



IMPACT AREA:
SUSTAINABILITY

WASTE WATCHERS

A **CITIES OF SERVICE** BLUEPRINT

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WASTE WATCHERS

BACKGROUND
/ P3

**EXECUTING
THE PLAN**
/ P6

**OPTIONAL
ELEMENTS**
/ P12

RESOURCES
/ P14

**REQUIRED
ELEMENTS**
/ P4

**MEASURING
IMPACT**
/ P11

**THE PLAN
IN ACTION**
/ P13

**SPECIAL
THANKS**
/ P16



WASTE WATCHERS

Waste Watchers is a high-impact service strategy in which the mayor's office engages volunteers to increase recycling at public events, thereby significantly reducing the amount of waste sent to the city's landfills.

This initiative utilizes volunteers to staff city events, such as marathons, parades, and city festivals, to decrease the amount of litter and waste being sent to landfills. Volunteers guide event participants in recycling (and/or composting) their trash at these events and, in turn, play a key role in reducing the increase of methane gas in landfills. This is a prime opportunity for cities to demonstrate their commitment to greener cities and for citizens to get engaged.





BACKGROUND

City events such as marathons, bicycle races, art festivals, and holiday parades often generate a considerable amount of litter and waste. Without planning in advance to incorporate recycling into the event, this waste will typically head straight to a landfill. Landfills generate a great deal of methane, a potent greenhouse gas that traps radiation in the earth's atmosphere and is a key contributor to global warming. By supporting recycling at public events, Waste Watchers is an effective way for mayors to stem the flow of waste into landfills.

Here is how it works: With the help of recycling experts such as the city's solid waste department or office of sustainability, volunteers learn which items constitute recyclables and which are trash. Armed with that knowledge, they assist event attendees in placing their waste in the correct receptacles. Following the event, volunteers are encouraged to use their new knowledge to support and expand their own recycling practices, and to spread awareness about waste diversion to their friends and family. In particular, volunteers recruited from neighborhoods with low curbside recycling rates tend to create lasting impact by becoming sustainability advocates in communities previously unaware of or unreceptive to recycling practices. Thanks to Waste Watchers, a city can significantly reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills.





REQUIRED ELEMENTS

- 1** Mayor's office identifies a dedicated Waste Watchers Coordinator responsible for successful implementation of the initiative. The Coordinator role may be filled by a city government employee, a contract employee, an AmeriCorps member, or a full-time volunteer.
- 2** Mayor's office, with support from the Waste Watchers Coordinator, engages the city agency leads responsible for public works, sustainability, and waste management, and local partners involved in public event planning, volunteer engagement, and the waste diversion process to:
 - Develop the Waste Watchers initiative plan;
 - Establish responsibility for volunteer recruitment, training, and management;
 - Guarantee support from city agencies for successful implementation of the initiative; and
 - Engage partners to help design and gather impact metrics.
- 3** The Waste Watchers Coordinator is responsible for, among other things, recruiting and training two types of volunteers:
 - Waste Watchers Leaders, who are charged with orienting, training, and supporting other Waste Watcher volunteers on the day of the event.
 - Waste Watchers Volunteers, who serve as waste diversion ambassadors at public events, educating and guiding event-goers on how to dispose of their waste properly.
- 4** After the events, all volunteers are encouraged to share what they have learned about recycling with family and friends and to work to increase recycling rates in their communities.





5

Mayor's office secures donations and grant funding to enhance the implementation of Waste Watchers at public events.

6

Mayor's office works with partners to track and report on the impact of the initiative.

REQUIRED METRICS INCLUDE:

- Number of public events where Waste Watchers is implemented
- Percentage of event waste diverted from landfill
- Pounds of event waste recycled (and/or composted)
- Recycling awareness among volunteers before and after service
- Number of residents from districts with low curbside recycling rates recruited as Waste Watchers volunteers

OPTIONAL METRICS:

- Number of new and returning volunteers recruited for Waste Watchers
- Percentage of volunteers who conduct recycling outreach after their service at the public event
- Percentage of volunteers who start or increase recycling and composting in their homes





EXECUTING THE PLAN

DEVELOPING THE INITIATIVE

With support from the Waste Watchers Coordinator (described more fully below), conduct an initial planning meeting with all initiative partners. Good potential partners will be organizations with expertise in waste management and recycling; organizations with experience in volunteer recruitment and management; groups responsible for planning large public events; and city agencies – including those responsible for public works, sustainability, and waste management – that can support the initiative. The planning meeting is an opportunity to:

- Introduce partners and clearly define roles and expectations;
- Identify the public events most appropriate for Waste Watchers;
- Share and/or develop goals regarding the initiative, including the proposed impact metrics;
- Discuss the city services and supports that will be made available for the Waste Watchers initiative. At a minimum, identify the agency or vendor responsible for collecting, weighing and hauling the recycling and trash, and the office or agency responsible for designing and collecting impact metrics; and
- Determine the number and type of volunteers needed for this initiative (including volunteer leaders) and identify potential sources of these volunteers.

