

Sustainable Event Certification Guidance Document



There are two levels of certification an event may receive:

- **Zero Landfill Waste:** Your event will be awarded the Zero Landfill Waste Certification if it eliminates all polystyrene (Styrofoam) from the waste stream, provides both recycling and composting bins throughout the event space, and no extra trash cans are ordered for the event. Any pre-existing trash cans are not available for use or are repurposed and clearly labeled as recycling or compost bins.
- **Gold:** 75% of all applicable checklist items are achieved, including all Zero Landfill Waste credits.

ZERO LANDFILL WASTE: For our event, we agree to . . .

Eliminate polystyrene (Styrofoam).

- ✓ Event planner will work with vendors and event team to ensure Styrofoam will not be used in any way and that compostable or recyclable alternatives are available.



Polystyrene is not accepted in Emory's recycling stream, meaning it ends up in landfills that negatively impact the property values and quality of life of local communities, and release greenhouse gases. Polystyrene is a petroleum-based plastic, making it resource intensive and taking hundreds of years to biodegrade ([Earth Resource](#)).

Make recycling and composting bins available throughout the event space.

- ✓ Event planner will ensure event space already has adequate recycling and composting bins and, if not, contact [Emory Campus Services Special Events](#) to coordinate delivery and setup of recycling and composting bins.



Every year, Americans throw away enough paper and plastic cups, forks, and spoons to circle the equator 300 times ([Earth911](#)). Keeping waste out of trash cans helps Emory get closer to its goal of diverting 65% of waste from the landfill by 2015.

Order no additional trash cans for the event. Hide, cover, or label existing trash cans to be repurposed as recycling or composting bins. Clearly label recycling and composting bins and place in locations where they will be easily used.

- ✓ Event planner will indicate through a work order to [Emory Campus Services Special Events](#) not to deliver trash cans with recycling or composting bins. He/she will plan the event space accordingly to assure that trash cans are out of sight and recycling/composting stations conveniently placed.

- ✿ Through Emory's expanded recycling and composting capacity, the need for trash cans is virtually eliminated (except for Styrofoam). Studies have shown that in institutional settings, the simple act of placing recycling bins in convenient locations greatly increases the amount recycled ([Ludwig et al., 1998](#)).

Hint: Make sure to check out Emory's "[What to Recycle and Compost Guide](#)" and add bin labels, if necessary.

WASTE MINIMIZATION: For our event, we agree to . . .

Serve tap water with reusable, recyclable, or compostable cups. No bottled water will be served at the event.

- ✓ Event planner will make sure vendors know not to serve bottled water. Instead, they will have a plan to serve tap water from refillable dispensers into reusable, recyclable or compostable cups.
- ✿ Bottled water production consumes 1,000 times more energy than tap water, and producing one liter of bottled water requires up to three liters of tap water. It is estimated that 38 billion plastic water bottles end up in landfills worldwide each year ([Hydros- The True Cost of Bottled Water](#)).

Hint: Plastic cups are recyclable and paper cups are compostable, therefore it is not necessary to purchase special compostable dishware.

Encourage guests prior to the event to bring their own refillable bottles and/or mugs.

- ✓ Event planner will include a message about sustainability encouraging guests to BYOM (bring your own mug) on electronic invitations and publicity materials.
- ✿ The average American office worker uses 500 disposable cups each year ([Boston University](#)). Requesting guests to bring their own mugs/bottles can encourage sustainable behaviors beyond the event. Personal mugs can also be a fun way to start conversation among guests.

Make sure all event staff, including caterers, are knowledgeable about how to recycle and compost and are instructed to separate recyclable and compostable materials into the appropriate containers.

- ✓ Event planner will make time prior to the event to ensure event staff members understand how to separate different materials for recycling and composting.

 Having event staff trained in recycling and composting is a great way to lead by example by showing guests Emory's commitment to sustainability and serving as a knowledge base for guests to learn about recycling and composting.

Hint: Use a catering company, such as [Emory Catering](#), which is committed to Emory's sustainability initiatives and understands the recycling and composting streams, or educate your preferred caterer about how to recycle and compost and what materials are acceptable for Certified Sustainable Events. Refer to Emory's "[What to Recycle and Compost](#)" guide.

