

How to create an environmentally sustainable event

A guide for community-run events



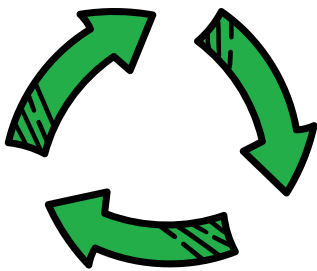
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How to create an environmentally sustainable event



Events can be planned and delivered in a way which looks after te taio.

Organising an event?

This guide gives you practical tips, resources, and checklists to help make your event more environmentally responsible. It suggests ways to reduce impacts of staging your event – from choosing the venue and location, to managing communications, suppliers, catering, waste, and transport.

With a little preparation, events can be planned and delivered in a way which looks after te taio (the environment that surrounds us).

How to create an environmentally sustainable event



Why host a greener event?

When organising events, you have an opportunity to show leadership in sustainability and deliver on climate action and waste minimisation goals.

Greening your event can:

Improve the experience of participants

Well-organised 'greener' events can improve, rather than detract from, attendees' experiences.

Position you as a leader

Showing your environmental commitment can enhance your relationships with event attendees.

Save money

By reducing the costs of waste disposal, energy, and water.

Influence behaviour change

By raising attendees' awareness, inspiring behaviour change, and influencing suppliers to adopt greener practices.

Help the environment

By minimising the use of water and energy; and reducing greenhouse gas emissions and waste.

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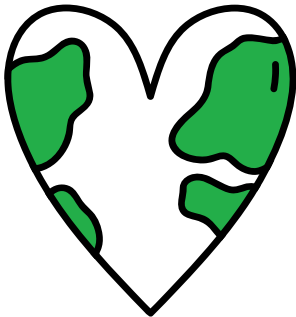
Pathway to planning and running sustainable events

01 Commit to greening your event

- Make a commitment to reduce the environmental impacts of your event. You can do this by setting specific objectives, for example, going waste-free for the event.
- Choose one or two key objectives and focus on doing them well. You can add more objectives at future events when you have nailed the first ones!
- Communicating with key event stakeholders and getting them on board is always an important step when planning a sustainable event. This includes event organisers, venue managers, presenters, speakers, suppliers, and stall holders. Communicating the importance of sustainability and climate action and getting a commitment from these stakeholders to be part of this process is key to hosting a successful and sustainable event.

Going waste-free for the event.

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The bigger the event, the more detailed your action plan may need to be. See the Checklist at the end of this Guide.

02 Plan with the planet in mind

Check the event's overall purpose and objectives to make sure there are no red flags to begin with.

Make sure the event values align with the commitment to sustainability and climate action. Doing this from the beginning allows time to discuss, change and improve. For example, don't give out bottled water at a zero waste event.

Develop an Action Plan

The plan should include:

- your objectives and any targets
- actions to achieve your objectives
- stakeholders – roles and responsibilities
- a plan for measuring and evaluating the success of your actions
- funding requirements and an estimate of costs.

Example of a possible objective, target, and actions

Objective: —————→ Reduce the amount of waste produced at the event.

Target: —————→ 80% of waste diverted from landfill.

Actions: —————→

- Develop a waste awareness campaign as part of the event.
- Work with vendors to only have drinks served in recyclable materials such as aluminium cans or plastic (#1 and #2).
- Set up managed recycling stations at the event to help people use recycling bins correctly.
- Consider refillable/reusable mugs and water stations.

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Things to consider at the planning stage:

- How can you prevent issues from arising in the first place? For example – think about how you can avoid waste in the first instance rather than recycling. Consider sustainability at each stage of planning; from designing the space and set-up to looking at how the programme will run and where resources are allocated.
- Early engagement: check in with everyone involved and make them aware of the sustainability principles or aims. This includes making it clear to staff, volunteers, attendees, and suppliers. Being clear and upfront from the beginning will smooth the implementation stage.
- Reduce waste by discouraging single use or disposable options or consider having waste free areas. If you create waste free areas, there is no provision for disposing of waste, so people need to take with them what they bring in. Deciding on waste free areas in the early stage of planning will allow you to determine which waste streams, if any, will be present.
- There are organisations that can help with planning for low waste events, including:
 - [Para Kore](#)
 - [Xtreme Zero Waste](#)
 - [Closed Loop](#)

Hosting the event

- Consider different ways to host the event – does it need to be in person, or could the event be run online, or even a mix of virtual and small, local face-to-face sessions? This will result in lower greenhouse gas emissions from travel and fewer resources used.
- Venue and location – the choice of where to hold your event can make a huge difference to its environmental impact. The location and how easy it is to get there determines how people and goods will travel there, which impacts the volume of greenhouse gases emitted from transport.

