



A Short Introduction to **Zero Waste Brain Trust's** **Eight Steps To Becoming A Zero Waste Community**

Most routes to Zero Waste follow a similar trajectory, yet the point of entry and task order will vary based on **who initiates the conversation** – staff, elected or advocate, and the jurisdiction's size, political culture, policies, programs and infrastructure. The path will be very different for a small rural town of two employees, one service provider and a 20-year disposal contract, than for a well-staffed metropolis with 6 service providers, 2 transfer stations and no landfill.

STEP 1. ASSESS

Investigate: Scrutinize the current system. What types of programs are in place? What is missing? What is the life of the current landfill and what are the tipping fees? What are the drivers for pursuing Zero Waste - Climate Change? Jobs? High costs for current system? End of life of facilities or contracts? Community concerns about proposed facilities?

Assemble: Assemble the collected information in an organized fashion.

Understand: Develop a basic understanding of the discard management system, local and regional resources and upcoming key decisions.

STEP 2. DEFINE

How a community defines high diversion and Zero Waste, the priorities they adopt and the stakeholder process they develop are crucial considerations. To some these details may seem trivial, but words have the power to inspire as well as hold people and agencies accountable.

Organize: Prepare a structured process for public involvement. Develop a timeline of meetings, draft agendas, possible activities and existing activities, task-holders – facilitators, note takers, timekeepers, etc. and relevant deadlines. Try to anticipate all possibilities. The plan will evolve as you go; be prepared to adjust and readjust.

Select: After getting a handle on the tasks above, select a few descriptions and principles as starting points. Brainstorm with the discussion group. When ready, test the process on a larger group of allies. **If all goes well, it is now time to launch the public discussion.**

STEP 3. FRAME

Do your homework, be inclusive and avoid stepping on toes. Be sensitive to the chain of command; decision makers - senior staff and local elected officials, should be briefed in advance before publically requesting a Zero Waste initiative. Perhaps one or more will be willing to formally support the effort.

Carefully frame the planning process. It may be that you start with the solid waste management plan update and include an analysis that recommends a Zero Waste goal or strategy.

Ask: At an appropriate public meeting, request a Zero Waste goal and a plan to implement it. Be sure to request it be added to sustainability and climate action plans as well as general plans.

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Resolve: Once you receive a green light, a resolution should be drafted with appropriate diversion goals as well as the Zero Waste goal and timelines. Nurture the resolution to approval by responding candidly to questions and concerns.

Train: Prior to the design/plan step, study sessions or trainings should be arranged for all involved in promotion, rulemaking and enforcement. If that is not practical, select individuals should be trained as Zero Waste trainers and in turn train others.

STEP 4. ENGAGE

In the months prior to a Zero Waste effort, plan and implement a public awareness and education campaign - of residents, businesses and stakeholders, that culminates in public support for Zero Waste. Be sure to involve local bloggers as well as the individuals and stakeholder groups identified in Step 1:

Send the local paper and radio stations stories and press releases about Zero Waste businesses and events. Show videos - like "Story of Stuff", "Garbage Dreams" "Trashed" "Wasted", at community meetings or on Earth Day or America Recycles Day. Follow each with a short discussion.

Invite Zero Waste experts to present at a council session or community workshop. Oftentimes the most powerful examples came from businesses, which can illustrate that Zero Waste not only saves money, but also reduces potential liability and carbon footprints, and often creates jobs.

Hold events with a documented Zero Waste goal or convert a major venue into a pilot project. Also, successful school projects can be very inspiring.

STEP 5. DESIGN/PLAN

Once a Zero Waste goal, strategy or philosophy has been officially embraced, an action plan is essential to make it a reality. Effective efforts require careful consideration of the existing system, changes that could/should be made and developing a strategic vision of how to get there incrementally. Last but certainly not least, are sector specific outreach programs and green and Zero Waste certification programs.

The appropriate level of detail required depends on the jurisdiction and the dynamics between the public, staff and elected officials therein. Where there is a lot of trust among those stakeholders, a brief plan may suffice. The plan should contain key findings and conclusions and recommendations - propositions for policies, programs and facilities and timelines to enact the propositions.

FOR THE ENTIRE EIGHT STEPS, PLEASE VISIT THE [ZERO WASTE USA WEBSITE](http://www.zerowasteusa.org).

CREATE A BUZZ

- ✓ Educate community, staff, decision makers and advisory boards
- ✓ Write articles and press releases
- ✓ Offer presentations, videos, films, awards
- ✓ Ask! Somebody has to ask for a Zero Waste future
- ✓ Solicit input from entire community: staff, decision makers, advisory boards, stakeholders and general public
- ✓ Formally request the adoption of Zero Waste goal