



Post-Landfill Action Network Ethical Partnerships Policy

Est. Jan. 2022

PLAN's Mission & the Goals of this Policy

PLAN's mission is to support students in reimagining systems beyond the Linear Consumption Economy. Our generation to be changemakers. Our partnerships support and recognize industry leaders who are restructuring broken systems towards a vision of systemic change, with a focus on developing solutions to the Waste Crisis. Our partnerships also work with other movements to create cross collaborative solutions. In light of this, the Ethical Partnerships Policy (EPP) aims to outline our values, describe the types of organizations PLAN partners with, and lay out our expectations of partners. This document is meant to be used as an internal guide when choosing partnerships and also as an informational resource for potential partner organizations to view prior to solidifying their partnering relationship with PLAN. Please note that this is a living document that is subject to change as we evolve and grow over time.

Our partnership strategy has the following goals:

1. We believe that solving the Waste Crisis requires a *movement*, and within it radical collaboration between mission-aligned organizations. We strive to support others fighting for social and environmental justice, and seek support from our allies as well. Partnerships make us all better changemakers.
2. Our partners offer a wide variety of areas of expertise and methods of changemaking, from high-tech businesses to grassroots organizing. As we continue to build and grow the Zero Waste Movement, we consider it our responsibility to expose students to companies and organizations working at every point of intervention. Students are forming their own perspectives and opinions, and PLAN's partnerships are a tool to support and guide their exploration.

As a zero waste organization with a systemic focus we address the full Linear Consumption Economy (LCE) through the [Points of Intervention theory of change](#), which PLAN applies to the LCE. Every stage of this economy is uniquely destructive and harmful, but at every stage there are also activists, companies, communities, governments, and organizations challenging it and pushing for change. From active resistance to product redesign, reuse systems to regulation, PLAN partners and works in solidarity with changemakers whose strategies vary widely. We work with for-profits, non-profits, community and mutual aid groups, individual changemakers and more. We actively seek partners whose work complements ours in the transition from a linear to a circular economy.

PLAN seeks partners whose values align with ours. Our [DEI Mandate](#) spells out PLAN's organizational commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. We exclusively work with partners who hold the values outlined in our DEI Mandate, and seek to ally ourselves with groups that are contributing to an increasingly diverse, equitable, and inclusive movement. We seek to work

with partners who actively incorporate and elevate historically-marginalized voices as they work towards solutions.

PLAN's willingness to partner with other organizations, and companies in particular, is coupled with a healthy dose of vigilance. However, even with the best of intentions, all organizations have their shortcomings. We do not expect perfection when working with partner organizations. PLAN commits to carefully vetting those we ally with and vows to listen to the concerns of our community—especially students—as they arise.

Towards the goals described above, PLAN partners with both for- and non- profit organizations. We recognize that we relate to these entities in different ways. The bulk of this document will be dedicated to exploring our vision for, expectations of, and relationships with partners who approach change from different points of intervention along the Linear Consumption Economy.

Partnership Expectations

In the following sections, we've laid out some guidelines for our partnerships. It is important to note that PLAN is selective in the partnerships we choose and will not work with any company or organization that can't adhere to these expectations. In other words, the list below enumerates things that we specifically look for in potential partners. Furthermore, we understand that we are all doing our best in an imperfect and broken system. In addition to the qualities listed below, we look for our partners to engage in constructive conversation and think critically—making room for us all to grow together.

Non-Profits

- Vision

We work with nonprofits that support the values stated above, including those who do so without a specific focus on zero waste but instead broader environmental and social justice themes (e.g. focus on dismantling racism, transphobia, ageism, classism, etc.). PLAN is uniquely positioned to illuminate connections between zero waste and other social justice movements to create more collective power. We strive to actively create a strong network of zero waste and social justice advocates. PLAN works with nonprofit partners toward a just transition to an equitable world without wasted people, resources, or talent.

