



WASTE, ERASED:

**Reducing single-use
plastics in Greater
Sudbury**

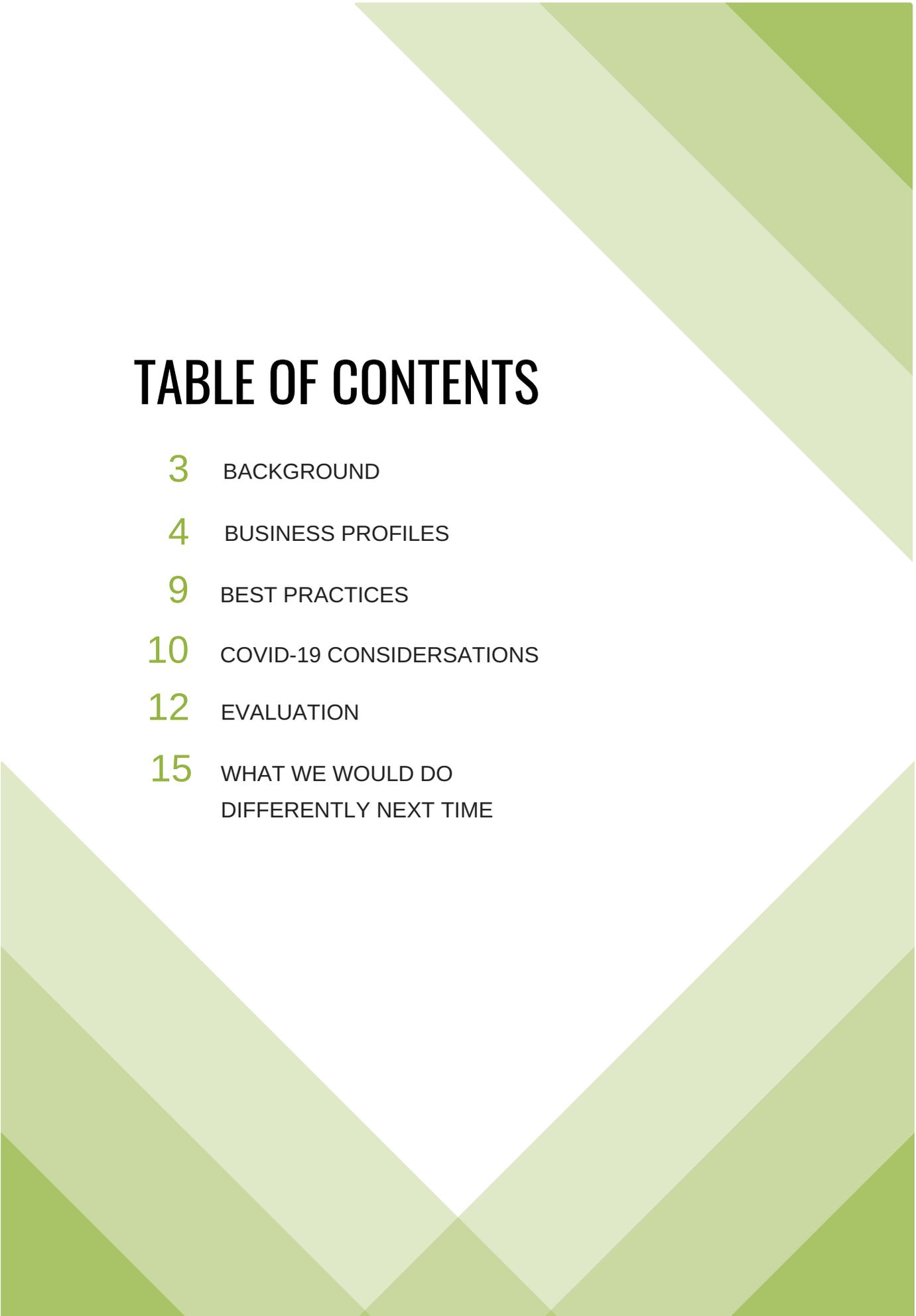


TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 3 BACKGROUND
- 4 BUSINESS PROFILES
- 9 BEST PRACTICES
- 10 COVID-19 CONSIDERATIONS
- 12 EVALUATION
- 15 WHAT WE WOULD DO
DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME

Background

Plastic-Free Greater Sudbury (PFGS) started as a community campaign in June 2018. With the initial goal to help local businesses, organizations, and schools remove/swap three or more single use plastic items, it quickly shifted into a way to engage with and educate the whole community. PFGS later partnered with reThink Green in 2019 (Sudbury's green incubator) to apply for funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation Seed Grant.

