



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Sustainability
Delivery Team

Campus
Management

Sustainable events guide



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Acknowledgement of Country

The University of Melbourne acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the unceded land on which we work and learn: the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong peoples (Burnley, Fishermans Bend, Parkville, Southbank and Werribee campuses), the Yorta Yorta Nation (Dookie and Shepparton campuses), and the Dja Dja Wurrung people (Creswick campus).

The University also acknowledges and is grateful to the Traditional Owners, Elders and Knowledge Holders of all Indigenous nations and clans who have been instrumental in our reconciliation journey.

We recognise the unique place held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and custodians of the lands and waterways across the Australian continent, with histories of continuous connection dating back more than 60,000 years. We also acknowledge their enduring cultural practices of caring for Country.

As we strive to create sustainable events, we acknowledge the wisdom of Indigenous land management and respect the principles of caring for Country. By minimising waste, reducing our environmental impact, and fostering community connection, we honour these traditions and work towards a future that respects and sustains the land for generations to come.

We pay deep respect to Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge the importance of Indigenous knowledge in the Academy. As a community of students, researchers, teachers and professional staff we are privileged to work and learn every day with Indigenous colleagues and partners.

Acknowledgement of Climate Crisis

We would like to acknowledge that we are in a triple planetary crisis whereby we face devastating effects from climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution. This is acknowledged and defined by the **United Nations**. That is a fundamental reason why the University has a strong commitment to embed sustainability into everything we do for our community and current and future generations.

Introduction

This revised second edition of the Sustainable Events Guide aims to support the University of Melbourne students and staff to embed sustainability into every stage of event planning and delivery, minimising negative environmental and social impacts that an event would normally produce.

The University is committed to global sustainability leadership by integrating sustainable practices across all operations. This commitment is publicly demonstrated through our [Sustainability Charter](#) and the [Sustainability Plan 2030](#).



As an example, during Orientation Week 2025—a week-long series of events run by multiple faculties and departments—waste generation was over 42% higher compared to an average week in 2024.

We all have a role to play in shaping a more sustainable future. Since the University community has set ambitious sustainability goals, we invite our community to adopt/implement sustainable practices. This guide offers practical strategies to help you achieve that objective.



Why run a sustainable event?



Events offer valuable opportunities for engagement; however, they can also have significant negative environmental and social impacts.

At the University we host a multitude of events each year, ranging from small meetings to large-scale celebrations. Regardless of size, every event negatively impacts the environment unless it is organised with sustainability principles in mind.

With highly visible events, it is crucial that we ‘walk the talk’, improving the campus and community experience while doing the right thing for attendees and the planet. By following the steps outlined in this guide, you will:

- Lower the carbon footprint of your event.
- Reduce energy consumption and waste generation.
- Eliminate single-use plastics (this is now Victorian **legislation**).
- Support small/ethical businesses and encourage fair work.
- Feel good doing the right thing.
- Lead by example and demonstrate leadership in sustainability.

As a leading educational institution, the University has an obligation to demonstrate sustainability leadership across all its events.



Start early and consider sustainability impacts at every stage of planning for your event. Embed sustainability into every aspect of your event.

How to run a sustainable event



Step 1: Learn how to plan a sustainable event

This guide will help you:

- Understand the principles of running a sustainable event.
- Identify and minimise your event's potential negative impacts.
- Explore the University's services to facilitate sustainable event planning.

Step 2: Utilise our resources

Accompanying this guide are a series of checklists for different event types and a [Sustainable Events Suppliers Guide](#) document. These documents can be found on our [Sustainable Events webpage](#).

The Sustainable Events Suppliers Guide provides information on sourcing sustainable alternatives, while the checklists break down the process into manageable steps.

There is also the Central Events Event Planning Guide for staff to access in [SharePoint](#) for more information on events.

Step 3: Apply for an ACTS Sustainable Event Certification

Showcase your sustainability commitment by applying for an [Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability \(ACTS\) Sustainable Event Certification](#) prior to your event. The ACTS Sustainable Event Accreditation is a program designed to recognise and support events that prioritise sustainability throughout all stages of planning and delivery.

