

THE ECOBIZ BUSINESS HANDBOOK 2.0

Small Business, Big Impact: What
You Can Do For The Planet



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#1 INTRODUCTION

The **Business** Handbook is a practical implementation guide designed for NYC-based businesses. It compiles grants, funding opportunities, sustainable packaging vendors, and other sustainability resources into **one** accessible document. It is a resource businesses can use to take steps toward becoming more environmentally (and financially) sustainable.

WHAT IS ECOBIZ?

EcoBiz is a New York City-based, student-led **nonprofit** dedicated to advancing sustainable business practices and empowering the next generation of ethical entrepreneurs. Founded by students, EcoBiz was created to **bridge** the gap between traditional business education and the growing need for environmental and social responsibility in today's economy.

Our mission is to **support** youth-led and small sustainable businesses and **educate** students about sustainable business practices. We believe that profitability and responsibility are not separate goals, but interconnected pillars of long-term success.

We **operate** through hands-on education, small business support, student-led entrepreneurship programs, and community partnerships. We also **produce** educational resources and monthly publications that **highlight** sustainable businesses and student initiatives while expanding access to sustainability education.



Since its founding in 2024, EcoBiz has grown into a network of over **300** active members, reaching more than **10,000** students through our workshops and resources. We've built a network of **30+** partner organizations and businesses, published **20+** newsletters, and **collaborated** with organizations such as TerraCycle and the Post-Landfill Action Network. Our work has been **recognized** at the United Nations ECOSOC Youth Forum and **featured** at the New York City Earth Day Festival at Union Square Park, reaching over **100,000** attendees.

Thus, EcoBiz exists to prepare students not just to participate in the future of business, but to actively shape it.

✦ HOW TO USE THIS ✦ HANDBOOK: A ROADMAP

Every business is different. Start by identifying your largest environmental impacts. To measure this, you can use sites such as:

- [Measuring Business Carbon Footprint Guide](#)
- [Smart Steps to Sustainability \(EPA Guide\)](#)

These **tools** can help businesses understand where their biggest sources of emissions, waste, and resource use come from. For example, a restaurant may discover that food waste and energy consumption are its **largest** challenges, while a retail store may find that packaging and transportation have the **greatest** impact. Identifying these areas allows businesses to focus their efforts where improvements are likely to have the **greatest effect**.

Once you understand your **current** environmental impact, the next step is to set **realistic** sustainability goals. Rather than attempting to change everything at once, businesses can begin with small, achievable improvements and build from there. **Consider** starting with actions that require little cost, such as reducing unnecessary waste, improving recycling practices, switching to energy-efficient lighting, or choosing suppliers with transparent environmental and labor practices. Plus, before investing, weigh the costs and potential benefits.



A **useful** approach is to follow these three steps:

Step 1: Identify your largest impacts.

Ask yourself:

- How much waste does my business produce?
- Where are my largest energy and water uses?
- Which materials or products have the greatest environmental impact?
- Are there opportunities to reduce waste or improve efficiency?

Step 2: Choose practical solutions.

Use the recommendations in this handbook as advice and potential strategies that fit your goals. Some businesses may prioritize food donation and composting, while others may focus on sustainable packaging, energy efficiency, or reducing water consumption.

Step 3: Track your progress.

Sustainability isn't just a one-time change; it's an ongoing process. Businesses should track their progress using specific, measurable metrics over a set period, such as:

- Pounds of waste diverted per month
- Kilowatt-hours used per square foot
- Gallons of water used per customer
- Amount of materials reused or recycled
- Annual cost savings

Small changes can create significant results when adopted consistently and effectively. Thus, businesses can lower their environmental impact while strengthening their connections with customers and communities.



#2 HOW CAN SMALL BUSINESSES ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE?

Small businesses have significant collective influence. In the U.S.:

- About 99.9% of all businesses are classified as “small businesses.”
- Small businesses employ approximately 45.9% of U.S. workers (about 59 million people) and contribute about 43.5% of U.S. GDP.
- From 2013 to 2023, small businesses (firms with fewer than 249 employees) contributed about 55% of net new job creation.



In terms of sustainability attitudes:

- 95% of small business owners believe sustainability is important.
- 35% said they aren't taking actions to reduce their carbon footprint.
- ~50% of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) calculate emissions; ~60% have plans to reduce carbon emissions, but many cite lack of resources, knowledge, and funding as barriers.

While an individual small business's footprint is typically much smaller than a large corporation's, the aggregate impact of millions of small firms adds up, and there's leverage in improving efficiency across the small business sector.



In addition...

Large corporations drive the majority of industrial, supply chain, and infrastructure-scale emissions. Large fossil-fuel producers play a major role in global emissions, but smaller businesses can still reduce energy and material use within their operations and supply chains.

At the same time...

SMEs collectively can have a large footprint simply because they are so numerous. For example, SMEs in the U.S. contribute approximately 272 million metric tons of CO₂e annually, accounting for 33% of commercial building emissions, making small businesses an important part of efforts to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions.

Small businesses are key to addressing climate change because, although each one has a smaller footprint than large corporations, together they make up nearly half of the U.S. economy and can drive significant change through collective action.

Their flexibility allows them to adopt sustainable practices, such as reducing waste, improving energy efficiency, and sourcing locally, more quickly than larger firms.

As community anchors, business owners like you can also influence local supply chains and consumer behavior, helping shift entire communities toward greener choices.