- How we work together

PLAN's relationships with non-profit partners include many collaborative events & projects, speaking engagements, workshops and trainings as well as educational resource sharing (manuals), endorsing each other's work and amplifying messages, and joint grant funding. We especially thrive when working in close collaboration on specific projects that each partner group brings certain expertise to.

- **Expectations**

PLAN expects the nonprofit organizations that we work with to:

- Prioritize both environmentally and socially conscious values, coupled with effective implementation strategies that have measurable and lasting impacts on the greater society.
- Holistically approach problems and create solutions based on systemic change, not individual actions.
- Be accountable and reliable for their stakeholders, PLAN included.
- Treat workers well and invest in them through non-exploitative work relations (staff, interns, board, volunteers, partners, etc.).
- Be communicative and include PLAN in spaces where they deem our expertise to be relevant.
- Foster representation for those with marginalized experiences and identities in organizational leadership.

- **Concerns**

PLAN is wary of working with nonprofit organizations that:

- Are culturally appropriative and unwilling to make changes when this is brought to their attention.
- [Greenwash](#)
 - An organization is "greenwashing" when it makes superficial changes in order to market itself as sustainable, without making real, systemic improvements to its business model and practices. This practice can make it difficult to discern which companies are legitimate in their efforts to make positive change.
- Are primarily funded or governed by companies with an interest in maintaining the consumption culture status quo.
- Defend individuals who are accused of racist, sexist, homophobic, classist violence etc.
- Impose themselves on a "vulnerable" community from the outside, rather than growing from the community and its needs (Savior Complex Nonprofits).

- **Who are our partners?**

- **The Zero Wasters**

These partners tend to be well-established Zero Waste Movement influencers, often with a conservationist bent. We draw upon their long history, educational resources, and national credibility to give our students access to highly reputable educational material, speakers, etc. PLAN is able to help these organizations expand their reach to include more students.

- **Sustainability in Higher Ed**

When students want to reform large-scale campus systems such as dining or recycling, we often draw upon the expertise of partners and work together instead of competing. The values of working with this type of partner include: (a) the opportunity to learn from their campus coordination systems (b) an avenue to

understand what issues other organizations address on campuses and (c) insight into what other conversations students are surrounded by and what other movements are important to them in conjunction with zero waste.

- **Youth in Climate Justice**

There are many young people taking their place in national discourse as the “next generation” to be affected by the climate crisis. There are organizations supporting and guiding those climate-change focused youth. Zero waste is only one part of the environmental crisis and it is beneficial to collaborate with others working on other aspects, particularly climate change.

- **Frontlines**

We use this term to describe grassroots resistance organizations using direct action to fight for the rights of marginalized peoples in the movement. From public health disparities to Superfund sites, environmental degradation systemically murders the marginalized. PLAN seeks to connect with and support those most impacted by fossil fuel and waste infrastructure in order to build a more equitable zero waste movement.

- **Waste Industry**

While we don't work within/for/with the traditional Waste Establishment, we specifically seek to work with those waste management organizations that recognize the need for significant industry shifts and are committed to creatively changing it from the inside. Our current reality includes significant waste streams, and PLAN partners with those who are creating new ways to recover materials and are handling waste in the least oppressive way possible.

- **Advocacy and Awareness**

These organizations are focused primarily on educating the public about environmental issues and pushing for solutions through public engagement. Usually they provide science and data based educational tools on issues connected to waste that PLAN draws on when students need more information on the movement.

For-Profits

- **Vision**

The for-profit sector is often, and correctly, framed as the villain in our narratives about consumption and exploitation. While it is certainly true that capitalism is the root of many of our planet's woes, we also recognize a broad community of “social entrepreneurs” who seek to decouple profit from destruction. PLAN believes that there is value in partnering with and uplifting these ethical organizations. In particular, we recognize the value of the for-profit sector in building infrastructure for medium-term solutions to waste.

