



**NEW YORKERS
GUIDE TO
FIGHT PLASTIC
POLLUTION**

**TOOLKIT FOR
ACTION**

**NEW YORK PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP
OCTOBER 2020**

Acknowledgements

This guide was written by Elizabeth Moran and edited by Blair Horner and Megan Ahearn of the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG).

About New York Public Interest Research Group

Established in 1976, the New York Public Interest Research Group Fund (NYPIRG) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization whose mission is to educate the public on policy issues and advance reforms, while training New Yorkers to be advocates. Consumer protection, environmental preservation, health care, higher education, public health, and mass transit are among NYPIRG's principal areas of concern.

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The Plastic Pollution Crisis

The world's plastic use and plastic pollution is staggering - approximately nine million metric tons of plastic waste enters the oceans every year, and it is estimated that there is a total of approximately 150 million tons of plastic in the oceans.¹ That figure will only continue to increase unless governments act.

The amount of plastic waste found in the ocean is the equivalent of *“five plastic grocery bags filled with plastic for every foot of coastline in the world.”* Experts estimate that by 2025, the amount of plastic waste entering the oceans would double, or the equivalent of 10 bags per foot of coastline.² The plastic that ends up in the ocean isn't just unsightly and harmful to aquatic life; it ends up in the food chain, including shellfish, fish,³ and even sea salt.⁴ In fact, *“[w]ithout significant action, there may be more plastic than fish in the ocean, by weight, by 2050.”*⁵

While the United States is not the world's worst offender – that distinction goes to China – the U.S. generates an estimated 110,000 metric tons of marine debris a year.⁶ The average American throws out 185 pounds of plastic every year.⁷

New York is part of the problem, and much more must be done to reduce the waste New York produces. The average New Yorker produces over 4.5 pounds of trash per day, and New York's landfills accept approximately 6 million tons of waste per year statewide – a large portion of that waste is plastic. For example, it is estimated that New Yorkers alone use 23 billion plastic bags annually, and plastic bags are far from the only problem.⁸

¹ Sharon Lerner, “WASTE ONLY: How the Plastics Industry Is Fighting to Keep Polluting the World,” The Intercept, July 20, 2019, <https://theintercept.com/2019/07/20/plastics-industry-plastic-recycling/>

² J. Schwartz, “Study Finds Rising Levels of Plastics in the Oceans,” The New York Times, February 12, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/13/science/earth/plastic-ocean-waste-levels-going-up-study-says.html? r=0>

³ L. Parkers, “Ocean Life Eats Tons of Plastic – Here's Why That Matters,” National Geographic, August 16, 2017, <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/08/ocean-life-eats-plastic-larvaceans-anchovy-environment/>

⁴ J. Glenza, “Sea salt around the world is contaminated by plastic, studies show,” The Guardian, September 8, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/sep/08/sea-salt-around-world-contaminated-by-plastic-studies>

⁵ World Economic Forum, “The New Plastics Economy Rethinking the future of plastics,” January 2016, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_New_Plastics_Economy.pdf

⁶ J. Schwartz, “Study Finds Rising Levels of Plastics in the Oceans,” The New York Times, February 12, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/13/science/earth/plastic-ocean-waste-levels-going-up-study-says.html? r=0>

⁷ CBS-TV This Morning, “Plastic trash from Americas and Europe fill the Arctic ecosystem,” October 23, 2017, <https://www.cbsnews.com/videos/plastic-trash-from-americas-and-europe-fill-the-arctic-ecosystem/>

⁸ “NYS Plastic Bag Task Force,” NYS DEC, <https://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/112291.html>

Plastic is Fueling Climate Change

The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recently issued a report which concluded that unless use of fossil fuels is reduced dramatically by 2030, the earth will face climate catastrophe.⁹ Although many industries have been identified that need to be transformed, and in some cases eliminated, in order to meet these goals, one area that often goes overlooked is plastics. While it's more widely understood that plastic is a large source of environmental pollution and a public health concern, there isn't yet enough discussion around the fact that it's also a fossil fuel product.

Over 99% of plastics are sourced from fossil fuels.¹⁰ The most common source of plastic resin in the United States is often natural gas.¹¹ This means that the more plastic society uses, the longer the fossil fuel industry will continue extracting oil and gas. While climate science is telling the world to reduce its climate emissions, the natural gas industry is planning to expand production of polyethylene (a building block for plastic) by 75% in the next few years.¹²

The fossil fuel industry is preparing to shift toward plastics because demand for oil from transportation is going down as electric cars and fuel efficient cars enter the market, but the demand for plastic is offsetting these losses.¹³ It is expected that plastic will account for 20% of the demand for oil by 2050.¹⁴

We Can't Recycle Our Way Out of the Crisis

The globe is currently facing a recycling crisis. China, which had been accepting massive amounts of plastic waste, stopped accepting contaminated plastic waste imports in January

⁹ International Panel on Climate Change, "Global Warming of 1.5°C," October, 2018, https://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15_spm_final.pdf

¹⁰ "Fueling Plastics: Fossils, Plastics and Petrochemical Feedstocks," Center for International Environmental Law, pg. 1 <https://www.ciel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Fueling-Plastics-Fossils-Plastics-Petrochemical-Feedstocks.pdf>

¹¹ Martha Gilcrist Moore, "The Rising Competitive Advantage of US Plastics," American Chemistry Council Economics and Statistics Department, May 2015, pg. 3 <https://plastics.americanchemistry.com/Education-Resources/Publications/The-Rising-Competitive-Advantage-of-US-Plastics.pdf>

¹² Katherine Blunt, "Ethane Consumption Surges with Petrochemical Boom," Houston Chronicle, February 24, 2018, <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/business/article/Ethane-consumption-surges-with-petrochemical-boom-12705962.php>

¹³ Ahmad Guddar, Ron Busso, "Rising Use of Plastics to Drive Oil Demand to 2050:IEA," Reuters, October 4, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-petrochemicals-iea/rising-use-of-plastics-to-drive-oil-demand-to-2050-iea-idUSKCN1ME2QD>

¹⁴ "Fueling Plastics: Fossils, Plastics and Petrochemical Feedstocks," Center for International Environmental Law, <https://www.ciel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Fueling-Plastics-Fossils-Plastics-Petrochemical-Feedstocks.pdf>

2018, creating a standard many recycling programs cannot meet.¹⁵ This has caused the recycling market to go haywire, and, as a result, many are now sending plastic waste to landfills or incinerators.¹⁶

There is good reason the phrase “reduce, reuse, recycle” puts the words in that order – the key to solving the plastic waste crisis is by prioritizing reducing plastic production dramatically. Single-use plastics will need to be largely eliminated to address environmental concerns.

¹⁵ Sara Watson, “China Has Refused To Recycle The West’s Plastics. What Now?,” NPR, June 28, 2018, www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/06/28/623972937/china-has-refused-to-recycle-the-wests-plastics-what-now.

¹⁶ Livia Albeck-Ripka, “Your Recycling Gets Recycled, Right? Maybe, or Maybe Not,” NYTimes, May 29, 2018 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/29/climate/recycling-landfills-plastic-papers.html>

Single-Use Bags: No to Paper, No to Plastic

New York Banned Plastic Bags

New York State made an important move to curb plastics by passing a ban on single-use plastic bags in the SFY2019-20 budget. According to a report from the Governor’s administration, New Yorkers alone use approximately 23 billion plastic bags annually.¹⁷ A significant number of these bags make their way into the environment causing litter and damaging wildlife, which can be seen within waterways, along streets and in oceans and lakes. During Riverkeeper’s 2019 annual Hudson River Sweep, single-use plastic bags were the 5th most common item found.¹⁸

Moreover, these bags do not biodegrade – they persist for years. The New York City Department of Sanitation currently estimates that it collects an average of 1,700 tons of plastic bags per week, costing \$12.5 million per year in disposal expenses.¹⁹

Laws banning single-use plastic have demonstrable effects. When San Jose, California passed a plastic bag ban in 2012, plastic bag litter found in storm drains dropped by almost 90 percent; it fell by 60 percent in waterways. Not only will there be less litter, but when less plastic is used, the oil and gas industry must extract less fossil fuels.

Although banning single-use plastic bags was an important move to protect the environment, the law missed a key component: it does not include a statewide fee on paper bags, which means consumers may switch to using paper bags, which have their own adverse environmental impacts.

However, New York’s law leaves it up to cities and counties to implement a 5-cent fee on paper bags. Charging a fee for paper bags – which end up in the waste stream or as litter – is an effective way to incentivize use of reusable bags.

