

Making your event sustainable

Introduction	1
Suggested practice	2
Catering	2
Venue	2
Transport	3
Event materials	3
Equipment, AV and Technology.....	4
Decoration and branding	4
Easy wins.....	6
Suggested suppliers.....	6
Communication.....	7
More support.....	7

Introduction

Oxford University is a world-leading authority on environmental research. The University has a robust Environmental Sustainability Strategy and aims to ensure that every aspect of its operations helps advance its goals - including planning and running events.

Events can bring people together, inspire them and promote discussion. However, events, especially international gatherings, can have a significant impact on environmental sustainability. Therefore, it is important that event organisers consider the sustainability of their events in their planning and delivery.

This document aims to help event organisers minimise the impact of their events on the planet.

It was compiled in cooperation with event practitioners across the University. It is not an official policy or guide, but rather a live document that lists applicable practices shared within the University.

If you have suggestions that others might find useful, or if you find mistakes in this document, please contact us. We will update the document as we move along and improve our practice. If you wish to participate in future discussions of the *sustainable events' professional community*, please contact the events or sustainability team (see emails below).

You are welcome to email the Development Events or the sustainability team for advice, ideas or questions.

Events@devoff.ox.ac.uk

Sustainability@admin.ox.ac.uk

Suggested practice

Catering

- If your event involves catering, the biggest positive change you can make is to switch to a vegetarian or vegan menu. Ask your caterer for their vegetarian, vegan and sustainable menus.
- Not everyone is ready to switch to a totally vegetarian or vegan menu. If that is the case, you could offer a meat option for those who ask for it but make a plant-based/vegetarian meal the default.
- Think about serving responsibly sourced meat that has less impact on the environment. Poultry and fish do less harm to the planet than beef, lamb and pork.
- When setting up a buffet, if you choose to serve meat, have the meat options set up near the end instead of at the very beginning. This has been proven to lead people to eat less meat overall.
- Use as little plastic packaging as possible. Buffet-style food often uses much less packaging than single-portion orders.
- Ask your caterer about their food waste policy. Ask them to send any usable leftovers to a local food bank.
- Use a caterer that sources produce responsibly (eg from sustainable farms); ask them where the food comes from.
- Have tap water as the main drink option. Other drinks should be served as much as possible in a carafe or jug.
- Serve local and sustainable drink options, eg local or Fairtrade wines and juices. The Development Events team have worked with several suppliers to serve locally produced, quality sparkling wine, spirits and other drinks at recent events.
- Check that tea, coffee, fruit and juices being served are Fairtrade.
- Consider communicating your food choices along with any information on hospitality eg "To reduce the environmental impact of this event, the food we serve is vegetarian/plant based/sustainably sourced. Food surplus will be sent to Oxford Food Hub."
- Table talkers are a nice way to tell the story of your food, for example by mentioning local farms you sourced from or other interesting choices.

Venue

- Ask the venue what their sustainability policies/actions are. Some University venues are members of sustainable event associations and can support you in delivering a more sustainable event.
- All University venues and other facilities, such as the museums, Exam Schools and Bodleian Libraries, purchase their electricity from zero carbon sources.
- Oxford Martin School (OMS) is a great venue example. If you hire OMS for an event, you can only have vegetarian or vegan catering supplied.
- When choosing your venue think about easy access to public transport.

Transport

- Consider offering all or some of the event in hybrid format to allow participation without traveling. This is especially impactful if your event is international. If you invite guest speaker who is expected to fly, consider offering them the option of joining virtually. Encourage guests to travel by public transport. You can do that by providing information about public transportation options alongside the location details on your invitation. You can also mention sites for bike parking nearby if applicable.
- In Oxford we have five [Park & Ride](#) sites. Consider offering a shuttle service from one of them.
- There are two train stations, [Oxford](#) and [Oxford Parkway](#), and the latter has lots of parking available.
- Oxford has a good [bus network](#) stretching across the city and out into the town and villages.
- The following link lists all the relevant information to share with your event participants: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/visitors/visiting-oxford/how-get-oxford>
-

Event materials

- Make sure all the items you plan to print are needed. Printed material often repeats information that exists elsewhere or includes elements that are no longer required such as the invitation to the event.
- Consider what you could do to reduce the need for printing by using digital alternatives, eg use of a QR code for those who are comfortable getting the information on their smartphone and print less copies.
- Set up screens to show the schedule around the venue, have signs with clear links to further information that attendees can take a photo or email information in real-time. You can offer a paperless version as a first alternative and offer a printed version for those that request it.
- Work with your graphic designer and printer to identify the best environmental option for your printing. [Seacourt](#) is an Oxford-based printer which offers the most sustainable printing options for all types of material.
- You could create a OneDrive/SharePoint or use another file sharing platform to provide details on the event. Social media is also a great way to spread this kind of information, especially with the use of a specific event hashtag. You could even consider creating an app for your event with live updates.
- Avoid paper feedback forms or paper RSVP methods. These can be done online through MS Forms or JISC and disseminated by email. MS Forms is approved by the University to handle personal data. The Development Events team has RSVP templates that we can share with you. The added benefit of moving to an online RSVP is that you can force the guest to answer questions, which means you get all the information you need in one go!
- Printed materials should be double-sided, and use recycled and preferably unbleached paper.
- When using name badges try to use cardboard ones.
- Reuse name badges; collect them after an event and re-use later. Dispose of any damaged badges responsibly.
- Avoid the use of laminated material and envelopes with windows, as these cannot be recycled.
- Encourage guests to bring their own notebooks and pens. Avoid handing out notebooks and single-use plastic pens. You can still have them on hand if guests ask.