Developed by Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability (ACTS), in collaboration with The University of Melbourne, the accreditation provides a practical framework for event organisers to implement environmentally and socially responsible practices by:

- Reducing environmental impact – utilising strategies to minimise waste, conserve energy, and manage resources efficiently.
- Promoting social responsibility – prioritising accessibility and inclusivity, while supporting ethical and socially responsible suppliers to ensure procurement reflects fair labour practices and contributes positively to communities.
- Demonstrating sustainability leadership – showcasing a clear commitment to sustainability that aligns with institutional values and stakeholder expectations.

By achieving accreditation, events not only deliver meaningful sustainability outcomes for their organisation but also enhance their reputation and appeal to audiences who value responsible and future-focused practices. Proudly display the certification on all promotional materials and communications.



For further support, reach out to the Sustainability Delivery Team or visit the [Sustainability website](#).

E: sustainable-campus@unimelb.edu.au
W: sustainablecampus.unimelb.edu.au

1. Venue



Events can generate a large amount of greenhouse gas emissions, leaving behind a big carbon footprint.

Can you switch to a virtual event?

- Go virtual. Hosting your event online drastically lowers emissions compared to in-person gatherings.
- Explore a hybrid format. If attendees are traveling from various locations, regional hubs can eliminate air travel emissions while maintaining in-person collaboration benefits.
- If you host big annual events, consider alternating years to reduce frequency and associated impacts. When hosting in-person:
 - **Energy efficiency:**
 - By using an existing University room / space, the venue will automatically be zero-net emissions from electricity
 - Prioritise energy-efficient venues by asking them with features like efficient heating/cooling, lighting, and audio-visuals, especially when hosting events off-campus.
 - Maximise natural light and ventilation.
 - For small crowds, avoid over-amplification; a few speakers may suffice.
 - **Accessible location:**
 - Choose a central venue accessible by public transport, biking, and walking to minimise air travel and single-occupancy vehicle use.
 - Ensure your venue has ample bike parking and end-of-trip facilities. If hosting an event on campus, refer to our [cycling map](#), there is ample space already.
 - Send attendees public transport routes.
 - **Transportation options:**
 - For remote venues, offer shuttle services or carpool programs to reduce individual trips.
 - Avoid flying as much as possible!



Did you know... the University is net zero emissions from electricity? Hosting your event on campus reduces emissions from the start.

Carbon offsetting

The University is committed to achieving **carbon neutrality for CY2025**. As part of this commitment, any emissions produced will need to be offset. Currently, offsets are managed centrally, but this approach may change in the future. To stay ahead, we encourage you to start reducing your emissions now by hosting a sustainable event.

2. Waste



Excessive and unnecessary waste can be one of the most significant negative environmental impacts of an event. Waste can be created by consuming food and beverages, packaging from purchased event materials, from handouts and collateral, or later down the track from giveaways that will ultimately end up in landfill.

Attempting to run a zero-waste event should be always your number one goal. And the best way to reduce waste is to try and avoid it from the outset, following the waste reduction hierarchy. Try and think about all your waste sources and what alternatives could be.

Here are some overall top tips:

- Avoid single-use items and biodegradable/compostable items! Reusable items should be your first point of call. If you are running an event on campus, hire the [Choose to Reuse Events Kit](#).
- If you absolutely must have takeaway items, paper based, and cardboard products are the best.
- Have clearly labelled [bin signs](#).
- All rooms at the University contain standard sized waste and recycling bins.



Choose to Reuse Events kit.



Hiring bins:

- For large indoor or outdoor events, staff must hire additional recycling and landfill bins to prevent overflow and ensure proper waste disposal. This can be arranged through [Service Now](#), and bins must be ordered in pairs (recycling and landfill) for event use. These bins are intended for front-of-house waste management.
- **Cardboard bins** are available for back-of-house use only and should not be placed front-of-house. These bins are designated solely for cardboard disposal and can be ordered via [Service Now](#).
- **Organic bins** for food scraps can be arranged by contacting the [Sustainability Delivery Team](#). These will need to be monitored by staff at the event to reduce contamination. Alternatively, you can request Waste Warrior volunteers through the Sustainability Delivery Team (at least a month in advance and for events within business hours only).
- For the disposal of **e-waste**, **batteries**, and **polystyrene**, you can submit a [ServiceNow request](#) for collection.
- If you are unsure where to dispose of a specific waste item, please refer to the [A-Z of Waste](#) guide for clarification.



