

SUSTAINABLE EVENTS GUIDE

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Events are great opportunities to connect, collaborate and inspire. However, without thoughtful planning, they can create big environmental impacts.

Whether you're running a small meeting or large student celebration, this guide helps you plan events that minimise negative impacts on the environment. It provides practical tools, resources and case studies to support you to make sustainable choices at every stage of the planning process.

Whilst these are not hard and fast rules, they're great ways to become more mindful when planning events and reducing your impact.

WHY RUN A SUSTAINABLE EVENT?

Sustainable event management supports [Monash's commitment to creating a more sustainable campus](#). The University has a goal to reach [net zero emissions](#), and our Circular Economy Framework has targets to reduce waste per person and divert waste from landfill.

By planning and delivering events with sustainability in mind, you will contribute to Monash's goals and

- reduce carbon emissions
- minimise waste including single-use plastics
- demonstrate leadership in sustainability
- inspire meaningful action and behaviour
- reduce costs with more efficient resource use.

PLANNING

Responsible organisers think about sustainability across every component of event planning – from programming, promotion, catering, transport and waste management.

If you're new to sustainability, start with one initiative or area of focus and grow from there. Remember, it's not all or nothing. **Every small change you make adds up over time.**

Make sure your staff, volunteers, suppliers and attendees understand your ambition to deliver a sustainable event. Share your aspirations and goals from the outset so you are supported to create change.

If you need advice or support, contact the Buildings and Property Campus Sustainability team at environment@monash.edu.au.

VENUE SELECTION

GO VIRTUAL OR HYBRID

Choose virtual events and meetings where possible – they significantly reduce transport, waste and energy impacts. You might consider offering a hybrid model to enable online access for attendees travelling from far distances.

If you're hosting an in-person event:

- Book a venue that matches your attendance expectations.
- Oversized rooms can lead to unnecessary lighting, heating and cooling use. Previous event attendance and RSVP data can help you better predict your capacity requirements.
- Choose venues close to public transport, walking and cycling facilities to minimise car travel. Try to schedule your event start and end times to align with public transport timetables.
- If your event is outdoors, select a location close to nearby permanent water stations. This means you might not need to provide single-use water options or water coolers.

When booking an external venue outside Monash:

- Look for a clear commitment to sustainability. Ask venues if they have a sustainability policy or action plan in place.
- Prioritise venues with accredited GreenPower and/or Green Star accreditation for construction and building requirements.
- Choose venues that offer reusable crockery and food/organics waste disposal to reduce your waste impact.

ENERGY

If you book a venue within Monash, your event's electricity will come from 100 per cent renewable sources. There are also some simple tricks to reduce your reliance on energy:

- Request rooms with natural ventilation and lighting to reduce energy use.
- Keep the heating and air-conditioning at a set temperature. The recommended thermal comfort temperature range is 19-26°C.
- Turn off lights, equipment, heating and cooling when not in use. When appliances are in standby mode, they still use energy so make sure to switch them off at the power source.
- Choose a PA system (i.e. speakers, microphone) that suits your venue size and avoid oversized equipment.

WASTE AND RESOURCE RECOVERY

The best way to reduce waste is to avoid it being created in the first place.

Start by investigating where you can minimise waste at its source, then reuse as many items as you can.

For the remaining items you can't reuse, ensure they are recycled correctly. Landfill disposal should always be your last resort.

STEP 1. REDUCE YOUR WASTE

Avoiding waste should be your first priority. Not only does it avoid the use of virgin materials, but it means you can avoid the time, effort and costs involved in recycling and disposal.