Working with suppliers and sponsors

- Suppliers may make an effort to provide the best possible alternatives if involved early on, so be sure to include them. This will also help to avoid difficult, and usually more costly, last minute changes. Engage with suppliers early about providing food, drinks, and other products only in materials that can be recycled easily or minimise waste.
- If there are event sponsors, make sure their values align with your sustainability goals; for example, are their giveaways sustainable? Does the sponsor have a good track record when it comes to caring for the environment and people?

Communication

- Communication - having sustainable events make great news stories and you can include relevant sustainability goals when giving quotes. Weave the sustainability narrative into your story and share it in media or promotional material.

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03 Event Organisation

Spread the message...
attendees, sponsors, suppliers

Think modular...
limit time sensitive signage and collateral

Designate waste free areas

Reusables by default...
crochery, cutlery, linen

Do visuals...
not printouts, use apps!

Support walking, cycling, public transport...
maps, priority bike parking, subsidise transport passes

Re-think defaults...
forms, sponsorship packs, instructions

Make the event waste free...
no bins required



Ask suppliers to back environmental claims

RSVP...
always ask

'Return' areas for reusables

Sustainable duties...
one or more staff members

Challenge expectations!

Offer carbon off-setting alternatives BYO...
bottle, mug, container, cutlery, bag

BYO priority...
queues, discounts

Offer pre-order...
avoid food waste

Local...
produce and products

Water...
on tap or fountain only

Souvenirs and prizes...
donation certificates, public transport passes, tickets to shows or venues

Goodbye single use...
straws, plastic bags, packaging

Minimise the energy, water and material resources used

Promote the use of sustainable modes of transport

Utilise current systems for recovery and disposal correctly

Prevent waste at source

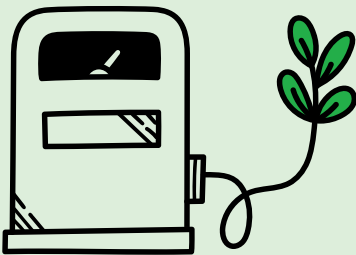
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Volunteers – your ‘Sustainability Champions’

Volunteers are often vital for the success of any great event and having a team that are mindful of the environment is a way to educate and involve as many people as possible in your sustainability plan.

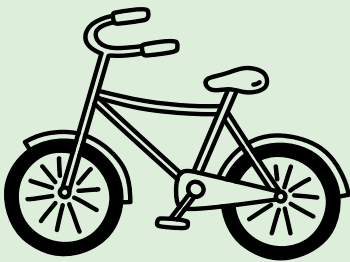
- Recruit volunteers to be ‘sustainability champions’ at events.
- It is helpful to have volunteers present at sorting bin stations to help educate attendees on waste streams and to make sure that waste is sorted correctly.



Travel

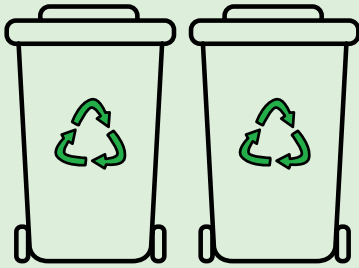
Travel is often the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions at events. Reducing the need to travel or choosing ‘greener’ transport options can reduce this.

- Encourage people to take public transport when coming to your event and find out where the nearest bus stops are (or other public transport hubs) so you can make it as accessible as possible.
- Try to organise or connect people to carpool.
- Encourage biking or walking to the event.
- Bike hire or scooter hire may be options for attendees as well - check out what’s available and promote it.
- Zoom /web conference for people who can’t attend.
- Carbon offset flights - encourage attendees to do this when (if) booking their flights.
- Encourage attendees travelling from far to use nearby accommodation and give details of hotels within 10km of your event or meeting.
- If providing transportation use the most efficient vehicles possible (hybrids or EVs) and the least number of vehicles. For example, try to fill up cars with passengers.



Try to organise or connect people to carpool.

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Create generic signage that can be used for future events.



Have reusable crockery and ceramic mugs instead of single-use cups.

