

Organising a sustainable event

About this guide

How do you organise a sustainable event? In this guide, we introduce the key areas to focus on including venue choice, communication, catering, suppliers, and transport. Plus, if you're just feeling your way with sustainability, we share some easy ways to get started to make your event make a positive impact, for your customers, your business, and our planet.

Green
Tourism



Why is sustainability important when it comes to events?

Businesses should always consider sustainability factors when planning an event, be it a dinner, a conference, or an awards ceremony. Why? Because events like this have an impact on the environment because they use resources such as materials, energy, and water. But by implementing sustainable practices, you can reduce your event's environmental footprint, thereby doing your bit to contribute to a more sustainable future – as well as potentially make cost efficiencies.

Sustainability is not only about environmental but also social and economic impacts. Being sustainable shows a commitment to social responsibility, for example, by contributing to the well-being of local communities.

Consumers increasingly consider a business's social and environmental impact in their brand affection and purchasing decisions. By actively demonstrating a commitment to sustainability, you can enhance your business's brand reputation and positively differentiate from competitors.

Finally, although pursuing sustainable practices may involve an initial investment, it can often lead to cost savings, especially over the long term through, for example, energy and water efficiencies, and waste reduction. Therefore, being sustainable is good for the planet – and for your bottom line.



Seven key considerations for planning a sustainable event

1. Venue.

Look for a venue that has implemented sustainability initiatives such as energy-efficient lighting, low-flow plumbing fixtures, and waste reduction measures. Also, consider venues that are easily accessible by public transport or that facilitate 'active travel' by being accessible on foot and providing bicycle storage.

2. Technology.

Look at how you can utilise technology to organise, promote, and run your event, reducing reliance on paper and other physical materials.

3. Community engagement.

Events can positively impact local communities by, for example, boosting the local economy or generating employment opportunities. But the impact can also be negative such as by putting stress on local resources or creating tensions between attendees and locals. Identify and assess all potential impacts to amplify the positive and mitigating the negative.

4. Catering.

Select a caterer that – as much as is practical - sources local and organic food and uses reusable or compostable tableware. Avoid individually packaged items and consider providing water stations instead of bottled water.

5. Suppliers.

Using local suppliers supports the local economy and reduces the emissions associated with transportation. Working with local suppliers can also help to build relationships with the community, generating goodwill for future events – and further business opportunities.

6. Decorations.

Avoid single-use decorations such as balloons. Instead, choose decorations made from recycled or natural materials that can be composted or recycled after the event.

7. Transport.

Road travel to and from events contributes to traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions. Encouraging the use of public transport, active travel, or even car sharing can help to reduce the environmental impact of attendee travel.

Seven actions to get started

1. Venue.

Find out if the venue has a recognised sustainability certification such as Green Meetings, Green Tourism, LEED, or ISO 20121, which are all good indicators of sustainable standards. If not, check the venue's website to see if they talk about their sustainability commitment, and if they show any examples of it in practice. You could also ask the venue directly about their sustainability practices and policies.

2. Technology.

Use digital invites/tickets and registration instead of paper formats. At the event itself, use digital screens or apps to display event information instead of printing programs or handouts.

3. Community engagement

Partner with local charities or organisations to involve the community in the event planning process. Consider donating a portion of the event proceeds to a local cause.

4. Catering.

Choose a catering company that proudly promotes its use of locally sourced and organic produce. Ask the caterer and the venue about how you can reduce food waste, such as portion control, or composting or donating surplus food.

5. Suppliers.

Review your current supply chain and map the location of any regular suppliers, allowing you to quickly identify local suppliers when hosting an event in a specific area. Where there are gaps use online directories such as the Soil Association's Find a Supplier service.

6. Decorations.

Consider renting decorations instead of purchasing new ones. Otherwise, use decorations made from recycled paper or biodegradable materials.

7. Transport.

Encourage or incentivise attendees to use public transport, active travel, or car sharing to the event. If transportation is provided, consider using electric or hybrid vehicles.