



VANDERBILT
UNIVERSITY

Sustainable Event Guide

**Tips for Reducing the Environmental
Impact of Your Next Event**

FutureVU >>>
SUSTAINABILITY

2022

By its very nature, events and meetings bring many people together who may need to travel, who will consume food and materials, and who will produce waste. To help reach Vanderbilt's zero waste goals, these guidelines were developed to help you minimize the environmental impact of your event/meeting as much as possible. More specific information pertaining to event transportation, communication, catering, decorating, waste minimization, and recycling is discussed below.



Before the Event

Do as much as possible to reduce waste prior to the event by planning your communications, materials, and waste streams carefully.

INVITATIONS AND PUBLICITY

- Publicize your event mainly [via email and online](#).
 - If you do use printed publicity materials, print quarter or half-sheets or postcards directing participants to the event website to get full details.
 - Look for printing vendors that offer green printing alternatives, such as vegetable-based inks, paper that is Forest Stewardship Council-certified (FSC), tree-free paper, and paper containing at least 30% post-consumer waste content.
- Use online registration and electronic payment with email confirmation

EVENT MATERIALS

- Encourage speakers to use [PowerPoint presentations instead of handouts](#), and dry erase boards instead of flip chart paper. Upload materials to a website, BOX site, or Google Drive for access by participants
- Purchase [sustainable event materials and gifts](#) for presenters and participants that are locally made; recyclable; made of recycled materials; made with organic and/or unbleached fibers; or purchase materials/gifts that save energy or water or reduce waste. There are many options available that can be requested from your supplier or vendor. However, please consider what is needed for the event and order exact quantities or ask attendees to bring their own materials.

MANAGING WASTE

- To receive the proper waste receptacles, **please match your waste collection request to the items that will be used at the event.**
- For events held on Vanderbilt's campus, **include a request for recycling and/or compostables collection** on your work order to Plant Operations, or contact Vanderbilt's Campus Recycling Manager at 615.343.2784 or recycle@vanderbilt.edu.
- If you are not serviced by Plant Operations, you could specify within your catering contract that the caterer provide recycling containers and move the recycling to a proper location when they leave.



- For events held off of Vanderbilt's campus in the Nashville community, visit [Nashville's recycling page](#).
- Place recycling/compostables containers next to trash containers for easy access and announce to participants throughout the event what and where to recycle.
- Make sure that your containers are well labeled, and, if possible, have restrictive lids (lids cut to the shape of the object being recycled). This helps to cut down trash winding up in the recycling/compostables container.

During and After the Event

Ask for a volunteer to help with cleanup during and after the event to ensure waste is being properly disposed of. In addition, think of creative ways to reuse materials from the event, particularly conferences that occur annually.

CLEAN-UP AND WASTE MANAGEMENT

- Designate or ask for a volunteer to ensure all waste is placed in the proper bin.
- Designate or ask for a volunteer "green sweeper" to collect recyclables, power down lights and equipment, adjust thermostats, take note of items that can be re-used, adjust blinds and curtains, etc. at the end of your event.

REPURPOSING MATERIALS

- **Reuse location and room signs** for several events.
- Provide reusable nametag holders and lanyards and collect them at the end of the event for use again the next year.
- Decorate with **natural and reusable items**, such as whole fruit, flowers, and herbs/plants that can be replanted for others to enjoy after the event.
- **Donate excess food** to food banks, if possible:
 - [Second Harvest Food Bank](#) at 615.329.3491
 - [Nashville Rescue Mission](#) at 615.255.2475
- Donate excess materials (marketing materials, pens, totes, etc.) to a local organization/Goodwill



Catering

For sustainable catering practices, consider the food, drinks, service ware, and materials used, the transportation of the food and drinks, and the waste produced by food and drink packaging.

- Hire local caterers who commit to using locally grown and organic food as much as possible. This greatly reduces the distance the food must travel to your event, pre- and post-caterer, resulting in fresher food with less environmental impact.
 - [VU Catering](#)
 - [Whole Foods Market](#)
 - [Taste Catering](#)
 - [Dream Catering](#)



Use the following checklist to make sure your catering is as sustainable as possible.