Hired bins for front-of-house waste management.



Binning it right

Did you know if you contaminate a recycling bin by more than five per cent, or an organics bin with more than one item, the whole bin goes to landfill? Try and avoid all waste sources in the first place. However, if you need to dispose of items, make sure you do it right.

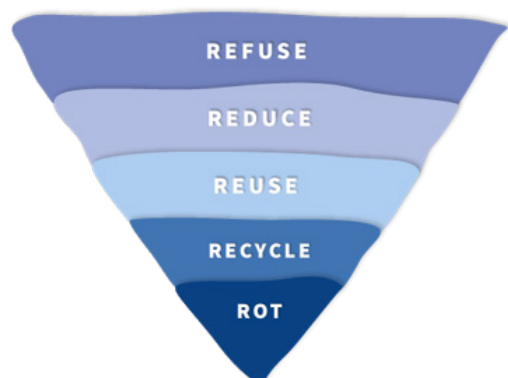
There are common misconceptions about what can go into which bin:

- Speciality 'PLA based bioplastic' disposable food packaging, bioplastics and most compostables = not recyclable and must go in landfill
- Food scraps = not recyclable and must go in an organics bin. Hire an organics bin if you are to have food at your events.
- Disposable coffee cups = not recyclable and must go in landfill bin
- Foil that covers food = only recyclable if clean and scrunched up into a ball
- Laminated signage = not recyclable and must go in landfill bins
- Clean paper and plastic containers/plates = recyclable
- Plastic cutlery = too small to go in recycling must go in landfill bins
- Paper straws = too small to go in recycling must go in landfill bins
- Napkins and paper towels = not recyclable, must go in landfill bins
- Large amounts of cardboard = a dedicated cardboard bin which can be ordered via [ServiceNow](#).



Did you know? You can request Waste Warriors by emailing the Sustainability Delivery Team! These student volunteers, who receive recognition through our volunteering program and Melbourne Plus, help minimise contamination by guiding attendees on correct waste disposal at events.

THE HIERARCHY OF WASTE



3. Food and Beverage



This might be as simple as providing tea and coffee or a water station or hosting a fully catered event.

Reducing waste with catering

Catering frequently generates a significant volume of waste due to the extensive use of cling wrap, disposable items, and other wasteful practices.

- If you are next to an accessible kitchen space (such as a staff tearoom), you can make your own events kit with reusable items. Source the items from Op Shops or Facebook Marketplace or through homeware stores.
- Avoid single-use disposable products. Hire reusable items, organics bins and more through the [Choose to Reuse Events Kit](#). The service is available to staff (with a Themis string) and student clubs (with an ABN) hosting events for a small fee (discounted rates for students).
- For extra-large events (more than 300 attendees), you can engage with [Green My Plate](#) or [B-alternative](#).

- Green My Plate can provide you with a mug wall with reusable cups or you can hire mugs and cups through our [Choose to Reuse Events Service](#). Another option is to ask attendees to 'BYO' (bring your own) reusable cups or to do a bulk purchase of assorted mugs from Opportunity Shops.
- Avoid bottled water at sustainable events. Opt for water stations with jugs and glasses or encourage attendees to bring their own reusable bottles and provide information on refill locations. Check out the [Sustainability Map for water fountain locations](#) and more.
- If you are organising a large outdoor event, investigate setting up portable hydration stations.
- Make sure you and your sponsors, partners or stall holders are not giving away bottled water or individually wrapped food items such as lollies as a freebie! Our retailers have contractual agreements to stop selling plastic bottles, so do not hand them out at your events as well.



DO NOT use biodegradable or compostable products.



Green My plate reusable cups.



Portable hydration station.

