

GREEN EVENTS: CATERER QUESTIONNAIRE

Washington University hosts hundreds of events, large and small, on campus annually. On many occasions, event organizers have the option to hire a caterer or order food from an area restaurant to bring the many tastes and flavors of St. Louis onto campus, introducing WashU students, staff and faculty from all over the world to what makes this town great.

Many event organizers opt to make these events "green" or "zero waste" by arranging for compost and recycling collection. For such events, it is beneficial to have caterers who emphasize green practices too.

As you navigate the process of finding the right caterer for your event, it helps to ask them the right questions to ensure that they are able to align with your sustainability goals.

General Considerations:

- Is the vendor a restaurant with large catering options, or a full-service restaurant?
- What type of menu does the vendor offer? (Examples: Tex-Mex buffet; sandwiches, upscale full service catering, etc.)
- Approximately how far are they from the main WashU campus?
- Do they offer delivery? If so, is there a charge for it?

Sustainability Standard Questions:

- Are you certified by the Green Dining Alliance (GDA)?
 - Find out more here: <https://greendiningalliance.org/find-a-restaurant/>
 - While this is a great initial screen for basic sustainability, it does not mean that they will necessarily align with zero waste goals – be sure to confirm the questions below if you are composting at your event!
- Are your staff members trained to understand your sustainability business practices?
 - For example, are they trained on proper recycling?
 - Could they answer questions correctly about whether or not serviceware is recyclable or compostable?
- Do you provide compostable serviceware for catering?
 - Includes forks/knives/spoons, napkins, plates, wraps, etc?
- How are your meals typically packaged? (Boxed lunches? A large platter for self-service? etc.)
 - Boxed lunches are convenient, but they often include a large amount of packaging. Can you serve sandwiches on a platter and have people grab a plate and then pick up their sandwich, some chips or pasta salad and a piece of fruit? Avoid a full utensil packet (knife, fork, spoon, salt/pepper, napkin) in plastic in favor of only what you need (napkin and a fork). Often, if people pick up only what they want, you have less food waste as well.
 - If you can get a detailed overview, you can plan for the waste management or request omissions and substitutions.
- Do you offer options to deliver/serve food on reusable dishes/platters/carafes/serving utensils, etc.?
 - Example: coffee carafes instead of disposable cardboard/plastic options
- Can you provide bulk water or other bulk beverage options upon request?
 - Seek alternatives to individual bottled water and soda.
 - If alternatives are not available, cans or boxed water is preferable to plastic bottles.
- Can you provide bulk condiments upon request?
 - I.e. providing ketchup bottles instead of ketchup packets, creamer; cream cheese, etc.

- Does your menu provide options that have locally-sourced ingredients?

Additional Considerations:

- Specifically ask for service provider to leave out unnecessary disposables (for example, half as many mustard packets as they would usually provide, no straws, unneeded utensils, etc.)
- If your preferred caterer cannot provide compostable serviceware, you could decline to take what they offer and purchase alternatives.
- If you are making an effort to use a green caterer, be sure to set up compost collection: <https://sustainability.wustl.edu/get-involved/event-greening/>
- For small events, you can do DIY composting. Simply adapt an existing container – be sure to make an announcement or post a sign to ensure people put their waste in the right area. Compost MUST be collected in a compostable bag.
- Small volumes of bagged compost can be deposited in the yellow totes within the trash enclosure in the Athletic Center parking lot (by the tennis courts). Be a good steward to ensure this opting continues – check your bags and remove items that are not compostable.

If you are confused by which products to purchase, contact the Office of Sustainability to check products before purchase or to receive vendor recommendations: Cassie Hage (chage22@wustl.edu, 314-935-5947)

RECOMMENDED CATERERS

The Office of Sustainability is piloting a process to create a list of caterers that can reliably provide zero landfill events and offer menus that also align with the new Green Event certification. To view the list, go to the Office of Sustainability website and review the Event Greening Resources.

Direct link to recommended caterers:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1SUBdp_ZVAkKHh9e0IJs4p_LoALXtY7FfERtX6Opopk/edit?usp=sharing

Is your favorite caterer missing from this list? Send us their name or send them [this form](#) to fill out. Filling out the form is a commitment to participate in zero waste catering for WashU events.