

Elevating Environmental Performance at Coffee Expo

OVERVIEW

The Specialty Coffee Association ([SCA](#)) encompasses every element of the coffee value chain and is dedicated to building an industry that is fair, sustainable, and nurturing for all. Because its mission is to engage, inspire, and expand a sustainable global specialty coffee community, the SCA prioritizes eco-friendly practices.

This sustainability-centered mindset has propelled the association to build a sustainable event management program at Specialty Coffee Expo that aligns with ISO 20121 sustainability standards and encourages continual improvement of the event's environmental performance.

BACKGROUND

For its 2019 Specialty Coffee Expo in Boston, SCA collaborated with [Honeycomb Strategies](#), [Freeman](#), and the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center ([BCEC](#)) to develop a comprehensive waste management plan. This approach would improve sustainable event processes and performance through targeted goals:

- Address items being procured that could ultimately end up in the waste stream.
- Minimize the amount of material sent to landfill by finding avenues to donate, compost, or repurpose.
- Engage and educate all Expo stakeholders about waste generation and responsible waste management.

Ultimately, the SCA team set a goal to achieve a waste diversion rate 15% higher than the venue's average annual baseline of 47%.

IMPLEMENTATION

Waste Management Strategy

As the organizer of a food and beverage-focused show where the use of tasting vessels is required, SCA has a unique challenge when it comes to waste at its Expo. Exhibitors prefer "virgin" serviceware for every new taste, which maintains the purity of the product. For the 2019 event, the team developed a strategy to reduce the use of single-use disposables, tackle the collection of waste front of house, and organize the sort/separate process back of house to make waste more useful down the supply chain.

Waste Bins

Working with the BCEC, SCA augmented its standard two-bin waste system of pairing landfill and recycling and added a third clearly marked compost bin in strategic locations: public spaces, activity halls, and in multiple areas across the Expo floor. All bins were specifically placed in groups with a minimum of two bins (landfill and recycling) or in clusters to make it clear for users. Stand-alone bins were prohibited. The bins were color-coded (black: landfill, blue: recycling, green: compost) and included color-coded liners to ensure proper collection and separation management when taken back of house for final disposal.



Team members conducted waste collection in a single stream and created a back-of-house sorting station to ensure that everything that could be repurposed was diverted from landfill. Training materials were created and distributed in both English and Spanish to ensure all team members were well versed on the waste-management plan and proper disposal channels.



To help exhibitors manage compostable waste created by coffee brewing, SCA provided an option to include compost bins with signage inside their booths. Landfill bins in booths were eliminated and exhibitors were encouraged to use the larger bins on the Expo hall floor that would later be sorted to avoid contamination.

Focused Coffee Grounds Collection

Coffee grounds, when separated from compost, are a very valuable waste stream for farmers. In an effort to better utilize this waste stream and provide something truly useful for the local farming community, SCA made a focused effort to source and collect grounds from all the coffee brewing classrooms and workshops, exhibition and activities hall, special event areas, and pop-up cafes. Working with local waste partner [Save that Stuff](#), SCA partnered with [The Food Project](#). This local nonprofit engages youth by teaching them about sustainable agriculture at urban and suburban farms, growing food, and distributing farm yields through community supported agriculture programs, farmers' markets, and donations to local hunger relief organizations.

Disposable Cups

Ever mindful of the industry's biggest waste stream, SCA zeroed in on ways to minimize the show's impact from disposable cups. To manage waste going to landfill, SCA used compostable cups for all its functions, and worked with [Detpak](#) who provided recyclable coffee cups and collection stations for the Roasters Village area of the show.

In partnership with [MiiR](#), SCA offered reusable cups for free at the Sustainability Station and piloted a program through [Keep Cup](#) in the Roaster Village where attendees could borrow a cup for tasting, clean the cup at wash-and-rinse stations, and then leave the cup behind for reuse the next day.



Stakeholder Engagement

To ensure sustainability and waste goals were met for Coffee Expo 2019, SCA worked with myriad partners to create an inclusive and comprehensive sustainability plan.

