

A Guide to Planning Greener Events & Meetings at UCSB

Helpful guidelines to reduce any event's eco-footprint and promote sustainability through resource conservation, waste minimization, and ethically and environmentally preferred purchasing.

It's easy to go green at your next event!

As an event planner, there are many decisions that influence the amount of resources your event uses. Making wise decisions can greatly reduce the number of resources you consume, the costs associated with the event, and are an opportunity to demonstrate your organization's commitment to sustainability. Your next green event will leave a positive and lasting impression on the attendees, organizers, service providers, and community as a whole.

"A green meeting or event incorporates environmental considerations throughout its planning process to minimize its negative impact on the environment." – Convention Industry Council's Green Meeting Report

Considerations During the Planning Stages

Work Smarter and Greener: General Office Procedures & Internal Communication

If your event is going to be green, then you need to also green your internal procedures and "practice what you preach."

- ❖ **Communicate your commitment.** Explain to all involved (planning team, vendors, venue staff) that you are making an effort to green your event.
- ❖ **Put it in writing.** Include a "sustainability clause" in all contracts and agreements associated with the event. This allows for a clear understanding of how you expect business to be conducted between you and the various suppliers, vendors, sponsors, etc.

Sustainability: An enduring, balanced approach to economic activity, environmental responsibility and social progress.

Green Meeting or Event: A gathering that incorporates a wide spectrum of environmental and social considerations throughout all stages in order to minimize negative impact.

Triple Bottom Line: "people, planet, and profit"

- ❖ **Avoid paper and printing** when possible to reduce waste & costs associated with the event. (See *Green Printing & Signage* on page 4)
- ❖ **Use electronic communication.** When possible, utilize shared online calendars or documents for everyone on the planning team. This reduces paper waste while also expanding opportunities for remote collaboration. Teleconferences enable the planning team to meet from remote locations, thereby reducing travel.

Facilities & Venues

The venue and facility you choose is a very important decision and one that has a huge impact on the "greenness" of your event. Carefully choose the best venue that meets all your event needs and either has green practices in place or is willing to adopt them for your event. If necessary, provide venue staff with a list of the green practices you wish to be carried out so that it is clear what is expected of them.

On-campus events:

- ❖ **Contact EAB** for help identifying opportunities to green your event.
- ❖ **AS Recycling can provide a FREE consultation and recycling bins** for any event on and off campus, both indoor and outdoor. AS Recycling staff will help you determine the number of receptacles needed based on the number of attendees, the type of food or beverages being served, and other activities planned during your event. You can also check out the receptacles yourself if your organization doesn't have the adequate funds for their manual service.

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Off-campus events:

- ❖ **Create a list of green practices that must be upheld by the venue.** Provide each potential venue with a list of desired green practices and select the venue that has the best system in place. Make sure the green practices are stated in all contracts.
- ❖ **Visit the venue.** Prior to your event do a thorough inspection and tour of the venue to ensure that green claims are valid
- ❖ **Is the venue centrally located?** Determine who will be attending your event and what distances they will be traveling so your selected venue is either centrally located (close to hotels, restaurants, and transportation facilities) or easily accessible by alternative transportation (bus, bike, etc.). You can also coordinate ride-sharing between attendees. *(See Events That Require Travel on page 6.)*
- ❖ **Plan ahead for Recycling.** Find out what on-site recycling and trash services are available. If no recycling collection is provided at that venue, make arrangements to collect your own recyclables. Ideally there should be side-by-side receptacles (one recycling bin next to each trash can). AS Recycling may be able to provide bins for an off-campus event on behalf of a campus department.

Food & Beverage

Sustainable food & beverage decisions for events can be culturally sensitive, politically tricky, or cost prohibitive. But even a small shift can have a big impact on the environment and there are simple ways to avoid those cost and sensitivity concerns. Food also presents an opportunity to recycle or compost large quantities of waste.

