

Planning Green Events, Offsite Meetings & Retreats

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GENERAL

- Obtain consensus on the planning team regarding the environmental goals of the event.
- Communicate with attendees about what has been done to make it a green event.
- Invite feedback on environmental practices from attendees, and if possible, calculate the reduction in environmental impact.

FACILITIES

- Select facilities that require a minimum travel distance. For example, seek out facilities that are centrally located and have good mass transit access.
- Evaluate the environmental practices and willingness to work with the team to do a green event for each potential facility.
 - Does the facility train staff to actively recycle, at a minimum, paper, metals, glass, and plastic?
 - Does the facility have a program to reduce energy use? (e.g., use compact fluorescent light bulbs and instruct guests to turn down the thermostat, turn off lights, and reuse towels)
 - Does the facility take steps to minimize waste? (e.g., provide dispensers for soap and shampoo, eliminate use of disposable cups, provide newspapers only on request)
 - Does the facility have a program to eliminate harmful chemicals? (e.g., toxic cleaners, pesticides)
 - Does the facility provide locally grown, organic food with vegetarian and vegan options?
- Select facilities that are Green Seal certified on www.greenseal.org/programs/lodging.cfm.

TRANSPORTATION

- Provide participants and speakers with information on environmentally preferable ways to get to the event.
- Provide vans or buses (using alternative fuels, if possible) or offer incentives to travel by public transit or bicycle. Assist registrants in arranging carpools.
- Purchase high quality offsets for CO₂ emissions produced by event and/or offer a way for participants to purchase offsets at the event or on the event Web site.

FOOD SERVICE

- Request food service providers to provide the following:
 - Vegetarian and vegan meal choices
 - Menu items prepared with locally grown/in-season, organic food
 - Fair-trade, shade-grown organic coffee
 - Durable plates, glasses, mugs, and utensils
 - Cloth napkins

- Condiments in bulk using non-disposable containers (including cream and sugar)
- Water and juice in pitchers rather than single-service bottles
- Provide snacks that are not individually wrapped.
- Request attendees to sign up for meals in advance to get an accurate count.
- Coordinate with a local food bank or soup kitchen to donate unserved meal portions.

RECYCLING

- Evaluate the accessibility and use of recycling containers used by the facility.
 - Containers should be well-marked and visible.
 - Confirm that containers are used by employees.
 - Ideally, containers are provided at the registration desk, near vending machines, in the conference rooms, and in the kitchen.
- If necessary, provide any additional containers for items the facility doesn't typically recycle, and arrange for disposition of these materials.
- If feasible, provide a bin for composting food scraps.
- Advertise the availability of recycling at the event.

WASTE REDUCTION

- Minimize handouts.
 - Make all presentations available on a Web site.
 - Provide hard copies only by request. Print double-sided on paper with at least 30% post-consumer recycled content.
 - Ask presenters to print multiple slides on each page.
- Use white boards with "low odor" pens or request recycled flipchart paper.
- Use reusable plastic covers for nametags and ask attendees to leave them in a box at the end of the event.
- Avoid promotional gifts that attendees may not want.
- Use recyclable mounting board rather than foam core for any posted signs.

For more information see the following:

www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/reduce/grn-mtgs/chklist.htm

www.vtgreenhotels.org/articles/grnconf.htm

www.conventionindustry.org/projects/green_meetings_report.pdf

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