When engaging with a caterer, we recommend you send an email to your caterers like the one below.

“Good morning/afternoon,

Could I please place a catering order with the following details: event title, number of attendees, date, venue, catering order, delivery and pick up time, contact.

We would also like this to be a fully sustainable event. To achieve this, could we please request the following:

A fully vegetarian menu (or vegan), with ingredients locally and ethically sourced.

No disposable or bio-degradable plates, cups and cutlery; only reusable crockery.

Could the food be wrapped in either foil or preferably reusable containers, no cling wrap is to be used.

No items to be individually wrapped, including tea bags. And can we please avoid having condiments in disposable containers and serve them in reusable dishes or bulk containers at self-serve stations instead.

Could I please ask, do you collect the food waste and if so, what do you do with this?

Thank you for your assistance and let me know if you need any more information.

Kind regards”

Reducing food waste with catering

- **Ask attendees to register**, so you’ve got a good idea of how many people to cater for.
- **Under-order!** We recommend under-ordering by approximately 10 per cent.
- **Have a plan for leftovers.** Bring your own containers to collect leftovers for home.
- **Have organics bins and collect food scraps and waste for composting.**
 - Collect food scraps for your own compost bin/worm farm or drop off the waste at one of the organics bins across the University ([System Garden](#), [Community Garden](#) or [Student Precinct](#)).
 - Ask your caterer if they partner with an organisation that collects leftover food and redistributes this or has a means of processing leftovers.
 - For events with fewer than 300 attendees, you can hire several seven litre organics caddies through the [C2R Events Service](#).
- For events with more than 300 attendees, you can hire 240L food organics bins. **Notify the Sustainability Delivery Team** that you would like extra organics bins at your events (refer to Section 2. Waste above).
- Check out this [useful list](#) of charities that are fighting against food waste that you could also partner with.



Did you know? Your caterer might offer disposable products marketed as “environmentally friendly,” such as biodegradable, recyclable, and compostable options. However, many of these, like Bioplastics, are challenging to recycle or compost in Victoria. These items often end up contaminating recycling bins because they require specialised conditions and machinery for decomposition, like regular single-use plastic items.

The dos and don'ts of catering

- Whether it's little snacks or full catering, we recommend at least **80 per cent of the menu to be vegetarian**. If you want to make it fully sustainable, make your menu 100 per cent vegetarian, or even better, vegan!
 - Animal products are resource intensive creating greenhouse gas emissions.
 - If animal products are necessary, ensure they are ethically sourced, free-range, and ask questions about their production methods.
- Ensure the food is sourced locally, seasonally and has healthy options.
 - This supports local farmers and reduces reliance on long-distance transport.
- Ensure your food is ethically sourced, like **Fairtrade Certified** products.
 - This empowers workers and farmers for sustainable livelihoods.
 - Caterers commonly offer Fairtrade items like chocolates, teas, coffee, hot chocolate, and sugar.
 - Access Fairtrade items from COS through iProc via your **Themis** account.
- For small events or if you are holding a stall, you may not need to engage a caterer. Consider other alternatives:
 - Tea (make sure it's Fairtrade)
 - Whole seasonal fruits
 - Seeds and nuts
 - Locally vegan baked goods
 - And ensure snacks are waste-free.
- If you do need a caterer:
 - We recommend engaging with a social enterprise caterer



Top Tip: Refer to our **Suppliers Guide** for a list of suppliers.



4. The true cost of freebies and decorations

Go paperless

With readily available technology options, there's no excuse not to make your next event entirely paperless.

Follow these simple steps:

- Email materials to attendees beforehand.
- Provide electronic guides accessible on any device.
- Create a dedicated event webpage.
- Implement digital registration/sign-in.
- Utilise event apps, some with free options.
- Use apps like Humanitix for check in and registration.
- Offer one hardcopy guide at reception as a backup.
- Ensure accessible Wi-Fi for smooth digital access.
- If printing is necessary, use minimal, double-sided, FSC-accredited, or 100 per cent recycled paper and avoid laminating to prevent landfill waste.

