

# REACHING ZERO WASTE GOALS AS THE ZERO WASTE SPONSOR

How Okapi Environmental Services Engineered a Plan that Resulted in the Green Sports Alliance Summit Achieving a 99.7% Diversion Rate



## OVERVIEW

When the Green Sports Alliance (GSA) Summit came to Cleveland, Ohio, sustainability wasn't simply a talking point, it was expected to be demonstrated in action. As the event's Zero Waste Sponsor, Okapi Environmental Services (Okapi) set a goal for its team, the GSA team, the convention center, and the vendors involved to meet a new diversion achievement. Okapi designed and implemented a diversion strategy capable of exceeding a 99% diversion goal across multiple venues, stakeholders, and waste streams.

By the end of the three-day event, the Summit achieved a 99.7% diversion rate, transforming a venue with an average diversion rate of approximately 25–28% into a model for zero-waste event operations.



## THE CHALLENGE

Achieving true zero waste requires far more than adding composting bins or better signage. The Summit involved multiple venues, food service providers, reusable systems, haulers, vendors, custodial teams, and thousands of attendee interactions, all of which needed to work together seamlessly.

The Huntington Convention Center's existing collection infrastructure was built around a traditional landfill-and-recycling approach. To achieve a diversion rate above 99%, the entire system needed to be redesigned to prioritize composting, reuse, recycling, donation recovery, and contamination prevention. Success depended on creating a clear end-of-life pathway for every material entering the event while ensuring attendees and staff understood exactly how to participate.



## THE SOLUTION

Okapi worked alongside Green Sports Alliance and their key partners including Denali, r.World, Max-R, venue leadership, back-of-house & concessions teams, and custodial staff to engineer a comprehensive zero-waste strategy months before the event began.

# SOLUTION

## Key Components Included:

### Customized Collection Systems

Collection stations were redesigned around the actual materials used throughout the Summit. Generic waste signage was replaced with custom visual guides that helped attendees quickly identify the correct disposal stream.

### Staff Training & Back-of-House Recovery Operations

Housekeeping, concessions, bartenders, custodial teams, and event staff received training before and throughout the event to ensure consistent collection procedures and contamination prevention. Materials were carefully sorted, weighed, and directed into compost, recycling, reuse, or donation streams to maximize recovery and ensure accurate diversion reporting.

### Attendee Engagement

Okapi introduced its "Refuse-ree" program, placing trained sustainability ambassadors throughout the event to assist attendees, answer questions, and encourage proper sorting behavior.

### Live Sustainability Tracking

Through a real-time diversion dashboard, attendees could monitor the event's environmental impact as it happened, turning sustainability from a back-of-house operation into an interactive experience.

# RESULTS

The impact was measurable from the opening reception at Progressive Field, through the final day of the Summit at Huntington Convention Center. The total diversion rate for the 2026 GSA Summit was 99.7%. Additional outcomes included:

- 173 pounds of materials recovered for donation
- Approximately 20 pounds of litter collected through a community plogging event
- Significant reductions in landfill disposal through composting, recycling, reuse, and donation programs
- Training and engagement of venue, concessions, custodial, and operations teams
- Real-time sustainability reporting for attendees and stakeholders

# IMPACT

The Green Sports Alliance Summit demonstrated what is possible when sustainability is treated as a core operational strategy rather than an afterthought. Through strategic planning, stakeholder coordination, custom collection systems, staff training, attendee engagement, live diversion tracking, and hands-on material recovery, Okapi helped transform an existing venue diversion rate of approximately 28% into a **99.7% diversion achievement**.

The Summit serves as a replicable model for conferences, sports venues, convention centers, and large-scale events seeking measurable environmental outcomes. Ready to achieve similar results? Contact Okapi Environmental Services to build a customized zero-waste strategy that delivers real, measurable impact.