

# Guidelines for Sustainable SWAG at Duke



Questions:  
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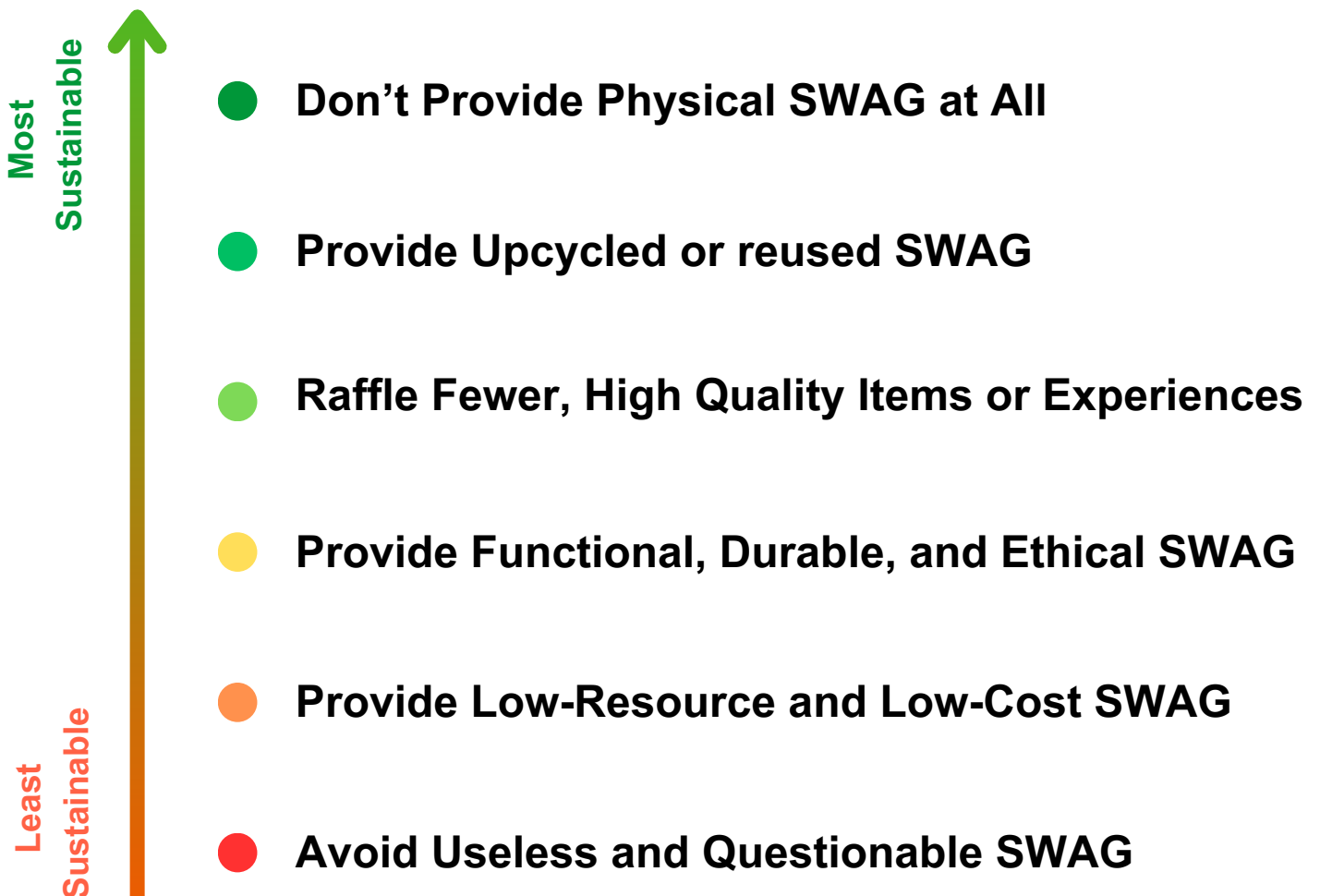
Duke | OFFICE of CLIMATE  
and SUSTAINABILITY

# BACKGROUND

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Every year across Duke, there are hundreds of events and activities where departments, student groups, and external companies provide SWAG (i.e. stuff we all get) to encourage people to visit and engage with their organization. Common examples of SWAG include t-shirts, water bottles, tote bags, plastic trinkets, and stickers. Some of the SWAG that is provided is discarded by the recipients either soon after receiving it or during move out and therefore ends up in landfills. With this guidance, the Office of Climate and Sustainability encourages members of the Duke community to **Bleed Blue, Live Green** with their SWAG purchases.

Below is the sustainable SWAG hierarchy that you should consider when making decisions about SWAG and giveaways.



# IDENTIFICATION TIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE SWAG

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If you are searching for SWAG to purchase, below are sustainability elements for you to consider.

