



**defra**  
Department for Environment  
Food and Rural Affairs

# ➤ Sustainable events guide ➤



think *sustainable*

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
Nobel House  
17 Smith Square  
London SW1P 3JR  
Telephone 020 7238 6000  
Website: [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

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Before organising your event, it is worth checking to see if there are other ways you can fulfil your objectives. You might be able to share ideas or engage with stakeholders and customers through another means e.g. video or teleconferencing.

### **Organising an event?** Here's our guide to help you:

Think about your social, economic and environmental impacts from the start – reducing these impacts should be integral to any event

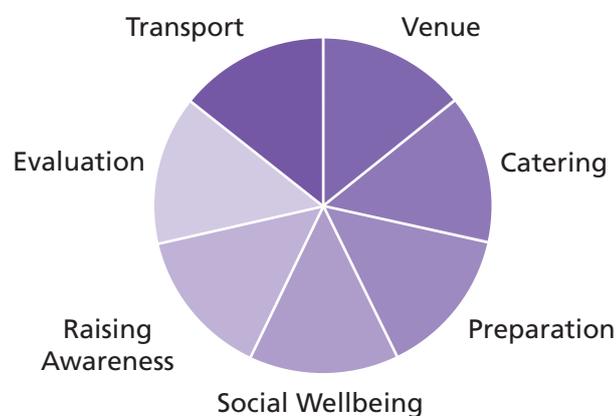
- Include sustainability clauses in contracts
- Use the 3 Rs – reduce, reuse, recycle
- Communicate electronically rather than by paper
- Be energy and water efficient
- Minimise the impacts of travel

Think about the wellbeing of your delegates, the local community, your suppliers and any other stakeholders

- Raise awareness of your efforts and share best practice

### **What's included?**

Options for organising events, split into the following themes:



### **Who's it for?**

This guide is intended to help governmental organisations plan successful and sustainable events. To protect our natural resources and save money, it is important that all aspects are not only sustainable but also seen to be sustainable, from the choice of venue (for example, is it easily accessible by public transport?) to the delegate pack and any giveaways (are you using recycled stationery and avoiding plastic bags which are usually not biodegradable and have a negative image?), and the catering & food miles, and tap rather than bottled water.

### **Can I use this guide if an external provider is organising my event?**

Whilst larger events are likely to be organised by external providers, the principles in this guide still apply and should be factored in to any contract with external providers. In fact, for major events there may be scrutiny by the media and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) about whether government is living up to its own sustainability principles.

Share this guide with your supplier, discuss options and then include appropriate clauses in your contract.<sup>1</sup> Government procurement rules, including obtaining value for money, may also be relevant so take a look at the referenced documents. A British Standard (BS 8901) on sustainable event management is due to be published in autumn 2007 (<http://www.bsi-global.com/BS8901>). This should provide a comprehensive sustainability guide for all events: BS 8901 can guide the issues to be included in contract clauses.

<sup>1</sup> For more information on engaging in contracts with suppliers, see [http://www.ogc.gov.uk/0\\_procurement\\_principles\\_terms\\_and\\_conditions.asp](http://www.ogc.gov.uk/0_procurement_principles_terms_and_conditions.asp)

### Will I get value for money?

Use these options from the very beginning and you could save money: cost-saving, sustainable options such as serving tap water instead of bottled water balances out more expensive choices like ordering sustainably-sourced fish; using electronic communication will save on paper, energy use and postage. Thinking sustainably will also help you achieve value for money, by taking into account total production costs and quality. See the boxes below for tips and ideas.

*Remember that it may not be possible to do everything suggested in the guide, so think about the overall approach and how the options you choose can make your event more sustainable.*

### Why measure?

Your event could have a substantial impact on the environment. Keeping a record of activities undertaken (e.g. energy/ water used and waste produced) does not have to be an onerous exercise! It will enable effective evaluation and will allow delegates and other stakeholders to have confidence in your efforts. Measurements allow continuous improvement – by helping you to a) minimise your negative sustainability impacts over time and b) become more ambitious with each event.

