

HARVARD STUDENT GROUP SUSTAINABILITY GUIDE



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About This Project:

When I started at Harvard in the Fall 2023 semester, I was amazed at the wide range of student organizations on campus. As I attended events I noticed that many student groups were unaware or faced challenges in incorporating sustainable practices into their activities.

As a student passionate about sustainability, I wanted to bridge this gap. Recognizing that student groups often lacked the necessary resources and knowledge to embrace sustainability, I saw an opportunity to make a change. And so, I created the Student Group Sustainability Guide: a comprehensive resource tailored to equip Harvard students with the tools and insights needed to infuse conscious practices into their organizations.

In creating this guide, I wanted to educate and empower individuals to focus on sustainability in their student groups. Yet, I also wanted to provide a tangible resource to help facilitate the journey toward more sustainable practices.

Sustainability can be a bit overwhelming, right? And that's precisely why the Council of Student Sustainability Leaders and I created this guide! In creating this guide, we incorporated input from students all across Harvard's campuses to best serve your student group. Whether you're organizing events, managing giveaways, or shaping your group's overall practices, I hope this guide can serve as your compass to create a more eco-conscious campus.

Thanks so much for reading and here's to a more sustainable Harvard!
Good luck on your sustainability journey!

-Nicolette Carpenter

Council of Student Sustainability Leaders, 2024

Student Group 4-Step Guide!

Ready to implement the Student Group Sustainability Guide?

Follow these simple steps to integrate sustainable practices, minimize your environmental impact, and build a more sustainable future for your organization!

1

Choose a Sustainability Lead –

Designate one group member to oversee sustainability efforts and communicate with CSSL.

2

Fill Out a Pre-Survey –

Share your group's current sustainability practices in this [short survey](#).

3

Test the Guide –

Use the guide's recommendations in at least one area: event planning, purchasing (e.g., merch, food), etc.

4

Provide Feedback –

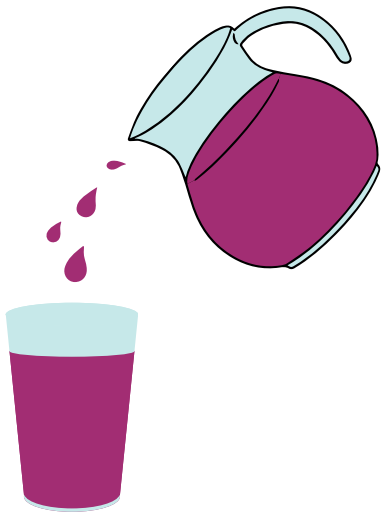
Complete a post-survey in May to let us know what worked, what didn't, and how we can improve the guide.

Sustainable Food Practices

The food provided at an event presents a huge opportunity to advance sustainability and set better norms. Here's the scoop on making your food choices at your event not just good for you, but for the planet too!

Sustainable Catering: Golden Rules

- Animal-based products including meat and dairy typically have a higher environmental impact; consider making your events plant based.
- Stray away from red or processed meat; these have the most negative impact on the environment!
- Offer fruits and vegetables for each meal that is served. Opt for local and in-season options, when possible!
- Ensure each event has options for different dietary restrictions and allergies.
- Check out the [Catering Showcase](#) for examples of some sustainable options!



Sustainable Beverages:

- To reduce waste from single-use plastic water bottles, serve pitchers of tap or filtered water with glass or compostable cups.
- Elevate your water game by infusing with some fresh fruit!
- Don't we all have an emotional support water bottle? Ask members to BYOC- Bring Your Own Cup!
- Offer plant-based milk and creamer when serving coffee or tea.

The Power of RSVP:

RSVP smart, party sustainably! By knowing the guest count, you can order food efficiently, minimize leftovers, and contribute to a waste-free event.

Pro tip: Reach out to members before the event to double-check their attendance status; sometimes, plans change!

If there are leftovers, provide students with compostable containers to take some food home, or have members bring their own reusable containers!



The Power of Defaults

By utilizing different techniques such as nudging and defaults, these subtle yet effective strategies guide students towards more sustainable options without restricting their freedom of choice!

How Do Defaults Work?



Default to plant-based alternatives such as milks, condiments and desserts.

Make plant-based dishes the default choice on the dinner menu and give members the opportunity to opt out if they want a meat or dairy dish.