Freebies and Giveaways

Giveaways, merchandise and promotional materials can boost event engagement, but very quickly end up in landfill, or even worse, as litter in the environment (covered with the University brand).



Avoid promotional materials altogether. If you need this, consider the negative impact of that item and if it will really add to the experience of your event. The most sustainable option is simply not having those items.

If you do need them, opt for reusable, eco-friendly options to make a lasting impression on your attendees and the planet, such as:

- Items that are manufactured locally and ethically.
- Items that are not wrapped in plastic and unnecessary packaging. Work with your suppliers to reduce this.
- Items that are not dated. You can extend the use of promotional materials by not using specific event titles and/or dates so that you can reuse them year on year.
- Items that promote positive behaviour change such as reusable cups, or plants.

Remember to:

- Avoid over-ordering by carefully estimating the required quantities.
- Reuse items like name tags and lanyards by encouraging attendees to return them.
- Prioritise items with environmental or social certifications, such as Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), fair trade, or carbon neutral.



If you are planning for an event that engages external stakeholders, such as partners or sponsors, make sure you discuss promotional materials with them as well and ensure they follow these sustainability requirements.



Did you know? Running competitions with a single prize (such as an amazing experience) is a fantastic alternative to giving away single items to all your attendees.



Decorations

Hire or rent items or create your own reusable materials that can be utilised for all your events throughout the year.

Some important things to remember when decorating:

- Say no to balloons! The University has joined the Zoos Victoria pledge “**When balloons fly, seabirds die**”.
- Invest in reusable decorative items such as banners, flags and bunting that you can use each time you run an event.
- Decorate with pot plants instead of flower arrangements.
- Pot plants or fruit bowls also look great as table centrepieces.
- Hire, borrow, or lease items as an alternative to buying.

You can find a comprehensive list of suggestions and links for giveaway options and decorations in our [Sustainable Events Suppliers Guide](#).



Top Tip: You can hire items including a-frames, chairs, tables, and banners through the [Events Hire Store](#).



Did you know? You can recycle any of your outdated or damaged banners through [Green Collect](#). Send them an email to enquire about it.

5. Education and awareness

Inspire others by showcasing your sustainable event efforts. Your commitment to reducing your event's environmental impact empowers others to follow suit. Talk about what you are doing to make a difference and show potential delegates that you care about the environment.

Before the event

- In all pre-event communications, advertise that it is a sustainable event and the things you are doing to make it a sustainable event. Showcase your ACTS Sustainable Event Accreditation if you have received this.
- If you are running an expo style event, send the Sustainability for Stallholders Guide to all event stall holders found on our website.
- Display your sustainable events accreditation logo if you have received this.
- Let attendees know how they can contribute (e.g., by bringing a reusable mug or water bottle).
- Recruit Waste Warriors to help encourage the proper separation of waste to reduce bin contamination by emailing the Sustainability Delivery Team.
- Contact the Sustainability Delivery Team if you need advice on your event plans.

During the event

- Include an [Acknowledgement of Country](#) to recognise Indigenous Australian people as the original owners and custodians of the land and waters of this nation.
- You could also include a Climate Crisis acknowledgement such as the one used at the start of this document.
- Share how your event is sustainable and what that means, providing examples.
- If you have any food menus or buffet stations, include sustainable food information (e.g., cooked with local produce). Consider whether this can be done digitally in your pre-event information.
- Label your bins with correct [bin signage](#).



After the event

- Once your event is over, send out follow up communications asking for feedback.
- Send out communications and include data around the positive impact your event had, such as how much waste was diverted from landfill or how many food miles you saved using local produce. Please ensure the privacy policy is being adhered to.
- Refer attendees to this document to encourage them to run a sustainable event.
- Ask the Sustainability Delivery Team to help you purchase carbon offsets for any unavoidable emissions at your event.

Get recognised through Green Impact

Deepen your involvement in sustainable events by joining [Green Impact](#), a sustainable action program that encourages students and staff to implement green initiatives using a tailored toolkit. The toolkit includes actions specific to running sustainable events. Participate to connect with others, earn accreditation, and gain recognition for your achievements in driving positive environmental change through events and operations.





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