## **Extraction and Transformation of Raw Materials:**

- Made of materials that are ethically-sourced (e.g. fair trade)
- Locally produced using local materials
- Made of recycled or reused materials, especially products with a high percentage of post-consumer materials

## **Manufacturing:**

- Low emissions in production process
- Production of SWAG uses renewable energy

## **Packaging and Distribution:**

- Minimal to no plastic packaging
- Locally distributed
- Shipping emissions are offset using high-quality carbon offsets

## **Usefulness:**

- Highly likely to be useful and have a long use period
- Only enough SWAG as necessary was purchased

## **End of Life:**

- Can be easily composted, recycled, or donated when no longer needed by the recipient

## **Producer Standards:**

- Producer of SWAG meets existing standards (e.g. B-Corp certified)
- Producer of SWAG has stated climate and sustainability goals



# NO PHYSICAL SWAG

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The most sustainable forms of SWAG are not physical at all. The Office of Climate and Sustainability encourages all departments and organizations to truly question the need for SWAG and whether alternatives could be considered instead to encourage participation. Some alternatives to physical SWAG items could include:

- **Experiences:** Your organization could raffle off experiences such as a Duke Lemur Center tour, provide trips to local businesses such as an escape room or a bowling alley, or tickets to a Duke sporting event.
- **Food:** Your organization could provide food at a tabling event or meeting, or it could raffle off a dinner at one of Durham's amazing restaurants.
- **Trainings:** Your organization could consider offering trainings or activities that your desired participants would be interested in such as bike repair workshops, an art class in Duke Gardens, or other programming that aligns with your office's subject area.
- **Games and Other Activities:** Your department could offer games or activities at your table or office to encourage people to visit such as trivia, a dog (students really miss their pets), or a competition for members of the Duke community.



Pro tip: Duke Lemur Center has a behind-the-scenes tour that is unforgettable!



# UPCYCLED OR REUSED SWAG

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If you want to provide a physical item, the Office of Climate and Sustainability encourages you to focus on items that are upcycled or reused instead of buying new. Giving items a second life is central to sustainability and there are plenty of opportunities to consider locally. Your department could consider the following alternatives to new SWAG:

- Items from local resale/thrift organizations or at the Scrap Exchange
- Clothing swap events (ex. Devil's Thrifthouse or a professional clothing drive)
- Screen printing clothing items that people already own
- Mending workshop for clothing



Pro tip: Collaborate with [Say the Thing](#) program at Duke Chapel.



# HIGH-QUALITY SWAG RAFFLES

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While SWAG means the “stuff we all get” you can consider raffling off a few high-quality items instead of providing something to every person. Depending on the item, you could encourage the same (or more) participation from people. Your department could also save money by purchasing fewer items and use the money for higher-priority programming instead. Examples of raffle items and experiences include:

- A jacket or rain coat from a sustainable company
- A fancy dinner in downtown Durham
- A bicycle or scooter
- A houseplant or succulent terrarium
- A Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) produce box subscription
- A stay at a local spa (ex. the Umstead)
- A cooking or cocktail mixing class
- Tickets to see a show at DPAC or Carolina Theatre



Pro tip: Duke Campus Farm has summer and fall [CSA programs!](#)



# FUNCTIONAL, DURABLE, LOCAL SWAG

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If you want to provide new and branded SWAG, please focus on SWAG that is functional, durable, and local. This may require additional research into companies that provide these types of goods and therefore may require registering a new vendor in Duke's system. Lastly, please consider that people may already have items that you want to provide, so consider high-quality items if you want people to keep them.

Examples of SWAG options include:

- **Functional:** coffee mugs (bonus if from a local ceramicist), high-quality water bottles, pens and notebooks, or another product that aligns with your organization's mission.
- **Durable:** high-quality t-shirts, reusable dining utensils, water bottles, and tote bags.
- **Local:** Durham is home to many local businesses that provide a wide variety of items. You can [support one of the many local businesses](#) for gifts.



Pro tip: You can get a [Shop Durham rewards card](#) to save at dozens of businesses!

# LOW-RESOURCE/COST SWAG

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If you want to provide SWAG to everyone who comes to your table or event, there are many low-resource and low-cost SWAG items to consider instead:

- Stickers
- Temporary tattoos
- Reusable sporks and straws
- Bookmarks
- Postcards
- Pens
- Reusable coffee-cup sleeves
- Consumables (cookies, Locopops, candy)



**Pro tip: Get great design ideas for stickers from current Duke students!**



# USELESS & QUESTIONABLE SWAG

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Avoid providing plastic trinkets or trendy items as much as possible since these are the most likely items to end up in landfills. Also, SWAG and giveaways should resonate with your organization's purpose. Examples of SWAG to avoid include:

- Fidget spinners
- Slap bracelets
- Plastic pompoms
- Balloons
- USB drives and power banks
- Plastic cups and water bottles
- Keychains
- Drink Coasters



**Pro tip:** Avoiding these disposable/useless SWAG items saves money for your organization.