

SUSTAINABLE EVENT GUIDE

go.ncsu.edu/sustainableevent



EVENTS HAVE IMPACT. THAT'S WHY YOU PLAN THEM.

While you're busy planning for maximum impact among event attendees, this guide will help steer you toward sustainable choices that reduce waste, energy, water and materials associated with your campus event.

From small receptions to large multi-day events, the ideas, resources and information within this guide will help you create a successful and sustainable event.

Earn recognition for your sustainability efforts by applying for Sustainable Event Certification at go.ncsu.edu/SustainableEvent. A checklist of sustainable actions begins on page 14 and will help you plan toward earning certification at one of three levels.

START PLANNING NOW:

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Champion: 56+ Points



Steward: 31-55 Points



Contributor: 10-30 Points

AREAS OF IMPACT

WHY SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS AT YOUR EVENT



Water Conservation

Water is a limited natural resource — use less now to ensure we have enough later.



Waste Reduction

Reuse, recycling and composting saves space in landfills while creating resources, money and healthier communities.



Food

We are what we eat, so make it healthy, sustainable and less wasteful.



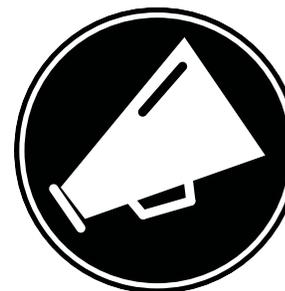
Purchasing

Sustainable choices mean less waste, safe production and oftentimes long-term cost savings.



Energy Conservation

Energy is expensive and costly to the environment to create. Use less to save money and natural resources.



Promotion and Marketing

Sustainable marketing produces less waste, uses less paper and saves money.



Alternative Transportation

Driving less reduces air pollution, saves gas and money, and improves health.

BEFORE THE EVENT



The foundation for a great event is created days, weeks or even months before the actual event. As you plan, integrate some of the following sustainable suggestions to minimize your event's environmental impact.

BEFORE THE EVENT



The College of Veterinary Medicine's annual Open House is a mostly outdoor event, which eliminates extra facility and energy use, and enables unique outdoor activities that attract large crowds every year.

Appoint a Sustainability Coordinator for Large Events

Event planning is all about details. If your event is planned by a committee, consider appointing someone to coordinate sustainability aspects, such as researching sustainable products, recommending sustainable solutions and completing the online form to earn [Wolfpack Certified Sustainable](#) recognition for your event.

Choose an Event Time and Location

Almost every event planner begins by choosing an event location. It's a major decision with big impacts on cost as well as sustainability.

Let the Sun Shine In

Consider holding your event during the day or early evening when it's possible to use natural lighting as a supplement to indoor lighting. In addition to creating a more pleasant natural environment, you will also conserve energy.

Make It Easy

Depending on your event's target audience, ensuring access to alternative transportation can be vital. If people are able to walk, bike or carpool to your event, your attendance rates may rise. As you promote the event, include information about nearby bus stops and schedules, bike routes, park and rides and any other alternative transit options.

Go a Step Further: →

- Encourage and incentivize the use of alternative transportation.
- If you anticipate many attendees arriving by bike, explore the growing trend of bike valet lots where attendees can securely park bikes while enjoying your event.
- Events cost money, time and resources. Consider whether your event's purpose could be accomplished online through a webinar or virtual conferencing. With recent technology advances, some events are easier held online than in person.

- In addition to cost and time, travel can also increase carbon emissions. In fact, up to 30 percent of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions come from travel. If your participants must hop in a car, train or airplane to reach your event, consider offering travel offsets, which is a small donation given to local nonprofits to enhance the community and/or environment.
- Innovate: What other ideas do you have for event locations that will help make your event more sustainable?

BEFORE THE EVENT



Homecoming created a mobile app instead of printing 6,000 flyers a day during the week-long Homecoming event.

Promote Your Event

It's never been easier to promote your event in sustainable ways.

Go Digital

In today's increasingly digital age, paper is no longer the only promotional option. In many cases, digital communications have been shown more effective at reaching target audiences. As you're making your promotion plan, save money and paper by utilizing as many digital promotion tactics as possible.

