



Post-Landfill
Action Network
Presents:

“Preserve2Go”
Container



A Guide to Setting Up To-Go Container Programs on Your Campus



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I. Introduction: The Who's, What's, When's, Where's, Why's & How's of a To-Go Container program

Who is Involved On Campus and Off?

We often combat the massive amount of food waste generated from campus eateries with trayless dining, food recoveries, and composting. Offering students an option for food on-the-go can align with existing food waste reduction efforts by means of a reusable to-go container program. PLAN has found Preserve to be a pretty cool company for providing campuses with reusable to-go containers that are BPA free, responsibly packaged, and made in the US with recycled materials.

The Preserve2Go initiative creates an effective model for a reusable to-go container program.

At PLAN, we keep in mind that each campus is unique! While infrastructural support for a to-go container program is best led by Food Service staff, students can serve a pivotal role in education and outreach efforts. The Case Studies in this guide exemplify a variety of stakeholder combinations involved in the facilitation of a to-go program, whether you are a Dining Services manager, Sustainability staff, or a student pitching this project to your campus.

Where are To-Go Containers Implemented on Campus?

Where to-go containers are used, distributed, and collected throughout campus will be dependent on several factors, including:

- Whether your dining facilities are managed in-house or by an external dining service company
- To what extent outside food vendors exist on campus, and the language in their contracts
- How many containers your program budget can fund

Keep these factors in mind, as they all have the potential to affect your program from year to year.

For example: You may be able to negotiate a stipulation around to-go containers with an outside food vendor who is renewing their campus contract, thus expanding your program on campus.

When Do I Start?

The start of a new term is best, especially if you can incorporate program education into incoming student orientation. Project planning, logistics, and securing funding could take up to an entire semester before you are ready to roll out your program. We also suggest starting off with a Pilot, in a single eatery. If your program proves to be successful, you can introduce it to other eateries throughout campus.



Why Should I Implement To-Go Containers on My Campus?

Your campus will benefit Financially, Socially, and Institutionally from the implementation of a reusable to-go container program:

- **Financial:** Eliminating single-use disposable to-go containers on campus lowers waste stream hauling fees and the cost associated with repetitive purchases on Dining service inventory. (*Reference University of Southern Indiana Case Study for basic cost comparison*)
- **Social:** Provide students on-the-go with a convenient and reliable option for taking food with them, while rewarding habits around source reduction and reuse.
- **Institutional:** Make a statement that your campus is committed to waste reduction, and sustainability in general, by fostering a culture of Zero Waste on campus.

This program becomes even more cost effective with the help of PLAN Membership benefits.

Take a look at our [GPO Discount Sheet](#) for more information on the discounts accessible to members.

How Do I Get Started?

While PLAN encourages our campuses to dream big, we will be the first one to suggest a Pilot for any program. Start in a single dining hall, establish a strong outreach plan, and gather metrics on the progress of the program before you expand further throughout campus!

To follow, we outline the major components of a to-go container program, including best-practices that we have seen from campuses across the country. We'll walk through initial logistics for the **Setup** of your program, how and by whom it will **Operate** throughout campus, how to **Engage** folks to participate, and means by which you can **Track & Measure** program success. At the end of this guide, you'll find a few campus-specific Case Studies that exemplify successful to-go container programs, each unique in their operations.

Remember that **your campus is unique**; connect with a PLAN Campus Coordinator to work through how to implement this program in a way which best serves your campus's needs!

II. Setup

Determine Your **Budget**

It will be key to determine your **budget** before you can decide **where** on campus the program will be implemented. Start with answering the following:

- Is the company that your campus contracts with for Food Services Management willing to front the funds for this project?

If your Food Services provider is not providing funding, or your Dining is facilitated in-house...

- What funding opportunities exist on campus? What other departments are willing to invest in this project? (i.e. Sustainability Office, Student Government, Housing, etc.)