Plastic-Free Greater Sudbury

Vision: To make Greater Sudbury a single-use plastic free community.

Mission: A community campaign dedicated to challenging the status quo of single-use plastic use in Greater Sudbury through collaborative, sustainable, and socially inclusive efforts.

reThink Green

Vision: By 2030, reThink Green will have built an engaged network of champions that are advancing environmental sustainability in 500 communities and organizations across northern Ontario.

Mission: reThink Green offers a variety of programs, tools, and services designed to help communities and organizations become more sustainable.

Objectives

By actively engaging with 30 locally operated, independently owned hospitality businesses, we hope to help identify their contribution to single use-plastic waste and to support them to make an action plan to reduce it through the use of education, guidance, and teamwork.

Process

In 2018, PFGS started by working with restaurant and café owners to identify commonly used and easy to reduce single-use plastics, with the goal for community owners and leaders to Take the Pledge. Given the success of this model, we decided to make that the main focus. To Take the Pledge means a business, school, or organization agrees to reduce at least three single-use plastic items that customers would normally receive.

Steps to Take the Pledge:

1. Identify realistic single-use plastics to start reducing.
2. Survey participating businesses to establish a single-use plastic waste baseline, helping us to identify current barriers and alternative options.
3. Develop a framework for measuring, tracking and setting targets for waste reduction.
4. Create customized action plans for each participating business to address single-use plastics. Enable them to set reduction targets.
5. Measure the number of single-use plastics reduced.
6. Celebrate successes on social media, website, and annual awards ceremony.

The Nickel Refillery



Date joined: Oct 2019

ACTIONS

- All food comes package free, customers bring their own or purchase a container
- Rent out stainless steel dishes, cups, and cutlery
- Kitchen Terracycle box to recycle items that can't be recycled

HIGHLIGHTS

Since opening their store in October 2019, the Nickel Refillery has reduced 140, 890 single-use plastics from landfill.

Motley Kitchen



Date joined: Sept 2019

ACTIONS

- Offer paper straws by request
- Compostable take out containers
- Paper bags for take out

OTHER ACTIONS

They operate as a brunch spot on the weekends and a catering business during the week. For catering they have a returnable platter program where they bring the food on a platter and pick it up the next day. They offer metal utensils and drinking glasses for an added cost and don't provide plastic utensils or water bottles. They are effectively making single-use options not an option.

Pinchman's

Date joined: Feb 2020



ACTIONS

- Paper bags for take out
- Plastic utensils are available only upon request
- \$0.25 off when customer brings their own mug

OTHER ACTIONS

In 2018, we had a cutlery drive where we collected metal utensils for many schools and groups. Pinchman's set up a box for people to drop off utensils. We were able to collect over 1,000 pieces of cutlery!



Old Rock Coffee Roasters

Date joined: Jan 2019



ACTIONS

- Offer paper straws by request
- Bamboo stir sticks instead of plastic ones
- Lend coffee carafes for catering

OTHER ACTIONS

- Water refill station with reusable glasses



"If we all do some small steps to reduce plastic then it will become a big thing, and if we can all jump in together it will make it easier for everyone."

-Carole Roy, co-owner



The Kouzzina

Date joined: Jan 2020



ACTIONS

- Sell bamboo cutlery for take out
- Package take out in paper bags
- Offer paper straws



"For takeout we have stopped giving out plastic cutlery, plastic bags, and styrofoam containers, among other changes in the restaurant. In doing so, we have eliminated almost 5,000 single-use plastic items a month."

-Matt Moutsatsos, manager



Indie Cinema

Date joined: Feb 2020



ACTIONS

- Compostable cups and recyclable lids
- Popcorn is served in compostable bags
- Snack come in recyclable cardboard boxes

OTHER ACTIONS

Staff teach customers which waste receptacle to use. They found this works better than signs. Indie has committed to asking customers if they would like a lid to try and reduce the plastic.