### Transport

*Reduce need for travel:*

- Consider whether video or teleconferencing is a viable alternative
- If not, consider where delegates are travelling from and choose a location which minimises the requirement for travel, particularly by plane/car
- Recommend accommodation within walking distance of event venue or use a venue which also offers accommodation

*Reducing travel not only reduces carbon emissions, it also saves on costs and improves the wellbeing of your delegates*

*Reduce the impacts of travel by offering a travel plan:*

- Try to find venues close to public transport and promote the available public transport links to delegates. Provide a link to a travel site such as the DfT's Transport Direct <http://www.transportdirect.info/>
- Provide a link to a map such as [www.streetmap.co.uk](http://www.streetmap.co.uk) (or, if in London, <http://journeyplanner.tfl.gov.uk/>) and tell delegates how they can reach the venue on foot
- Promote and/or provide cycling facilities, such as local cycle lanes & routes and bike racks
- If venue is not in walking distance of public transport, offer a shuttle service or encourage taxi-sharing
- Limit the number of car parking spaces available, and provide them only to those who are unable to travel by public transport
- For those travelling by car, encourage car-sharing: put delegates in touch with others travelling from the same areas so they can share cars. This networking opportunity can also add value to delegates
- Offset staff and delegate carbon emissions or encourage delegates to offset their own emissions – a British Standard on carbon offsetting is due to be published in autumn 2007

**Top tip:** Use low emission vehicles such as hybrid cars if possible.

### Venue

*Choice of venue:*<sup>2</sup>

- Try to use venues that have sustainable or environmental policies of their own because they will be more keen to cooperate. A simple indication of an organisation's environmental commitment is if they have an environmental management system certified to a national or international standard, such as ISO 14001, BS 8901 "Sustainable event management system – specification with guidance for use" (both on [www.bsi-global.com](http://www.bsi-global.com)), BS 8555 ([www.iema.net/acorn](http://www.iema.net/acorn)) or if they are registered with the Eco-Management & Audit Scheme (EMAS) ([www.emas.org.uk](http://www.emas.org.uk))
- Ask hotels if they are registered with the Green Tourism Business Scheme which provides a comprehensive green audit of accommodation facilities, or if they have won any Sustainable Business Awards

*There may be a suitable venue for your event in your own organisation or elsewhere in the public sector so check this option first as it could save money*

*You may not be able to include all sustainability requirements in the contract, however, once agreed, work with suppliers to encourage more environmentally friendly measures. Use this guide to raise awareness of sustainability issues for your event and you may even influence the venue itself.*

- Top questions to find out if a venue is sustainable:
  - Do you have members of staff with responsibility for environmental management and Corporate Social Responsibility?
  - Do you buy products with a reduced environmental impact e.g. energy-saving lightbulbs, energy efficient electrical equipment, recycled paper, low VOC paints, natural cleaning products etc?
  - Do you practice waste minimisation and have recycling facilities?
  - Have you installed water-efficient devices for taps and toilets and water saving devices for showerheads?
  - Have you implemented water conservation measures such as rain water harvesting or grey-water reuse?
  - Do you buy green electricity or generate your own renewable energy?
  - Have you installed motion sensors for corridor lighting and reminders to turn lights off when leaving rooms?
  - In hotels, are bed linen and towels only changed if guests leave a card requesting so and are toiletries provided via dispenser, not individually packaged?
  - Do you prepare fairly traded, and/or fresh produce in season? (See catering)

<sup>2</sup> For more detailed advice on sustainable purchasing, see the Defra and Office of Government Commerce (OGC) "Environmental Issues in Purchasing" guide and the OGC "Social Issues in Purchasing" guide.

## › Sustainable events guide ›

- Larger venues often require more heating and cooling so try to use venues of appropriate size for the number of attendees and minimise space taken up by exhibits. Using a venue with natural ventilation will not only save energy, it will also keep your delegates alert
- Use a venue which provides in-house equipment (audio-visual etc) so reducing the need for transportation
- Choose a venue which maximises natural lighting so reducing the need for electric lighting

*Although many venues may not yet have sustainability measures in place, it's worth asking these questions and to show that there is demand and to encourage them to change their practices.*

### *Getting the most out of the venue:*

- Make sure all electrical equipment and power supplies are turned off when not in use, encourage delegates to use the stairs instead of the lifts
- Use heating and air conditioning sparingly – heating above 21 degrees is not required and use natural ventilation where possible rather than air conditioning
- Arrange stands/displays etc to maximise use of natural light
- Provide clearly labelled recycling bins for different types of waste and advertise their presence

*Turning your thermostat down one degree saves up to 10% on the electricity bill: save energy to save money!*

### **Contracts:**

You have the power to affect an entire supply chain! Contracts and tender specifications are a vital tool in improving the sustainability of your event(s). Work with your suppliers to set specific and ambitious targets against which progress can be measured. Include clauses in contracts requiring suppliers to comply to your sustainability policy, such as:

- The supplier will use energy and water as efficiently as possible
- The supplier will comply with the event organiser's waste management requirements, including a recycling policy
- The supplier will comply with the event organiser's sustainable catering requirements
- The supplier will measure their impacts relating to the event, e.g. food miles, energy use, waste produced and recycled, water used – *this does not have to be detailed!*