Here are some ways to eliminate waste:

- Ditch disposables and switch to reusable cups and crockery. See page 6 for more information.
- Avoid all items in single-use packaging including compostable packaging and straws.
- Use digital brochures, pamphlets, and agendas instead of printed materials.
- Avoid single-use party items. Glowsticks leak toxins into the soil when they go to landfill, confetti is difficult to clean and can't be recycled, escaped balloons can often harm marine animals, and plastic glitter pollutes waterways and soil impacting local plants and animals. Consider alternatives like face painting, costume props or reusable decorative materials.
- Avoid merchandise freebies as most end up in landfill.
- Opt for reusable, repairable and refillable items and equipment.
- Hire or borrow items and furniture instead of buying for one-off use. Small quantities of trestle tables and chairs are available for hire via [Access BPD](#). Larger quantities need to be hired from external furniture companies.

STEP 2. REUSE MATERIALS

Before you make any purchases, take some simple steps to make sure items can be reused or repurposed.

- Avoid printing dates and years on signage, banners and uniforms so they can be used at future events. This will save you both money and reduce waste in the long-term.
- Minimise name tag and lanyard use. When they're required, make sure to collect them at the end of the event.
- When purchasing materials and props for activities or performances, choose quality items which can be reused or repurposed.



CASE STUDY: MONSU CAULFIELD AND DODGY PAPER

MONSU Caulfield partnered with local recycled-paper maker [Dodgy Paper](#) to divert waste posters and misprints from landfill and transform them into handmade paper.

The MONSU print shop collected months' worth of misprinted or outdated large-format posters, which were delivered to Dodgy Paper for pulping and remanufacturing. Dodgy Paper then visited campus to run a live demonstration, showcasing the recycling process and returning a ream of freshly made paper.

To close the loop, MONSU screen-printed two custom designs onto the recycled sheets and turned them into greeting cards, which were offered free for students to take home.

STEP 3. ORGANISE BINS AND TRADES

Once you have maximised your reduction and reuse efforts, the next step is establishing robust recycling systems to divert waste from landfills.

Precision is key: contamination can ruin an entire batch, resulting in recyclable or organic waste being sent to landfill.

Planning your waste strategy

- External venues: Always confirm which waste streams are available and exactly what materials they accept.
- Monash campus events: You must coordinate with Buildings and Property to ensure your event is supported.

To allow for adequate coordination of logistics and trades, please adhere to the following minimum notice periods:

Category	Attendees	Minimum notice required to Buildings & Property
Small	Under 200 people	1 week
Large	200+	2-3 weeks
Major	Large events (i.e., O-Week, Open Day, Block Party)	1-2 months

Buildings and Property can assist by providing essential infrastructure and services to keep your event sustainable and functional, including:

- **Waste management:** Providing general waste, commingled recycling, and organic waste bins for both 'back of house' (stallholders) and 'front of house' (attendees).
- **Strategic placement:** Ensuring bins are positioned effectively with clear, high-visibility signage to minimise contamination.
- **Event services:** Enabling minor works, cleaning, portage, furniture setup/hire, electrical, plumbing, HVAC, OH&S, and security services.
- **How to request support:** Submit your requirements online via the [Access BPD request form](#). You may submit a single request by selecting all necessary trades or raise separate requests for each specific service required.

STEP 4. SORT AND RECYCLE MATERIALS

Once you have your bins ordered, create a plan to avoid contamination. By educating your attendees on waste disposal, you can ensure a clean waste stream, supporting better recycling outcomes.

If your event is on-campus, follow Monash's [mixed recycling and landfill guidelines](#) to understand how to correctly dispose of items.

Remember, commonly used event items like coffee cups, bio-plastics, paper towels, serviettes and compostable food packaging cannot be recycled and must go in landfill.

To take it one step further, look at other items you can recycle including e-waste, textiles or stationary. Visit [Planet Ark](#) for advice on hard to recycle items.

For smaller meetings, you might want to create a separate collection point for cans and bottles which are eligible for the [Container Deposit Scheme \(CDS\)](#). By collecting and returning containers, you could use the 10c proceeds to fund your next sustainability activity or donate to a local charity.