Go a Step Further: →

- Design an all-paperless promotion plan.
- If you need to print, you can be more sustainable by choosing to print on recycled paper or paper that has been FSC-certified for responsible tree harvesting. Be even more sustainable by choosing soy-based ink instead of traditional inks which are from petroleum sources. Many commercial printing companies offer these options.

- Make sure your attendees know about your efforts. If you used FSC-certified paper or soy ink, include that in small print somewhere on your publication. If your event earns [Wolfpack Certified Sustainable](#) recognition, print and display the certificate and promote this accomplishment on event material.

- Innovate: What other ideas do you have for sustainable event promotion and marketing?

Benefit the Community

Being sustainable isn't just about conserving money and natural resources. Creating vibrant, healthy communities is also important. Consider adding wellness or service components to your event.

Move It

In addition to offering healthy food, consider including an activity that encourages attendees to move more for better health. Adding an expo or exhibit area is a great way to encourage movement before or after a banquet or other formal event. Outdoor events are often an even easier place to add an interactive element.

Partner Up

Adding a service component doesn't have to be challenging or time consuming. Reach out to established service or non-profit organizations for service ideas, resources and opportunities.

Go a Step Further: →

- Consider whether your event has potential for a major service component. Not every event does, but if possible, make a difference in the community.
- Innovate: What other ideas do you have for service components that will help make your event more sustainable and beneficial to the community?

BEFORE THE EVENT



Earth Day t-shirts are made from recycled cotton and plastic bottles, and volunteers rave about the comfortable, non-shrink fabric.

Purchase or Rent Sustainable Supplies

The larger the event, the more supplies and equipment are required. With smart and sustainable material choices, you could save money while also reducing waste.

Big Savings Are a Click Away

Staying within an event's budget can be daunting. Be a resourceful and savvy planner by tapping into NC State [sustainable purchasing resources](#).

Cut It Out

By reducing the need for something at your event, you'll spend less money and limit waste. As you make your event's supply and to-do lists, ask yourself which items are vital and which are non-essential.

See What's Out There

Take advantage of what's available on campus. There is a good chance you can borrow items such as tables, chairs, tents and decorations – making it

possible to eliminate some expenses altogether.

Rack Up On Reusables

Look for opportunities to save money by reusing resources. For example, instead of printing a new banner every year for your annual event, print a generic banner that you can use year after year. Explore other items you could reuse by purchasing from NC State's [Surplus Property Office](#).

Go a Step Further: →

- If your event will use equipment or appliances, select the energy-efficient version such as Energy Star or EPEAT (for computers and electronics).
- Some events are nearly off the energy grid because they use solar-powered or biodiesel generators. If you're having an outdoor event, this may be a particularly appealing option.
- Purchase supplies that contain recycled content and/or reduce packaging. Individually wrapped items are often unnecessary and create extra waste such as plastic film that is difficult to recycle.

SELECTING SUSTAINABLE SUPPLIES

Avoid

- Products with excessive, single-item packaging
- One-time use vinyl banners
- Single use decorations, such as balloons and streamers

Better Choice

- Banners made from paper, cardboard or another recyclable product
- Live or edible decorations, such as food or plants

Best Choice

- Bulk packaged products
- Reusable banners that can be used at other events
- Reusable decorations, such as art

- If your event has a giveaway planned, avoid waste by giving away a service or consumable item such as coupons, experiences (e.g. tickets to an NC State athletic event), gift certificates, plants, food, etc.
- Buy in bulk if you anticipate using supplies in the future. Often bulk purchases reduce packaging and save money.
- Buying event t-shirts? Consider a sustainable material such as organic or local cotton. Many vendors also offer shirts made from recycled plastic bottles, which are spun into a soft polyester fabric.
- Purchasing local products supports the local economy while reducing the distance a product must travel to your event.
- Support socially responsible companies that have environmental or social initiatives to improve the community and world.
- Innovate: What other ideas do you have for using sustainable materials at your event?

BEFORE THE EVENT



Two of University Dining's most popular events of the year – All Carolinas Meal and Farm Feast – feature local food.

Food Choices

Many events feature food. Whether you're planning a dessert reception or a five-course dinner, sustainable food choices are available.

