

## Guide to Establishing



**On your campus, in your office, or anywhere!**

Initiative and Guide Created by

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**After two years** of working to increase the campus recycling rate here at the University of Southern Maine we knew we needed to look beyond improved signage and attractive bins to really crack the hard nut of wasteful behavior. We had made recycling very easy in all the public areas of buildings across our three campuses but we still had not seen the desired drop in waste numbers or costs. After some thought and research, we decided to pursue a system of small desktop trash cans at every staff, faculty, and student worker desk or work station. In our estimation this would cause little inconvenience for the employees of the University but would substantially raise awareness of how much they are throwing away. We aimed the initiative at the employees of the University because they are our 40+ hours a week community and they have less turnover than the student population allowing us to educate fewer people with greater long-term rewards.

The following guide is based on our process and the lessons we learned planning, implementing, and maintaining this program. At the time of writing, the Tiny Trash initiative has been going for three semesters. Because we are always changing and updating our waste reduction operations and no two semesters are ever exactly alike in terms of staffing, building use, and enrollment, it is hard to measure progress specifically from Tiny Trash. We have gathered a fair amount of quantitative data, but also feel that the qualitative data speaks highly of our ambitions to educate the campus community.

Please feel free to use our wording or our brand name (Tiny Trash). You can always give us credit (or blame us, if that is helpful!) in your print or web materials. Mostly we want to share our work with you to help you be successful in reducing waste in your area. You will definitely need to tailor the program to meet your needs and due to the fact that every administration/upper level management is a unique set of personalities, we cannot help you navigate the political systems that could support or derail your efforts. Just know that you have our support and plenty of data to back you up!

Onward,

Tyler & Steve

This Guide Includes:

- Quick Talking Points – Page 4 – This gets you up to speed and is the essence of the message you need to deliver to gain support before implementing the program and to educate your audience during roll-out
- Chronological Steps – Pages 5-9 – From start to finish, this is the timeline for how we would recommend the program be rolled out for maximum effectiveness
- Tiny Trash: The Numbers – Page 10 – Explanation of costs and savings of the program in its first year at USM
- Tips and Tricks – Pages 11-12 – How to effectively present the Tiny Trash program
- FAQs – Page 13-15 – You will get a lot of questions during this process. We have provided you with some answers!
- Communication Materials –Page 16 – Check out our print materials, and web info to use as models when you are communicating with your audience at various steps in the process.
  - Pages 17-18 – Front and back of Tiny Trash Brochure
  - Pages 19-20 – Front and back of Tiny Trash Quarter sheet (four per 8.5x11 page). We laminated these to encourage people to hold on to them.

# Tiny Trash Quick Talking Points

Excerpt from <http://www.usm.maine.edu/sustainability/tiny-trash>

We are working hard to increase recycling here at the University by implementing a new system for waste generated in offices. This initiative requires participation by all members of the USM community to be successful and will have a great environmental and economic impact.

## **Here's how it works:**

Staff and faculty will be issued a small desktop trash can in place of the larger desk side trash container. All non-recyclable items including food scraps can be placed directly in your personal Tiny Trash. All recyclable materials can be placed in your blue desk side recycling bin to be collected by the building custodial staff.

You will be responsible for emptying and cleaning your Tiny Trash as needed. Each office or area will be provided with a large communal waste receptacle in which to empty your Tiny Trash.

## **Why the change?**

- **Close to 90% of the waste generated in offices and academic areas on campus is recyclable.** USM is working to dramatically increase our recycling rate which in turn decreases the amount we spend to dispose of waste. By implementing the Tiny Trash initiative, we are asking USM employees to do their part to recycle more and throw away less.
- Currently USM **spends \$2,200 a year on plastic trash bags** for desk side waste cans. By using a Tiny Trash, you can help us decrease not only this purchasing cost but also the resource waste AND the hauling and tipping charges associated with use and disposal of plastic bags.
- USM spends about 45 hours of custodial labor daily to visit and empty each desk side trash can across campus. Instead of spending time on this task, **custodians will be able to focus on more important cleaning tasks** and provide a better environment in which to work and learn.
- **Rise up** and move around! The science of **ergonomics tells us that we should take two to three micro-breaks an hour.** These breaks encourage proper blood circulation, reduce our chances of getting a musculoskeletal disorder, and make us feel better. So stand up and take a short walk...to empty your Tiny Trash!

