



How to Launch a Reusable Container Program Checklist

Ready to reduce single-use waste on your campus?

This checklist is your go-to resource for planning and launching a successful reusable container program using Fill it Forward's Borrow. Whether you're a sustainability coordinator, dining director, or passionate student leader, this guide outlines every step to help you move from idea to action—with clarity, confidence, and impact.

Let's make reuse simple, scalable, and sustainable—together.



OPERATIONS

Before launching a reusable container program, it's essential to understand the day-to-day dining operations where the reusable container program will be used. Mapping out foodservice locations and meal distribution models will help you tailor Borrow to your campus needs.

Most campuses include a mix of residential dining (all-you-care-to-eat locations for meal plan holders) and retail dining (branded outlets where students pay per item). Each setting comes with its own set of workflows, customer habits, and potential integration points for reusables.

By identifying how meals are ordered, picked up, and consumed across different dining models, you can better anticipate user behaviors and design a program that fits seamlessly into existing routines.



Inventory all dining locations and how meals are ordered/distributed

Include every foodservice outlet on campus, from dining halls to cafés, noting hours of operation and meal types served.



Classify locations as residential or retail

Residential: all-you-care-to-eat for meal plan holders.

Retail: pay-per-item branded outlets such as Chick-fil-A or Starbucks



Map key workflows: service style, point of sale, staffing, peak traffic times

Capture how students order and receive meals (e.g., mobile pre-order, cashier line, self-serve), who is involved, and when volumes peak.



Identify opportunities for container distribution and collection within each model

Determine where containers could be picked up and returned within each dining setup to support user convenience and high return rates.

INFRASTRUCTURE

A strong infrastructure is the backbone of any successful reuse program. Understanding your campus's existing dishwashing, storage, and transport capabilities is essential to ensure smooth operations without disrupting service.

Evaluate what systems are already in place—and what may need to be adjusted—to support the cleaning, return, and redistribution of reusable containers.



Assess dishwashing capacity at each location

Note whether each site has commercial dish machines, undercounter washers, or no washing equipment at all.



Confirm availability of drying rack or storage space for clean containers

Identify where sanitized containers can be safely stored and air-dried without disrupting existing kitchen operations.



Evaluate staffing availability for dishwashing and logistics support

Understand current labor resources and determine if additional staff or shifts may be needed to support the reuse program.



Identify optimal return bin locations for high traffic and accessibility

Strategically place return bins where students naturally pass through after eating, such as dining exits or near waste stations.



Plan transportation logistics: how will clean containers be moved between locations?

Outline a system for transporting sanitized containers back to pick-up points, especially if washing is centralized.

FINANCIALS AND RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Reusable programs offer long-term savings by reducing the reliance on single-use disposables, but the upfront planning should include a solid financial analysis. Start by assessing your current costs for compostable or disposable packaging, as well as losses due to missing dishware. If you already have a reuse program, review return rates and container losses. Understanding funding sources—whether from a green fund, auxiliary services, or grants—can help align your goals with your institution’s sustainability or financial priorities.



Evaluate disposable packaging spend

Review weekly, monthly, or annual costs for compostable and recyclable materials across dining locations.



Track costs associated with lost or missing ware

Quantify annual spend on replacing reusable containers, cups, utensils, and trays by reviewing procurement records.



Review the performance of existing reuse programs

Container loss rates, return rates, and budgeting cycle for replacement containers.



Identify funding sources

Determine how reuse programs or sustainability initiatives are funded (e.g., green funds, grants, auxiliary budgets).

STAKEHOLDER ALIGNMENT

Launching a reuse system is easier when the right people are involved early on. Start with your sustainability office, dining services, and facilities or auxiliary teams to create alignment on goals and expectations. These internal champions can help advocate for the program, streamline logistics, and troubleshoot pain points. Dining staff are especially important—they'll play a central role in integrating the program into daily workflows.

Fill it Forward's Borrow Dashboard offers real-time visibility into key metrics to keep stakeholders engaged and informed.



Engage internal champions

Tap into sustainability offices, dining teams, procurement, and auxiliary services.



Involve dining operations staff

Understand current workflows, technical comfort levels, and staff needs.



Leverage the Member Portal

Share real-time data on impact metrics, return rates, inventory, and performance with key stakeholders.

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

The success of your reuse program hinges on student awareness and participation. That's where marketing comes in. Work with your internal communications team to design a multi-channel rollout strategy that clearly explains how the program works and what students need to do. Fill it Forward supports your launch with templated messaging, signage, and digital content to increase awareness and encourage adoption. Think posters in dining halls, onboarding emails, social posts, and reminders—all designed to make reuse simple and engaging.



Identify your internal marketing or communications team

Collaborate on messaging strategy and outreach plan.



Define communication channels

Which platforms are most effective for student outreach? (e.g., email, social media, digital signage).



Access Fill it Forward's Success Hub for marketing tools

Branded how-to signage, return station posters, social content templates, onboarding email templates, in-app announcements and reminders, and more.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND PROGRAM AMBASSADORS

Students are both your primary users and your most powerful advocates. Their behavior drives program success, and their feedback helps you improve it. Tap into existing student ambassador programs, sustainability clubs, or hire part-time student staff at dining locations to act as reuse champions.

Fill it Forward offers gamified impact tracking and digital rewards to keep students engaged. Plus, when students see the environmental impact of their actions in real-time, they're more likely to return containers and encourage others to do the same.



Leverage student employees at dining locations

Train them to support program adoption and user education.



Recruit student sustainability leaders

Integrate reuse into existing ambassador or green team programs.



Use feedback loops

Encourage ongoing input from students to optimize user experience.

Launch with Confidence

When all the pieces are in place—from operations and funding to student engagement and marketing—you're ready to launch your reuse program. Fill it Forward partners with your team every step of the way to ensure success, including onboarding, technical support, staff training, and long-term program optimization. Our team helps monitor performance, boost return rates, and report impact metrics you can share with leadership and stakeholders. Together, we can create a culture of reuse on your campus that makes a measurable difference.

Ready to launch your reusable container program? We'd love to support your journey.

[Book a personalized demo](#)
Contact us: info@fillitforward.com

