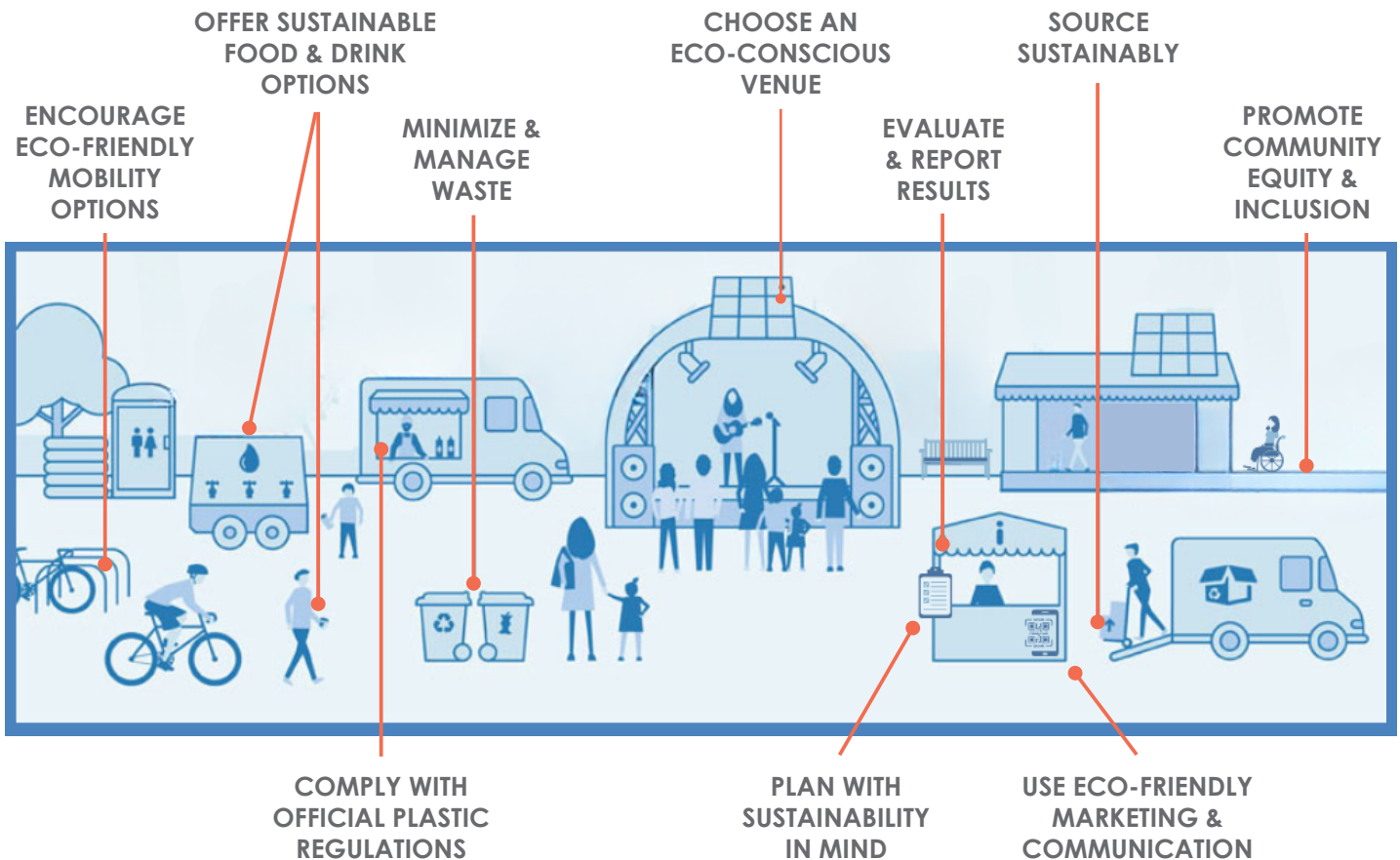




City of Charleston

# SUSTAINABLE EVENT GUIDE

FOR FUNCTIONS OF ANY TYPE, SIZE, LOCATION OR HOST



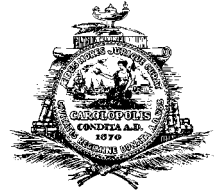
## VISION

Promote Charleston's economy while minimizing environmental, social & economic impacts from events.



