

# COMMUNITY ASSETS



**Directional Signage at Queens Botanical Garden**  
Source: Queens SWAB Organizing Committee member

In this section, we highlight a sample of representative organizations, institutions, nonprofits, community groups, and businesses working to increase awareness about reduce, reuse, and recycling practices. Some of these entities work exclusively in the service of their local communities, while others are accessible borough-wide and available to the general public. The list of Queens’ resources compiled here is far from exhaustive but — along with a master list posted on our website— we hope it helps communities identify assets they already have so that they can make full

use of them, while also noting resources and services which are lacking and can be advocated for.

*\* Nonprofits, community groups, academic institutions, and businesses not included in this report or on our website reflect time or space limitations of the QSWAB Organizing Committee. We welcome submissions of additional community assets that may have been overlooked and look forward to adding these to our master list.*



Overview

The QSWAB Organizing Committee identified at least 191 community assets, not including libraries and schools, GrowNYC community gardens, and civic organizations, directly or indirectly supporting sustainability and zero-waste efforts. The top 10 categories of assets identified include:

Asset	Count
Community Fridge	22
Thrift Shop	16
Buy-Nothing Group	15
Greenmarket	15
Mutual Aid - Donation + Resources	15
CSA	15
Food Scrap Drop-Off/Composting	14
Stewardship	13
Responsible Shopping	11
Education	10
Total	146

Source: Queens SWAB Organizing Committee

These assets are located across the borough, but predominate in certain neighborhoods (the below neighborhoods being the top 10 asset hosts):

Neighborhood	Count
Astoria	25
Queens (serving the entire borough)	19
Long Island City	19
Ridgewood	12
Flushing	11
Jamaica	10
Corona	8
Sunnyside	8
Jackson Heights	7
Forest Hills	7
Total	126

Source: Queens SWAB Organizing Committee

DSNY New York City Compost Project Host Sites

**Big Reuse** (Long Island City) was founded as Build it Green with a mission to reduce the environmental burden of construction and demolition waste sent to landfills. The nonprofit opened a resale warehouse in Astoria in 2005. When their landlord doubled their rent in 2017, they had to close the location and take the business — and green jobs — to Gowanus, Brooklyn. In 2011, Big Reuse diversified its work to focus on organic waste. Ten years later, they are a leading player in a Citywide community-led network that works to rebuild soil by providing New Yorkers with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities to produce and use compost locally.<sup>1</sup> This past year, The NYC Compost Project Hosted by Big Reuse received the U.S. Composting Council Small Scale Composter of the Year award for its work.<sup>2</sup> Today, however, Big Reuse is again in danger of losing its Queens space, this time so NYC Parks can create a vehicle storage lot. After public outcry about this development, in late 2020, NYC Parks agreed to extend the nonprofit’s lease until June 2021. Although NYC Parks Commissioner Silver agreed to find a new home on a “non-NYC Parks site” for Big Reuse, so far they have made no progress to secure them a new location.<sup>3</sup>

**Queens Botanical Garden** (Flushing) is an urban oasis that celebrates people, plants, and cultures through inspiring gardens, innovative educational programs, and demonstrations of environmental stewardship. Its operations and programming reinforce its commitment to the City’s OneNYC goals. QBG hosts a Farm & Compost Site that demonstrates the closed-loop of organics recycling as applied to agriculture, horticulture, and green infrastructure. In 2019, the [Farm & Compost Site](#) harvested 7,442 lbs. of produce, half of which they donated to food pantries. In typical years, QBG also offers a Master Composter certification course as a part of the NYCCP. Modeled after programs nationwide and modified for the realities of composting in New York City, the program:

- teaches participants how composting fits with the City’s waste management plan;
- provides a deeper understanding of the composting process;
- offers information on how participants can use finished compost through hands-on experiences and;
- grants participants the experience of interfacing with the public around the topics of organic waste and composting.<sup>4</sup>

Colleges and Universities

**St. John’s University** (Jamaica) works to create a more [sustainable campus](#) while engaging the school’s facilities team and student body. Annually, St. John’s participates in the nationwide RecycleMania competition, which engages 400+ schools in competition, (achieving a 50% diversion rate in 2017). Following the EPA’s Food Recovery Hierarchy, St. John’s recovers more than 6,000 lbs. of food annually for donation and composts 100 tons of food per year utilizing a pulper and aerated static compost pile (ASP). St. John’s also collects unwanted food and clothing from students upon move-out. The school works with student Sustainability Coordinators to make this work possible.<sup>5</sup>

