

Brand Audit Guide



#breakfreefromplastic

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Introduction

Thanks for your interest in holding a Brand Audit in your community! This guide contains everything you need to know to run a successful brand audit event. If you have a question that isn't addressed in this document you can email us at info@storyofstuff.org.

So, what exactly is a brand audit? Think of it as a public litter cleanup with a healthy dose of citizen science! Volunteers collect plastic trash they find in the environment: on beaches, roadsides, public parks, or even in your own home. Next, participants catalog the products and brands that make up the plastic trash they collected. The corporations behind these brands created and ultimately profited from this waste, leaving us to clean up the mess. This activity helps identify which companies bear the most responsibility.

Let's Talk About Plastic Pollution

Before diving into the nitty gritty of organizing a brand audit near you, let's review how we at The Story of Stuff Project talk about plastic pollution. It's important that we're all on the same page! We suggest familiarizing yourself with this information and sharing it with other participants at your event. Let's dive in:

Much of the conversation about plastic pollution focuses on waste in the ocean – we've all seen the heartbreaking images of a turtle stuck in a six-pack ring or a seabird with a stomach full of plastic. And truly, what is happening to our oceans is deeply worrying – but it's also just one part of the story.

In reality, plastic pollutes at every step. Plastic begins its life as fossil fuels, so when we're talking about plastic we also have to talk about the risks and consequences of fossil fuels – from fracking pollution to pipeline explosions. The next step is production – and here, too, we see pollution. The plants that produce plastic and its various chemical ingredients release a variety of pollutants that poison surrounding communities. What's more, these facilities tend to be located in low-income and other marginalized communities, where people may lack the political power to fight back. Plastic harms people and the planet well before it reaches store shelves.

What about disposal? How is plastic ending up in the ocean and the environment? Big Plastic wants us to blame individual litterbugs or countries in the Global South. **In reality, countries in the developing world are being flooded with low-value plastic that can't be recycled – much of it being produced by multinational corporations based in the US and EU like Nestlé, Proctor and Gamble, and Unilever.** And because these countries often don't have the same type of waste collection infrastructure – like curbside trash pickup – that we enjoy in countries like the U.S., there is nowhere for that waste to end up *except* the environment.

What's more, for decades countries in the Global North have been exporting their trash to Asian nations. Valuable recyclables get sorted out, but the low- and no-value plastic gets burned, buried in a landfill, or released into the environment.

In either case, the multinational corporations that produce and sell single-use, low- and no-value plastic that can't get recycled bear ultimate responsibility for what happens to their products at

the end of its life. **These multinational corporations are the real litterbugs that need to be held accountable.**

That's why the global #breakfreefromplastic movement has developed a unified strategy to take on Big Plastic and create a future free from plastic pollution. **#breakfreefromplastic is a global movement of almost 1500 organizations with a unified strategy to end plastic pollution.** One of the main pillars of that strategy is to reduce the amount of plastic being produced, with a focus on low- and no-value plastics.

First, we need to identify the products and packaging that most often ends up in the environment as plastic pollution. To do so, a #breakfreefromplastic member group based in the Philippines developed a strategy called a brand audit. Now, organizations around the world are mobilizing to conduct brand audits under the banner of the #breakfreefromplastic movement in order to create a global data set that will help us hold companies accountable for their waste.

Organizing a Brand Audit

Brand audits are an important tactic in the fight to end plastic pollution. Brand audits create data that support the push to hold corporations accountable for the plastic waste they create. They help reframe the narrative around who is responsible for plastic litter in the environment. They reveal the scale of the problem and help align a global movement. **Here's what's involved in organizing a brand audit:**

Plan

Your first step is to choose a location for your brand audit. This must be held in a public location that is safe and legal to assemble, and where there is plastic trash to collect. Good locations include coasts, rivers, parks, or city streets or even your street. If you can't recruit a group, you can also conduct a brand audit of your own trash at home. For public brand audits, it's recommended that you visit the spot before planning your event. You'll also want to pick a meeting point for the start of the event, and consider questions like parking if people will be driving.

Next, let us know that you'll be holding this event via the [#BreakFreeFromPlastic sign up form here](#). This helps us track the brand audit events happening around the world and ensures you get all the resources you need to complete and submit your brand audit.

Prepare

Once you've registered your brand audit with us, it's time to prepare for the day. You can either use a [custom made web application](#) (no download required) or use a trusted pen and paper to record your data. Here are the supplies that you'll need to make your event a success:

- Print & bring:
 - This guide
 - The brand audit [web app](#) OR
 - Plenty of [data entry forms](#)
 - Copies of the [visual identification guide](#)

- If you can find one, bring a guide of what's recycled locally to complete the form
- Pens, pencils, and clipboards or another hard surface to write on (if using forms)
- Lots of battery life or consider a portable charger for your phone (if you use the app)
- Gloves to handle waste safely (optional: Tongs, grabbers, or other gear that will help with waste collection)
- Trash / recycling bags or buckets to dispose of the waste you collect
- Optional: supplies for volunteers, like snacks, water, and sunblock (if you're not providing these, you should remind your volunteers to bring them)

Promote

Now it's time to build your team of helpers! Start off by thinking about how many helpers you want. The amount of trash, size of the area and equipment available should help you determine how many helpers you want joining the brand audit. Next, reach out to your networks: friends, social media networks, public forums, environmental groups, volunteer and civic groups, anything you can think of. You might also contact local elected officials, and use the event to call attention to the need for policies that will reduce plastic pollution. Finally, consider inviting local media to come check out your event!