As stated above, all partnerships should first and foremost maintain PLAN's values. When considering who to partner with, PLAN first asks, "If the world were significantly more zero waste, which companies and organizations would thrive and contribute to a circular economy?" We seek to work with corporate partners whose business models: (1) accelerate the transition away from wasteful systems and practices, (2) actively foster the development of a zero waste world, and (3) center justice and equitable treatment of all people in their work.

- **How we work together**

PLAN works with company partners in a variety of ways, and also remains open to exploring new and different projects. A few examples of previous partnerships include sponsorship of the Students for Zero Waste Conference and Points of Intervention Tour, exhibiting at PLAN events, manual and resource creation, digital and in-person workshops, speaking events, and discounts for member campuses.

- **Expectations**

PLAN expects the for-profit companies that we work with to:

- Offer a business-model-based solution to waste, not merely reduce the waste associated with their own operations or disposable product.
- Challenge planned obsolescence via upcycling, repair, recycling, durability, etc.
- Be transparent about their own business practices, operations, and sourcing.
- Explicitly and publicly prioritize both environmentally and socially conscious values.
- Center coalition building and cooperation (not marketing deliverables) in partnership development.
- Invest in their people. This applies to staff, laborers, contractors, interns, board members, volunteers, etc.
- Value representation in organizational leadership and actively create opportunities for advancement of underrepresented folk.
- Closely monitor and report on any overseas operations. Partners' overseas facilities should exceed local environmental and labor standards.
- Be informed, respectful, and flexible when working with vulnerable and/or traditionally marginalized populations.

PLAN prefers the for-profit companies that we work with to:

- Bear trusted certifications such as B Corp, 1% for the Planet, LEED, USDA Organic, Green America, Bluesign Certified, NMSDC, Fair Trade Certified, FSC, etc.
- Regularly publish evidence of thorough impact assessment (ie: supply chain tracking, life-cycle analysis, B Corp Assessment).
- Offer funding and other support to non-profit and community organizations in their sphere of influence.
- Structure their organization in a creative or non-traditional way (ie: cooperatives, non-hierarchical structures, etc)
- Have existing relationships with students or campus communities.

- Concerns

We have made a list of qualities that we would consider barriers to partnership. PLAN is weary of working with for-profit private companies that:

- Associate with or advancing the growth of landfill / incinerator infrastructure.
- Consider incineration to be recovery, whether energy recovery or resource recovery.
- [Chemical Recycling proponents](#) (e.g. Pyrolysis)
- Invest in the proliferation of plastic production.
- Associate with multinational conglomerates; specifically organizations that directly support / benefit from the top [global plastic polluters](#).
- Are publicly traded companies.
- [Greenwash](#).
 - A company is "greenwashing" when it makes superficial changes in order to market itself as sustainable, without making real, systemic improvements to its business model and practices. This practice can make it difficult to discern which companies are legitimate in their efforts to make positive change.

- Who are our partners?

- [Repair](#)

Companies that sell repair tools and products to make the goods you already have last longer. This helps prevent planned obsolescence, divert material from waste streams, and shift the ways we relate to our "stuff." PLAN is interested in collaborating with these companies because they contribute to the circular economy by providing students with the tools and equipment to mend their broken goods.

- [Reuse Systems](#)

There is a growing movement of companies building reuse infrastructure into their business models. These companies create a system for consumers to purchase and use goods that are recovered or shared. PLAN believes that building the reuse economy is crucial to moving away from linear consumption, so we work to connect students with these partners.

- [Personal Reuse / Zero Waste Lifestyle Alternatives](#)

Some of PLAN's partners offer reusable or durable alternatives to disposable consumer products. Although we recognize that owning a reusable lifestyle item isn't the answer to the zero waste crisis, PLAN also acknowledges that these small shifts in everyday life are important to the mission of advancing the movement. PLAN often collaborates on discounts with these companies, helping students access products that may otherwise be outside of their price range. We acknowledge that this sector of zero waste lends itself particularly towards over-emphasis on individual rather than systemic reform, and can spur a new type

of consumerism. As such, we keep a critical eye towards new partnerships in this category.