Cities and Counties Can Lead by Enacting Paper Bag Fees

Some counties in New York have already implemented a fee on single-use bags, and it has proven to be successful. Suffolk County charges a fee for single-use bags and according to a

¹⁷ Governor Cuomo, News Release, “Governor Cuomo Announces Launch of Statewide Plastic Bag Task Force,” March 12, 2017, <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-announces-launch-statewide-plastic-bag-task-force>

¹⁸ “Plastic pollution in the Hudson: Detailed data from Riverkeeper Sweep 2019,” Riverkeeper, June 24, 2019, <https://www.riverkeeper.org/blogs/ecology/plastic-pollution-in-the-hudson-detailed-data-from-riverkeeper-sweep-2019/>

¹⁹ Governor Cuomo, News Release, “Governor Cuomo Announces Launch of Statewide Plastic Bag Task Force,” March 12, 2017, <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-announces-launch-statewide-plastic-bag-task-force>.

survey from the Food Industry Alliance of New York State, there was a notable eighty percent decline of single-use grocery bags within the first four months.²⁰ New York City, Albany County, the City of Troy, and many others have already passed legislation to opt-in to a paper bag fee to avoid the consequences paper bags have on the environment.²¹ Other municipalities should follow their footsteps in order to best protect the environment from the harm of single-use paper bags and to successfully change consumer behavior.

Environmental Consequences of Paper Bags

Without discouraging use of paper bags through a fee, numerous counties will end up trading one set of environmental costs for another. **When questioning what kind of bag is better for the environment, plastic or paper, the answer is neither.** Reusable bags are the answer.

- Paper bag production wastes clean water - it takes a gallon of water to produce a single paper bag.²²
- Paper bags are resource intensive. The production of paper bags involves clear-cutting forests around the globe which is one of the lead causes of climate change.²³
- It takes large amounts of fossil-fuel based energy to transport paper bags because they are so heavy.²⁴

California's Experience: Fees Work Best

The California model of a ban on single-use plastic bags paired with a fee on paper bags has proven to effectively change consumer behavior to switch to the use of reusable bags. In Alameda County, CA, people used 210% more reusable bags while shopping once the ban and fee system was in place. Before the single-use plastic bag ban and paper bag fee was implemented, Los Angeles County, CA gave out 196,000 paper bags annually. A year later when the paper bag fee was implemented, they gave out 125,000 paper bags- a 71,000 decrease.²⁵

There are concerns that a fee on paper bags disproportionately effects low-income communities; however, experience has shown that this concern is overblown. Lower-income

²⁰ Torry N. Parish, "Single-use grocery bag numbers fall 80% in Suffolk, retail group says," *Newsday*, December 20, 2018, <https://www.newsday.com/business/suffolk-nickel-plastic-bag-fee-reusable-1.24755898>

²¹ Bernadette Hogan, Rich Calder, and Lia Eustachewich "New York City prepared to opt in to paper bag fee when statewide law begins," *New York Post*, March 29, 2019,

<https://nypost.com/2019/03/29/new-york-city-will-opt-in-to-paper-bag-fee-when-statewide-ban-begins/>

²²Suzie Cave, "Carrier Bags- Environmental Impact," Northern Ireland Assembly, April 7, 2014, <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2014/environment/8314.pdf>

²³ Collin Dunn, "Paper Bags or Plastic? Everything you need to know," *Treehugger*, July 9, 2008, <https://www.treehugger.com/culture/paper-bags-or-plastic-bags-everything-you-need-to-know.html>

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Kelly O'Mara, "Are Plastic Bag Bans Actually Helping the Environment?" *KQED News*, May 18, 2017, <https://www.kqed.org/news/11461251/are-plastic-bag-bans-good-for-the-environment>

people adjust to the fee effectively. In Richmond, CA, customers of a discount grocery stores increased their rate of bringing reusable bags by 48%. In order to address this concern in New York, people on food assistance programs, such as SNAP and WIC, are exempt from the fee.

What You Can Do

Your action is essential to preventing continued use of single-use bags, both paper and plastic. Later in our resource guide, we detail ways you can organize in your community, including tips for organizing meetings, organizing call-in drives, engaging press, finding your local and state elected officials, template legislation for local governments, and more.

Here are some specific actions you can take to address single-use bags:

- **Make sure the stores you shop in are complying with the plastic bag ban.** The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation begins enforcement of the plastic bag ban on October 19, 2020.²⁶ At this point, no stores (the only exception is restaurants for the purpose of food takeout/delivery) can give out any plastic bag – including thicker plastic bags marketed as “reusable.” If you see a store in violation of the law, you can:
 - Visit DEC’s Bag Waste Reduction Law webpage here: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/50034.html>
 - Email DEC at plasticbags@dec.ny.gov
 - Call DEC at (518) 402-8706
- **Bring your own reusable bag while shopping.** This includes refusing single-use bags from takeout delivery (which are exempt from New York’s plastic bag ban law).
- **Contact your City or County elected officials about adopting a paper-bag fee.** Tips for talking to your local elected officials are included in our guide. We also have included a template for local legislation that your city or county can use. You can [find a survey of where your county may currently stand](#) from Democrat and Chronicle.²⁷
- **Talk to your friends and neighbors and encourage them to call their County or City elected officials to support a paper-bag fee.** The more people your local government hears from, the more likely it becomes that they will adopt a paper-bag fee.
- **Push your local grocery store to adopt a paper-bag fee.** Stores don’t have to wait for local governments to take action on paper bags – stores can take action themselves,

²⁶ NYS DEC, “DEC Announces Enforcement of New York’s Plastic Bag Ban to Start Oct. 19, 2020,” September 18, 2020, <https://www.dec.ny.gov/press/121415.html>

²⁷ Joseph Spector, “Will you soon pay 5 cents for a paper bag? We surveyed every county in New York to find out,” Democrat & Chronicle, June 6, 2019, <https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/politics/albany/2019/06/06/you-soon-pay-5-cents-paper-bag-we-surveyed-every-county/1340984001/>

and some already have. Chains like Price Chopper and Wegmans have already announced that they will charge 5-cents for paper bags.²⁸

Model Paper Bag Fee Legislation

The following template and corresponding instructions for local governments is from the New York State Department of Tax and Finance.

[CHOOSE ONE—RESOLUTION/LOCAL LAW/ORDINANCE]

of the

[INSERT PROPER TITLE OF LEGISLATIVE BODY] of the [CITY] of the [INSERT CITY NAME], imposing the paper carryout bag reduction fee,

pursuant to the authority of section 27-2805 of the

Environmental Conservation Law

of the State of New York.

Be it enacted by the [INSERT PROPER TITLE OF LEGISLATIVE BODY] of the [CITY] of [INSERT CITY] as follows:

SECTION 1. Definition

For the purposes of this [RESOLUTION/LOCAL LAW/ORDINANCE], the following definitions shall apply:

- (a) “Paper carryout bag” means a paper bag, other than an exempt bag, that is provided to a customer by a person required to collect tax to be used by the customer to carry tangible personal property, regardless of whether such person required to collect tax sells any tangible personal property or service to the customer, and regardless of whether any tangible personal property or service sold is exempt from tax under article twenty-eight of the Tax Law of the State of New York [hereinafter “Tax Law”].
- (b) “Exempt bag” means a bag:
 - a. Used solely to contain or wrap uncooked meat, fish or poultry;
 - b. Bags used by a customer solely to package bulk items such as fruits, vegetables, grains, or candy;
 - c. Bags used solely to contain foods sliced or prepared to order;
 - d. Bags used solely to contain a newspaper for delivery to a subscriber;
 - e. Bags sold in bulk to a consumer at the point of sale;
 - f. Trash bags;
 - g. Food storage bags;
 - h. Garment bags;
 - i. Bags prepackaged for sale to a customer;

²⁸ Joseph Spector, “Price Chopper will soon charge 5 cents for paper bags. What you need to know,” pressconnects, January 21, 2020, <https://www.pressconnects.com/story/news/local/new-york/2020/01/21/price-chopper-5-cents-paper-bags-new-york-plastic-bag-ban/4522622002/>

- j. Plastic carryout bags provided by a restaurant, tavern, or similar food service establishment, as defined in the state sanitary code, to carryout or deliver food; or
 - k. Bags provided by a pharmacy to carry prescription drugs.
- SECTION 2. Imposition of paper carryout bag reduction fee.

Pursuant to the authority of section 27-2805 of the Environmental Conservation Law of the State of New York, on and after _____,²⁹ there is hereby imposed and there shall be paid a fee of five cents on each paper carryout bag provided to a customer within the territorial limits of [CITY] by every vendor of tangible personal property subject to tax under subdivision (a) of section 1105 of the tax law. The paper carryout bag reduction fee must be collected from the customer by the vendor at the time such bag is provided and must be reflected and made payable on the sales slip, invoice, receipt or other statement of the price rendered to the customer.

SECTION 3. Exemptions.

- (a) The paper carryout bag reduction fee imposed by section 1 of this [RESOLUTION/LOCAL LAW/ORDINANCE] shall not apply to any customer using the supplemental nutritional assistance program, special supplemental nutrition programs for women, infants, and children, or any successor programs used as full or partial payment for the items purchased.
- (b) Entities described in paragraphs (1) through (3) of subdivision (a) of section 1116 of the Tax Law of the State of New York shall be exempt from the fee imposed by section 1 of this [RESOLUTION/LOCAL LAW/ORDINANCE].

SECTION 4. Administration and collection.