## Chronological Steps to Implement the Tiny Trash Initiative

1. Brand it
  - a. Come up with a catchy name (or borrow ours)
  - b. Design a logo – simple is OK, be aware of copyrights!
  - c. Identify project team and assign roles
    - i. Communication Lead
    - ii. Training Lead
    - iii. Data Manager
    - iv. Implementation Lead
  - d. Create a conservative timeline
2. Perform initial data gathering – work with custodial staff & mobilize student workers
  - a. Inventory of desks/offices
    - i. Use this to estimate supply costs and to create initial cost reduction estimates for labor
    - ii. Determine locations of communal trash bins.
  - b. Estimate decrease (and therefore monetary savings) in plastic liner use
  - c. Locate past waste data, figure out current recycling rate
  - d. Gather information about recycling vs trash hauling and tipping charges to estimate potential savings of increasing recycling
  - e. Compile all of this in a professional-looking document
3. Gain approval – Even if you do not technically need approval, it is still smart to involve other people in the process as early as possible to increase the number of champions and decrease the number of potential naysayers. Take all above information with you to meetings!
  - a. Start with immediate supervisor
  - b. Work up to Facilities Head – You need this person's approval and help
  - c. Personally bring to President / Top of the Organization, or allow supervisor to do so
  - d. Address any and all concerns with a level head
  - e. If you do not receive approval, try again in a few months.
4. Build Support & Get Feedback – Hit the pavement! Tell acquaintances and friends about the initiative; build excitement.
  - a. Educate custodial supervisors, listen to their feedback
  - b. Announce at staff meetings, listen to feedback

- c. Select a few 'champions' in various offices or departments who will help communicate intentions, roll out the program, and reduce pushback by connecting with peers.
  - d. Process feedback – Learning to address people's concerns early will make roll-out much easier. Do you need to adjust your approach? What can you learn from people's reactions?
5. Train custodial supervisors and staff – This team is your built-in experts on current and potential behavior in offices.
  - a. Get them on your side early – flattery, coffee, and donuts worked for us!
  - b. Ask for their opinion – listen to and thoughtfully address any feedback or concerns. Adjust your plan if you need to!
  - c. Push through the initial fear of change – demonstrate that you are listening, that you empathize with their challenges, and that you will support the team through the transition. Change is hard for everyone!
  - d. Do detailed training for every custodial shift
    - i. Re-educate about what is and what is not recyclable,
    - ii. Provide tools in case custodians are confronted while on the job,
    - iii. Empower them to be the experts out in the field,
    - iv. Invite them to connect with you whenever they have concerns or questions,
    - v. Give out your contact information and encourage them to send problematic people your way, respond to issues promptly, and be available.
6. Order Sample Materials
  - a. Containers chosen to be desktop trashes MUST be recyclable and should also be made from recycled content, made close to home, and be BPA free if possible.
  - b. Labels/stickers for trashes must be durable and waterproof
  - c. Print materials should be minimal and easy-to-read. All information should also be available online.
7. Pilot – Choose two or more offices/departments/divisions in which to pilot the program.
  - a. Pilot areas should be isolated so data is not skewed
  - b. Weigh the waste at the same time every day (preferably at the end of the workday) in the pilot offices for two weeks before starting the program. We call this 'pre-weighing'. Don't weigh over a break or

