

Custodial Staff Engagement



Getting your school or office to recycle requires everyone's help! People are responsible for sorting their recyclables from their trash, not the custodial staff. It is important to engage the custodial staff about recycling, but remember everyone needs to be a team player and should be included in the discussion. Appreciation goes a long way (e.g. baking cookies!) for all the unnoticed times the custodial, other staff or kids continuously recycle properly or save recyclables from the trash bin!

A big team player in implementing recycling in schools and offices is our custodial staff! They handle a lot of waste daily with hundreds of people, so it is important to engage custodial staff when adding a recycling collection to your building. Adding a recycling collection does not add much more to a custodial position. This is because students and staff should be keeping recyclables separate from trash before the custodian collects the bin. However, listen to any concerns your custodial staff may have about the recycling process and talk through any hurdles they may have. It's important to reassure them that the amount of waste will not increase, but simply be split between a recycling bin and trash can instead of one waste bin.

Make a plan and talk through what items are commonly found in classrooms, lunchrooms or workspaces that can and cannot be recycled. Custodial staff will be your eyes when others are not following correct recycling procedures. They will be the first line of defense, so check in with them regularly to ask if they are seeing recycling issues or problems so that it can be corrected in the classroom or office. Secondly, it is important to have correct signage placed around the school or office for everyone to see and quickly reference when they are unsure whether something can or cannot be recycled. Reviewing what is recyclable and not recyclable with your custodial staff will be beneficial so that they have a deeper understanding. Make recycling a learning experience and a judgement-free zone that is always open for questions. Remember, just because it has a [recycling symbol with a number](#) on it does not mean it is recyclable!

Make it easy for custodial staff to know which bin is for trash verses recycling. The easiest way for people to determine where to put items is the color of the bin. Usually, blue is designated for recycling and black is for trash. If all your bins are the same color, clearly designate recycling from trash with signage on the bin preferable, or directly above the bin. Keep the trash and recycling bins centrally located and as close as possible to each other for easy collection. Don't place a recycling bin in a far corner or without a trash bin paired with it because it will be forgotten about or worse—misused!



When being collected, there is one major difference between recycling and trash. The trash can be bagged up and disposed of in a plastic bag. Recycling must remain loose and free from being collected in a plastic bag. Otherwise it will not be sorted properly and sent to the landfill. This is the most important point to mention to your custodial staff: Do NOT put recycling in a plastic bag! If recyclables are put in a plastic bag they cannot be properly sorted out. So instead of recyclables being recycled, they will end up in the trash.

Depending on how your organization is structured, there may be several ways to set up recycling services and collections. It is best to review the collection schedule with all of your employees, especially your custodial staff. Here are a couple of ways your organization can set up recycling collection. Feel free to create your own recycling collection system that works best for your organization!

- Have your custodial staff empty each recycling and trash bin at each desk and/or classroom. This usually requires the most effort from the custodial staff and the least effort from everyone else. In order for this to be effective, the custodial staff would need two rollcarts (one designed for recycling and one for trash) as they move from room to room or desk to desk for collection.
- Have people empty their recycling or trash into larger communal bins stationed throughout your workspace. The custodial staff then collects the larger communal bins to empty. This requires effort from both the people utilizing the bins and the custodial staff. Custodial staff may need two rollcarts to empty the large communal bins if they do not have wheels.
- Note: Some organizations are too small to have custodial staff. In this case, a designated person, or a green team, would need to empty the trash and recycling.

