

Sustainability 2028 Goal-Setting Workshop: Waste

November 18, 2019, 9:30am-11:30am

Meeting Notes

Recorded by Elias Platte-Bermeo

Meeting Attendees

Seth Strongin, Mark Ewalt, Tara Davis, Ellen Dux, Peniel Park, Jeremy Kagan, Nichelle Mitchell-Huizar, Joshua Sierra, Farris Sukkar, Elias Platte-Bermeo, Tianna Shaw-Wakeman, Isabella Caltabiano, Naomi Martinez, Karen Reed, Gina Whisenant, Pix Veredia, Josh Goldstein, Dan Mazmanian, Sri Sankari, Rebecca Lonergan, Kim Sandoval, Audra Bardsley

Agenda

1. Introductions and goals of the meeting (9:30 to 9:40am)
2. Progress to date with 2028 Sustainability Plan (9:40 to 9:45am)
 - a. This is the 3rd full SSC Meeting within the 2028 Sustainability Planning process (Energy, Water, Transportation completed)
 - b. In January we will hold an Engagement meeting to set goals for how we want to engage and educate the USC community with regard to sustainability efforts
3. Waste Goals and Initiatives (9:45 to 11:15am)
 - a. Policy Context
 - i. California 75 Percent Initiative - Policy goal to achieve 75% diversion through recycling, composting and source reduction of solid waste by 2020.
 - ii. AB 341 - Businesses that generate more than 4 cubic yards of solid waste per week must arrange for recycling services
 - iii. SB 1383 - To lower methane emissions, State set 50% reduction goal in statewide organic waste disposal from 2014 levels by 2020, and 75% reduction from by 2025.
 - iv. AB 1826 - Businesses that generate more than 4 cubic yards of solid waste per week must engage in organic recycling activities
 1. 2020 Assessment: If CALRecycle determines that organic waste diversion of 50% is not achieved, they will lower the threshold to 2 cubic yards per week in 2021
 - v. Please see Arup slide deck for detailed information on waste policy context at the local level
 - b. Goal Setting

- i. **Goal #1: Achieve zero waste (90+ diversion) of solid waste from the landfill by 2028**
1. UC System has a goal of Zero Waste (90+% diversion) by 2020 and is currently at 64% diversion. Stanford has a goal of Zero Waste (90+% diversion) by 2030 and is currently at 63%.
 - a. Please see Arup slide deck for detailed benchmark of near peer universities and local government goals
 2. Construction and demolition is included in overall waste diversion numbers for the peer institutions, which has posed problems as it heavily skews the data based on on-going construction projects
 3. Dan Mazmanian suggested creating Principles for why we are reducing waste: a means of meeting regulations? Following best practices? Reducing GHG emissions?
 - a. This idea will be explored in the January Engagement SSC meetings.
 4. Waste diversion will increasingly become a priority for stakeholders due to concerns about resource efficiency, lack of landfill space, GHG reductions, and rising financial costs associated with landfill waste
 5. Food touches several areas of the waste issue, including packaging. Other universities and organizations are looking into systems for eliminating single-use take-away containers where there are controlled environments (e.g. university dining facilities). Certain cities like Portland have programs to allow customers to bring their own reusable containers to all eateries.
 6. The City of LA is using RecycLA as a tool to discourage sending waste going to landfill through fees
 7. Dan Mazmanian suggests using evolving industry best practices for diverting waste. This is more impactful than focusing on eliminating specific products (e.g. plastic water bottles) in the present.
 8. Gina believes there's value in understanding why students are not utilizing campus water refill stations
 - a. Karen has a map of water refill stations and will share this with the Office of Sustainability to promote.
 - b. Nichelle noted that several years ago Residential Education provided incoming freshmen with reusable

water bottles, but several hundred bottles were thrown away by the end of the year.

9. Nichelle believes there's more room to incorporate friendly competition into campaigns on waste diversion. Other schools, like LMU, are already doing this.
 10. Naomi pointed out that certain departments are encouraging staff to forego plastic water bottles at events
 11. Mark reiterated that, for an initiative to be effective, the inventory of materials, educational campaigns, and tools to force compliance all must be present
 - a. Gina noted that "compliance by threat" is very effective for a financial department, with RecyclA serving as a good example of this.
- ii. Zero Waste Approach Strategy & Initiatives
1. Approach Strategy: Waste Management Plan → Education → Source Reduction → Source Separation → Recycling → Composting
 2. Waste Management Plan Initiatives:
 - a. at least two annual waste characterizations from 2020 onwards
 - i. If our efforts are effective, the waste characterizations conducted now will look different in 2021
 - ii. It's important to note that a Waste Plan needs to be iterative to keep on course for meeting your target
 3. Education Initiatives
 - a. Starter training upon plan implementation
 - b. Mandatory induction training for new staff and student orientations
 - c. Tours of recycling/composting facilities
 - i. Research shows that it's more impactful to go on physical tours than to watch videos; however, it's important to note that the way people are consuming information is changing
 - d. Behavioral change pilots
 - e. Possible model to follow: Stanford "Zero-waste partnerships" in student housing, where buildings opt in to a waste diversion program

1. Nichelle plans to incorporate a waste competition into housing once all waste streams are incorporated
2. Isabella noted that it's important to not leave complete ownership of projects and programs in the hands of students who will eventually leave; these must be institutionalized for longevity
3. Kim Sandoval noted that people will generally do what is most convenient for them.
 - a. Example: Arup discourages landfill waste in their office through a desk-side recycling/composting program which removes most landfill bins and requires greater effort for staff to put items in landfill bins.