- (a) The fee imposed by this [RESOLUTION/LOCAL LAW/ORDINANCE] shall be administered and collected by the New York State Commissioner of Taxation and Finance as provided in Subdivision (6) of § 27-2805 of the Environmental Conservation Law and in a like manner as the taxes imposed under Articles 28 and 29 of the Tax Law; provided, however that: (i) the vendor credit provided in subdivision (f) of § 1137 of the Tax Law shall not apply to this enactment; and (ii) the exemptions provided in section 1116 of the Tax Law, other than the exemptions in paragraphs one, two and three of subdivision (a) of such section, shall not apply to the fee imposed by this [RESOLUTION/LOCAL LAW/ORDINANCE].
- (b) Any monies received by [INSERT CITY NAME] from the Comptroller in respect of the fee imposed by this act shall be expended only in accordance with subdivision 7 of § 27-2805. Any monies not expended by [CITY] for such purposes shall be returned to the Comptroller at the end of the fiscal year.

SECTION 5. Applicability of State Laws.

All the provisions of § 27-2805 shall apply to the paper carryout reduction fee imposed by this [RESOLUTION/LOCAL LAW/ORDINANCE] with the same force and effect as if those provisions had been incorporated in full into this [RESOLUTION/LOCAL LAW/ORDINANCE].

SECTION 6. Repeal of existing imposition of carryout bag fee.

²⁹ Insert effective date of fee. Must be the 1st day of March, June, September, or December, and no earlier than March 1, 2020.

[INSERT TITLE OF THE INITIAL ENACTMENT THAT IMPOSED A FEE ON PLASTIC AND/OR PAPER CARRYOUT BAGS CURRENTLY AUTHORIZED BY CITY LAW] [RESOLUTION/LOCAL LAW/ORDINANCE] No. [INSERT IDENTIFYING NUMBER OF ORIGINAL ENACTMENT], of [INSERT YEAR OF INITIAL ENACTMENT] as amended, is hereby REPEALED.

SECTION 7. Effective date.

This [RESOLUTION/LOCAL LAW/ORDINANCE] shall take effect _____, and shall apply to paper carryout bags provided to a customer on and after that date.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR MODEL ENACTMENT

- This model enactment has been drafted to achieve the purpose of imposing a paper carryout bag reduction fee authorized by § 27-2805 of the Environmental Conservation Law and repealing any city's existing imposition of carryout bag fee. Any changes could render it insufficient to achieve that purpose. If you are considering changes to this model, please contact Melanie Spaulding in the Department of Taxation and Finance's Office of Counsel at 518-457-2070. Please note that any existing fee on paper carryout bags cannot continue to be imposed on and after March 1, 2021. We recommend repealing any existing fee simultaneously with the enactment of the fee authorized by § 27-2805 of the Environmental Conservation Law to ensure uninterrupted collection.
- A city may enact the paper carryout bag reduction fee as a local law, ordinance, or resolution. However, a local law can only be amended by local law; an ordinance can be amended by ordinance or local law; and a resolution can be amended by local law, ordinance, or resolution. Therefore if a city enacted its pre-existing carryout bag reduction fee as identified in Section 5 by local law, then it must be repealed by local law. If the fee had been enacted by ordinance, then it may be repealed by either local law or ordinance. Finally, if the fee had been enacted by resolution, then it may be repealed by either local law, ordinance, or resolution.
- If the city's resolution/local law/ordinance specified in Section 5 enacted and/or amended additional items besides its initial carryout bag fee, specify the subdivision of the resolution/local law/ordinance enacting the fee so that only that portion that is repealed.
- Retain the phrase "as amended" in Section 5 ONLY if the resolution/local law/ordinance being amended has been previously amended.
- If the city elects to impose such surcharge at a later date, please contact our office for further instructions. Please note that the Paper Carryout Bag Reduction Fee can take effect only the 1st day of March, June, September, or December.
- In order for the fee to take effect, the city must adopt its enactment and mail a **certified copy** to the New York State Commissioner of Taxation and Finance by **certified or registered** mail at least **90 days** prior to the effective date. The Commissioner **may** reduce the period to not less than 30 days prior to the effective date if the city requests a waiver in writing. For the surcharges to take effect March 1, 2020, any waiver request must be mailed, along with the certified copy of the local enactment, no later than January 31, 2020.

- Mail the Tax Department's certified copy, with the clerk's raised seal, and waiver request, if applicable, to:

Deborah R. Liebman, Esq.
Deputy Counsel
New York State Department of Taxation and Finance
Building 9, Room 228
W.A. Harriman State Campus
Albany, New York 12227

- **Within five days of enactment**, the city **must** also file certified copies of the enactment with:
 - Secretary of State;
 - State Comptroller; **and**
 - County or City clerk (as the case may be).

Straws, Stirrers, and Utensils

Small, but Big Impact

Reliance on single-use plastic—big and small plastics alike—must be significantly reduced in order to protect public health, ecosystems, and combat climate change. Small plastics such as straws, utensils, and stirrers are often referred to as “gateway plastics” because they are ubiquitous, normalizing plastic as part of individuals’ everyday lives.³⁰

The need to reduce all single-use plastics is clear, and adopting an “upon-request” policy for plastic straws, coffee stirrers, and plastic utensils is a simple and easy method to reduce plastic waste. Importantly, by allowing these items to be available when requested, they will be available to those who need them, like those in the disability community.

These may seem like small items, but their impact is large:

- Plastic straws and stirrers were the 3rd most commonly found item in the United States during the 2020 international coastal cleanup conducted by the Ocean Conservancy.³¹
- Across the globe, plastic straws and stirrers were the 5th most commonly found item during the 2020 international coastal cleanup.³²
- Plastic straws, stirrers, and utensils cannot be recycled in most places because they are small and too lightweight.³³ As a result, they can make it harder to recycle other plastics when they are mixed into recycling bins.
- When plastic enters the environment, it does not biodegrade. It breaks down into tinier and tinier pieces of plastic called microplastics, which are being discovered in our air and water, and are found in animals and humans. The impact of this on human health is still being researched.

Businesses and Local Governments Are Taking Action

A number of businesses, states, and local governments have already adopted policies to make plastic straws, stirrers, and utensils only available when requested by a customer, and

³⁰ Alix Langone, “No One Knew How Many Plastic Straws Americans Use Every Day. Then a 9-Year-Old Kid Did the Math,” *Money*, July 23, 2018, <http://money.com/money/5343736/how-many-plastic-straws-used-every-day/>

³¹ “International Coastal Cleanup 2020 Report,” Ocean Conservancy, page 19, https://oceanconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020-Report_FINAL.pdf

³² “International Coastal Cleanup 2020 Report,” Ocean Conservancy, page 15, https://oceanconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020-Report_FINAL.pdf

³³ “Understanding Plastic Pollution,” For a Strawless Ocean, <https://www.strawlessocean.org/fag>, accessed June 20, 2019.

many more have legislation that is currently under consideration. From an article from National Geographic:

“At the beginning of July 2018, Seattle became the largest U.S. city to ban plastic straws. They’re not alone. Starbucks plans to phase out plastic straws by 2020. McDonald’s recently announced it will ban plastic straws at its U.K. and Ireland restaurants. Bon Appétit Management, a food service company with 1,000 U.S. locations, announced last May it will phase out plastic straws. Alaska Airlines will be one of the first airlines to phase out plastic straws and stirrers, in part thanks to an environmentally conscious girl scout.”³⁴

New York City and the city of Buffalo are currently considering legislation to adopt an upon-request policy for straws. Additionally, several communities in New York have already adopted such policies, including the city of Troy, Ulster County, Suffolk County, Albany County, and several communities on Long Island. There is also legislation that would have New York State adopt an upon-request straw policy statewide.

What You Can Do

Your action is essential to pushing communities to adopt upon-request policies for plastic straws, stirrers, and utensils. Later in our resource guide, we detail ways you can organize in your community, including tips for organizing meetings, organizing call-in drives, engaging press, finding your local and state elected officials, template legislation for local governments, and more. Here are some specific actions you can take to address plastic straws, stirrers, and utensils:

- **Bring your own reusable straws.** The market for reusable straws has grown tremendously in recent years. A reusable metal straw is a good alternative to single-use plastic ones. There are also bamboo, and even seaweed, reusable straw options.
- **Contact your City or County elected officials about adopting upon-request policies.** Tips for talking to your local elected officials are included in our guide. We also have included a template for local legislation that your city or county can use.
- **Contact your state legislators to support a statewide upon-request straw policy.** In addition to pushing your local elected officials, New York State could act on this issue as well. You can call your state representatives to let them know that you support upon-request straw policies and to urge them to act. Tips for talking to legislators are included in our guide.
- **Talk to your friends and neighbors and encourage them to call their County or City elected officials to support upon-request policies.** The more people your local government hears from, the more likely it becomes that they will adopt upon-request policies.

³⁴ Sarah Gibbens, “A brief history of how plastic straws took over the world,” National Geographic, January 2, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2018/07/news-plastic-drinking-straw-history-ban/>

Model Upon-Request Plastic Straws, Stirrers, and Utensils Legislation

The following template has been adapted from Ulster County's Local Laws 2 and 4 of 2019.

