

LOW-WASTE EVENTS GUIDELINES



Reducing Food Waste in Events

Food waste remains one of the most visible and solvable sustainability challenges within the events industry. Pilot data from six business conferences revealed that, on average, 42% of prepared food went uneaten. These findings demonstrate both the magnitude of the opportunity and the critical need for consistent practices that minimize food waste.

Across conferences, meetings, and conventions, large quantities of food go uneaten not because of intent, but because of fragmented communication, inconsistent planning processes, and the absence of shared expectations between planners and venues. The Low-Waste Events Guidelines were developed through the U.S. Food Waste Pact pilot to address these gaps. They translate lessons from real event data into clear, actionable practices for both planners and venues.

Together, these guidelines aim to make waste prevention a standard part of event design and delivery—reducing environmental impact, improving cost efficiency, and strengthening collaboration across teams. While separate versions of the guidelines outline role-specific actions for planners and venues, they are designed to work as a unified framework. When applied together, they create a consistent, transparent process that reduces overproduction, improves recovery, and builds trust throughout the event lifecycle.

PLANNER GUIDELINES



Planners play a defining role in shaping food waste outcomes. From the earliest client conversations to post-event reflection, planners' actions influence how much food is prepared, served, and ultimately consumed. By setting clear expectations, collaborating closely with venues, and applying lessons from each event, planners can turn food waste reduction from an aspiration into standard practice—reducing waste, strengthening partnerships, and driving lasting change across the industry. These guidelines, along with the accompanying toolkit, provide clear, timely actions to help you lead that change.

Discover

- Add food waste prevention and recovery to internal planning agendas and pre-con meetings.
- Confirm the venue's donation, compost, and diversion partners, and document expectations in contracts, Banquet Event Orders (BEOs), and client materials.
- Share best-available attendance insights (e.g., no-shows, early departures, consumption patterns) throughout the event lifecycle to support real-time adjustments that reduce waste.

Design

- Co-design menus with the venue to reduce highly wasted foods, limit preset items, and avoid unnecessary menu variety.
- Align with the venue on portioning and service formats for top menu items, including strategies to avoid overproduction of special meals.

Deliver

- Agree in advance on how real-time adjustments will be handled—such as slowing or stopping refills, consolidating stations, or shifting service as guest flow changes.
- Embed food waste expectations into BEOs and on-site communications so all teams execute the plan consistently.

Debrief

- Request a post-event summary on production, consumption, surplus, donation, and composting, and capture insights to improve future forecasting and menu planning.

Ready to put these guidelines into action? Dive into the Low-Waste Events Toolkit to leverage checklists and templates that enable your team to embed these practices into day-to-day operations and track improvements over time.