

# Running a sustainable event

## About this guide

How do you run an event sustainably? This guide introduces the key areas to focus on, including energy, water, waste, transport, and sourcing. We also share some simple ways to get started, plus some handy tips and best practice examples. Moreover, we provide an overview of the sustainable events certification, ISO 20121.

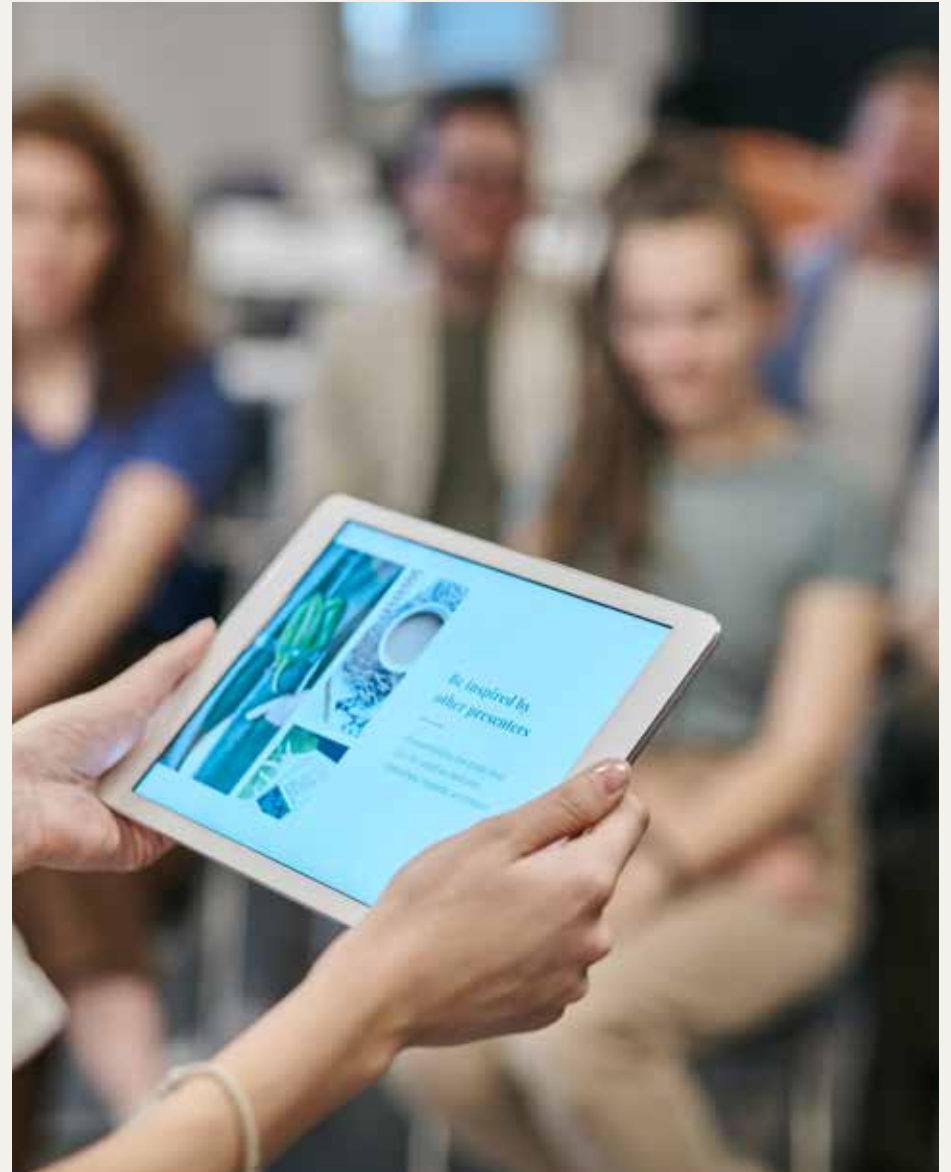
We hope that this guide will inspire you to make your event, whether it's a meeting, a conference, or an awards dinner, more sustainable – and give you the tools and resources to do so.



## Why it is important to make your event sustainable?

More than ever, your customers, staff, and other stakeholders expect businesses and organisations to operate in a socially responsible and environmentally sustainable way. Meeting - and demonstrating - these expectations will build, trust, loyalty, and brand equity, attracting and retaining customers and talent.