Offer more plant-based dishes in comparison to meat dishes. Try to accomplish a ratio of 2 plant-based dishes to 1 meat/dairy dish.

This ratio also helps to ensure that plant-based options will be available to vegans/vegetarians!



Nudge members towards choosing plant-based options by placing them at the front of the buffet line.



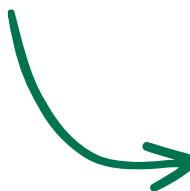
Tips on Defaults and Nudges

1.

We want to encourage members to choose plant-based options, but also want to make sure we are still preserving their freedom of choice, fostering a diverse and inclusive dining environment. Defaults and the option to opt-out are a great way to do so!

2.

Be intentional about the language you use when describing plant-based options. In the main description or name of the dish, use indulgent language such as “flavorful” or “plant-powered”. While you should still label dishes as being vegan/vegetarian for allergies and dietary restrictions, include them elsewhere in the meal description!



Tips to Navigating HUDS

Food caterers on Harvard's campuses and HUDS are all about supporting sustainable choices and minimizing food waste. They also love getting creative with food for student groups and are happy to work with your specific needs!

Let's work with HUDS on being sustainable in food catering!

Here are some questions to guide your conversation about catering from Harvard...

Can you provide plant-based options early in the buffet-line?



By placing plant-based foods early on in the food line, members are more likely to pick it! Or even better, make all options plant-based!

Can you use bulk containers to avoid individually wrapped items?



Opting for eco-friendly materials and practices isn't just about flavor – it's a way of expressing our love for the planet!

Can you offer sustainable beverages such as infused water in pitchers?



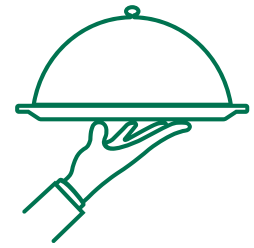
Who ever said water can't be fun? Avoid single use items entirely by having members bring their own cups or using reusable glasses from HUDS.

Can accommodations be made for specific allergies or dietary restrictions?



Ensuring each member of your student group is comfortable and safe with the food being served is vital, and HUDS will make sure to work with you!

Questions For Your Caterer



Sustainable Materials



Can you provide BPI compostable materials?

If the caterer offers BPI-certified compostable materials, communicate the headcount of your event and how much is needed. If not, consider sourcing compostable cutlery from HUDS or alternative suppliers.

Can you provide reusable utensils and glassware instead of disposable items?

If the caterer confirms they can provide reusable utensils and glassware, ensure to discuss logistics such as cleaning and return processes to ensure a smooth transition. If they don't offer these items, inquire if they can accommodate your request or if they can recommend alternative suppliers who do.

What type of packaging materials do you use and are they environmentally friendly?

If the caterer indicates they use environmentally friendly packaging materials, inquire about the specifics of these materials, such as whether they are biodegradable or recyclable, to ensure they meet your sustainability criteria and you know how to properly dispose of them.

Food Waste

What measures do you take to minimize food waste at your restaurant?

If the caterer shares their strategies for reducing food waste, like composting or donating leftovers, acknowledge their efforts and ask for more details on how these practices are implemented. If they don't mention any specific measures, politely inquire if they have any policies in place to minimize food waste and express interest in exploring options for your event.

Could you assist with providing estimates for a specific headcount to reduce food waste?

If the caterer can provide estimates, communicate the headcount of the event and keep them updated if anything changes. If they don't provide estimates, ask for advice on portion planning strategies to prevent over ordering and minimize leftovers.

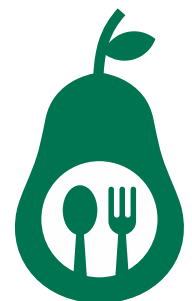
Dietary Restrictions

Can you provide a variety of vegetarian and vegan options?

When asking for vegetarian and vegan options, provide specific details such as the number of each needed and any preferences for ingredients or dishes. This helps caterers better understand your requirements and create a menu that aligns with your event's needs.

How do you accommodate dietary restrictions and allergies?

Provide specific details about the restrictions or allergies involved and ask how the caterer can accommodate them. This ensures clear communication and helps caterers tailor their menu options accordingly to meet your guests' needs.