Waste

Waste reduction is a great way to embed sustainability into your events, with lots of waste-minimising options to choose from. These ideas listed below will help you get started.

After the event, it can be helpful to look at what types of waste the event created and note that down. This helps when planning for future events, as you will have a better idea of problematic waste types that you can work to reduce at future events.

Event information:

- Use an online booking system to save paper and time.
- Avoid printing event programmes. Alternative options include information boards with event schedules and maps, digital screens with programmes, or app options.
- If you must print information, make sure it is double-sided.
- For professional printing, choose a printer that uses paper sourced from recycled materials, or that is FSC certified, and use low VOCs and vegetable inks.
- Create generic signage that can be used for future events.

Food and drink:

- Cater conservatively, don't over order. Plan for dealing with any leftover food:
 - Can attendees bring a container and take it home?
 - Can you arrange to donate it to Kaivolution (or a local pig farmer?)
- Have reusable crockery and ceramic mugs instead of single-use cups.
- Collect napkins for the worm farm.
- Choose to not purchase individual packets/sachets/stirrers. They cost more and create waste.
- Tell people water refill stations will be available (if they are) and encourage them to bring their own water bottle. Don't provide water in plastic bottles.
- Be aware of wrappers that can easily become litter, such as lolly wrappers or ice block wrappers. If possible, avoid products packaged like this – choose food options with less packaging like ice cream in a cone, or popcorn from a machine.

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Reduce, reuse, and recycle:

- Provide recycling bins and if needed, rubbish bins - place them next to the recycling bins. If they are separated, you will get rubbish in any bin that people can find.
- Monitor recycling stations, with volunteers to help people place items in the right bins.
- If you have an MC or presenters at the event, get them to ask attendees to recycle carefully, not drop any litter, etc.
- Provide reusable lanyards that are handed back at the end of the event and reused at the next one.
- Using one-off signage and decorations can really increase waste. Consider creative ideas that recycle and upcycle resources to create props. This could include wine barrels for bar leaners, old doors used as trestle tables, cardboard walls for backdrops, and live plants instead of cut plants.
- Avoid 'goodie bags' at your events, as they can be waste waiting to happen.



Pick up litter for a spot prize!

Litter:

- Prevent plastic and other waste getting into the environment by collecting litter routinely during your event.
- Involve event attendees in this, by asking them to pick up litter for a spot prize! This reinforces the idea that everyone is responsible for the waste, not just the event organiser

Communication:

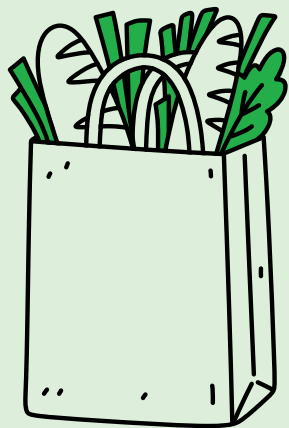
- Include information about the sustainability components of your event on the event promotion – this will encourage others to be more sustainable too.



Water

- Hire water fountains and encourage usage of reusable drink bottles, such as stainless steel bottles or keep cups.
- Inform attendees that there are water refill stations throughout the event and have the locations on the event map or app.

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Prioritise locally sourced kai.

Food

Providing food and drinks creates large amounts of paper, glass, plastics, and organic waste. The suppliers and caterers you choose will have a big influence on your event's environmental impacts.

When checking out potential suppliers, being clear about your sustainability objectives will help you choose. And when you request products that minimise environmental impacts, you send a clear message to suppliers that there is a growing demand for sustainable products and services.

Some considerations:

- Prioritise locally sourced kai and consider making your event vegetarian or even vegan.
- Specify how you want the food presented/delivered, e.g. in reuseable boxes or containers, not covered with cling film.
- Donate leftover food that is untouched and usable to Kaivolution.
- Have dietary requirements indicated before the event to reduce food wastage.
- If having seafood, make sure it's sustainably sourced.
- Finger food means less need for utensils and less waste.



If you need lights, try to use low voltage lamps or LED lights.

Energy

- Zoom / web conference for people who can't attend the venue in person.
- Consider the venue you're using and if it has energy efficient sensors for lights.
- Use detection devices that automatically power room displays on and off.
- Try to use natural light for your event if it's a day event and use a venue with lots of windows.
- If you need lights, try to use low voltage lamps or LED lights.
- Turn off electronic equipment when not in use.
- Keep windows and doors closed when heat or AC is on.
- Make sure the AC setting is not too cold but is still a comfortable temperature.