CITY OF CHARLESTON

# SUSTAINABLE EVENT GUIDE



In Charleston, events occur year-round, hosted by both public and private entities at various locations.

**All events taking place in the City of Charleston, regardless of public or private property, are expected to be sustainable.**

Event planners, this guide is for any type or size event!

## WHAT IS A SUSTAINABLE EVENT?

Sustainable events are organized and conducted in a manner that minimizes negative environmental, social and economic impacts to support the local economy and community.



Charleston sets an example by providing reusable bags at the City's Small Business Opportunity Expo.

## EVENTS CAN HAVE UNINTENDED IMPACTS

Embracing sustainable practices minimizes unforeseen negative impacts on our community and City parks, leading to decreased government expenditures, lowered energy and water consumption, minimized plastic pollution, waste reduction, ecosystem protection, and a reduced risk of events perpetuating social inequities.

## MONEY MATTERS

Planning a sustainable event doesn't have to increase costs. In fact, adopting suggested actions like eliminating paper usage, ordering in bulk, and reusing materials can actually reduce expenses.

The saved funds can be redirected towards initiatives like composting service and purchasing more durable supplies instead of disposables.

## BENEFITS OF SUSTAINABLE EVENTS

1. Minimize litter and landfill waste.
2. Support local businesses, organizations, and community members.
3. Establish your organization as an environmental steward within the community.
4. Mitigate carbon emissions and air pollution.
5. Promote social equity, inclusion, and accessibility for all community members.
6. Educate staff and the public.
7. Foster a healthier community.



# HOST A SUSTAINABLE EVENT IN CHARLESTON

## TEN GUIDELINES

1

### **Comply with official plastic regulations.**

By law, it is critical to avoid the use of polystyrene foam, single-use plastic bags, straws and other disposable food packaging items. For guidance, refer to [www.charleston-sc.gov/plastic](http://www.charleston-sc.gov/plastic).

2

### **Plan with sustainability in mind.**

Set clear objectives from the outset and train staff to work towards specific goals. Plan to track data to assess impacts and report results. Collaborate with partners for ideas and support.

3

### **Choose an eco-conscious venue.**

Choose accessible locations near public transit, prioritizing venues with energy and water-efficient facilities, recycling and composting capabilities, and renewable energy sources.

4

### **Use eco-friendly marketing and communication.**

Embrace a paperless approach and leverage QR codes, social media, electronic tickets and apps for advertising, event agendas and programs.

5

### **Source sustainably.**

Prioritize local, seasonal, organic, and fair trade products, especially those from businesses and vendors which are local, eco-friendly and minority and women-owned.

6

### **Offer sustainable food and drink options.**

Provide drinking water refill stations and reusable beverage containers and incentivize attendees to bring their own reusable water bottles by offering discounts or opportunities.

7

### **Minimize and manage waste.**

Prioritize durable items to be reused instead of disposable items. Avoid single-use plastics and provide well labeled recycling and composting receptacles adjacent to each garbage can.

8

### **Encourage eco-friendly mobility options.**

Promote a variety of mobility options such as public transit, carpooling, walking, and biking. Provide supporting services such as shuttles, EV charging stations and secure bike parking.

9

### **Promote community equity and inclusion.**

Foster an inclusive event that embraces diversity and actively encourages the participation of underrepresented groups. Consider donating event proceeds to a local non-profit.

10

### **Evaluate and report results.**

Analyze data to measure progress and goal attainment. Gather stakeholder feedback to identify trends, successes, and areas for improvement. Highlight progress publicly.



## SEEKING MORE SPECIFIC IDEAS?

The subsequent pages provide in-depth recommendations to implement the above guidelines.

# BEST PRACTICES FOR SUSTAINABLE EVENTS



## A CHECKLIST FOR HOSTING A SUSTAINABLE EVENT IN THE CITY OF CHARLESTON.

The City of Charleston expects all events to be as sustainable as possible and encourages events to fulfill as many items as possible. The actions with the highest impact are marked ★.

