

# Sustainability Playbook

## Executive Summary

This playbook, created in partnership between MeetGreen and Park City Chamber & Visitors Bureau, provides actionable steps to help event teams plan and execute sustainable events and can be shared with other teams across Park City to support sustainable event practices.

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# Sustainable Meetings & Events Review

## What is Event Sustainability?

Event sustainability refers to managing an event in a way that reduces its environmental footprint while considering economic and social impacts:

### **Environmental Responsibility**

Reducing waste, conserving resources, and minimizing carbon emissions.

### **Social Responsibility**

Supporting local communities and workforce, reducing impacts for residents and engaging stakeholders in sustainability efforts.

### **Economic Impact**

Ensuring sustainability practices are cost-effective and contribute to the long-term resilience of the event industry.

Sustainable event management requires collaboration between event organizers, vendors, and attendees to achieve the following:

1. Setting clear sustainability objectives (e.g., reducing waste, supporting local businesses).
2. Engaging stakeholders and consumers in sustainability efforts.
3. Tracking and reporting on sustainability metrics to measure the event's impact.

## Basics of Sustainable Events

Event sustainability can seem complex, but the principle of "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" remains fundamental. The key is to apply these steps in sequence. Often, the focus is on managing waste after the event, rather than preventing it from the start. For example, while forming local partnerships for post-event food donations helps reduce waste, optimizing food orders beforehand can prevent that waste altogether. Below are examples of each, and you can also view the Top 10 Sustainable Event Practices ([Resource A](#)) for a checklist of items to consider. Even if only one environmentally responsible practice can be utilized, it will make a difference!

### Reduce

- Prioritize locally sourced, carbon-friendly food options and carefully optimize quantities to minimize excess.
- Use bulk options for condiments, creamers, and dressings to eliminate single-use items.
- When ordering swag, prioritize sustainable, durable materials and ensure quantities are carefully calculated to meet actual needs. Whenever possible, collaborate with local makers to support the community and reduce transportation impacts.
- 'Ask first' - ask attendees if they want/will use an item before giving it to them.

### Reuse

- Use ceramic service ware and glassware wherever possible to minimize disposable items, which reduces stress on the waste streams and water systems.
- Create modular signage from sustainable materials that can be reused from event to event.
- Utilize rental furniture and decor wherever possible.
- Create items without year/location so leftovers can be used at future events.

### Recycle/Compost

- Ensure your team is up to date on local rules and regulations for recycling and composting.
- Clearly label receptacles for consumers & attendees to prevent waste stream contamination.
- Strategize the best way to handle, collect and manage glass recycling.
- Donate edible food to local nonprofits (CCPC & WasteLess Solutions).

## Key Planning Stages

### 1. Identify sustainability goals and objectives

Set specific and measurable sustainability goals for the event, such as reducing waste by a certain percentage, minimizing carbon emissions, or supporting local eco-friendly businesses. For annual events, you might consider establishing a baseline understanding of key metrics including waste generation, water, and electricity use at your event (see [Resource G](#) for critical info on Data and Metrics). Using this information can help inform the delivery of future events. For one-time events, setting achievable and small goals is a good place to start, don't feel like you must do it all at once!

Initial steps to help define your goals:

#### **Develop**

Create a written plan to reduce environmental impacts and increase social impact. A plan may or may not include a policy or written commitment to environmental stewardship.

#### **Determine**

Who will manage the sustainability initiatives of the event on a day-to-day basis?

#### **Involve**

Work with key stakeholders, including sponsors, vendors, and attendees, in setting sustainability goals and gaining their commitment to support initiatives.

### 2. Review Existing Best Practices

Understanding the resources and programs that are already in place and identifying gaps will help determine where new efforts can be focused. For example, do you already have a robust recycling program? Are there bins already onsite that can be used for this event? Separately, if there are gaps in your ability to manage problematic materials, can they be reduced? In many events there are booths, carpet and other resources that get thrown away at the conclusion of an event. Can you find alternatives for those or not use them at all?

Identify the bright spots! What programs do you already have in place? What resources are available to you already? Make a list of the assets and initiatives you have in place.

Where are the gaps? Do you need to find alternatives to materials that generate waste? Can materials be donated? Look for creative partnerships, collaborations, and alternatives to help achieve your goals.

### 3. Create Communication Strategies

Communicating your sustainability plan is critical for success. Plans may be broad or directed on key initiatives. This might include encouraging the use of public transportation, eliminating single-use plastic, or promoting a volunteer or community give-back event. Make sure communications are consistent and include:

#### **Internal Communication**

Ensure clear communication within the event planning team regarding sustainability goals, responsibilities, and timelines.