BE IT ENACTED, by the [XX LOCAL GOVERNMENT], as follows:

DEFINITIONS.

As used in this local law, the following terms shall have the meanings indicated:

"Beverage Straw" shall mean a tube for transferring a beverage from its container to the mouth of the drinker.

"Condiment Packet" shall mean any spice, sauce, or seasoning packaged in a single-serving packet that is intended to be added to food to impart a particular flavor, to enhance its flavor, or to complement a dish.

"Cutlery" shall mean knives, forks, and spoons used for eating food.

"Dine-In Customer" shall mean a customer that orders and consumes Prepared Food on a Restaurant's premises.

"Fast Food Service Establishment" shall mean food service establishments located within the County of Ulster that serve food and/or beverages (1) via a drive-through;

(2) in a packaged form for take-out/take-away; or (3) from stands or kiosks which provide no shelter for customers.

"Prepared Food" shall mean food or beverage prepared for consumption on the Restaurant's premises, using any cooking or food preparation technique.

"Restaurant" shall mean any vendor located or providing food within the County of Ulster which provides Prepared Food for public consumption on its premises.

"Single-Use" shall mean a product that is designed to be only used one time in its same form by the customer, food vendor or other entity.

"Stirrer" shall mean an object or device used to mix something, frequently offered at establishments that serve coffee.

"Take-Out Food Orders" shall mean prepared meals or other food or beverage items that a customer purchases at a Restaurant and intends to eat elsewhere.

REGULATION OF SINGLE-USE BEVERAGE STRAWS.

A. Restaurants and Fast Food Service Establishments shall only provide a Single-Use Plastic Beverage Straw, Single-Use Plastic Cutlery, Single-Use Plastic Stirrers, and Single-Use Condiment Packets to a Dine-In Customer upon the customer's request.

B. Restaurants and Fast Food Service Establishments shall only provide a Single-Use Plastic Beverage Straw, Single-Use Plastic Cutlery, Single-Use Plastic Stirrers, and Single -Use Condiment Packets to a customer purchasing a Take-Out Food Order upon the customer's request.

Nothing in this law shall prevent any establishment from providing paper or non-plastic straws or biodegradable alternatives to plastic stirrers and cutlery without a request.

NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENT.

A. Each Restaurant and Fast Food Service Establishment that provides single-use plastic beverage straws, single-use plastic cutlery, single-use plastic stirrers, and/or single-use condiment packets shall post a sign in a location easily visible to each customer which shall state: "SINGLE-USE PLASTIC BEVERAGE STRAW,

SINGLE-USE PLASTIC CUTLERY, SINGLE-USE PLASTIC STIRRERS, AND/OR SINGLE-USE CONDIMENT PACKETS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST." Items mentioned above that are not offered by the Restaurant or Fast Food Service Establishment shall not be included in signage.

B. Signs shall be protected from tampering, damage, removal, or concealment.

PENALTIES.

Violations of this local law shall be enforced as follows:

A. For the first violation, the Commissioner of Health, or designee, upon determination that a violation of this local law has occurred, shall issue a written warning notice to the Fast Food Service Establishment or Restaurant which will specify the violation and the appropriate penalties in the event of future violations.

B. Thereafter, the following penalties shall apply:

1. First Offense. Any Fast Food Service Establishment or Restaurant guilty of a first offense shall be guilty of a violation and shall be fined an amount not to exceed twenty five (\$25) dollars.

2. Second Offense. Any Fast Food Service Establishment or Restaurant guilty of a second offense shall be guilty of a violation and shall be fined an amount not to exceed fifty (\$50) dollars.

3. Third and Subsequent Offense. Any Fast Food Service Establishment or Restaurant guilty of a third or subsequent offense shall be guilty of a violation and shall be fined an amount not to exceed one hundred (\$100) dollars for each offense.

For the purpose of this section, each physical location or establishment shall be treated individually, and offenses and fines for separate locations shall be considered individually.

REVERSE PREEMPTION.

This local law shall be null and void on the day that federal or statewide legislation goes into effect, incorporating either the same or substantially similar provisions as are contained in this law, or in the event that a pertinent state or federal administrative agency issues and promulgates regulations preempting such action by the [XX LOCAL GOVERNMENT]. [XX LOCAL GOVERNMENT] may determine via mere resolution whether or not identical or substantially similar federal or statewide legislation, or pertinent preempting state or federal regulations have been enacted for the purposes of triggering the provisions of this section.

SEVERABILITY.

If any clause, sentence, paragraph, section, subdivision, or other part of this local law or its application shall be inconsistent with any federal or state statute, law, regulation or rule then the federal or state statute, law, regulation, or rule shall prevail. If any clause, sentence, paragraph, section, subdivision, or other part of this local law or its application shall be adjudged by a court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid or unconstitutional, such order or judgment shall not affect, impair, or invalidate the remainder of the local law which shall remain in full force and effect except as limited by such order or judgment.

EFFECTIVE DATE.

This local law shall be effective three (3) months subsequent to filing in the Office of the Secretary of State.

Plastic Beverage Bottles

A Big Pollution Problem

Plastic bottles make up a tremendous portion of plastic pollution both nationally and internationally. During the 2020 International Coastal Cleanup, conducted by the Ocean Conservancy, plastic beverage bottles were the third most commonly found item, with plastic beverage bottle caps following right behind in fourth place. In the United States, plastic beverage bottle caps were the third most found item, and plastic beverage bottles were in fourth place.³⁵

Much work needs to be done to eliminate the amount of plastic beverage bottles consumed and the amount that pollute the environment. Thankfully, there are a number of solutions to reduce the footprint of this major source of plastic pollution.

New York's Most Effective Litter Reduction Measure: The Bottle Bill

Enacted in 1982, the New York State Returnable Container Act, commonly known as the Bottle Bill, requires a 5-cent refundable deposit to be placed on eligible beverage containers. The program originally covered beer and soda sold in New York and was later expanded to include wine coolers.

The law requires retailers who sell covered beverages to accept any empty containers back of products that they sell and refund the deposits. The law also requires beverage distributors to compensate retailers for the cost of collecting and recycling empty containers by paying them a small handling fee per container. In 2009, the law was expanded to include bottled water, and the handling fee was increased from 2 cents, which it had been set at since 1997, to 3.5 cents.

The beauty of the bottle deposit law, and what makes it so effective, is that it makes the producers of the plastic beverage containers, responsible for their own waste.

Over its 30-year history, New York's Bottle Bill has proven to be a highly effective means of diverting these containers from the waste stream, significantly reducing litter and increasing recycling rates. This program is recognized as New York's most effective litter-reduction measure. In 2019, New York's redemption rate was at 64%.³⁶ According to DEC, the bottle

³⁵ "International Coastal Cleanup 2020 Report," Ocean Conservancy, pages 15 & 19, https://oceanconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020-Report_FINAL.pdf

³⁶ Container Recycling Institute, Bottle Bills in the USA: New York, <http://www.bottlebill.org/index.php/current-and-proposed-laws/usa/new-york>

bill reduces roadside container litter by 70%, and in 2016, 5.1 billion containers were recycled.³⁷

Additionally, states with bottle deposit laws have far better recycling rates than non-deposit states. According to the Container Recycling Institute, states with bottle deposit laws have a beverage container recycling rate of around 60%, while non-deposit states only reach about 24%.

A common-sense solution to further reduce plastic pollution in New York is by expanding and strengthening the bottle deposit law by:

1. **Adding a deposit fee to most beverage containers**, including: wine, liquor, cider, sports drinks, juices, coffee beverages, iced tea, and other non-carbonated beverages. More containers with deposits will incentivize consumers to recycle these containers, making them less likely to be littered or take up rapidly disappearing landfill space.
2. **Increasing the deposit from 5-cents to 10-cents.** States with higher deposit fees have higher redemption rates than states with a five (5¢) cent fee. In Michigan the deposit fee is ten (10¢) cents, and the redemption rate in 2016 was 92.2%. Vermont has a fifteen (15¢) cent fee on liquor bottles and the redemption rate for liquor containers in 2017 was 84%. The data shows that increasing the deposit fee increases the incentive for recycling. A ten (10¢) cent deposit fee would ensure that even more beverage containers get recycled in New York State.
3. **Increasing the percent requirement for recycled content in new plastic and glass beverage containers.** This will strengthen the market for recycled content.

Not only would the expansion of the state Bottle Bill increase recycling rates and make New York's environment and communities cleaner, it would also help municipal recycling programs that are currently facing a recycling crisis. China, which had been accepting massive amounts of plastic waste, stopped accepting contaminated plastic waste imports in January 2018, creating a standard many municipal recycling programs cannot meet.

Municipal recycling programs are particularly struggling with glass contaminating their recycling streams. When glass breaks in curbside containers it makes it difficult, or impossible, for most municipalities to recycle the rest of the materials.