### 1) COMPLY WITH OFFICIAL PLASTIC REGULATIONS

- ★ ☐ Adhere to City code by not using or providing polystyrene, single-use plastic bags, plastic straws, stirrers, etc. Refer to: [www.charleston-sc.gov/plastic](http://www.charleston-sc.gov/plastic)

### 2) PLAN WITH SUSTAINABILITY IN MIND

- ☐ Determine your objectives (what you want to achieve).
- ☐ Gather the support of stakeholders in developing and accomplishing your objectives.
- ☐ Establish a baseline (what your current impact is).
- ★ ☐ Set targets and SMART goals (where you want to get to). Ex. set a zero plastic goal, or a composting goal.
- ☐ Brainstorm actions (to get you there) with stakeholders.
- ☐ Make a plan to achieve goals (who, what, where & when).
- ☐ Publicize your plan. Put your environmental commitment for the event in writing, on your tickets or webpage.
- ★ ☐ Put your plan into action and regularly check your progress and adjust actions to achieve your target.
- ☐ Plan to measure the impacts of your event and to report on outcomes after the event.

### 3) CHOOSE AN ECO-CONSCIOUS VENUE

- ★ ☐ Choose a venue located near [public transportation options](#) and which is accessible for walking and biking.
- ☐ Pursue a site nearby [bikeshare parking](#) and [electric vehicle charging spots](#) whenever possible.
- ★ ☐ Prioritize energy-efficient venues with eco-friendly systems, lighting, and appliances. Opt for clean energy or carbon-neutral options if possible.
- ☐ Select a venue that promotes water efficiency and provides accessible drinking water taps for bottle refills.
- ☐ Consider venues offering vegetarian, local, and seasonal catering choices.
- ☐ Seek venues actively minimizing waste and opting for more durable decorations, plates and utensils.
- ★ ☐ Pursue venues that offer food waste composting, donate surplus food, and provide recycling services.
- ☐ Seek venues who can aid with data collection & tracking.

### 4) USE ECO-FRIENDLY MARKETING & COMMUNICATION

- ★ ☐ Go paperless by using QR codes and apps for agendas and programs. Avoid paper handouts.
- ☐ Use electronic tickets sent via email for event entry. Emphasize that printed tickets/RSVPs are not required.
- ☐ Advertise events through digital channels like social media, email, electronic billboards, and radio, minimizing paper and mail carrier pollution.
- ☐ Share proud pictures and impacts of your eco-friendly event publicly, especially on social media.
- ☐ Design event materials, such as name tags, banners, and signage, for reuse without specific dates or locations.
- ☐ Communicate sustainability efforts clearly, especially waste disposal guidelines, to vendors, staff, and patrons.
- ☐ Recognize event partners who support your goals.
- ☐ Train event staff and vendors on all sustainability practices at the event, especially waste management.
- ☐ Assign one volunteer to oversee all sustainable event operations, including training other volunteers, monitoring water dispensers, lighting, and resources, and ensuring the smooth execution of the sustainability plan on the event day.
- ☐ Design signage and messages that encourage sustainable behavior from attendees.

### 5) SOURCE SUSTAINABLY

- ★ ☐ Support [local businesses](#), particularly those already dedicated to sustainability. Buy locally made, seasonal and organic products, as possible.
- ☐ Look for environmental or social certifications like FSC, fair trade, or carbon neutral.
- ★ ☐ Prioritize reusable, recyclable, or compostable items. Find out [what can be recycled](#) in Charleston County.
- ☐ Choose compostable items that are “BPI Certified Compostable” for acceptance at the Bees Ferry Compost Facility.
- ☐ Avoid products with excessive packaging, buy in bulk.
- ☐ Seek out businesses that will support your event goals.