- **Material Innovation**

PLAN partners with some companies that creatively use natural, organic, or compostable materials in their products as an alternative to toxic synthetics. There is a great need to develop non-plastic options, especially in packaging, so we work to showcase innovative alternatives. One challenge of working with companies that offer “technological solutions” is that it is often difficult to verify their claims. We are cautious not to uplift companies that are greenwashing in this manner.

- **Expanded Recycling & Upcycling**

Some of PLAN's partners focus on turning a specific waste stream into a usable product. These companies help fill the gaps in our material recovery systems by recycling or upcycling uncommon materials (e.g. mattresses, computer parts, & cork). While upcycling has limitations, we value these companies' contributions to recovering end-of-life materials and to creating products that start a conversation about waste.

- **Restorative / Regenerative**

There's a category of companies that are not necessarily waste-focused but are trying to build regenerative ecosystems through “Green Business” models. A “green business” can be defined as a company that internalizes the negative impacts (or externalities) that their operations impose environmentally and socially. We acknowledge that these companies do not provide the perfect solution but they meet society where it's at, with the goal of pushing the boundaries of how our economy works towards sustainable models. PLAN is mission-aligned with this approach. Unfortunately, we operate within a capitalist society that is at odds with the principles of a zero waste world. Sustainability-minded businesses bridge the gap between capitalist functionalism and environmental idealism.

Process of Partnership

At PLAN, we routinely engage in lengthy discussions that evaluate and vet companies on their sustainability claims, and attempt to make the important distinction between greenwashing and genuine changemaking.

- **Research**

Potential Partners go through a review process led by PLAN's Director of Partnerships beginning with initial research on an organization or company. This can include the organization's own marketing materials, news articles & reviews, conversations with mutual contacts, and other information.

- **Conversation**

Once research is complete, an initial call is set up to discuss in more depth the vision and mission of the potential partner group, as well as how PLAN can create a mutually beneficial relationship. This time is also used to address any initial questions and concerns that came up during research. If the initial call goes well, PLAN and the other party discuss partnership opportunities.

- **Decision Making**

As of Fall 2018, decisions about potential partnerships are made by the Director of Partnerships and subject to full team review. The full team should be kept up-to-date about new partnerships.

- **Continued Accountability**

PLAN commits to being responsive to critiques expressed by our community (especially students), even for long-standing partners. Students have the power to influence PLAN's partnerships. When concerns are brought to our attention, we strive to share those perspectives with partners and, where possible, to work with them to improve. We also reserve the right to stop working with partners who are unresponsive to our concerns or have too gravely violated the trust of our community.

Conclusion

We would like to state that we don't claim to have absolute solutions to waste. In fact, many organizations are dependent on the existence of waste streams in order to grow. Although the Zero Waste Movement is not perfect, we strive to "work with what we've got" today to make a better tomorrow. This Ethical Partnership Policy does not aim to gatekeep the movement, but instead to push the movement further in terms of HOW we work towards justice as a network.

How we relate to and work with partners is of the utmost importance. At PLAN, we believe it is important to engage in relational instead of transactional partnerships. What we mean by that is making authentic, meaningful connections with those we work with. We recognize the need to reestablish the humanity in doing business that is so often stripped away by capitalist norms. If we expect to grow a movement, it must be built on strong foundations through partnerships that are attentive to detail, honest, and reliable. Symbiotic relationships allow us to build coalitions & grow the movement. Whether we are working with a partner to provide campus programming, zero waste gear, logistical advice, or educational materials to our student network, we want to do so with companies and nonprofits that are reflective, accountable, and compassionate towards their employees and communities alike.

We hold our partners to a high standard because we want to serve our network to the best of our ability. PLAN has always been dedicated to seeking out those with practical and innovative solutions to environmental and social justice problems. Thank you for being a part of the PLAN network! We are excited to grow PLAN's partnerships in order to foster a more robust movement.

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