



## University of Washington 2025 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study

### Contact info:

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### Focus of Case study:

Education and Awareness (outreach and marketing strategies)

### Detailed description of campaign or effort:

UW Recycling organized and promoted activities focused on waste reduction during the Campus Race to Zero Waste competition period. Our team organized 10 events: Waste Trivia Week, the UW Trash Art Contest, and 8 tabling events in partnership with one of our waste vendors, Recology. We also promoted 8 waste-related events organized by partners on campus. All CRZW activities were compiled on our blog: [sustainability.uw.edu/blog/2025-crzw](https://sustainability.uw.edu/blog/2025-crzw).

During Waste Trivia Week (February 10 - February 14), our team posted daily questions to the @uwrecycling Instagram account. Participants selected from 2-4 multiple choice answers. At the end of the week, we randomly selected 5 winners. Winners received a reusable metal bubble tea straw kit.

The Trash Art Contest was held February 12 - March 28 and was open to all students, staff and faculty. Our contest asked participants to create an art piece from items normally thought of as trash or a literary piece about waste. Categories included 2D art, 3D art, textile art, and literature. We promoted the contest via a [web page](#) on various platforms and it was viewed over 1,950 times from February – March. We also promoted the contest on our Instagram; these posts were viewed over 1,110 times. Contest judges (UW Recycling staff, a UW faculty member, a UW staff member, and one of our vendor's [Artist-in-Residence](#)) graded on pre-determined criteria. Two winners for each category received e-gift cards to a low-waste shop or art supply store. All submissions were highlighted in our [online blog post](#) and winning pieces were exhibited at UW's undergraduate library.

Our team planned 8 student-focused tabling events in UW residence and dining halls. Representatives from our waste-haulers, Recology or Cedar Grove, and UW Recycling provided educational resources and answered questions about waste.

We promoted 8 events organized by students and campus partners via our blog, our Instagram, and at other outreach events. The events hosted by student groups were: compost promotion tabling by SEED, a clothing thrift

swap by ReThink, a presentation and forum about fast fashion by HuES, a community clean-up event hosted by Green Greeks and BeautifyUDub, and a sustainable market hosted by Green Greeks. The Housing & Food Services department hosted a waste sort for students, and a UW professor held a public virtual lecture for UW staff and faculty on reducing food waste.

### **Planning steps & timeline to implement:**

#### **General**

- Before Campus Race to Zero Waste, UW Recycling staff (Marketing Specialist) drafted a list of waste-related activities to share on our blog
- At the start of Campus Race to Zero Waste, staff posted the list of activities to our blog ([sustainability.uw.edu/blog/2025-crzw](https://sustainability.uw.edu/blog/2025-crzw)) and updated the activity list throughout Campus Race to Zero Waste as needed

#### **Waste Trivia Week**

- In January 2025, UW Recycling staff (Marketing Specialist, Program Coordinator, Student Assistant) met to determine content and dates for Waste Trivia Week
- In January and February 2025, staff drafted and finalized graphics to post for Waste Trivia Week (includes questions/answers and supporting images/designs)
- During Waste Trivia Week (2/10-2/14), staff posted 1 trivia story per day
- During Waste Trivia Week (2/10-2/14), staff used a randomized generator to select 1 winning participant per question
- After Waste Trivia Week (2/18), staff notified winning participants and distributed prizes

#### **Trash Art Contest**

- In January and February 2025, UW Recycling staff (Marketing Specialist) contacted other campus groups and departments to coordinate collaborations (such as the UW Libraries, the student union building, and potential student and faculty judges)
- In January, staff updated the contest online submission form (used in previous years), contest rules, and judging rubric based on previous feedback from participants, judges, and the team
- In February, staff created promotional material about the contest and worked with other campus groups to cross-promote
- On February 12, staff opened the contest for submissions (published submission form and blog post with submission instructions)
- During the Trash Art Contest campaign (2/12-3/28), staff posted promotional content on our Instagram, on advertisements in buildings, and submitted the contest to email lists run by the art school and the UW's Program on the Environment
- After the Trash Art Contest, staff provided submissions to the judging panel and collected judges' scores, then notified participants about results (including coordinating exhibition and prize distribution to winning submissions)
- UW Recycling staff worked on a blog post to highlight the winning pieces and promoted via UW platforms

## Tabling

- In January 2025, UW Recycling staff (Program Coordinator) worked with one of our vendors, Recology, to coordinate an outreach schedule
  - Recology staff provided a list of available dates and times
  - UW staff verified whether their team members were also available at each date/time
  - Staff cross-referenced available outreach dates with waste service schedules for UW residence halls and dates of scheduled recycling inspections (Recology inspects UW residence hall recycling at their MRF to check for “contaminants,” or non-recyclable materials, in each recycling load) to create an outreach schedule targeting specific residence halls before scheduled inspections
  - Staff obtained approval from the UW residence hall team to conduct outreach in the proposed locations
  - Staff (Marketing Specialist, Program Coordinator, Student Assistant) created promotional materials for outreach events (social media, posters in residence hall communal spaces, digital displays)
- During Campus Race to Zero Waste, UW Recycling staff tabled with Recology (tabling supplies provided jointly by UW Recycling and Recology, including candy prizes)

## Resources and stakeholders involved:

Budget	
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> place prizes for 8 Trash Art Contest winners	\$600
Advertising for Trash Art Contest	\$125
Giveaways for Waste Trivia Week participants	\$20
Giveaways for tabling events	\$45
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$790</b>

The primary costs for these efforts were staff and vendor time.