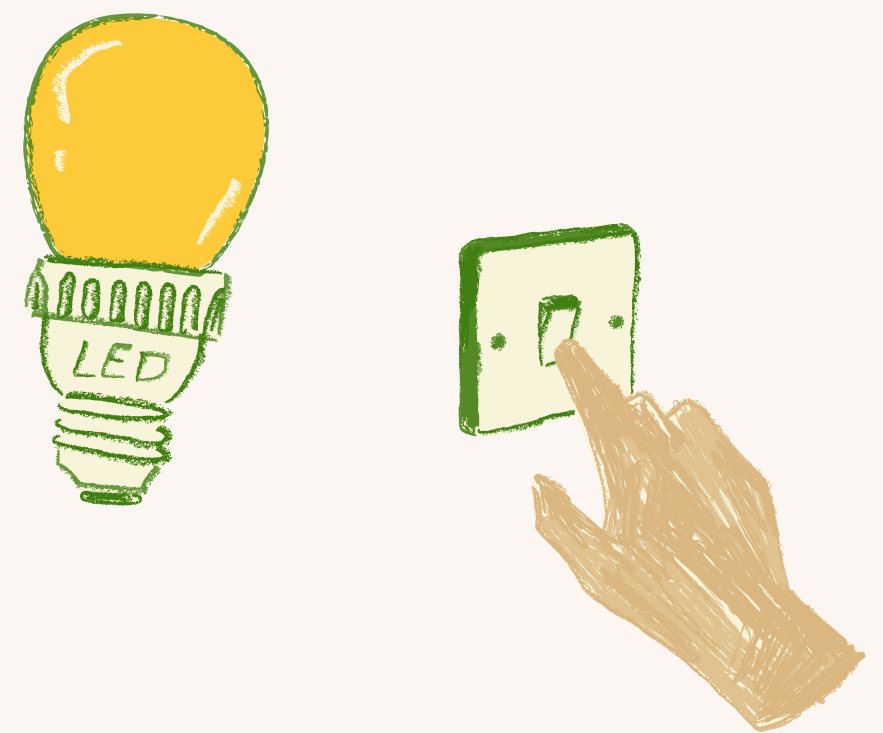
#3 WHY SUSTAINABILITY MAKES FINANCIAL SENSE

Many business owners assume sustainability is expensive. While some improvements require upfront investment, many sustainable practices actually reduce operating costs and improve efficiency, thus increasing long-term profitability.

Thus, businesses can save money by:

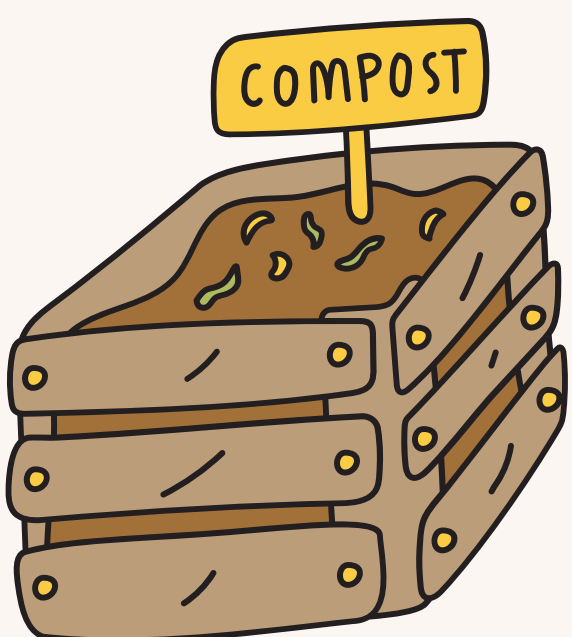
1] Lowering utility bills

- Switching to LED lighting
- Installing smart thermostats
- Using ENERGY STAR appliances
- Reducing water consumption



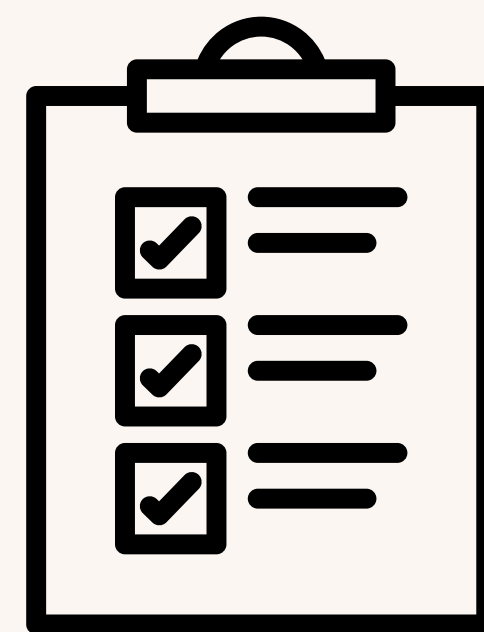
2] Reducing waste disposal costs

- Improving purchasing and demand forecasting
- Composting organic waste
- Separating recyclable materials correctly and working with an appropriate waste contractor
- Preventing unnecessary inventory loss



3] Improving inventory management

- Better forecasting reduces over-ordering
- Menu engineering minimizes food waste
- Reusing materials lowers purchasing costs



4] Qualifying for grants and rebates

Many state, federal, and utility programs offer incentives for businesses investing in:

- Energy-efficient equipment
- Electric vehicles
- Renewable energy
- Water-saving technology
- Building improvements



(Eligibility, funding availability, and deadlines should be confirmed directly with the administering organization.)

5] Preparing for the future

- Governments are gradually introducing stricter environmental standards and waste regulations. Businesses that adopt sustainable practices early are often better positioned to comply with future requirements while avoiding unexpected costs.

