



## 2021 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study Competition University of Richmond

1. Contact info (name, department, school, email, phone)

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2. Focus of Case study

University of Richmond composted 54 tons of food related waste in the first five months of its compost pilot program.

3. Detailed description of campaign or effort:

Supporting our University value of stewardship for the environment, University of Richmond has an ambitious goal of 75% waste diversion from the landfill by 2025. As much as one-third of waste that we send to the landfill on campus is compostable. Composting is a critical way to drive forward our diversion goals and commitment to sustainability.

The COVID-19 pandemic raised many unique challenges for institutions in higher education. Dining locations on campus made changes to their operations to support physical distancing guidelines, including coordinating outdoor dining tents and increasing to-go services. An unintended consequence of providing a safe dining experience was an increase in to-go waste. Although the University was already on track to implement a campus wide composting program in 2022, a call from our student body to offer composting services accelerated this goal. The Rethink Waste committee, a group charged with supporting the University's diversion goals, formed a partnership with Natural Organic Processes Enterprise (N.O.P.E.) to capture compostable materials in exchange for returned processed compost to be used on campus grounds. The committee worked closely with staff at each dining location to implement both pre- and post-consumer composting services. Post-consumer composting options were rolled out one location at a time in outdoor dining tents.

In order for us to reach the campus community, we needed to be "on the ground" and interacting with diners at the tents. The Office for Sustainability hired approximately fifteen students to be "Compost Coordinators". Compost Coordinators were paid student staff that were the face of composting education on campus. While interacting with

diners in the tents, they assisted people in sorting their waste at the bin. We plan to bring back our Compost Coordinator team to continue outreach efforts around composting and zero-waste initiatives in the future.

#### 4. Planning steps & timeline to implement:

- Summer 2020: The Rethink Waste committee was charged with implementing the composting pilot.
- Fall 2020: Contracted with local company, N.O.P.E., to provide hauling services, storage totes, and compost bin liners.
- November 2020: Compost Coordinator student staff were interviewed and hired.
- November 2020-April 2021: Pilot is rolled out across campus. Communicated to each dining location that composting services were coming to their location. Requested sample to-go materials to identify compostable, recycling, and landfill items.
- The following list describes additional actions taken throughout the duration of the compost pilot.
  - Compost Coordinator student staff built educational displays that included the to-go materials and gathered tabling materials for compost education.
  - Ensured bins were in place at each location with appropriate composting signage. Totes for storing compostable material were also placed adjacent to each dining location.
  - Conducted a walkthrough of each dining location with Compost Coordinator student staff prior to first shift to train on new process.
  - Announced each location rollout via campus communication channels, including digital flyers, daily announcements, and social media.
  - Confirmed process with Support Services staff for ongoing bin servicing at each location once student staff left.
- May 2021: Outdoor composting options are now available at all open dining locations on campus.

#### 5. Resources and stakeholders involved

Stakeholders involved in the composting pilot played a critical role in making the program successful. The University's Rethink Waste committee (which includes Dining Services, Custodial Services, Events Conferences & Support Services, and Sustainability staff) spearheaded the planning and implementation of pre- and post-consumer composting services on campus. This committee oversees the contract with the compost hauler, N.O.P.E. Supporting the composting pilot were Compost Coordinator student staff, who are crucial for compost education. Compost Coordinators interacted with students, staff, and faculty dining in each location. They also helped sort waste and explained how to compost in an effort to increase participation.

Perhaps the most significant financial cost was establishing an annual contract with our compost hauler, N.O.P.E., to collect compostable materials. We also purchased storage totes and bin liners from N.O.P.E. at an additional cost.

Other items in our budget include the following:

- New collection bins to support expansion of composting streams across campus
- Printed signage affixed to the bins about what items are accepted into the compost stream
- Staff labor, including wages for Compost Coordinator student staff
- Procurement of compostable to-go materials (e.g., cups, cutlery, to-go boxes, etc.)
- New triple stream collection bins (including streams for landfill, composting, and recycling) in areas where they did not already exist
- Compost Coordinator uniform

The table below identifies stakeholders affiliated with the implementation of this project.

Campus Department or Project Partner	Roles and Responsibilities
Custodial Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Placement of bins and toters</li> <li>• Move compost to storage location</li> <li>• Cleaning out toters after tipping</li> <li>• Scott Lincoln, Manager of Custodial Services, is the Rethink Waste Committee chair and oversees the composting pilot</li> </ul>
Dining Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible for back-of-house compost collection</li> <li>• Provide compostable to-go materials (e.g., cups, cutlery, to-go boxes, etc.)</li> <li>• Work with University Procurement to purchase compostable materials used in each location</li> <li>• Share program information to customers eating in dining area with composting options</li> </ul>
Office for Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide support for Compost Coordinators and Rethink Waste committee</li> <li>• Create communications and signage</li> </ul>
Events, Conferences & Support Services (ECSS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage Compost Coordinators</li> <li>• Create communications and signage</li> <li>• Service front-of-house bins after Compost Coordinators leave each location</li> <li>• Communicate with dining locations</li> <li>• Write <i>Compost Compass</i> newsletter for stakeholder communication</li> </ul>
Compost Coordinator Student Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On the front lines of compost and waste education</li> <li>• Move compostable material to bins while staffing the location</li> <li>• Conduct visual waste audits to identify contamination</li> </ul>
Natural Organic Processes Enterprise (N.O.P.E.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect and haul compost to McGill Environmental Systems Composting Facility in Waverly, VA to be processed</li> <li>• Provide toters and bin liners</li> </ul>