- ❖ **Avoid single use dishware.** Whenever possible choose reusable, washable dishware, cups, and utensils. This may be available at little or no additional cost from the venue or caterer. This is the greenest option. EAB also has plates, cups and utensils that your organization can check out (and return dirty!) for free.
- ❖ **Think plateless.** Consider finger foods that require no dishes or utensils.
- ❖ **Go compostable.** If reusable/washable dishware is not appropriate for your event, compostable dishware is the next best alternative, but only if proper composting service is available. AS Recycling can provide bins and signage to collect food scraps for compost. Contact AS Recycling in advance to ask about their services.
- ❖ **Caffeinate Wisely.** Serve fair trade and/or organic coffee and tea. Avoid individually packaged condiments and offer sugar and cream in bulk containers. Replace plastic stir straws with wooden compostable sticks or washable metal spoons for a zero waste event.
- ❖ **Serve in bulk.** Avoid individually packaged items such as condiments (sugar, creamer, juice, butter, salad dressings). Instead serve in bulk containers.
- ❖ **Avoid disposable plastic water bottles.** There are a number of concerns with bottled water including health concerns related to plastic leaching into the water, waste associated with disposable bottles, and the vast distances that bottles must be shipped. By using pitchers or carafes you will greatly reduce cost and avoid all the other negatives associated with bottled water.
- ❖ **Plan food quantities carefully** to avoid having excess food at the end of the event. Arrange to donate any leftover food to a local charitable organization or food bank.
- ❖ **BYO Cup!** Encourage attendees in advance to bring their own mug, cup, or bottle for beverages. Communicate this through the event website or invitation. Consider prizes or rewards for those who bring their own!
- ❖ **Consider food** that is all or some of the following:

While organic food may increase your costs, local seasonal food may be comparable in price. Choosing one organic option is better than none at all. Work with the venue concessionaire or caterer. Creative adjustments of the menu through portion control or substitution of less expensive items (e.g. chicken for beef) will help you manage your budget.

Good to know: In spring 2011, AS Leg Counsel passed a resolution prohibiting the purchase of bottled water UNLESS for outdoor events with more than 200 attendees.



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- Organic
 - Fair Trade
 - fresh and whole foods
 - seasonal
 - no packaging
 - locally-grown or locally-sourced
- ❖ **Consider special dietary needs.** Remember to ask attendees about any food preferences or special dietary needs such as vegetarian, vegan or gluten-free.
 - ❖ **Always include a vegetarian option,** which means offering a dish that contains no meat, poultry or fish of any kind. Consider reducing the amount of meat served overall at the event, since meat production itself has a heavy impact on the environment.
 - ❖ **Choose sustainable meat, poultry, and fish.** If you plan to serve meat and/or fish, choose options that have been raised in a sustainable manner. The Green Bill requires 50% of food purchases to be sustainable in some way. For specifics, *consult the “Guide to the Green Bill” attached on page 8.* Try to choose USDA certified organic meat or fish when possible and don’t be fooled by terms such as “naturally raised” and “free-range” because they are not valid. When serving seafood, consult Seafood Watch’s Recommendations Guide online at http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/cr_seafoodwatch/sfw_recommendations.aspx
 - ❖ **Highlight your green efforts** using signage at food and beverage stations explaining what you have done to make their dining experience as green as possible. (*See Green Printing & Signage page 4.*)

Waste & Recycling

Plan ahead for waste and recycling on site during your event. Consider striving for a “zero waste” event.

- ❖ **Anticipate your waste.** Consider what materials will be generated during your event so you can select appropriate receptacles (trash, paper, cans/bottles, or compost bins).
- ❖ **Place receptacles strategically.** Bins should always be grouped side-by-side, never solo. This prompts attendees to stop and consider which bin is best for the waste in their hand and makes each bin equally convenient with the next.
- ❖ **A picture is worth a thousand words.** Signage on receptacles should be large, easy to read, and ideally at or near eye-level. Photos help tremendously and reduce confusion about what goes where. AS Recycling can provide signage to be placed next to bins.
- ❖ **Color coordinate bins.** Use a color-coordinated system to help attendees easily recognize and distinguish between recycling, compost, and trash containers.
- ❖ **Composting is cool.** If your event includes food, contact AS Recycling to see about offering composting bins for collecting food waste and paper products. Compostable dishware can be purchased online at ecoproducts.com or from the IV Food Co-op.
- ❖ **Consolidate waste stations & use “waste advisors.”** To ensure successful separation of waste types, group bins together into waste stations that are staffed by volunteer “waste advisors” who assist attendees with disposing of their waste in the proper receptacle. “Waste advisors” should be easily recognized with a vest or badge and will require training prior to the event. AS Recycling & Sustainability can assist with this.

Are Plastic Cups Recyclable?

Don't provide plastic cups at your events. Regardless of whether there is a recycle symbol on the bottom of the cups or what number is inside, disposable plastic cups are generally NOT recyclable.



Marketing & Outreach

(see also: [Printing & Signage](#))

Every event, big or small, requires some amount of marketing to inform people that you are hosting an event. Paper and printed materials used to be the preferred method for marketing, but today digital promotional strategies are often the most efficient, effective, economical and environmentally friendly.