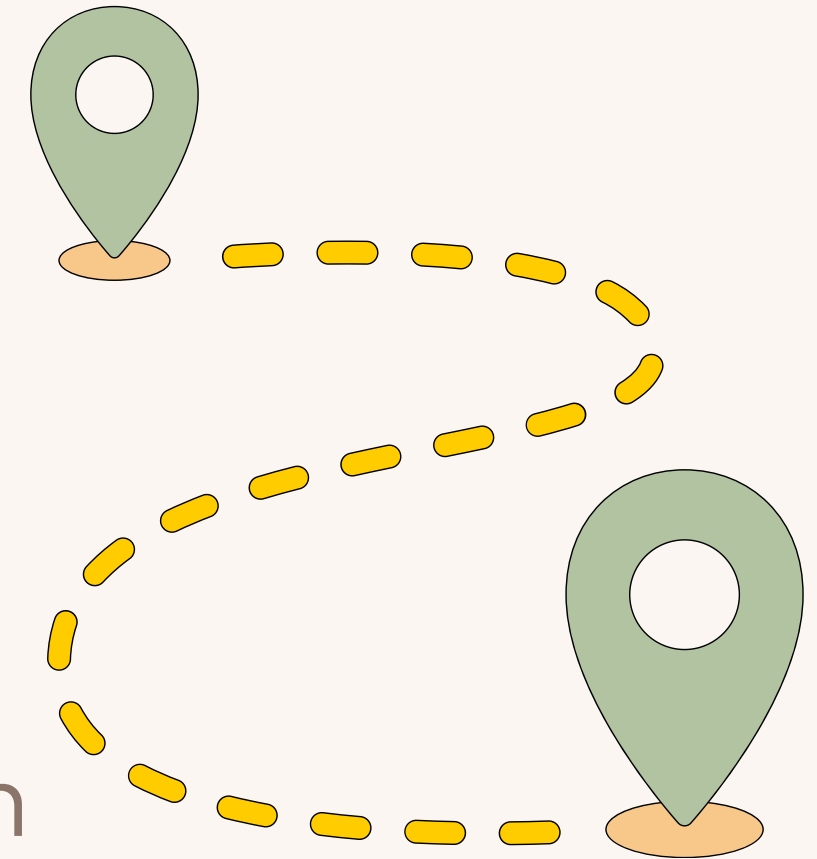


Sustainability doesn't have to mean higher costs—it can help businesses save money, operate more efficiently, and strengthen their bottom line. By **starting with small, practical changes**, businesses can reduce waste and resource use while building a more resilient operation for the future.

#4 WHAT CAN RESTAURANTS DO?

In the United States alone, an estimated 30–40% of the U.S. food supply is lost or wasted across the supply chain.

This massive waste of resources not only worsens food security for millions, but also impacts the environment through greenhouse gas emissions. Every plate scraped into the trash represents wasted farmland, water, labor, and electricity. By the time that food reaches a restaurant, it has often traveled hundreds or even thousands of miles.



The transportation alone burns fuel, releases greenhouse gases, and intensifies climate change. Globally, GHGs from food waste account for nearly 10% of total emissions. Food loss also wastes agricultural land, water, labor, and energy.



However, there are many ways local restaurants and food vendors alike can help mitigate these harmful effects and prioritize sustainability:

- Use waste prevention tools.
- Reduce food waste.
- Measure and track discarded food.
- Understand its effects on costs, communities, and natural resources.

Within NYC, businesses can start by:

Sourcing from vendors and markets:

- GrowNYC's Wholesale Food Hub
- South Asia Food Group
- Choy Commons Wholesale
- USDA Local Food Directories (a national directory that can help businesses identify local food suppliers)



Sourcing from packaging suppliers (Some based in New York):

- EcoQuality
- QPSI
- Envi Reusable Bags
- Packaging NYC
- Green Pond Packaging
- Redway Group



Disclaimer: *Inclusion in this list does not constitute an endorsement by EcoBiz. Businesses should independently evaluate suppliers based on their own needs, costs, environmental practices, certifications, and other relevant criteria.*

Toward the end of the supply chain, restaurants can donate or sell safe surplus food instead of throwing it away. This not only reduces waste, but also ensures food continues to serve the community.

Furthermore...

Platforms such as the ones listed below allow restaurants to sell excess meals at a discount, reaching new customers while preventing food from entering landfills:

- **Sell surplus food:** Too Good To Go
- **Donate surplus food:** DonateNYC, City Harvest, Food Bank For New York City, Rescuing Leftover Cuisine, Food Donation Connection
- **Community sharing:** OLIO



Note: *When donating surplus food, businesses should ensure that food is safe, properly stored, handled, and transported. See NYC's Surplus Food guidance for more information.*

Keep in mind that:

- “Menu engineering” is an effective way to make the most of ingredients while keeping sustainability in mind.

This means designing the menu to reduce waste, maximize ingredient use, and increase profitability. Restaurants analyze which dishes sell well, which generate leftovers, and which require ingredients that spoil quickly. Some strategies include:

- **Designing dishes** that share overlapping ingredients
 - Featuring “**specials**” to use up surplus items
 - Rotating seasonal ingredients instead of over-ordering
 - **Highlighting** plant-forward dishes (often lower-impact and cheaper)
 - **Tracking plate waste** to identify what customers aren’t finishing
- **Portion control** is another key aspect of eliminating as much unnecessary waste as possible. This can be done by offering multiple portion sizes, serving sides only when requested, and standardizing measurements in the kitchen so food isn’t overportioned.



- Businesses can also creatively repurpose safe surplus ingredients in the kitchen (like turning extra vegetables into soups, bread into croutons, or ripe fruit into sauces and desserts). Ingredients should only be repurposed when they are safe, properly stored, and permitted under applicable food-safety rules.