#### **External Communication**

Communicate sustainability initiatives to vendors, sponsors, and attendees through event websites, emails, and promotional materials to raise awareness and encourage participation.

#### **Provide Guidance**

Offer guidance and resources to vendors and sponsors on sustainable practices they can adopt to align with event objectives.

See [Resource D](#) for examples of communication to vendors and [Resource B](#) for more on external communication strategies.

### 4. Engage Vendors

Collaborating with vendors is critical for executing a sustainable event. Whether it's selecting eco-friendly materials, minimizing waste, or streamlining operations, vendors play an important role in helping achieve sustainability goals. To ensure sustainability goals are met, engage vendors as early as possible and establish clear sustainability expectations. Here are some tips:

#### **Share Your Sustainability Goals**

Provide vendors with a clear outline of your sustainability objectives, such as using locally sourced food, reducing single-use plastics, or eliminating unnecessary packaging.

#### **Hire Local Artists and Artisans**

Collaborate with local creatives and makers to support the local economy and add unique, community-focused elements to the event.

#### **Prioritize Eco-Friendly Vendors**

Choose vendors with a record of sustainability, like using reusable service ware or minimizing waste.

### **Build Sustainability into Contracts**

Ensure sustainability requirements are included in contracts to create accountability.

### **Request Data Tracking**

Ask vendors to provide data on sustainability metrics (e.g., waste generation, recycling rates) and communicate your data needs early on to allow time for planning and compliance.

### **Vendor Negotiation**

When vendors are unfamiliar with sustainability practices, negotiation may be necessary. Focus on cost-neutral or low-effort sustainability measures like bulk serving items or smaller plates to reduce upstream food ordering and downstream food waste. Many sustainable practices, like offering reusable service ware, are cost-saving for vendors.

See [Resource C](#) for examples of contract language.

## **5. Event Execution**

During the event, conduct a back-of-house tour to observe the implementation of planned sustainability practices. This walkthrough typically includes areas like waste docks and kitchens to verify that key actions are in place. Confirm that other agreed upon practices, such as recycling and compost collection, food scrap management, and waste separation, are fully operational.

As you assess these areas, document the event's sustainability practices with photographs where possible. Capture elements like reusable service ware, waste stations, sustainability signage, and the processes for move-in/move-out. For further guidance, refer to the Onsite Observations Guide ([Resource E](#)).

## **6. Post-Event Evaluation and Reporting**

As post-event data becomes available, begin compiling your Event Sustainability Report (See [Resource F](#) and [Resource G](#)) to document successes and lessons learned. Share this report with internal and external stakeholders to showcase the impact of your sustainability efforts. Reporting on measured outcomes not only highlights your event's achievements but also inspires continued commitment to sustainability for future events.

# Resource A: Top 10 Sustainable Event Practices

Use these 10 practices as a starting point to make your event as sustainable as possible. Although they aren't the only sustainable event practices, they are the highest impact efforts you can take.

Sustainability Initiative	Description	Impact
Food Waste Reduction	Take waste reduction steps such as using historical data to predict food and beverage buys, reducing buffet options, etc.	Very High
Reusable Service Ware	Request that reusable service ware be used for all meals.	High
Plant-Forward Menu	Plan for a menu with many plant-based options and reduce or eliminate beef.	High
Material Rental or Reuse	Request that materials such as furniture, build materials, and decor be rented. If custom, make a plan to store for reuse.	High
Communication	Communicate event sustainability initiatives through onsite digital signage, event app, website, etc.	High
Recycling	Request venues and hotels to recycle (paper, glass, aluminum).	Medium-High
Swag	Request that physical conference swag be reduced or eliminated. Ensure quality and thoughtful swag is provided if reduced.	Medium-High
Reusable Water Containers	Replace single-use bottled water with reusable glasses/bottles and water stations.	Medium-High
Food and Material Donation	Request that leftover food and materials be donated locally.	Medium-High
Environmentally Preferable Materials	Where physical materials are needed, request that FSC-certified wood and paper products be used over metal and plastic.	Medium

By incorporating these 10 practices, you will have eliminated ≈90% of the waste and non-travel carbon from your event!



# Resource B: Communication Strategy

## 1. Pre-Event Awareness and Engagement

### Dedicated Event Sustainability Page

Create a specific section on the event website or app detailing sustainability efforts, objectives, and what attendees can do to support these goals. Include resources like travel tips, packing lists for reusable items, and details on waste management at the event.