Other states with bottle deposit programs have already moved forward with the recommended policies above. Maine's Bottle Deposit Law includes all containers covered in New York's existing Bottle Bill, plus wine, spirits, hard cider and most non-carbonated beverages. Maine has a 5-cent deposit for all beverages, except wine and liquor, which have

³⁷ DEC, New York's Bottle Bill, <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8500.html>.

a 15-cent deposit. Maine’s redemption rate in 2017 was 84%. Other states with Bottle Deposit Laws that include non-carbonated beverages include: California, Hawaii, and Oregon. Oregon, in 2017, raised its deposit fee from 5-cents to 10-cents, which led to the state reaching a 90% redemption rate.³⁸

Prohibiting the Sale of Plastic Water Bottles

Better and more effective recycling, particularly where the producer is held responsible, will help reduce plastic pollution, but there is nothing more effective than eliminating as many plastic items as possible. A simple start to this is by eliminating the sale of water sold in plastic beverage bottles, which a number of entities have begun to do, including local governments, colleges and universities, and airports.

New York City has an executive order, going into effect by January 1st, 2021, banning the sale of single-use plastic beverage bottles on city-owned and -leased properties. According to the executive order, this policy could eliminate as many as 1 million plastic beverage bottles that the city buys each year.³⁹

New York City is not alone. In 2014, San Francisco adopted a policy to stop selling bottled water on city property and expanded that policy to San Francisco International Airport in 2019.⁴⁰ Concord, Massachusetts also passed an ordinance banning the sale of bottled water anywhere in the town limits in 2012.⁴¹ Great Barrington, Massachusetts also has a ban on the sale of bottled water.

There are also some colleges and universities in New York with similar policies. In 2014, SUNY New Paltz adopted a policy to ban the sale or distribution of bottled water on campus.⁴²

A note: it is a common myth that bottled water is safer than tap water. In most cases, this is false. Tap water is far more regulated than bottled water. Additionally, plastic bottles themselves can pose a health risk when chemicals leach from the bottle into the water.⁴³

³⁸ Profita, Cassandra, “Oregon Bottle Deposit System Hits 90 Percent Redemption Rate,” OPB, January 18th, 2019, <https://www.opb.org/news/article/oregon-bottle-deposit-redemption-rate-2018/>.

³⁹ Justine Calma, “New York City is cracking down on plastic bottles,” The Verge, February 7, 2020, <https://www.theverge.com/2020/2/7/21127981/new-york-city-single-use-plastic-bottle-ban>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Jennifer Newman, “CAS Board Votes “No” On Plastic Water Bottles,” The New Paltz Oracle, December 11, 2014, <https://oracle.newpaltz.edu/cas-board-votes-no-on-plastic-water-bottles/>

⁴³ Andrew Postman, “The Truth About Tap,” NRDC, January 5, 2016, <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/truth-about-tap>

What You Can Do

Your action is essential to pushing communities and the State to reduce and eliminate plastic beverage bottle pollution. Later in our resource guide, we detail ways you can organize in your community, including tips for organizing meetings, organizing call-in drives, engaging press, finding your local and state elected officials, template legislation for local governments, and more.

Here are some specific actions you can take to reduce plastic beverage bottle pollution:

- **Bring a reusable beverage container.** Many businesses will allow customers to bring their own reusable beverage containers to their establishments. When traveling, instead of buying plastic water bottles, fill a reusable bottle and bring it with you.
- **Contact your City or County elected officials about banning the sale of plastic water bottles.** Tips for talking to your local elected officials are included in our guide. A model your local government can use for such policy could be [New York City's Executive Order](#),⁴⁴ or [San Francisco's ordinance no. 28-14](#).⁴⁵
- **Contact the governor and your state legislators to support expanding the Bottle Deposit Law.** In addition to pushing your local elected officials, New York State could act on this issue as well. You can call your state representatives to let them know that you support reducing beverage container pollution and want the producers to be held responsible. Tips for talking to legislators are included in our guide.
- **Talk to your friends and neighbors and encourage them to call their County or City elected officials to support banning plastic water bottles.** The more people your local government hears from, the more likely it becomes that they will adopt a policy banning the sale of plastic water bottles.
- **If you are a college student, engage your college administration and student government to ban the sale of plastic water bottles on campus.**

⁴⁴ The City of New York, Office of the Mayor, Executive Order No. 54, February 6, 2020, <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/executive-orders/2020/eo-54.pdf>

⁴⁵ San Francisco Ordinance No. 28-14, https://sfenvironment.org/sites/default/files/fliers/files/sfe_zw_bottled_water_ordinance.pdf

Civic Action

The Role Of A Community Activist

In light of all the threats posed by plastic consumption and pollution, what can one person do? The answer is that uninformed, uninterested voters will probably not accomplish much. However, someone committed to spending a little time and effort to influence the process can have an impact.

An essential fact to remember is that politicians want to get reelected. No matter how much money corporations give to their campaigns, candidates still need votes. Your vote is power, your voice is power, and as a constituent, you are important to your elected officials.

Voting is not the only power you have to get your voice heard. Other actions a community activist can take and be involved in include: speaking out at government and administrative hearings, participating in public processes like participatory budgeting, and engaging the media.

Below are some basic, time tested to getting what you want from government.

Know your representatives

If you do not know who your legislators are, you can find out by your local Board of Elections, the League of Women Voters or NYPIRG. Once you know who your legislators are, you can get a wealth of information about them from various sources at the local library or in Albany, including information about the committees on which they sit, their outside occupations, campaign contributions, voting records, and so on.

The important information can be obtained through the web by visiting the Assembly and Senate websites: www.nysenate.gov or www.nyassembly.gov. If you want to get information about the Governor or the executive branch, start at www.ny.gov and go to either "Governor" or "state agencies" (this provides a link to the senate and assembly as well). If you're looking for information on the Comptroller, go to "state agencies" and link to the "State Comptroller, Office of" or simply go to www.osc.state.ny.us. The state's Attorney General can be found at www.ag.ny.gov.

By the way, the general state website (www.ny.gov) also offers links to the federal government and local governments as well. Start by clicking on "state agencies" and you'll get the option to go to those sites.

Become informed about legislation

Before approaching a legislator about a bill that interests you, there are several things that you can do to learn about the issue:

- Research your subject. Use reputable sources to gather information about your issue area and where the state and your local government stands on it.
- Adapt the research to your local area if possible. For instance, if you want the passage of local law adopting an upon-request straw policy, be armed with information documenting how well restaurants have fared in counties with similar policies;
- Learn your legislator’s position on bills. You can easy access to this information on the web by going to either the senate or assembly websites (www.nysenate.gov or www.nyassembly.gov) and look for links to “bills.” On both sites you can gain access to state laws and the status of legislation as well.

Advocate.

The tactics of advocating for legislation range from writing letters or petitions, to visiting legislators, community “actions,” and getting media attention for your issue. Of these, do not downplay the importance of letter writing. Well written, personalized letters draw the attention of staff and legislators, and may help convince legislators that there are other voters who are concerned about the issue but didn’t bother to write. Here are some tips for writing an effective letter:

Address the letter properly;

- Let the legislator know you are a constituent;
- Include some information that shows that you know something about the legislator and the state Legislature in general;
- Make your case in a short, persuasive manner;
- Always cite a bill number and other relevant bill information, if available;
- Include local arguments and facts where possible;
- Tell the legislator what you want them to do, and specifically request a written response;
- Write a follow-up letter;
- Write to other key public officials, such as committee chairpersons and the Governor.

Other extremely effective steps to lobby on an issue are to urge friends and neighbors to write letters, make calls, or visit legislators; write letters to the editor of local papers, TV or radio stations and encourage them to editorialize on the issue; and contact public interest groups that are lobbying on your issue. These groups often hold rallies or other actions to get media attention for an issue, or need volunteers to work in petition drives.

Meeting with Elected Officials

Getting Started:

- Set up a meeting; leaving enough time for to play the game of phone tag with the representative’s office and follow up to confirm in writing.
- Identify with whom you’ll be meeting, if possible.

- Outline your presentation and key responses, and practice with others beforehand.
- Know who will be addressing the different areas of the issue and the order in which they are going to speak.
- Remember to tailor the pitch to your audience (e.g. pro-business Senate member; pro-consumer Assemblymember; bill sponsor, etc.)
- Know the legislator before meeting: location and concerns of district, party affiliation, rank and committee membership, voting record on the issue or similar issues.
- Bring a packet of materials, business cards (if relevant, or otherwise include contact information with the packet of materials), notebook and a pen – digital or actual.
 - The packet of materials can include the bill concerning that issue, support memos (a short document explaining the issue and why you want a certain position to be taken), fact sheets, relevant news clips and articles on the issue, etc.