- holiday week as this will alter the amounts of waste generated and make it impossible to show a difference after the pilot period.
- c. Ensure there are adequate communal trash and recycling containers in which the staffers will empty their desktop trashes.
  - d. Issue each staffer/desk a desktop trash and enthusiastically educate them on its use, care, and what is recyclable. Present to small groups if possible and hone your presentation skills in prep for the roll-out.
  - e. Run pilot for at least two weeks, ideally one month. No need to do it longer! In this case, a long pilot reduces the buzz created by the pilot in the first place and does not yield any additional information.
  - f. Weigh the waste (trash and recycling) daily by office block
  - g. Interview participants
    - i. Did their behavior change?
    - ii. Do they have suggestions?
    - iii. Can they tell a colleague or two about this awesome new program?
  - h. Compile information – add to the info document already created
8. Order supplies!
- a. Order enough for every desk + some extras
  - b. Keep ordering information handy as you will likely need to order more of everything at some point in the future
  - c. Track expenses
9. Prepare to roll-out the program
- a. In our experience, doing this the second or third week of the academic semester was best.
    - i. Depending on the rhythms of your establishment, you want to choose a time where people are generally around, not too busy, and near the 'beginning' of something, perhaps the calendar or budget year.
    - ii. Timing it this way makes telling the story and gathering data easy
  - b. Ensure that each office space has access to an appropriately sized communal trash container.
    - i. DO NOT ADD standalone trash cans. If you need to add a trash can, be sure to also add a recycling bin to complete the waste station.
    - ii. In our case, many offices were near a corridor with a large bin, others were able to use the lounge/breakroom/kitchen trash can. Only a few needed a new waste station.

- iii. Remember that each staffer is not generating a huge amount of trash at their desk and you probably don't need to install huge communal bins
- c. Assign roles for roll-out – mobilize student workers or whoever makes a good first impression and can effectively present the program to the community.
- d. Create a timeline and a schedule for presentations.
- e. Create tracking system to record which areas have had presentations and which still need them
- f. Immediately before roll-out: email community to alert them to the new initiative and all the positives associated with it. Choose the most influential person possible to send this email (President?)

#### 10. Roll out!

- a. We had the most success presenting to small groups of staffers clustered by office or department. For our smallest campus, we were able to present for the first 15 minutes of an all-campus staff & faculty meeting.
- b. See below for tips and tricks to an effective presentation and check out our FAQ section to prepare.
- c. Prepare to spend some time re-explaining the program or putting out fires from those who do not feel like they should have to play by the rules.
- d. It is your choice if you decide to remove the deskside trash cans at the time of presentation or if you leave them for a few weeks. We did half and half and I think you can do it either way. In many cases we gave people the choice and returned a few weeks later. We told them that when they are ready we would remove the large can. This gave people a little control of the change and made the transition easier for them.

#### 11. Refresh & Revisit

- a. Find a use for the trash cans!
  - i. We cleaned and cut some into the shape of a Husky, our mascot, and used them at events. Others we built into a wall behind our table at orientation to educate people about the effects of the program. Still others we donated or sold to local schools.
- b. After you've rolled out, don't forget that you need to maintain your program. Set monthly reminders to check in with random or chosen users to see how it is going.



- c. Two or Three months out: send a reminder email to the community encouraging them to check the website if they have any questions and to get in touch if they need new or additional bins. Social science tells us a new habit takes about three months to establish.
- d. Perform periodic (every two months or so?) post-weighings to determine office-by-office success. Continue to revisit pilot offices and add others to the list. You can use this as an opportunity for friendly competition between offices and build excitement.
- e. Track waste and recycling as often and as precisely as you are able by teaming up with your waste hauler, transfer station, or dump.
- f. On your one-year anniversary, send a similar email reminding people to take care of their bins and celebrating the success of the program.
- g. Additional staffers may have started during this time and you can create a way for them to get in touch to request a bin.
- h. Apply for awards, tell the story, take photos, share your experience with peers.

## **Tiny Trash: The Numbers**

### **Financial and weight data to support the case for a desktop trash initiative at USM**

#### **Campus Information**

- Estimated number of staff/faculty/student work spaces on campus: 1,000
- Three campuses separated by 12-30 miles.

#### **Materials and Equipment**

- 41 Quart deskside recycling and trash containers: **\$5-\$8 each**
- 32 oz plastic container with lid: **\$0.60 each**
- Waterproof labels: **\$35/100, \$0.35 each**
- Print Materials: Varies
- Additional communal waste stations: Varies

#### **Waste Costs**

- Per ton tipping & hauling fee for trash: \$16.25 & \$70.50, respectively. **\$86.75 total.**
- Per ton tipping & hauling fee for recycling: \$16.25 & \$0, respectively. **\$16.25 total.**
- 2012 trash tonnage: **352 tons**
- 2012 recycling tonnage: **337 tons**
- Estimated weight of bin liners for offices for a year (generated plastic waste): **1,320 lbs**
- Estimated annual savings from reduced bin liner purchase: **\$1,700 (a 75% reduction)**

#### **Labor Costs**

- Labor per hour cost: **\$25.00**
- Daily cost of first hour of 45 custodian work shifts spent emptying trash: **\$1,125**
- Annual cost of custodians picking up trash/recycling: approximately **\$155,000**
- Savings in transportation emissions/mileage and labor to stock, store, and handle bin liners: Unable to precisely measure this, but it is a lot!