**York College** (Jamaica) provides students with learning experiences that support their personal growth and encourage passionate service to improve the lives of community residents. Through several academic

programs, students participate in research to contribute to the health and well-being of people and the environment. [The Environmental Health Science \(EHS\) Program](#) addresses man-made environmental pollution. EHS students are trained to think critically about real-world problems by visiting off-campus sites and engaging in field investigations that provide experiential learning that expand classroom instruction. The EHS 426 class conducts solid-waste management surveys in the local community, exploring ways to enhance waste processing and recycling and improving operations at waste transfer stations. Students have also conducted air-quality monitoring in Jamaica Center and contiguous neighborhoods to assess potential health risks caused by particulate matter and gaseous pollutants.<sup>6</sup>



**Source: Queens Botanical Garden**  
Since it started in 2000, QBG has trained and certified 323 Queens Master Composters and exposed many more to hands-on composting experiences. Many graduates have gone on to run or volunteer in Queens compost sites.<sup>7</sup> For a continually updated list of food-scrap drop-off sites across New York City, [visit this link](#).



Nonprofits

The nonprofits below are some of the more prominent organizations in the borough working to provide innovative waste education and resource recovery services.

**Cafeteria Culture** (New York City) is part of the Partner Project Program of The Fund for the City of New York. The organization started in 2009 as Styrofoam Out of Schools and was instrumental in bringing about legislation that eliminated Styrofoam trays from all New York City public schools. CafCu works creatively with youth using interdisciplinary educational methods. Their programming focuses on encouraging youth-led solutions to achieve zero waste in schools and create plastic-free and climate-smart communities. CafCu has shared its program with 10 Queens public schools and is currently building a relationship with the Queens Public Library in Long Island City.<sup>8</sup> For a list of schools, see Appendix V.

**Eastern Queens Alliance** (Southeast Queens) is a federation of civic associations established a little over 30 years ago to advocate for a sustainable Southeast Queens. The organization uses its collective voice to identify common challenges and develops and executes strategies that maintain or restore balance in their communities. Their initiatives address: Education, Health and the Environment; Parks and Open Space; Community Development, Economic Management, and Safety. EQA is also a steward of the Idlewild Park Preserve, a 225-acre Forever Wild site located north of

JFK Airport. Since 2003, EQA has worked toward the preservation and restoration of the Preserve, which in earlier times served as a dumping ground for City agencies. In 2021, the EQA will host the grand opening of the Idlewild Park Salt Marsh Environmental Science Learning Center. Along with a new planned hiking trail, the center will serve as an environmental education complex that will offer hands-on workshops, field trips, recreational activities, and nature center offerings.<sup>9</sup>

**Guardians of Flushing Bay** (Flushing) is a nonprofit coalition of boaters, park users, and local residents advocating for a healthy and equitably accessible Flushing Bay and Creek. Flushing Waterways are overburdened by more than 2 billion gallons of raw sewage and contaminated stormwater runoff every year. To raise awareness around this issue, the organization has hosted waterfront programming, community cleanups, and grassroots advocacy to promote a healthy ecosystem and equitable waterfront land use practices. They successfully advocated to remove a toxic, foam-leaking abandoned barge from Flushing Bay. In 2020, they hosted a 'Watershed Justice Film Series,' screening movies about single use plastic reduction in collaboration with the Queens SWAB Organizing Committee. They advocated for robust implementation of the Flushing Bay and Creek Combined Sewer Overflow Long-Term Control Plans from the Department of Environmental Protection and collaborated with Billion Oyster Project to bring more water-filtering oysters to Flushing Waterways.<sup>10</sup>

**Materials for the Arts** (Long Island City) is part of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, and distributes thousands of pounds of reused materials that would otherwise end up in the waste stream to artists, schools, community centers and the public. Giving these materials a second life showcases how art can be an inspiring part of sustainability. In a typical year, MFTA's educational programs reach over 5,000 teachers and 15,000 students. In 2019, the organization diverted 900 tons of material from landfills valued at \$14,318,516. During COVID-19, to safely serve their partner institutions, MFTA pivoted to online instruction and curbside-pickup at their Long Island City warehouse.<sup>11</sup>

**Queens Climate Project** has a mission to “engage in advocacy, education, and climate-related initiatives that promote clean energy and sustainability.” Although the group’s 2021 Policy Platform is primarily focused on clean and green energy, the group also promotes Citywide composting and expansion of collections for electronics, textiles, and hazardous waste, while calling for the reduction of single-use plastics. The QCP also touts a Compost Task Force, which has conducted education and outreach around compost, while assisting in the expansion of compost neighborhood initiatives.<sup>12</sup>