| Category | Sustainable Catering Strategies | ✓ |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Table Settings and Decor | Use reusable plates, cups, cutlery, and serving ware | |
| | Use tables that don't require tablecloths, or use reusable tablecloths | |
| | Use reusable linens for your tables, if covers are needed | |
| | Use table decor that can be reused or repurposed, such as potted plants or fresh fruit | |
| Food Packaging and Serving | Serve food in large containers instead of single servings, using large platters or casserole dishes for salads, sandwiches, and other food items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use containers that are reusable or recyclable ○ Avoid individually packaged meals ○ Avoid individually packaged sides | |
| | Serve drinks out of large bulk containers such as gallons of tea or pitchers of water <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Prioritize cans or boxed drinks over plastic bottles, if single-serving is only option ○ Avoid single-serve drinks if possible | |
| | Serve bite-sized finger food to minimize plate and utensil use | |
| | Serve local, organic, and seasonal produce and other goods when possible | |
| | Minimize meat consumed and instead use plant-based proteins as the center of the meal | |
| Food and Meals | Use whole, minimally processed foods | |
| | Minimize food waste by correctly sizing portions for the actual number of attendees and not overestimating total amounts needed | |
| | Choose sustainable seafood certified by the Marine Stewardship Council | |
| | Serve sustainable coffee, such as shade-grown, fair-trade, organic, bird-certified, etc. (available from most wholesalers) | |
| | Where single-use items such as cups, napkins, and cutlery are required, choose the following materials in the following order of preference: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Compostable or bio-based ○ Items with recycled content ○ Recyclable items | |
| Materials and Packaging | | |
| Recycling and Compostables Containers | Ensure recycling and food waste/compostables containers are available to accommodate the amount of recycling anticipated. These can be requested on your work order if not available | |
| | Prioritize recycling/compostables containers over trash cans to encourage recycling | |
| | Ensure clear signage with instructions for proper recycling and composting is posted by each type of container | |

OTHER TIPS

- Get an accurate count of attendance and special dietary requests (vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, etc.) before the event to eliminate excess food waste. Use this [calculator](#) from Save the Food to help estimate the amount of food to order for your event.
- Look to rent reusable dishes and silverware
- Buy coffee from local brewers to reduce transportation related carbon emissions. Look into coffee from [Bongo Java](#), [Frothy Monkey](#), and [OSA](#).
- **Reduce food waste** by encouraging participants or organizers to bring reusable containers to take leftover food home with them.



Water

When considering alternatives to single-use plastic water bottles for your event, you can provide bulk water out of a dispenser or bottle filler instead of individually packaged water. Pair the bulk water with reusable or compostable cups for a more sustainable, plastic-free solution!

Consider providing bulk water at events with water coolers or multi-spout hydration stations paired with reusable or compostable cups. Both are available from Plant Operations at 615-343-9675.

BULK WATER

- **Consider using water coolers***, which can be rented through SIS at this link <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/plantops/services/sis.php>, or **pitchers*** for your meetings and events.
- **A portable, multi-spout hydration station*** can be rented for events and parties through emailing Robert West at: robert.w.west@vanderbilt.edu. Cost is \$50 to deliver plus any water hookup costs by zone.
- Ask participants to bring reusable cups to your event.
- Provide compostable cups (listed below) when utilizing bulk water dispensers. **If individually packaged, disposable water is required and a bulk option will not work, then refer to boxed, canned, and glass options.**

*Consider water dispensers as high-touch surfaces and clean as recommended

REUSABLE CUPS

Encourage your staff/attendees to bring their own reusable cup, which reduces the need for disposables and reduces waste. Individuals maintaining and cleaning their own reusable cups helps limit the number of items that are shared or touched by others.

COMPOSTABLE CUPS (available in Vanderbilt e-Procurement system):

If one-time use cups are necessary, compostable options are environmentally preferable. The following options are available in Vanderbilt e-Procurement system:

- **Dart Solo®** Waxed Paper Cold Cups with “superior rigidity” made with at least 70% renewable resources and compostable. <https://www.dartcontainer.com/products/foodservice-catalog/hot-coldcups/paper/solo-waxed-paper-cold-cups/r9bb-jd110/>
- **Perk** 12-oz Compostable Paper Hot Cup. https://www.staples.com/perk-compostable-paper-hot-cup-12-oz-white-green-50-pack-pk56222/product_24394127
- **EcoProducts** GreenStripe® Cold Cups, which are made with 100% Corn BioPlastic and are compostable. https://www.ecoproducts.com/greenstripe_cold_cups.html

More permanent water dispensing systems can also be installed in a space for easy access to filtered water on a regular basis.

IN-OFFICE WATER DISPENSERS*

Still Water – Subscription and Rental Options

- **DS Services** provides subscription water dispensers that have large, reusable plastic water jugs that are delivered and sent back to the vendor to be reused. This is an approved vendor through VU e-Procurement <https://www.water.com/bottled-water-equipment>
- **Hydrodore** is a VU student run business that provides subscription water dispensers that have large, reusable plastic water jugs that are delivered and sent back to the vendor to be reused regularly. <https://hydrodore.org/>
- **Consider using water coolers***, which can be rented through SIS at this link <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/plantops/services/sis.php>, or pitchers*
- **A portable, multi-spout hydration station*** can be rented for events and parties through emailing Robert West at: robert.w.west@vanderbilt.edu.

Still Water – Purchase Options

- **Permanent Rapid Water Bottle Fillers** can be installed in your buildings as additions to drinking fountains or as standalone installations. Contact Facilities at 615-343-9675.
- **Water Dispensers** can be purchased from retailers like Staples, Amazon, or Walmart and replacement water jugs can be purchased from the same retailers.

Sparkling Water – Purchase Option

- **Quench** offers still and sparkling bottleless filtered water dispensers <https://quenchwater.com/product/quench-570-fs-vivreau-freestanding-main-bottler/>

*Consider water dispensers as high-touch surfaces and clean as recommended

If you need to provide individual, on-the-go water, use boxed, canned, or glass water products that are more sustainable and reduce consumption of single use plastic bottles!