#### **After the program was implemented:**

- 2013 trash tonnage: **333 tons (5.5% or \$1,679.50 reduction)**
- 2013 recycling tonnage: **335 tons**
- Qualitative, non-scientific interviews displayed tremendous behavior change. Non-recyclers started recycling, people learned that things they had been throwing away were recyclable and learned about other recyclable materials, people confessed to rethinking their purchases, offices wanted to compete with each other, staffers started emptying their beverage containers before putting them in the recycling, and more.

## **Tips and Tricks to Effectively Presenting the Tiny Trash Program**

**Small Groups** are the best audiences. In each group you will likely have both the very excited person and the very doubtful or challenging person. This balance works well as you can focus on getting the positive person more excited and simultaneously reassure the unsure person. Sometimes the excited person will help you do this.

**Keep it short and sweet** to ensure that people do not have a chance to tune it out and so that they know you respect their busy schedule. We aim for 10-15 minutes per presentation, depending upon the audience and the number of questions they have.

**Encourage people to be part of the solution** by participating. At the end of the day you cannot force them to use a desktop trash but you can empower them to be a part of the new, exciting, forward-thinking, sustainable, and frugal direction of your organization. The 'everyone else is doing it' tact can work quite well here.

**Personalize it!** The point of the initiative is not actually to get people to use a tiny trash can, it is more about changing the amount of trash people generate and throw away, increasing recycling, reducing the use of plastic bin liners, and saving wasted labor. As long as those goals are still accomplished a staffer can make small changes in their area to make the program work for them. Maybe they want to bring in their own bin from home or they don't want a 'messy' Tiny Trash anywhere near their desktop. As long as custodians aren't visiting or emptying a trash can in their office, any modification is fine. They can opt to not have a Tiny Trash and walk to the communal trash station each time they need to get rid of something, bring in a bag or bin in from home, decorate their Tiny Trash, etc. Find a compromise if possible.

**This is the age of accountability** and it is time that everyone took responsibility for their actions and consequently, the waste they generate. People may tell you this is simply not their problem or that it is not something they have time to worry about. Luckily, you can inform them that it will add almost no time to their work day. They can empty their bin on the way to the bathroom or a meeting, rinse it out when they do their lunch dishes, etc. If they don't want to mess with it, they can opt to not have one and just use the communal bin. At the end of the day we are adults and we need to own our contributions to the world. Gone are the days of wasted resources and littering!

**Be positive!** People may act like this is just 'one more thing' that they have to do or change but your enthusiasm and self-assuredness will go a long way toward convincing

them that smart, normal people have designed, implemented, and complied with your initiative and that they should get used to it because it's here to stay!

**Saving money** appeals to administrative types but often doesn't do you any favors with other staffing and faculty groups. It is important to emphasize that this is a waste, labor, and money saving program and that it will not negatively impact the campus culture or comfort of office environments. On a related note, folks who opt not to use a desktop trash in favor of a slightly altered version of the program should be made aware of where they can return their Tiny Trash. We lost lots of Tiny Trashes to the recycling bin because people viewed it as a throwaway item!

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Q: What do I do with all the trash that won't fit in there?**

A: You'll find that most things you need to get rid of that are larger than the bin are actually recyclable. What are some examples of things you need to throw away regularly? *[If you have single-stream recycling then most everything they need to dispose of will be recyclable and will fit in their deskside recycling bin. Take this as an opportunity for some targeted recycling education].* For larger items, you'll have access to a larger communal waste station just over there. *[show them!]*

### **Q: What goes in there?**

A: Teabags, food waste (although it's neater for you if you empty that directly into the communal waste bin), granola bar wrappers, tissues, ziplock bags, candy wrappers, etc.