Off-Campus Caterers with Plant-Based Options



Sweet Green
39 JFK Street



Veggie Galaxy
450 Mass. Ave



Rhythm 'n Wraps
1096 Commonwealth Ave



Life Alive
22 JFK Street



Clover Food Lab
1326 Mass. Ave



Veggie Grill
57 JFK Street



CAVA
22 Brattle Street



Mother Juice
1350 Mass. Ave



Stoked Pizza Co.
1611 Mass. Ave

Signage and Waste Processes



COMPOST:

- Food scraps
- Compostable Containers and Utensils
- Tea Bags and Coffee Grounds
- Napkins and Paper Towels



RECYCLE:

- Glass Bottles and Jars
- Plastic Bottles, Jars, Jugs and Tubs
- Paper, Magazines and Flattened Cardboard
- Metal Cans and Foil

To recycle, make sure the containers are clean and free of food!



TRASH:

- Plastic Bags, Wrappers and Film
- Straws and Utensils
- Foam, Plastic Utensils and Cups
- Single-Serve Packets
- Hot Drink Cups (unless compostable)



HARVARD WASTE
SIGNAGE



Best Practices

1. When in doubt, throw it out!
2. Put up waste signage at events so members know where to properly dispose of their waste
3. Contact Head of Facilities, or Recycling & Waste Services to request bins for your events!

Additional Sustainability Tips

Waste Reduction

Disposing of waste properly is super important, but how can we facilitate it? --- Sustainability Ambassadors!

Give members an opportunity in a leadership position and appoint a Sustainability Ambassador! This role ensures proper waste disposal and drives eco-friendly practices in planning and events.



Food Sustainability

Snack Edition:

What are some delicious snacks that are also friendly to the environment?

- Sliced Fruit
- Nuts
- Veggies with Hummus

Dessert Edition:

First, always consider if dessert is necessary for your event.

However, sometimes we all need a sweet treat! Here are some tasty desserts:

- Fruit, Nuts and Dark Chocolate
- Bite Sized Portions of Vegan Brownies, Cookies and Cake

Meal Example:



What's the most popular food given at events? Pizza!

Here's how pizza can be more sustainable:

- Order from pizzerias that source locally and sustainably
- Opt for plant-based toppings instead of meat.
- Choose a vegan pizza instead of meat toppings

Vegan pizza uses 36% less water, 65% less land and emits 58% fewer greenhouse gases than a meat and dairy pizza!

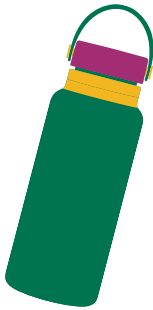
And just to set the record straight, vegan pizza is delicious!

Sustainability is not an all or nothing practice!

Each student group is different and it's important to choose what is attainable for you. Sustainability is a journey and it's okay to start small; making incremental changes over time lead to significant eco-friendly improvements!

Thinking Smart About Merch

As a student, I recognize the value of using merch as an incentive to attract more attendees to your events. However, there are many sustainable approaches we can adopt to enhance our eco-consciousness!



Helpful Tips

- Try not to label anything with the event itself so the leftovers can be reused.
- Make giveaways a consumable.
- Survey the group of giveaways they would use to reduce the possibility of waste.
- Instead of doing a giveaway, offer the incentive of a raffle to lessen the risk of waste.



Consider whether SWAG is necessary; offer experiences instead of things!

Sustainable SWAG

- Reusable Stainless Steel or Glass Bottles
- Potted Plants
- Reusable Tote Bags
- Recycled Notebooks
- Bamboo or Stainless Steel Straws
- Subscription Trials such as Music Streaming or LinkedIn



Sustainable Clothing Tips

- Opt for organic and sustainable fabrics such as organic cotton or recycled polyester.
- Look for clothing items that carry certifications GOTS or OEKO-TEX Standard 100.
- Choose clothing from brands or suppliers that prioritize fair labor practices and ethical manufacturing processes.

Travel Sustainably

Public Transportation

When going on group trips, use public transportation! Cambridge has an incredible public transportation system including the bus and underground train. Also, remember to take advantage of the Blue Bikes discount offered through Harvard! Public transportation not only cuts down your carbon footprint but also keeps your budget happy!

If public transportation is not an option, why not carpool with fellow group members? It lowers emissions and makes the journey more fun!

