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# It's Easy Being Green!

## A Guide To Planning And Conducting Environmentally Aware Meetings And Events



# Preface

This booklet was developed through the Greater Leadership Opportunities (GLO) Program at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a project by GLO Group #13, **Green Meetings Focus Group**. Focus group members include: Tanya Hill, Headquarters; George Malone, Region 6; Donna Vizian-McCabe, Region 2; Mary Ellen Ryan, Region 5; Ayn Schmidt, Region 8; and Mia Zmud, Headquarters.

This guide provides information gathered from organizers of environmentally aware meetings and special events around the country. In this guidebook, environmentally aware meetings and events are those planned in such a way as to eliminate, reduce, or recycle waste. While focusing on municipal solid waste, this guide also touches on other environmental concerns. It is intended to heighten the environmental consciousness of event planners and demonstrate the advantages of conducting environmentally aware events.

## Acknowledgments

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# Environmentally Aware Events: What Are They?

**T**his guide will help meeting and event planners reduce the amount of municipal solid waste generated by their meeting or event. This guide outlines the key steps in planning and conducting an environmentally aware event, profiles a variety of meetings and events, and provides a checklist that can be used as a planning tool.

Imagine that you are attending a workshop. You arrive by public transportation. The hotel reminds you to turn off the lights in your room to conserve energy. Workshop materials are printed double-sided with soy- or vegetable-based inks. As a name tag, you wear your own business card inserted in a reusable name tag holder, which is collected as you leave. Coffee is served in reusable mugs embossed with the workshop name and sponsors. Sugar and cream are served from a covered sugar

bowl and a small chilled creamer.<sup>1</sup> Bite-sized breakfast snacks and fresh fruit are served on small reusable plates, and you are even asked to throw your discarded food items in a worm composting bin.

This workshop actually took place in April 1992, in Montgomery County, Maryland. EPA, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and the Montgomery County Department of Environment invited approximately 50 state and local waste management specialists to attend a workshop on waste prevention. The meeting planners went to great lengths to conserve materials and reduce waste.

The key to planning such an environmentally aware meeting or event is to set environmental priorities early in event planning and incorporate them into as many facets of the event as possible.



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<sup>1</sup>It is important to address public health when planning a food-service component to your environmentally aware meeting or event. Local health departments are able to provide advice and guidance on safe and proper handling of food and drink.



# Meeting And Event Environmental Nuts And Bolts

## Step 1: Gain Management or Sponsor Support

**S**ell your approach to management by emphasizing the range of environmental benefits, enhanced public image, and potential cost savings that result from incorporating environmental considerations into the planning process. In addition, your environmental leadership may help you obtain new or additional sponsorship and funding.

## Step 2: Set Your Environmental Priorities

**F**irst, identify environmental issues that are especially significant to your organization, community, or region. Next, select environmental priorities reflecting those particular issues. Finally, determine the amount of effort your management will dedicate to meeting the priorities.

Clearly defined environmental priorities will help you identify the specific actions you can take to meet these objectives. The planning checklist at the end of this guide can help you set and meet these priorities.

### *Preventing or Reducing Waste*

The best way to deal with waste is not to create it in the first place. Determine what materials are needed at your event and consider ways to reduce the amount used. For example, conference planners may reduce the amount of paper they distribute by purging duplicate addresses from mailing lists and requiring that all printed materials be double-sided.

### **Work with your recycling vendor to consider:**

- What items can be recycled in the event community?
- Where will you collect and store recyclables?
- Who will be responsible for signs and collection?

### **Contracting for Services:**

If your event does not take place in a facility with recycling and food service contracts already in place, remember to share your environmental priorities with the potential contractors:

- Incorporate priorities in the contract.
- Let reluctant contractors know that you can shop around for other contractors that will meet your environmental priorities.
- Consider incorporating incentives into contracts, such as sharing profits from the sale of recyclables.

## Recyclers Lead the Way at National Recycling Coalition Congress

During the National Recycling Coalition's (NRC's) 1995 annual congress in Kansas City, Missouri, participants had the opportunity to practice recycling first hand. They welcomed the opportunity to toss cans and bottles into recycling bins, drink coffee from complimentary thermal mugs, and read agendas printed on recycled paper with soy-based inks.

