visibility.
- Standardized bins for all events throughout the region.
- In bear-aware communities, metal bins should be used for garbage and recycling, although better signage on these bins are needed.
- Some events have smaller waste bins (not carts). Some may have metal racks with clear plastic bags to show the waste inside the stream.
- Get higher quality bins so that the bins are more durable and last longer.
- Penticton has started standardizing streetscape bins on municipal streets.

Volunteers

- The hardest position to fill is the clean-up crew. Partner with groups (school teams, community teams/groups) that could volunteer for an honorarium.
- [One Sky](#) is a group of individuals that are available to volunteer, and they receive the proceeds from the depot refundables, as well as a flat-rate donation. This means one less volunteer group that is needed to recruit.
- [Penticton and District Community Living](#) is another great group to partner with. They created an internal contest for who could collect the most recyclables.
- Municipal environmental summer students can work at events, teaching attendees about diverting waste from residential waste streams (as well as how to divert waste at the particular event).
- Like many mall food courts, get volunteers/workers to sort waste off a food tray, etc.

Examples of Low-Waste Events

- For Healthy Living Fair and [RV Show](#): switched from sponsored t-shirts (which would end up at Value Village or in the landfill), they moved to a “Wal-Mart Greeter” style



vest that were reused year after year. This cut thousands of dollars from event t-shirt costs, as well as downstream waste.

- [Fest-of-Ale](#) gives guests a single beer glass which is kept for the whole event. They also use plastic tokens instead of tickets which can be reused every year, and the food vendors are the only waste-producers at that event.
- [Festival of Grape](#) also gives a single wine glass which is kept for the whole event.
- At the [Downtown Penticton farmers market](#), [Backyard Beans](#) uses donated or thrift store coffee mugs to distribute coffee.
- UNBC [Borrow-A-Mug](#) program: students and staff can get coffee in a clean mug around campus, then place it in a dirty mug bin.
- At a City of Penticton summer BBQ, summer students were asked to source food items with as little packaging as possible.

Ideas for Zero-Waste Initiatives at Events

- In a broad sense, reduce all things used or needed at events. Ask if there are more sustainable ways to procure food for events, or use shirts made from more sustainable fibres (or no shirts at all!).
- Make sustainability part of the grant application process. When non-profit organizations are applying for event grants, they should be asked if they are making it a sustainable event.
- Encourage offset credits: create a plan that event organizers must follow, or provide the organizers the opportunity to reduce their waste (to save venue time and money) so that the venue fees can be reduced. This would need to be negotiated into the venue agreement.
 - Add some additional offset suppliers, such as Cowichan Energy Alternatives, and other BC-based offset suppliers.
- Initiate a Plastic Water Bottle Reduction initiative. Rent large tubs that can provide a gravity feed water station at aid stations and distribute reusable water bottles that would be their cup for the event.
 - [City of Richmond](#) has a bookable tap water station for events to eliminate bottled water consumption.
- Move towards digital entry packages to reduce waste (paper, bags, etc).
- Rethinking athlete packages: t-shirts, and moving toward coupons for local restaurants that support the local economy and reduce the food and dish waste as an alternative to big pre-race/post-event dinners (which often use disposable dishes and create a lot of food waste).



- Public education about what can be recycled and what can not. There is confusion about recycling throughout the Okanagan in different districts. More signage may be helpful.

What are the barriers to doing more?

Financial capital

- Priority is given to large budget items that are “must haves” while adding lower-cost (but important) amounts for increased recycling to “do the right thing” can feel daunting.
- Venue costs are likely to increase post-COVID (to make up for lost revenue). Recycling and garbage disposal costs also likely to increase.
- Obtaining a recycling bin from Waste Connections is cost-prohibitive. Existing bins are over-used and overflowing, and there are a lack of people to help maintain them.

Human resources

- Need more volunteer person-power; hard to get things started.
- Not everyone likes or understands garbage and recycling, so there needs to be proper education for volunteers on what goes where.

Logistics

- Where will the RDOS store any shared-use bins that they do procure?
- Will need more bins and then the proper disposal for those bin contents.
- Pre-COVID, lots of events occurred at the same time. This requires intentional thought for allocating resources ahead of time (versus last-minute organizing), understanding roles and responsibilities, as well as outreach needs.