Use China or reusable plates, cups, bowls, serving containers, and cutlery. Use compostable, paper, or plastic items only if disposables are needed. No Styrofoam!

- ✓ Event planner will communicate in advance with caterers about reusable or compostable serving containers and utensils.

 In 2012, 7 million tons of plastic waste came from nondurable (one-time use) goods, including throwaway plates, containers, cups, and utensils ([EPA](#)).

Hint: [Emory Catering](#) provides compostable service without any additional charge, and china service ware is also available upon request for a nominal charge.

Minimize give-away items.

- ✓ Event planner will attempt to exclude give-away items from the event, or provide sustainable items if necessary.

 Minimizing give-away items avoids excess waste and reduces costs.

Hint: If give-away items are necessary, choose sustainable items such as reusable water bottles, potted herbs, or gifts/experiences from local businesses.

Minimize paper use.

- ✓ Event planner will utilize electronic invitations, communication, and publicity to minimize paper.



Producing one ton of paper requires 3 tons of wood and 19,000 gallons of water, and produces approximately 2,300 lbs. of solid waste and 5,700 lbs. of greenhouse gases ([CSU Ohio- Paper Facts](#)). The EPA estimates that recycling 1 ton of paper saves 17 trees and 7,000 gallons of water ([SF Gate- Recycling Instead of Landfills](#)).

Hint: Provide electronic meeting agendas and documents. Limit necessary paper materials and reuse or recycle any leftovers. Utilize social media platforms, email listservs, or websites instead of paper flyers and invitations. Inform guests as to why these options are being used. If printing is necessary, utilize double-sided/multi-page printing and draft mode versus regular printing. Hand-outs can be placed at the entrance, rather than each seat. [TRUMBA](#) (Emory's online website calendar and event registration software) is a great resource for publicizing events.

Minimize waste related to single-use name tags.

- ✓ Event planner will opt out of name tags, use reusable name tags, or collect and reuse plastic name tags after event.



Reusable name badges save on paper, ink, electricity, and delivery when compared to disposable ones. Protective sleeves also give them a longer lifetime.

Hint: For reoccurring events, OSI recommends purchasing durable name tags and organizing a system among event staff for dispersing and collecting name tags at each event.

Minimize waste from marketing materials.

- ✓ Event planner will opt for electronic flyers and a minimal number of printed flyers and other marketing materials. When physical materials are necessary, event planner will use banners, signs and posters made of reusable or recyclable materials.



Electronic flyers eliminate paper and plastic waste and can reach a greater audience. Laminated or plastic signs can be easily cleaned and reused. Laminate protects signs from handling, wear, and UV damage ([PhotoColorGraphix](#)).

Hint: Consider plastic signs with removable letters that can be altered for different events, and laminate reusable items to keep them in good condition. For reoccurring events, use language to allow banners, signs, and posters to be easily reused, and invest in durable materials.

Use sustainable paper options for any necessary paper use.

- ✓ Event planner will ensure that 100% post-consumer recycled, FSC-certified, or tree-free designated products (in that order) are used for the event.



100% post-consumer waste paper generates less solid waste and fewer emissions, and avoids using virgin wood. FSC-Certified products ensure water quality protection, prohibit old-growth forest harvesting and hazardous chemicals, and engage local communities. Tree-free paper is made from the residues of other products, such as sugar cane production, which would otherwise be burned or landfilled (Vanderbilt- Green Printing Guide).

Hint: These types of paper are available through Staples in Emory Express.

LOCATION: For our event, we agree to . . .

Use natural light as much as possible instead of indoor lighting.

- ✓ Event planner will schedule the event in a room with windows during daylight hours or host the event outdoors, when feasible. Event planner will turn off overhead or other unnecessary lights when sufficient natural light is available.



Utilizing natural lighting increases energy efficiency and reduces climate impact, while also improving the indoor environment and sense of well-being of occupants (EPA).

Switch off and unplug all indoor lighting, A/V equipment, and electronics when not in use.

- ✓ Event planner will communicate with whomever is running equipment to switch devices off when not in use.



A vampire load is the amount of energy an appliance uses while in "standby" mode or switched "off" while still plugged in, and can account for a large amount of a building's energy consumption (EPA- Climate Leaders Web Conference).