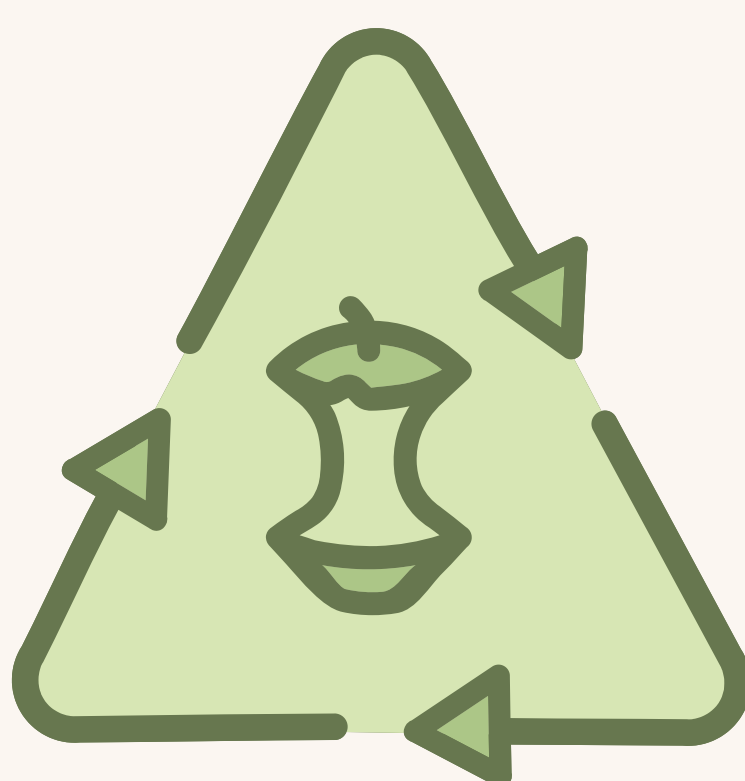
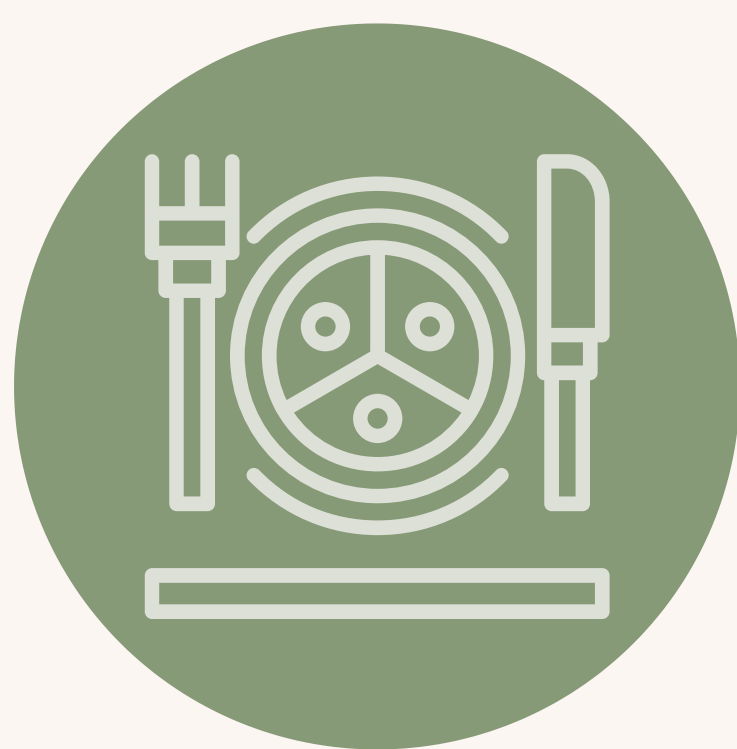
- **Composting food that is not consumable is another option.**

Restaurants can partner with local compost programs or private haulers so leftovers are broken down into nutrient-rich soil that supports future food production. Here are some New York City resources:

- [Hudson River Park Community Compost Center](#)
- [Curbside Composting](#)
- [BK ROT](#)

Restaurant Sustainability Action Checklist

- Design menus strategically to reduce food waste and improve profitability.
- Adjust portions and offerings to better match what customers actually eat.
- Use ingredients efficiently by sharing them across dishes and planning ahead to minimize waste.
- Repurpose or redistribute surplus food through specials, discounts, or donations when safe and permitted.
- Take a proactive, system-wide approach by considering prevention, sourcing, and long-term environmental impacts.



#5 What Can Retailers Do?

Retailers make up 11.1% of U.S. businesses and significantly impact emissions through overseas manufacturing and long-distance shipping. Plus, up to 30% of apparel globally goes unsold or discarded.

Packaging and unsold inventory contribute heavily to waste, with textiles and plastics making up about 12% of municipal solid waste. By sourcing responsibly, reducing packaging, and improving operations, retailers can cut emissions, minimize waste, and support local economies, especially in cities like New York.

You can do this by:

- Reducing overproduction waste
- Adopting circular retail models
- Using sustainable packaging

