



McGill University 2026 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study

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Focus of Case study:

“Creating a Culture of Zero-Waste”

In 2025, McGill reinvigorated its Zero-Waste Ambassadors program to meaningfully engage the community and collect data to support the University in becoming zero-waste by 2035.

Detailed description of campaign or effort:

In 2025, McGill secured nearly [\\$900,000](#) in funding to significantly upgrade its waste-sorting infrastructure and develop waste engagement programs. With only 89 compost collection points in 2025, McGill is adding more than 700 new compost streams within its expanding system of 4-stream sorting stations. However, infrastructure improvements represent an important, yet incomplete development as part of the University’s comprehensive zero-waste approach. Accordingly, the McGill Office of Sustainability (MOOS) launched the Zero-Waste Ambassadors (ZWA) program to meaningfully engage the McGill community regarding the University’s goal to become zero-waste by 2035 and educate the community about how they can directly contribute toward meeting this goal. During the 2025/2026 academic year, 17 Zero-Waste Ambassador student volunteers at the graduate and undergraduate levels contributed 50 hours each toward various activities: tabling, class presentations, event hosting, personal projects, and waste audits.

During the fall semester, the ZWA program follows a more structured calendar of activities. Here, Ambassadors hosted regular tabling sessions in high-traffic buildings for four days per week, offering free coffee coupons (‘bring-your-own-mug’) to a student-run café for members of the community who tried to sort commonly missorted items (e.g., coffee cups and food scraps). Ambassadors also contacted their professors to schedule brief presentations about McGill’s zero-waste commitment at the start of class. Through these outreach activities, Ambassadors reached more than 3,000 students directly on campus. Lastly, Ambassadors conducted a comprehensive waste audit in November 2025 of bins in high-traffic areas on McGill’s Downtown and Macdonald campuses, which they repeated in March 2026. The insights gleaned from these waste audits have been central to

the upcoming upgrades to campus waste sorting infrastructure, namely the addition of compost streams to every waste-sorting station and the rearrangement of streams to de-prioritize the landfill stream.

During the winter/spring semester, Ambassadors carried out more self-led and creative projects, such as: interviewing key stakeholders (for example, with the Executive Director of Compost Montreal); hosting a zero-waste trivia night (with over 40 attendees); creating social media content (which has been viewed more than 31,000 times); and surveying students regarding their waste-sorting behaviors and attitudes.

Overall, not only does the Zero-Waste Ambassador program function as a professional development pipeline—in which Ambassadors build public speaking, systems-thinking, and stakeholder engagement skills—but it is also crucial for meeting University's zero-waste commitment by empowering students to engage in meaningful peer education.

Planning steps & timeline to implement

- Design the volunteer program and create recruiting materials (June/July)
- Arrange for tabling with building directors/porters in high-traffic areas (July/August)
- Post the call for volunteers (mid-August)
- Select volunteers (early September)
- Train volunteers (mid-September)
- Meet with volunteers every week toward the start of the semester to build rapport, then every two weeks to prevent burnout
- Host an end-of-semester appreciation event for the volunteers' contributions (December)
- Re-start program (January)
- Meet with volunteers every week toward the start of the semester to build rapport, then every two weeks to prevent burnout
- Host an end-of-year appreciation event for the volunteers' contributions (April)

Resources and stakeholders involved

Regarding campus departments that supported this program, Buildings and Grounds were very helpful in providing in-kind support, namely securing spots for tabling (as well as lending a table and chairs) and helping to collect materials for the waste audits. Their expertise in collecting the waste for the audit—ensuring it arrived on the proper day/time and accurately labeled according to date/time/location—was particularly essential.

Regarding budget, we set aside about \$10,000 for the year to fund the program. This number includes funds for outreach materials (e.g., free BYOB coffee coupons, raffle prizes, events, audiovisual equipment) and waste audit materials. However, through the funding mentioned earlier in the case study, we have also hired three student interns who support the Zero-Waste Ambassador program. The Zero-Waste Engagement Intern helps lead the group of volunteers, while the Zero-Waste Knowledge Management Intern helps collate and present the audit and interview data they collect and the Zero-Waste Communications Intern supports the Ambassadors in creating social media content.

Results of this campaign component

- a. Over 3,000 students on campus were engaged through the efforts of the 17 Zero-Waste Ambassadors.

- b. Two waste audit cycles were conducted (one in November and one in March), which directly contributed to the infrastructure upgrades unfolding during the summer of 2026.
- c. The Winter semester saw ambassador-led creative projects: an interview with the director of Compost Montreal, a trivia night (40+ attendees), social media reels/stories (31,000+ views), and a student survey to help McGill understand campus sorting behavior.

What would you do differently in the future?

In the future, we would like to shorten the timeframe of the program slightly. Rather than ending the program just before finals in April, we are considering ending the program at the end of February. We have noticed that engagement seems to naturally wane after spring break, and instead of chasing individuals during this time, we are thinking that it might make sense to end the program when people are still engaged.

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

We would suggest that only enthusiastic candidates are selected for a similar program. Even though these are not paid positions, we have noticed (through this volunteer program and others) that having a dedicated team is essential to keep up momentum, especially with volunteer programs.

We would also advise that the program have a more solid structure toward the beginning of the program (to help establish knowledge of the University and mission overall), while facilitating more creative, self- or group-led activities later in the program.



Zero-Waste Ambassadors Tabling (Ebell Tu and Yitong Cai, September 2025) – Peter Garber



Zero-Waste Trivia Night (March 2026) – Peter Garber



Zero-Waste Ambassadors Conducting Waste-Audit (Finley Cohen, Ainsley Dey, Antoine Lerocque, Grant Borucki, November 2025) – Chloe Hedley



Zero-Waste Ambassador Team Meeting (Léandre Noël, Finley Cohen, Jane Orr, Jiayuan Cao, Kingson Campbell, Christy Abou-Saab, Ayan Allahverdiyeva, Razan EL Rifai, Jasmine Kim, Yizhi Huang, Mathilde Raoul, Elena Sales, January 2026) – Peter Garber