### Pre-Event Email Campaigns

Send a series of engaging emails to attendees highlighting the event's sustainability commitments and how they can contribute. Include specific actions, such as bringing reusable water bottles, choosing sustainable travel options for local transit, (try [My Event Footprint](#)), or participating in sustainability-focused sessions.

### Gamification and Incentives

Introduce a sustainability challenge or competition via the event app or website. Reward attendees for sustainable actions like using public transport, recycling correctly, or attending sustainability workshops. Prizes could include a donation to a charity of their choice or discounts on future event tickets.

Use language that your audience understands. If “sustainability” feels like a loaded term, try words like these:

Regenerative	Resource Conservation	Innovation	Durable
Stewardship	Commitment	Integrity	Savings
Nurture	Protect	Efficiency	Renewable
Next Generation	Resilient	Prosperity	Artisanal
Vitality	Local	Organic	Circular
Benefit	Responsible	Support	Growth
Preserve	Community	Legacy	Quality

## 2. Communication and Nudging

### **Clear and Engaging Signage**

Place visually appealing and easy-to-understand signage throughout the venue to guide attendees toward sustainable actions. Use icons, infographics, and color coding for recycling stations, water refill stations, and energy-saving reminders.

### **Real-Time Data Sharing**

Use digital screens, the event app, or social media channels to share real-time sustainability metrics (e.g., waste diverted, energy saved, water consumed). This transparency can motivate attendees to see the collective impact of their actions.

### **Sustainability Ambassadors or Green Teams**

Have a team of sustainability ambassadors or volunteers on-site to educate attendees, answer questions, and encourage participation in sustainability initiatives. Ambassadors can host quick "Green Talks" or offer guided tours highlighting sustainable features of the venue.

### **Sustainability related "walk-in" session slides**

Have simple messaging on the screens highlighting the sustainability efforts happening during the event/meeting

### **Social media**

Share pictures and videos on social media and encourage attendees to do the same.

## 3. Engaging Content and Sessions:

### **Sustainability-Focused Sessions and Workshops**

Integrate dedicated sessions, panels, or workshops on sustainability topics related to the event theme or industry. Highlight thought leaders, case studies, and innovative practices to inspire attendees.

### **Interactive Displays and Experiences**

Create interactive sustainability booths or displays where attendees can learn about sustainable practices, measure their carbon footprint, or make pledges to reduce their impact. Consider virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR) experiences to visualize sustainability challenges and solutions.

#### 4. Post-Event Follow-Up and Impact Reporting:

##### **Sustainability Report and Highlights**

Share a post-event sustainability report with attendees, outlining the goals, actions, and achievements (e.g., waste diversion rates, energy savings, local sourcing). This transparency reinforces the commitment to sustainability and can serve as a learning tool for future events.

##### **Feedback Loop**

Send a post-event survey to gather feedback on sustainability efforts and suggestions for improvement. Offer questions focused on the attendee's experience with sustainable practices and areas they found challenging or rewarding.

##### **Thank-You and Continuous Engagement**

Send personalized thank-you messages acknowledging attendees' participation in sustainability efforts. Provide links to resources for continued learning or future events that align with their values.

#### 5. Utilizing Technology and Digital Platforms:

##### **Event App for Sustainable Actions**

Use the event app to centralize all sustainability communications. Include features like a digital map showing sustainability points (e.g., water refill stations), push notifications reminding attendees of key actions, and a digital carbon footprint tracker.

##### **Social Media and Hashtags**

Leverage social media channels and event-specific hashtags to promote sustainability stories, share live updates, and engage attendees in conversations about sustainable practices.

#### 6. Collaborations with Sponsors and Partners:

##### **Highlight Sustainable Sponsors**

Work with sponsors who align with the event's sustainability goals. Co-create content that educates attendees, such as "sustainable sponsor of the day" highlights or co-hosted sustainability activations.

##### **Sponsored Giveaways with a Purpose**

If offering swag, choose items that are sustainable, functional, and educational, such as reusable straws, portable utensil sets, or seed packets. Communicate the sustainable story behind each item.

By implementing these communication strategies, you can create an informed, engaged, and motivated attendee base that actively contributes to the sustainability goals of the event.