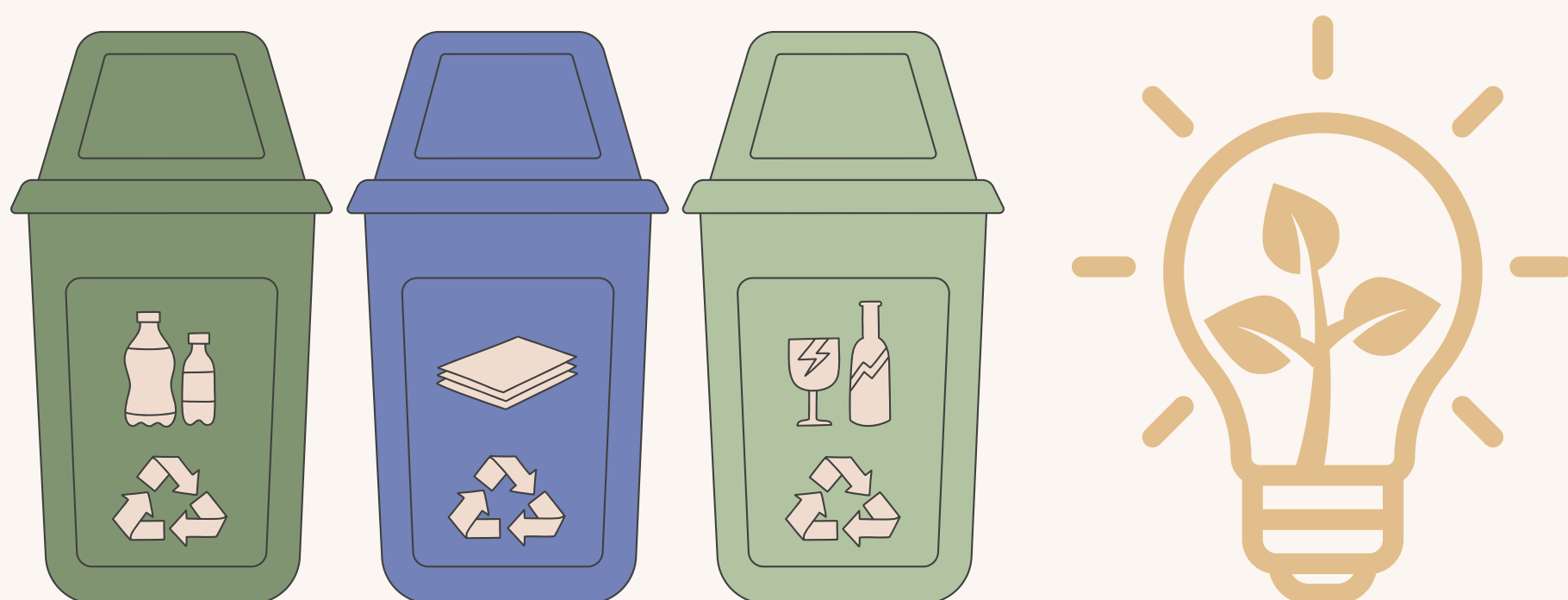


Retailers can reduce these impacts by:

- Avoiding or minimizing sourcing from exploitative or environmentally harmful producers, especially those relying on synthetic materials. Instead, evaluate suppliers based on traceability, labor practices, material selection, production impacts, durability, and credible certifications—regardless of location.

Some New York sourcing resources include:

- [Made in NYC](#)
 - [FABSCRAP](#)
 - [Build It Green NYC \(BIG Reuse\)](#)
 - [EcoQuality](#)
-
- Reducing packaging waste by minimizing unnecessary wrapping, choosing recyclable or compostable materials, and encouraging customers to bring reusable bags or skip double-bagging.
 - Investing in more efficient transportation and delivery, including route optimization and, when financially possible, **hybrid** or **electric** delivery vehicles to cut fuel use over time.
 - Improving in-store energy efficiency through **LED** lighting, **ENERGY STAR**-certified appliances, and better heating/cooling controls.
 - Establishing **take-back programs** (only when a verified downstream reuse, refurbishment, recycling, or resale partner is in place).



- Some examples include:
 - Setting up a clearly labeled drop-off point for returned or unwanted products (clothing, electronics, packaging).
 - Offering store credit, loyalty points, or discounts for eligible products returned for resale, refurbishment, or recycling.
 - Partnering with the [LES Ecology Center](#) for e-waste recycling. Its community recycling events accept e-waste from NYC small businesses, but businesses should check current event details and accepted materials before dropping off items.
 - Educating shoppers about sustainable choices, highlighting durable, repairable, secondhand, or eco-certified products and explaining why they matter.
 - Including information about take-back programs and resale options at checkout.
 - Donating unused or gently used materials and items to reuse centers so materials can be repurposed instead of thrown away.
 - A local NYC reuse center is [Materials for the Arts](#). Businesses can donate materials, but free materials are distributed only to eligible nonprofit organizations and institutions.

#6 WHAT CAN PERSONAL CARE AND COSMETOLOGY BUSINESSES DO?

Personal care and beauty businesses, including salons, spas, and barbershops, have an outsized environmental impact due to high water and energy use, chemical-heavy products, and single-use plastics.

Key impacts:

Globally, the beauty industry generates over 120 billion units of packaging annually, much of it plastic. Hair salons use significant amounts of water and energy for services such as hair washing, lighting, dryers, and styling tools. Certain ingredients may create occupational, wastewater, or aquatic-environment concerns if products are improperly selected, handled, or disposed of.



Ways to reduce these impacts:

Despite their smaller footprint compared to large manufacturers, collectively, personal care businesses can influence waste, chemical pollution, and consumer behavior, especially in urban centers like New York City.

By adopting sustainable practices, these businesses can reduce their environmental impact while lowering costs, improving client experience, and supporting local communities.