To prevent contamination:

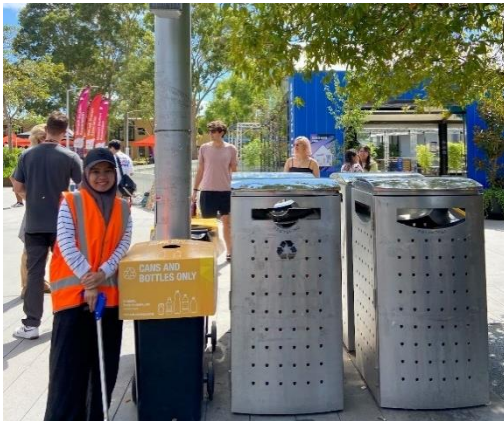
- Confirm items can be recycled in Monash bin systems before purchasing. **Remember compostable is NOT recyclable.** If you're unsure whether an item can be recycled, reach out to Buildings and Property for advice by emailing environment@monash.edu.
- Brief all event staff, suppliers and volunteers on waste disposal at the event briefing. Even if your volunteers aren't on 'waste duty,' they may receive questions from the public.
- Allocate a dedicated sustainability lead to monitor bins during the event.
- Position volunteers in high traffic areas to help attendees recycle correctly.

- Monitor bin levels and report when they need emptying. When bins overflow, many attendees will disregard recycling habits.

COMPOSTABLE FOOD PACKAGING

Compostable or 'bio' food and beverage packaging is not recyclable and must go into landfill. This includes compostable coffee cups, drink and food containers. This is because compostable packaging requires specific industrial processes in order to break down and cannot be recycled in traditional recycling infrastructure. It is always better to opt for reusable crockery than compostable single-use packaging, which often contaminates recycling and food waste bins.

If you're unsure about how to dispose of your packaging, reach out to the Sustainability team for advice at environment@monash.edu.



CASE STUDY: O-WEEK SUSTAINABILITY CHAMPIONS REDUCE CONTAMINATION

Orientation Week is a key period on Monash University's events calendar. As part of the week's activities, clubs and societies, student associations and faculties host a range of events, stalls and activities to welcome new students to Monash. With new students arriving on campus, contamination of bins is often high.

To help reduce waste contamination, Sustainability Champion volunteers were stationed at key high-traffic bins to educate attendees on waste and ensure items were disposed of in the correct bin. Over the week, more than 60 volunteers helped to avoid items from contaminating waste streams, significantly improving recycling outcomes.

CATERING, FOOD AND BEVERAGES

Catering often creates unnecessary waste from packaging, single-use serving containers and leftover food. By making clear catering decisions, you can significantly reduce your overall event impact.

To avoid inappropriate serving containers or waste, tell your caterer your sustainability requirements before finalising your order. Some caterers may provide complimentary single-use items even when they aren't specified.

When selecting a caterer:

- Avoid individually wrapped food items, coffee sachets or snacks
- Request reusable or returnable serving materials. Compostable packing is not the best option.
- Avoid plastic wrap or film.
- Avoid single-serve sauce packets and provide a condiment station such as refillable salt and sauce bottles.
- Consider how you plate and serve food and beverages. Ask your caterer to opt for reusables whenever possible. Let them know that compostable packaging is not recyclable and that you would prefer reusables whenever possible.

REUSABLES

Reusables have a whole range of wider benefits for your event. Not only do they significantly reduce waste but they also encourage people to dine in, connect with others and stay longer at transient events, and in the long-term can save on purchase costs of single-use items.

Simple switches to reusable cups, crockery and cutlery can significantly reduce event waste. For example, by providing jugs and glasses for water, you can avoid the need to purchase single-use plastic bottles. For large scale events, consider engaging a reusable service provider to manage a reusable cup and crockery system.

Provide water refill stations and encourage your attendees to bring their own bottles, cups and containers. Offering incentives, such as discounts, free food or giveaways is a great way to incentivise reusable uptake.