- ❖ **Take credit for your green efforts.** In all material you produce and give out be sure to highlight your greening efforts. This communicates your organization’s values and may even attract people to your event.
- ❖ **Create an event website.** Offer your audience a paperless, one-stop shop for all information related to the event. Drive traffic to the site through email invitations, social media postings, and even “Quick Response” (QR) codes. Your event website can also provide transportation links such as ride sharing or the bus schedule, reminders to “BYO” beverage container,

QR Codes

A pre-event promo postcard or handbill with a QR Code points people to a website with all the relevant event details. This turns a very small paper item into a hugely effective promotional piece.



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an opportunity to register for your event, buy tickets, or select preferred meal choices.

- ❖ **Avoid mass mailing** of printed event material. Instead, go electronic and direct all event traffic to the website. This will greatly reduce your marketing costs since you won't be paying for printing or postage.
- ❖ **Electronic Invites** are pretty widely accepted these days and have functional benefits beyond saving a tree. Consider services like Evite or simply send the event flier or invitation via email. Digital invites are easily forwarded or reposted and also provide a means to RSVP or ask questions about the event.
- ❖ **Utilize Social Media** by setting up an "event" in Facebook, and tweet your event over Twitter.
- ❖ **Online community calendars** are usually free, easy to use, and are an effective way to reach a wide audience. Most require that you create an account. Some, like the UCSB campus calendar require that you take a training and get authorized to post. (see inset for suggested online calendars)

Online Community Calendars in the Santa Barbara Area

UCSB Campus Calendar <http://events.sa.ucsb.edu/>
AS Website Calendar <http://www.as.ucsb.edu/calendar/month.php>
KCSB <http://bigcitybuzz.com/events.php?zipid=1069307&ptnid=1197>
UCSB Arts & Lectures <https://artsandlectures.sa.ucsb.edu/Calendar.aspx>
UCSB Events <http://www.ucsb.edu/events/index.shtml>
UCSB Eventful <http://eventful.com/santabarbara/events>
Downtown SB
→ <http://www.santabarbaradowntown.com/calendar>
Santa Barbara Chamber <http://sbchamber.org/calendar.php>
Craig's List Calendar <http://santabarbara.craigslist.org/cal/>

- ❖ **News Releases** will multiply your exposure to the general public but must be timed carefully to get pre-event media coverage. If you send your press release to the Public Affairs office at UCSB with enough advance time, they can help disseminate your release. Local media are very responsive to UCSB Public Affairs official releases and you'll be much more likely to pique their interest this way. Visit the website at <http://www.ia.ucsb.edu/pa/>
- ❖ **Public Service Announcements (PSAs)** are a free and easy way to get the radio stations to promote your event on the air. Be sure to send one to KCSB and the other commercial stations in town.
- ❖ **Collaborate with sponsors and vendors** on joint promotion. They can help expand your audience by promoting beyond your own. They are likely to reach a whole new audience through their e-mailing lists, Facebook pages, and their own website.

Avoiding Printed Handouts at the Event:

Encourage speakers and presenters not to provide printed handouts. Instead, provide a method for presentations or handouts to be accessible online for attendees to reference either before, during, or after the event. Remember to let the attendees know this information will only be available online and encourage that they download the presentations or handouts if they want to have them electronically available while at the event. If your event has a large number of speakers, presenters, or workshops then you may want to set up a website with a centralized server that can be linked to the event website so that there is enough space to upload all files.

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Green Printing & Signage

(See also: Marketing & Outreach)

Inevitably, some printed materials may be necessary for your event such as signage, posters, and programs. As we know, paper means trees, but there are many strategies to minimize the impact on the environment by opting for “greener” printing choices.

- ❖ **Choose green.** Choose the highest recycled-content paper possible, minimum of 30% post-consumer content. The University Print Shop on campus (Siskiyou Hall) has a variety of 50 - 100% recycled-content options as well as lots of 30% options as well as “virgin” paper with no recycled content. If it’s not labeled as recycled, it’s not.
- ❖ **Avoid elements that compromise the recyclability of your paper.** Coatings, laminates, foils, adhesives, labels, paint or excessive ink can prevent paper from being recyclable and should be avoided. Avoid inks containing heavy metals like lead, cadmium, or mercury, commonly used to produce some bright colors. Instead request soy- or vegetable-based inks.
- ❖ **Be wise, use both sides.** Be sure to print double-sided where appropriate.
- ❖ **Forget the date.** For annual events, design durable posters, banners, or even t-shirts that can be reused year after year and do not become obsolete due to the date.
- ❖ **Give yourself credit.** Include on all printed material (on the back or at the bottom) a graphic acknowledging the use of recycled paper and FSC paper.
- ❖ **Scratch paper is OK.** For temporary signage or ice-breaker activities, use scratch paper rather than new.
- ❖ **Small is better.** Design the event program as compactly as possible, reducing white space in margins, and focusing on the most important info that needs to be in attendees’ hands. Consider not having a program at all. Or provide a giant poster in a central area with the program info. Provide all other details such as speaker bios on the website.



