



Youth Climate Action Grants

Project Template: School Waste Audit and Waste Reduction Challenge

This template can help you get started. Feel free to change it and add your own ideas!

Project Overview

Lead a waste reduction challenge at your school and help reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill.

Students will learn about the waste made at school and where it comes from. They will gather information about garbage, recycling, and compost and learn how reducing waste impacts climate change.

Students will complete a waste audit to learn what is being thrown away, recycled, or composted. Then, they will lead a school-wide challenge to help students and staff create less waste and sort materials into the correct bins.

Why This Project Matters

When waste is sent to landfill, it can create greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. Making and transporting new products also produces greenhouse gases. By reducing waste, recycling, and composting, we can reduce pollution and protect the environment.

Project Goals

Students will:

- Learn how waste affects the environment and climate change.
- Reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill.
- Help others learn how to reduce waste and sort waste correctly.
- Find ways to improve recycling and composting at school.
- Build leadership, teamwork, communication, and data collection skills.

Project Results

By the end of the project, students will:

- Complete a waste audit before and after the challenge.
- Review and share the audit results with the school community.
- Lead a school-wide waste reduction campaign.
- Create learning materials about waste reduction and proper sorting.



Data Collection

Students may collect and track:

- The total amount of waste collected during first and second waste audits.
- The types and amount of materials found in garbage, recycling, and compost.
- The amount of items sorted in the wrong bins.
- The number of students, staff, and community members who take part.
- Photos and notes from project activities and results.

What You'll Do

Get Organized

- Create a project team and choose a staff supervisor.
- Give each team member a role.
- Decide what you want the project to achieve.
- Create a project timeline and data collection plan.

Learn and Explore

- Learn how waste contributes to climate change.
- Learn how to sort garbage, recycling, and compost properly.
- Explore ways to reduce waste.

Conduct a Waste Audit

- Decide which waste streams you will study:
 - Garbage
 - Recycling
 - Organics/compost
 - All three
- Collect waste from a typical school day.
- Sort materials into waste categories.
- Record:
 - Total amount of waste (bags and/or weight)
 - Types of materials found
 - Common sources of waste
 - Contamination (items placed in the wrong bins)
- Take photos and record your observations.

Review Your Results

- Review the waste audit findings.
- Find ways to improve sorting and reduce waste creation.
- Identify which waste materials appear most often.



- Look for common sorting mistakes.
- Think of solutions that could help your school reduce waste.

Launch a Waste Reduction Challenge

- Create a school-wide waste reduction campaign.
- Encourage students and staff to:
 - Bring litterless lunches
 - Use reusable containers and water bottles
 - Reduce food waste
 - Sort waste correctly
- Create posters, announcements, newsletters or social media posts.
- Run waste-sorting demonstrations or interactive activities.
- Invite guest speakers to talk about waste reduction and sustainability.

Conduct a Second Waste Audit

- Repeat the waste audit.
- Compare the results to the first waste audit.
- Measure changes in:
 - Total waste created
 - Waste diversion rates
 - Contamination levels
- Identify what went well and areas for improvement for waste reduction, sorting, and contamination.

Share and Inspire

- Share results with students, staff, and families at assemblies, newsletters, displays, or social media.
- Share ideas for future waste reduction at your school.
- Celebrate your accomplishments.
- Reflect on what you learned.

Suggested Project Timeline

Time	Activities
2-3 Weeks	Planning, choosing team roles, training and waste education
1 Week	First waste audit and results review
3-4 Weeks	Waste reduction challenge and awareness campaign
1 Week	Second waste audit and results comparison with first audit
1-2 Weeks	Reflecting on the project and sharing results

Suggested Project Supplies

- Gloves and/or metal tongs
- Clear garbage bags
- Large bins/sorting containers or tarps
- Digital hook scale
- Hand sanitizer
- Protective clothing like aprons, gloves, eyewear, etc.
- Poster boards and display materials
- Markers, sticky notes, and other presentation supplies
- Printing materials for educational resources

Sample Project Budget

Budget Item	Description	Amount
Materials/Tools/Equipment	Digital hook scale	\$100.00
Materials/Tools/Equipment	Gloves, tongs, safety supplies	\$150.00
Materials/Tools/Equipment	Tarps, bins, clear garbage bags	\$150.00
Education/Awareness Materials	Posters, displays, outreach materials	\$150.00
People/Labour	Honorarium for guest speaker (waste reduction/sustainability expert)	\$250.00
Barrier Reduction	Hospitality and participant support	\$100.00
Education/Awareness Materials	Results-sharing event and presentation materials	\$100.00
	Total Budget	\$1000

Project Team Roles

Project Coordinator – keeps the project organized, plans meetings, helps group follow the project timeline, communicates with school staff

Activity Lead - leads the demonstrations, guides participants during activities and makes sure activities are run safely

Data Collection Lead - taking photos, records student and community participation, records results and collects participant feedback

Education & Outreach Lead - shares information through newsletters, social media, or assemblies and invites students to get involved

Reporting Lead - helps the group share what they learned through reports or presentations.

Safety and Accessibility

- Wear gloves, closed-toe shoes, and protective clothing during waste audits.
- Wash hands after handling waste.
- Do not touch sharp, unsafe or unknown items.
- Make sure an adult is present during activities.
- Work in a large, well-ventilated indoor or outdoor space.
- Keep walkways and work areas clear and organized.
- Offer different ways to participate, such as taking photos or recording notes.
- Dispose of waste properly after the audit.

Reflection Questions

- What types of waste did you find most often?
- How much waste could have been recycled or composted?
- Where did you find the most sorting mistakes?
- Did the amount of waste or contamination change after the challenge?
- What makes waste reduction difficult at your school?
- What leadership, communication or teamwork skills did you learn?
- What ideas would help reduce waste in the future?

More Project Ideas

- Focus on one issue such as food waste, single-use plastics, or paper waste.
- Conduct audits in different locations, such as classrooms or cafeterias.
- Create artwork or displays using recycled materials.
- Work with another school to compare results and share tips.
- Survey students about difficulties with recycling or composting.
- Create a long-term waste reduction plan for your school.
- Organize a "Zero Waste Week" or litterless lunch challenge.

Project Resources

- [City of Toronto Waste Strategy](#)
- [Working Towards a Circular Economy](#)
- [City of Toronto Waste Wizard](#)
- [City of Toronto Waste Education Resources](#)
- [U of T Trash Team](#)
- [TDSB EcoSchools Waste Minimization Resources](#)
- [Toronto Public Library – Our Fragile Planet Program](#)