Identify the Waste Watchers Coordinator. This individual will be responsible for:

- Planning and facilitating meetings with the planning committee;
- Creating a project timeline and volunteer recruitment plan (see below for considerations in developing the timeline);
- Communicating with event staff;
- Creating a “cheat sheet” with visuals for typical waste items at the event for volunteers to use as a reference guide;
- Leading volunteer recruitment efforts;





- Scheduling and facilitating volunteer leader training;
- Serving as the key liaison with city agencies engaged in Waste Watchers;
- Serving as the primary contact for all Waste Watchers-related questions, volunteer inquiries, and concerns leading up to and on the day of the event;
- Serving as the lead operations person on the day of the event;
- Collecting all impact metrics; and
- Following up with and thanking volunteers.

Design the specific training the volunteers will receive as part of the initiative, and the person/group responsible for delivering the training. Given the large number of volunteers that may be engaged on the day of the event, a “train-the-trainer” approach where a group of volunteer leaders receives training from the recycling expert and in turn, trains and supports a subset of the volunteers works best. Volunteers are trained on what types of waste go into the recycling bin, trash bin, and compost bin (if applicable). Volunteers are also trained on how to interact with event attendees and how to educate them with easily accessible language. (See Resources Section for sample volunteer training guides.)

Develop a budget to cover materials and supplies. (See Resources Section for a sample Budget and Materials List.)

Create a project timeline, taking into consideration the following:

- Large city events are planned far in advance and their dates are usually set regardless of inclement weather.
- If the event recruits volunteers through its own website or system, plan on including a description for Waste Watcher volunteers. The volunteer sign-up link can then be included in all recruitment communication, but you must consider the event’s timing and follow any existing guidelines for volunteer recruitment.
- Bin deployment is time consuming. Obtain an event map (GIS version is ideal) early in the planning process to determine the location of recycle and trash bins (and compost, if appropriate). It is best to have the Waste Watchers Coordinator work on this with support and guidance of appropriate event staff and experienced city agencies when possible, and communicate the deployment plan to all team members in advance of the event.

Develop a communications plan to mobilize, connect, and update the volunteers, event staff, and others involved in the initiative, with particular attention given to communications on the days leading up to and on the day of an event.





SECURING RESOURCES FOR WASTE WATCHERS

When planning to integrate Waste Watchers into a public event, it is important to consider the following costs (Sample Materials and Budget List in Resources section):

- Waste Watchers Coordinator: percentage of staff time or contract cost, if this person is not a full-time volunteer
- Waste hauling service
- Supplies (bags, gloves, signs, etc.)
- Waste collection staff wages (if overtime pay for city staff is required)
- Waste receptacles/bins labeled for compost, trash, and recycling
- Branding materials (t-shirts, buttons)
- Beverages and snacks for volunteers

Although the cost of Waste Watchers can be absorbed across multiple city departments and event sponsors, additional funding can enhance impact. While city funds can be used for the Waste Watchers program, the event should absorb as much of the cost to implement Waste Watchers as possible. If event management includes Waste Watchers costs in their budget, it greatly enhances the likelihood that the initiative will continue on in following years even if city funds are not available.

A proposal to potential funders could include:

- An overview of the Waste Watchers initiative as it relates to the Mayor's sustainability goals
- Amount of funding requested and a description of how those funds would be used
- Metrics used to assess the initiative's impact on the environment
- Information on Cities of Service (<http://www.citiesofservice.org>)
- Waste Watchers Blueprint (download at <http://www.citiesofservice.org/resources>)
- Description of a recognition plan for the donor

National nonprofit organizations that focus on recycling and other sustainability practices, such as Keep America Beautiful, www.kab.org, have information about grant opportunities to support recycling campaigns and may offer recycling materials at no cost.





ENGAGING VOLUNTEERS

Waste Watchers gives people of all ages the opportunity to learn about waste diversion. It can be positioned as a volunteer opportunity for individuals as well as groups (e.g., families, corporate groups, youth groups, veterans groups, neighborhood associations, and job training programs focused on urban sustainability). There are at least two different types of volunteers – Waste Watchers Leaders and Waste Watchers Volunteers. Waste Watchers Leaders are often enthusiastic returning volunteers, or people connected to the mayor’s office who are interested in the initiative and able to commit to the training described below. They are charged with training and supporting other Waste Watchers Volunteers on the day of the event. Waste Watchers Leaders must be willing and able to dig through trash, be on their feet and mobile for several hours, and able to motivate, encourage, and instruct their fellow volunteers throughout the day.

