

# PLANNING AND CONDUCTING SUSTAINABLE MEETINGS & EVENTS

More and more meeting planners and organizations are seeking ways to minimize the environmental impact of their events. As the destination marketing association for America's Greenest City\*, Experience Grand Rapids stands ready to help!

**Here are a few ideas for making your next event more sustainable:**

## Sell Sustainability to Management

Enlist management support by emphasizing the range of environmental, social and economic benefits that result from a sustainable approach. Sustainable meetings can help the environment, enhance public image, heighten attendance and potentially save money.

**TIP: Consider creating a sustainable meeting policy for your team, department, or event.**

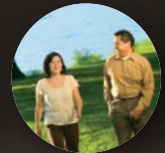
## Set Your Sustainable Priorities

Identify the sustainability issues that are important to your organization or community – e.g., waste reduction, recycling, water conservation or air quality. Set priorities that reflect these issues. See the Priority Planning Checklist at the end of this document for examples.

## Translate Your Priorities Into Actions

Use these priorities to help guide your planning process:

- Choose a destination city that makes sustainability a priority.
- Select a site based on its ability to best address your priorities – for example:
  - Does it incorporate energy-efficient water, lighting and HVAC systems?
  - Does it maintain a recycling program?
  - Does it utilize renewable energy?
  - Does it use “green” cleaning chemicals?
  - Is it close, accessible by mass transit and/or pedestrian-friendly?
- Evaluate foodservice providers for sustainable practices – for example:
  - Do they source from local farms and emphasize fresh ingredients?
  - Do they use eco-friendly utensils, serving pieces and packaging?
  - Do they offer vegetarian meals, which leave a smaller environment “footprint”?
  - Do they compost food waste, and “recycle” or donate leftover catering meals?
- Choose vendors and suppliers that offer sustainable products and integrate sustainable business practices.



**TIP: Share your priorities with convention bureaus so they can identify appropriate sites and suppliers for you. Share them with suppliers to help set expectations.**



  
CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

[ExperienceGR.com/sustainable](http://ExperienceGR.com/sustainable)

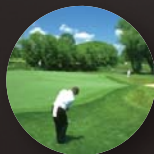
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## Promote Sustainability to Attendees

Make sure potential attendees are aware of your event's sustainable features. Your environmental commitment can help build attendance – and raise the public profile of your event and organization in attendees' local communities.

## Evaluate and Celebrate

Monitor and track your sustainability efforts. Document problems, successes and failures through on-site observation, participant surveys and supplier feedback (e.g., the quantity of materials recycled during the event). Promote your achievements to management, members, sponsors, suppliers and the public, in presentations, newsletters and press releases.



\*Fast Company magazine, 2008

Note: This information is freely adapted from information provided by the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

# PRIORITY PLANNING CHECKLIST

Following is brief overview of possible environmental priorities and the action steps you might take in support of them.

## Waste Prevention and Reduction

- Utilize new media and electronic technology to promote your event and register participants.
- Purge duplicate addresses from mailing lists.
- Require that all printed materials be double-sided.
- Avoid mass distribution of handouts and allow attendees to order copies.
- Provide reusable nametags and binders.

## Recycling and Waste Management

- Collect paper and recyclable beverage containers in meeting areas.
- Collect cardboard and paper in exhibit areas.
- Collect cardboard, beverage containers, steel cans and plastics in food vending areas.
- Make recycling bins visible and accessible.

## Energy Conservation and Traffic Reduction

- Seek naturally lighted meeting and exhibit spaces.
- Work with meeting venue to ensure lights and HVAC are turned off when rooms are not in use.
- Publicize mass transportation options.
- Provide shuttle service from mass transit stops or hotels to the event site.
- Choose pedestrian-friendly convention campuses.

## Food Service and Lodging

- Provide accurate headcounts to reduce unnecessary meal preparation.
- Consider using reusable foodservice items and/or eco-friendly disposables.
- Donate excess food to charitable organizations.
- Choose hotels that offer a linen reuse program and bulk soap/shampoo dispensers.

## Environmentally Aware Products

- Use recycled paper and vegetable- and soy-based inks for printed materials.
- Sell or provide refillable containers for beverages.
- Provide reusable containers for handouts or samples (cloth bags, file folders).
- Select products that are made from recovered materials and can also be recycled.

## Educating Participants and Exhibitors

- Promote your sustainable vision and action plan.
- Request the use of recycled and recyclable handouts or giveaways.
- Request that unused items be collected for use at another event.
- Encourage participants to recycle materials at the event.
- Publicize your environmental performance after the event.