



SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES CHECKLIST

For the Conference and Events Industry



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Sustainability is a growing trend in all industries and is now finding its way into mainstream tourism. The increasing popularity of sustainability has led to differing understandings of what sustainability really means. To help clarify for tourism professionals, the Center for Sustainable Tourism at East Carolina University has developed a working definition to include "actions that contribute to a balanced and healthy economy by generating tourism-related jobs, revenues, and taxes while protecting and enhancing the destination's socio-cultural, historical, natural and built resources for the enjoyment and well-being of both residents and visitors."

The following twelve categories are offered for consideration where you might incorporate sustainability within your tourism business, in developing government policy, or in your personal life. Within each category you will also find a list of specific actions for sustainable practices applicable to conference and event organizations.

Given the comprehensive nature of this list, not all practices are relevant or recommended for every property. Practices listed are for informational purposes and proper care should be taken before adopting any practice to insure applicability to specific situations. This list is not intended to be an environmental certification program. It is also not intended to replace a formal sustainability management plan, however it can be a helpful tool in assessing your current business practices and serve as a spring board in developing your own business' formal sustainability plan. This checklist is a work in progress and businesses are encouraged share with its authors best practices not included in this list.

We would like to acknowledge the staff of Sustainable Travel International for the development of many of these items as well as their permission to use this information for informational purposes. Please visit www.sustainabletravelinternational.org for further information and a list of their services. You can contact Sustainable Travel International directly by email at info@sustainabletravel.com or by phone at 800-276-7764.

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Greenhouse Gas Emissions Management and Reduction

- Conduct a greenhouse gas emissions assessment or carbon footprint analysis
- Use renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, biomass, and geothermal
- Use passive solar water heating systems
- Purchase renewable energy credits and or greenhouse gas/ carbon offsets
- Minimize transportation by scheduling deliveries for multiple items
- Provide opportunities for the use of alternative forms of transportation for participants and staff such as carpooling, mass transit maps, bike racks and showers
- Offer preferred parking spaces for participants and staff who use alternative fuel vehicles or alternative transportation
- Choose local vendors to reduce transportation of items
- Institute fuel economizing programs for company vehicles such as regular inspection of vehicles, reduced idling, and route planning to minimize travel distances
- Allow flexible staff schedules to minimize staff travel during heavy traffic periods
- Adopt alternative forms of transportation and fuels, such as hybrid-electric, biodiesel, E85 such as shuttle (Ethanol) or electric for business activities services and/or errand and delivery companies
- When appropriate use ultra-low sulfur or biodiesel generators
- Plan location and timing of events to reduce the need for transportation during the event
- Include information during registration, on web site, and at the event to facilitate the use of mass transit and carpooling
- Organize shuttle services for participants for transportation needs
- Choose shuttle and transportation firms with non-idling policies
- Choose a venue that offers public transportation or that is located in walk-able distances from accommodations
- Provide participants the opportunity to offset greenhouse gas emissions that result from travel and participating in event

Solid Waste Management, Reduction, Reuse and Recycling

- Conduct a waste audit/assessment
- Purchase products in reusable or returnable containers
- Work with suppliers and vendors to reduce packaging, for example developing “take back” program to return crates, pallets, and other packing materials
- Provide waste reduction education to staff and routinely inspect trash bins to ensure that best practices are being followed
- Reduce and reuse paper by:
 - Set photocopiers and printers to print on both sides
 - Distributing information to participants, staff, and business associates via e-mail and avoid unnecessary printed copies
 - Avoid use of fax cover sheets
 - Collect and use the reverse/blank side of single-sided printed paper as scratch paper
 - Reuse envelopes for inter-office mail
 - Digitize operational processes that rely on single use paper/printed documents
 - Routinely inspect internal mailing lists to minimize unnecessary direct mailing to your customers
 - Write weekly schedules and prep schedules using reusable products such as a laminate sheet and grease pencil or dry erase board.
 - Set and use fax and copy machines to copy documents directly to computers rather than printing a new copy
 - Request to be taken off of mailing lists of unneeded catalogs and print advertisements
 - Ensure that materials such as brochures and marketing materials are printed on paper with high recycled content (at least 35%) and printed using soy ink
 - Install high efficiency air hand-dryers, cloth or roll type to minimize paper towel usage
 - Use reusable methods of informing participants during the event rather than single use printed documents
 - Use online registration



