

Planning Tips

Greening your meetings and special events is a long-term process that involves numerous stakeholders, planning and making changes at many levels. Developing a green meeting policy and plan is one of the best ways to ensure that your efforts bear fruit and are successful well into the future. The planning process doesn't have to be difficult or complicated. It can be accomplished in just a few key steps following this simple format:

- STEP 1: Create a "Green Team"
- STEP 2: Conduct an Assessment
- STEP 3: Establish a Policy
- STEP 4: Develop a Plan
- STEP 5: Promote the Program
- STEP 6: Evaluation and Monitor Progress

STEP 1: Create a "Green Team"

The team should include anyone whose input and support is critical to making the program work. If you're a meeting planner, the team may include representatives from management, education, membership and communications. If you're a site manager, hotel operator, outside event planner or other industry supplier, the team may include individuals in charge of operations, finance, sales and marketing.

STEP 2: Conduct an Assessment

Consider your meetings and events from all angles to determine how you could reduce consumption of paper, water and energy and promote other eco-friendly practices. While there is presently a wide variation in the criteria you can use to evaluate your practices, in general, most environmental assessments cover the following areas:

1. **Recycling:** Do you recycle paper, plastic, glass and metal; compost food or related waste; or donate food and other usable waste whenever possible?
2. **Reduce Paper Use:** Do you make an effort to reduce the amount of printing associated with your event (for yourself as well as your vendors), giving preference to online communications? Do you print on two sides or recycle scrap paper in your own operation?
3. **Eco-Friendly Printing:** When printing is necessary, do you use paper with high-recycled-content that is Processed Chlorine-Free (PCF) or Total Chlorine Free (TCF). Are vegetable-based inks being used in the printer?
4. **Waste Reduction:** In addition to conserving paper, do you try to reduce the amount of plastic or replace it with recycled plastic or compostable serving materials? Incorporate reusable linens, china and cutlery and bulk service of water, beverages and condiments in food service? Work with hotels that provide a linen reuse program, soap and shampoo dispensers in sleeping rooms or recycle individual bottles? Do you encourage attendees to bring their own from home; recycle or donate unused toiletries?
5. **Energy Efficiency:** Do you give preference to sites that have taken steps to measure and reduce energy consumption through energy-efficient lighting, programmable thermostats, motion sensitive lighting and pursuing other energy-saving strategies, such as increasing natural daylight, using alternative energy sources or installing green roofs. Have you instituted similar measures within your own operation?
6. **Water Conservation:** Do you choose sites that have installed water-saving devices in bathrooms, conserve water in food service, or have a program in place to recycle waste water? Have you instituted similar measure within your own operation?
7. **Environmentally Responsible Purchasing:** Do you use refillable ink cartridges.

7. **Environmentally responsible purchasing:** Do you use reusable ink cartridges, environmentally preferable office equipment, non-toxic cleaning and pest control products and similar purchases, and or choose sites and other vendors who do so?
8. **Carbon Reduction:** Do you minimize travel, encourage the use of public transportation, carpooling, walking and cycling whenever possible? Do you secure carbon offsets for any necessary travel or transport of goods, or provide a carbon offset program for event participants and guests? Do your vendors offer carbon offsets?
9. **Sustainable Food:** Do you make an effort to serve locally produced, in-season, organic, free-range, fair trade and similar sustainable foods or choose caterers who can provide such services?

STEP 3: Establish a Policy

Once you determine where you can reduce the environmental impact of your meetings, the team should draft a green meeting policy that captures the overall purpose, focus and general goals of your effort. Build support with decision-makers at the highest possible level in your organization to ensure that you will be provided with the time and resources needed for implementation, especially if you choose to take on one of the more ambitious goals, such as implementing an energy reduction program or purchasing carbon offsets.

STEP 4: Develop a Plan

The next step is to lay out an implementation plan that identifies specific goals and the steps you will take to reach them. It should also include a timetable and identify who will be responsible for carrying out various parts of the plan. You can start slow by targeting easy areas first, such as establishing an office paper recycling program or fixing dripping faucets. Then work your way up to the not-so-easy areas, checking them off as you go.

STEP 5: Promote the Program

Take the time to introduce staff to the green meeting initiative, explain how they can help make it a success, and educate participants about the program at all levels. Be sure to thank people for their contribution and recognize exemplary efforts.

STEP 6: Evaluation and Monitor Progress

To establish a successful program, evaluate it periodically, assessing progress, making adjustments and recognizing what you have accomplished. A periodic report on what your program has saved both environmentally and financially can help keep your green team engaged and generate enthusiasm throughout your organization. See [Tips and Tools](#) for measurement resources and sample reports.