Running a Brand Audit

You've planned, prepared for, and promoted your event. Finally, it's time to run the brand audit itself!

On the day of your event, be sure to arrive early, before volunteers start showing up. Be sure to welcome everyone and thank them for participating – this is a great opportunity to welcome new people to the movement or to grow your own network as a Changemaker.

Getting Started

To begin, welcome your volunteers and thank them for attending. Introduce yourself and invite everyone to do the same (if your group isn't too large).

Next, we suggest reading or paraphrasing the "Let's Talk About Plastic" section from this guide. This is a great opportunity to educate people about the plastic crisis, and to make sure that we as a movement remain aligned in our communications about this issue. This will also help volunteers understand what a brand audit entails and how it fits into the broader effort to tackle plastic pollution.

Finally, describe to them how the event will run. You might split your volunteers up into two groups; have one group start collecting waste, while the other group starts collecting the data about that waste. Or, you could have your whole crew collect, then audit, the waste together. It's up to you! Either way, make sure that everyone understands what is expected of them. Be sure to leave time for folks to ask questions!

Remember, the safety of you and your volunteers comes first. If you come across anything that would be unsafe to handle, **leave it and notify the appropriate authorities.**

Recording Your Data

The first thing to decide is whether you plan to use the web app on your phone or data forms in this document. If you're using printed forms, take a few minutes to outline the parameters of the brand audit, including:

- The date and location of the audit
- Start and end time
- Number of participants
- Your organization name if you have one (please add Story of Stuff Project too!)
- The approximate area covered for the audit.
- Add the type of location e.g. beach, park, home etc
- As best you can, approximate the volume of each of your collection containers and the total number of containers once you've finished
- If you're not using the web app, [use this page](#) to find and mark the latitude and longitude of your clean up destination.

We're interested in collecting data about plastic waste in the environment – so your first step will be to separate out plastic from the other materials you collect – please make sure that those still get recycled or otherwise disposed of properly.

Next, use the data entry form and material identification guide (or app) to record the following about each item you collect. Please be sure to fill in the details about your brand audit on every data sheet to make sure that we know where your data was collected. Record:

- The brand (ex: Powerade, Kit Kat, McDonald's). If a brand is not present or identifiable, leave it blank
- Item description: mark what the product is (ex: straw, takeout container, shopping bag)
- The product type:
 - HP – Household products (detergents, cleaning products, bleach, cleaning tools, cigarette butts, textiles, etc.)
 - FP – Food packaging (chip bags, wrappers, takeout containers etc.)
 - PC – Personal care (soap, shampoo, toothpaste, medical products, etc.)
 - SM – Smoking materials (cigarette butts, lighters, tobacco packaging)
 - FG – Fishing gear (nets, hooks, lines)
 - PM – Packaging materials (boxes, styrofoam, enveloped, tape)
- The type of plastic – use the “Material Identification Guide” to select one of the following categories: PET #1 HDPE #2 PVC #3 LDPE #4 PP #5 PS #6
 - Note: some items have multiple components with different types of plastic; record these separately (ex: a soda bottle is two entries: the bottle is #1 PET plastic, and the cap is #5 PP plastic)

- Layers: some items are single layer (a plastic bottle or film wrapper) whereas others have multiple components with multiple different layers (tetra pack, or a plastic backed on cardboard), please record or mark unsure if you don't know.
- Recyclable: If you have a local recycling guide, use the check box to check off against whether the item is recycled locally.
- Number of pieces: if you collect multiples of the same item, record the total tally in this column and add up in the total column afterwards.

Sharing Your Brand Audit Story

Sharing photos and videos from your event is a great way to showcase the global movement working to stop plastic pollution, and hold the companies responsible accountable. Together, we can change the conversation about plastic waste! Here are some ideas:

- Take photos of branded trash in their environment or in piles of branded trash
- Tweet the pictures at the brands whose packaging you find with the hashtags #breakfreefromplastic #BrandAudit2019 and #isthisyours?
- Take a team photo next to a sign of where you are or next to the branded trash that we can use for social media (please make sure the people in the photo consent to having their photo shared).
- You can also share a short video from your event – mention where you are, what you're doing, and show some of the plastic waste you've collected.

Clean Up

When you're finished with your event, dispose of the waste you collected, recycling everything you can. Be sure to thank your volunteers!

After the Event

After your event has concluded, submit your data through the web app or if you used the forms submit your data to #breakfreefromplastic at:

www.breakfreefromplastic.org/brand-audit-online-form/

The Story of Stuff Project also uses Brand Audits as a tactic for specific campaigns. You may have been asked to focus on specific products or brands, and to submit data or photos to The Story of Stuff Project via email at info@storyofstuff.org. Keep an eye out for additional communications from us!

Thank You!

Thank you for being part of our global community of Changemakers and for taking action to end plastic pollution. We are powerful together! Keep up the good work.