**Materials for the Arts**  
Source: Materials for the Arts



**Queens County Farm Museum** (Floral Park/Glen Oaks) is one of the longest continually farmed sites in New York State (c.1697) and the largest tract of farmland in NYC. The 47-acre farm provides a healthy ecosystem through pollination, seed disbursement, nutrient recycling, and climate regulation. Its growing fields, farm animals, compost site, apiary, and regenerative farming methods make it a leader in the ecological well-being of New York City, a model for teaching and research, and an important source of locally grown food to an urban community. Queens County Farm welcomes over 400,000 visitors per year. The farm has been composting on-site since 2008 and accepts community food scraps daily. To date, Queens Farm has diverted over 325,000 lbs. of food scraps and organic material from landfills.<sup>13</sup>

**Rescuing Leftover Cuisine and Restaurant Partners**  
Rescuing Leftover Cuisine is a national nonprofit that uses volunteer labor to collect excess, unused food from businesses and restaurants and donate it to local service agencies. The nonprofit’s Executive Director, Robert Lee, grew up and still lives in Queens. In 2019, the nonprofit rescued 1,638,328 lbs. of food, providing 1,365,275 meals to those in need. The organization engages restaurants, food banks, and volunteers to coordinate its efforts. Currently, there is only one Queens location, Levain Bakery’s commercial kitchen, that weekly donates excess food. RLC’s prior Queens restaurant donors include:<sup>14</sup>

- Indie LIC
- Griddle Cafe & Deli
- Java Day Cafe
- Queens Comfort
- Salt & Bone Smokehouse
- Tortillería Nixtamal
- Treat House

**RISE (Rockaway Initiative for Sustainability and Equity)** (Far Rockaway) was established in 2005 to provide “civic engagement and youth development programs that advance social equity and the physical well being of our vibrant, coastal community.” The group began by reforming an illegal dumping site into a waterfront park, and now leads educational programs and workshops, including many focused on marine debris and coastal stewardship efforts including cleanups. The group has served over 40,000 people over its tenure, and hosts 110 local school, business, community partners and other collaborators per year.<sup>15</sup>

**Smiling Hogshead Ranch** (Long Island City) Founded as a guerrilla garden in Spring 2011, the Ranch is a collectively run urban farm with no fences and no individual plots. Members participate in various committees to carry out the functions of the Ranch’s mission, which is to create a culture that empowers and connects our communities through ecology, education, and collaboration. The Ranch hosts an unstaffed food scrap drop-off from sunrise to sunset daily. The grounds consist of sitting areas, annual row crops, a food forest, bees, and pollinator plants. The Ranch demonstrates several different types of composting including aerated static piles, three bin, bokashi, leaf mold, mushroom compost, and windows.<sup>16</sup>



**Queens County Farm Museum**  
Source: Queens County Farm Museum



**Queens Together Distributing Donations from Rescuing Leftover Cuisine**  
Source: Rescuing Leftover Cuisine



Potential Compost Collection and Processing Sites

Community gardens, farmers markets, community-supported agriculture distribution sites, and vacant City-owned lots are all potential compost collection and processing sites that are currently underutilized assets.

In Queens these include: **Forty-one community gardens**, about half overseen by NYC Parks’ GreenThumb; seven administered by the Brooklyn Queens Land Trust; four by the New York Restoration Project; and the rest by NYCDOT, DOE, MTA, or a private entity.<sup>30</sup>

**Approximately 20 farmers markets**, one-third of which operate on weekdays and the rest on the weekends. Four are run year-round (three of these are GrowNYC markets and the other is run by Edgemere Farm, a half-acre urban farm in Far Rockaway). All but three of Queens’ farmers’ markets accept Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT).<sup>31</sup>

**Fifteen CSA distribution sites**, four in Astoria with others distributed across Long Island City, Jackson Heights, Sunnyside, and Forest Hills/Kew Gardens.<sup>32</sup>

**Seven vacant City-owned lots**, all located in Queens Council District 31 (near QNS Comm. District 83 - JFK and Comm. District 13), representing a little over an acre of land that, under Local Law 46 of 2018, was deemed suitable for farming.<sup>33</sup>

45TH STREET COMPOSTERS

The story behind a compost site in Sunnyside, Queens illustrates the importance of engaged community members and the benefits of community-supported partnerships.

After the suspension of Curbside Organics Collections, a group of guerrilla gardeners called the 45th Street Composters took over a privately-owned lot in Sunnyside for a composting site and community garden.