INDIVIDUALLY PACKAGED WATER

Still Water

- Aquafina canned water is available through Campus Dining and e-Procurement(?)
- **JUST Water** in boxed containers available in e-Procurement from American Paper and Twine.

- Cartons can be recycled in Vanderbilt's paper recycling stream if empty and with the caps on.
- **Open Water** canned still water is another alternative to bottled water.
 - Aluminum containers are recyclable in the aluminum/plastic recycling stream on campus.
- Other options such as Boxed Water, Flow Hydration (includes flavored boxed water), and Ever & Ever still water (also has a sparkling option) are available through common retailers.

Sparkling Water

- **Many vendors and retail outlets** offer canned sparkling water in a variety of brands and flavors such as Bubly, LaCroix, etc.
 - Aluminum containers are recyclable in the aluminum/plastic recycling stream on campus.
- **Mountain Valley Spring** offers single-use glass-bottled sparkling water delivery to offices. <https://www.mountainvalleyspring.com/shop/sparkling/>.
 - Glass containers are recyclable in the glass recycling stream on campus.



Transportation

When planning an event, make sure to provide options for environmentally-friendly accommodations and transportation.

- Consider holding a small conference or meeting **via video-conference** to eliminate travel issues altogether.
- Provide local accommodations that are within **walking distance** to the event.



- Look for hotels that include [sustainable practices](#) to book for your guests.
- Hire shuttles to **transport participants in large groups** to and from airports or hotels, or give information about public transportation to reduce the use of individual car travel.
- Post a ride-share network on the event's website for carpooling opportunities.
- If flying, consider **offsetting the carbon emissions** of your flight. Helpful information can be found through [Climeco](#), [Terrapass.com](#), [carbonfund.org](#), and [myclimate.org](#).

Zero Waste Checklist

This checklist can be used to plan zero-waste events and meetings! Use any or all applicable strategies.

| Category | | ✓ |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| Event Preparation Strategies | | |
| Invitations and Publicity | Publicize your event via email and social media | |
| | Use online registration and electronic payment with email confirmation | |
| Planning Waste and Recycling Streams | Ensure recycling and food waste/compostables containers are available to accommodate the type/amount of materials anticipated. These can be requested on your work order if not available | |
| | Prioritize recycling/composting containers over trash cans to encourage recycling | |
| | Ensure clear signage with instructions for proper recycling/compostables collection is posted by each type of container | |
| Sustainable Catering and Materials | | |
| Table Settings and Decor | Use reusable plates, cups, cutlery, and serving ware | |
| | Where single-use items such as cups, napkins, and cutlery are required, choose the following materials in the following order of preference: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compostable Recyclable items | |
| | Use table decor that can be reused or repurposed, such as potted plants or fresh fruit | |
| | Use tables that don't require tablecloths, or use reusable tablecloths/linens | |
| Food | Minimize food waste by correctly sizing portions for the actual number of attendees and not overestimating total amounts needed | |
| | Serve food in large containers instead of single servings, using large platters or dishes for salads, sandwiches, and other food items | |
| | Use containers that are reusable or recyclable | |
| | Avoid individually packaged meals & sides | |
| | Serve drinks out of large bulk containers such as gallons of tea or pitchers of water <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritize cans or boxed drinks over plastic bottles if individual containers are the only option Avoid single-serve drinks if possible | |
| Materials and Packaging | Encourage speakers to use PowerPoint presentations instead of handouts, and dry erase boards instead of flip chart paper. Upload materials to a website, BOX site, or Google Drive for access by participants | |
| | Consider forgoing gifts or gifts for presenters and participants, or providing gifts that help individuals reduce waste | |
| | Provide reusable nametag holders and lanyards and collect them at the end of the event for use again the next year | |
| Post-Event Waste Elimination | | |
| Repurposing Materials | Reuse location and room signs for several events | |
| | Donate or reuse excess materials (marketing materials, pens, totes, etc.) | |
| Excess Food | Have a plan for extra food so that it does not go to waste <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask participants/attendees to bring reusable to-go containers for extra food Donate excess food to food banks, if possible: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Second Harvest Food Bank at 615.329.3491 Nashville Rescue Mission at 615.255.2475 | |
| | Designate or ask for a volunteer to ensure all recycling and compost is placed in the proper bin. | |
| | Designate or ask for a volunteer "green sweeper" to collect compostables/recyclables, power down lights and equipment, adjust thermostats, take note of items that can be re-used, adjust blinds and curtains, etc. at the end of your event. | |

Thank you for your interest in creating a more sustainable Vanderbilt.

Check out FutureVU Sustainability's other [Sustainability Guides](#)

For more information on any of the suggestions above or general sustainability information, please visit <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/sustainability/>

For additional assistance with making your event sustainable, please contact the FutureVU Sustainability Office at 615.322.9022 or FutureVUSustainability@vanderbilt.edu