Our efforts were supported by various campus departments and groups, including University of Washington Libraries (supported exhibition of winning pieces in Trash Art Contest), the Husky Union Building (student center, hosted advertisements for the Trash Art Contest) various University marketing and communication groups (University Marketing and News, UW Facilities Employee newsletter, UW Sustainability), UW faculty (UW School of Art, UW Program on the Environment), and collaboration with UW student groups.

Staff involved from our team (UW Recycling) were the Marketing Specialist, a Program Coordinator, and a Student Assistant. Our contracted waste-haulers provided staff for outreach, which is included in our contract with these waste-haulers.

## Describe the Results of this campaign component:

We received 29 submissions to our Trash Art Contest.

The blog post about the Trash Art Contest winners received more than 1,500 views from April 1 – May 31, 2025.

We engaged 113 people in our Waste Trivia Week (with 50 people participating across multiple days).

We engaged a total of 69 students through our tabling events with Recology.

**What would you do differently in the future?**

In the future, we plan to promote the Trash Art Contest across more art-related UW communities, such as featuring the submission form in the UW Makerspace ([www.washington.edu/innovation/spaces](http://www.washington.edu/innovation/spaces)) email newsletter. Although we did not experience this issue this year, we plan to determine a tie-break process for next year's Trash Art Contest. Our judging committee individually scores each piece using a scoring rubric. In each category (2D art, 3D art, textile art, and literature), the piece with the highest combined score wins. Fine-tuning our tie-break process will improve the operational flow of the contest. We also plan to determine whether we will permit repeat winners.

We plan to prioritize outdoor locations for our residence hall tabling events where possible. While winter weather is a limiting consideration, tabling in outdoor spaces generally enables us to reach more students than in indoor spaces due to higher levels of foot traffic.

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

We advise other colleges to consider time and resources. Students and student groups can be great partners for direct engagement with students. To build partnerships with students and student groups, we recommend the following practices:

- Develop contacts with multiple interested students and relevant student groups throughout the academic year.
- Provide outreach information and/or training to students and student groups so they can promote waste reduction to their peers.
  - Check in to ensure everyone is on the same page with waste-related messaging.
- Provide examples of cool waste reduction and/or educational events that students could hold. If needed, provide instructions for organizing and hosting these events. Then you can cross-promote other groups' good work related to waste!

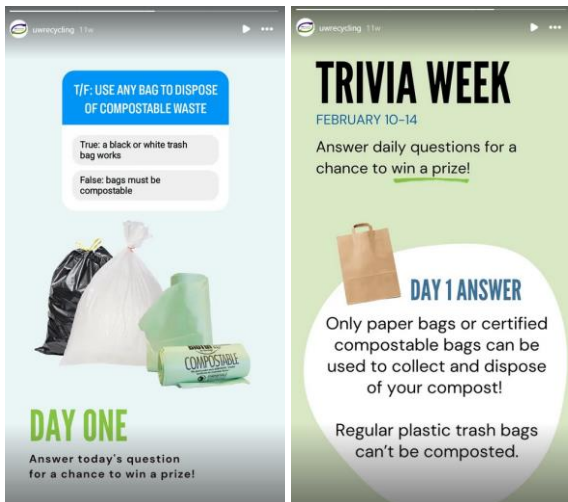
We also recommend providing waste outreach and waste reduction training to other campus departments and contracted waste vendors, if applicable and whenever possible. When other groups share the work of spreading waste diversion/reduction resources and awareness, the message can spread further.

If you would like to run a Trash Art Contest on your own campus, feel free to contact our team at [recycle@uw.edu](mailto:recycle@uw.edu). We'd be happy to meet with you and discuss our insights further.

**Photos and Graphics:**



A selection of submissions to our Trash Art Contest. The butterfly is made from unused personal medical syringes. The wreath is made from old jeans and aluminum cans. The placemats are woven from plastic bags used to deliver newspapers. Credit: University of Washington (Shellye Horowitz, Marisa Garcia, Arni Litt).



The question and answer (posted the following day) for Day 1 of our Waste Trivia Week, hosted on Instagram stories. Credit: UW Recycling.



An Instagram story shared by UW Recycling to promote tabling events in UW residence halls. Credit: UW Recycling.