Although initially skeptical, the property owner and group worked with a local nonprofit to allow the 45th Street Composters to use the lot to collect food scraps and create compost for a year. The person behind the partnership was Michael Otterman, the property owner’s nephew, who worked for the company that managed the lot.

While the property owner was not familiar with composting, Michael was and sympathized with the group’s goal. He encouraged his uncle to work with them and eventually struck a deal.

Today, an unused private lot serves as a community asset through a private-nonprofit partnership that benefits everyone.<sup>17</sup>



45th Street Composters  
Source: Sunnyside Post

Volunteer Initiatives: Cleanup Groups

Additional cleanup groups are discussed in the COVID-Impacts section of this report.

**Operation Clean Up** (Laurelton) is a community and volunteer-driven sanitation and maintenance project for the improvement of Laurelton. Founded in 2017 by residents and business owners, Operation Clean Up’s mission is to keep the community clean and free of garbage, debris, and overgrown weeds from May to September. Since its inception, the project has organized an average of 30 monthly volunteers throughout the season. In 2019, they resurrected the Laurelton Mall Beautification Contest, awarding cash prizes for the best-kept, most improved, and most beautiful green medians in the neighborhood. The project is spearheaded by Melva M. Miller and documented by Clarisa James, both Laurelton residents.<sup>18</sup>



Operation Clean Up  
Source: Operation Clean Up



Sustainable Businesses

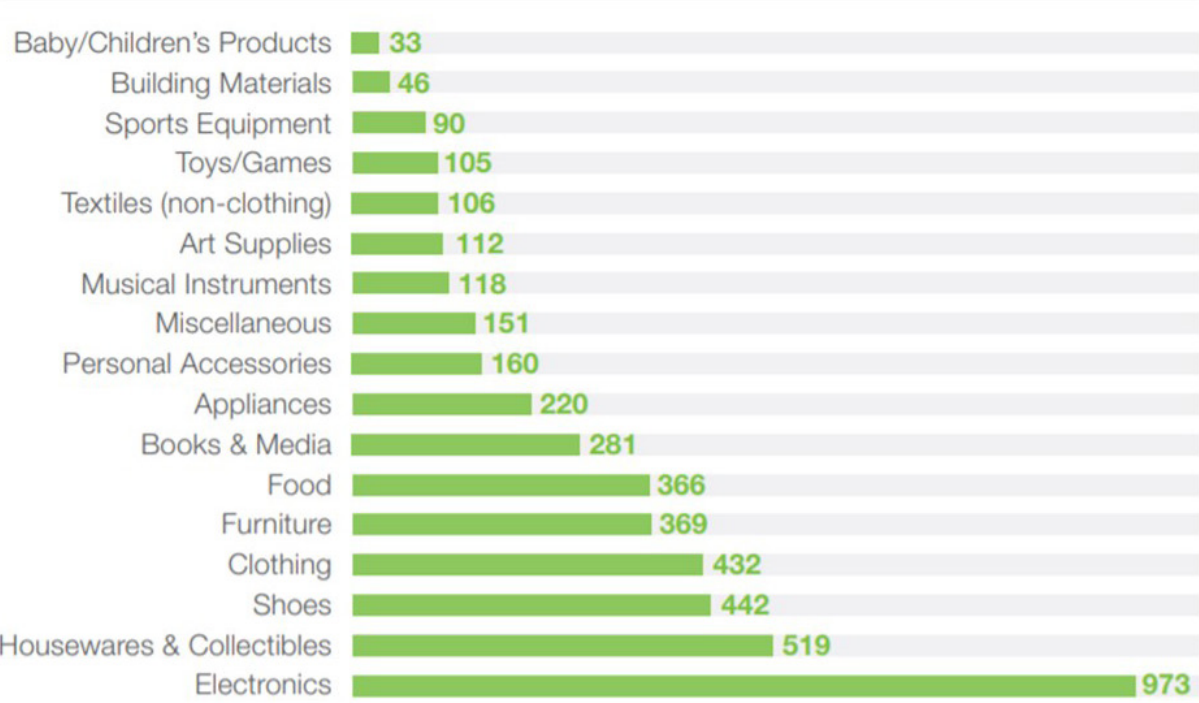
Given the many businesses in Queens striving to adopt zero waste practices, this report cannot begin to name them all. In the future, informed by [DSNY’s Reuse Sector Report](#), [Queens Chamber of Commerce](#), and [Business Improvement Districts](#), the QSWAB Organizing Committee hopes to use its website as a platform to showcase more enterprises and entrepreneurs contributing to a sustainable borough. For now, we acknowledge the contribution of Queens resident Brittany Cattaruzza, creator of the 2020 [Sustainability Map Project](#). Established as a one-stop website to find local resources for leading a more eco-conscious life, her platform includes information not in this report, such as stores that recycle plastic bags; pharmaceutical and hazardous material diversion opportunities; and clothing and electronics donation sites.<sup>19</sup>

