The 'Just Enough' Project

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Walking across campus on a crisp November morning, I did a mental run-through of the events the day had in store. It was the first student conference of the new academic year.

As I thought about the plans for lunch, I worried for a moment that we had been too aggressive in our 'just enough' ordering strategy. Although there should be 400 lunches for 400 attendees, I was nervous we wouldn't have enough to feed everyone…

I needn't have worried. After lunch a surprisingly large amount of untouched food remained that would sadly go to waste.

The 'Just Enough' Project is Born

We are Isabella Carbonell and Amy Varney, **Student Sustainability Associates** (SSA) class of 2019/2020. After Amy's experience helping organise a student conference we gathered a wealth of anecdotal evidence from SSAs, classmates and HBS Operations about food waste on campus from student-led events. Two things became clear:

1. Over-catering and excess food waste are big problems

2. There is very little data available – quantification is currently impossible

Since it is difficult to manage what you can't measure, we explored the idea of establishing a protocol that conference organisers could follow, which would capture consistent data sets from future events. Ideally, each future conference would capture:

- How many attendees were expected?

- How much food was ordered?

- How many people showed up?

- Was there adverse weather on conference day? *Affects number of attendees.*

- How many meals were leftover?

We thought consistent data sets could be a springboard for future SSAs to work from.

However, speaking with different conference organisers and **Harvard Business School** (HBS) Operations revealed that even at the most basic level we could not reasonably implement a protocol in the project timescale. For example, some conferences had not yet considered the use of technology to assist with identifying how many people actually showed up (e.g. through apps like **Whova**/**Attendify**).

A Food Donation Network

If we couldn't use a data-driven approach to reduce over-catering, the next best thing was to stop excess food being thrown out.

We explored increasing donation through HBS's partnership with local charity **Food For Free**. However, student conferences, held on weekends, presented logistical and food safety challenges to donations, as food is typically out for longer periods of time than is deemed appropriate for food health and safety requirements.

We looked instead to the impressive precedent set by the **Harvard Kennedy School** (HKS). Under the leadership of **Emily Flynn-Pesquera**, ALM, HKS has established a robust food network that notifies members when and where free leftover food is available on campus. Developed in compliance with strict food safety standards, and with strong community values and norms, HKS's opt-in system has been a resounding success.

We were excited and, after receiving guidance from Emily, poised to roll-out a trial on the HBS campus.

Unfortunately, 2020 had something else in store for us all. As the COVID-19 pandemic tightened its grip on the world, HBS campus operations shifted to support remote working and learning, and students and staff returned to their homes around the world. The roll-out would have to wait. However, a pandemic in the era of technology opens your eyes to the way tech can be used to overcome problems…

An Online Resource

Throughout the project we continuously noticed that student leaders were not typically aware of the sustainability resources available to them, but they are the ones in control of ordering food. The school has plentiful resources, but they are detailed and disparate.

Given section and club leadership teams typically have large demands on their time, we set out to consolidate the key points relevant to running a sustainable student event and, more importantly, to increase the awareness of this resource by thinking of effective distribution channels and convenient online access through '**myHBS**'. We are working with the administration and the new Student Association role of VP Sustainability to incorporate sustainability into leadership training sessions that take place each fall semester. We hope the online resource will help make this more accessible and start to reduce food waste at student-led events.

Running a sustainable event entails much more than preventing food waste, this is why the **Sustainable Events Guide** also covers topics such as reducing single use plastic, promoting plant-based meal options, encouraging travelers to use public transportation and rethinking the type of event swag that is provided to attendees. Our belief is that, given the right upfront knowledge and convenient enough resources, club and section leaders can make a significant environmental impact throughout the school year. This can be in the form of pre-ordering compostable cups for all section and club events, purchasing a set of to-go containers that can be re-used by the section to store leftovers or simply by informing conference attendees on the right way to dispose of items while on campus.