



Engaging Your Neighbors Toolkit

There are three primary roles for Zero Waste Block Leaders:

1. Establish yourself as a resource.
2. Educate others.
3. Create opportunities.

Block Leaders may select or create projects that meet any of these three needs depending on their time, abilities and interests. We recommend beginning by establishing yourself as a resource through introductions about your new role to your communities. Consider ways that you may engage with your neighborhood, community groups, friends, extended family networks or workplace. You may decide that you want to focus your efforts on engaging with one or two of these communities, or you may decide that you want everyone in your life to be more active in recycling and composting. This decision is up to you.

Introducing Yourself as a Resource for Recycling and Composting

Making your presence known is a key part of opening doors to discussion in your neighborhoods. Let your neighbors know that you are a resource for recycling and composting and have knowledge of the different options for recycling and composting in Austin. If they have any questions, you can answer them or connect them to the right place to get answers (Feel free to refer anyone to the Austin Resource Recovery website!)

Project ideas:

Neighborhood Door-to-door Introductions (In Print)

Print out short introductions (may be set up as multiple introductions on one sheet to save space, then cut into smaller sections) and deliver them to your neighbors.

Example:

My name is _____, and I'm a Zero Waste Block Leader in the neighborhood. I'm passionate about making sure everyone in the neighborhood is recycling and composting to the best of their abilities. Recycling and composting isn't just about helping the environment, in many cases it's more cost effective and it also creates jobs. Over the past decade 1 landfill has filled up and closed in Austin, and we are running out of space in the 2nd landfill. Recycling and composting more waste will slow down this rate and help preserve Austin's natural beauty. If there is anything that is stopping you from recycling and composting, or if you have any questions, please call me at _____ so we can talk.

Neighborhood Door-to-door Introductions (In Person)

Knock on your neighbors' doors and shake their hands! Tell them a similar statement to what is found in the sample print introduction, and let them know any ideas you may have about improving recycling and composting in the neighborhood. You may want to have something available to hand them with your contact information.

Introductions for Community Groups and Co-workers

The next time you meet with a community group you are active in or convene a staff meeting, inform everyone about your new Zero Waste Block Leader role. Ask for questions, let people know their options for recycling and composting (e.g. City curbside recycling and composting programs) and the Austin Recycle and Reuse Drop-Off Center, or propose ideas to get people recycling and composting (see Creating Opportunities section below for starter ideas).

Inter-office Email Introduction

If you don't regularly meet with your co-workers, or if you work in a small team at a large office, send an all-staff email about being a Zero Waste Block Leader. Encourage people to email you with questions or stop by your office, announce any ideas you have for starting recycling and composting in the office and ask for feedback or other ideas. Let people know they can check to see what materials they can recycle or find a place to drop off and or pick up recyclable materials by visiting the Austin Resource Recovery website:

- City of Austin recycling and composting programs:
austintexas.gov/department/austin-resource-recovery

Email Lists and Facebook Groups

Compile a list of emails or create a Facebook Group for your neighbors, friends, family, etc. who are interested in hearing more about recycling and composting. Send out informal updates about how to recycle and Austin recycling and composting-related news. Periodically send out reminders about what you're doing and ask if anyone has any questions or if they're interested in starting recycling and composting more in their home.

Educating Your Neighbors

Knowledge about the importance of recycling and composting is the greatest barrier to getting people involved. Residents of Austin place relatively less importance on the idea of recycling and composting than their peers across the nation. When people hear about the ways to recycle in the area and why they should start a practice from a trusted friend, family member, neighbor or co-worker, they are more likely to begin recycling and composting on their own. In addition to the project ideas here, we've listed many of the questions and misconceptions we hear from the community on the FAQ online at austintexas.gov/department/austin-resource-recovery/faq. These may come up in your conversations.

Project ideas:

Distribute Flyers and Door Hangers

We will provide you with educational print materials about recycling and composting in the area, and you may hand them out to your neighbors, friends or co-workers. You may also walk your neighborhood and place them in your neighbors' mailboxes and door handles. If you have a personal or work event coming up, or if you have a facility in your neighborhood that regularly hosts events, hand them out in person there. Please let me know if you need more materials at any time.