Guest Speakers

Guest speakers are a great way to enhance the student group experience, but let's think of travel sustainability!

If an in-person presence is preferred, consider the method of travel the speaker will be using. Airplanes produce large amounts of harmful CO₂ emissions into the environment; if possible, opt for a train which are way kinder to the environment.

How can we eliminate the possibility of emissions all together? Zoom! I understand that a virtual presence may not always seem like the best option, but there are numerous benefits to utilizing virtual platforms like Zoom. Not only does it eliminate the environmental impact associated with travel, but it also allows for greater flexibility in scheduling, speakers can reach a wider audience, and minimizes the logistical challenges of in-person events.

Woo-hoo Zoom!



Hosting a Virtual Speaker Tips

1. Coordinate a technical check with the speaker before the event to ensure their audio, video and screen-sharing work smoothly.
2. Share a meeting agenda and schedule to the guest speaker beforehand and outline the discussion points, Q&A sessions and any other interactive portions.
3. Have technical support (HUIT) available during the event to assist the guest speaker with any unforeseen issues that may arise.
4. Designate co-hosts who can assist with managing the Zoom meeting and moderating audience engagement while the speaker focuses on their presentation.
5. Encourage audience engagement through Zoom chat, Q&A, and polling features. Communicate with guests beforehand on how they can actively participate.
6. Explore breakout rooms for interactive discussions or smaller group activities. Familiarize the speaker with this feature if it aligns with the event format.
7. Develop a back-up plan in case of technical issues. This might include having a backup co-host or alternative means of communication if Zoom experiences disruptions.

Promotional Materials

When you're thinking about printing promotional stuff, keep in mind it can generate a lot of waste. Sure, some things are worth printing, but it's key to weigh the pros and cons of printing specific items and see if they really fit your goals. If you decide to print, when possible, don't put specific event details so the poster can be reused in the future!



Now, let's talk alternatives:

In a world where almost everyone is constantly connected to their phone, utilizing digital promotional materials are a guaranteed way to spread the word about your student group!

Capitalizing on Social Media:

Practically everyone uses social media; platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are awesome ways to spread the word without a paper trail. Plus, it's cheaper!



Utilizing Mailing Lists:

We're Harvard students, of course we're constantly checking our email! Have members sign up for your email list and send out all opportunities and events. Mailchimp and Constant Contact are great platforms to check out!



Text Messaging:

Ever thought about using GroupMe or other texting services? Quick, direct, and zero waste generated!

Navigating Sustainability

Sustainability will look different for each and every student group; it's about making thoughtful and attainable choices within the constraints of your resources!

Here are some golden rules to initiate sustainability:

1.

Start Small, Think Big

Start your sustainability journey with manageable steps. Consider easy-to-implement practices that don't strain your budget.

2.

Educate and Engage

Prioritize education and awareness within your group. A well-informed community is more likely to support and participate in sustainable practices!

3.

Adapt and Evolve

Your sustainability approach should be adaptable! As your student group evolves and expands, so can your initiatives.

4.

Spread the Sustainability Message

Share your sustainability efforts on social media and with other student groups to catalyze the impact of eco-consciousness! And don't forget to tag [#SustainableHarvard](#)

Budget-Conscious Initiatives



Every student group is unique and of course, that means different budgets. But guess what? Being sustainable doesn't have to break the bank!

Check out these ideas we talked about earlier and see just how budget-friendly they can be:

Money Savers

- Change from merch giveaways to raffles.
- Choose to ride public transportation instead of ubers.
- Switch to social media marketing instead of printing materials.
- Host your guest speaker over Zoom instead of paying for travel costs.

No Cost

- Collect RSVPs for events to minimize food waste.
- Set up proper waste bins and signage at events.
- Survey your student group for giveaways they are interested in.
- Appoint a Sustainability Ambassador to prioritize eco-consciousness.
- Place plant-based foods at the beginning of the buffet line as a nudge
- Choose plant-based alternatives such as tofu, lentils and beans for events.

Low Cost

- Change to plant-based milk when serving coffee or tea.
- Invest in pitchers for fruit-infused water.
- Opt for compostable cutlery.

Medium-High Cost

- Invest in sustainable merch including stainless steel water bottles, potted plants or tote bags.
- Collaborate with outside plant-based caterers.