- Offer documents, such as agenda and presentations online to reduce distribution at event
 - Ask participants to bring personal pens and paper and provide additional paper only on demand
 - Encourage exhibitors to limit distribution of documents, such as brochures and handouts. Provide web based or electronic distribution methods if possible
 - Send follow up communication electronically and use based post-event evaluations
 - If speakers require distributing paper copies themselves, ask that they follow these suggestions
- Eliminate use of Styrofoam (polystyrene) and other difficult to recycle products; if necessary, develop "difficult to recycle" programs if volumes warrant
 - Offer hydration stations rather than single use plastic water bottles
 - Donate left over signs, banners, and old printed materials to local schools or artisans and craftsmen
 - Donate obsolete or unwanted equipment, electronics, furniture, drapes, and carpeting to charity
 - Purchase products such as promotional materials, cleaning supplies, and other durable products in bulk and in concentrated form when possible
 - Give preference to products with high post-consumer recycled content in purchasing policy
 - Give preference to reusable options if available, such as glass cups, cotton bags, and refillable soap and shampoo dispensers, over single use items in purchasing policy
 - When reusable options are not feasible use disposable products that are compostable or recyclable
 - Purchase used/antique furniture and equipment from local vendors
 - Purchase durable goods of sufficient quality to allow reuse, refinishing, and/or reupholstering
 - Recycle damaged towels and sheets as cleaning rags and torn or worn linens into other usable items, e.g., aprons into rags
 - Reuse newspaper, shredded paper, and incoming packaging materials (bags, boxes, peanuts) for packaging and shipping needs
 - Institute a composting program for yard and food waste. Mulch grass clippings and avoid bagging
 - When reusable options are not feasible, use disposable products that are compostable such as corn based cutlery
 - Purchase recyclable toner cartridges
 - Encourage staff to conserve reusable materials
 - Use non-bleached disposable paper products such as paper towels and coffee filters
 - Provide alternatives to individual plastic water bottles such as water pitchers and point of use water filters
 - Reduce waste from expired stock by using effective inventory control, such as just-in-time purchasing, effective labeling systems, and last in/first out
 - Install high efficiency air hand-dryers, cloth or roll type to minimize paper towel usage
 - Provide incentives and discounts to participants who use refillable mugs and to-go containers, and encourage employees to use reusable mugs and cups
 - Ensure that appointed staff inspect deliveries before accepting
 - Use rechargeable batteries
 - Inform attendees of waste reduction efforts before, during, and after the event
 - Assure that promotional items, if needed, are minimally packaged and made from a high content of recycled materials. Examine using promotional items with green message
 - Rent or use reusable signage or post staff/volunteers at key location to reduce the need for printed materials
 - Encourage exhibitors to use reusable and/or recycled components for tradeshow booths. Consider creating a recognition program for participants that exemplify best practices
 - Provide cigarette disposal bins in smoking areas

- ❑ Ensure proper disposal of hazardous materials such as aerosol cans, solvents, and other potentially hazardous materials
- ❑ Use preventative maintenance on equipment to reduce risk of replacement
- ❑ Request that venues do not place water at podiums and encourage speakers to use reusable bottles
- ❑ Ensure caterers have an accurate number of participants. Work with staff to re-evaluate food needs as event proceeds
- ❑ Offer box lunches in buffet style to minimize waste
- ❑ Collect name badges at the end of the event for reuse or recycling
- ❑ Include waste reduction efforts as part of event evaluation
- ❑ Provide and publicize recycling bins throughout facilities, including public areas
- ❑ Begin or enlarge a recycling program to include:
 - Aluminum
 - Glass
 - Office mix
 - Batteries
 - Yard waste electronics
 - Plastic
 - Corrugated cardboard
 - Newspaper
 - Ink cartridges and laser toner cartridges
 - Phone books
 - Fluorescent light tubes
 - Electronics such as computers and televisions
 - Carpeting