La Fromagerie

Date joined: Aug 2018



ACTIONS

- Offer paper straws by request
- Package take out in paper bags
- Returnable mason jar dessert program

Salute Coffee Company

Date joined: Jun 2018



ACTIONS

- Only have bamboo cutlery for take out
- Wooden stir sticks
- \$0.20 off when customer brings their own mug
- Package free crackers for soup

OTHER ACTIONS

- Water station with reusable glasses

HIGHLIGHTS

Salute was the winner of the 2019 Plastic-Free Greater Sudbury Sustainability Award



The Cedar Nest

Date joined: Aug 2018



ACTIONS



- Paper bags for take away desserts
- Discount for take away items when you bring your own container
- Offer plastic straws or plastic bags by request

Salty Dog Bagels

Date joined: Nov 2020

ACTIONS

- Wooden utensils available upon request
- Wooden stir sticks and staff use metal spoons
- Paper takeout cups and containers



OTHER ACTIONS

- Refillable soap and cleaning products from the Nickel Refillery



Tony V's

Date joined: Jan 2020



ACTIONS

- Straws are only given upon request
- Take out bags are all paper
- Cutlery for take out only given upon request

"Since we switched to only offering straws when customers ask for them, we have reduced our straw use by 60%"

-Ryan Nesci, owner



Beards

Date joined: Feb 2020



ACTIONS

- Paper bags and boxes for all desserts
- Coffee cups are compostable
- Wooden utensils

Flurples

Date joined: Feb 2020



ACTIONS

- Wooden spoons for ice cream
- Paper straws for milkshakes
- Ice cream is served in compostable cups



Tucos Taco Lounge



Date joined: Jun 2018

ACTIONS

- Paper straws
- Paper bags for take out
- Compostable take out containers

OTHER ACTIONS

- All 4 businesses + 7 apartments generate less garbage than the city limit

"Sustainability is first priority at Tucos - this is one of the reasons we're a vegan restaurant. We recycle and compost virtually ALL of our waste."

-Marc Browning, owner

HIGHLIGHTS

Tucos Taco Lounge used to donate all of their compost to a neighbour when they before getting municipal composting. At the end of every shift a staff member would walk a wheelbarrow full of kitchen scraps down the street. Now they have a commercial size composter.



Best practices

1. The “Big Three” Single-Use Plastics

The “big three” are single-use plastics that are easy to eliminate, swap, and reduce. When a new business Takes the Pledge, we suggest they start by eliminating plastic straws, swapping plastic cutlery, and reducing plastic bags. Once businesses have started on the “big three”, we work with them to find other single-use plastics they can eliminate, swap, and/or reduce. The “big three” were carefully considered based on an environmental scan we completed that identified these items don’t get used by customers and they have accessible, affordable, and practice alternatives. In addition, the “big three” are included in Canada’s nationwide ban on six single-use plastic items that will take effect by the end of 2021.

Plastic straws are the easiest item to **eliminate** for a business. There are a few reasons for this, much environmental work has been done to share the negative impacts of straws, customers are very receptive and vocal about not needing straws, and it is very easy switch to paper straws. Most businesses were already doing this or keen to start. For businesses who were unsure, we suggesting keeping a small stock pile of straws available for customers who ask. We also share with businesses about the need to support customers with accessibility requirements.

Plastic bags are the easiest item to **swap** for a business. Paper bags (or ones made of recycled paper content) are relatively inexpensive and are becoming more the norm. A typical plastic bag is created through the use of oil and/or natural gas, leaving a long-lasting product that is used once and typically not recyclable. Choosing paper bags saves on these non-renewable resources and can easily be composted or recycled and will break down quickly if it ends up in the environment. Business owners didn’t seem to mind the increase cost of paper because as it allows them to reduce their environmental impact and keep up with demand from customers.

Plastic cutlery is the easiest item to **reduce** for a business. We recommended that businesses either ask their customers if they required cutlery or only provide it if the customer asked. A few businesses made the switch to bamboo cutlery and charged a small fee (\$0.10 to \$0.25). Before asking if the customer needed cutlery, they would tell them how much it cost. This switch was two-fold, it allowed the business to cover the cost of the more expensive alternative and made customers stop to think if they did need the cutlery.