Good sustainability practice optimises resource usage and minimises waste, so reduces lower operational costs – and increases profitability. It will also help you to meet regulatory requirements. The responsible, ethical ethos that such practice entails helps the environment and so helps to foster a more sustainable future for all.



## Six areas to focus on

### 1. Energy and water efficiency.

Energy usage, such as lighting, heating, cooling, and sound systems, is one of the biggest environmental impacts of an event. Therefore, implementing energy efficiency measures and encouraging related behaviours will reduce energy consumption, emissions, and costs. Reducing water usage through measures such as low-flow fixtures and waterless urinals will bring similar benefits.

### 2. Technology.

Utilising digital solutions to promote and run your event can reduce environmental impact and could be the stimulus to reduce your business's reliance on paper and other physical materials in the long term.

### 3. Waste reduction and recycling.

Events can generate all manner of waste, from packaging to food waste to disposable tableware. Replacing single-use items with those that can be recycled reduces the volume of landfill and promotes a circular economy.

### 4. 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.

### 5. Sourcing.

Food, beverages, décor... events often require the sourcing of a large amount and variety of materials. Using sustainably sourced (local, ethical, responsible, or fair-trade) products reduces environmental impact, as well as potentially supporting the local economy.

### 6. Community engagement.

Events can have a significant impact on the local community so it's socially responsible to foster positive relationships with that community. Encourage attendees to learn about the local area and its culture, give local businesses a platform to showcase their products, generate local employment opportunities, and provide avenues for locals to input and raise concerns about the event. From PR to talent acquisition, good practice will have benefits for your business.

## Six ways to get started.

### 1. Energy and water efficiency.

Conduct an energy audit of the event venue to identify areas where energy consumption can be reduced. Similarly, look for opportunities to reduce water usage, such as fixing leaks or installing low-flow fixtures.

### 2. Technology.

Use digital invitations, registration, and ticketing platforms to reduce paper usage. Use digital screens or apps to display event information instead of printing programs or handouts.

### 3. Waste reduction and recycling.

Analyse previous events to identify the main sources of waste and work out how to avoid waste in those areas. Educate suppliers, attendees, and exhibitors about sustainable waste practices. For unavoidable waste, ensure waste disposal guidance is visible throughout the venue and provide sufficient disposal facilities.

### 4. Transport.

Encourage attendees to use sustainable transport options by providing information on public transport, organising shuttle buses, and offering incentives for attendees who use sustainable travel options.

### 5. Sourcing.

Work with suppliers to identify sustainable sourcing options for the goods and services you need such as staff, food and drink, equipment, and decor. Prioritise locally, ethically, and responsibly produced products and consider partnering with suppliers who have made a public commitment to sustainability.

### 6. Community engagement.

Engage with the local community by partnering with local charities or non-profit organisations and donating a portion of the event proceeds to them.

## Best practice for running a sustainable event.

- **Stakeholder engagement.** Engage with stakeholders - including customers, employees, suppliers, and local communities - to understand their needs and expectations and incorporate them into your event management plan.
- **Lifecycle thinking.** Consider the entire lifecycle of the event, from planning to post-event activities, and identify opportunities to reduce its environmental impact, and enhance its social and economic benefits.
- **Resource efficiency.** Optimise the use of resources such as energy, water, and materials, and minimise waste and emissions throughout the event.
- **Diversity and inclusion.** Foster diversity and inclusion by promoting equity, accessibility, and social responsibility in event planning and delivery.
- **Continuous improvement.** Regularly review your sustainable event management system and practice based on performance data and stakeholder feedback, to make it even more successful (and sustainable!) next time.

## Looking to go formal? An introduction to ISO 20121

ISO 20121 is a voluntary international standard that specifies requirements for implementing and maintaining a sustainable event management system (SEMS). It was developed to help organisations in the event industry, such as event planners, venues, and suppliers, plan and deliver events that are economically viable, socially responsible, and environmentally sustainable.

The standard provides a framework for organisations to identify the potential environmental, social, and economic impacts of their events and to take steps to reduce or eliminate those impacts. This includes managing energy and water usage, minimising waste and emissions, promoting social responsibility and inclusivity, and enhancing economic benefits for local communities.

ISO 20121 is designed to be compatible with other management systems standards, such as ISO 9001 for quality management and ISO 14001 for environmental management. By implementing ISO 20121, organisations can improve their sustainability performance, enhance their reputation, and meet the growing demand for sustainable events from stakeholders, including customers, employees, and communities.