Local Foods Potluck Dinner + Info Session

Invite people to each make a dish featuring a local food. The Sustainable Food Center Farmers Market is a good place to send people if they are unsure about how / where to buy local. During the dinner, take a moment to talk with everyone about your thoughts on recycling and composting. Offer resources and places to find more information, such as our website: austinrecycles.com.

Simple Afternoon Information Session

Invite people for a simple afternoon session (30 – 60 minutes) to explain about different options for recycling and composting in Austin and to answer any questions. Encourage people to think before they come about unused items stored in their home now, such as cell phones and TVs, which could be recycled.

“Recycle More. Ask Me How” Yard Sign

Place the yard sign in your yard to encourage your neighbors to come to you if they have questions about recycling, reusing, or composting.

Austin Resource Recovery Newsletter

Share the digital version of the newsletter among your neighbors and friends, and encourage them to sign-up if they haven't already. Also, feel free to use one of the articles in the newsletter in your homeowners or neighborhood association newsletter.

Social Media

If you use social media, this can be a powerful and fun way to engage your social networks. You can share any of the Austin Resource Recovery posts on Facebook, or NextDoor. If you do, use the hashtag #BlockLeaderATX in any of your posts. We're happy to share content of yours, too! Our Facebook page is [facebook.com/AustinRecycles](https://www.facebook.com/AustinRecycles)

Dare to Go Zero Watch Party

We created a short docuseries, “Dare to Go Zero”, in which Four Austin families try to reduce the amount of waste they generate while documenting their progress on camera... all for a chance to win a Sustainable Home Improvement Package worth more than \$2,000. We have the DVD's available for you to have.

Creating Opportunities to Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Compost

Once you have people interested in the idea of picking a sustainable option for getting rid of their waste, consider creating ways for them to carry out this idea.

Project ideas:

Mass-cycle

A mass-cycle is a morning or afternoon event where you collect recycling. You may specify the types of items you are looking for, such as Styrofoam. For example, suggest to your neighbors that everyone saves their Styrofoam items for 1 month. Then, designate a location for everyone to bring their paper to. Take a photo of the final amount of paper to share with

your neighbors. This has the added effect of being a visual reminder in each of your neighbors' homes about how much Styrofoam they actually throw away in one month.

You may also make this an ongoing or semi-regular event with differing themes – ask your neighbors to bring one to two types of items each time. Consider picking non-traditional recycling items such as batteries and light bulbs.

Transport the Styrofoam to the Recycle & Reuse Drop-off Center at 2514 Business Center Drive. The mass-cycle may require a truck or van, and you may want to be considerate of which types of items you agree to collect. Recycling and composting can be a messy business.

Clothing Swap

A clothing swap is a party where each person brings at least one item of clothing or accessory they haven't worn in a while. At the party, friends trade clothing and accessories. The more you bring, the more potential you have for a swap. Clothing swaps are creative ways to "donate" unwanted items and get something in return.

DIY Upcycle Craft Night

Invite your neighbors and friends over for an evening. Ask them to bring an out-of-use or under-used household item to make their craft as well as 1 – 3 craft supplies of their choice. Provide additional craft supplies and a little inspiration. If desired, create a theme for the night so that everyone has an idea to start working from. There LOADS of exciting DIY craft ideas available online from TerraCycle – check out terracycle.com/en-US/pages/do-it-yourself-projects to pick a project!

Upcycling is a creative way to reduce the waste we send to landfills. See the Craftgawker website at craftgawker.com/post/category/upcycle for more information about upcycling and to find places where there are upcycling craft ideas.

Make a DIY Food Scrap Collector

Creating a Do It Yourself Food Scrap Collector is a fun way to engage your neighbors, especially the kiddos, in composting and help to eliminate the “composting is gross” mentality. You can easily create a food scrap collector with a reusable plastic coffee container, carbon filters from the pet supply store, and a hot glue gun or super glue. The instructions are available online at <http://www.diynatural.com/kitchen-compost-bucket-diy-easy-and-frugal/>

This is a living document, and we'd like to add your great ideas to it! Send your suggestions to block.leader@austintexas.gov to add them to this document.