

## **Bridging Communities Through Reuse: Boosting Awareness of the Harvard Surplus Center**

*By the 2024-2025 SSAs from sections I & J*

As Student Sustainability Associates (SSAs) this year, we set out to work on a deceptively simple but high-impact project: increasing awareness and usage of the Harvard Surplus Center—a space that allows students, faculty, and staff to donate and retrieve gently used items, ranging from furniture to clothing to study essentials.

While the concept of reuse is often discussed in sustainability circles, bringing it to life required cross-campus coordination and a strong communications push. Together, we designed and implemented a multi-phase outreach strategy that included eye-catching flyers with QR codes, student club partnerships, and targeted messaging at donation bins and high-traffic locations across Harvard University. What may have looked like a basic advertising campaign on the surface ended up revealing deeper lessons about sustainability, inclusion, and the power of small wins.

We partnered with The Sustainability Club and The Energy & Environment Club at HBS, as well as Harvard College Sustainability REPs, to incorporate Surplus Center promotions into newsletters and student communications. These partnerships were key to embedding long-term visibility, allowing us to create a replicable structure for future events or reminders. Importantly, we focused on building low-maintenance, high-impact systems that could last beyond our involvement—for instance, recommending that one SSA annually check the flyers' visibility, and that Surplus Center staff send a fall reminder to student club leaders about its offerings.

The Surplus Center's mission resonated with us because it operates at the intersection of environmental and economic sustainability. Beyond reducing waste, it directly enhances affordability and accessibility for members of the Harvard community and beyond. A student picking up a lamp or a set of plates for free is not just diverting items from a landfill—they are saving money and feeling more supported in the process. That dual benefit is where we believe sustainability truly thrives.

Through this project, we were reminded that building a more sustainable future doesn't always require cutting-edge tech or sweeping reforms. Sometimes, it starts with a flyer, a community, and a shared sense of purpose.