At least a week prior to the day of the event:

- Waste Watchers Leaders complete a mandatory training to prepare them for the following tasks on the day of the event: providing an orientation to Waste Watchers Volunteers including guiding them to their waste stations; circulating throughout an assigned area to ensure that volunteers are sorting correctly; and interfacing between volunteers and event staff.
- Waste Watchers Volunteers receive a training manual via email that includes: an overview of the initiative; a picture of the compost, trash, and recycling stations that they will be managing; a list of the types of waste that belong in each bin; and information on where to check-in on the day of the event. Cities may also wish to include a visual guide (“cheat sheet”) of the waste that volunteers can expect to encounter at the event; it is particularly helpful to have this cheat sheet categorize the objects as compost, recycling, or trash to provide clarity.

On the day of the event:

- Waste Watchers Leaders arrive at least 30 minutes in advance of the start of the volunteer shift to get acquainted with the location and number of waste stations in their area. Each Waste Watchers Leader is responsible for multiple waste stations.
- Waste Watchers Leaders brief the Waste Watchers Volunteers on tasks at the start of their shift. The Volunteers receive an exclusive Waste Watchers t-shirt for easy identification, a “cheat sheet” that shows which items go where, an event map, contact information for the Waste Watchers Leader, and multiple pairs of protective gloves.





- Waste Watchers Volunteers are invited to take the following Recycling Pledge:
*I pledge to learn what can and cannot be recycled in my city.
I promise to talk to and teach my family, friends, and neighbors about the importance of recycling.
I pledge to recycle everything I can, whenever I can, and wherever I can.
I will reduce my own trash by conserving resources and reusing objects.
I will not litter on my block, at my school, or in my or any other community and will do my best to take care of the planet.*
- Waste Watchers Volunteers oversee waste stations with recycling and trash bins, direct event attendees towards the appropriate bin to use, and thank attendees for their participation in the initiative.

After the event:

- Waste Watchers volunteers are encouraged to fulfill their Recycling Pledge by becoming advocates for recycling, reducing their own trash output, and increasing their recycling efforts.

RECOGNIZING AND THANKING VOLUNTEERS

Although the Waste Watchers initiative is meaningful and engaging, and the atmosphere can be fun and exciting, volunteers should be appropriately thanked and recognized for tackling unglamorous tasks with admirable enthusiasm.

The Waste Watchers Coordinator should send volunteers a thank you letter or email the day after an event. High performing volunteers may receive a personal thank you email from the Waste Watchers Coordinator that also encourages them to serve at future events. Superb returning volunteers may be offered the opportunity to be Waste Watchers Leaders for future events. The Waste Watchers Coordinator should also provide community service certificates for volunteers who would like to submit community service hours to a school or other organization.





MEASURING IMPACT

The mayor's office collects data and surveys volunteers to ensure that Waste Watchers has a positive impact on the environment and on the volunteers who participate in the waste diversion initiative. Required metrics to collect for each event where Waste Watchers is implemented are as follows:

- Number of public events where Waste Watchers is implemented
- Percentage of event waste diverted from landfills*
- Pounds of waste recycled*
- Recycling awareness among volunteers before and after service
- Number of residents of districts with low curbside recycling rates recruited as Waste Watchers volunteers

*The source data is collected by the organization that actually hauls the trash/recycling/compost, which might be a city's Department of Public Works or a private waste management company.

OPTIONAL METRICS MAY INCLUDE:

- Number of new and returning volunteers recruited for Waste Watchers
- Percentage of volunteers who conduct recycling outreach after their service at the public event
- Percentage of volunteers who start or increase recycling and composting in their homes





OPTIONAL ELEMENTS

COMPOSTING

Though this initiative focuses on introducing a recycling component to major city events, composting has emerged as an innovative way to capture soiled paper and food waste that would otherwise end up in landfills. Incorporating a compost component increases the event's waste diversion rate, and offers an educational opportunity for volunteers and event-attendees that might extend to at-home waste diversion practices. Cities should include composting in Waste Watchers if the city has the following capacity:

- Access to compost facilities that can accept commercial-grade compost waste;
- Access to and ability to coordinate and pay for compost hauling services;
- Access to separate and well-marked compost receptacles for the event; and
- Ability to recruit a one-to-one ratio of Waste Watchers Volunteers to compost receptacles.

INTEGRATING WASTE DIVERSION INTO CITY-WIDE EVENT PLANNING

By integrating waste diversion into event planning, the mayor's office can encourage large public event planners to make certain decisions that will help reduce the overall amount of landfill waste generated overall at the event. Vendors often sell or give away items at public events that become trash throughout the day. By incorporating the Waste Watchers initiative, event planners might choose to contract only with vendors who pledge to generate less waste or who use compostable materials.

