



Green Meetings and Events

A Planning Guide

What is a green event?

Meetings, events and conferences allow professionals to get together to exchange information, share ideas and network. While important, these events can generate a significant amount of travel, use of resources (e.g. energy, paper, water) and waste.

The United Nations Environment Programme defines a green event as “one designed, organized and implemented in a way that minimizes negative environmental impacts and leaves a positive legacy for the host community.”

There are many simple things we can do to reduce the environmental impact of events. The purpose of this guide is to provide suggestions to help you do this. Applying a green lens when organizing meetings, events and conferences of all sizes can help tackle climate change and enhance environmental sustainability by reducing direct and indirect greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and waste. Your actions will demonstrate organizational leadership, set an example for others and could inspire them to follow suit.

Why plan green meetings or event?

Environmental awareness is at an all-time high; and citizens, employees and stakeholders alike have increased expectations for environmental conservation. With heightened awareness and expectations, there is an opportunity for government to show environmental leadership through incorporating green practices into all operations, including meetings and events. Doing so can also result in cost savings by minimizing the use of resources and reducing waste. Choosing to avoid bottled water, reducing transportation through venue selection and use of technology, and eliminating print materials are examples of actions that will both improve your event’s environmental sustainability and save money.

About this guide

The Green Meetings and Events Planning Guide will help you rethink the waste, energy and materials used during your event, and provide you with suggestions on how to reduce its environmental impact. These suggestions can be adopted and modified depending on the unique needs of your event. It is important that environmental considerations are incorporated early in the planning process, rather than as an afterthought. Green considerations should be integrated in all aspects of event management, and support from your executive is essential. This guide provides tangible approaches to help you green your event.



Approximately one-third of the food produced for human consumption each year is wasted.
(United Nations Food and Agricultural Program)

Four steps to planning your green event

It is important to think through how you intend to green your event. We have identified 4 steps to help with this process. These are not intended to be arduous, rather aim to provide ideas and information that can reduce the environmental impact of each of your planning decisions.

1. Commit to greening your event

Getting executive or senior management approval and buy-in from the outset is important. Everyone needs to be on the same page. Obtaining executive support will demonstrate a strong commitment to sustainability, and help ensure that required supports are available.

2. Establish and agree on objectives.

Integrate green considerations into all stages of the planning process, and identify the best options available to create a more sustainable event. Devise a plan that uses SMART objectives (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) to help identify what specific actions you are going to take, and how you will execute them. When creating your plan, also consider how ambitious you intend to be; e.g. do you want to green all aspects of the event or just focus on specific elements, do you plan to engage event participants, and will you green your planning meetings and processes? Keep in mind that every action helps, and while you may not be able to green everything, you can do something. Once you have identified your objectives, create a tool to help track the actions required, people responsible, and associated time frames. It is important to ensure that your plan includes a method for evaluating your efforts; e.g. if you are putting in place targets, such as zero waste, identify how you will track and measure your success.

3. Execute your plan.

When implementing your plan, revisit the objectives and processes outlined to complete the work and track your progress. Ensure the mechanisms required to meet these objectives are in place. This could include incorporating green requirements into tenders for any goods or services or developing and implementing a communication plan. For suggestions on how to do this, take a look at the [Buying Green Guide](#), developed by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to help integrate environmental conservation into the procurement of products and services. Also consider identifying the greatest opportunities and challenges related to greening your event, and use this to help inform your decisions. Ask venue and service providers how they can help to reduce the event's environmental impact, or identify other entities that could provide guidance, e.g. another department or organization that has hosted a green event or who has expertise on waste or energy efficiency.

4. Evaluate your efforts.

Your event plan should include an evaluation strategy to help determine if you met your objectives and targets, demonstrate key learning from the process, and identify opportunities to strengthen the sustainability of future events. Your evaluation strategy should identify the aspects of your event that need to be assessed, methods for doing this, and time frames for when the review will take place. Consider also seeking participant feedback on green practices; this could be included as part of a broader event evaluation.

Things to consider when greening your event

Think about whether your in-person event is definitely needed. Consider whether video or teleconferencing, small local workshops or a digitally broadcast presentation would work as an alternative. If you decide that getting together in one place is essential, make the most of this time. For example, explore opportunities for related meetings, training or workshops to be held in the margins.

There are five key aspects of your event to consider when reducing the environmental impact: venue and accommodations, food and food services, transportation, materials, and involving participants. Suggestions for each of these key areas are listed below and a checklist is provided at the end of the guide to assist with your planning. These suggestions are intended to be flexible and we encourage you to modify the list to meet your needs.

