

# how to plan a Sustainable Event

CONCERN, INC.  
1794 Columbia Road, NW  
Washington, DC 20009

Printed with vegetable-based ink  
on 100% postconsumer recycled paper.

## how to plan a Sustainable Event

Any event can be successful and sustainable. Here are some ideas to help you get started. Even if you only implement a few, you will make a difference! All it takes is vision and commitment. A sustainable event conserves and restores resources, honors and supports those involved, adds value to the local economy, and educates participants about the benefits of sustainability.

### Get Started

- ◆ **Engage members of the planning committee** in committing to a sustainable event. Set goals. Discuss criteria, outcomes, and means of measuring them.
- ◆ **Meet at sites** that are transit-accessible (bus, trolley, tram, train, metro), walkable, or bikable.
- ◆ **Publicize your commitment** to a sustainable event in your outreach materials and in your communications with potential sponsors, funders, presenters, participants, and contractors.
- ◆ **Research event sites**, contractors (organizers, caterers, etc.), and suppliers (paper, printers, bioware manufacturers, etc.) that have a commitment to sustainable practices.

### Plan the Event

#### *The Site*

- ◆ **Choose a site that is near public transportation** and/or provide shuttle service. Remember to publicize all the transit options in outreach materials.
- ◆ **Find out if the facility managers have adopted sustainable practices.** Do they buy locally sourced food and materials? Conserve energy and water? Use green construction materials? Ask if they are willing to work with the planning committee to improve the site's environmental performance in preparation for the event.

Further resources are available online at [www.sustainable.org](http://www.sustainable.org) and [www.swampnet.org](http://www.swampnet.org).

## The Presenters

- ◆ **Identify local presenters** as well as other experts to publicize local initiatives and talent.
- ◆ **Consult the national list of green hotels** to select potential rooms for out-of-town participants. Ask the planning committee and others to host presenters.
- ◆ **Use email to gather bios and photos** and to inquire about audio/visual requirements and accessibility and dietary needs.

## Publicity and Registration

- ◆ **Distribute 'Save the Date' information by email**, listservs, websites, and other electronic means to minimize paper use.
- ◆ **Provide online registration.**

## Event Materials

- ◆ **Paper:** Optimize the use of environmentally sound paper and packets by purchasing 100% post-consumer, chlorine-free or tree-free paper and print with vegetable-based ink. Check online resources for co-ops in your area to order in bulk.
- ◆ **Handouts:** Consider which materials need to be included in the packet (printed double-sided), and which can be provided online.
- ◆ **Name tags:** Use recycled paper. Request participants return the holder and provide a bin at the exit for this purpose.
- ◆ **Markers and White Boards:** Use water-based, non-toxic markers on reusable white boards.

- ◆ **Proceedings:** If they will be available, give participants a website address where they will be posted.
- ◆ **Reading Resources:** Prepare a list and post on website ahead of the event.
- ◆ **Presentations:** Request copies from presenters and post them on the event website.

## Food Service

- ◆ **Discuss your goals** with the caterer, Executive Chef, or facilities manager: Local organic and seasonal sources of food and beverages, sustainable seafood sources, vegetarian/vegan meals, and distribution of edible leftovers to charity. Closely estimate food amounts through a careful head count to minimize waste.
- ◆ **Compost:** Set up a system with the chef and food service team to gather all food preparation scraps for composting and hire a local organic farmer to take it to his or her farm for composting. Place a compost bin next to the food service area for participants to deposit leftovers.
- ◆ **Use reusable tablecloths**, napkins, plates, flatware, and beverage containers.
- ◆ **Use large containers** for beverages, condiments, and other food instead of individual packets, cans or bottles.

## Site Amenities, Signage, and Program

- ◆ **Use signage throughout** to educate participants about recycling, composting, water and energy conservation, and menu selection.
- ◆ **Include information in the program** about the sustainability objectives and how you intend to meet them.

Save trees

Improve soil

Minimize waste

Create community

Improve the local economy

Conserve water and energy

Support local farms and farmers

Reduce contributions to global warming

## Giving Back

- ◆ **Arrange in advance** to give something back to the host institution or nonprofit organizations. For example, by giving a donation to a re-tree effort you can offset global warming impacts from transportation to the event.

- ◆ **Seed packets** are an option for favors both for participants and presenters.

## At the Event

### Logistics

- ◆ **Signage:** Clearly mark all recycling and composting containers, energy and water conservation prompts, and menu selection (local, organic sources).
- ◆ **Decoration:** Select live plants; natural materials such as pumpkins, pine cones, organic community garden produce, or flowers; or re-usable or donatable materials for panel presentations, centerpieces, and other decorations. Raffle off plants to participants or donate to presenters, local schools, or charities.

- ◆ **Name tags:** Ask participants to recycle tags at the end of the event.
- ◆ **Transit:** Post information about transit options in a central place.

## Education

- ◆ **Announce to your participants** what the goals of the event are and ask their assistance in meeting them.
- ◆ **Develop and report out metrics:** e.g. water and energy savings, composting, and other sustainability objectives during the event and lessons learned.
- ◆ **Note any extra steps** that the event site has undertaken to become more sustainable; e.g. lighting, composting, nontoxic cleaning supplies, energy conservation.
- ◆ **Feature and give Certificates of Appreciation** to those who have 'walked the talk' at the event; e.g. event coordinator, Executive Chef, Food Service Team, and others.

## Evaluation

- ◆ **Ask participants to evaluate** the sustainability aspects with a packet questionnaire to be returned at the event. Also post it on the event website.
- ◆ **Calculate and report out results** at the event and post event outcomes and next steps on event website.

Celebrate your  
success!