Outline for Visit:

- Introduction:
 - Introduce everyone in the room
 - Identify constituents
- Greeting, Name and Title; give and get business card if relevant, names, etc.
 - Thank elected official or staff member for the meeting and for discussing the issue
 - Thanks for support on this issue (if applicable)
 - If time limits are not set, tell them how long it will take (or ask them).
- Start Narrative: It's helpful to create a narrative story line that can easily be followed - with a beginning, middle, and end. It should introduce the general subject of the legislation and identify the problem and how the legislation would address the problem. It's helpful to answer the basic questions in this narrative, without getting in to too much detail.
 - Describe problem. Use data/statistics from reputable sources to depict problem/issue with particularity; use studies, press clips, etc.
 - Need for legislation: talk about why legislation is needed to address the problem.
 - Discuss shortcomings in current laws or regulations.
 - Discuss key components of the legislation and how they address the problem.
 - Status of legislation: including who has passed similar legislation (e.g. other states).
 - Lay out legislative history of bill, particularly in the relevant house.
 - Identify key sponsors and supporters.
 - Identify opponents (as appropriate) and their main arguments.
- Rebuttal of Opposition Arguments:
 - Prepare for any rebuttal or opposition arguments.
 - Always address these arguments calmly and with respect.
- The "Ask" & Close:
 - The "Ask:" Know the "ask" ahead of time, i.e. request of sponsorship, support, questions in committee, speak to leadership, etc.

- Thank them very much for their time today (thanks for support, or we will meet again to discuss this matter further, I hope you will reconsider)
- Include that you will get back to them with the information they requested.

Tips for a Successful Meeting:

- Be respectful, always.
- Don't get sidetracked. Remember that you scheduled the meeting and set the agenda. Elected officials or their staff members sometimes use tangents as a strategy to eat up time when meeting on a touchy subject. Other times, it's innocent conversation. Either way, don't fall for it.
- Only say what you know. If the legislator or a staff member asks you a question to which you don't know the answer, it is OK to say that you will get back to them. Never lie. It can seriously damage your credibility.
- Meeting with a staff person is expected and important. Legislators rely on their staff people to represent them, do policy research, and are often extremely knowledgeable on the issue at hand.
- ALWAYS follow up when you say you will. Even if there are no unanswered questions, write a thank you letter. This is another good opportunity to remind the legislator what issue was discussed. (e.g. Thank you for taking the time to meet with us to discuss [issue]...)
- Know the issue that you will be meeting about and stick to it.
- Don't be too hard on yourself. If you are meeting with the opposition leader of a particular initiative, don't feel that you have to convince him/her to change their mind in just one visit. The point is to put continued pressure on elected officials to do what is in the interest of the public.
- In addition, don't feel that you are wasting your time if you are meeting with someone who supports the issue.

Coalition Building

What is a coalition?

- It is an alliance, with one or more organizations/groups working together for a specific goal.
- Short Term – used for an event or quickly achieved goal.
- Long Term- used for a campaign or issue that may last months or even years.

Why are coalitions important?

- Increases political power and influence
- Pools resources and add expertise, experience, information and analysis
- Increases credibility to lawmakers, opinion makers and other groups
- Demonstrates seriousness of issue
- Increases range of tactics and variety of approaches to accomplish goals
- Develop partners for other issues build relationships that keep on giving
- Learn different approaches

Why are you building a coalition?

- What type of coalition do you want to build (ie. Paper, working event or working issue)?
- What are your goals?
- Think broadly. Don't underestimate the interest and power of those who have different views. It may be appropriate to invite elected officials, business leaders, civic leaders, head of religious and many various groups to join.

Approach potential partners:

- Figure out how best to approach potential coalition partners. This will vary upon your relationship with the group or individual. Approaching a community group that you already have a relationship with will be different than a business leader you don't.
- Make an appointment to meet with the potential partner
- Drop by a group meeting and request the opportunity to speak
- When working to enlist organizations in a coalition you must clearly and convincingly state your case for the coalition.
 - Why should they join you?
 - Why is it relevant to them?
 - What will they get out of it?
- Prepare a rap, or script, to address these issues. Here are sample bullets to form your rap:
 - Introduction – Who are you? What organization are you with?
 - Legitimization – Why should we listen to you? What have you done for us?
 - Problem – Why are you here today?
 - Solution – How is that problem going to get fixed?
 - Action – What can I do today to help?
- Have sign-on sheets, fact sheets, and other relevant materials on hand. Always get contacts! How will you follow up if you don't have their contact information? Have one specific contact per group.

The first meeting:

- Eventually you will have a meeting and at this point you are in charge. Have an agenda ready. However, be flexible. Your role may change by the end of this meeting.
- At this meeting, the group should try to come to an agreement on the following issues:
 - The Goal
 - Strategies to achieve the goal
 - Making sure all tasks are accounted for
 - Decision-making process
 - The resources the coalition will need and who will provide them
 - How coalition partners will communicate
 - Set the next meeting day/time/place

Follow up and follow through

- Follow up on a regular basis to make sure that all the coalition partners are doing what they promised. Don't wait until the day before your event to learn that enthusiastic coalition member who promised to book the room or get the speaker forgot!
- Hold coalition partners accountable, but don't do so in a way that damages your relationship with them or the coalition as a whole. Even those with the best intentions don't follow through for a wide variety of reasons. Have a back-up plan to pick up and keep moving when other partners must pull back or fall short.

One last note: Make sure that you develop a database with contact information for each of the organizations as well as the history of contacts that you have had with each group. Organizing is all about keeping lists, when it comes to coalitions, lists are critical!

Persuasive Speaking: Presenting an Effective Argument

Whether speaking with your neighbor, a local community group, or a legislator, the "Hook, Line, and Sinker" approach is a simple way to think about how to present your arguments while involved in your advocacy efforts.

Hook: Introductions

Everyone involved in a meeting should introduce themselves at the start of the meeting. If appropriate, let each individual mention a brief comment about their community involvement so that the person/organization you are meeting with gets a sense of the diversity of your group's membership.

Line: Stories and Statistics

Provide local stories and/or basic statistics about the relevant issue. This could include sharing stories and experiences. Remember, you are a community member, you do not need to be a policy expert. Your authenticity is based on your experiences in the community.

Sinker: The Request

Stay on message. Make a clear request of the person you are meeting with. Ask for a commitment and listen carefully to the response. Write down what you are told. Sometimes, the response will be for a follow-up from a NYPIRG staffer. Please remember to thank the individual(s) before you leave.

Writing an Effective Letter-to-the-Editor

The letter-to-the-editor (LTE) section in your local newspaper is an excellent forum for getting the word out about a local issue or problem. It is one of the most widely read sections of a newspaper, and your chances of being published are actually greater than you might suppose. Large papers may only print 15 percent of the letters that they receive. Smaller daily and weekly newspapers print a greater percentage. The more you submit, the better chance you have of being published. LTEs respond to, expand upon, or correct items that were printed in the paper. LTEs are also a great way to publicize your opinion or point of view on a specific issue. Here are some tips for writing a LTE.

- Your first sentence should communicate your most important point.
- Write for brevity. Use no more than 200 words — use fewer if you can.
- Sacrifice depth and examples for brevity, but never sacrifice accuracy.
- Be punchy and sharp, but never get personal or offensive.
- Try not to repeat negative arguments that you are responding to. Identify the piece and indicate that it was generally negative, but use your limited space to make your point about why your position is better.
- Use short sentences and make your points clearly.
- Be yourself. Write the letter similarly to how you would hold a conversation.
- Always sign the letter (or include your name if it is emailed). Unsigned letters never get published. Always include contact information like an email and a phone number. The papers often check back with you to authenticate your letter. Include the name of the group beneath your name if you are writing as a representative.

Remember, once something goes out to the media, someone in the media will read it. Comb over everything multiple times, checking for grammar, accuracy, tone, and issue relevance.

Example of a Letter to the Editor

<Date>

<Name of Media Outlet or Publication>

<Address>

<City>, <State> <ZIP Code>

Re: <Name and publication date of the article that you are responding to. Or, it may be included in the first line of the letter instead.>

To the Editor:

<State your reason for writing here, your strongest and best point made clearly and in a catchy manner. You may also use the first sentence to reference the title of the article, name of the publication, and date it appeared.>

<State your case here. Include facts, references, or research to establish credibility. This section can be one to three paragraphs, each paragraph with its own topic. (Keep length in mind though. Acceptable letter length will vary from periodical to periodical. Look at their LTE section to get a feel for an appropriate length.)>

<Include a call to action, asking readers to follow up with some activity, such as attending an event or looking into an issue. Then end with a strong, positive statement in support of your case.>

Sincerely,

<Writer's signature (not needed for emailed submissions)>

<Name of writer>

<Writer's address or neighborhood>

<Title and group affiliation (if appropriate)>

<Contact email and phone number (this will not be printed)>

Hosting Educational Tables

Setting up an educational tabling, or as we call it "tabling", is a tried and true public education method that provides a visual focus to draw people to a campaign. It provides a handy space to display attention grabbing materials such as posters, project slogans, and petitions; and it provides a base from which "tablers," or volunteers at an educational table, can float out to passing people.

This combination of "floating" and maintaining a stationary table is especially effective. A floater essentially carries around a mini-table of materials, such as flyers, project lists, and sign-up sheets, on a clipboard to engage people and bring them back to the table when they are interested in learning more. It is absolutely essential to avoid standing or sitting behind the table.