2. Compostable plastics aren't the answer for Greater Sudbury...yet

Many Pledging businesses were interested in using bioplastic products as an alternative to single-use plastics. Through this project, we identified that The City of Greater Sudbury only accepts two types of certified compostable products. These products include waxed cardboard, paper, untreated cardboard, parchment, and butcher paper. Many of the single-use plastic alternatives are made out of Polylactic acid or corn starch. While they are made out of plant fibres, they technically decompose like plastics making them unfit to be processed in the city's compost. Bioplastic alternatives require more time and a higher heat to break down properly than the city's current system.

COVID-19 Considerations

It is impossible to talk about single-use plastic use without mentioning the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pandemic started to see increased cases in Ontario, restaurants were not able to offer eat-in options and solely relied take-out options. Since then, we have seen an increase in single-use plastic bags and take-out containers. Before the pandemic, many businesses who Took the Pledge made the switch to paper bags and reduced the number of plastic bags they were giving out. Businesses noticed that many orders were quite large and it was much more convenient to pack everything into a plastic bag with the assurance that it wouldn't rip, unlike a paper bag. This is an unfortunate consequence of the pandemic, however with less dine-in services many businesses are seeing a decrease in straws. Businesses were not offering drinks on their take-out menu and were not using nearly as many straws.

Cafes that were offering a discount for customers who brought in a reusable mug could no longer because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Large coffee shops were the first businesses to stop allowing reusable mugs, and everyone seemed to follow after that. Research now shows that there are safe ways to use reusables during a pandemic with countless campaigns all over the world educating businesses to do just that. Some chains in the United Kingdom, including Starbucks, are now accepting reusable cups with systems for baristas not to touch the cups, many other independent chains are still only using disposable cups. Unfortunately, we have been unsuccessful in getting any location within Sudbury to do this by the writing of this report.

The COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult to work with businesses, with lockdown measures requiring them to close in-store customer access and most having to switch to take out/delivery only. Reusable options were considered to be a potentially unsanitary option and were no longer used even when businesses started to open back up. Skip the Dishes has become very important part of operations for many of our participating businesses to provide take-out delivery to customers. There is an opt-in option that businesses can turn on to only provide cutlery upon request and notes can also be attached to each specific food items and at checkout, making it very easy for businesses to continue this reduction.

At the end of this grant, we intended to have 30 businesses Take the Pledge and commit to reducing three types of single-use plastics. Although we were on a solid path to achieving this goal, the COVID-19 pandemic began mid-way through the grant. Suddenly, the businesses that we had already engaged plus ones that had expressed interest had to pivot swiftly to a take-out only service platform, and therefore were more reliant on single-use plastics. In total, we only had 14 businesses commit to the Pledge. Of those, none were able to meet set targets due to the pandemic.

There are however, a number of actions that could have been taken, even while providing take-out option only and may have been beneficial to explore with businesses if scenarios occur that require take-out only measures in the future. Compostable to-go boxes with compostable labels could have played a large part in diverting single-use plastic containers from the local waste stream. Compostable containers and labels are readily available and continue to display branding, list ingredients, and can seal bags and containers as needed. For disposal, containers, compostable label, and any leftover food can all be composted together.

Waste, erased: Reducing single-use plastics in Sudbury

We surveyed businesses in the customer service and hospitality industry about single-use plastics. Business owners want to do their part to reduce waste but don't know where to start. Customers are tired of receiving unnecessary single-use plastics. We developed the Pledge to help businesses reduce or eliminate single-use plastics and provide customers with sustainable options.



What do you foresee being the greatest challenge to Taking the Pledge?

Customer buy-in

We surveyed 461 Sudburians to better understand their thoughts on a single-use plastic ban. 90% said action to reduce single-use plastics is urgent and necessary.

People want to reduce single-use plastics: with the support from businesses, it's much easier.



Municipal Support

The cost of sustainability goes beyond the cost of products; municipal support also places a huge part in businesses' ability to reduce single-use plastics. The Community Energy and Emissions Plan (CEEP) is the long-term plan to reduce carbon emissions and pollution in Greater Sudbury. This plan outlines waste reduction efforts at the municipal level including partnering with retailers to produce less packaging and improving composting services.

Did you know?

Single-Use Plastics are plastics that you only use once, such as plastic cutlery, straws, containers, etc.

Plastic-Free Tip! Easy switches we suggest to businesses:

- Only offering paper straws upon request
- Charging a small fee for bamboo cutlery and ask customers if they need it while they are ordering
- Switching to recycled paper bags



What do you foresee being the greatest challenge to Taking the Pledge? Continued...