CASE STUDY: MGA DITCHES DISPOSABLES

In 2025, the Monash Graduate Association (MGA) ran a series of waste-free lunches and dinners at Clayton campus. Working closely with selected caterers, MGA ensured all food (where possible) was delivered in reusable trays and serving containers, eliminating the need for single-use packaging.

Students used dine-in reusable plates, bowls and cutlery, supported by volunteers who helped with waste sorting, returns, dishwashing, and education.

Building on this success, MGA then expanded its efforts to introduce reusable takeaway containers to their popular 'Grab and Go' dinners. The reusable clam-shell containers were labelled with clear return instructions, making it easy for students to return their container, eliminating the need for single-use containers.

Through careful planning, MGA prevented more than 2000 single-use plates and containers from entering landfill. These programs also helped reduce the cost of purchasing disposables, encouraged Monash teams to collaborate, empowered students to participate in the initiative, and encouraged students to spend more time socialising with each other as opposed to taking their meal to go.

FOOD WASTE

Over-ordering is one of the leading causes of food waste at events. When food decomposes in landfill, it generates methane – a potent greenhouse gas. Limiting food waste is a key way to reduce your event's emissions.

Where possible, ask attendees to register and list their dietary preferences ahead of the event to ensure you order suitable portion sizes.

Create a plan for any leftovers:

- Ask attendees to bring a container to take home excess food.
- Share leftovers in communal spaces on campus such as MSA's food pantry/fridge or the MGA lounge.
- Share leftovers with a local food kitchen or food rescue service such as OzHarvest or SecondBite.
- Check if your caterers have food donation partners they can recommend.

MENU CHOICES

Choose menus with locally sourced, organic, vegetarian and plant-based options to minimise the environmental footprint of your catering. You can take it one step further by making vegetarian the default meal for all attendees – plant-based meals are significantly less carbon intensive than meat and dairy.

You should also consider sourcing [FairTrade](#) and ethically sourced food and beverage options, including tea, coffee, sugar and chocolate.



CASE STUDY: MONASH UNIVERSITY ACCOMMODATION GO VEGETARIAN

For their staff lunches and wider workshops, Monash University Accommodation offered vegetarian catered lunches.

The lunches were delivered on reusable serving trays and received great feedback from attendees.

TRANSPORT

Transport planning doesn't stop at choosing the venue. You should actively encourage and make it easy for attendees to use sustainable transport options, such as public transport, cycling, or walking.

- Determine the start and end times of your events with transport in mind. It won't matter if the venue is near a bus route if the bus isn't running at the time of your event.
- Provide directions, appropriate train and tram timetables, maps and details of any shuttle buses or carpooling schemes in your event invitations, ticketing links and reminders.
- Share bike storage areas for delegates and/or list nearby bicycle racks or arrival stations.
- Encourage Monash students and staff to use the sustainable transport options such as carpooling or carshare.
- Consider incentives for people who take greener transport options.

MERCHANDISE AND GIVEAWAYS

Majority giveaway items are thrown away after the event. Avoid cheap and low-quality branded giveaways that will break or end in landfill.

- If you plan to provide giveaways, opt for plants, vouchers or non-tangible items. Otherwise select high quality, long lasting items that won't be discarded.
- Consider prizes that support long term sustainability change. Branded reusable cups, metal straws, reusable lunchboxes or cutlery sets are great options that encourage reuse on campus.
- Request that your sponsors and other event partners avoid physical promotional materials or only provide sustainable items that could replace your own giveaway stock.
- Only provide merchandise products that are made from sustainable materials, such as organic or recycled content.
- Avoid apparel and clothing unless you can accurately predict sizes – excess sized items end up waste. If you have to offer apparel, consider one size fits all options like hats.
- Avoid printing the date or other event details that would prevent you from using the merchandise at future events.
- If you need uniforms, choose reusable options like high-vis vests rather than single use t-shirts.