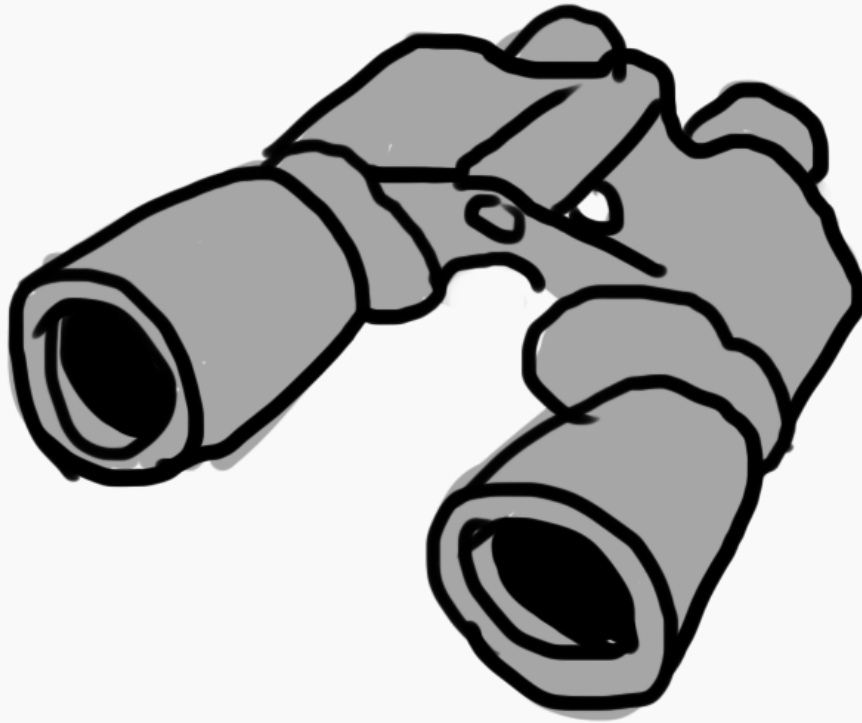
Be sure that your funding sources are able to cover the following **expenses** associated with a to-go container program:

- \$ Initial purchase** of containers
While we recommend Preserve2Go containers, your container options may depend on products from certain companies registered with your campus purchasing accounts
- \$ Replacement** of lost or broken containers over time
- \$ Distribution and collection** of containers
Will you purchase a collection machine OR will Dining staff collect containers manually?
- \$ Labor and resources** associated with washing containers (water, electricity, etc.)
- \$ Any single-use disposable to-go options** that you will need to maintain
(see *University of Southern Indiana Case Study*)
- \$ Signage, education & outreach**

As you build out your budget and begin to implement your project, you will find value in measuring the financial savings from a to-go container program. Cost-benefit analysis and other forms of program evaluation are discussed further in the *Tracking & Analysis* section.

Funding will determine whether you are able to roll out to-go containers campus-wide, or pilot them in a single dining hall. Your program's scope will also depend on the ratio of eateries overseen by your campus' Food Service Management company, versus the amount of chain-style eateries contracted to serve food on campus.

Connect with these individual establishments to encourage them to participate in your campus's to-go container program; it can save them money on purchasing single-use disposable to-go containers and communicate their values as aligning with campus Zero Waste goals!



III. Operations

Distribution, Collection, & Sanitation

Whether your program is implemented campus-wide, or in a single dining hall, you will need to map out a clear order of operations for how the program is managed and by whom. **Distribution, collection, and sanitation** of containers will be the major components for which you'll need streamlined systems established. These systems are important for maintaining stock of containers, while holding participants accountable for taking care of and returning those containers!

Distribution and Collection System for Containers



A practical way to verify program participants is through utilizing student and staff meal plan accounts. When a student checks out a container, a temporary charge can be applied to their student account via their campus ID, and then debited back to their account once a container is returned. Alternatively, program participants can be given a token that they exchange for a container upon entering an eatery. Once they return their container, they receive back their token. If a token is lost or a container is not returned, a student must pay to receive a new token for participation in the program.

Other options for distribution systems involve manual hand-out and collection by Dining staff as students enter an eatery. Keep in mind that this does limit container collection to your dining facility's hours of operation. If your budget permits, additional collection stations could be set up around campus.

Sanitation of Containers

After collection, containers will ultimately need to be transferred to the kitchen and sanitized. This process can easily be streamlined into existing dish washing operations. Dishwasher-safe containers like Preserve2Go are your best bet to surpass extra labor for dining employees.

As your project grows beyond a single dining hall or campus eatery, think about how to extend these program components to other eateries on campus; Will there be other drop-off locations aside from dining halls? How often will these locations be serviced and by who? Consider partnering with other groups on campus like student Eco-Reps or the Housing Department to facilitate collections like these in dorms that can be managed by RAs or student volunteers.