Cost

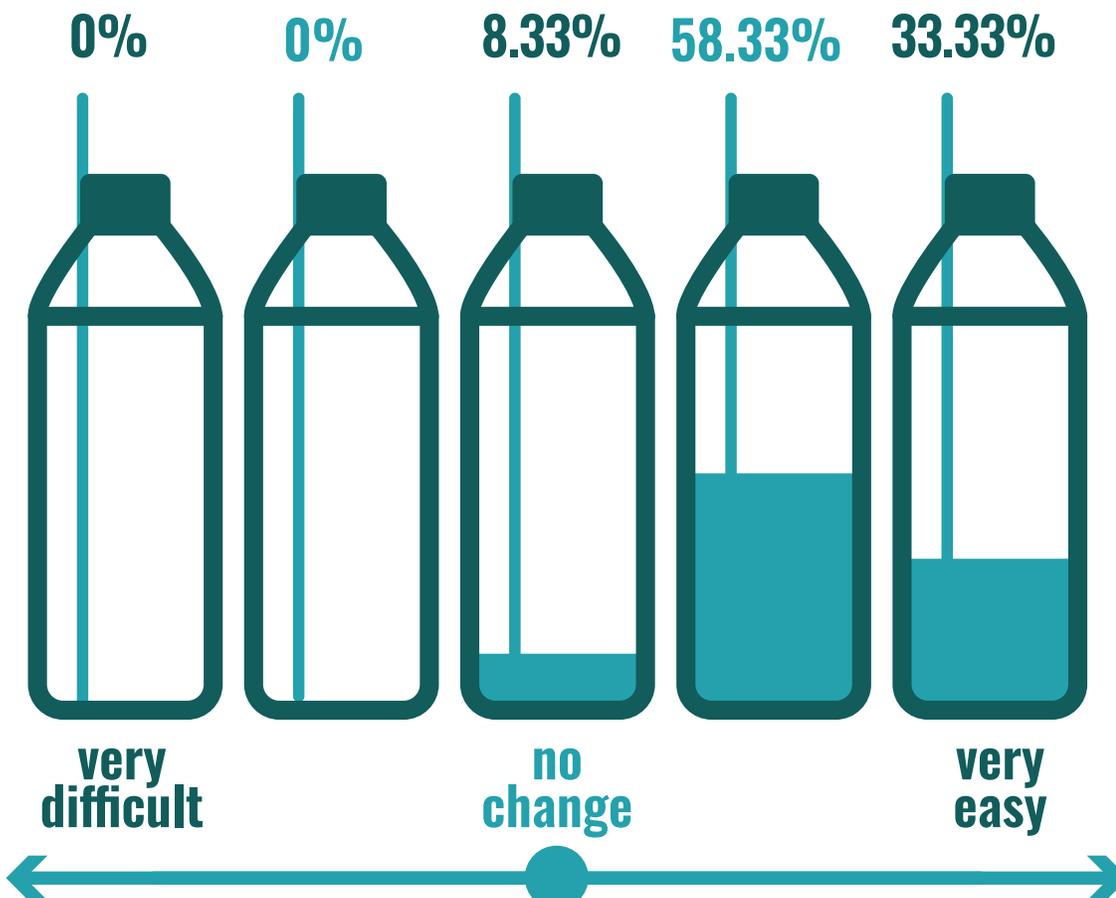
There are many alternatives to single-use plastics, including plant-based fibres for take-out containers, bamboo cutlery, and reusable mug options; however, all of these are costly compared to their plastic alternatives. Some businesses prioritize sustainability as its part of their mission and make it work regardless of the cost. Other businesses are quite small and don't have much revenue to accommodate the higher cost of sustainable products.



