



2024 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study University of Virginia

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Focus of Case study:

Green Games: diverting waste and educating attendees on waste streams at home football and basketball games

Detailed description of campaign or effort:

Green Games are held at each UVA home football game and a number of consecutive home basketball games, and their goal is to divert compostables and recyclables from our waste streams while educating attendees about responsible waste disposal. UVA has an ambitious waste reduction goal of 70% by 2030, and athletics arenas were identified for their potential for waste diversion. Volunteers work alongside student employees to sort waste stations and interact with attendees during the second half of home games. After games end, volunteer groups head into seating areas to collect compostables left behind by attendees. Volunteers are essential to the success of Green Games, so we invest time into recruitment and communications before each game.

While the majority of concessions (including service ware) is compostable or recyclable at UVA's home games, many fans tend to either place waste in landfill bins or leave them at their seats after the game. Compost and recycling bins are strategically co-located with landfill bins, and signage depicting specific items for each waste stream is posted at waste stations, yet contamination persists as an issue at these games. This emphasizes our need for volunteers to not only sort through waste stations but also to guide attendees on the correct waste streams for each of their items. Additionally, volunteers meet with third-party concessions vendors near the end of each game to collect bulk compostable food waste before it goes to the trash.

Green Games occur during both the fall and spring semester, with volunteers at all home football games during the fall and a few consecutive basketball games during the spring. We will be focusing on our spring basketball

Green Games in this case study while using the fall season as reference, as our basketball waste diversion efforts took place during the 2024 Campus Race to Zero Waste competition window. Since basketball games are held at John Paul Jones Arena, which often hosts other events with less compostables/recyclables, we selected a time period of four consecutive home games to move in compost bins/signage and recruit volunteers for. After this period, our partner Black Bear Composting picked up compost totes, metrics were gathered, and the Office for Sustainability moved compost bins/signage out of the arena.

Planning steps & timeline to implement:

Fall 2023

- Football Green Games take place at each UVA home football game
- Basketball Green Game dates selected
 - 2/17/24 Men's game versus Wake Forest
 - 2/18/24 Women's game versus Syracuse
 - 2/22/24 Women's game versus Miami
 - 2/24/24 Men's game versus UNC
- Basketball Green Game sign-up forms created

January 2024

- Promotions and volunteer recruitment posted on social media
- Sign-up form distributed among student groups, particularly those that require volunteer hours

February 2024

- Previous volunteers at UVA Sustainability events emailed for recruitment
- February 15: Compost totes delivered to John Paul Jones Arena by Black Bear Composting
- February 16: Compost bins and signage set up inside John Paul Jones Arena
- Reminder email with more detailed information about volunteer shift sent out to volunteers 1-2 days before their corresponding Green Game
- February 26: Compost totes picked up by Black Bear Composting; compost bins and signage collected from John Paul Jones Arena

Green Game timeline

- About half an hour after the game starts, volunteers and some Office for Sustainability (OFS) employees arrive. We hold a briefing on volunteer duties and give out supplies (gloves, pickers, bags) and t-shirts before students begin sorting waste stations and engaging with fans
- As the game ends, 3-5 volunteers wheel compost totes around concourse and collect food waste from cooperating vendors
- At the end of the game (~1.5 hours after volunteers arrive), volunteers and employees gather to discuss their experiences before gathering more supplies and heading in to sweep the bowl where attendees were seated
- 3 hours after the Green Game begins, volunteers and employees meet one last time to talk about successes and challenges of the day before departing
 - Volunteers are also encouraged to take rest breaks and watch the game throughout their shift!

Resources and stakeholders involved:

Resources

There were three major resources that were necessary for each green game: compost totes from Black Bear Composting, compost bins/signage set up by the UVA Office for Sustainability, and volunteers. Additionally, OFS employees were needed to facilitate each Green Game, and the number of fans attending each game (purchasing concessions/taking programs) was a factor in the total amount of waste generated/diverted at each event.

Stakeholders

- RMC Events staff: communication with football and basketball events staff was necessary to make sure that volunteers could enter and walk through the venues without issue
- Third-party vendors: communicating the goal of green games and where vendors should direct their compostable waste boosted our total waste diverted
- Black Bear Composting: as our local commercial composter, Black Bear Composting makes zero-waste events possible. They also receive thousands of pounds of compostables in the process
- Volunteers: it was very important for us to give volunteers the best experience possible at Green Games, as the events would not be possible without them (and we would love for them to come back!)
- UVA Office for Sustainability: since these events are created and run by the Office for Sustainability, it is important for us to be respectful towards fans and other stakeholders so that we can continue the events and form further partnerships

Describe the Results of this campaign component:




General results

This year's Green Games garnered the attention of the UVA and Charlottesville community. As we approached the Fall 2023 semester, UVA Today reported on our switch to making all home football games Green Games [here](#). During the fall season, Live 5 News and 29News reported on football Green Games (see the Live 5 News report [here](#)). Basketball Green Games, however, lasted for a significantly shorter period of time (1 week total) than waste diversion during the football season, and these games received less attention as well.