Freshwater Consumption Reduction

- ❑ Conduct a water audit with a water conservation professional
- ❑ Conduct regular inspections and establish preventative maintenance schedules to ensure maximum efficiency, i.e., ensure that the blow down on cooling towers are at manufacture's specifications
- ❑ Educate staff on water conservation and best practices
- ❑ Discourage water-based cleanup and use alternatives such as microfiber technology
- ❑ When purchasing new or replacing appliances or fixtures, purchase water-efficient models such as those certified by EPA WaterSense® and Energy Star®
- ❑ Install low-flow aerators on sinks (1.5 gal/min)
- ❑ Install automatic shut off sinks in common area rest rooms
- ❑ Use re-circulating, chilled water loop and temperature control systems in water cooled ice machines, air conditioners, and water cooled refrigeration units
- ❑ Use air-cooled ice machines rather than water-cooled models
- ❑ Clean windows on an on-call basis rather than according to an established schedule
- ❑ Use floor cleaning equipment with high pressure, low volume and recycling filtering systems
- ❑ Routinely inspect icemakers to prevent overflow
- ❑ Serve water on request only
- ❑ Use best management practices in water usage for landscaping/irrigation, including:
 - Establish frequency schedule according to local climate, season and landscaped area (multiple hydro zones) in order to maximize water use efficiency
 - Raise lawn mower cutting height to cut down on evaporation
 - Routinely inspect sprinkler system, including heads, nozzles, lines and valves, to ensure efficient settings and proper operation

- Ensure irrigation equipment applies water uniformly
- Limit lawn areas and/or use xeriscaping
- Place ornamental water features in shaded areas
- Avoid plant fertilizing and pruning that would stimulate excessive growth
- Use soaker hoses in plant beds
- Remove weeds and unhealthy plants to ensure only wanted plants are watered
- Water landscapes only when necessary; one inch of water per week is sufficient to sustain established lawns in most circumstances
- Time watering to occur in the early morning or evening when evaporation is lowest
- Remove any thatch and aerate turf to encourage the movement of water to the root zone
- Avoid runoff and make sure sprinklers do not run onto sidewalks paved areas
- Do not water on windy, rainy, or overly hot days
- Install rain shut-off or moisture sensors to ensure against over watering
- Establish drip irrigation systems where feasible
- Mulch around plants to limit evaporation and discourage weed growth
- Avoid extravagant uses of water such as hosing down sidewalks, driveways, and parking lots
- Consider using gray water (from dishwashers, laundry, etc.) and rain water to irrigate landscaping. Check state and local government-approved gray water uses

Wastewater Management

- Ensure proper use, storage, and disposal of cleaning products and other potentially harmful chemicals such as fertilizers and paints
- Limit the number of chemical products used and stored, minimize stockpiling on the property and have a management plan for chemical purchasing, such as just-in-time purchasing
- Ensure that all chemicals are securely stored and clearly marked
- Use best storm-water runoff practices to ensure that wastewater does not enter local waterways, include:
 - Reduce amount of hard surfaces such as impervious parking lots
 - Create natural buffers around bodies of water
 - Build bio-swales or ditches near parking lots
 - Build natural areas to retain storm water such as rain gardens
 - Limit use of chemicals, such as fertilizers and pesticides, and ensure they are not used near storm-water drains and natural water
- Use environmentally safe/preferable cleaning products:
 - MSDS Health Hazard Rating of 1 or less for all cleaning chemicals used on property
 - Ensure dishwashing detergents are biodegradable and do not contain nitrilotriacetic acid or chlorine bleach, that they are phosphate and bleach-free, nontoxic, biodegradable, and are concentrated liquid or powder laundry detergents
 - Use disinfectants only when necessary and in accordance with public health standards
 - Use environmentally certified cleaning products
- Use linen service that uses environmentally preferable cleaning methods or use an Ozone washing machine which has shorter wash cycles, enhanced soil removal and disinfectant capability
- Use less harmful alternatives if possible such as organic substitutes for chemical fertilizers
- Monitor equipment and products for potential chemical leaks such as aerosols, fire extinguishers, CFCs and HCFCs from cooling equipment refrigerators, and automotive liquids
- Use an integrated pest management (IPM) system for interior and exterior jobs
- Follow best management practices for fats, oil, and grease
- Use environmentally preferable or certified paints, solvents and coatings (MSDS Health Hazard Rating of 1 or less)
- Reuse paint thinners
- Use latex paints rather than oil based paints
- Educate staff on proper methods of containment and clean-up of spills, drips, leaching and conduct regular inspections in relevant areas
- When doing exterior cleaning or pressure washing, proper care should be taken to avoid discharge of contaminants, such as detergents, into rivers, wetlands, or other natural bodies of water