Venue and Accommodation

- Inform the manager of the venue about your commitment to sustainability and discuss options to make the event more sustainable.
- Look for venues that have green policies and practices. Remember that requesting green is key. **Ask venue providers about the following:**
 - Does the venue have a sustainability policy?
 - Are recycle bins for paper, cans, and plastics located throughout the property and, if accommodation is on site, are recycling blue boxes located in guest rooms?
 - Does the venue ensure that recyclable materials are diverted from landfill?
 - Does the venue compost food waste?
 - Does the venue have energy and/or water conservation programs (e.g. energy efficiency lighting and automatic lighting controls, low-flow taps, shower heads and toilets)?
 - Does the venue offer a linen and towel reuse program? This provides guests with the option to reuse their linens and towels more than once, thus reducing water, energy and detergent use.
 - Has the venue completed an energy audit recently and/or taken steps to improve their energy efficiency?
 - Does the venue keep current with environmental best practices within the meeting and hospitality industry by participating in eco-rating programs such as Green Leaf Eco Standard, Green Key or the International Associations of Conference Centers Green Star?
 - Has the venue received independent certifications or awards to show they follow sustainable practices?
 - Does the venue have any sustainable building certifications such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), BOMA BEST or Green Globes?



Each year, an estimated \$100 billion is spent on extracting, altering, packaging, shipping and consuming bottled water.
(Windsor Utilities Commission)

Food and Food Services

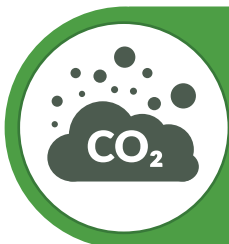
- Choose reusable items over disposable.
- Provide water pitchers and glassware rather than bottled water.
- Have your food and beverage suppliers use bulk dispensers for milk, cream, sugar, salt, pepper and other condiments, rather than individual sachets or cartons.
- Use cloth napkins or those made from post-consumer materials.
- Order the right amount of food and beverages for the number of participants. Over-ordering costs money and generates waste.
- Request locally produced and/or vegetarian food. If local or regional food isn't available, ask for food/produce that is seasonal, organic and/or fair trade certified.
- Consider partnering with a local charity to donate leftover food, or see if it can be brought back to the office to share with staff.
- Compost food waste. Tell participants you are trying to minimize food waste, ask them to put any food waste into a prominently-located container for composting.
- Consider the environmental impacts of any products/services you will purchase and source goods from environmentally responsible suppliers. See the [Buying Green Guide](#) fact-sheet on what to look for when procuring food and catering services.



30 per cent of waste in NL is made of organic material, much of which can be composted in a backyard or community compost.
(Multi-Materials Stewardship Board)

Transportation

- Choose a meeting venue that will minimize travel and facilitate public and/or active transportation for the majority of participants.
- Recommend accommodation within walking distance of venue, and encourage participants to walk or use public transport when possible.
- Provide information on walking and biking trails/routes and transit schedules.
- Ensure vehicles used during the event are appropriate in size for the number of participants you are transporting.
- Provide a shuttle service and/or facilitate carpooling by linking participants who need to travel to the same place around the same time (e.g. to the airport).
- Enable participation by teleconference and/or videoconference.
- Encourage participants to offset the greenhouse gas emissions associated with their transportation (many airlines offer this service).



34 per cent of greenhouse emissions in Newfoundland and Labrador are from transportation.
(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador)

Material

- Consider the environmental impacts when choosing any products you need to purchase and source goods from environmentally responsible suppliers. See the [Buying Green Guide](#) for tips and facts sheets on what to ask for when procuring products for your event.
- Send pre-event information electronically. If you need to send invites out by mail, make sure your mailing list is up-to-date.
- Register participants electronically, using registration software or your own electronic system. Avoid paper invitations, correspondence and tracking where possible.
- Avoid overprinting.
- Go paperless. Make presentations available by email or download; use whiteboards, projectors and posters rather than handouts or flip charts; use laptops or tablets for note taking, and encourage participants to do the same.
- If needed, use 100% post-consumer paper, always print double-sided, and put copies of any handouts at the entrance of rooms rather than at every chair - this will ensure only participants with a genuine interest/need will take them.
- Turn off computers, photocopiers and other equipment when not in use - don't leave them on standby.
- If needed, provide pencils and pens made out of recycled material. Reuse leftover material at future events and avoid printing dates on promotional banners and signage so they can be reused.
- Have visible and on-site services for the collection of recyclables and any reusable items (e.g. name badges, pens, etc.). If there is no recycling at the venue, inquire about having it added for the event. If this is not possible, consider alternatives such as taking it to your office for recycling or contracting an outside service.

Involve Participants

- Keep participants informed of your commitment to environmental sustainability and your green initiatives. Identify opportunities to include information on green initiatives in the agenda and promotional materials.
- When planning the event, notify participants that you will not have print materials available, and invite them to bring electronic copies on their devices (phones, laptops or tablets).
- Provide participants with information on how to reduce their travel emissions. Let them know that direct flights generate less GHG emissions than indirect flights (more emissions are generated during take offs and landings), provide information on public transit, carpooling options, and active transportation routes.
- Provide a contribution to an environmental non-governmental organization or a green project instead of gifts for presenters or consider local products made from sustainable materials (e.g. locally made crafts or non-perishable food products, such as organic jams or local chocolate). Avoid products made out of province.
- During the event remind participants about your green objectives. Arrange an information stall with advice on how to be more environmentally responsible at the event. Include suggestions on sustainable practices, and information on where they can learn more.
- Ask for participant feedback and involvement. You could offer a prize or donation to charity for those who arrived by greenest means or put forward the most imaginative ideas for improving future events. At the end of the event, ask participants if they were aware of the green initiatives at the event and if they have any additional suggestions which could be implemented in the future.