### Catering

For smaller events, you will often be limited to using in-house catering, but it's still worth asking the questions below to find out about their policies and see if you can encourage them to make changes

- Top questions to ask your caterer<sup>3</sup>:
  - Do you use mostly fresh, seasonal produce?
  - Are fairly traded goods such as coffee and tea available?
  - Do you serve meals produced from healthy and nutritious ingredients and avoid foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar?
  - Do you serve food in bulk rather than individually packaged?
  - Do you offer tap water to drink to save on transportation of bottled water and recycling of bottles? If bottled water is unavoidable, buy water in biodegradable corn-based bottles or, as a last resort, ensure the bottles are recycled.
  - Do you operate a recycling scheme, including composting? On-site is best.
  - Do you use reusable crockery, glassware, cutlery, tablecloths etc where possible? If disposables are unavoidable, use paper or wooden recyclables, or biodegradable plastics.

*Getting the most out of your caterer:*

- Ask your caterer as far as possible to serve:
  - Fresh produce in season as this will generally mean less energy has been used in its production.
  - Consider produce meeting farm assurance standards, such as Red Tractor, LEAF Marque or equivalent<sup>4</sup>.
  - Fish from sustainably managed sources that are harvested in a manner that does not lead to over-fishing or depletion of exploited populations.
  - Fairly traded products, such as coffee, tea, bananas and chocolate<sup>5</sup>.
  - A good range of vegetarian choices and options suited to specific dietary requirements, including choices for ethnic minorities.
  - Fresh fruit as an alternative to prepared desserts.

**Top tip:** Have attendees sign up for meals in advance to reduce wastage and ask which sessions they plan to attend e.g. morning, afternoon or both.

<sup>3</sup> For further information on food procurement, including fair-trade, health and nutrition, consult the Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative (PSFPI): <http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/policy/sustain/procurement/index.htm>

<sup>4</sup> "Equivalence" is explained in Defra's catering toolkit – see the model clause on farm assurance at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/policy/sustain/procurement/toolkit.htm>

<sup>5</sup> There are legal requirements governing how products, such as food, can be specified and purchased in the EU. For example, it is possible to specify "organic" as this is a method of production that affects the quality of the product being supplied. You may not specify "FairTrade" or fairly traded goods but advertisements and invitations to tender can make it clear that fair trade options can be included in the products provided. OGC has published "Guidance on Fair and Ethical Trading" giving advice on the issue, see: [http://www.ogc.gov.uk/documents/Guidance\\_on\\_Fair\\_and\\_Ethical\\_Trading.pdf](http://www.ogc.gov.uk/documents/Guidance_on_Fair_and_Ethical_Trading.pdf).

### Preparation

#### *Communication:*

- Avoid excessive paper usage by carrying out all marketing, correspondence and registration electronically
- Use double sided printing and non-glossy, recycled paper, with vegetable based inks where possible
- Print documents in black and white rather than colour.
- Make sure plastic name badges are returned at the end of the event to be reused

*Electronic communications save on the costs of paper, printing and postage*

#### *Literature:*

- If providing delegate packs, hand them out on arrival to avoid duplication
- Format handouts to minimise amount of paper required e.g. reduce the margins in page setup, print double-sided and print more than one page per sheet (this particularly applies to PowerPoint handouts)
- Provide links to downloads of literature rather than providing large handouts, or offer documents on CDs or memory sticks
- Have a laptop and printer on site so that literature can be printed out on demand if delegates require hard copies. And ensure that all paper waste is collected and recycled

*Use large paper clips to hold the contents together instead of expensive and wasteful individual folders*

#### *Materials:*

- Use whiteboards rather than paper flipcharts
- Use reusable, rather than event-specific, name badges, signs and display materials and collect these items after the event

*Reusable display materials etc save on costs of producing new ones for different events*

**Top tip:** To enable signage to be reused – avoid putting the date on.

- Use reusable materials for exhibition stands, flooring etc. Hire rather than purchase items – this should be a contractual requirement
- Use pens and pencils made from recycled/sustainable materials (e.g. from recycled vending cups or timber from sustainably managed forests). These make a positive statement about the efforts you are making to reduce the impact of your event, and also can be used to communicate important messages
- If reusable materials are not appropriate, use recycled and/or recyclable materials for packaging, paper etc – this should be a contractual requirement
- Communicate in advance with the venue to inform them of likely waste materials – a later event may be able to make use of them
- If bags are needed, use reusable organic cotton, jute or recycled bags rather than plastic, and advertise the benefits on the bags

*Ask exhibitors and/or event management companies to comply with these suggestions and reuse or recycle leftover literature.*

### Social wellbeing

It is unlikely that every need can be anticipated. However, venues chosen need to have basic reasonable adjustments on behalf of individuals.