Eat Well

Many delicious, healthy options exist for your event's menu. Keep the food fresh and wholesome by using whole grains, vegetables and proteins.

Variety Is Best

Many people prefer vegetarian diets and abstain from meat. Some of your event attendees might also be vegans, who in addition to not eating meat also don't consume eggs, dairy or other animal products. Have options available for these guests.

Go a Step Further: →

- Serving local produce from farms that are less than 400 miles away is a fantastic way to support the local economy and reduce travel costs and emissions related to food.

- Organic options are becoming more available as demand for organic growing practices continues to rise. Look for USDA certified organic produce when searching for healthy food options for your event.
- Farmers select what to grow and when to grow it according to the seasons. [Serve food in season to stretch your budget.](#)
- Food that is Fair Trade certified means that it was produced with high social and environmental standards. Purchasing these products (e.g. coffee, tea, bananas, nuts, rice and chocolate, etc.) supports sustainable farming in developing countries.
- Save money and reduce excessive packaging by buying food in bulk.
- While disposable plastic forks and knives are generally the go-to for events, compostable tableware is just as easy and environmentally friendly since attendees toss them in a compost bin instead of a trash can.
- Innovate: What other ideas do you have for sustainable food choices at your event?

N.C. SEASONAL FOOD EXAMPLES

SUMMER:

eggplant, zucchini, bell pepper, new potato, peas, cucumbers, basil, peaches

AUTUMN:

carrot, pumpkin, sweet potato, lettuce, turnips, shiitake mushrooms, apple

SPRING:

artichoke, asparagus, cauliflower, celery, kale, radish, spinach, strawberry, raspberry

WINTER:

carrot, brussels sprout, red cabbage, leek, winter squash, pear, tangerine

[More examples of seasonal, local food](#)

SELECTING SUSTAINABLE FOOD SUPPLIES

Avoid	Foods shipped from long-distance, international locations
	Plastic plates
	Bottled water, foam cups, plastic cups, straws
	Plastic silverware
	Plastic tablecloths
Better Choice	Prepackaged sandwiches or meals
	Single serving condiments (mustard, ketchup, sugar, etc.)
	Foods grown in the United States
	Paper plates (compostable if composting)
Best Choice	Paper cups (compostable if composting)
	Flatware made from a compostable material (if composting)
	Paper tablecloths and napkins
	Seasonal foods from North Carolina
Best Choice	"Real" or reusable plates
	"Real" or reusable cups
	"Real" silverware
	Washable tablecloths and napkins
	Finger foods

BEFORE THE EVENT



At the Kay Yow Spring Football Game, volunteers guided attendees about whether items could be composted or recycled.

Reduce Event Waste

When planning an event, waste management is often overlooked but plays a vital role in an event’s success and sustainability. Strive for zero waste, which is a philosophy of thoughtful reuse, composting and recycling in order to minimize waste sent to landfills. By striving for zero waste at your event, you will help save landfill space and reduce the use of natural resources.

Call in the On-Campus Experts

NC State’s [Waste Reduction and Recycling Office](#) exists to reduce the amount of waste NC State sends to landfills, so they are the ideal resource to draw upon as you plan your event. Complete an [online special event request form](#) or call 919-515-9421.

Go a Step Further: →

- Upon request, Waste Reduction and Recycling can provide event bins (known as clear streams) that have options for recycling, composting (especially useful if your event has food) and landfill waste. These units are effective ways to avoid trashing an item that could be composted or recycled.
- Waste Reduction and Recycling can assist with creating an event recycling plan that details the number of bins and bin locations. Convenient bin locations encourage attendees to recycle or compost. Volunteers can help manage the waste stations by emptying full bins and, if composting, ensure discarded items are placed into the correct bin.
- In many cases, paper is a thing of the past as new digital technologies provide paperless opportunities to communicate. Use technology where available, and if you must print, strive for strategic placement that reduces how much you need to print. For example, use centralized whiteboards, electronic dashboards or posters with event information displayed instead of distributing paper handouts to each participant.

