



Sustainable Events Guidance Document for Emory Alumni

May 2024



Emory's Sustainable Events Checklist and Certification is a way to encourage and support event planners to embrace sustainability principles when planning and running events of all sizes. The checklist lists actions focused on waste minimization, energy reduction, sustainable transportation, and social justice. Emory's Office of Sustainability Initiatives encourages you to pursue as many items from our checklist as possible when planning your events. While our colorful 5-bin system will likely not follow you after university, we hope that you will utilize these action items beyond your time at Emory.

Some aspects of this checklist were integrated with permission from the Department of Accessibility Services' [Program Planning Checklist](#).

Please reach out to emorysustainability@emory.edu if you have questions.

How to Use this Guide

Use this guide to determine what sustainable actions you can implement when planning events for friends, family, or a corporate environment. This guide can be used in a variety of environments to help you reduce your environmental impact, increase health and productivity, and accelerate our transition to a sustainable world!

Review each item, determine whether it's feasible to implement that sustainable action in your event planning, and once complete, check the item off! We encourage you to revisit this checklist annually to explore new opportunities that have become feasible, or to restore practices that need renewed attention.

Proud of your achievements? Send us a message at emorysustainability@emory.edu sharing your story (pictures especially welcomed) and we'll promote it!

Guidance Document 2024-2025

#	Item Description	Justification
1.0	Zero Landfill Waste	
For our event, we agree to...		
1.1	Eliminate polystyrene. (Styrofoam)	The World Health Organization (WHO) categorizes polystyrene as a probable carcinogen. Researchers estimate that polystyrene may take 500 years to biodegrade .
1.2	Make sure to compost and recycle at your events.	Compost organic material such as food, coffee grounds, hair, and animal bedding. Recycle metals, plastics, mixed and white paper.
2.0	Waste Minimization	
For our event, we agree to...		
2.1	Serve tap water with reusable, recyclable, or compostable cups. No bottled water will be served at the event.	The EPA estimates that only 29.1% of plastic bottles are recycled. Plastic water bottles take over 450 years to fully decompose. Consider using filtration systems like water filters instead of packaged bottles and gallons.
2.2	Encourage guests prior to the event to bring their own refillable bottles and/or mugs.	It is estimated that 2.5 billion single-use coffee cups are discarded globally every year. This equates to a staggering 5000 cups every minute . To combat this problem, request guests to bring their own bottles/mugs.
2.3	Use reusable plates, cups, bowls, serving containers, and cutlery. Use compostable, paper, or plastic items only if disposables are needed. No Styrofoam or unnecessary single-use plastic!	Plastic utensils are the 7th most collected item in waste collections. Using reusable items can be a great way to reduce waste from your event and can make for great conversation and awareness-raising!
2.4	Minimize give-away items.	Please minimize give-away items to avoid excess waste and reduce costs. The best branded items to hand out at an event are those that are reusable—not one use. Consider giving away reusable water bottles, reusable bags, or reusable utensils from ethical sources. Here is a memo with more information.
2.5	Minimize paper use.	Approximately 1 billion trees worth of paper is wasted EVERY year. Utilizing electronic sources like Canva, Evite, and other websites can help you creatively and colorfully express your event details without any waste!

2.6	Minimize waste related to single-use name tags.	Reusable name tags are a great long-term sustainable solution.
2.7	Minimize waste from marketing materials.	Out of all manufacturing subsectors , paper production consumes the third largest amount of energy. Help reduce this energy consumption with electronic, laminated, or reusable plastic flyers.
3.0	Date Accessibility For our event we agree to...	
3.1	Check the date of religious holidays or Sabbaths.	Please contact the Office of Spiritual and Religious Life for guidance on religious observances. Event planners can check a calendar of world religions to assess whether participants can eat during the time of their event or if they are fasting. In addition, the event planner checked to see if the holiday includes specific food restrictions.
4.0	Location For our event we agree to...	
4.1	Use natural light as much as possible instead of indoor lighting.	Utilizing natural lighting increases energy efficiency and reduces climate impact, while also improving the indoor environment and sense of well-being of occupants.
4.2	Switch off and unplug all indoor lighting, A/V equipment, and electronics 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.
5.0	Food/Floral/Decor For our event, we agree to...	
5.1	Minimize waste by choosing reusable or recyclable event decor, rather than disposable.	Balloons contribute to a shortage of helium , a nonrenewable resource. When balloons are released, they pollute the land or waterways and are hazardous to animal populations. 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.
5.2	Choose flowers that are local, organic, or certified sustainably and/or ethically grown.	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.
5.3	Guarantee food service areas, food, and dishes are accessible to those with mobility impairments.	The Department of Accessibility Services advises that 36" ensures food service areas are accessible to individuals who use wheelchairs for mobility or those with other types of mobility impairments.
5.4	Ensure water fountains are accessible.	Water fountains are accessible to those with mobility impairments or arrangements have been made with the caterers to assist people with these needs and requests. Also, a water station is available to guests unable to access the water fountains.

