



VANDERBILT  
UNIVERSITY

# Sustainable Event Greening Guide

Tips for Reducing the Environmental  
Impact of Your Next Event

# SustainVU

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By its very nature, a large event or meeting brings many people together who must travel, who will consume possibly large amounts of food and products, and who will produce waste. These guidelines were developed to help you think about the environmental impact of your event and how to minimize that impact as much as possible. More specific information pertaining to event transportation, communication, catering, decorating, waste minimization, and recycling is discussed below.

## Reduce

Do as much as possible to reduce waste before the event even starts.

- 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.
  - [VU Printing Services](#) offers 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. Visit the [SustainVU Green Printing](#) page for additional information.
- Use online registration and electronic payment with email confirmation, such as [Eventbrite](#) or [ConstantContact](#).
- 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 Docs 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. Specific items often available in more environmentally friendly versions are badge holders, folders, pens, reusable water bottles and coffee mugs, conference bags, t-shirts, pullovers, or LED hand-cranked cell phone chargers and flashlights.
- 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.



## Reuse

Think of creative ways to reuse materials from the event, particularly conferences that occur annually.



- 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

## Recycle

Request recycling bins for your next event.

- For events held on Vanderbilt's campus, include a request for recycling on your work order to Plant Operations. Or you can contact Vanderbilt's Campus Recycling Manager at 615.343.2784 or [recycle@vanderbilt.edu](mailto: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 containers next to trash bins 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.



## Food

For sustainable food practices, consider the food itself, the transportation of the food, and the waste produced by food packaging.

- Hire 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, resulting in fresher food with less environmental impact
  - [VU Catering](#)
  - [Whole Foods Market](#)
  - [Martha Stamps Catering](#)
  - [Karla's Catering and Prepared Foods](#)
  - [Taste Catering](#)
  - [The Chic Pea Catering Company](#)





**Did you know?** Coffee is the second-most traded commodity in the world. Your choice in coffee really does make a difference!

- Serving sustainable coffee, such as shade-grown, fair-trade, organic, bird-certified, etc. (available from most coffee wholesalers).
  - Buy coffee from local brewers to reduce transportation related carbon emissions. Look into coffee from [Bongo Java](#), [Frothy Monkey](#), and [OSA](#).
- Use reusable china plates and utensils whenever possible to reduce the waste of disposables. Look for local party companies to rent reusable dining and party items.
  - If disposables must be used, here are some choices, recommended in order of least environmental impact: 1) paper products with a high recycled content (i.e. paper cups or napkins made with recycled paper), 2) bioware that is made of corn, potatoes, etc. that is biodegradable or compostable, or 3) recyclable plastic ware. **Earth-friendlier cups** are available from American Paper and Twine (APT) through E-Procurement.



- **Dixie's Insulair Hot/Cold Cups** are made of 25% post-consumer recycled paper material with a 100% post-consumer recycled built-in sleeve.
  - **Solo's "Bare" Hot/Cold Cups** are made of at least 10% post-consumer recycled paper material and comes in sizes 4 to 20 ounces. **Solo's "Bare" Plastic cup** is made of 20% recycled PET.
  - For more options on earth friendlier product choices, please contact [Vanderbilt Purchasing Services](#).
- If your event is offering soft drinks and/or plastic water bottles, it is a good choice to use the 12-ounce size over the standard 16-ounce. Often, people don't drink the entire 16 ounces of water, leaving liquid in the bottle that needs to be emptied before being properly recycled.
  - Eliminate excess packaging by serving food in large containers instead of single-servings, such as salad or wrap platters instead of individual boxed lunches. Provide bulk water, coffee, and drink dispensers instead of individually packaged products. Consider using water coolers instead of water bottles and providing food in lunch bags with recycled content instead of lunch boxes. Environmentally friendly lunch bags can be purchased at many locations. One local option is [Nashville Wraps](#).
  - Serve bite-sized or finger foods to minimize plate and utensil use
  - 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.
  - Buy napkins that have post-consumer paper content in them. Whole Foods carries napkins in bulk sizes that have between 80% - 100% post-consumer recycled material. This is a good example of how a small change can make a big difference.



- Minimize the use of meats and choose [Marine Stewardship Council](#) certified sustainable fish and seafood or locally-grown, organic vegetables and fruits instead.

## Transportation

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



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

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

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

For additional assistance with greening your event, please contact the Sustainability and Environmental Management Office at 615.322.9022 or [sustainvu@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:sustainvu@vanderbilt.edu).

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