IV. Engagement

Signage, Incentives, & Student Voices

Just as the distribution, collection, and sanitization of containers can be streamlined into existing operations, so can advertising, education, and outreach for your program. **Informational signage** will likely be housed in and around dining halls, and can extend to dorms, bulletin boards, and departmental websites (i.e. Dining, Sustainability Office, etc.). In terms of engagement, you can provide **incentives** for folks who bring their reusable container, and/or enforce **disincentives** for those who don't comply. **Students** can play an integral role in the creation and dissemination of this information, serving as the best advocates to their peers.

Signage can include...



- Menu boards in and around Dining halls and eateries
- Digital advertising, on campus website and social media pages
- Existing graphics from Preserve
- Instructions printed on the container, like this Preserve2Go from DePauw University!

For examples of effective signage, see the supplementary resources list at the end of this guide!



Incentives can include discounts on meals that are taken out in a reusable to-go container, while **disincentives** could be upcharges on meals taken in a disposable to-go container. While you may not be able to eliminate disposable options all together, you can try to offer other alternatives such as traditional dish ware.

Utilize **student voice** to increase program engagement through

- Tabling outside of dining halls
- Promotional deals, like "Half-Off October" (see *UCCS Case Study*)
- Raffles or surveys that incorporate reusable to-go containers as prizes
- Shoutouts on campus social media pages



V. Tracking & Analysis

The major variables that you want to consider tracking in your program include your **container inventory** (i.e. how long containers last and how often they are lost, broken, or otherwise not returned) and any **cost savings** associated with reusables. Cost savings could manifest themselves through decreased **waste hauling fees** due to less disposable containers going to landfill and decreased **purchasing** of disposable to-go container materials.

When determining **true cost benefits**, take into consideration:

- Who covers utilities on your campus (i.e. electricity & water)
- Any labor costs associated with the collection and sanitization of reusables (we've found these costs to be negligible on campuses with to-go container programs)
- Existing disposable to-go ware in eateries (i.e. types and amount of products purchased, cost per product, frequency product is ordered)
- Cost of reusable containers (i.e. How many will you buy? How often will you replace them?)

(Ask a Campus Coordinator about our Plastic Audits Template to assist you with disposable container inventory tracking!)



Tracking these sorts of variables are especially important for determining the feasibility of expanding your program beyond a Pilot phase to other parts of campus. While the environmental impact is a core value to these programs, your administration will often want to see hard numbers on any potential cost savings.

Ordering for your school?

Use your PLAN membership to get a **10%** discount off your school's purchase of Preserve2Go containers - like the one on the cover of this guide!

preserve

Nothing wasted. Everything gained.™

VI. Conclusion

Pilot is Key

As we've mentioned before, PLAN will be there to support you in your most ambitious Zero Waste projects. Even so, we recommend kicking off your to-go container program with a Pilot, which can be super valuable for measuring program benefits and troubleshooting potentially tricky logistics. Take a semester to roll out your program in a single eatery on campus, and use that time to collect data on challenges and successes. Survey program participants, experiment with program marketing and signage, track container usage, and record how often - if at all - containers are lost or not returned. Gathering this data will help you develop a smoothly-run program that can function on a campus-wide scale. Tracking your impact will also come in handy when communicating the success and viability of such a program to campus administration!

PLAN is Here to Help!

While we hope that this How-To Guide will get you started, the PLAN team is readily available to help you take your program planning and implementation to the next step! In addition to regular advising from one of our Campus Coordinators, be sure to take advantage of our monthly online certificate trainings & workshops and our various Zero Waste program best-practice manuals. If you are looking for more hands-on support for your program, talk to us about organizing a visit to your campus for an in-person training, workshop, or inspirational talk for your student group and campus staff.

Talk to a Campus Coordinator!



Faye: Born to organize, started a freestore at Earlham, minored in Google Docs.
faye@postlandfill.org



Chris: Went to UC Santa Cruz, has great dance moves, champion of waste audits.
chris@postlandfill.org



Nim: Went to RIT, started a sweet move-out program, loves soccer.
nim@postlandfill.org

Case Study: University of Southern Indiana

Type of Campus:

- Mid-size rural campus with roughly 10,700 students
- Dining contracted with Food Services Management company Sodexo

Program Background

Initiated by USI's Executive Chef in 2015, the Preserve2Go program is facilitated entirely by Food Services. Aimed at influencing environmental impact - with any monetary returns being a bonus - the program addresses the problem of students asking for disposable to-go containers for their meals, only to sit down and eat them within the vicinity. USI's dining is not buffet style, so students who request a to-go container place their order and have their meal served up by dining staff. In addition to purchasing containers for every student on a meal plan and all faculty, USI's Food Services funded the installation of two collection machines. Dining staff service the machines at the end of each meal period to collect and sanitize used containers, a process that is negligible to pre-existing labor and washing operations. In addition to its positive environmental and financial impacts, the program has been a great selling point to prospective students and alumni.

