

Case study

Creating low waste community events

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About the event

Since 2009 the WA Chapter of the Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEEWA) has presented an annual one-day Science and Sustainability Community Expo at Canning River Eco Education Centre, Wilson. Each Expo consisted of many stalls and displays, with interactive features. One of the key focuses of these Expos was to showcase low waste initiatives at a community event.

Target audience

The target audience was the general public. Families and interested community members of all ages and backgrounds attended the Expos.

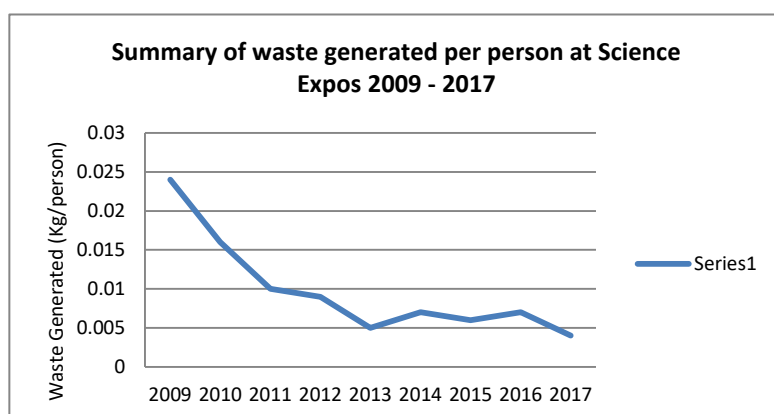
What happened

As part of the event, AAEEWA developed the "*Watch your Waste*" stall and was awarded two grants to assist with waste education: KABC Beverage Grant (2012) and Waste Authority Community Grant (2014). These enabled AAEEWA to develop a mobile waste education trailer as well as a range of resources to increase waste education and community engagement about the importance of reducing waste generation and litter. The resources included:

- Low waste promotion banners;
- Development of waste education posters;
- Waste education games;
- A Litter Sculpture;
- Sam the Can Costume; and
- Initiatives developed with the local Café.

All these resources are freely available from the AAEEWA website and continue to be a key part of AAEEWA for community education at events, including AAEEWA Expos.

Attendances at the Expos have increased from 300 in 2009 to 3000 in 2017, with many being repeat visitors from one year to the next. Despite this ten-fold increase in attendance, waste audits of the bins have shown a dramatic reduction in the waste generated per person from 0.024 kg/person in 2009 to 0.004kg/person in 2017.



Considerable evidence has been documented in a number of publications (<http://aaeewa.org.au/publications.html>) regarding the outstanding successes of the low waste initiatives at these events. Six recommendations emerged from our eight years of experience conducting Expos.

Recommendations for other low waste event planners

1. Exclude multiple take-away food vendors:

Reducing multiple vendors at events of this scale reduces the opportunity for waste to be created. Instead, hold a sausage sizzle or offer food alternatives where waste is minimised. Buy food in bulk to reduce packaging waste.

2. Offer a learning experience for patrons:

A low waste event is a great teaching and learning opportunity. An example is the *Watch your Waste* Stall that was developed in 2009 with the first Expo and has continued to expand and engage with patrons about waste education. Numerous grants have contributed to its expansion through the creation of a range of waste games and costumes over the years.

3. Work with partners:

Since 2012 a café was located on the Expo site. As part of the KABC Beverage Grant, AAEEWA liaised closely with the café to develop a range of in-house initiatives to reduce waste generated by the café and its customers. Then in 2013 AAEEWA was awarded a Waste Authority grant under their Community Grant Scheme, and in partnership with the City of Cockburn, developed the Mobile Waste Education Trailer and education resources. These resources are freely available to borrow for schools and community groups, and the trailer may be used at any school or community event within the City of Cockburn.

4. Promote low waste alternatives:

Work with catering partners to encourage the use of reusable take-away coffee cups, water bottles, bags and the provision of a two-bin waste system for recycling. Additionally, all stall holders and presenters were informed and encouraged to adopt waste minimisation practices.

5. Think critically and be innovative:

The event planning team needs to think critically, be innovative and prepared to trial new ideas when addressing event waste issues. In 2009 an innovative low waste initiative involved the introduction of a two-bin waste disposal system with detailed signage to guide patrons in how to dispose of waste correctly. This initiative was successful and continues to be employed.

6. Assess the success of waste initiatives:

Each year the Expos were evaluated to assess the effectiveness of the waste initiatives. These included: Waste surveys of patrons; end of Expo bin audits; observations & anecdotal feedback; and photographic records.

It is evident through the implementation of innovative, low-waste initiatives at the Community Expos, that it is possible to significantly reduce waste. Some or all of these initiatives may be worth trialling in your event context.