Energy Efficiency, Conservation and Management

- Conduct an energy audit to determine your baseline energy use and identify any improvements that could be made
- Monitor, record, and post rates of energy to quickly identify if there is system leakage
- Work with an energy expert to develop an energy management system
- Develop a comprehensive energy education and conservation program
- Use a renewable energy heating system (e.g. passive solar or geo-thermal)
- Use natural light whenever possible
- Turn off electronic equipment at the end of each workday. Consider using surge protectors enabled with master switches so that energy is not consumed when electronics are not in use
- Ensure that audio-visual equipment and lights are turned off when not in use
- Activate sleep/standby or low energy mode on applicable appliances and electronics
- Maximize central air efficiency by allowing sunlight to enter through windows in the winter and blocking sunlight in the summer. Install heat-control glass and/or sun control window film to windows with heavy sun exposure
- Weatherize the facilities by ensuring that doors and windows have tight seals and remain closed when shut; seal unused windows and doors, and inspect the workplace at least annually for cracks and leaks
- Replace existing lighting (particularly incandescent) with energy efficient or compact florescent bulbs. Replace or retrofit T12 florescent lamps and magnetic ballasts with T8 or T5 lamps and electronic ballasts
- Use programmable Energy Star®-labeled thermostats. Set to appropriate temperature ranges and conduct regular inspections to ensure efficient function
- Perform regularly scheduled preventative maintenance on equipment and appliances, including replacing and cleaning air filters, cleaning burners and air conditioner coils, and checking duct and pipe insulation for damage
- Set water heater to 120 degrees Fahrenheit rather than pre-set 140 degrees
- Ensure proper insulation of water heater and hot water plumbing
- Install energy saving equipment, such as timers, motion sensors, master switches, and photocells. Conduct regular inspections to ensure proper function
- Purchase and replace existing equipment with energy efficient or Energy Star® labeled electronics, appliances, and heating and cooling equipment
- Insulate facilities, including interior and exterior walls, ceilings, and wall cavities
- Use LED or electroluminescent exit signs
- Open windows rather than using central air when possible
- Install and use ceiling fans to circulate air in both winter and summer
- Install motion sensors on vending machines and/or remove unneeded lights on vending and snack machines
- Consider installing a "white" or "green" roof to reduce heat island effect
- Install variable speed fans where appropriate
- Use ventilation fans with humidity sensors for areas where needed
- Operate multiple individual climate controlled comfort zones
- Clean lighting fixtures and lamps regularly to increase illumination
- Plan events to minimize the number of rooms needed to be lit and/or heated/cooled
- Work with AV, IT, lighting, and sound technicians to implement most energy efficient equipment
- Use Energy Star's® or other similar benchmarking tools to compare energy use with industry standards

Ecosystem and Biodiversity Conservation

- Develop partnerships with local environmental and community organizations
- Participate in local environmental and conservation efforts either through sponsorship, monetary contributions, or volunteering and supporting employees to do so
- Provide environmental education materials and information on local biodiversity conservation efforts to staff and customers
- Design landscaping or on-site gardens to incorporate and support “heirloom” and native species
- Work with relevant parks and public land agencies to find out how your business might participate in ecosystem and biodiversity conservation efforts
- Provide information on how staff and customers can become involved in community projects such as posting project information in common areas and offer transportation assistance when needed
- Provide staff incentives to volunteer
- Rehabilitate or improve waterways on property or in the region
- Avoid purchasing and serving overexploited species, particularly seafood. Consider developing a sustainable seafood policy
- Set aside property and/or donate land to a conservation society or consider establishing a conservation easement
- Prevent wildlife from accessing trash and food by secure food sources
- Ensure that interactions with wildlife is done at a safe and respectful distance
- Protect sensitive areas, such as wetlands and large trees
- Install glass that has low levels of reflectivity
- Establish measures to reduce light pollution
- Contribute a percentage of annual net revenues to local environmental and community based organizations

Land Use Planning and Management

- Follow standards for development and construction that take into account community values, distinctiveness, and sense of place
- Adopt development strategies that result in a constructive and collaborative relationship with local community
- Direct development towards existing local communities that are already served by infrastructure and utilize the resources they have to offer
- Support the integration of mixed land uses and provide local community with more choices in housing, shopping, communities, and transportation
- Integrate green building design in new construction and remodeling
- Take measures to ensure property and operations do not cause soil loss, soil contamination, or other negative impacts, such as erosion and sediment pollution to lands and waterways
- Participate in community events such as National Arbor Day, Earth Day, Great American Backyard Bird Count, and Take a Child Outside Day with local community
- Preference is given to environmentally responsible landscaping, pool, and construction services and firms

Air Quality Protection and Noise Reduction

- Avoid use of ozone depleting chlorofluorocarbons (CFC's) found in refrigerants and aerosols
- Designate your property as a non-smoking establishment or designate smoking areas outside the building and away from air in-take
- Address the root cause of odors rather than masking them with the use of artificial air cleaners, refreshers, and cleaning products