The event site, the Kansas City Convention Center, did not have a recycling program. NRC worked with the center's managers to institute a permanent recycling program—starting 9 months before the actual event—to collect aluminum, corrugated cardboard, mixed paper, clear and colored glass, plastic, and polystyrene. In addition, NRC collected food and food-contaminated paper waste for composting. The Air Force ran a composting pilot project with the NRC's food waste, the compost from which was given back to NRC to donate to charity.

Along with recycling, NRC reduced and reused materials. Reusable name tag holders and mugs, printed with a sponsor's logo, were distributed. Caterers were asked to use reusable dishware, utensils, and napkins as frequently as possible. They provided straws and drink stirrers only upon request. Exhibitors were kept informed of exact attendance levels so that they would bring the correct number of distribution materials, to cut down on the amount of materials that might be thrown away after the event.

NRC started looking at the environmental impacts of its yearly meetings in 1990 and has increased its efforts every year since. Environmental priorities have become a matter of policy for NRC's events and meetings.

### *Recycling and Managing Waste*

Arrange for collection of as many recyclables as possible. Work with event site managers and recycling vendors when planning your meeting or event. Waste prevention measures and recycling collection will significantly reduce the amount of trash generated during your meeting or event.

### *Other Environmental Issues*

Other environmental issues important to your community might include water conservation, air quality, or specific natural resource issues. For instance, meeting planners in California might place a high priority on water conservation during water shortages.

## Step 3: Translate Your Priorities Into Actions

### *Selecting a Site*

Look for a site that best addresses your environmental priorities. To meet waste reduction and energy conservation priorities, for example, look for a naturally lit site offering comprehensive recycling collection and mass transit services.

### *Arranging for Food Service*

Select food service providers that use reusable serviceware, or sell products that come in recyclable, little, or no packaging. A careful head count of attendees will reduce preparation of unnecessary meals.

## Walking the Walk: National Tribal Pollution Prevention Conference

Participants in the August 1995 National Tribal P2 Conference in Billings, Montana, received more than just lectures and networking opportunities. For three days, they lived a lesson in environmentally aware planning that they could take back to their tribal communities. Conference planners highlighted their “green conference” considerations in conference materials, asking attendees to participate in a full recycling program and reminding them that their personal habits can save energy and reduce waste.

Rather than printing enough conference programs to accommodate any possible attendance, conference planners matched their print run to the number of registered attendees. Speakers agreed not to hand out written resources; instead they provided materials only upon request. This encourages conversations between speakers and members of the audience and ensures that only interested parties receive printed matter. In addition, the hotel food service agreed to use china and glassware in lieu of disposables for indoor events. The hotel, fearful of liability for any injuries caused by broken glass or crockery, wanted to use paper cups and plates for the outdoor buffalo feast. However, conference planners convinced them to at least use ceramic plates.

Mindful that even the most successful waste reduction strategies would not eliminate all trash, conference planners negotiated with their waste hauler to provide recycling services for the event. The hauler supplied containers for recyclable glass, plastic, aluminum, and paper. In exchange for use of the containers and for collecting the recyclables, the hauler received the revenues from the recycled commodities. The conference program urged participants to use the recycling bins and, when possible, to avoid the purchase and use of materials destined for a waste stream.

## Scoring for the Environment: CU Buffaloes Football Game

Imagine you're at a Big Eight football game with 50,000 other cheering fans. Suddenly the scoreboard flashes an “environmental savings report” telling you how many natural resources have been saved as a result of recycling during the game. This is just one of the ways that the University of Colorado (CU) Recycling Program, called CU Recycling, educates football fans about the environmental impact of their recycling efforts.

CU Recycling promotes active recycling in the stadium in a variety of ways. Before the games, recycling staff with handcarts rove the parking lots to collect recyclables from tailgate parties and inform the partygoers about the environmental savings to which they're contributing, such as saving a gallon and a half of gas by recycling a case of aluminum cans. Other recyclable materials are separated by concessions or stadium staff. CU Recycling runs ads in the game programs and in the game-day edition of the campus newspaper to remind people to recycle. They also sponsor media spots featuring Buffalo team members promoting the recycling program. These efforts enable CU Recycling to recover and recycle 20 percent of the stadium's waste.