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It always pays to reflect after the event with your team and see what went well and what could be done better for next time.

04 Evaluate

When planning your event, think about how you will measure and evaluate after the event. You can measure against any targets set before the event, such as amount of waste diverted from landfill, or number of people who took public transport or walked / cycled to the event.

These measurements help tell the sustainability story of the event. It always pays to reflect after the event with your team and see what went well and what could be done better for next time.

Here are a few ways to do this:

- Post event surveys including some questions about sustainability.
- When debriefing with your event team, discuss your efforts to make the event more sustainable, and how this turned out.
- Consider a Waste Audit; this involves keeping all waste and recycling from the event separate so that it can be manually sorted and weighed. You can find more info here [resources online to guide you.](#)

Thanks to the Climate Action and Sustainability team and Waste Minimisation team at Waikato District Council.

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It doesn't have to be perfect - the most important aspect is to create awareness and bring new ideas into the event planning process.

Green Event Guide checklist

(adapted from the Ministry for the Environment checklist)

Here is a checklist to help guide you through creating a sustainable event.

Actions

Yes Future Action Not Applicable

Event Planning

If you hold events regularly, do you have existing environmental initiatives or sustainability principles incorporated?			
Have you considered the sustainability expectations of your attendees/stakeholders?			
Have you set your green event objectives?			
Have you developed an action plan?			

Before the Event

Are there systems in place to collect data that will help measure the success of your objectives and/or targets?			
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After the Event

Have you considered what went well and what could be improved?			
Will the lessons learnt be incorporated into planning your next event?			

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Communication

Actions

Yes Future Action Not Applicable

Event Planning

Have you shared your environmental objectives with the stakeholders? (e.g., venue owners, suppliers, volunteers, caterers, and sponsors)			
Have you decided what communication methods you will use to promote your objectives to attendees?			
Have you considered what (if any) training your staff and volunteers need to help you deliver your objectives?			

Before the Event

Have your objectives been communicated to your attendees through the website, social media, and other appropriate channels?			
Have your volunteers and staff received appropriate training? For example, if you expect them to act as 'sustainability champions', are they clear what is required of them?			

During the Event

Are you using appropriate communication methods – e.g., clear signs, announcements, sustainability champions/volunteers?			
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After the Event

Have you communicated your successes and lessons learnt to your stakeholders and attendees?			
Will the lessons learnt be incorporated into planning your next event?			

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Venue (may not be needed)

Actions

Yes Future Action Not Applicable

Event Planning

Do the potential venues have policies and plans for:			
• Waste minimisation, and/or recycling and composting?			
• Energy efficiency			
• Water efficiency			
• Staff training and awareness of environmental policies?			

Before the Event

Do you have all necessary resource consents and/or permissions?			
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During the Event

Are all unnecessary lights and appliances switched off to avoid unnecessary energy wastage?			
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After the Event

Will the lessons learnt be incorporated into planning your next event?			
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Suppliers and caterers

Actions	Yes	Future Action	Not Applicable
Event Planning			
Does the potential supplier have policies and plans for:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimising waste – e.g., by avoiding individually packaged items and using reusable, recyclable, or properly compostable packaging? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recycling and composting waste? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sourcing food, goods, and services from local providers where possible? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using certified sustainable products? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using energy efficiently – e.g., by minimising transport emissions and energy usage? 			
Have you included greening clauses in your suppliers' contracts?			
Before the Event			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can attendees order food before the event to minimise food wastage? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have you informed caterers of the exact number of attendees to avoid unnecessary food waste? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can food be vegetarian? 			
During the Event			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is packaging reusable, recyclable, or biodegradable? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is packaging being disposed of correctly? 			
After the Event			
Will the lessons learnt be incorporated into planning your next event?			

