

How-To Guide for Conducting Conferences Sustainably at Yale University

There are six major areas to consider to enhance the sustainability of any conference. The following list summarizes the basic actions in each category.

- **Transportation** – Promote alternative modes of transportation when providing information on traveling to the event. Minimize carbon-intensive travel at the conference; offset the carbon emissions of participant travel to and from the conference.
- **Materials use** -- Keep hand-outs to a minimum; paperless registration; avoid disposables, particularly single-serving types, at catered events. Choose post-consumer recycled paper manufactured with renewable energy and sustainable ink sources.
- **Food Service** – Keep portion sizes reasonable; compost or arrange to have leftovers donated; use food from sustainable sources.
- **Recycling** – Ensure both on and off-site recycling opportunities are in place and easily accessible.
- **Space** – Choose meeting rooms that exploit natural lighting; time conferences to occur at times of year when heating and cooling needs are minimal.
- **Neutralize remaining GHG emissions** – Obtain renewable energy credits, either through purchase or donation, to offset the emissions that were not avoided through sustainable measures.
- **Education** – Take the opportunity to raise awareness and educate both the client and the participants.

1. Transportation

a. Participant travel to conference

-Promote alternative modes of transportation when providing information/directions about traveling to the event. Include bus and train schedules and routes, location of bike racks for participants who live in close proximity to the venue, and set-up an electronic carpool/rideshare board. Visit the Yale transportation options website for a great resource on traveling to yale: www.yale.edu/to

-Via the online registration form, ask participants to fill in how many miles they estimate they will travel round trip and by what mode. The form should be structured so that the information is available on a participant basis. Work with IT personnel in designing how best to capture miles/mode information for registrants. It would be ideal to capture the information and have an internal program process it such that the result is an aggregate number of miles per mode. Use this information to purchase carbon offsets to make up for the GHG emissions associated with travel to and from the conference.

b. Getting around at the conference

Choose venues that were within walking distance of each other to minimize the need for carbon-dependent transport and encourage participants to walk to other venues. Where necessary, use vehicles that cut GHG emissions and/or advance sustainability in other ways. Design tours so that they do not necessitate vehicle use. If a Yale shuttle is needed, be sure to inform participants that the buses are fueled by an ultra-low sulfur diesel and 20% biodiesel (soybean oil) blend.

2. Materials Use

Minimize the generation of waste by preventing it to begin with and distributing a minimum amount of paper and other materials.

a. Office paper

-Have a "paperless" registration process where people register online or by phone and receive confirmation by email (or on paper but they should have to request that).

-Minimized the number of handouts distributed at registration. Post all brochures, programs, maps, etc on the event website and ask guests to print only what they need. Most people can access maps on their mobile devices now and even have the capability of referring to programs and other documents this way. If written material must be printed, be sure to do so on 100% PC Recycled paper using a soy or vegetable based ink. With enough lead-time, a truly sustainable paper source could probably be found. In addition, offset printing processes will accommodate a much wider range of papers than a pure copy process will (according to RIS). Ask participants to return their holders for reuse (consider placing a basket on the registration table for this purpose).

b. Catering supplies

Minimize the use of throw-aways. All food service should utilize durable silver, plates, glasses and napkins. Cold drinks, including water, juice and iced tea should be provided in pitchers, not single-serving bottles or cans.

3. Food service

a. Providing the Right Amount of Food

Work with catering staff to reducing the standard portion size since most catered events seem to end up with so many leftovers. Portion size is a delicate subject and catering professionals are right to feel that they know what people will eat without having excess leftovers. However, it is worth it to connect on this point to drive home the importance of minimizing food waste.

There is, of course, a fine line to walk. When conference participants are paying for the meals included with the registration fee, organizers want to make sure they "get what they pay for." On the other hand, excessive amounts of leftovers signals poor planning and poor sustainability practices.

b. Managing Leftovers

Have a contingency plan for leftovers. Depending on the venue, this could be composting, or distribution to charity, or incorporating in next-day campus meals. Provide To-Go containers (biodegradable) for people to take leftovers with them. Announce this so that people feel okay about doing taking it.

c. Sustainable Food Sourcing

Maximize the use of local, and sustainably produced foods as much as possible, while providing delicious meals.

It is far less resource-intensive to avoid meat and dairy, however, in the interests of appealing to a broad palate this is not always an option. YSFP is able to provide locally-sourced, grass fed, and organic meat. Vegetarian options should be provided at every meal.

Get creative with the menu and utilize credible organizations, including the Monterey Bay Aquarium (<http://www.blueocean.org/Seafood/>
http://www.mbayaq.org/cr/cr_seafoodwatch/download.asp) for certification of choices.

4. Recycling

Avoid generating solid waste as much as possible by using durables and minimizing handouts and single-serving disposables.

-For conferences where an outside venue is used, it is important to check what systems are already in place for recycling and then customize these if necessary or require that the venue "walk the talk" if they say they are recycling by making it a requirement of the contract.

-For on campus events, work with CJ May, Yale's Recycling Coordinator to ensure that appropriate and adequate recycling bins are available in space.
Recycling opportunities were assumed at campus venues that were used.

5. Heating, cooling and lighting of rooms used for the conference

Time the conference to occur at a time of year when outside temperatures are moderate, minimizing the need for heating or cooling of meeting rooms. Choose venues and meeting rooms that connect to the outside and where natural ventilation and daylight is exploited. These choices will minimize the need for energy-intensive HVAC and unnatural lighting. Encourage facilities engineers to allow broader swings of temperature in the meeting rooms used. Ask conference participants to "self-regulate" by wearing layers that can be taken off or put on to compensate for such swings.

6. Using carbon offsets to neutralize the remaining greenhouse gas footprint of the conference

a. Calculating the carbon used in meeting rooms

Work with facilities engineers at Yale (Tom Downing) to obtain the "building energy intensity data." This means obtaining the volume of the rooms being occupied for your events, as well as the time duration of occupancy and the temperature to which it is heated or cooled. From these figures calculate energy used in BTUs, and convert this to Metric Tons of Carbon Equivalents (or MTCEs) which provides a figure in tons of carbon. Then offset it.

b. Calculating the emissions associated with participant travel to the conference

As discussed in the transportation section, calculate the aggregate miles traveled per mode (plane, car, etc) for conference participants. In addition to requesting registrants to report how many round-trip miles they travel by transportation type (see above), estimate travel for local speakers and organizers who are not registering officially. Once you have defensible mileage figures, convert these to MTCEs using an online carbon calculator.

c. Arranging for the carbon offsets

In order to make a defensible calculation, carefully design how you will collect the data you need on miles/mode traveled and BTUs used and then go out to bid.

Be transparent about how you are going about your calculations, and share them with the conference participants.

Ensure the offsets you obtain or get donated are credible, transparent, additional, socially responsible and cost efficient. A helpful resource is Clean-Air Cool-Planet's December 2006 publication "A Consumer's guide to Retail Carbon Offset Providers."

7. Educate your guests about the sustainable aspects of the conference

-Promote the efforts being made to reduce the environmental impacts of the event. Incorporate a statement such as the following into promotional material and the event's website.

Every attempt is made to reduce the environmental impact of events at Yale, including minimizing the need for carbon-dependent transportation between meeting and tour sites; using reusable, recycled content and recyclable materials; maximizing the use of locally and organically produced foods; and minimizing the amount of waste produced.