CASE STUDY: MONSU CAULFIELD UPCYCLED DESIGNS

MONSU Caulfield delivered a creative upcycling initiative that transformed old clothing into refreshed, personalised items.

Two Monash design students were engaged to create original screen-print artworks. Staff and students were invited to bring an old t-shirt or jumper to be screen-printed live at a pop-up station during the event, and soy-based inks were selected to minimise chemical use and environmental impact

This initiative avoided the need for new merchandise, extended the life of existing garments, reduced textile waste and created a highly engaging hands-on experience for students.



PROCUREMENT

In 2024, purchased goods and services made up 38 per cent of Monash's total emissions. Every purchase decision you make – from stationary, event tools, equipment and furniture – can help to reduce your emissions, waste impact and save costs in the long term.

Before purchasing any equipment or items, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I need to purchase this item?
- How often will I use this item?
- Is there a reusable or refillable alternative?
- Where will I store it when it is not in use?
- How will I dispose of it?

If you still need the item, consider hiring or borrowing it first. You could save on costs by checking if other departments, clubs or faculties will allow you to borrow the item or equipment. Consider returning the favour by offering to lend or share items with other faculties.

If you have to purchase an item, consider:

- Can I purchase it second-hand?
- Is it made of organic or recycled materials?
- Is it locally made?
- Can it be recycled in Monash waste systems at the end of life?
- Is it ethically sourced or certified?
- Can you order it with other items to reduce transport costs and emissions?

PRODUCT CERTIFICATIONS

Many products use certification or schemes to verify their sustainability. It can be confusing to understand what different terms mean. Here is a short list of some certification schemes and definitions you might come across. While it is important to do your own research, generally we would recommend products labelled with:

- [1% For The Planet](#) - Business commitment to donate at least 1 per cent of annual revenue directly to environmental organisations.
- [Australian Certified Organic](#) - Products made without synthetic chemicals, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), or artificial additives. Third-party certification (e.g. Australian Certified Organic) ensures compliance with organic farming and production standards.
- [B Corporation \(B Corp\)](#) - Assesses businesses based on their verified social and environmental performance across a range of key criteria. The scheme requires businesses to transparently publish their certification performance on the [B Lab website](#).
- [Fairtrade](#) - Certification that ensures producers and workers are paid fair wages and operate under safe, ethical, and environmentally sustainable conditions. Applies to products like coffee, tea, chocolate, textiles and more.
- [Indigenous Art Code](#) - Voluntary code that sets standards for fair, transparent, and ethical trade between businesses and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.
- [Kinaway](#) - Victorian certification that verifies business is at minimum 51 per cent owned and operated by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.
- [Supply Nation](#) - National directory and certification that verifies businesses are at least 50 per cent owned by Indigenous people.

Some claims and schemes that may require more research include:

- **Biodegradable** - Materials that break down generally under natural environmental conditions. Biodegradability does not guarantee compostability. The term is often linked to greenwashing as it does not guarantee a specific timeframe or that the product will leave no harmful residue over time.
- **Carbon Neutral** - Describes an activity, product, or organisation that balances its carbon emissions by reducing emissions and often purchasing carbon offsets, resulting in net-zero emissions. While many reputable businesses use high quality offsets, some organisations use less robust offsets as a way to claim carbon neutrality while not taking steps to reduce their underlying emissions.
- **Compostable** - Compostable products must break down fully and safely under composting conditions within a specified timeframe. In Australia, there are two key types of compostable certification:
- **Home Compostable (AS 5810)**: Products that will break down in a typical healthy backyard compost bin, without requiring high temperatures. Remember, home composts require a mix of diverse 'brown' and 'green' materials to effectively break down. Home compostable items need to be dispersed within other compost materials to effectively break down.
- **Industrial Compostable (AS 4736)**: Products that require the controlled conditions of a commercial composting facility (such as higher heat and humidity) to decompose properly. These include items like Bio Cups which cannot degrade in home compost conditions. There are currently limited industrial composting facilities available in Australia, meaning they often end up in landfill.
- **FSC (Forest Stewardship Council)** - Certification system that verifies that products such as timber and paper comes from sustainably managed forests. There are three types of FSC certification with different standards:
 - **FSC Recycled**: Product is made from 100 per cent recycled materials. FSC Recycled should be your priority when selecting paper-based materials.
 - **FSC 100%**: All materials come from responsibly managed forests.
 - **FSC Mix**: Includes a mixture of materials such as FSC-certified forests, recycled materials and controlled wood (i.e. not FSC-certified wood).