Work the crowd; call out to people passing by; urge them to sign the petition, point to materials while you talk. This often helps inexperienced tablers. When their confidence improves, send them directly in to the crowds as floaters. In addition to honing the recruiter's rap to perfection, floating builds commitment by constantly reinforcing the organizations strengths. When tabling, remember these tips:

- Smile, smile, smile
- Be aggressive, not pushy
- Be friendly
- Gather your materials beforehand and tailor the materials to the issue
- Always target tabling to a specific action (such as signing a petition or registering to vote)
 - Be relaxed
- Avoid arguments.
- Always identify yourself

- Remember- your technique will improve with practice

Recruitment Materials (Particularly For Table-Use)

Posters, Banners, Signs: These bring life to your effort. They are useful as attention- grabbers and must be prepared in advanced. Loud banners, with large lettering and bright colors, will draw a crowd.

Leaflets and Factsheets: During a conversation, you can use these as a reference quickly and easily. You can highlight the most compelling, local, and urgent points about a policy using cited facts, and then leave a copy with an interested community member.

Issue Materials: Whether it's petitions, postcards, or letters, make sure to bring the pile of signature forms, postcards, or blank paper with you. If your hosting a call-in drive, make sure to have a poster with the phone number displayed in a high visibility way. Voter registration is a real service to the community.

Organizing An Event

Organizing major events (e.g., mayoral debates, celebrity lectures, benefit concerts, Earth Day festivals) is a great way to demonstrate your organizing capacity, but it is also a great deal of work. Big events (with big turnouts) can make a splash in your community. They can mobilize residents around an issue and they can strengthen your volunteer base – if planned and implemented properly.

They can also become a burden if you aren't yet experienced enough to organize such events without giving short shrift to the other issues in your life. What follows here is a six-week schedule for organizing major events in your community. It's designed specifically to help organize a debate or a meet-the-candidates forum, but its lessons apply to any large-scale event.

Roughly Six Weeks Before the Event

- Set specific goals. How many people should attend? Will you get media coverage? How many groups will cosponsor?
- Pick the date, time and site of the event. If you are assuming that there will be media coverage, make sure the event is accessible to them.
- Brainstorm the title and messaging.
- Check around to see if any other event is happening that day/night. Your community newspaper probably has some place where there is a record of what events are booked.
- Get other groups to cosponsor. The broader the participation, the better the credibility and turnout. Connect with all groups quickly to alert them to the date so that they can come and will not organize an event on the same night.
- Decide on a format. If you're hoping for TV coverage, make sure you have a lively format. Speeches are deadening. Debates are good. A panel consisting of a wide range of

"experts" with a lively moderator (such as a local TV personality) is probably best. Try to involve the critical cosponsoring organizations in this decision, but don't let it wait too long.

- Invite VIP guests. Make sure you have diversity -- all sides of the issue, individuals who are considered "experts," policy makers.
- Put together a "team" of volunteer helpers. You'll need someone to be in charge of the event's logistics, someone to make sure the materials are ready, people to help with crowd recruitment, people to staff information tables and act as "floaters" for the event ("greeters," ushers, etc).
- Confirm speakers' involvement in writing immediately. Send them a draft agenda, a map of the school with the building highlighted and in your cover letter go over the format and names of the other participants. Make sure you mention any audio-visual equipment they may need too.

Roughly One Month Before the Event

- Send out an email to all community organizations announcing the event and requesting that you speak to their organizations on the topic and the event itself.

Roughly Two Weeks Before the Event

- Begin push to get the crowd there. Put up posters and share leaflets (paper and/or digital).
- Call event participants again. Let them know the final details, go over the final plan, make sure they are coming and that they have directions, ask them what things they may need.
- Send out public service announcements to local media with enough time to have an impact (two weeks). Follow-up with a round of calls. For more impact, develop a taped PSA for community radio stations.
- Prepare the media materials.
- Check over the site. Where do you want the media, do you need a special section for "dignitaries" (heads of organizations that have worked on this with you, a spouse of a participant, public officials, etc), the information tables? How are the tables and chairs going to be arranged?
- Train volunteers who have a role. Make sure they have a written statement (people do forget when they are nervous, and it helps to ensure that they are really prepared) or a written list of things they should be doing.

One Week Before the Event

- Walk through the site again. Make sure that all the plugs work, microphones, lighting, etc. Make sure the technical person is going to be there.
- Email media advisories to local media. You should have the names of the assignment and news editors, the city desk editors and the reporters who have the "politics beat."

- Crowd recruitment for the event hits a fever pitch with email announcements, posters, leaflets, text and phone banks – pull out all the stops to maximize the crowd and to achieve your goals.
- Finish media materials. There should be a packet for the media with a news release, fact sheets, list of endorsing organizations and a list of participants with a background blurb on each (with phone numbers).

24 Hours Before the Event

- Re-email media advisories to contacts and make phone calls. Make follow-up calls again on the morning of the event.
- Do a dry run. Meet your volunteers at the site and go over what everyone's responsibilities are. Hand out one-pagers with key information for each person.
- Send texts and make phone calls to interested community members to confirm their attendance and send a confirmation email with all of the important logistical information.

The Day of the Event

- Call all media in the morning to make one last pitch and call those who showed to see if they need any more information.
- Have a person there to take pictures. You can send a picture out to media that may need it and it may run in the local papers.
- Have a person post to social media accounts throughout the event. Live-posting is a great way to expand participation in an event to folks who were unable to attend in-person.
- Have copies of the news release with you and, make sure every media person gets one. Welcome all participants personally, talk it up with local dignitaries, and make sure everything is ready for prime time.
- That night, make sure you have some sort of celebration for any volunteers who helped in pulling off a successful event.

One to Two Days After

- Schedule a meeting with your organizing team to debrief the event with them.
- Send thank you notes – they matter!
- Gather any media clippings, videos, etc. to document the event.

Tips for Organizing a Call-In Drive

Call-in drives are a great tactic to mobilize many people to reach out on your issue over a short period of time. There are a number of ways to host call-in drives. This can be done by hosting them in-person by holding a tabling event, by including it as an action at the end of a presentation, or virtually by emailing your contact list and providing them with a script and contact information to make calls. Here are some tips to get started:

- *Know your target-* who are you calling? Make sure you have the correct number for the elected official's office you are calling and a backup in case the number stops working or the voicemail fills up. If there are multiple targets for your call-in drive, make sure you have a list of districts or a laptop so you can look up a people's elected officials on the spot.
- *Visuals are important-* when hosting a call-in drive in person, like with any tabling event, we want to engage people on the campaign and draw them over to the table. Set up exciting visuals/posters, and include a sign that has the phone number you are calling that is easy to see so multiple people can call at once.
- *Provide a rap-* make sure there is a quick rap ready for people to make a call. This makes it easier to get the message across quickly and effectively. Keep the rap as short and to the point as possible.
- Example: "Hi, my name is _____ and I live at _____ , calling to urge Senator _____ to support the strict drinking water standards to protect us from contaminants. New York must pass protections before the session ends. It can't wait another year! Thank you."
- *Keep track of your callers-* call-in drives are great opportunities to list-build. Have sign in sheets ready for people to fill out after they've completed a call so you can keep track of the calls made at a table and contact them with future information about the campaign.

Organizing Effective Phonebanks

Why phonebank?

Phonebanking has been used by major campaigns (issue and electoral) for decades. One on one contact is the most effective way of organizing, getting your message across and getting people involved. People feel more committed if they've told someone they would go to event or show up to vote. Making a connection with people again keeps them coming back and reminds people of events or elections they forgot about. Phonebanking also keeps people involved and connected throughout a project. Maybe they cannot make it to the first event but with a phone call, they can tell you they are interested and they can learn how to get in touch in the future, a date for a second event, etc.

Logistics for conducting a phonebank. You'll need:

1. People to call and an organized list of contacts. Make call lists with columns for name, number, result and notes/comments.
2. Space. You can use your home, the homes of friends, or even the local NYPIRG office.
3. Phones

4. Tic-Sheets to record number of calls made and responses. Use this information to keep phonebankers motivated and momentum building throughout the phonebank.
5. Raps. Make sure you have a prepared a rap and practice running through it a few times to practice before you start making calls.
6. Volunteers to make calls. As we are about to go over, it takes many hours to call the right amount of people to get 100 people to an event. Always recruit more volunteers than you need because inevitably, a few volunteers will have something come up and they may cancel.

Phonebank your phonebankers.

You should have a list of individuals who have expressed interest in working with you on your issue. These are the same people you should ask to make calls and to help you get other people to make calls too.

The numbers game: the “rule of halves”

It is perhaps our most effective rule for predicting turnouts, gauging volunteer needs and managing expectations. It is almost flawlessly true. Simply put, it states that half the people who commit to attend an event or take an action will actually follow through.