General Barriers

- Waste management is not typically the focus of event organizers
- Compost facilities are not widely available and compostable plastics are a problem item: often considered a form of “greenwashing,” they are not typically compostable unless diverted to an industrial composting facility
 - E.g., Compostable plastic cups cannot go into the recycling stream, whereas plastic cups can.



- Guests don't know, don't care, or there aren't enough bins.
- Some groups are good at diverting and some groups need improvement.
- Non-profit groups look to the municipality to provide them with necessary equipment to properly divert waste; each event buying bins is cost-prohibitive and there are storage issues, etc.

In addition to the toolkit, would bins and zero/minimum waste kits provided by the RDOS support you in running reduced/zero-waste events? What else is needed?

- RDOS Play Initiative - Instead of using the events budget/resources to host, for example, a children's activity, the [RDOS Physical Activity Trailer](#) can be used.
 - This leaves more resources for doing minimum waste things.
 - Used an Active Communities Grant.
 - If event organizers could borrow a self-contained trailer (or trailers), a summer student could bring the trailer to events and conduct educational activities.
- Have a kit for events to borrow with the waste bins:
 - Some printed signage.
 - Personal protective equipment for volunteers, such as gloves, etc
 - A reusable waste volunteer uniform.
 - An educational program for volunteers to learn how to use the waste kits (bins, signage, etc) appropriately.
 - Multiple small bins for waste would be better than one big bin.
- Start a Green Team or volunteer pool.
- Remove the financial barrier for non-profit organizations to self-haul their waste, potentially a landfill tipping fee waiver if they encourage recycling at their event.
- Recycling stations should have green bins for compost if available.
- Creates a network of community gardens within the RDOS that accept small amounts of compost, for event organizers to connect with.
- To reduce paper waste at events, provide business cards with QR codes or links to the same information.
- Hand out useful swag such as reusable bags, water bottles, etc.
 - QR codes on the swag for more information about the program
- Create communications materials (posters and email scripts) to encourage guests going to an event to bring their own plate, cutlery, cup, etc.



Would you be willing to commit to trying to run one or more zero-waste event(s) in 2022? Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would need to make this happen?

- An information binder was put together for filming organizations coming to Penticton to be a part of the community, and it requires them to complete a checklist.
 - Should require a sustainability/waste checklist to be completed as part of an event application. It should be shared with all venues, event organizers, and executive directors for nonprofit societies.
- The RDOS is having a Christmas event. It will be good to notice how much waste is generated, and create a baseline for measuring progress. They could use wooden cutlery and paper straws (ones without plastic wrappers).
- Try to find alternatives to polystyrene packaging.
- Encourage bringing reusables, now that COVID restrictions are lifting ([research suggests](#) that COVID is not transmitted on surfaces).
- The company [Reusables](#) provides reusable take-out containers for public use, which people can return to a drop-off location.

Key Recommendations

These recommendations have been developed based on the above discussion points, in order to help the RDOS, event organizers, and other stakeholders divert waste efficiently and correctly at events. There is so much more that can be recycled now and that's why it's important to have a good recycling system at festivals and events. While there are many challenges to effective waste diversion, particularly at public events, implementing any of these recommendations will go a long way toward achieving low-to-zero waste in the RDOS.

Changes to Toolkit

- The only commercial compost contractor in the region, Spa Hills, should be referred to in the toolkit when mentioning commercial composting.
- Change the language around hauling waste to depots: currently, depots are only for residential use and do not typically accept commercial sources of waste.



- Clarify what needs to be recycled through a hauler (this will depend on the hauler).
- Change “Styrofoam” to “foam packaging”

Education and Communications

- Provide general education for RDOS residents about what goes where and the importance of recycling and diverting waste from the landfill, which should help them divert waste correctly at public events
- Encourage event attendees to “Bring Your Own (BYO)”: Draft communication materials (posters and email scripts) prior to or during events, to encourage guests to bring their own plate, cutlery, cup, etc.
- Enlist volunteers to sort waste or stand near bins to help event guests sort their waste.
 - Partner with groups (school teams, community teams/groups) that could volunteer for an honorarium.
 - Provide an educational program for volunteers to learn how to use the waste kits (bins, signage, etc) appropriately.

Infrastructure

- RDOS: obtain high-quality, durable, standardized bins for all events throughout the region.
- RDOS: obtain a trailer for storing/transporting these bins, to incentivize event organizers by making the logistics of recycling easier at events.
- RDOS: purchase a refillable water station that can be rented out to events and encourage “Bring Your Own Bottle (BYOB)” campaigns.