



Sustainable Event Greening Guide

**Tips for reducing the environmental impact of
your next event**

Sustainability is achieved when the needs of the present population are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. To achieve sustainability, we should examine the impact that our activities have on the environment and implement ways to reduce our consumption of resources and our generation of waste. In keeping with the efforts of Vanderbilt to become a more sustainable campus, the Sustainability and Environmental Management Office has developed this **Sustainable Event Greening Guide** in order to provide those planning on-campus events with the tools they need to lessen the environmental impact of the conferences, meetings, social gatherings, and other events that they plan each year.

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

The basis of environmental sustainability rests on the concept of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, in that order. The first step in “greening” is to **REDUCE**. This means making a conscious effort to lessen your consumption of resources and products on a day to day basis, whether this is using a reusable coffee mug instead of a disposable cup, or emailing or printing double-sided copies at work to save paper. Reducing your consumption of resources also reduces the waste you produce.



Reducing waste means looking for products that you can easily **REUSE**, which is the second step. You might repurpose items yourself or you can look for places to donate unwanted products to someone else or a charity so others can reuse them.

To close the waste loop, any product that cannot be reused, you should attempt to **RECYCLE**.

- ◆ **All of Vanderbilt** recycles cardboard, [confidential paper](#), [computers and electronics waste \(e-waste\)](#), [ink and toner cartridges](#), [small batteries](#), and [pens and mechanical pencils](#).
- ◆ [Vanderbilt campus](#) recycles all plastic containers, mixed paper, aluminum and glass. (Glass is drop-off only at Peabody Recycling Center on Appleton Drive and other select locations).
- ◆ [Vanderbilt School of Medicine \(SOM\)](#) and [Vanderbilt Children’s Hospital \(VCH\) Doctors Office Tower \(DOT\)](#) recycle all plastic containers, aluminum, and mixed paper.
- ◆ Other Vanderbilt University Medical Center areas, including [Vanderbilt University Hospital \(VUH\)](#), [Vanderbilt Children’s Hospital \(VCH\)](#), [One Hundred Oaks](#), [Medical Center East](#), and [The Vanderbilt Clinic \(TVC\)](#), recycle all plastic containers and aluminum.

Specific ways you can reduce, reuse, and recycle will be discussed in more detail throughout this guide.



By its very nature, a large event or meeting brings people together who must travel, who will consume 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. Here are some suggestions:

- ◆ Publicize your event mainly via email and the internet.
 - 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 for access by participants.
- ◆ Purchase sustainable event materials and gifts for presenters and participants that are **recyclable; made of recycled materials; made with organic and/or unbleached fibers; or purchase materials/gifts that save energy or water or reduce waste**. Specific items often available in environmentally-friendlier versions are badge holders, folders, pens, reusable water bottles and coffee mugs, conference bags, t-shirts, pullovers, or LED handcranked cell phone chargers and flashlights. There are many options available; simply request these characteristics from your supplier or vendor.
- ◆ Designate a **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. A few options would be:

- ◆ 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 Coordinator 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 remove the recycling to its 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. Sustainable food practices include:



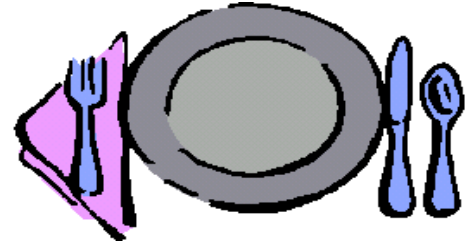
- ◆ Hiring caterers who commit to using locally grown and organic food as much as possible. This greatly reduces the distance the food had to travel to your event, making it fresher, and reducing the environmental impact of that transportation process.
 - [Whole Foods Market](#)
 - [Local Kitchen Catering](#)
 - [Martha Stamps Catering](#)
 - [Karla's Catering and Prepared Foods](#)
 - [VU Catering](#)
- ◆ 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](#).

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

- ◆ Using reusable china plates and utensils whenever possible to reduce the waste of disposables. Several local companies who offer these products for rental include:
 - [Art Pancake](#) at 615.834.1234
 - [Classic Party Rentals](#) at 615.641.1111
 - [Grand Central Party Rentals](#) at 615.868.3747
 - [Liberty Party Rental](#) at 615.822.4392
- ◆ 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 Jenny Kirby at American Paper and Twine at 615.350.9050 ext. 2250, or at jkirby@aptcommerce.com.

- ◆ 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. This will cut down on waste as well as cut costs, reducing overall material and labor costs.
- ◆ Eliminate excess packaging by serving food in large containers instead of single-servings. 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.
- ◆ 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.



Transportation

When planning an event, make sure to provide options for environmentally-friendly transportation. These include:

- ◆ 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.
 - [The Hutton Hotel](#) on West End offers **sustainable accommodations**, including energy-efficient lighting in public areas, reclaimed wood furnishings, key card activated lighting in guest rooms, dual flush toilets, waterless urinals, a hybrid courtesy vehicle, biodegradable cleaning products, and more. The hotel's restaurant, [1808 Grille](#), serves locally-produced coffee and wines, and utilizes organic ingredients and sustainable seafood.



- The [Holiday Inn Nashville – Vanderbilt](#) is part of IHG's [Green Engage](#) program, an innovative program which allows IHG to design, build and run sustainable hotels through energy reductions of up to 25% per year.
- ◆ Hire shuttles to transport participants in 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 “greener” Vanderbilt.

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

For more information on any of the greening suggestions above or general sustainability information, please visit www.vanderbilt.edu/SustainVU.

If you would like to receive regular emails from SustainVU, send an email to sustainvu@vanderbilt.edu with the phrase “subscribe sustainvu” in the subject line.

For additional assistance with greening your event, please contact the Sustainability and Environmental Management Office at 615.322.2057 or sustainvu@vanderbilt.edu.