



CASE STUDY

SSA & The Florida Aquarium: Setting a New Standard for Zero-Waste Events

At the 2025 AZA Annual Conference Icebreaker, SSA Group partnered with The Florida Aquarium to transform a large-scale hospitality event into a zero-waste success. The event hosted nearly 3,000 attendees and achieved a 96% waste diversion rate, significantly exceeding the 90% threshold required for zero-waste designation.

The Challenge

Large events typically generate significant landfill waste due to single-use materials, food waste, and inconsistent guest sorting behavior. The team set out to design an event that minimized landfill contribution while maintaining a high-quality guest experience.



96%

*waste diversion achieved at
a large-scale, conservation-
focused event*



The Approach

Sustainable Procurement

Planning began with sourcing. All single-use items were selected to be either recyclable or compostable, ensuring waste could be diverted from landfill streams.

Strong Cross-Partner Collaboration

SSA worked closely with The Florida Aquarium and a network of sustainability partners to execute the strategy. This included coordination across culinary, operations, and sustainability teams to align on goals and execution.

On-Site Waste Sorting and Volunteer Engagement

A team of trained volunteers, led by sustainability partner Renüable, actively sorted waste during the event. This ensured proper separation of materials and reduced contamination across waste streams.

Technology-Enabled Guest Participation

AI-powered Oscar smart bins helped guide guests to dispose of items correctly, simplifying waste sorting and improving participation rates.

Closed-Loop Recycling and Composting Systems

- 1,370+ pounds of organic material and compostable serveware were composted
- 380 pounds of aluminum containers were recycled into new products. These efforts ensured materials were reintroduced into the supply chain instead of sent to landfills.

Food Recovery and Community Impact

Instead of being discarded, 885 pounds of surplus food were donated to Feeding Tampa Bay, extending the impact beyond the event itself.

Hands-On Operational Execution

Team members remained actively involved throughout and after the event, manually checking and correcting waste streams to ensure accuracy and maximize diversion.



The Results

- ✓ 96% waste diversion rate achieved
- ✓ Over 1,300 pounds composted
- ✓ 885 pounds of food donated
- ✓ 380 pounds of recyclables recovered
- ✓ Nearly 3,000 attendees engaged in a zero-waste experience

The Impact

This event demonstrates that large-scale hospitality experiences can successfully align with sustainability goals. By combining operational planning, strong partnerships, and guest engagement, SSA and The Florida Aquarium created a replicable model for zero-waste events in the cultural attraction industry.

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