Some strategies include:

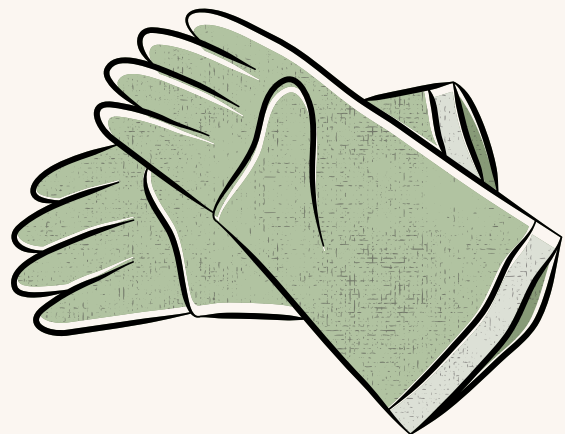
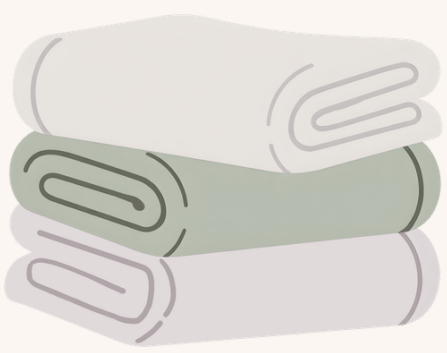
- Conducting a basic waste, water, energy, and purchasing audit to identify which services and products produce the highest emissions or waste.
 - An optional advanced step can be to perform a Life Cycle Assessment (LCA).
- Reducing packaging waste:
 - Purchasing shampoos, conditioners, dyes, and other supplies in bulk containers instead of single-use bottles.
 - Encouraging clients to bring their own reusable containers for products where permitted and where sanitary filling procedures can be maintained.
- Using cleaner, safer products with transparent ingredient information or credible third-party environmental and safety certifications.
- Switching to LED lighting, energy-efficient dryers, water heaters, and HVAC systems.
 - Participating in eligible Con Edison energy-efficiency programs for audits and rebates.
- Reducing water waste by adopting low-flow faucets, spray nozzles, and water-efficient hair-washing stations.
- Minimizing single-use items by replacing disposable items with reusable tools where safe and sanitary.
- Improving indoor air quality by using non-toxic cleaning products and ensuring proper ventilation to protect staff and clients.
 - Some options are:
 - The Salon Chair Guys
 - Home Ventilating Institute



#7 WHAT CAN HOTELS DO?

Hotels have a large environmental footprint due to energy-intensive operations, high water usage, frequent laundry, and food and amenity waste. The hospitality industry accounts for about 1% of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, largely from electricity and heating/cooling.

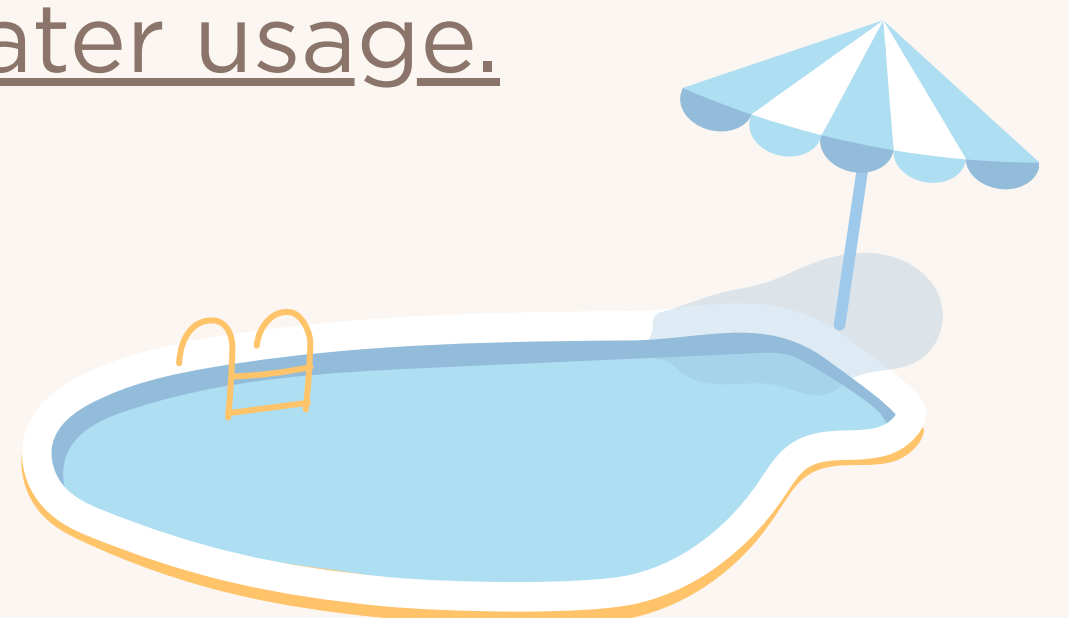
- A single hotel guest can generate up to 15 pounds of waste per night, including food, packaging, and disposable amenities.
- Hotels use significant water for guest rooms, pools, laundry, and landscaping; laundering towels and linens alone accounts for up to 50% of water usage in some properties.



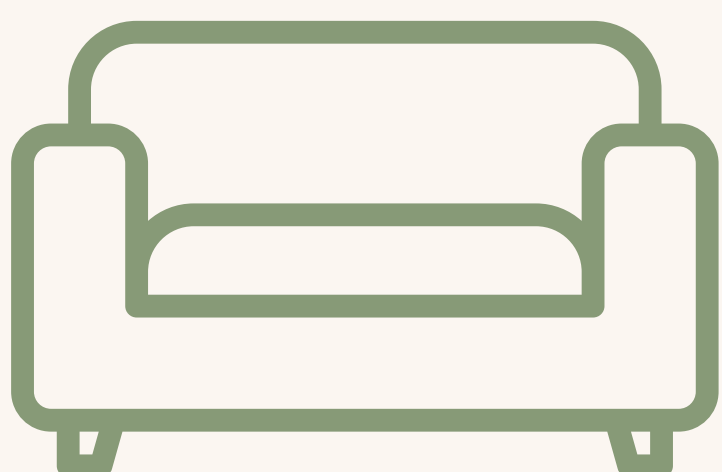
Because hotels host millions of guests annually, they have enormous potential to influence sustainability practices both directly (through operations) and indirectly (through guest behavior).