Additionally, the official UVA Instagram account made a post about Green Games on March 24th, 2023 that highlighted the Office for Sustainability's waste diversion efforts at home basketball and football games. The caption read:

Trash talk at athletic events gets a new meaning as @sustainableuva teams up with student volunteers to create Green Games, an effort to divert the waste produced from home athletic events from a landfill and toward more productive locations.

"Us being environmentally conscious makes the #GoHoos fans conscious."

Read more about how UVA's Office for Sustainability is striving to make every game a 'green game' at the [link](#) in bio.   

Students and groups at UVA have also expressed their enjoyment in being able to participate in our athletic waste diversion efforts, with many volunteers returning to participate in more than one Green Game. This has strengthened our network of volunteers within the Charlottesville community, which shows as more students and organizations have begun participating in volunteer opportunities beyond Green Games.

Specific measurable impact figures

Our fall football Green Games saw a total of almost 63,000 pounds of waste diverted from landfills, while basketball Green Games during the CR2ZW competition diverted almost 3,100 pounds (47 64-gallon totes of compost). Additionally, the basketball season brought in 50 volunteers (compared to the 83 volunteers of the fall).

Finally, Green Games won two awards in the past year - one each for football and basketball. We partnered with GFL Environmental, a waste collection service operating in the Charlottesville area, to reach 60,000 pounds diverted at home football games. Once we reached this number, GFL presented the Office for Sustainability a check for \$6,000 on the field of Scott Stadium during a home game, which also gave more publicity to the initiative. During the basketball season, John Paul Jones Arena won a Virginia Green Travel Star Award for Most Innovative Projects, specifically for our zero-waste events (including Green Games).

What would you do differently in the future?

One of the key difficulties during Green Games is the logistics of getting event staff and third-party vendors, who aren't trained in zero-waste events, on the same page as our volunteers. Many pounds of food waste have been lost to the landfill due to a lack of communication between us and third-party vendors, whose everyday protocols involve trashing bulk amounts of leftover food at the end of the game. Since the employees that we speak to towards the end of the game are mostly cooks or cashiers, not managers, they are not always sure if they can give us their food waste rather than landfill it themselves. As such, we would like to have more conversations with management of food distribution at these events so that we can effectively rework protocol to include composting. This could prove difficult, however, due to the constant shifting of different vendors in the venues.

Additionally, attrition is an issue with these events - we often receive more sign-ups than people who show up to volunteer. We incentivize participation in Green Games with a free UVA Sustainability T-shirt and guaranteed access to basketball games that would otherwise be hard to get tickets to, but there may be more room for attracting volunteers. Investing more promotions towards groups with required volunteer hours or even partnering with these groups for each event could help bring in more consistency between sign-ups and attendees.

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

We would advise other colleges interested in pursuing zero-waste athletic events to communicate directly with management bodies and lean into any existing volunteer groups in their community. A strong partnership with all stakeholders involved is key to putting on large zero-waste events like Green Games - our continued work with Black Bear Composting has bolstered the capacity for waste diversion at Green Games. Additionally, adding a competitive aspect to zero-waste events, like a race to a specific metric of diversion or a competition between groups of volunteers, could help bring more participation aboard. Most of the students that participate in Green Games discuss how impactful and exciting the process is for them, so communicating the importance of the event is a great way to bring in volunteers who will keep coming back. Finally, sending a thank-you email to volunteers after events makes volunteers feel appreciated and more likely to participate in further events.

Photos and Graphics



Student employees bring compost totes to loading bay



Students hold signage on the basketball court



Volunteers gather for briefing and gathering supplies



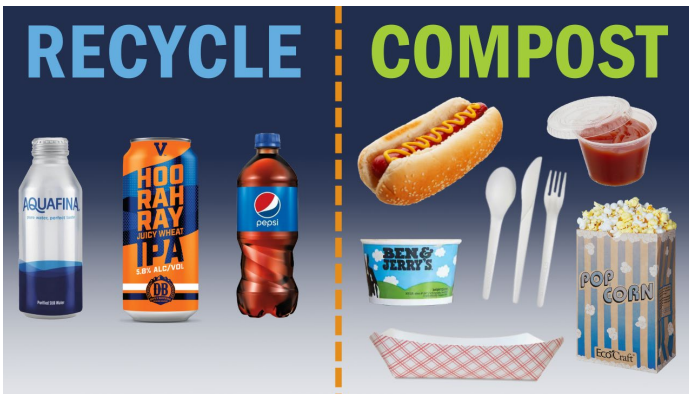
Volunteers pose with compost totes at the loading bay



Instagram story post (posted with sign-up link) graphic



Early volunteer recruitment Instagram post



Signage on waste streams for attendees