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## Organising 'Greener' Events

How you run events or meetings can send out an important message about your commitment to seeing a greener, cleaner and fairer world. If your activities promote environmental issues but you haven't taken these on board yourself then it is only fair if people criticise you. If your work is more socially focused this isn't an excuse to ignore environmental considerations.

There's enough information around highlighting the importance of collective action in tackling the challenge of climate change. In our increasingly interconnected world, actions have consequences. These can be positive. Asking a venue about its recycling practice or its Fair Trade policy can lead to change – but only if enough people ask.

No-one expects you to be perfect. Unlike the business and public sector, VCS organisations are less likely to have dedicated events organisers. This doesn't mean ignoring environmental and ethical considerations. Try to do your best – if something isn't possible (e.g. a common issue is venue restrictions such as using internal catering arrangements) make a point of communicating this to attendees. This needn't be a guilty response and it can help raise awareness.

Making an effort is what counts. Initially this will probably take a little more time and resourcing especially if you are starting from scratch. Keep a record of what you do; it will help next time.

The guidance below provides some pointers towards further action. Adapt as appropriate. If you find something works really well find time to publicise it around your networks and let EAC know.

## Planning your event

Good planning and preparation is the key to avoiding pitfalls. Have clear objectives about what you want to achieve. If you are new to the issues, decide what you want to focus on and do it well. Use your next event to reinforce this and try something else.

### Venue and Catering – things to check or do

- Ask potential venues if they have an environment policy
- Does the venue have recycling arrangements in place
- Choose venues that are easily accessible by public transport (as appropriate) or plan to provide shared transport facilities (if possible).

- Ensure physical accessibility arrangements are adequate and that venues will accommodate requests for food to meet cultural requirements (Ask for it to be kept separate and labelled).
- Choose caterers or catering options that promote Fair Trade, locally-sourced and/or organic food and refreshments as far as possible.
- Is there a local social enterprise that can provide catering or printing services
- Don't over-order food (external catering is expensive!)
- Can left-over food go to a local charity or hostel or be used internally (some venues have arrangements but health & safety regulations may intervene). For smaller in-house events, composting may be another option.
- Request jugs of iced tap water instead of expensive bottled water
- If venues have water coolers, ask if the plastic cups are collected for recycling (on the day, encourage people to reuse their cup)
- Check what caterers are going to do with glass bottles after the event, do they have a recycling policy?
- Can caterers supply glasses and china plates instead of using disposables?
- Can you/ caterers use tablecloths/linen instead of disposables

## Publicity & Promotion

- Use recycled paper for advertising materials, reports and delegates notepaper
- Cut down on unnecessary waste by using electronic communication as far as possible (this includes encouraging speakers to offer to email presentations etc rather than reams of photocopying)
- If you are having a banner printed does it need to have a date on? For an annual event it could be reused again.
- Display material – can it have another use?
- Give attendees clear information in advance about public transport options (include this information on your website)
- Include information in attendee's packs about your own efforts on environmental issues. Use the opportunity (if relevant) to encourage others to follow suit e.g. Fair Trade at work, Recycled copier and letterhead.
- Make a statement with promotional items – use pens/pencils made from recycled materials, organic cloth bags etc
- If you are supplying gifts or awards to contributors is there an opportunity to use local products?
- For larger events with exhibitors encourage consideration of environmental issues, and provide information about recycling facilities.
- Find out if local outlets or businesses may be willing to provide reduced cost items, sponsorship or items for raffles/fundraising prizes e.g. Fairtrade hampers.
- When promoting your event – is there any environment angle you'd like to highlight

## Action on the day

- Share taxis or cars if they are needed to transport items to the venue

- Make sure agreed recycling facilities in place and clearly labelled. Encourage people to use them.
- Remind the venue's Facilities Manager and caterers about any agreed reuse and recycling arrangements
- Encourage exhibitors/attendees to cut wastage by only bringing the amount of publications etc they think they will need (request in advance)
- Have a small display of Fair Trade leaflets, newsletters, recipe cards and product samples e.g. tea or coffee available (or put in attendees packs if your event is a conference)
- Encourage attendees to leave badges for reuse (and other items they don't need)
- Encourage attendees to take leftover food
- At the end, salvage reusable display and packaging materials etc
- Collect up unwanted paper for recycling & spare promotional items for reuse

## After the event

- Thank contributors, sponsors, staff and volunteers – reiterate benefits if extra effort was needed to incorporate environmental considerations
- Have a debrief session or take time to reflect what worked well and less so
- Lessons learned?
- What could have been done differently? Can you identify the reasons (e.g. didn't have enough information in advance; some arrangements beyond your control – e.g. internal venue caterers; need more leadership from management to get buy-in from others; need a green housekeeping policy to show commitment etc).
- What else was needed?
- Are there any immediate steps that can be put in place to help next time?
- Briefly write up lessons learned for Management and Board/Trustees
- Share what you learnt – informally in your organisation and networks,
- Do you have a story to tell? – would someone be interested in a case study?

## Keep going

- Ensure your actions weren't just a one-off. Set your organisation a challenge for the next time.
- If you haven't got one, develop a **Green Housekeeping/Environment Policy**, <http://eaclink.info/?UESPO>, (funders increasingly want to see evidence that community groups are tackling the issues)
- Become a Fair Trade workplace so that internal meetings continue use these items too.
- Are there new opportunities to look at facilities management within your building e.g. is it time to ask again about local recycling collections? Can staff/volunteers agree to reduce/cut out their use of disposable plastic cups?

Other information and advice:

[The Sustainable Events Guide](#) – Defra (Sept 2007)

<http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/advice/sustainable-events-guide.htm>

Not all advice will be relevant to smaller VCS groups but it was developed to encourage event organisers to think about the social, economic and environmental impacts from the start of the organising process, whether in-house or through contractors.

Fairtrade Foundation – products, suppliers, retailers. <http://www.fairtrade.org.uk>