## Resource C: Contract Language Examples

Including sustainability requirements in vendor contracts ensures accountability and clarity. Below are some examples of contract language that can be customized based on your event's needs:

### 1. Waste Reduction and Recycling

Vendor agrees to implement the following sustainable practices:

- Use bulk serving items for condiments and beverages instead of individual packaging.
- Provide reusable service ware for all meals and beverages.
- Eliminate single-use plastic bottles and replace with refillable water stations.

Ensure waste is properly separated into landfill, recycling, and compost streams.

Vendor will provide a post-event report within 60 days detailing the total waste generated and the amounts recycled and composted.

### 2. Food Donation

Vendor agrees to donate any surplus food to a designated local charity. All food donations will comply with the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act, protecting the vendor from liability. Vendor will provide documentation of the amount of food donated within 30 days post-event.

### 3. Sustainable Materials

Vendor agrees to prioritize the use of environmentally preferable materials, including:

- Recyclable or compostable packaging for all food and beverage service.
- Signage made from recycled or reusable materials.
- Decorations and materials that can be reused for future events or donated to local charities.

### 4. Data Reporting

Vendor will provide data tracking for sustainability metrics, including:

- Total waste generated (in pounds).
- Total waste diverted from landfills (recycled, composted, or donated).
- Energy use from setup to breakdown (in kWh).

Vendor will submit this data within 60 days post-event for inclusion in the event sustainability report.

## Resource D: Example Communications and Data Requests

### Venue Example Email

Suggested point of contact – Director of Operations, Sustainability Lead

Suggested first contact – As soon as contracts are signed

Attach – “Top Ten Sustainable Event Practices”

### Sample Email

Hello,

We are so excited to work with you and your team! As you know, environmental sustainability is extremely important to Park City, and our events are no exception. We’re asking to partner with you to minimize our environmental footprint and collect data to ensure our goals are met.

We will be doing our part to reduce waste as much as possible before the event, and look to divert any additional waste we are not able to reduce from landfill through reuse, storage, donations, compost, and recycling. This will include conversations about your waste haulers and what they accept, and waste stations and signage.

We will be tracking the following:

- Waste – weights of landfill, recycling, compost, and donations
- Energy – amount of energy used from move-in to move-out (this can be estimated)

Thank you so much in advance for helping to align with our sustainability goals. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,  
Event Producer

## Catering Example Email

Suggested point of contact – Director of Catering, Head Chef

Suggested first contact – As soon as contracts are signed

Attach – “Top Ten Sustainable Event Practices”

### Sample Email

Hello,

We are so excited to work with you and your team! As you know, environmental sustainability is extremely important to Park City, and our events are no exception. We're asking to partner with you to minimize our environmental footprint and collect data to ensure our goals are met.

Food and beverage has one of the largest environmental impacts and the most opportunity for impact reduction. We will be doing our part to choose environmentally-friendly menus and not over-ordering food, but there are some efforts that we hope to partner with you on to achieve. This includes reusable service ware as standard, plant-based menus, and food donation prep and partner help.

We will be tracking the following:

- Food Type – Number of meals served by protein type
- Service Ware – Number of meals served by service ware type
- Waste – Leftover food by number of meals or weight and disposal type

Thank you so much in advance for helping to align with our sustainability goals. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,  
Event Producer

## Resource E: Onsite Observations Guide

Write about everything sustainable you see during the event. And don't forget to take pictures!

### **Food and Beverage**

Are there bulk dispensers, reusable service ware, signs for dietary food choices, any disposables, waste/compost education information, clean preparation area, employee health practices, food waste, attendee interactions with food menu, etc.?

### **Venue & Communication**

Are there clearly marked waste stations? Signage type (vinyl, polystyrene, cardboard) (reusable, branded)? Sustainability information provided?

### **Participant Behavior**

How are participants, staff, and exhibitors interacting? Reusable water, coffee mugs? If giveaways are available, are they useful? Are attendees taking them? Interacting with waste education signage?

## Resource F: Sustainability Report Inputs

Suggested minimum info to include for a recap email or document:

1. Event Overview:
2. Event Date:
3. Event Location:
4. 3 - 5 Sustainability Goals (metrics included):
5. 3 - 5 Sustainability Wins/Success (metrics included):
6. 3 - 5 Sustainability Opportunities/Recommendations for future events (metrics included):



## Resource G: Data and Measures

As part of your sustainable event negotiations, be sure to include a request for measurement. Do not skip this step. Tracking both environmental and economic impact provides the ability to quantify your results. If you're unfamiliar with these metrics, it might be hard to know where to start. Consult the *Example Sustainability Communications Summaries* (Appendix C) and utilize the *Event Food and Beverage Tracker for Venues and Caterers* (Appendix D). Once this Information is collected, it can be included in a post-event summary.