Once a city has developed a successful Waste Watchers program, the city can create a Waste Watchers manual that event planners can use to implement the program independently. This manual might include:

- Where events can obtain well-marked trash, recycling, and compost bins;
- List of local or regional recycling and composting facilities;
- List of necessary materials; and
- Volunteer training guides.





THE PLAN IN ACTION

 The **Philadelphia** Mayor's Office of Sustainability and Mayor's Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service partnered with the Philadelphia Marathon to pilot Waste Watchers in 2011. The partners saw an opportunity to innovate the waste collection process at a major city event, and were enthusiastic about the potential waste diversion benefits. The partners collaborated on readying the Philadelphia Marathon for a new sustainability initiative, recruiting volunteers, and managing program logistics on the day of the event. However, the team did not have well-marked compost bins, and learned that without direction from volunteers, event attendees often will not compost properly. The compost facility was forced to reject the compost collected that year because there was too much non-compostable material in it.

The following year, Waste Watchers at the Philadelphia Marathon achieved an 87.5% waste diversion rate, earning the Marathon a Gold Certification from the Council for Responsible Sport. The Marathon has maintained that rating for two years in a row. The success can be attributed to designating two Waste Watchers Coordinators tasked with planning and implementing the program; securing well-marked trash, compost, and recycling bins; recruiting many dedicated and well-trained volunteers; and communicating all aspects of the program with all the partners.

Waste Watchers has become the most reliable program for greening city events and has expanded to three additional major events in 2014: the Philadelphia Science Festival, the Broad Street Run, and the Philly Cycling Classic. The commitment of an event team to waste diversion along with the Waste Watchers Coordinator's ability to collaborate with the event planning team are essential to achieving success and continued expansion. While Waste Watchers requires a significant amount of planning and coordination across several different city departments, Waste Watchers produces benefits that are shared by all.





RESOURCES

Sample Documents from Philadelphia Waste Watchers

- Waste Watchers Leader Training Presentation provides an overview of the initiative, an outline of the volunteer role, and an explanation of the Waste Watcher Leader responsibilities: <http://www.citiesofservice.org/sites/default/files/WasteWatchersLeaderTrainingPresentation.pdf>
- Waste Watchers Volunteer Guide provides volunteers an overview of their role, specific waste items to expect, and where to check-in for a shift. It is recommended that this document be emailed in advance of the event: <http://citiesofservice.org/sites/default/files/WasteWatchersVolunteerInstructionalGuide.pdf>
- A team of AmeriCorps VISTA members created this low budget, high energy video designed to educate and inspire volunteers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26loZZhK3Ag>

Implementation Resources and Research

- Keep America Beautiful provides public space recycling resources, including helpful tools and templates for promoting recycling at events: <http://americarecyclesday.org/public-space-recycling-resources>
- The Environmental Protection Agency publishes data about the generation, recycling, and disposal of garbage and publishes data: <http://www.epa.gov/waste/nonhaz/municipal/>
- The Environmental Protection Agency provides information on how landfills contribute to global warming: <http://epa.gov/climatechange/ghgemissions/gases/ch4.html>
- SCA Americas donated 500 bins to the Philadelphia Waste Watchers initiative that helped event-goers and volunteers distinguish between compost, recycling, and trash receptacles: <http://www.sca.com/us>





SAMPLE MATERIALS LIST AND BUDGET

Item	Quantity	Price per Unit	Price
Compostable bags	15 boxes	\$61.66	\$924.90
Clear trash bags	7 boxes	\$52	\$364
Blue recycling bags	11 boxes	\$59	\$649
Work gloves	12 packs	\$9	\$138
Latex gloves	24 boxes	\$8	\$192
TOTAL			\$2,267.90

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

- 1 Hand sanitizer
- 2 Trash bins
- 3 Recycling bins
- 4 Compost bins
- 5 Volunteer t-shirts
- 6 Volunteer drinks and food





SPECIAL THANKS

We'd like to thank the following cities and organizations for their support:

- City of Philadelphia for submitting the Waste Watchers concept to the Cities of Service Blueprint Contest and for their generous support in developing this blueprint.
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Cities of Service is a national nonprofit that supports mayors to design and implement high-impact service strategies that can be replicated in cities worldwide. We provide technical assistance, programmatic support, planning resources, and funding opportunities. Founded by Michael R. Bloomberg, Cities of Service supports a coalition of approximately 200 cities whose mayors are committed to engaging citizen volunteers to solve local pressing challenges, from increasing high school graduation rates to improving energy efficiency in buildings. We help coalition cities share solutions, best practices, and lessons learned, as well as spread awareness about their great work.

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