### **Q: Is this really going to work? I already recycle!**

A: Awesome, me too! Help us by spreading the word because honestly, lots of people don't recycle if you can believe that. Yes, we think it will work and it has been proven to work at other places, too.

### **Q: Why do we have to change? I think the old system worked just fine.**

A: *[Cite Tiny Trash Quick Talking Points.]* We live in a new world and we must adjust to it. Our previous system did function but it was not the most efficient or appropriate way to conduct business. We've carefully developed this improved system which we hope will benefit the whole organization, of which you are a crucial part.

### **Q: Are custodial staffers going to lose their jobs?**

A: Are you kidding? We barely have enough custodial staffers as it is! This will just free them up to get to all those more important tasks like cleaning your offices and classrooms. They are too important to lose.

**Q: This is so gross! You want me to put WHAT on my desk? NO WAY.**

A: Whoa there Nelly! We are just letting you know that the University and the custodians who service this area will no longer be providing or emptying deskside trash cans. No need to keep our cute little can on your desk if it so offends you. If you'd like to bring one from home, you are free to do that. Or, you can skip the receptacles entirely and just get up for stretch breaks to carry your waste to the communal bin.

**Q: I have students who cry in my office and it is a health issue for me to have to handle their tissues. Plus they won't all fit in that little bin. What should I do? You obviously haven't thought this out for my area!! I have a very important job etc etc!! [Similar concerns were aired by the health clinic and a few campus reception/lobby areas that are open to the public.]**

A: Yikes! I'm glad I don't have your job – you must be a saint! Listen, I'll let you keep a bin in here but I still want you to try to recycle more! And don't tell anyone I let you keep yours! It will be our little secret. *[Make exceptions in cases like these. Work with the custodian and custodial supervisor to be sure they empty these bins, but not others]*

**Q: If custodians no longer empty our trash but they still empty the recycling at our desk, how does that save money?**

A: EXCELLENT QUESTION! This reduces custodians' time spent dealing with waste in a few ways:

1. Staffers are handling fewer bins each day which saves time,
2. We do not use bags in recycling bins so they are changing out zero plastic bags, which are expensive to buy and dispose of, plus take time to change;
3. Custodians are experts as to what you generate for waste each day. Did you know that they can anticipate which person uses how much of what and how often they need to empty your recycling? Because deskside recycling bins rarely fill up in a day (and the recyclables with food on them often end up in the lounges or kitchen bins which are always emptied daily), custodians can make a decision to only pick up certain deskside recycling bins every other day, cutting their office visits in half.

**Q: Why are we asking high-paid faculty and administration members to do the work of an unskilled custodial worker? That is a bad use of resources.**

A: *[Try not to punch them – I actually got this question TWICE!]* I understand your concern but you are implying that some humans are more valuable than others. You are also assuming that emptying a desktop trash takes more than 20 seconds, which it does not. So even if our expensive employees are more valuable (which they are not), you're arguing that they are unable or unwilling to spend 20 seconds on a task that supports the mission of this organization, reduces waste, and saves money. I don't think the high-paid faculty would appreciate you saying that they are not up to the task.

In addition, this destructive line of thinking supports such behavior as throwing trash on the ground in order to provide work for someone. We strive to provide meaningful employment to our staff and hope they continue working here.

We have only displaced unnecessary work previously done by custodians and given them a chance to focus on more important things. We have not taken any work away from our custodial team ensuring that they still have plenty of work opportunities at the university.

**Q: What are you going to take away next, my [insert service here, i.e. toilet paper, water fountains, field trips, etc]?!?!**

A: That's actually a really good idea, I bet we could save a ton of natural resources and money if we did away with *[insert all the fun things ever here]*. Don't tempt me! But seriously, I actually do not exist to ruin your life. To the contrary, I've been hired to help make this place more efficient and to improve the environment for everyone. To accomplish that we all need to change just a bit. I promise, this will be painless. And it is not optional.



USM's Tiny Trash starter kit – we hand this to each staffer when we roll out the program

## Communication Materials

On the following pages we have shared some of the materials we developed to communicate with our campus community. Use them as inspiration to craft your own effective promotion and communication campaign.

Be sure to check out the website for up-to-date info as well:

[www.usm.maine.edu/sustainability/tiny-trash](http://www.usm.maine.edu/sustainability/tiny-trash)