Going Further

After reducing the negative environmental impacts of your event as much as possible, consider calculating and offsetting the remaining GHG emissions to achieve a carbon-neutral event. Carbon offsets help mitigate climate change by compensating (or offsetting) the emissions associated with an activity such as transportation, by investing in another activity elsewhere that avoids or reduces the same amount of emissions (e.g. planting trees, renewable energy).

Purchasing carbon offsets to make air or ground travel carbon neutral is a convenient way to reduce the GHG emissions associated with an event. There are an increasing number of reputable options available, with established third-party accreditation. The David Suzuki Foundation and Pembina Institute have created a [Guide for Purchasing Carbon Offsets](#), and further information on carbon calculators and offset programs are available on the David Suzuki Foundation [website](#).

Carbon offset programs allow you to choose from a range of activities and initiatives to invest in, and costs approximately \$20.00 per tonne of emissions released. The price varies slightly within and between programs, depending on which offset standard you choose, and if you are offsetting flight emissions, the number of stopovers you have will impact your emissions and associated offset costs.

You could purchase carbon offsets for all greenhouse gas emissions linked to the event, including those incurred from travel by participants to get to and from the event, or opt to offset the emissions for which you are directly responsible (e.g. those resulting from travel by the host organization and any presenters invited, the energy used to heat/power the part of the venue being used) and invite participants to offset their own.

If you are interested in further enhancing your green event, consider adopting a green lens to all policies, procedures and processes linked to your event planning. Detailed information on this can be found in the ISO 20121 International Standard on event sustainability management systems.

Final Thoughts

Thank you for taking an interest in greening your event. While it may not be possible to implement all of the suggestions outlined in this guide, every action counts and we hope you will feel inspired to implement as many as possible. Why not also consider implementing these changes in your workplace. Reducing the emissions and waste in your daily operations will undoubtedly result in greener future events. If you have any comments or suggestions, please send them to climatechange@gov.nl.ca.

The total CO₂ emissions calculated using [less.ca](#) for a single passenger, direct round-trip flight from St. John's to Ottawa are 0.630 tonnes, costing less than \$20.00 to offset. The total CO₂ emissions calculated using [carbonzero.ca](#), for a return trip from Corner Brook to St. John's in a Chevrolet Sonic car, are approximately 0.24 tonnes, and cost \$5.97 to offset.



81 per cent of consumers would be willing to consume/ purchase fewer products to preserve natural resources.
(Cone Communications & Ebiquity Global)

A Check-List for Greening Your Meeting or Event

Venue & Accommodations

- Select a venues with a sustainability policy and/or energy and water conservation initiatives
- Inform the venue manager of your commitment to sustainability and discuss options to make the event more sustainable
- Request visible and on-site services for recyclables, compost and trash. If applicable, create a bin for reusable items such as lanyards
- If composting and recycling services cannot be provided by the venue, consider bringing it back to your office for appropriate disposal or contracting an outside agency to provide the service
- Have staff at waste stations to ensure people dispose of items properly
- Seek accommodations that offer linen and towel reuse programs, recycling, and other environmental initiatives

Food & Food Services

- Order the exact amount of food and refreshments, avoid over-ordering
- Use reusable dishes and cutlery
- Use water pitchers and glassware rather than bottled water
- Use bulk dispensers for milk, sugar, and condiments, rather than individual sachets or cartons
- Use cloth napkins or those made from post-consumer materials
- Partner with a local charity or farm to ensure leftover food is donated or composted
- Request food that is locally produced, vegetarian, seasonal, organic and/or fair trade certified

Transportation

- Minimize travel required during event planning
- Select a venue in a city/town closest to the majority of participants
- Recommend accommodation within walking distance of the venue
- Encourage and facilitate carpooling, public transit, active transportation and vehicle right-sizing
- Explore opportunities for participants/presenters to join via videoconference
- Consider offsetting the greenhouse gas emissions associated with transportation

Materials

- Ask yourself if an item is really needed before purchasing
- Consider the environmental impact of any products, source goods from environmentally responsible suppliers
- Prioritize local, recycled and biodegradable items
- Review the [Buying Green Guide](#) for Purchasing Environmentally Preferable Products
- Reduce use of paper and print materials
- Use post-consumer recycled paper and always print double sided
- Reuse old supplies, and save event materials for future use
- Ensure green messaging is included in event promotions
- Provide tips to participants/presenters on how to be more environmentally responsible at the event

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