- If your event uses vendors, such as catering or equipment rental, inquire about the company’s waste reduction practices. When contacting potential vendors, make sure they are aware of your waste reduction efforts and are willing to comply with zero waste standards. A [“Dear Vendor” letter](#) is available online.
- Innovate: What other ideas do you have for reducing waste at your event?

DURING THE EVENT



The event is planned, and you're ready to welcome attendees. These ideas help keep your sustainable event running smoothly.

DURING THE EVENT



Event bins can be requested to enable easy composting, recycling and waste collection at your event.

Spread the Word

If using a speaker system, consider announcing specific sustainability opportunities (e.g. "Our goal is to make this a zero waste event. Volunteers are located at waste stations to help you compost and recycle").

Offer Rewards

Offer awards, incentives or recognition to event vendors or attendees for helping make the event more sustainable through actions such as riding public transportation or eliminating waste.

Save Energy

You may not need to use lighting or heating/air conditioning systems throughout the event. To save energy, turn off these systems when not in use.

Watch Your Water

Monitor water usage to ensure your event isn't soaking up extra costs or environmental impacts.

Reduce Event Waste

If you are using [event bins](#) from Waste Reduction and Recycling, volunteers are critical to ensuring that discarded items are sorted correctly. Successful recycling and composting depends on proper avoidance of contamination, which occurs when non-recyclable or non-compostable items are placed incorrectly in recycling or composting bins.

Train Volunteers

To minimize contamination, recruit one volunteer for each station. You will need volunteers to set up the stations, stand by the stations during the event and break down stations after the event. Volunteers should be provided with an easy reference tool on what can and cannot be recycled or composted. The chart to the right can be used or Waste Reduction and Recycling can create a reference tool specific to your event.

WHAT CAN BE COMPOSTED, RECYCLED, OR LANDFILLED?

Category	Items
Compost	Food scraps
	Egg shells
	Coffee filters and grounds
	Paper napkins, towels and plates
	Plastics made from corn
	Pizza boxes
Recycle	Floral trimmings and leaves
	Aluminum cans
	Plastic bottles
	Glass jars and bottles
	Cartons
	Plastic jugs
Landfill	Paper
	Cardboard
	Styrofoam containers
	Styrofoam plates and cups
	Plastic plates, cups and silverware
Landfill	Plastic tablecloths
	Plastic packaging

AFTER THE EVENT



The event is over but you still have final tasks to check off your to-do list. Try these tips to sustainably wrap up your event.

AFTER THE EVENT



After the annual Krispy Kreme challenge, volunteers collect thousands of pounds of compostable and recyclable material to reduce the event's impact on local landfills.

Wrap Up Waste Reduction Efforts

If you are utilizing event bins, break down and return the bins as well as bagged compost and recycling to the location where you picked up the bins. Relock the bins and leave the bagged compost and recycling next to the bins. Discard trash in the nearest dumpster and break down cardboard boxes to place in the nearest cardboard dumpster. NC State Waste Reduction and Recycling will pick up the compost, recycling and bins at the indicated pickup time and location.

Donate Extra Food

If there is any excess food from your event, team up with a local food bank or soup kitchen, such as the [Interfaith Food Shuttle](#), [Raleigh Rescue Mission](#) or the [Food Bank](#) to donate any remaining food.

Promote Your Success

Spread the word about your sustainable event planning efforts on social media or through other communications channels. For example, report the amount of material that your event recycled or composted. Tag us on twitter @ncstatesustain and we'll retweet your event's sustainability success.

Evaluate Success

If a post-event evaluation is necessary, consider using an [online system](#) instead of a paper survey.

Say Thanks Sustainably

Need to show your appreciation? Consider electronic thank you notes or using thank you notecards made from recycled paper. Also, plants or gift certificates are great expressions of appreciation if a small gift is appropriate for event leaders.

SUSTAINABLE EVENT CHECKLIST

Use this checklist as a guide to achieving sustainable event certification, which can be completed online at go.ncsu.edu/SustainableEvent. Check the box that most closely aligns with your event and tally points as instructed.



Contributor:
10-30 Points



Steward:
31-55 Points



Champion:
56+ Points

Points
Earned ↓

BEFORE THE EVENT:

- 3 Appoint a Sustainability Coordinator for the event.

