

Weigh the Waste How-to Guide

FRN National Team
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Photo courtesy of University of Dayton FRN

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Introduction

Weigh the Waste (WTW) is a fun and interactive way to engage fellow students in understanding just how much plate waste an individual can produce at the end of a meal. While food recovery is an important and effective solution to food waste, exposing how much food students throw away demonstrates that, even if unintentionally, everyone can cause food waste.

During a WTW event, you will ask students to place their waste into different containers. You will weigh these bins every 15 or 30 minutes and record the data. This will show you how much post-consumer waste is produced at your school.

Let us know if you are planning an event:

- Email: programs@foodrecoverynetwork.org
- Text: (240) 473-3778

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MATERIALS

In order to plan a successful WTW event, you will need to gather certain materials ahead of time. Exact materials will vary from school to school, but the following are the most basic, necessary items that you will need:

➤ Trash bins

- We recommend five separate bins, one for each of the following categories: Edible (unfinished food scraps), Inedible (like orange and banana peels or strawberry leaves), Liquid, Recycling, and Landfill.
 - » **Liquid container:** A plastic, spill-free container usually works best.
 - » You might also consider a sixth bin for napkins, for more precise food waste data, but this is not essential.
- If possible, use see-through containers rather than standard trash bins. This will show your audience their food waste.

➤ Signs

- To label each trash can
- Make these signs easy to read with big, clear letters.

➤ Scale

- To weigh the trash cans
 - » This must be big enough to fit your trash containers.

➤ Pen and a notebook OR computer

- For note-taking

➤ One box of rubber gloves

➤ Trash bags

- If your school has a composting system, use compostable liners.

➤ Whiteboard (not required)

- Dry erase markers and an eraser
- Suggested for data-keeping
- Useful in a fast-paced environment

VOLUNTEERS

➤ Recruit volunteers from both within and outside of your FRN chapter.

- See if other members of the sustainability community at your school would be interested in helping organize and volunteer for this event.
- Reach out to organizations who require service hours.

➤ Utilize an electronic sign-up sheet that you can easily share with others.

- Send out at least 2 weeks prior to the event.
- Be specific with the tasks that volunteers will do during their shift.
- List 30-minute shifts throughout the day, during each meal period. Encourage students to sign up for more than one shift if they are able.
- Collect volunteer contact information.

Pro-tip:

[Here is a sample sign-up sheet.](#) If you'd like to use this, make a copy and save it to your Drive or download it as an Excel file by clicking File > Download as > Microsoft Excel (.xlsx).

PREPARATION

➤ Contact your food donor.

- *This event cannot happen without the approval of your food donor.*
- If you plan on hosting this event in your campus dining hall (a popular choice), you will need to contact the dining manager(s) at least three weeks in advance of your planned date.
- We suggest emailing them to set up a time to pitch them the event in-person, if possible. If they are your chapter's food donor, use your positive relationship with them to your advantage!
- Invite your food donor to partner with you in hosting it! Make sure to plan a date and time that works best for both of you.
- They may also be able to help and/or provide materials, such as tables, trash bins, compostable trash bags, or a whiteboard.
- Even if they can't necessarily provide additional materials or resources, **it is vital to get permission from the donor to host the event and keep them in the loop since it will be held in their space.**
- Ask dining staff where you should dispose of your trash at the end of the event and where you should return any borrowed materials.

➡ Create a spreadsheet for data collection. Be prepared to update the weight of the separate bins throughout the event.

- We suggest using Google Sheets.
 - » [Here is a template for data collection.](#) Like the sign-up sheet, be sure to make a copy and save it to your Drive or download it as an Excel file by clicking File > Download as > Microsoft Excel (.xlsx).

DURING THE EVENT

- ➡ Place the trash bins near dish return/trash area.
- ➡ Double-bag bins with trash bags or compostable liners.
- ➡ Determine the tare weight by placing empty bins on the scale. Enter the weight in the corresponding cell of your data collection spreadsheet.
- ➡ Have at least one volunteer at all times standing by the bins to direct students to throw their waste away in the corresponding bins.
 - Politely ask students to separate their trash and leftovers into the proper receptacles (Edible, Inedible, Liquid, Recycling, and Landfill).
 - » Use language like, “Before you return your dishes, please dump the rest of any edible food scraps into the Edibles bin, your inedible waste — banana peels, orange peels, etc. — into this Inedibles bin, and the rest of your drink into our Liquids bin.”
 - » Students’ reactions will vary. Some will be eager to help out, while others may either not notice you or intentionally walk past you. While you and all volunteers should encourage them to participate, **be respectful** and don’t force it.
 - » This is also a great opportunity to plug FRN! If a student asks why you are hosting this event, say something like, “This event allows us to shine a light on how much food each individual student wastes every day. We aren’t weighing your waste to make you feel bad, but rather to help find a solution to food waste! I am particularly interested in these efforts because of my involvement with the Food Recovery Network...”
- ➡ Weigh each bin every 30 minutes and enter data into [spreadsheet](#).
- ➡ When you need to switch bags, make sure to mark this accordingly in your data collection spreadsheet.
 - *If you use our template, you can simply write an “X” in the “Bag Switch” column.*
- ➡ Take photos.

➤ After final weigh, *clean up!*

- It is crucial to leave your environment exactly how you found it! This will show that you respect the dining staff and are grateful for the opportunity, increasing the chance of hosting events with them in the future!

➤ Optional: advertise FRN.

- If a student seems particularly interested in your food recovery efforts, let them know about your next recovery or info session! Collect potential volunteers' contact information in a spreadsheet. While your focus should remain on WTW, consider having one volunteer at a separate table or standing to the side passing out flyers, handouts, or stickers.
- Don't forget to follow up with anyone who expresses interest in joining FRN!
- Visit our student portal or [click here for our Flyers & Handouts](#).

AFTER THE EVENT: WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR RESULTS

➤ Send it to your dining services.

- This information can be incredibly useful for your dining provider in helping them cut down on waste. By understanding what types of food are being thrown away most and when (breakfast, lunch, or dinner), they can cut down on those items. This will save the institution money in the future.

➤ Share the results and photos on social media by tagging us @foodrecovery and using the hashtag #WeighTheWaste and you could be featured by FRN!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s [Guide to Conducting Student Food Waste Audits](#).