5.5	Minimize food waste by requiring attendees to register for meals (rather than just showing up).	Having an attendee headcount improves accuracy in food estimates, thus reducing potential waste.
5.6	Ask registrants to indicate if they have any accommodation needs.	Guests with disabilities should not have to go out of their way at an event to request access to something that other guests are enjoying without barriers, when it is something that can be avoided by preliminarily asking the guest at registration and planning for it. Please contact the Department of Accessibility Services for more information on accessibility at Emory.
5.7	Offer only/ majority vegetarian and vegan options, if serving food.	The current livestock production system accounts for 36% of US methane emissions, one of the most potent greenhouse gases. Producing 1 kilogram of beef protein requires twice as much water and over thirty-five times more greenhouse gas emissions than producing 1 kilogram of protein from beans.
5.8	Incorporate local and/or sustainable food into the menu and specify on any signage (menu cards, buffet markers, etc.)	Sustainably grown food supports environmental health, worker welfare and wages, and farm viability, in addition to improved nutrition. Purchasing locally grown or raised food supports the local agricultural economy and allows for attendees to eat more according to what is locally, seasonally available. Signs serve as visual cues to remind us to incorporate sustainable behaviors into our day-to-day lives and help attendees with dietary restrictions or preferences make informed food selections, which can help reduce wasted food.
5.9	Accommodate food allergies and dietary needs/restrictions.	Event planners ask guests if they have food allergies or other dietary needs/restrictions prior to the event and take the appropriate steps to accommodate dietary needs.
5.10	Clearly mark all the food with ingredients and dietary information.	All foods will be clearly marked with ingredients and/or to indicate if they are vegan, Kosher, gluten-free, dairy-free, and/or nut-free.
5.11	Provide Fair Trade coffee and tea, if refreshments are being served.	Fair trade certification improves incomes and working conditions of small farmers and gives these individuals the tools to improve their quality of life.
5.12	Minimize material waste by serving condiments, sauces, and spreads in bulk rather than individual packets.	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.

5.13	Repurpose unopened or packaged leftover food or goods.	Rotting food in landfills is a significant source of methane, a potent greenhouse gas. U.S. landfills collected 35 million tons of food waste in 2018. Having a food recovery plan can help you feed more people, not landfills.
6.0	Travel For our event, we agree to...	
6.1	Encourage attendees to use sustainable commute options for all events, and/or <i>proactively</i> arrange carpooling for internal events.	Sustainable 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. Carpooling decongests roads, saves money, and can save time where there are HOV lanes.
6.2	Reduce commute miles by offering a virtual presence.	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 are the same emissions as driving a typical passenger vehicle nearly 600 miles .
6.3	Reduce commute miles by recommending local accommodations to overnight guests accessible by public transit.	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.
7.0	Education For our event, we agree to...	
7.1	Announce sustainable event features to attendees during the event, including an explanation of how to recycle and compost.	Announcing event features makes guests more observant of sustainable actions and behaviors, and explaining recycling and composting gives guests clarity and allows them to act efficiently both during the event and in the future.
7.2	Share sustainable event features with other event planners and colleagues to encourage others to plan sustainable events.	Sharing experiences is critical for marketing new behaviors and purchases; 74% of online consumers say they learn about new products from ratings and reviews .
7.3	Assign volunteers or representatives to recycling/composting stations to assist guests with proper disposal.	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 with training event volunteers, please email emorysustainability@emory.edu .
8.0	Innovation Action	

8.1	Encourage innovative ideas from fellow event planners.
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