



2021 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study Competition

Case Study – University at Albany Fills it Forward

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Focus of Case study

This case study focuses on waste reduction and access to clean water (SDG #6 and 12) through incentivizing reusable water bottles with the Fill It Forward app while also giving back to the global community.

Detailed description of campaign or effort:

The Fill It Forward app is a program that donates money to build clean water projects in the United States and around the world. Those that use Fill It Forward receive a tag with a barcode on it. Users scan this tag each time they refill a reusable water bottle. With each scan, the Fill It Forward app tracks their reuse, communicates the environmental footprint the waste diverted from the landfill and triggers a donation to a clean water initiative. Users are able to keep track of their projects and their peers' reuses through the app. At UAlbany, this effort is fairly new and, as a result, has had many different approaches. Each semester, one to two Fill It Forward Ambassadors are appointed through the Office of Sustainability. These students are in charge of promoting the Fill It Forward app among both UAlbany students and the greater Albany community. This semester, a Fill It Forward ambassador held events at local areas, including grocery stores and malls to present and promote this initiative to the community outside of the University. Ambassadors also tabled for the cause in the Campus Center at the University, giving away tags and water bottles, and advocated for the app on social media. Through social media, those that were interested were able to sign up for a tag, which was then mailed directly to their address, on or off campus. In addition to social media posting, two senior administrators (the Provost and the VP of Student Affairs) created promotional videos for the program.

Planning steps & timeline to implement:

1. Learn and understand Fill It Forward (one week)
2. Research places around the Albany area to present Fill It Forward; present same week (one week)

3. Contact clubs and student organizations, explain Fill It Forward, present to club or have link to sign up for tag in email (two weeks)
4. Reserve table in Campus Center and table during that week (two weeks from date table was reserved, tabling for five hours twice in one week)
5. Promote on social media, including creation of flyer and link tree (one week, but periodically used through semester)
6. Obtain video of VP of Student Affairs and Provost promoting the cause (3 weeks)

Resources and stakeholders involved

The Fill It Forward tags must be purchased, although their cost is quite low (\$3 or less) and comparable or cheaper than the average give away purchased by offices. This semester the Center for Leadership and Service purchased tags for the effort. We had several people from campus involved in the effort, including two student Fill It Forward ambassadors and staff and interns from the Office of Sustainability.

Describe the Results of this campaign component

General results: This campaign attracted the attention of several student organizations, including Model UN and YDSA. It also promoted the use of reusable water bottles on campus. Membership totaled over 150 people with 4,274 reuses. This equated into 123 pounds of waste diverted, 26 pound of ocean pollution prevented and a reduction in emissions of 1,880 pounds. Fifteen clean water projects were completed by the UAlbany Fill It Forward community including those in the US, Canada, India and Bangladesh.

What would you do differently in the future?

In the future, we will distribute tags to incoming freshmen at orientation and have incentive for those with the most refills on the Fill It Forward app. By doing this, we will build a strong community and keep a steady participation rate. We also hope to do BYOB (bring your own bottle) events (in-person) in the future.

What advice would you give to another college that wanted to do a similar effort?

If another college wanted to do a similar effort, we suggest that their target audience be incoming freshmen and to hold in-person promotions when possible. Online promotions were not nearly as effective in our experience, as in person presentations or tabling, though this is quite possibly due to the circumstances of the world.

Photos and Graphics

All graphics created by Office of Sustainability Social Media intern Gina Cricenti

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Provost Kim video:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rRmA5mkeMAuud-mhYWMxMoaMTdGU2vxT/view?usp=sharing>