AS Publications, located in the MCC, can ensure that all printing done with them will meet Green Bill standards.

Eco-Friendly Decorations

Decorations are often disposable items that end up contributing to waste at the end of your event. Think creatively about alternatives to the standard fare usually found at party stores or the dollar store.

- ❖ **Reusable is the way to go.** Choose decorations that can be used again at future events, in future years. Curtains, candle holders, light fixtures, silk flowers or live plants are good examples. Holiday decorations should be durable enough to be stored and reused in future years.
- ❖ **Borrow, don't buy.** If you can't afford to purchase your own supply of reusable decorations nor have a place to store them, consider renting or borrowing items such as linens, centerpieces, balloon arches, live plants, or wall hangings.
- ❖ **Floral arrangements & centerpieces.** Cut flowers usually have a large carbon footprint due to the far distance they are transported from tropic areas of the globe. Consider supporting local florists with seasonally available flowers. Local nurseries may be willing to donate or loan some potted plants. Pots could be decorated for the event and later either returned to the nursery or given as gifts to speakers.
- ❖ **Get crafty.** There are loads of creative ways to get crafty and make decorations out of old magazine photos or other “waste” items. Find great craft ideas online and have a crafting party with your event volunteers.

Eco Tip

Look for a clear description of what the product is and what materials it is made out of when searching for eco-friendly promotional products and decorations. **Green washing:** is the practice of companies untruthfully spinning their products and policies as environmentally friendly.

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SWAG: Promotional Products, Prizes, & Giveaways

Sometimes there's an expectation that participants will get some kind of goodie bag of SWAG ("stuff we all get"). These types of giveaways can often end up directly in the trash or can feel to some like unnecessary waste. But with some intentionality, this can be an area to demonstrate your eco-friendly values by choosing eco-friendly options or even in opting not to do giveaways. Responsibly selected giveaways reflect well on the event, the sponsors, the vendors, and the organizers.

- ❖ **Recycled-content goodies** are easy to find online and range from pens, mugs, notebooks, tote bags, toys, lanyards, trophies, and much more.
- ❖ **Responsible manufacturing is worth considering.** Are you buying American-made or from China? Does this company have a commitment to sustainable manufacturing or fair wages for workers?
- ❖ **Choose items that are useful, reusable, durable or have educational value.** Avoid single use items.
- ❖ **Choose items that facilitate your event's sustainable goals** such as giving out a flash drive containing all the presentations or a reusable water bottle to encourage the use of tap water
- ❖ **Support local sustainable business enterprises** by featuring their products or services.
- ❖ **Give gift certificates for local businesses.** This is a way to promote shopping locally and gives recipients more opportunities to get something they really want.
- ❖ **Choose organic cotton t-shirts** for all event staff as well as for shirts to be sold or given away. Other sustainable t-shirt materials include bamboo, recycled cotton, or recycled polyester.

T-Shirts: Consider purchasing T-shirts for campus events or programs from local companies. Also, splurge for the organic cotton option when available.

Vendors and Exhibitors

It's important to communicate with vendors or exhibitors early on and make clear what expectations you have of them. Provide guidelines for how their participation can be in line with your event's sustainability goals.

- ❖ **Contracts and Vendor Guidelines** should state in writing what is expected regarding waste and recycling on site, types of products to avoid, themes and messages to promote.
- ❖ **Provide a list of items that are encouraged or prohibited** at your event. Emphasize that giveaways should be eco-friendly, that paper handouts should be minimized, etc.
- ❖ **Provide information about on-site recycling and trash services** so vendors can prepare to recycle cardboard, packaging, etc. If vendors are providing food samples, discuss zero waste serving options and consider the best ways to capture any waste generated at the booths.
- ❖ **Consider requiring "producer take-back" of waste items** generated by vendors and exhibitors. This makes them responsible for thinking ahead and considering their impact.

Events That Require Travel

Travel is often the largest carbon contributor to an event. Venue choice will dictate whether public transit is a viable transportation option. Planners should encourage strategies to reduce emissions created by any transportation associated with your event.