- Basic standard requirements will include access to buildings such as; level or ramped entry, acoustics appropriate for hearing aid users and (working) loop systems in lecture theatres or reception desks
- Ensure you communicate emergency evacuation arrangements such as;
  - flashing light fire alarms or vibrating pagers for deaf people
  - fire refuges or alternative escape routes for people with mobility impairments
  - the accessibility of external paths and landscaping
  - accessible toilets, convenient and reserved parking spaces for those who need them.

This should include any related website/electronic communications.

- There are legal requirements for employment (equal opportunities and pay) and health and safety: if you become aware of breaches of these, intervene
- Identify and engage with stakeholders e.g. local community and communicate information about the event and the sustainability measures being undertaken
- Communicate local attractions and amenities to your delegates to benefit the local economy and educate delegates

**Top tip:** Improving the wellbeing of your delegates, for example by minimising travel, providing plenty of fruit and water and maximising natural daylight, will help them to stay engaged and productive.

### Raising awareness

- Make delegates aware of the sustainability measures being taken to improve the image and reputation of the organisation and to protect the environment. For example, make an announcement at the welcome session with information about the seasonality of the produce on offer and the benefits this delivers (e.g. benefits of local or international options). This information should also appear on any electronic communication.

### Evaluation

- Evaluate the success of the measures taken and learn for next time. In addition to your evaluation, offer delegates the opportunity to provide feedback e.g. electronically or on a recycled paper form – preferably before they leave
- Email delegates and other stakeholders to inform them of the successes, and areas for improvement, such as energy savings and % waste recycled. Transparency is a key principle of sustainability. No-one expects you to be perfect, but they expect you to try
- Use carbon calculators to calculate the emissions generated by the event. As a last resort, these can be offset. For government event offsetting, contact [carbonoffsetting@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:carbonoffsetting@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

## Further information

For a simple checklist to aid discussions with your venue, see the GOSW-SDC-Envirowise "Greener Events" guide at <http://www.oursouthwest.com/SusBus/gevents.html>

British Standards institution will be publishing BS 8901, 'Sustainable Event Management System – Specification with Guidance for Use' in autumn 2007: [www.bsi-global.com](http://www.bsi-global.com)

Envirowise offer advice on waste minimisation, resource efficiency, environmental policy writing and much more at [www.envirowise.gov.uk/](http://www.envirowise.gov.uk/) and helpline 0800 585794.

WRAP offer advice on waste minimisation and recycling at [www.wrap.org.uk](http://www.wrap.org.uk)

The Energy Saving Trust offer advice on energy efficiency, especially for buildings and transport, at [www.est.org.uk](http://www.est.org.uk)

The Carbon Trust offers advice on how businesses and the public sector can reduce carbon emissions at [www.carbontrust.co.uk](http://www.carbontrust.co.uk)

Defra page on carbon off-setting:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/climatechange/uk/carbonoffset/index.htm>

Greenhouse gases produced as a result of preparation; travel to/from and attendance on a conference can be calculated by visiting [www.climatecare.co.uk](http://www.climatecare.co.uk) or [www.futureforests.com](http://www.futureforests.com)

For more information on engaging in contracts with suppliers, see

[http://www.ogc.gov.uk/0\\_procurement\\_principles\\_terms\\_and\\_conditions.asp](http://www.ogc.gov.uk/0_procurement_principles_terms_and_conditions.asp)

For more detailed advice on sustainable purchasing, see the Defra and office of Government Commerce (OGC) "Environmental Issues in Purchasing":

[http://www.ogc.gov.uk/documents/environmental\\_issues-defra.pdf](http://www.ogc.gov.uk/documents/environmental_issues-defra.pdf)

and for "Social Issues in Purchasing":

[http://www.ogc.gov.uk/sustainability\\_social\\_issues\\_in\\_purchasing.asp](http://www.ogc.gov.uk/sustainability_social_issues_in_purchasing.asp)

For more information on food procurement, including fair trade, health and nutrition, consult the Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative (PSFPI):

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/policy/sustain/procurement/pdf/foodprocure.pdf>

For the model clause on farm assurance see

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/policy/sustain/procurement/toolkit.htm>

For guidance on Fair and Ethical Trading see:

[http://www.ogc.gov.uk/documents/guidance\\_on\\_fair\\_and\\_ethical\\_trading.pdf](http://www.ogc.gov.uk/documents/guidance_on_fair_and_ethical_trading.pdf)

For information on a list of hotels which have been assessed for their environmental standards see [www.green-business.co.uk](http://www.green-business.co.uk) and [www.greenstop.net](http://www.greenstop.net)

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