Tips On Phone Banking

- Try and make a connection first: how’s it going, etc.
- Don’t forget to identify yourself and the organization.
- Your tone and the rap should be friendly and informal.
- Speak confidently. Avoid inflection.
- Emphasize the “what,” “when,” and “where.”
- Keep it short- the whole thing shouldn’t be more than a minute or two.
- Don’t forget to ask, “Can we look forward to seeing you there tomorrow night?” or “Great, we’ll put you on the list”, or something that asks a ‘yes/no’ question and confirms they will be there
- Keep track of yays and nays.
- Sometimes people hang up. Don’t take it personally. You have to talk to lots of people to find ones that are really enthused.
- Don’t be shy- people gave you their numbers to stay in the loop on events and activities and actions.

How to Run an Effective Meeting

Meetings are a key part of any organizing effort and a great way to share information or make decisions, but they are no substitute for activism; you can’t solve a problem by just talking about it.

Also, don’t meet just for the sake of meeting. If there isn’t enough work to be done at a meeting, then don’t have it.

The meetings that you do hold should be as short as possible to accomplish their purpose, and they should follow a pre-planned agenda. They should also be facilitated to ensure that everyone has a chance to be heard and no one voice dominates the discussion.

What do you want to accomplish from the meeting? Examples:

- Brief and educate participants on your issue
- Persuade participants to act
- Brainstorm new ideas for action
- Coordinate, plan, and set goals for your project
- Delegate tasks to participants
- Build a sense of community and camaraderie – create a place people can look forward to coming to w/news, story they found, etc.
- Learn more about participants

What makes for an effective meeting?

- Everyone gets a chance to participate, there is a productive exchange of ideas, it is focused and FUN, and everyone leaves with a plan of action
- The meeting is well-prepared
 - Prep Time Rule: spend at least as much time prepping for the meeting as the length of the meeting itself.
 - Decide what your goals are: (Educate? Pump people up about getting more to commit to an upcoming event? Identifying potential leadership?)

Sample Agenda:

- Intro and start with an ice-breaker, way for people (particularly those who are there for the first time) to get to know each other, tells you a little about them
- Old Business: quick recap/wrap up of last meeting - if questions have been answered since, update for everyone (include “props” for standout work).
- New Business: Breaking campaign update: background, problem, solution, brainstorm.
 - Notes on brainstorm: be inclusive of all suggestions focus ideas to be realistic and steer conversation away from tangents.
- Assign Actions: something relevant to the project. Make sure the actions are the very next step in the project so people don't have to wait for a couple of steps before they can get started
- Set next meeting time (if it's not a regular weekly meeting)

Tips for running the meeting itself:

- Write out the agenda ahead of time and place it where all meeting attendees can see it and can follow the flow of the meeting.
- Run your draft agenda by a few people well in advance of the meeting to see if anything is missing.
- Only include items that must be covered before the next meeting.
- Be specific. This will keep the meeting on time and on track.

- List each category in the form of a question. This encourages participation because members will be thinking of how to answer each question and will be more prepared to give suggestions.
- Include time limits for each section to keep things on the limited time schedule.
- At the beginning of each meeting, ask the group if there is anything that should be included or omitted from the agenda.
- Even with the best preparation, things can still go wrong. The success of the meeting also depends on the execution of the agenda, and the ability of the facilitator to effectively inspire discussion while keep it on track
- The person running the meeting shouldn't be talking all of the time. Make sure others in the group have ample opportunity to contribute and ask questions
- Key ingredient to effective meetings is respect
- Make sure to have fun
- Allow for things to veer off track, be flexible, but make sure at some point to get things back into the agenda

Digital Organizing

In today's age, much organizing is conducted digitally, and there are a number of tactics that can be conducted online. From organizing virtual meetings, to engaging elected officials via social media, to engaging existing and potentially new members, digital organizing is a needed aspect of any campaign. Here are some basics to digitally organize.⁴⁶

Ways to communicate with members:

- *Email:* Email is one of the most essential and basic ways to contact members. Emails should be sent to members to share updates for the campaign, action-specific emails, and emails to share notes from meetings.
- *Slack:* Slack is essentially a chat room for your members that was designed to replace emails. Slack allows organizers to share updates, urgent and timely asks, share files, and have a streamlined quick form of communication. See below citation for more information on how to set up slack.⁴⁷
- *GroupMe/WhatsApp:* These group messaging apps are a great way to keep a more informal running dialogue with your core members. With these kinds of messaging services you can quickly share updates, facilitate conversations with members, and more.

Using social media:

Social media is an effective organizing tool, and a great way to supplement in-person advocacy, lobbying, and direct outreach efforts to get new members. These avenues are free and

⁴⁶ More resources and details for virtual organizing can be found via NYCET: <https://help.nycet.org/support/solutions/articles/29000033813-virtual-tools-directory-for-remote-organizing>

⁴⁷ Emily Johnston, "What is Slack and How Can My Team Use It?," CloudApp, July 13, 2020, <https://www.getcloudapp.com/blog/what-is-slack>

instantaneous channels to share information that can increase the visibility of your campaign, help with recruitment, and can inform the press and elected officials. Here are some social media sites and apps you can use to elevate your campaign:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- YouTube
- TikTok
- Snapchat

Here are some general tips for effectively using these outlets:

- Create Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., pages specific to your campaign or group
- Create a logo or image for your campaign/group profiles. You can do that for free using websites like picmonkey⁴⁸ or canva.⁴⁹
- Add pictures to your posts. Posts with pictures are more likely to have engagement.
- Tag the profiles of organizations, members of the press, and elected officials that you are working with or if you are calling for a specific action.
- Post daily – you can do this by sharing news related to your campaign/issue, actions people can take, upcoming events, etc.
- Hashtags are important to use so people can find your content. Create a hashtag for your campaign and use hashtags that are popular for your issue. Have members all use your campaign hashtag from their personal accounts. For example, a popular hashtag created and used to advocate for water infrastructure funding in New York is #FixOurPipes.
- Don't be afraid to get creative! Creative posts and videos can draw more attention to your issue.
- Share sample tweets and posts with your members/lists so they can participate in social media actions easily.
- Create posts for specific days of action – for example, World Water Day is a great day to coordinate social media posts for a water campaign.

Below are some sample posts for water infrastructure funding. Similar models can be used for other campaigns:

- **Twitter:** Water infrastructure needs in New York exceed \$80 billion over the next twenty years. To catch up, we need a new \$2.5 billion for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act! #FixOurPipes #NYBudget @NYGovCuomo @AndreaSCousins @CarlHeastie
- **Twitter:** Algal blooms in New York are hurting wildlife and threatening public health – the Clean Water Infrastructure Act can help stop them! @NYGovCuomo @AndreaSCousins @CarlHeastie, please include a new \$2.5B for water in the #NYBudget. #FixOurPipes
- **Facebook/Instagram:** Post pic of your local body of water, or create a graphic that can be used: In the last 10 years, we have seen deadly algal blooms in the finger lakes, chemical contamination in Hoosick Falls and Newburgh, and enough people have gotten sick.

⁴⁸ www.picmonkey.com

⁴⁹ www.canva.com

Water is one of our most fundamental needs, and we expect it to be safe. It is time New York leaders address this issue seriously and #FundCWIA #FixOurPipes in the budget to protect New York's environment and public health! @nygovcuomo @andreastewartcousins @cheastie

Organizing digital events:

Face-to-face meetings are an important part of organizing and spreading awareness about an issue. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to do so in-person. In today's age, there are a number of free and subscription-based videoconferencing platforms to do this. There are pros and cons to each service, so some may better fit your needs than others:⁵⁰

- Google Hangouts
- Zoom
- Skype
- Webex
- GoToMeeting
- Jitsi
- Facetime
- And more.

Some tips to run a virtual meeting/event smoothly:

- Have an agenda for the meeting.
- Ask participants to mute their phones/microphones unless they have something to say or ask (some applications have a "hand-raise" feature for this purpose).
- Have participants share comments, documents, and ask questions in text boxes, if that feature is available with your chosen videoconferencing service.
- If it makes sense to do so, screenshare PowerPoint presentations or other relevant graphics during a presentation.

⁵⁰ A comprehensive list of platforms and their capabilities can be found here:
https://videoconferencing.guide/?fbclid=IwAR1FBuhZubU7clNoo-NEpi1Jn3DKP9B_OX8UL3ttkQHV1A-dJYoMqMjTpuw

Resources

Know Your Elected Officials

To look up your local representatives, visit <http://www.elections.ny.gov/district-map/district-map.html>

Your State Senator

Name:

Office Phone Number:

Name of district office contact:

Email address for contact:

Phone number for contact:

Your State Assemblymember

Name:

Office Phone Number:

Name of district office contact:

Email address for contact:

Phone number for contact:

Your Congressional Representative

Name:

Office Phone Number:

Name of district office contact:

Email address for contact:

Phone number for contact:

For additional information about your state representatives visit NYPIRG legislative profiles: <https://www.nypirg.org/goodgov/legislativeprofiles/>

You can also find contact information for public water suppliers by county at the New York State Department of Health website: https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/water/drinking/pws_contacts/map_pws_contacts.htm