Some greener practices that hotels can adopt are:

- Using energy-efficient equipment and evaluating renewable energy options.
- Using low-flow fixtures and tracking water usage.
- Recycling and composting.



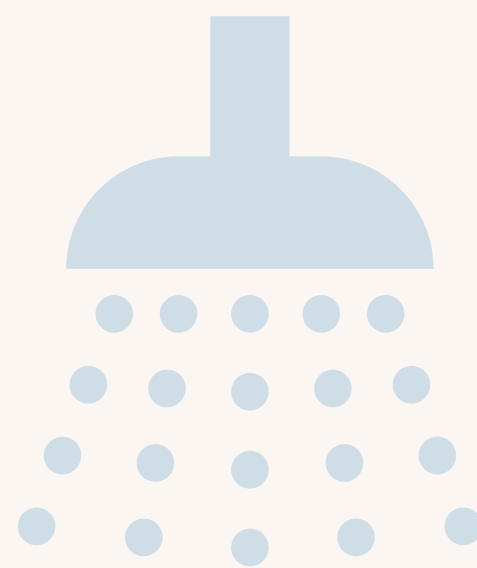
- Switching to LED lighting, energy-efficient dryers, water heaters, and HVAC systems and using motion sensors in back-of-house areas to prevent unnecessary electricity use.
 - Participating in eligible Con Edison energy-efficiency programs for audits and rebates.
- Offering clearly labeled collection bins for paper and plastics, along with designated drop-off points or take-back programs for electronics and textiles.
- Reducing food waste by tracking buffet, restaurant, and event leftovers and donating or selling surplus through local programs. Some examples include:
 - Food Bank for NYC
 - NYCP's Food Rescue program
 - Rescuing Leftover Cuisine
 - Feeding America
 - Further with Food
 - Food Donation Connection
- Participating in take-back or resale programs for furniture or electronics. Some starting resources include:
 - Official Electronics Disposal Guide
 - IKEA
- Reducing single-use items by replacing single-use amenities (shampoo, conditioner, water bottles) with bulk dispensers or refillable containers.



- Conserving water by installing low-flow faucets, showerheads, and toilets and implementing towel and linen reuse programs (encouraging guests to hang towels or leave linens in place to reuse, reducing water, energy, and detergent use while cutting laundry costs), and using smart scheduling for laundry (running laundry during off-peak hours and consolidating loads to save energy, water, and detergent while maximizing machine efficiency) to minimize energy and water use.

- Some helpful guides are:

- [The Solutions Desk](#)
- [Good Call](#)



#8 WHY SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING?

Packaging is often one of the **easiest places for businesses to reduce waste while saving money**. Every unnecessary bag, box, plastic utensil, or layer of wrapping increases purchasing costs and contributes to landfill waste. Small improvements can reduce expenses while creating a better customer experience.

The most sustainable packaging is packaging that isn't used. Here is the process that every business should go through while deciding how to package their goods.

They should first ask:



- Can this item use less packaging?
- Can multiple items fit into one package?
- Is double-bagging necessary?
- Can customers opt out of disposable items?
- Can receipts be emailed instead of printed?



Reducing unnecessary materials immediately lowers purchasing costs.

However...

When packaging is necessary, businesses can prioritize:

- Recycled paper and cardboard
- FSC-certified paper products
- Compostable food containers
- Plant-based bioplastics where appropriate
- Recyclable aluminum
- Glass containers
- Reusable packaging



Avoid materials that are difficult to recycle, including mixed plastics, foam containers, and excessive plastic wrapping.

Furthermore...

Businesses can encourage customers to reduce waste by:

- Offering discounts for reusable cups
- Allowing customers to bring reusable containers (where staff can handle them safely and consistently)
- Selling branded reusable bags
- Offering refill programs
- Using returnable packaging systems



Additionally...

Buying packaging in bulk often:

- lowers costs
- reduces shipping emissions
- minimizes packaging waste from suppliers



Businesses should also work with suppliers that minimize unnecessary shipping materials.

Sustainable packaging matters because it reduces waste and lowers the environmental impact of everyday products. And with **increasingly accessible alternatives**, making the switch can be simple and affordable.

#9 RESOURCES TO HELP YOUR BUSINESS GET STARTED

Small businesses are a cornerstone of the U.S. economy, accounting for 99.9% of all businesses, employing nearly 46% of workers, and contributing roughly 43.5% of GDP. Various programs, tools, and organizations can help businesses take their first steps toward reducing their environmental impact.

For example:

- Local composting facilities and commercial organic-waste collection services help businesses divert organic waste from landfills.
 - GrowNYC (provides information and community composting resources in NYC).
 - Waste Connections (a commercial organic-waste collection vendor serving New York City)