FOOD/FLORAL/DÉCOR: For our event, we agree to . . .

Incorporate local and/or sustainable food into the menu and specify on any signage (menu cards, buffet markers, etc.).

- ✓ Event planner will plan a menu that includes certified Fair Trade items, produce from local and/or sustainable sources, and/or certified organic products.



Sustainably grown food supports environmental health, worker welfare and wages, and farm viability, in addition to improved nutrition ([Eating Sustainably](#)). Signs serve as visual cues to remind us to incorporate sustainable behaviors into our day-to-day lives.

Hint: Ensure seafood is **not** on the 'avoid' list of the [Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch](#). Use stickers to indicate sustainable options on food vendor signage, or use recycled materials to make your own creative signage. To learn more about Emory's sustainable food initiatives, refer to the [Sustainable Food Guidelines](#) and the Office of Sustainability Initiatives [Sustainable Food](#) page.

Repurpose unopened or packaged leftover food or goods.

- ✓ Event planner will repurpose unopened or packaged food by donating to local charities, allowing attendees to take home leftovers, or using leftovers at other campus events.



Rotting food in landfills is a significant source of methane, a potent greenhouse gas. U.S. landfills collect 36 million tons of food waste annually. Feed people, not landfills ([EPA- Food Recovery](#)).

Hint: Ask for to-go containers when placing a catering order so leftovers can be easily distributed to attendees. Some local charities to consider donating leftovers to include [Atlanta Community Food Bank](#), the [Ronald McDonald House](#), and the Emory student group [Campus Kitchens Emory](#), a student run organization. Contact Naomi Maisel at namaise@emory.edu for more information about working with Campus Kitchens.

Provide Fair Trade coffee and tea, if refreshments are being served.

- ✓ Event planner will communicate with coffee/tea vendors about beverage options and select Fair Trade coffee/tea.



Fair trade certification improves incomes and working conditions of small farmers and gives these individuals the tools to improve their quality of life ([Emory- Eating Sustainably](#)).

Hint: Many vendors have fair trade options available, but they may require special requests.

Make vegetarian and vegan options available, if serving food.

- ✓ Event planner will work with food vendors to add vegetarian and vegan options, or eliminate meat options all together.

 The current livestock production system accounts for 37% of methane and 65% of nitrous oxide emissions, two of the most potent greenhouse gases. Producing 1 kilogram of animal protein requires 100 times more water than producing 1 kilogram of grain protein. Currently, 50% of the world's corn and 90% of the world's soybeans are not consumed by humans directly, but are used for animal feed on factory farms ([Emory- Eating Sustainably](#)).

Minimize food waste by requiring attendees to register for meals (rather than just showing up).

- ✓ Event planner will require an RSVP for attendees indicating the number of guests in their parties.

 Having an attendee headcount improves accuracy in food estimates, thus reducing potential waste.

Hint: [Signup Genius](#), [Punchbowl](#), and [Anyvite](#) offer free electronic invitation services.

Minimize material waste by serving condiments, sauces and spreads in bulk rather than individual packets.

- ✓ Event planner will request that vendors use bulk-size serving container options.

 Bulk dispensing containers can be refilled, thus reducing packaging waste. Individual condiment packets that are still full contaminate the recycling stream, therefore bulk options are best.

Minimize waste by choosing reusable or recyclable event décor rather than disposable.

- ✓ Event planner will use décor such as potted plants, or decorating with fabric rather than disposable plastic.

 Reusable decorations extend the life of the resource inputs and can serve dual purposes. For example, beeswax candles or potted plants can liven up event tables and be used as give-away items.

Choose flowers that are local, organic or certified sustainably and/or ethically grown.

- ✓ Event planner will search for local flower growers or utilize companies with certified sustainably grown flowers.



The cut-flower industry grows many flowers in developing countries. Companies that don't have environmental/ethical certification **may** overexploit water and land resources and risk workers' health due to pesticide exposure and low wages ([Food and Water Watch](#)).

Hint: [Whole Trade Guaranteed](#) is a good certification/company to consider when ordering sustainably grown flowers.

TRAVEL: For our event, we agree to . . .