- ❖ **Choose a venue that reduces transportation needs.** Find out who will attend your event, where they're coming from, and how they intend to get there. Events on campus are easy for locals to access via public transit, ride sharing, or bike. If campus attendees need to travel across town, consider the venue and the opportunities for ridesharing or public transit.
- ❖ **Select a venue that is centrally located** near restaurants, hotels, public transit and air travel.
- ❖ **Promote UCSB's Zimride program** on your event website or posters so that people can easily request or offer a ride to your event. You can even create an "event" in Zimride that creates a unique URL for your

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event and auto-inserts the event venue as the destination on the appropriate day and time.

<http://www.zimride.com/ucsb/>

- ❖ **Promote alternative modes of travel** to and from the event such as biking, walking, or public transit. Publicize these options on your website or posters by linking to local bus schedules, ridesharing, etc.
- ❖ **Choose hotels that make sustainability efforts** and promote the reason behind this choice.
- ❖ **Consider purchasing a group travel pass** on the B-Line Bus service for fieldtrips. (See “Fieldtrips” below.)
- ❖ **Consider purchasing carbon off-sets** for the travel associated with your event or setting up a mechanism for attendees to purchase their own carbon off-sets. For examples of websites that offer this type of service, visit: <http://www.carbonfund.org/>

Field Trips and Outings

Large events that have fieldtrips or off-site components provide a challenge in transporting attendees but also offer opportunities. Traveling as a group provides an opportunity to use the travel time as a way for the attendees to get to know one another, listen to an on-board speaker or tour guide, while once again demonstrating your commitment to sustainability.

- ❖ **Select destinations and venues that are accessible** via public transit, or that are biking or walking distance from your event.
- ❖ **Reserve a set of loaner bicycles** for attendees to use while getting around town or to event destinations. AS Bikes is currently developing a lending program. Contact bikes@as.ucsb.edu for more info.
- ❖ **Arrange a shuttle bus or coordinate carpools to transport participants, thereby minimizing** the need for single-occupancy car trips.
- ❖ **Schedule field trips to coincide with public transit** routes & times.

Give Yourself Credit

If you successfully plan a green event, most of your green efforts should go unnoticed. Green event planning should not be an inconvenience to you or your guests. All of your efforts in resource conservation and carbon emissions reduction will look as if they took no effort at all — therefore it is very important to make sure your guests know about all of the extra special steps you took to ensure they have a wonderful time in an earth-friendly way. Signage celebrating the green side of your event is critical to sharing your mission with your guests, ensuring guests know how to manage their waste, and will hopefully inspire them to green any future events they might plan or attend in the future.

Conclusion

Do what you can. Start small and expand your sustainability initiatives over time. It is important to recognize that this journey does not happen overnight. For annual or recurring events, planners can start with actions that make sense for the particular situation and improve or add sustainable strategies each year. The journey to sustainability is a team effort.

*Originally authored by Stacy Canada, edited by Robyn DiFalco, AS Sustainability Program, CSU Chico.
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This guide is a work in progress. Help create the next version by sharing your comments, knowledge and experience with us at ucsbeab@gmail.com

Green Bill Guide

Sustainable Purchasing: For all events and meetings, 50% of purchases towards food, plates and silverware, and “SWAG” that utilize student funds must be “sustainable” in some regard.

- Food: 50% of food and beverages must be sustainable: local, organic, or fair-trade certified
 - *Solution*
 - Buy organic, local food from IV Food Co-op and Farmer’s Markets
 - Tip: ask employees at the IV Food Co-op about their whole sale program, community donations and catering services
- Plates, Cups, Utensils: 50% of products must be compostable or recyclable
 - *Solution*
 - Buy compostable plate ware from IV Food Co-op or ecoproducts.com
 - Encourage BYO_Cups, Plates, Utensils, etc.
- “Swag” Promotional Products (such as T-shirts) must be made from partially recycled or organic materials and sourced locally
 - *Solution*:
 - Consider buying organic cotton or from “green” and local companies
 - Isla Vista Screen Printing offers organic cotton
 - <http://tsdesigns.com/> is a sustainable t-shirt printing company
 - <http://www.ecoproducts.com/products>
- *No water bottles* are allowed to be purchased with student funds UNLESS for an outdoor event with over 200 attendees.
- *Styrofoam may never be purchased* with student fees.

2) Off Campus events must have recycle and composting bins onsite

- Contact AS Recycling at asrecycling@as.ucsb.edu for more info