Choose An Event Time and Location:

- 1 Choose to hold the event in a location easily accessible by alternative transportation.
- 2 Choose to hold the event in an outdoor location or naturally-lit indoor location.
- 2 Encourage or incentivize alternative transportation.
- 3 Provide a bike valet for event attendees.
- 3 Choose to have an online event to avoid the need for attendees to travel.
- 3 Provide an opportunity for attendees to utilize travel offsets.
- 3 Think of other ways to be sustainable in the early planning stages? Earn 3 innovation points for your ideas.

Promote Your Event:

- 1 Utilize digital promotion for the event.
- 2 Include sustainable event efforts in promotional materials.

- 3 Design a paperless promotion plan.
- 3 For print materials, use FSC certified paper and soy based ink.
- 3 Think of other ways to include sustainability in event promotion and marketing? Earn 3 innovation points for your ideas.

Purchase or Rent Sustainable Supplies:

- 1 Utilize NC State's green purchasing resources.
- 1 Reduce the need to purchase or rent something at the event.
- 1 Borrow items to avoid the need to buy or rent them.
- 2 Buy items that can be reused every year or at other events.
- 2 Purchase items in bulk that are not individually packaged.
- 2 Purchase items made from recycled content.
- 3 Choose energy-efficient event equipment or appliances.
- 3 Use a solar powered or bio-diesel generator (if needed).

- 3 For event giveaways, choose to give away experiences or consumable items.
- 3 Choose sustainable (e.g. organic, recycled and/or local) t-shirts for your event (if needed).
- 3 Buy products locally if possible.
- 3 Support socially responsible companies when making purchases.
- 3 Think of other ways to use sustainable materials for your event? Earn 3 innovation points for your ideas.

Food Choices:

- 1 Provide fresh and healthy options on the event menu.
- 1 Provide vegetarian or vegan options.
- 2 Buy in bulk (i.e not individually packaged).
- 3 Discuss sustainable food opportunities with event caterer and/or vendors.
- 3 Serve local food -- grown or produced within 400 miles -- at the event.
- 3 Serve organic food at the event.
- 3 Serve fruits and vegetables that are in season.

SUSTAINABLE EVENT CHECKLIST

Use this checklist as a guide to achieving sustainable event certification, which can be completed online at go.ncsu.edu/SustainableEvent. Check the box that most closely aligns with your event and tally points as instructed.

- Purchase Fair Trade items for the event.
- Provide compostable tableware for the event.
- Think of other ways to offer sustainable food at your event? Earn 3 innovation points for your ideas.

Reduce Event Waste:

- Consult Waste Reduction and Recycling through their [online special event form](#) or 515-9421 regarding event waste.
- Utilize special event zero waste bins for the event.
- Reduce printing through centralized signage or billboards at the event.
- Create a recycling/waste diversion plan for the event.
- Ensure event vendors comply with zero waste standards.
- Think of other ways to reduce waste at your event? Earn 3 innovation points for your ideas.

Benefit the Community:

- Partner with service or nonprofit organizations.
- Incorporate a service component into the event.
- Include physical activity as part of your event.
- Create a service component that is a core function of the event.
- Think of other ways to make the event more sustainable and beneficial to the community? Earn 3 innovation points for your ideas.

DURING THE EVENT:

- Ensure that event sustainability information is provided to event participants.
- Turn off any unnecessary lighting or heating/air during the event.
- Monitor water usage during the event.
- Utilize and train volunteers to help manage the zero waste stations at the event.
- Offer incentives to attendees or vendors for contributing to event sustainability.

- Think of other ways to increase sustainability during the event? Earn 3 innovation points for your ideas.

AFTER THE EVENT:

- Provide an online survey for event evaluation when necessary.
- Ensure waste, recycling and compost are bagged and placed in the correct location for collection.
- Send electronic or sustainable thank you notes or gifts when necessary.
- Donate any extra food to a local food bank or soup kitchen.
- Promote the success of your event sustainability efforts.
- Think of other ways to advance sustainability after the event? Earn 3 innovation points for your ideas.

TOTAL POINTS

Contributor: 10-30 Points
Steward: 31-55 Points
Champion: 56+ Points