- **Boston Convention and Exhibition Center (BCEC)** managed front of house bin placement and waste collection as well as back of house waste streams, spot checks for contaminants, and disposal. Through its Convention [C.A.R.E.](#) (Community Assistance by Responsible Events) program, the BCEC provided donation bins around the show floor to collect clean, non-perishable goods to be donated to local charities.
- **Freeman** focused on maximizing the amount of recyclable and reusable materials used for items such as signage and reusable exhibit materials for walls and counters, which were used to build the SCA store. Freeman also offset waste by providing black carpet, which is up to 50% recycled content and can be reused up to six times. SCA also reduced their waste footprint by opting to leave several areas uncarpeted. The team provided 40 hours of labor to collect food and material donations at the close of the show.
- **Levy Catering** (at the BCEC) worked to procure all compostable disposable serveware throughout concession areas. They helped coordinate food donation through local organization [Rescuing Leftover Cuisine](#) and provided no-fee refrigeration to hold the food overnight before it could be picked up by [The Greater Boston Food Bank](#).
- **Save that Stuff** is the waste hauling partner at the BCEC and provided options for most all items to be donated, composted, or recycled.

Communication

A major contributor to the success of Specialty Coffee Expo was actively and clearly communicating clear and measurable sustainability goals, particularly those concerning waste diversion, to all stakeholders.

Helpful emails leading up to the show outlined specific actions attendees could take to reduce their environmental impact at the event:

- Understand the differences between compost, recycling, and landfill with specific examples
- “Think before you throw” with helpful hints about what waste goes where in designated bins
- Bring a reusable water bottle to use with filtered water stations on-site
- Use the SCA mobile app rather than collecting a printed program

SCA surveyed their hotel partners and requested that in-room recycling bins and public space recycling be provided in each of the contracted hotels. Survey results were shared with attendees on the housing page to encourage more sustainable choices when booking a hotel.

Dedicated pre-show emails to exhibitors provided available resources and suggested ideas to be more sustainable including:

- On-site donation programs for any leftover materials, managed by Freeman and BCEC, with forms provided in exhibitor service kit
- On-site donation for leftover food and beverages, managed by Freeman and Levy
- Options for recycling and compost bins for use in booths
- Procuring reusable/compostable drink and serviceware
- Consider reusable graphics or use materials that can be recycled after the show managed by the recycling waste streams
- Minimize printing and giveaways

The waste plan and training materials were created in collaboration key stakeholders outlined above. All team members were part of the months-long planning and execution process to ensure success. Bi-monthly planning calls as well as bilingual (Spanish and English) training materials were created for all team members.

OUTCOMES

With careful planning and a dedicated community approach, SCA exceeded its goal of a 62% diversion rate, achieving a 70% waste diversion rate at the convention center, which was 23% higher than the annual diversion rate at the BCEC. The group effort also helped the SCA report strong results:

- 14,629 pounds (6.63 metric tons) of food, beverages, and materials [3810 lbs. (1.72 metric tons) of food/beverage; 10,819 lbs. (4.90 metric tons) of materials] were collected for local nonprofits through the Exhibitor Donation Program and Food Donation Program
- Almost five tons of coffee grounds were donated to local farms and gardens
- 18.53 tons (16.81 metric tons) of materials were recycled
- 100% of the coffee beans brewed in SCA-controlled areas was composted
- 100% of serviceware used at BCEC concessions was composted
- 30% of exhibitors that ordered booth bins chose compost and recycling bins to manage their waste responsibly

A copy of the full 2019 Sustainability Report is located [here](#).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR 2020

While the 2019 Specialty Coffee Expo made substantial strides and successfully met key goals, the SCA realizes that its biggest waste challenge lies with disposable cups. The 2019 Keep Cup program at the Expo provided an important step forward, so the team plans to double down on that effort and expand for 2020. Current planned initiatives include a BAM (Borrow a Mug) program and a reuse opportunity that will offer cups for rent that will later be saved and reused for future Coffee Expos.



SCA collected a record volume of items for donation such as bookshelves, tables, chairs, and countertops, which was exciting to divert these items going to landfill. It also indicates the need to work further with exhibitors on order quantities and educate them on renting items that can be reused again.

To create a sustainable event in Boston, SCA established three long-term event sustainability objectives: improve sustainable event process and performance; optimize stakeholder engagement; and exemplify leadership and inclusion. The objectives cover everything from communication strategies to waste management.

By establishing key performance indicators, SCA has recognized pain points and made strategic changes to achieve impressive and measurable results. This approach of employing sustainable best practices, setting goals to work toward, and tracking key performance metrics is a model most any event organizer could easily follow to produce a more sustainable event.