



Sustainability and Special Events

Special events present unique challenges in terms of solid waste and resource consumption. This document is designed to help guide Knox students and employees through the process of planning events with these important sustainability considerations in mind.

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The “Gate-to-Gate” Principle

The “Gate-to-Gate” principle addresses the life cycle of items used on campus, from the time they enter the campus system to the time they leave. In order for this life cycle to be more sustainable, we should only bring items into our campus system that can be **reused**, **recycled**, **composted**, or a combination of the above. Therefore, especially with single-use items, it is important that we consider our purchases in context with our available disposal options.

Keeping this in mind, we not only improve the sustainability of our operations, but even affect cost savings for the school. Recyclable materials have market value, and therefore have lower disposal costs than landfill-bound items. The campus composting system generates valuable soil for the Knox farm, and carries the lowest disposal cost of all.

Food at Special Events

Waste stations

The Office of Sustainability will provide clearly labeled waste stations for your special events. These waste stations are highly pedagogical, and particularly valuable for events involving new students or visitors who have not yet familiarized themselves with the campus systems for handling waste. These stations can only be effective, however, if the dishes and materials used at your event are aligned with those represented in the waste station displays. Displays can be customized for your event with sufficient prior notice.



At large special events, it is sometimes impractical to provide washable dishes and flatware for food. Where single-use items are required, apply the Gate-to-Gate principle. The handy charts below can help you to consider your servingware options in the context of the Knox system. The Catering division of Knox Dining Services is already aligned on these principles, and will be able to facilitate a low-waste event. If you are contracting an outside caterer, include recyclable or compostable wares in your contractual agreement. If the outside caterer is unable to meet this request, arrange for Dining Services to provide the dishware for your event. Feel free to share this document with outside parties, to guide them in making more sustainable choices.

TABLE 1: Sustainable Servingware, Utensil, and Tableware Choices for Caterers

CATERING ITEM	RECOMMENDED ITEMS	HANDLING OPTION	PROBLEM ITEMS TO AVOID
Eating plates/bowls	Paper plates/bowls*;	Compost	Polystyrene (#6) plates/bowls
Cups	Paper cups preferred*; Plastic #1-5 cups possible (NOT #6)	Compost; Recycling	Plastic #6 cups
Flatware	Washable flatware*	Wash	Plastic flatware
Serving platters, bowls, or trays	Washable Serving Bowls or Platters*; Basket lined with napkin*; Foil roasting trays	Wash; Compost; Recycle	Disposable platters, bowls, especially plastic #6
Toothpicks	Wooden Toothpicks*	Compost	Plastic toothpicks or picks with plastic fringe
Coffee Stir Sticks	Wooden stir sticks*	Compost	Plastic stir straws
Napkins	Paper napkins*	Compost	None - all paper napkins are compostable at Knox.
Table Covering	Washable tablecloth*	Wash	Disposable plastic tablecloth

*NOTE: Knox College Dining Services stocks compostable dishware, washable flatware, table wraps, baskets, and other items that you can arrange to use for your special event.

These further tips can help avoid problem waste items at events with food. Knox Dining Services is equipped to meet all of the recommendations in Column I.

TABLE 2: Sustainable Food Packaging and Servingware Choices for Catered Events

FOOD ITEM	RECOMMENDED SERVING METHOD	NOTES	PROBLEM ITEMS TO AVOID
Coffee Cream	Washable Pitcher		Individually packaged creamers
Pastries	Platter of pastries	muffin papers can be composted at Knox	Individually packaged pastries
Sandwiches	Platter of sandwiches; party sub		Bagged, wrapped, or boxed sandwiches
Condiments, Peanut Butter, Jelly	Standard household-sized condiment containers	Most standard ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, peanut butter, and jelly containers can be recycled. Individual packets cannot.	Individually packaged condiments
Sliced Cheese	Bulk deli-sliced cheese		Individually wrapped cheese slices
Chips or snack mixes	Bulk packages; Bowl or basket for self-serve	Besides reducing packaging waste, this enables individuals to take only what they plan to eat	Individual bags of chips or snack mixes
Water	Water dispensing coolers; reusable or paper cups	Paper cups are compostable at Knox	Bottled water; non-recyclable plastic cups
Beverages	Aluminum cans; Large bottles with paper cups	Cans are easily recyclable; 2-liter bottles are recyclable and paper cups are compostable at Knox	Non-recyclable plastic cups; foil or composite drink packs or drink boxes
Pizza	Paper plates	Pizza boxes are <i>compostable</i> at Knox! Look for collection areas around campus, or contact the Office of Sustainability to have them collected from your event site.	Plastic or foam plates
Event lunch	Platter of sandwiches; bowls of chips; bowls of salad; platter of cookies; paper plates and cups	While “Box lunches” seem convenient, they are wasteful, both in terms of packaging as well as food waste. Platters allow participants to choose the appropriate quantity and items for their appetite and taste.	Packaged, or “Box lunch”