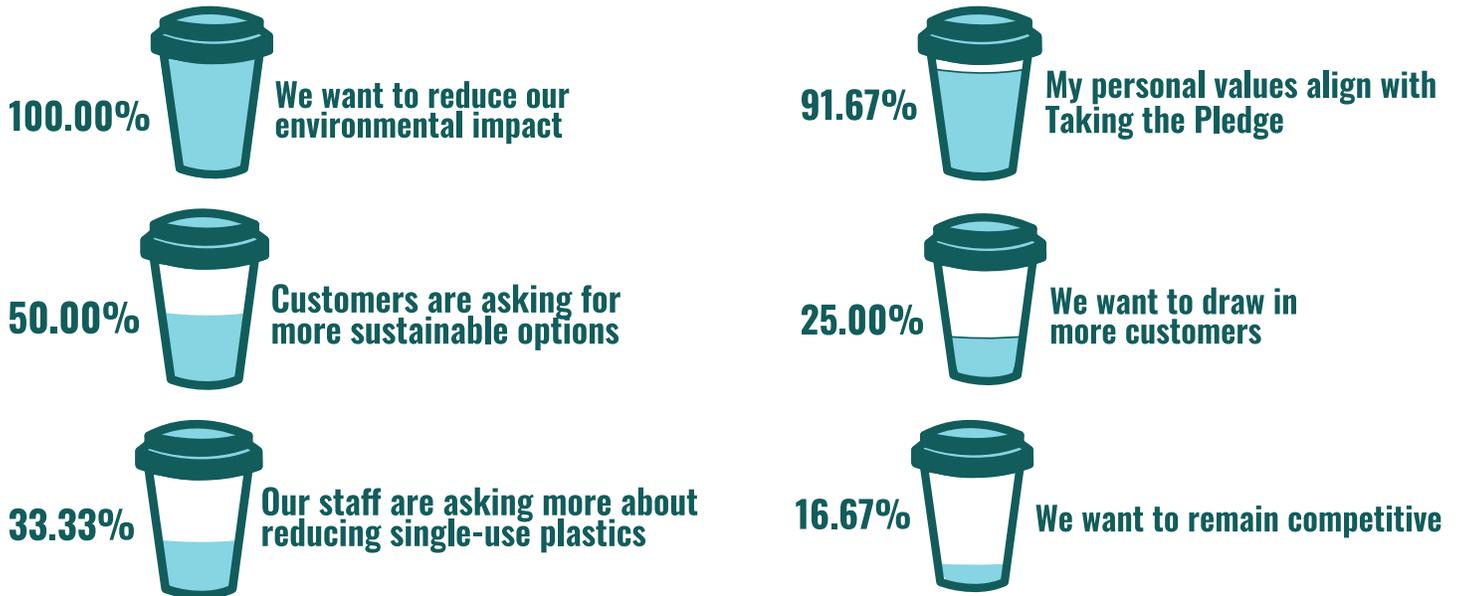
Unforeseen pandemic challenge:

One business cancelled their private recycling services during the pandemic because the cost was too high for them to stay open and keep recycling.

Reducing single-use plastics in my business will be:



What motivated you to Take the Pledge?



We wanted to know what waste reduction meant to business owners.

60% of businesses have regular discussions about waste. Business owners who foster open discussions and collaborate with their employees will see higher success in reducing single-use plastics. The longer a business participates in the Pledge, the higher this percentage will be.

90% of Pledging businesses recycle and only 40% compost.

To qualify for composting businesses must be on a residential route, pay an annual fee, and use the same curb bins as a residence. This program doesn't adequately provide businesses with enough bins to compost all of their food waste, the cost is just not worth it.



For more information about pledging businesses and what you can do to reduce single-use plastics visit www.plasticfreegreater Sudbury.org.

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What we would do differently next time

1. **Businesses must first work on the “big three” to Take the Pledge.** These three single-use plastics are identified as easy switches, have affordable alternatives, and they are common items to reduce. This more concise pledge approach would allow us to track the single-use plastics easier and keep the product alternative recommendations and follow up more straightforward. To capture the other waste reduction efforts, we will interview business owners. These interviews would be structured and done at the beginning and end of Taking the Pledge.
2. **We would target a different audience.** While the food industry uses and creates a lot of plastic waste, it was difficult to reach the owners. Given our experience with schools and relationship with another non-profit working in schools this may have been a better audience to target. Working with teachers and students has been very successful in the past, as most teachers are excited for their students to learn about this topic and the students (and most often their families too) are interested to learn. We could have partnered with a school board or university to capture the number of single-use plastics being used in cafeterias, student’s lunches, or in classrooms. Similar to this project, we could have created a baseline, measure the amount they are reducing, and capture the difference in single-use plastics. These new actions could have also been more easily maintained throughout COVID-19 measures.



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