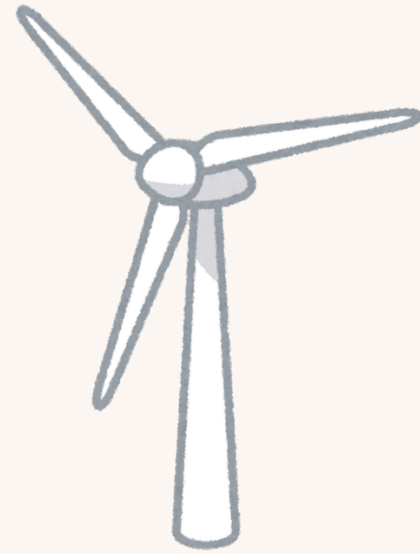
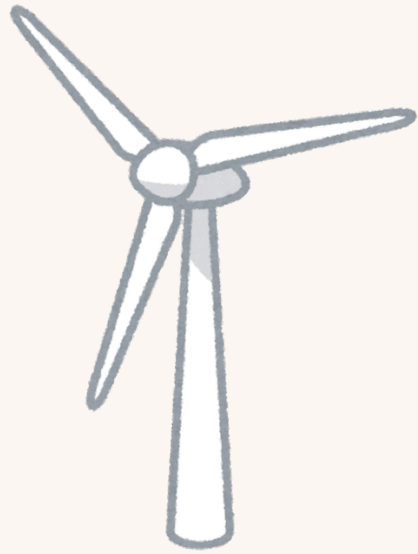
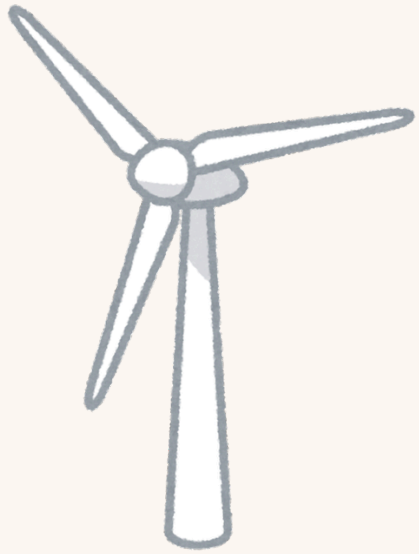
Disclaimer: *Listing a service or organization does not constitute an endorsement. NYC businesses should compare authorized commercial waste carters serving their specific commercial-waste zone and select a provider based on their needs, services, and pricing.*

- State and federal EV rebates make electric or hybrid vehicles more affordable for business fleets.
 - [New York State Energy Research and Development Authority](#)
- Eco-friendly wholesalers provide bulk, low-waste, and sustainable product options.
 - [Earth Hero](#)
 - [Jungle Culture](#)
- Green Business Certification programs offer guidelines and recognition for environmental leadership.
 - [Green Business Certification Inc.](#)
- Utility companies often provide free or low-cost energy audits to identify efficiency opportunities.
 - [ENERGY STAR](#)
- Small Business Development Centers offer free assistance with sustainability planning and grant applications.
 - [New York Small Business Development Centers](#)
 - [Small Business Environmental Support Office \(SBESO\)](#)
- The U.S. EPA's ENERGY STAR for Small Business provides tools for reducing energy consumption.



#10 GET INVOLVED WITH ECOBIZ

Creating a more sustainable business world requires **collaboration between businesses, entrepreneurs, students, and organizations** working together toward shared goals.



EcoBiz is committed to supporting businesses in their sustainability journeys by providing resources to connect with a community focused on responsible business practices. Whether you are a small business owner looking to adopt greener practices, an organization interested in collaboration, or a community member passionate about sustainability, there are many ways to continue engaging with EcoBiz:

- Join our community and stay informed.
 - Subscribe to the [EcoBiz newsletter](#) to receive updates on upcoming workshops, opportunities, sustainability resources, student projects, and ways to get involved. Our newsletters explain important topics in sustainable business, showcase the work of businesses creating meaningful change, and highlight impactful sustainable business opportunities for students.



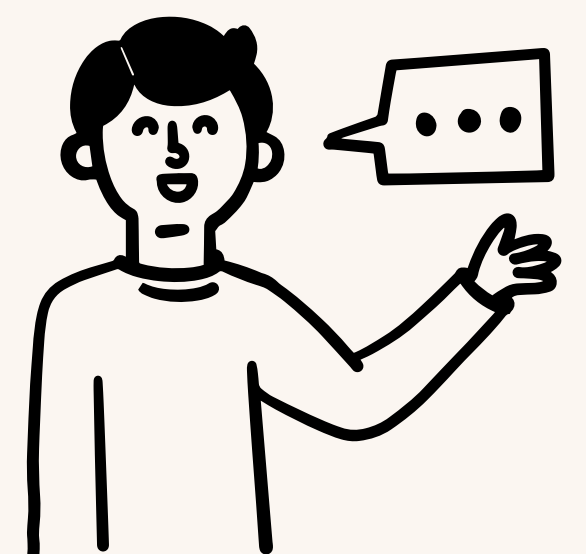
- Follow EcoBiz and support our mission.
 - Follow us on Instagram at @ecobiznyc. Sharing our work helps spread awareness and encourages more students and businesses to explore sustainable practices.



- Partner and collaborate with EcoBiz.
 - Businesses can work with EcoBiz through partnerships, projects, events, research opportunities, and community initiatives. Fill out the form linked [here](#).



- Invite EcoBiz to speak or collaborate.
 - Interested in bringing sustainable business education to your workplace? Invite us to speak at events or collaborate on initiatives focused on sustainability.



- Explore more resources.
 - Continue learning beyond this handbook by exploring EcoBiz's additional resources on our website: <https://ecobiznyc.org/>
 - Email us with any questions or comments: nyc.ecobiz@gmail.com.



#11 THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO READ THIS!

We're very glad that you've decided to take the next step in making your small business more sustainable.

Implementing sustainable practices can directly reduce operating costs through lower energy, water, and disposal bills. Businesses can access state and federal tax credits, grants, and utility rebates for renewable energy, energy-efficient appliances, and waste reduction programs.

Sustainability can increase revenue by attracting environmentally conscious customers and improving brand reputation, while also reducing risk from regulatory changes and waste management challenges.

Every action, from portion control and donation to composting and sourcing local ingredients, improves efficiency, saves money, supports the community, and reduces environmental impact.

These steps can create measurable impact, helping your business thrive while supporting your community and the planet.