6. Describe the Results of this campaign component

- a. General results (*ex: attracted attention of campus president, campus paper did a news story on the event, etc.*)

The composting program has been highly successful with the participation of many students, staff, and faculty. In March, the Rethink Waste committee received an Outstanding Service Award during the University’s annual Service Award ceremony. This award acknowledges the outstanding achievements of staff on campus. In addition to this recognition, there was a [press release](#) from the University, which was also distributed across University of Richmond official social media channels. Post-consumer composting options will continue to expand across campus next year as the Rethink Waste committee considers indoor dining and residential locations.

The Compost Coordinator team was instrumental to reaching our goal of 50 tons collected by the end of the academic year. The primary focus for this team was face-to-face education centered around composting and waste diversion. They also approached students, faculty, and staff dining in each location to help them sort their dining waste. As a result, N.O.P.E. reported minimal contamination in our collected compost.

University of Richmond's Robins School of Business sponsors a Sustainable Solutions Challenge every year. The challenge invites students to learn about a sustainability issue on campus and offer solutions to address the issue. This year's challenge topic asked students to consider ways to increase participation in the composting program, while also reducing contamination. Sixteen teams submitted proposals. The [winning solution](#) focused on a need for including composting in first-year orientation and streamlining compostable options across campus. Stakeholders in the composting program are considering how the solution can be implemented starting as early as next year.

- b. Specific measurable impact figures, if applicable (*Ex: Reduced contamination rate 13%, Gathered 316 pledges to recycle more, etc., 250 people engaged, etc.*)

Within the program's first six months (November 2020-April 2021), University of Richmond diverted 53.68 tons, or 107,360 pounds, of compostable material from the landfill. It is important to note that students went home for winter break during the week of Thanksgiving and did not return until January 18. The list below describes total collected weights for each month.

- November: 4.51 tons
- December: 2.10 tons
- January: 6.38 tons
- February: 10.52 tons
- March: 16.52 tons
- April: 13.65 tons

#### 7. What would you do differently in the future?

There are many challenges that surface when rolling out any new program. A significant challenge for us is the lack of streamlined, consistent to-go materials across all locations. For example, a compostable cup at one location may not be compostable at another location. Working with Procurement to offer compostable materials across all locations is a slow process as we consider vendor changes and available financial resources. Compostable wares, like cups and utensils, are more costly than recyclable or landfill alternatives. Streamlining materials across campus creates a simpler, more efficient option for diners as they dispose of their waste. Contamination in the compost stream is also likely to be reduced with more consistency in to-go materials.

Another challenge for us during this pilot was maintaining signage, especially after Compost Coordinators left a location. One way we addressed this issue was leaving table tent signs at tables in the dining areas with a graphic about composting and how to participate. However, we found that bin signage would occasionally be incorrect as dining locations would need to alternate to a non-compostable "back-up" option when compostable to-go items were exhausted. This increased our risk for contamination. Next year, we will consider how to utilize temporary and permanent signage at each location differently.

#### 8. What advice would you give to another college that wanted to do a similar effort?

Our program had a successful start for several reasons. Rolling out post-consumer composting in one location at a time allowed us to identify issues early in the pilot and make changes as we implemented composting options across campus. Our pilot started at Heilman Dining Center, the central dining hall on campus, and moved through four retail locations every 3-4 weeks.

Secondly, consistent communication with all stakeholders involved in the project is critical. A staff member working closely with the composting project created a weekly newsletter, *Compost Compass*, that was shared with each stakeholder group every Friday. The newsletter included necessary information and updates about the program. A feedback submission form was also added to each newsletter, inviting people to share their suggestions for improving the program. The Compost Coordinators and the composting admin team met weekly to discuss updates and rollout logistics.

### 9. Photos and Graphics



Table tent signs created by Jenn Bock, ECSS Administrative Assistant.



Compost Coordinator uniform.  
Mockup designed by Jenn Bock.



Compost Coordinator information table at an outdoor dining tent.



Educational display board identifying what items are compostable, recyclable, or should be landfilled. Board created by Lead Compost Coordinator, Rosa Lovo.



Compost stream with bin signage at a dining location. All triple stream bins included Landfill (left), Compost (center), and Recycling (right).



Sample digital signage announcing rollout at a new location created by Jenn Bock.





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45 likes

beagreen spider Did you know that all the items from Organic Krush are compostable? Cardboard food containers, cups, utensils, straws... Everything!

Remember to compost your leftover food + the containers!  
[@urdining](#)

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January 26

A social media post about composting on the Office for Sustainability's Instagram account, [@beagreen spider](#).