

Position Statement on reusable swap systems

April 2022

Boomerang Alliance supports the use of reusable cup/container swap systems and applies a values-based criteria in their recommendation under our Plastic Free Places program.

Reusable cup and container swap systems are a direct response to the growing need for cafes and consumers to eliminate single-use takeaway waste.

There are numerous swap systems currently available on the market, which differ in terms of how the system works and is applied to the consumer. Despite the nuances, all are fundamentally based on the notion of ordering takeaway drinks or food items in a borrowed reusable receptacle (a cup or container), with the receptacle later returned to the same café, or to another participating cafe within a network of cafes using the same system.

Differences between systems are generally in the way of money deposits at point of sale, QR codes/app downloads to track cups, or consumer buy-in. There can also be considerable differences in the type and design of the receptables.

With reusables sitting high on the zero-waste hierarchy, increasing their use is of high importance within our [Plastic Free Places](#) program. We recommend reusable swap systems as they offer a viable alternative to single-use.

As with any product or service we recommend to businesses, we are impartial, only seeking to offer the best alternatives (from an environmental and waste standpoint) that we believe will suit a business's needs.

With an increasing volume of reusable swap systems on the market, our program seeks to make it easier for a cafe to determine which one to choose by narrowing down to a select few that will best suit their needs.

To do this, we developed a set of criteria derived from our experience of working one-on-one with hundreds of businesses around the country - finding out what is important to them and to what they perceive their customers may best respond. We use this to help us determine which may best suit any given business. Ultimately however, the decision is made entirely by the business.

Criteria:

1. Accessibility

How easy is the system to access for the cafe? Is it locally available and being used by nearby businesses, making it more likely to be successfully implemented?

2. Ease of Use

Is the scheme easy to use for both the cafe and customer? For example, does it require QR codes, downloading apps or depositing money? All of which could be perceived as potential barrier to uptake by a business.

3. Costs to business and consumer

What are the associated costs to both the business and consumer? Are these one-off upfront costs, or is it ongoing?



4. Support provided

Does the scheme offer support in the form of marketing materials? Do they have representatives who are easy to access and who respond in a reasonable amount of time? Do they continually support the cafe and are engaged, or is it hands off?

5. Materials

What are the cups/containers made from? Are they free from toxins such as bisphenols? Are they made from virgin or recycled materials?

6. End of life (circular economy)

Are the materials recyclable? Can they be recovered widely, or do they need to enter specific recycling programs (meaning items must be returned to the brand itself or another program once end of life is reached)?

7. Aesthetics and Use

Is the cup or container visually appealing to the café owner? Does it look durable for multiple uses?

8. Are there other options available i.e., not just cups?

As well as cups, does the reusable system provide containers for a takeaway container swap system to replace other single uses? This makes other swap options viable for the café.

The role of our Program within the communities we work is to provide suitable options to businesses; assist them to choose options that suit their needs; and encourage them to adopt values and behaviours that support long lasting change.

Boomerang Alliance receives no financial benefit or support from any swap system.