

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.

VENUE GUIDELINES



Venue teams shape food waste outcomes through every stage of an event—from planning and ordering to preparation, service, and post-event recovery. Venues' decisions determine not only how food is produced and presented, but also how much is ultimately eaten, repurposed, donated, or discarded. When teams work in alignment toward shared goals, waste prevention becomes a natural part of how events are planned, delivered, and remembered—demonstrating leadership in sustainable event operations. These guidelines, along with the accompanying toolkit, provide clear, timely actions to help venues lead that change.

Design

- Review upcoming food waste prevention opportunities as a team during weekly planning meetings.

Order

- Identify donation, compost, or other diversion partners for keeping food waste out of landfill, and make planners and clients aware of these partnerships.
- Order no more than 3–5% above confirmed guest counts—track actual attendance to refine production numbers.

Prep

- Create and use standardized portion specifications for your top five to 10 most-ordered items.

Serve

- Right-size your serving vessels (e.g., trays, carafes, serving spoons, chafing dishes with half pans) to match your portion specifications and maintain visual appeal through frequent, smaller refills.

Eat

- Agree upon service end times with planners in advance. In the final 15–20 minutes, reduce refill frequency and consolidate lines as guest flow decreases.

Debrief

- Send donation, compost, and food waste prevention summaries to planners after each event, highlighting outcomes and opportunities.

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.