Let your venue and accommodations teams know early on in the planning process about your desire for data to allow them to enroll key stakeholders like operations, engineering, and catering into the conversations as they will likely be the ones collecting the data for you. The following is an example of some data points that are found in the *Event Venue Tracker for Venue and Caterers* (Appendix E):

### Venue Metrics

Event Waste Recycled (lbs.):  
Event Waste Composted (lbs.):  
Event Waste Landfilled (lbs.):  
Event Materials Donated (lbs.):  
  
Energy Usage (Kwh):  
  
List Items Donated:  
Food Donated (lbs.):  
Food Donated Beneficiary:  
Food Donated Description:

### **A Note About Event Data**

Receiving post-event data from your venue, caterer, and hotel is often much harder than it appears. In general, convention centers have the staffing roles and capacity to more easily document and codify event-level impacts than hotels. As always, start with the highest impact metrics, the ones linked to the Top 10 Sustainable Event Practices ([Resource A](#)), and expand from there.

Another challenge with data is that frequently, energy use is tied to billing, on a 30-day or more cycle, and waste streams may need special hauler arrangements to obtain a weight. As a result, it is common that final environmental footprint data may not reach you until close to two months after the event.

Rather than being discouraged by these challenges, know that if given ample lead time, 60 days or more pre-event, venues will often be able to accommodate your data requests. The meetings and conventions industry need more advocates for event data, so here is your chance to make a difference!

## Resource H: Additional Sustainable Event Tools

### Sustainable Event Planning

[My Event Footprint - Impact Calculator](#)

[Sustainable Event Infographics](#)

[United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#)

[ISO 20121: Event Sustainability Management Systems](#)

### Local Resources

[Park City Christian Center](#)

[Waste Less Solutions](#)

[Momentum Composting](#)

[Local Art & Artisans](#)

[Green Business Program](#)

[Download Transit App & Share with Attendees](#)

### Carbon Offsets

[Carbon Offset Basics](#)

[Bonneville Education Foundation - Carbon Offset Overview](#)

### Emergency Response Planning

[Emergency Response Plan Template](#)

### Food & Beverage Resources

[Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act of 1996](#)

[ReFED Roadmap to Reduce U.S. Food Waste](#)

[Monterey Bay Seafood Watch](#)

[Know Your Food: Water-Wise Infographic](#)

[Environmental Impacts of Food Production](#)

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Why do some practices have a higher impact than others?**

Many of the factors that make a product more or less sustainable happen before it gets to you. We call that time “Cradle to Use” and it can make it hard to know what has the biggest impacts. For instance, how much energy is used to excavate a raw material, manufacture it into a usable product, and transport it to you, can vary widely between materials. Lesser known factors can also contribute. Who would have thought that the reason beef has such a large carbon footprint is because they burp methane, a gas 25x more potent than CO<sub>2</sub>!

### **Doesn't the water use from washing reusable service ware mean it has a higher footprint than**

**disposable products?** While water IS used to wash reusable service ware, much more water is used in the manufacturing process of disposable products.

### **What is the most impactful practice my event can implement to reduce its carbon footprint?**

Choose a location that is close to your attendees. Transportation (air, ground) makes up 90%+ of a typical event's carbon footprint. Just by choosing a location that is close to your attendees, you will dramatically decrease the footprint of your event.

### **What is the most common item seen in event trash?**

Disposable service ware and low-quality swag.

### **Why can't we use compostable service ware/bioplastics?**

Compostable service ware may seem sustainable on the surface, but it's actually the same as, or worse than plastic from an environmental standpoint if it isn't actually composted. And it's REALLY hard to actually compost these materials for various reasons:

- **No certification** – Just because it says “compostable” on the side, does NOT mean it's compostable.
- **Few facilities** – There aren't many facilities that will accept these materials, and with so much variety in compostable ware, it's difficult to know what will actually break down. Bioplastics are no longer accepted in Park City compost facilities.
- **Sorting** – It's extremely difficult to effectively sort these materials during an event without a dedicated procedure, typically involving manually opening each bag of compost and removing non-compostable items by hand.
- **Contamination** – Since this material is mixed with organics to break down into dirt/garden compost, it has to be extremely pure. Often events will have a mix of materials used in catering, or attendees will accidentally throw something in the wrong bin. If that plastic fork gets into the compost, it won't break down and you'll have little plastic pieces in your compost.