Making your event sustainable

- Borrow University branded banners to brand your event; the Development and Public Affairs Events Teams can help with this.
- If you are printing pull-up banners, you can reuse the frames from 'retired' banners. This saves a great deal of material (metal in most cases). If you do not have any from previous events, ask your colleagues. Many of us will have them stored and unused.
- If you print any banners/stands, avoid putting in a date/year on them so you can keep re-using them. Try not to include the kind of information that tends to go out of date quickly (eg names, specific time-limited programmes, etc.) and try to keep things general, to improve the chances they will last a while
- Talk to your print supplier about printing on honeycomb cardboard to make your banner/branding even more sustainable.

Equipment, AV and Technology

- Some of our suppliers are trying to limit their environmental impact (and therefore your event's). Ask your suppliers about their environmental policy.
- If you have multiple events happening in Oxford, or a single event with multiple sections, choose the same supplier to minimise transport for deliveries and collections. Ask your venue or colleagues to see if you can do the same with events that are organised by others in the University.

Decoration and branding

Flowers

- Consider renting potted plants instead of using cut flowers. These are reused repeatedly.
- Ask for in-season flowers, preferably local and presented in sustainable (reused or recycled) containers. Avoid the use of oasis (the green foam stuff!); it is made from plastic, takes hundreds of years to degrade and turns into millions and millions of micro-plastic particles.
- If the season allows, ask for wildflowers. These support local biodiversity (pollinators) before being harvested and offer a unique look.
- Ask the florist to hand-tie your arrangements; you can then give them to guests as they leave your event – guests LOVE this!

Lighting

- Lighting is a clever way to decorate or dress a space in a low-impact way. It can be cost-effective too.

Decorative objects

- See if the department or venue where you are holding the event has anything you can display. For example, using items from the handling collection at Oxford University Natural History Museum as part of the decorations.

As with AV and other types of equipment, try to reuse flowers or decorations at other events/sections of an event if those are happening in Oxford at the same time.



Images for inspiration. From top left: Items from the handling collection at Oxford University Museum of Natural History as part of event decorations; reusable potted plant; rented plants create a mass of green and festive look at low cost and with minimal waste; local wildflowers and green setting.

Easy wins

- Ask your suppliers about their sustainability accreditation.

Catering:

- Have the default menu without meat and serve meat only upon request (opt in)
- Choose poultry or fish instead of beef, pork or lamb.
- Serve plant-based milk as an alternative to dairy milk, or alongside it
- Choose local wine, beer and juice
- If guests are choosing food from a menu, put the vegetarian items at the top
- If you serve a buffet, have the caterer serve the meat dishes at the end.

Event material/printing:

- Have the event programme available online with a QR code to access it easily.
- If your guests expect a printed programme, offer a shorter version or print a limited number of copies with a reference to the online version.

Decorations:

- Renting potted plants can create a mass of green in your space in a cost-effective way.
- Ask about accreditation – Fairtrade flowers guarantees that the growers receive a fair income for their work and apply sustainable methods.

Suggested suppliers

*This is a partial list. Please share with us other suppliers that you would recommend.

Event Management & Production

- Michelle Miles, Fusion Events & Weddings | Sustainable Events and Weddings (fusionliveevents.com)

Catering:

- [Oxford Fine Dining](#) sources produce locally and has a climate-conscious menu. [Compass](#), Oxford University contractor, offers hospitality and [fine dining](#) with sustainability accreditation from the Sustainable Restaurant Association (SRA).
- [Waste2Taste](#) is a small local social enterprise. Very suitable for colourful canapes and less formal meals.

Venue:

- Oxford University Event Venues – <https://www.venues.ox.ac.uk/>

Flowers:

- [Skylark Flower Farm](#)

AV and event equipment

- [That Event Company](#) is a carbon-neutral equipment supplier.

Communication

Communicating your environmental choices can assist in setting expectations among the event participants and other stakeholders and reduce push back.

In most cases people will be happy to take part in a sustainable practice, for example by not taking a printed programme if they don't need one or returning name tags for reuse.

Here are some tips for communicating your environmental choices effectively:

- 1) Focus on impactful actions. These include dietary choices, transport and material.
- 2) Link your choice to the University's Environmental Sustainability strategy. For example, *Oxford University has strategic goals of reaching net zero carbon and biodiversity net gain by 2035. As part of this process the [choices made for this event] aim to reduce the environmental impact of [food/transport/resource use].*
- 3) Be sensitive to declarations that might come across as bragging or even greenwashing.
- 4) Be friendly and ask for cooperation from your guests.
- 5) Ideal opportunities to share your choices are:
 - a. Sustainable transport – in the invitation
 - b. Food – menu, table talkers
 - c. Programme

More examples for suggested text:

Invitation:

- We aim to reduce the carbon footprint of this event. We would appreciate your cooperation by travelling sustainably. [Include information about buses, trains and bicycle parking if relevant].
- We aim to reduce our use of disposable cups. Please feel free to bring your own reusable mug and water bottle to enjoy Fairtrade coffee and tea throughout the event.

On a sign in the registration desk:

- We aim to reuse the name badges. Please return yours to the dedicated baskets at the end of the event.
- The programme is available online by following this QR code. Feel free to take a printed version if you need one.

On the menu (if sent ahead of the event):

- The food served at this event is vegetarian. If you wish to have a meat dish, please note that in the special dietary requirement of the registration form.

More support

For additional support, please contact:

[Vered Balan](#), Environmental Sustainability Programme Manager

[Huw Mason](#), Head of Development Events