Encourage attendees to use alternative commute options for all events, and/or proactively arrange carpooling for internal events.

- ✓ Event planner will provide alternative commute information along with the customary parking information to event attendees.



Alternative commute options contribute to reduced traffic congestion and emissions. Biking and walking improve personal health, and public transportation/carpooling can encourage community building and provide opportunities for social networking ([Green Plus- Alternative Transportation](#)). Carpooling decongests roads, saves money, and can save time where there are HOV lanes ([Green Living Tips](#)).

Hint: Consider providing walking directions, [bike rack locations](#), and [MARTA](#) and [Cliff Shuttle](#) routes to event attendees. Online programs like [ZimRide](#) make coordinating carpool easy. It is much more effective when peer-to-peer requests for carpooling are made.

Reduce commute miles by offering a virtual presence.

- ✓ Event planner will utilize virtual conferencing or a webinar for attendees who are not local or for out of town speakers if they are not already in the area.



Out-of-town guests and speakers use a lot of energy in transport- one roundtrip economy class flight from New York to Atlanta emits 0.24 metric tons of carbon dioxide per person, which is the approximate weight of the waste produced by one person in a year ([Flight Carbon Footprint Calculator](#), [GE Data Visualization](#)).

Hint: Contact the UTS Service Desk at 404-727-7777 or <http://it.emory.edu/help/>, or contact the UTS Video Services team at videoservices@emory.edu to learn about virtual conferencing options.

Reduce commute miles by recommending local accommodations to overnight guests accessible by public transit, such as Emory's LEED-silver certified Conference Center Hotel.

- ✓ Event planner will provide attendees a list of area accommodations, as well as Cliff and MARTA routes.



Accommodations that are close to campus cut down on transport time and encourage guests to engage in the community and learn more about the local area.

Hint: Emory maintains an [updated list of area hotels](#) recommended for university guests, while the [Emory Conference Center Hotel](#) is on campus and is LEED-silver certified. Event planner should also provide guests with access to [Cliff Shuttle](#) and [MARTA](#) routes so accommodations can be easily planned with sustainability in mind.

EDUCATION: For our event, we agree to . . .

Announce sustainable event features to attendees during the event, including an explanation of how to recycle and compost.

- ✓ Event planner will work time into the event agenda to announce sustainable features and your participation in the sustainable events program.



Announcing event features makes guests more observant of sustainable actions and behaviors, while explaining recycling and composting gives guests clarity and allows them to act efficiently both during the event and in the future.

Share sustainable event features with other event planners and colleagues to encourage others to plan sustainable events.

- ✓ Event planner will talk to colleagues about strategies for achieving Sustainable Event status.



Sharing experiences is critical for marketing new behaviors and purchases; online peer recommendations are a leading influence for 70% of consumer decisions, while 59% are from an online article ([Customer Think](#)).

Hint: Sustainable events are recognized on the Office of Sustainability Initiative's [website in its newsletter](#). Event planners are encouraged to share news about event sustainability in newsletters, listservs, or social media, making sure to share ideas and leftover resources.

Assign volunteers or representatives to recycling/composting stations to assist guests with proper disposal.

- ✓ Event planner will work with volunteers so that they are knowledgeable about how to recycle and compost.



Having educated station attendants shows your commitment to sustainability and provides guests with an understanding of recycling and composting that they can apply throughout campus in the future. If you need assistance training event volunteers, please email emorysustainability@emory.edu.

INNOVATIVE ACTION

Create your own innovative action for the event and describe the action here. The action can focus on any facet of sustainability.

- ✓ Event planners often have the most innovative ideas about how to make events more sustainable. We want to hear about these and share them!

Example: Event planner could blog about initiatives to share green ideas with a wide audience and promote events

**Event planner should complete the Sustainable Events Checklist at www.sustainability.emory.edu/page/1056/Sustainable-Events-Checklist-&-Certification. Once the survey has been completed, the event planner will be contacted by the Office of Sustainability with information about the level of certification received and how to receive Certified Sustainable Event marketing materials and a banner to display at your event.*

In an annual raffle, each Gold-Certified event planner and department will be entered to win a \$100 Emory Dining gift card to use for future events.