COMMUNICATIONS AND EDUCATION

Communicating your ambition to be a sustainable event is a great way to bring your attendees, stallholders and contractors along the journey with you.

Many of the choices your attendees make, such as how they travel to the event or manage their waste, directly affect your event's emissions and impact – so keeping them informed is key to achieving your sustainability goals.

Additionally, through your programming and curation you have the opportunity to inspire attendees to take action and improve sustainability in their own lives.

When planning your event program, consider including a sustainability-focused speaker, panel, presentation, performance or stall to engage your audience with sustainable ideas.

- Include sustainability messages in all communications – before, during and after the event.
- Ask contractors, suppliers or caterers about their sustainability policies. Many suppliers offer environmentally-friendly service options, but will only share them when directly asked.
- Make sure your ticketing or registration link includes advice on what to bring such as reusable cups, bottles or containers.
- If you send event reminders, make sure to include sustainable travel advice.
- If making an introduction to the event, share your sustainability efforts and promote the event as socially and environmentally responsible.
- Celebrate your wins after the event. For example, if you used reusable cups, you may be able to share how many single use cups were avoided.
- Ask attendees for feedback on the sustainability initiatives. This can allow you to improve your messaging and activities year on year.

CHECKLIST

Not sure where to start? Use this checklist as a guide.

Category	Action
Venue	Consider a virtual or hybrid format
	If booking an external venue, choose one close to public transport
	Select a space suitable for expected attendance
	Choose external venues which have a sustainability policy, GreenPower or GreenStar Accreditation
	If using external venues, request one which can facilitate reusable crockery and food and organics recycling
Energy	Request rooms with natural ventilation and lighting
	Keep heating and air-conditioning at a set temperature
	Switch off appliances from power source when not in use
Waste	Switch to reusable crockery, cups and cutlery
	Use digital materials (agendas, collateral, tickets) instead of printed paper
	Avoid printing dates/years on signage and merchandise so they can be reused at future events
	Collect name tags and lanyards at the end of events for reuse
	Contact Buildings & Property ahead of your event to organise suitable bins with appropriate signage
Catering	Collect registrations and dietary requirements to reduce the risk of overordering
	Opt for plant-based, vegetarian, and local produce wherever possible
	Request reusable packaging and crockery
	Avoid compostable food packaging - it goes into landfill
	Make a plan for any leftover food
	Check if your packaging can be disposed of in Monash waste services
Procurement	Check if you can borrow or hire any materials or equipment before purchasing
	Look for items with verified certifications
	Opt for second-hand, refillable or repairable items wherever possible
Transport	Provide public transport advice and timetables in event invitations and ticketing links
	Provide information on bike arrival stations or racks in event invitations and ticketing links
	Encourage carpooling or EV charging where possible
Communications and Education	Include sustainability advice such as transport information and BYO cup incentives in all event communications
	Advertise your sustainability goals to encourage patron behaviour
	Curate or program sustainability content or speakers into your event
Merchandise and Giveaways	Avoid giveaways and freebies where possible
	If providing giveaways, opt for items that support sustainability (reusable cups, straws, cutlery)



FOR FURTHER ADVICE

If you require further support in making your event sustainable, reach out to Buildings and Property Campus Sustainability at environment@monash.edu

To learn about Monash's sustainability initiatives, visit [Campus Sustainability](#).