To make sure CU Recycling is reaping the economic benefit of diverting waste from disposal, the program carefully monitors trash disposal containers before pick-up. This enables CU Recycling to reduce the volume and cost of its trash disposal contract. Looking to the future, the cleanup crews and CU's Design School are working to design a collection container with separate compartments for trash and recyclables that clean-up crews can carry with them.

### *Buying Products*

Encourage your planning team and contractors to look for products that:

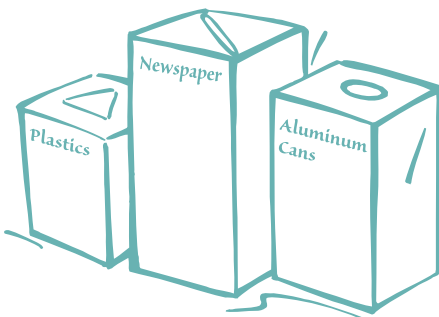
- Are reusable (e.g., name tags, binders, grease boards).
- Have recycled content (especially post-consumer).
- Use little or no packaging or packaging that contains recycled or reused materials.
- Are recyclable or compostable on site or in a community program.

### *Collecting Recyclables*

Encourage attendees to recycle with visible signs, written announcements, and opening remarks. Also, inform event contractors, exhibitors, and vendors about recycling procedures prior to the event. Arrange with your recycling contractor for an appropriate number of containers to be strategically placed throughout the site.

### *Promoting Your Event's Environmental Features*

Make sure that event attendees are aware of its environmental features. Take the opportunity to exhibit your leadership and share your environmental commitment with others.



## Monitoring and evaluating results enable you to:

- Document and track problems, success, and failures of event initiatives.
- Quantify results and measure the effectiveness of initiatives.
- Promote the environmental achievements of the event.

## Step 4: Evaluate the Event and Celebrate Its Success

### *Measuring Recycling Collection and Waste Generation*

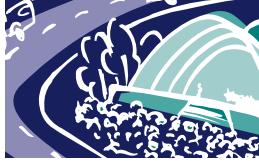
As collected recyclables are removed, look for food waste mistakenly discarded in recycling bins or recyclables placed in the wrong bins. Try to determine the cause of any contamination such as inadequate signage or poorly placed containers. Request that the recycling vendor and trash hauler report on exact quantities of materials and trash removed from the meeting site.

### *Surveying the Participants*

Some meeting planners have done exit polls asking respondents to comment on the environmental aspects of the event. Also, seek suggestions to improve the environmental quality of your next event.

### *Promoting Environmental Achievements*

Inform management, shareholders, sponsors, contractors, and the public about your success using your internal newsletter, bulletin board system, or annual report. Prepare press releases highlighting the environmental results of your event.



# Planning Checklist: Setting Environmental Priorities

Consider the following as you select your environmental priorities:

## ***Preventing and Reducing Waste***

- Use double-sided printing for promotional materials and handouts.
- Avoid mass distribution of handouts and allow attendees to order copies.
- Provide reusable name badges.
- Other actions: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## ***Recycling and Managing Waste***

- 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.
- If reusables are not used, encourage use of recyclable beverage containers.
- Other actions: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## ***Conserving Energy and Reducing Traffic***

- Seek naturally lighted meeting and exhibit spaces.
- Publicize mass transportation options.
- Provide shuttle service from mass transit stops or hotels to the event site.
- Other actions: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## ***Contracting Food Service and Lodging***

- Plan food service needs carefully to avoid unnecessary waste.
- Consider use of durable food service items.
- Donate excess food to charitable organizations.
- Work with hotel on non-replacement of linens, soaps, etc.
- Other actions: \_\_\_\_\_

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## ***Buying Environmentally Aware Products***

- Use recycled paper and vegetable- and soy-based inks for promotional materials and handouts.
- Consider selling or providing refillable containers for beverages.
- Provide reusable containers for handouts or samples (pocket or file folders, cloth bags).
- Where reusable items are not feasible, select products that are made from recovered materials and that also can be recycled.
- Other actions: \_\_\_\_\_

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## ***Educating Participants and Exhibitors***

- 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.
- Reward participation by communicating environmental savings achieved.
- Other actions: \_\_\_\_\_

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## ***Other Environmental Priorities***

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