Below are examples of sustainable and zero-waste focused Queens businesses:

- [4th Bin](#) (Long Island City) offers sustainable e-waste recycling and secure data destruction to businesses.<sup>20</sup>
- [Cup Zero](#) (Ridgewood) provides reusable, branded cups for events and offers talks about sustainability to industry partners.<sup>21</sup>
- [Earth & Me](#) (Astoria) bills itself as “Queens’ first zero-waste store” providing “eco-friendly items that are good for makers and the planet.”<sup>22</sup>
- [Habitat for Humanity ReStore](#) (Woodside) sells donated overstock and used items such as appliances, furniture and more with proceeds supporting Habitat for Humanity.<sup>23</sup>
- [Jars of Delight](#) (Jamaica) is a sustainable catering company that uses reusable glass serving containers and donates food waste for local composting.<sup>24</sup>
- [The Junkluggers & Remix Market](#) (Astoria/Long Island City) seeks to serve as a sustainable disposal business for homes and offices, finding new homes for removed items and providing tax-deductible receipts to customers. Junkluggers is a sister company to Remix Market NYC (Long Island City), which donates and resells furniture, art, and appliances at competitive prices to eliminate waste and make basic necessities accessible to New Yorkers at all income levels.<sup>25, 26</sup>
- [Loops Recycling and Recovery](#) (Queens Village) provides zero-waste, recycling, and sustainability consulting to businesses and other entities in Queens and Citywide.<sup>27</sup>
- [Queens Night Market](#) (Flushing Meadows Corona Park) is a themed food fair which has piloted bokashi composting and compost education stations and hosted research and design studies on waste diversion initiatives. The market sells reusable eating utensils, has banned plastic bags for its vendors, and launched a creative Halloween costume swap station for families.<sup>28</sup>
- [Zero Waste NYC Workshop](#) (Astoria) hosts a workshop series to highlight strategies for reducing personal waste from compost to fashion and beyond.<sup>29</sup>

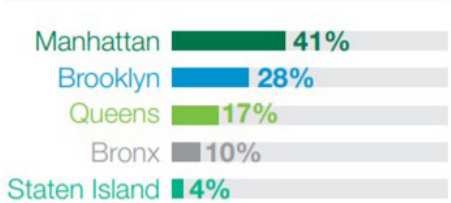
\* Not included above, but deserving of recognition, are larger businesses that have been ground-breakers in reducing waste in their industries, among them [CitiField](#), [JetBlue](#), and [SilverCup Studios](#).

Figure 1 Breakdown of Reuse Entities in NYC Based on Products Handled



Source: DSNY 2019 NYC Reuse Sector Report

Reuse Outlets by Borough



Source: DSNY 2019 NYC Reuse Sector Report





**Astoria Park Shoreline Cleanup, March 2021**  
*Source: Queens SWAB Organizing Committee Member*

## Conclusion

Because communities are our greatest asset, any effort to reach a zero-waste future must include equipping Queens' public institutions, nonprofits, businesses, and community groups with the knowledge, tools, and resources they need to catalyze change. The City's previous [GreenNYC program](#) confirmed the importance of tapping into that potential, concluding in its 2017 [Small Steps, Big Strides](#) report that residents are essential to the success of any large-scale sustainability solution.<sup>30</sup>

In this brief overview of sustainability and zero-waste-related assets in Queens, it is clear that the array of efforts underway in the borough, if given more support, could become even more powerful advocates for New York City's zero-waste future. Our research found:

- Queens is rich with close to 200 sustainability and zero-waste assets, with more needing documentation;
- The presence of 11 colleges and universities in the borough, not all included in this report, can be leveraged to serve as community educators around zero waste and sustainability practices;
- While we found assets in nearly all Queens neighborhoods, over half (55%) were clustered in nine communities (Astoria, Long Island City, Ridgewood, Flushing, Jamaica, Corona, Sunnyside, Jackson Heights, Forest Hills);
- Although food scrap drop-off and composting are critical to diverting organic materials from landfills, we can do more to prevent food waste before it reaches that stage. Most urgently, almost no Queens restaurants are taking advantage of the opportunity offered by Rescuing Leftover Cuisine to save food from restaurants while still safe and able to feed thousands of food-insecure Queens residents.

ENDNOTES

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