Successes

- Quick return on investment in the first year of the program: Food Services spent \$30,000 for 2 OZZI collection stations & 2 pallets of Preserve containers compared to \$28,000 of procuring single-use compostable containers for 36 weeks (more data is needed on the cost of hauling disposables as well as washing reusables).
- Most disposable to-go options have been eliminated from campus

Challenges & Takeaways

- Preserve2Go containers are currently not compliant with the dining company's corporate purchasing lists, resulting in charges when dining services are audited (see Setup section for more details on advocating for Preserve containers on your dining's purchasing list)
- Dining facility is still in search of a reusable alternative to their standard 6x6 salad and soup containers
- Tokens used with the OZZI machine are often lost by students - ideally, the program would be tracked via students' ID cards

Case Study: University of Colorado, Colorado Springs

Type of Campus:

- Large sub-urban campus with roughly 12,000 students and 1500 staff
- Dining & Hospitality Services ran in-house
- UCCS Sustainability Website: www.uccs.edu/sustain

Program Background

Initiated in Fall of 2015, UCCS's take-out container program was championed by a student after attending a national sustainability conference, with support from the campus Green Action Fund, Dining & Hospitality Services and the Office of Sustainability. A large volume of compostable to-go containers was resulting in increased compost hauling fees, that then manifested in higher meal prices for students. Reusable containers are now a one time purchase of \$4.50, and collected via machine. After receiving ADA approval to be placed in the University Center, the machine was installed to service customers from the campus cafe and pub. In addition to saving students and the campus money in compost hauling fees, the program provides customers with a \$0.50 meal discount when they bring their reusable container.

Successes

- The program has received a lot of positive response, through regular advertising and promotional events like "Half-Off October", for which students' one time fee for a container is half off if they opt into the program throughout the month of October
- Long term monetary savings associated with decreased compost hauling fees

Challenges & Takeaways

- The campus has a high turnover of Dining staff, and knowledge of the to-go container program has yet to be incorporated into standard staff training
- The campus is currently unable to charge customers for using a compostable to-go containers, so no disincentives exist
- Making students aware that when they use a disposable container, they are contributing to increased compost hauling fees, and ultimately, increased meal prices

Case Study: Trent University

Type of Campus:

- Midsize urban campus with roughly 8,200 students
- Dining contracted with Food Services Management company Compass (Chartwells)

Program Background

The Preserve2Go program was proposed by Trent's Sustainability Department, in collaboration with the campus Food Advisory Committee that consists of various students groups and department representatives. The manual take-back program was eventually implemented throughout campus in Fall 2016 by Compass Food Service General Manager. Students, staff, and campus visitors pay a one-time \$5 fee for their container, and are given a special program card once a dirty container is handed back to a dining staff member. Those who don't opt into the program, but still wish to take their meal to-go have the option of reusable dishware at no extra cost, or a compostable to-go container for a \$1 fee. Trent has not purchased a collection machine, so containers are handed back manually; bus bins also exist outside of dorms for returning chinaware. Program organizers say the key to success has been direct client interactions, supported by multiple campus departments.

Successes

- Currently, roughly 41% of takeout meals utilize the Preserve2Go container
- Trent has received inquiries from other campuses on how to implement a similar program successfully
- Cost savings associated with less purchasing of disposable to-go containers

Challenges & Takeaways

- More data needs to be gathered on tracking the amount of Preserve containers that are lost or broken
- Syncing the program with students' ID cards would be more convenient than having an entirely separate card used for the program
- Sometime students hold onto their containers for too long without cleaning them, and become too moldy for dining staff to sanitize upon their return

Supplemental Resources

- PLAN GPO Discounts
- Trent U: "Your Choice" Signage
- Trent U: Meals 2 Go Program Flyer
- Trent U: Container Return Signage
- UCCS: To-Go Container Program General Signage
- UCCS: Napkin Holder Signage
- UCCS: Digital "How-To" Signage
- Preserve2Go Information Sheet