4. Source Reduction Initiatives

- a. Upstream procurement mandates and prohibitions (e.g. Styrofoam, foil, single-use plastics)

- i. Rebecca noted efforts need to be timed carefully, for example, USC updated certain waste bins without adequately managing source reduction

- ii. **Potential Goal #2: Eliminate single-use plastics from the waste-stream by 2028.**
Should this be a standalone goal? A clause? An initiative under another goal? Governments and universities handle this in various ways

1. Dan believes having this as a standalone goal doesn't get to the heart of the story we're trying to tell. For instance, the story may be "eating sustainably in the 21st century" which touches food and food product sustainability. Without the story, implementing a ban on products simply feels like another rule to follow

- a. Rebecca believes creating cohesive themes and stories is an engagement issue. We ought to be creating this cohesive narrative that ties all areas of this plan together
 - 2. Based on the waste characterizations that FMS consultants have conducted, USC's largest problem is currently food waste sent to landfill. This is in line with most other organizations.
 - a. Rebecca believes there is a culture change required to reduce food waste on campus, in meetings, etcetera
 - 3. Reducing plastics aligns with city and county goals, our goals in procurement, waste, carbon, and more. This is why Mark believes it is important to highlight reducing plastic by setting a goal for this.
 - 4. Tianna believes it's important to discuss ramifications of initiatives; e.g. the true life cycle of "sustainable" plastic products, like handing out hundreds of reusable water bottles. Mindset of USC community needs to shift to think of reusable products as a necessity which people only need one of, like a backpack.
 - 5. It is important to note that it will seem odd if USC is out of step with the City in terms of waste initiatives, so they should be closely related or there should be strong reasoning for why USC is deviating from the City.
- 5. Source Separation Initiatives:
 - a. Improve signage of waste infrastructure
 - i. Gina noted that, for signage, it's important to consider what the city has mandated that it will

- accept as recycling/composting, which may differ from what can technically be recycled.
 - ii. It's important to not put out massive amounts of signage until other efforts (e.g. composting) are in place - changing messaging lessens the efficacy of the educational campaign
 - iii. Signage should be accessible to all users, regardless of language barriers or disabilities
 - b. Develop a comprehensive outlay of outside separate-waste-stream bins
 - i. It will be important to have a university-wide mandate that every school and building follows the same streamlined process. Consistency in branding and messaging is crucial.
6. Recycling Initiatives:
- a. University-wide enforcement of recycling standards
 - i. To improve the lifespan of products, there are companies that can tackle hard-to-recycle products, and donation programs can serve as a useful tool.
 - ii. Europe has "design for disassembly" laws which increase a product's ability to be recycled. These laws have not taken off in the United States but could be a focus of USC's efforts.
 - b. Enforce Move-In/Move-Out donation programs
 - c. Mattress recycling program
 - d. Enforce the E-waste program
 - e. Separation/tracking of white, shredded recycled paper
7. Composting Initiatives:
- a. Develop a comprehensive composting program with provisions for liquid disposal
 - i. Stanford began a composting program in 2003 which includes all dining, on-site vendors, housing and some athletic venues and schools, academic buildings.
 - ii. Stanford and UCLA have addressed building-level waste minimization through various methods, including opt-in zero waste programs

where interested buildings receive 3-stream infrastructure

- iii. Tianna notes that education will be important once composting is implemented to avoid confusion (e.g. compostable items being put in the recycling stream)

- b. Enforce the use of compostable containers in place of single-use plastics on campus (after reducing source generation where possible).

8. Zero Waste Events Current USC Efforts:

- a. Coliseum program with sort staff to reach 90+% diversion.

- b. Zero Waste inauguration and several other campus events

- i. Events represent USC's reach into the greater LA community. This is an important area to demonstrate that USC has its priorities in order.

- ii. USC can expand the number of zero waste events hosted and/or increase the prominence of zero waste events

c. Review of Initiatives

d. Discussion of Challenges and Barriers (11:15 – 11:30)

- i. Where do you see problems in waste awareness/education? Where do you see challenges/barriers to addressing those problems?

- 1. Confusion about where to place items

- 2. Aversion to waste diversion. There is suspicion and resistance to certain waste diversion efforts, which represents institutional/cultural resistance.

- a. It's important to have different messaging strategies for different audiences.

- b. For audiences who do not already care, we need to simplify sustainability

- 3. Identity connection: some students may have an aversion to being associated with the "green" crowd

- a. In creating culture changes, it's important to incorporate projects into the student experience to demonstrate that there is personal ownership of one's impact on the environment

- 4. Burden of proving Return on Investment

- a. This is part of a conversation about how value is recognized, which will need to be held at the highest levels of the university as part of USC's broader culture change
- 5. Waste behavior seems to be tied to affluence/entitlement
- 6. Accessibility of sustainability
 - a. USC needs to understand how to reach populations beyond the already-riled-up group of students, staff, and faculty. This can be done by making the sustainable choice the easiest and most rewarding choice.
 - i. For example, providing free recycling and composting bins with educational materials.
- 7. Ability to control environments, i.e. expand the controlled model of the Coliseum
- 4. Procurement
 - a. Procurement will be discussed in a December meeting, date and time TBD.
- 5. Open discussion and close