

Sustainable Event Planning Guide & Checklist

Supporting responsible, low-impact and inclusive events



Introduction

As organisations move from measuring emissions to actively reducing them, meetings and events present a significant opportunity to drive meaningful impact.

In New Zealand, where travel—particularly aviation—often represents the largest share of event-related emissions, sustainability must be considered from the earliest stages of planning through to delivery and post-event review.

This guide has been developed based on customer conversations, real-world event delivery, and evolving best practice. It is designed to support a structured and practical approach to sustainable event planning—covering carbon measurement, emissions reduction, and broader social considerations such as community engagement, indigenous partnerships, and attendee wellbeing.

As part of this shift, organisations are also exploring emerging solutions such as Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and internal carbon funding models to address travel-related emissions. This is not about creating perfect events—but about making better, more informed decisions that reduce impact over time.

Guiding principle: Prioritise reduction first, then optimise, then compensate.

Sustainable Event Planning Checklist

1. Event Purpose & Governance

- Event objectives clearly defined
- Sustainability goals established (e.g. emissions reduction, waste minimisation)
- Event sustainability lead assigned
- Key stakeholders identified and aligned
- Budget includes sustainability considerations
- Post-event review and reporting approach agreed

2. Carbon, SAF & Environmental Impact

- ❑ Scope of measurement defined (travel, accommodation, venue energy, catering, materials, waste)
- ❑ Carbon calculation tool or partner selected
- ❑ Baseline or historical data available (if applicable)
- ❑ Emissions reduction targets aligned to organisational goals

Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF)

- ❑ Opportunity to incorporate SAF into event-related travel is considered
- ❑ Airline or travel partner SAF programmes reviewed (e.g. Air New Zealand, Qantas)
- ❑ Internal funding approach for SAF (if applicable) defined

Carbon Offsetting / Compensation

- ❑ Approach to offsetting or compensation defined (if required)
- ❑ Preference for high-quality, verified offsets (e.g. Gold Standard, VCS)
- ❑ Clear position established: reduction first, offset second
- ❑ Plan in place to report outcomes to stakeholders

3. Destination & Venue Selection

- ❑ Destination selected to minimise overall travel distance
- ❑ Accessible via public transport or active travel options
- ❑ Venue holds recognised sustainability certifications (e.g. ISO 20121, Green Key)
- ❑ Venue policies in place for energy, water, and waste management
- ❑ Accessibility requirements met
- ❑ Opportunities to support local communities considered

4. Attendee Travel & Accommodation

Travel

- ❑ Low-emissions travel options promoted where feasible
- ❑ Public transport and active travel options communicated
- ❑ Policy guidance on air vs rail (if applicable)
- ❑ Group transfers arranged to reduce impact
- ❑ Travel data captured for emissions tracking
- ❑ Opportunities to incorporate SAF into air travel identified
- ❑ Consider internal carbon or sustainability contribution linked to travel

Accommodation

- ❑ Hotels selected with sustainability policies or certifications
- ❑ Accommodation located close to event venue
- ❑ Hotels aligned on linen reuse, waste reduction, and responsible sourcing

5. Event Format & Programme

- ❑ Hybrid or virtual elements considered where appropriate
- ❑ Programme designed to minimise unnecessary travel days
- ❑ Attendee wellbeing considered (breaks, pacing, travel load)
- ❑ Diversity, equity and inclusion reflected in speakers and content
- ❑ Sustainability messaging or activations included where relevant

6. Registration, Communications & Marketing

- ❑ Registration captures travel mode, dietary and accessibility needs
- ❑ Digital-first approach (apps, QR codes, e-tickets)
- ❑ Printed materials minimised and sustainably sourced
- ❑ Pre-event communications include sustainable behaviour guidance
- ❑ Code of conduct shared with attendees

7. Catering (Food & Beverage)

- ❑ Strong plant-based and vegetarian options included
- ❑ Seasonal and locally sourced ingredients prioritised
- ❑ Sustainable or certified meat and seafood options selected
- ❑ Accurate headcounts to minimise food waste
- ❑ Plan to donate surplus food where possible
- ❑ Tap or filtered water provided (no single-use bottles)
- ❑ Reusable crockery, cutlery and glassware used

8. Materials, Production & Suppliers

- ❑ Suppliers meet sustainability and ethical standards
- ❑ Preference for local and indigenous suppliers where possible
- ❑ Staging, signage and materials designed for reuse or recycling
- ❑ Branding minimises single-use items (no event-specific dating where possible)
- ❑ Giveaways are useful, durable and responsibly sourced
- ❑ Digital alternatives considered (e.g. e-vouchers, donations)
- ❑ AV and production partners briefed on low-impact delivery



9. Energy, Water & Waste Management

Energy

- Venue uses renewable energy where available
- Lighting and AV equipment used efficiently

Water

- Refill stations available for reusable bottles
- Bottled water avoided

Waste

- Waste hierarchy applied: avoid → reduce → reuse → recycle
- Clearly labelled waste and recycling streams provided
- Suppliers aligned to waste management requirements
- Materials reused, repurposed or donated post-event

10. Social Impact & Accessibility

- Event aligned with organisational ESG and CSR commitments
- Suppliers meet human rights and labour standards
- Diversity and inclusion embedded in event design
- Opportunities to engage indigenous and local suppliers considered
- Accessibility needs addressed (physical, sensory, communication)
- Attendee wellbeing prioritised throughout the experience

11. Health, Safety & Risk Management

- Risk assessment completed
- Emergency procedures agreed with venue
- Health and hygiene measures in place
- Insurance requirements reviewed (event, travel, liability)
- Incident management and reporting process defined



12. Data Privacy & Cybersecurity

- ❑ Data collection aligns with privacy and security policies
- ❑ Consent obtained for photography, filming and data use
- ❑ Secure data storage and deletion processes defined

13. Reporting & Post-Event Review

- ❑ Attendance data captured
- ❑ Travel and emissions data collected
- ❑ Waste and recycling data gathered (where available)
- ❑ Attendee feedback collected (including sustainability insights)
- ❑ Post-event sustainability summary prepared
- ❑ Lessons learned documented to inform future events