- ❑ Purchase non-toxic paints or paints with low levels of Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs)
- ❑ Maintain "quiet" hours in the evening and early morning for staff and customers. Avoid noise intrusion by scheduling service and repairs at optimum hours
- ❑ Landscaping design should include a noise abatement plan
- ❑ Place insulation around loud equipment
- ❑ Design ventilation to exhaust outside of the building and not to roof space or other building cavities
- ❑ Ensure that dehumidifiers are installed in high moisture areas (e.g., kitchen and laundry), building is ventilated, and that relative humidity is maintained (between 35 percent and 55 percent)
- ❑ Use High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters
- ❑ Conduct regular tests for poisonous gases such as carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, and radon
- ❑ Conduct regular tests for particulates such as lead and asbestos
- ❑ Conduct regular inspections of HVAC system for mold/bacteria, air flow blockages, and clean drip pans
- ❑ Consider an air filtration system

Preserving the Social Norms and Cultures of Local and Indigenous Communities

- ❑ Develop methods of establishing dialogue with local representatives to determine socio-cultural and economic impacts of your organization and to ensure their concerns are recognized in operational decisions
- ❑ Train staff to ensure they are well-informed on local customs
- ❑ Develop informative educational materials for participants about the local community and local history
- ❑ Use appropriate and authentic cultural elements from the local region
- ❑ Make your property available for community events
- ❑ Establish policies that restrict commercialization of endangered or protected flora and fauna
- ❑ Incorporate traditional local arts and crafts in your facility and make information available to participants
- ❑ Use regional/traditional and locally grown agricultural products

Providing Economic Benefits to Local and Indigenous Communities

- ❑ Provide information to and encourage participants to purchase local products and services
- ❑ Provide employment opportunities for local community members
- ❑ Allow local artists to display and sell their handicrafts and art work at your property
- ❑ Provide information to participants on local attractions and cultural activities
- ❑ Form partnerships with locally owned businesses (e.g., transportation and guide services)
- ❑ Use local goods and services whenever possible
- ❑ Involve your organization in local philanthropic projects and develop a public relations plan that ensures participants, the greater community, and interest groups and others can be aware of your community involvement
- ❑ Provide volunteer opportunities for participants and staff
- ❑ Exceed minimum local standards for employee's wages, salaries and benefits, ensuring a livable working wage
- ❑ Ensure that operational demands for basic services (water, electricity, roads, food, and other resources) do not compete with local needs
- ❑ Provide education and training opportunities in your place of business for local community members
- ❑ Support training for community members for non-competitive tourism-related activities that compliment your business



- ❑ Provide promotional information on local services and businesses to participants

Responsible Purchasing

- ❑ Develop an environmentally preferable procurement/purchasing program that has a clear mission and distinct purchasing targets. Elements of program should include:
 - Preference to vendors and suppliers that are environmentally and socially responsible
 - "Lease toxic alternative"
 - Recyclable or compostable materials
 - Products and services are from local locally owned businesses whenever possible
 - Products come from sustainable and/or renewable sources
 - Produce, meats, fish, and other food products are sustainable (e.g. organic and/or locally grown)
- ❑ Use recycled and/or environmentally certified building materials on property
- ❑ Regularly test new environmentally preferable products for effectiveness in operations and evaluate current products used
- ❑ Ensure that life-cycle analysis is conducted for major investments such as new equipment and construction projects
- ❑ Incorporate environmental preferences and requirements in RFP's and contracts with vendors and suppliers. Suppliers and vendors can then be held accountable to the environmental commitments made during negotiations
- ❑ Chose Fair Trade Certified™ products for business uses as well as for resale to participants

Training and Education for Employees and Clients

- ❑ Create an environmental program that includes stakeholder participation and input
- ❑ Place informational signing about your organization's sustainable practices is placed around the property in appropriate places
- ❑ Provide an incentive program for staff and participants to participate in your business's' current sustainable practices
- ❑ Claims of environmental practices are transparent and verifiable by participants and/or third party entities
- ❑ Notification about sustainable efforts is provided to participants in publications, advertising, and web site
- ❑ Offer feedback or comment cards to get participants and staff input on further sustainable practices
- ❑ Educate other businesses about sustainability by speaking at events and conferences and providing tours of facility's sustainable practices
- ❑ Provide continuing sustainability training for staff and forums for staff input
- ❑ Include sustainability as part of staff evaluation
- ❑ Participate in an environmental or sustainable tourism certification program