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Waste

Actions	Yes	Future Action	Not Applicable
Event Planning			
Have you talked to the Waikato District Council Waste Team or the Climate Action & Sustainability team to find out what can and cannot be recycled and composted in the area?			
Before the Event			
Are you clear about what can and cannot be recycled and composted, and have you written this into your suppliers' and caterers' contracts?			
Have you organised your recycling, composting, and rubbish bins, both for attendees and for other waste generating areas (e.g., behind the food stalls and stages)?			
Have you thought about how to manage the flows of waste from public areas to the area where these materials are to be collected and sorted before removal from the site?			
Have you briefed staff and volunteers on how to use the bins correctly and responsibly?			
Do the people managing the collection of the full bins know how to handle each stream of material?			
Are there systems in place to measure quantities recycled, composted and sent to landfill?			
During the Event			
Are recycling bins clearly marked and visible?			
Are all receptacles for waste products (e.g., wheelie bins for rubbish or skips for back-of-house cardboard recycling) clearly labelled?			
Are staff and volunteers located at bins to help attendees and stallholders?			
After the Event			
Have you calculated the percentage of total discarded materials that were successfully diverted to recycling and composting?			
Has all waste been disposed of correctly and responsibly?			
Have you received waste reporting from the waste collector?			
Will the lessons learnt be incorporated into planning your next event?			

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Transport

Actions

Yes Future Action Not Applicable

Event Planning

Have you identified the most efficient ways of getting attendees, goods, and services to and from the event?			
If public transport isn't available, have you considered arranging bus or shuttle services to get attendees to and from the event?			
Have you considered offering incentives that encourage attendees to use public transport and discourage car usage (apart from disabled access)?			

Before the Event

Have you informed attendees of the most efficient transport options to get to and from the event?			
Have you publicised details such as bus timetables, carpooling options, transit stops, and the location of secure bicycle storage?			
If attendees need accommodation, have you recommended options close to the venue to reduce transport costs and distances and encourage walking?			

During the Event

Are transit stops and bicycle storage facilities clearly marked?			
Have you limited parking spaces to discourage private vehicle usage?			

After the Event

Will the lessons learnt be incorporated into planning your next event?			
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Template checklist for organising an event

This checklist can help you plan the key elements of your event.

Choose what is relevant to your event, depending on the size and scale of the event.

Initial Planning:

- Purpose and aims of event
- Event theme and concept
- Identifying key audience
- Getting people involved
- Date and venue
- Wet weather plan

Budget:

- Set the budget
- Research sponsorship or fundraising



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Operational requirements

Any permits, licenses, or consents needed?

- Permit for the use of venue
- Resource consent
- Liquor licenses
- Permit to have a fire
- Amusement device licences/fireworks
- Food stalls and licences
- Fire hydrant access permits
- Road closures
- Parking
- Temporary building permits and indemnity
- Public liability insurance
- Damage bonds
- Health and safety plan
- Consultation with affected parties
- Noise control
- Liaison with NZ Police and other services
- Waste management and clean up

Event equipment and facilities

- Electricity and lighting
- Water supply
- Toilets
- Rubbish and recycling bins
- Tents and marquees
- Tables and chairs
- Signage and decorations
- Security
- Road closure equipment
- Access to venue for event vehicles
- Lost children
- First Aid and lifesavers
- Catering

Programming activities

- Ideas for activities and entertainment
 - Planning the event activities
-

Site management and equipment

- Public address systems
- Lighting
- Power for any stalls, stage etc
- Health & safety
- General information sheets: for performers, volunteers, officials, stall holders, etc
- Specific information sheets: specific to different people participating in the event

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Getting the word out

- Marketing/communications plan
- Various media channels
- Media releases
- Media kits
- Photographs
- Newsletters, flyers, advertising leaflets
- Mail outs, letterbox drops
- Event program
- Distribution points for brochures and leaflets
- Paid radio and newspaper advertising

Promotional activity

- Sponsors promotion
- Word of mouth
- Presentations, launches
- Community launch
- Community noticeboards
- Street banners and pole banners
- Street parades
- Pre-event activities

Documentation and evaluation

- Press articles
- Photographs and videos
- Radio and TV recording
- Surveys of attendees
- Post event evaluation meeting
- Putting together an analysis report
- Economic impact
- Thank you letters to sponsors

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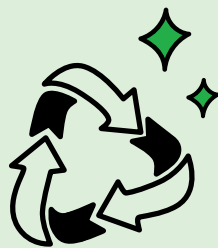
Template Event Runsheet

Name of event: _____

Event day, date, month, year and time: _____

Venue name and address: _____

Time	Activity	Responsibility	Location
	Setup Venue <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Signage• Lighting• Etc		
	Set up any equipment <ul style="list-style-type: none">• List equipment		
	Arrival of guests / visitors <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instructions re H & S, facilities etc		
	Event runs		
	Pack up and tidy venue		
	Venue Lock up		



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A Guide for community-run events