Decorations

Decorating an event can definitely be done sustainably - it just takes a little bit of thought. The following guide will help you to identify problem items, and appropriate alternatives.

Problem items:

- **Balloons** cannot decompose in nature, and they create a myriad of environmental hazards. In addition, helium is a non-renewable resource, and an irreplaceable cooling agent for MRI machines and other important medical technology. (To learn more about these challenges, visit BalloonsBlow.org.)
- **Disposable table coverings and event decor** are increasingly inexpensive, widely available, and make event setup and takedown a snap. However, the environmental and human costs of their manufacture and disposal do not warrant these advantages.

Recommendations:

Consider keeping a set of durable decoration materials that can be reused at for events that your department or office hosts. In addition, sustainable options for decorating an event include:

- locally produced cut flowers (which can be composted later)
- potted plants (which can be reused at multiple events and/or kept in your office)
- reusable ribbons and bows
- country flags; Knox flags
- historical artifacts
- energy-efficient string lights
- rented or borrowed decorations
- non-petroleum-based candles

At outdoor events, consider the following in lieu of balloons:

- Knox banners
- Windsocks or Reusable streamers on tall poles
- “Teardrop flags” or “feather flags”



Promotional Giveaways

Promotional giveaways have become so common that they are almost expected at special events. However, inexpensive items may carry a heavy social or environmental cost, sometimes even directly contradicting the philanthropic purpose they have been used to promote.

If you feel promotional items are an important component of your event plan, please think about the following considerations:



Where and how was it made?

- Did this item's production life cycle entail exploitative work conditions, or was it made fairly?
- Is it made from renewable resources or recycled resources?
- Was the energy used for its production and transport worth it?

Is it useful?

- Will this item continue to serve a useful function for the recipient after the event?
- Even if useful, is this item so common that another might become redundant?

Is it destined for the landfill?

- Is the item recyclable or compostable, or will it be landfilled at the end of its usable life?
- Is the item durable enough to continue being useful for a reasonable amount of time?

The following suggestions may help as you plan for promotional item purchases.

PROMOTIONAL ITEM	TRY ONE OR MORE OF THESE OPTIONS
Garments (Hats, T-shirts, Lanyards)	Recycled polyester or organic cotton; Fair Trade and/or fair labor certified; nontoxic dyes
Tote Bags	Recycled polyester or organic cotton; Fair Trade and/or fair labor certified; nontoxic dyes
Water bottles, Cups, Mugs	Post-consumer recycled content; Fair Trade and/or fair labor certified; Nontoxic dyes; Renewable materials
Edible Treats	Fair trade or Organic
Stationery (notepads, pencils, pens)	Post-consumer recycled content; FSC certified wood; Fair Trade and/or fair labor certified

Landfill-Free events

Knox College has achieved great success as a pioneer of solid-waste-free events. Our advice has now been sought from outside parties, and the value of this sustainable and educational endeavor is being shared with the larger community. Where possible, consider making your event **Landfill-Free!** The Office of Sustainability is always available to help you plan and conduct a minimum-waste event.

Landfill-Free Event checklist

I have:

- ☐ Chosen decorations that will be reused or composted
- ☐ Arranged for dining services to provide compostable dishes and/or washable flatware, where appropriate
- ☐ (If catered by an outside party) Contacted the outside caterer to discuss the Landfill-Free goal, and shared this document with them
- ☐ Arranged to have waste stations delivered by the Office of Sustainability
- ☐ (If catered by Knox Dining Services) Requested for Dining Services to arrange recovery of leftover food for internal use or donation to a local family shelter
- ☐ (If catered by an outside party) Arranged to have leftover food collected and brought to a local family shelter
- ☐ Arranged for decorations to be collected post-event for reuse or composting