## 6) OFFER SUSTAINABLE FOOD AND DRINK OPTIONS

- ★ ☐ Offer cold [drinking water refill stations](#), water fountains or pitchers instead of bottled water.
- ★ ☐ Provide reusable water bottles or cups for staff and attendees, or encourage them to bring their own.
  - ☐ Incentivize attendees to bring their reusable cups, bags, and bottles by offering discounts or opportunities.
  - ☐ Include vegetarian, vegan and healthy options.
  - ☐ Request caterers to avoid single-use waste products and excessive packaging.
  - ☐ Give priority to catering services that use fair trade, local, seasonal, and carbon-neutral ingredients.
  - ☐ Seek local seafood that is a certified 'Good Catch' by the SC Aquarium, or rated as 'Best Choice' or 'Good Alternative' by Seafood Watch.
  - ☐ Minimize individually wrapped food items and try to avoid boxed meals to reduce packaging.
- ★ ☐ Partner with organizations that collect leftover food and redistribute it to people in need, such as: [Cuisine Rescue](#), [Neighborhood House](#), [Star Gospel Mission](#), [Lowcountry Food Bank](#)

## 7) MINIMIZE AND MANAGE WASTE

- ★ ☐ Adhere to [City code](#) by not using or providing polystyrene, single-use plastic bags, plastic straws, stirrers, etc. Refer to: [www.charleston-sc.gov/plastic](http://www.charleston-sc.gov/plastic) If using compostable products, a compost service must be provided.
  - ☐ Offer straws, stirrers and individual utensils upon request only. Avoid full silverware packets.
- ★ ☐ [Recycle](#) and [compost](#) at your event to reduce waste. Utilize the City's [Zero Waste Events](#) program.
  - ☐ Place recycling and compost bins next to every garbage can and strategically distribute waste stations to prevent contamination due to crowds.
- ★ ☐ Label all waste bins with signs and visual examples of what can be disposed of in each. Use these [free sign templates](#).
  - ☐ Enlist volunteers to supervise waste sorting stations and reward them for their assistance.
  - ☐ Opt for reusable plates, tableware, drinkware etc, or

use only recyclable and compostable options.

- ☐ Strive for consistency in waste disposal; use all recyclable or all compostable items for easy sorting.
- ☐ Provide napkins only upon request and opt for reusable or compostable napkins.
- ★ ☐ Replace single-use plastic bottles with drink stations, pitchers or cans.
  - ☐ Per policy, avoid balloons, lantern releases, confetti, glitter, etc. that harm wildlife. Use alternatives like lavender, flower petals, birdseed, paper streamers.
  - ☐ Buy or rent reusable event materials such as tablecloths, decorations, and nametags/nametag holders rather than using single-use items.
  - ☐ Utilize living plants or produce for centerpieces, rather than cut flowers or plastic decor.
  - ☐ Provide receipts only by request or exclusively offer digital receipts.
  - ☐ Collect name tag holders to reuse them for future events.
- ★ ☐ Avoid promotional materials that will end up in the garbage: opt for reusable and practical items. Ex. reusable bags and water bottles, native plants, etc.
  - ☐ Dispose of chemicals and oil responsibly, ensuring they are not poured down drains.
  - ☐ [Reduce food waste](#) by offering smaller portions, smaller plates or adopting a buffet self-serve style.
- ★ ☐ Donate excess food to help feed hungry people, then compost any remaining food scraps.
  - ☐ Save or donate materials that can be reused.



This waste station is well labelled and all three bins are conveniently accessible in one place.

## A CHECKLIST FOR HOSTING A SUSTAINABLE EVENT IN THE CITY OF CHARLESTON. (CONTINUED)

### 8) ENCOURAGE ECO-FRIENDLY MOBILITY OPTIONS

- ★ ☐ Offer secure bike parking options such as [bike valet](#) or request a [bikeshare corral](#).
- ☐ Include directions to the event that highlight public transit routes, bike routes, walking paths, and electric vehicle parking stations.
- ☐ Encourage attendees to bike, walk, use public transit, or carpool by providing incentives like food or drink vouchers.
- ★ ☐ Arrange for a shuttle service from public transport stops to the event location.
- ☐ Minimize idling of vehicles and utilize alternative fuel generators whenever possible.

### 9) PROMOTE COMMUNITY EQUITY AND INCLUSION

- ☐ Advertise and market public events to reach a diverse audience. Utilize neighborhood associations and houses of worship.
- ☐ Ensure the community where the event is going to be hosted is aware of how it might affect them. Collaborate with neighborhood presidents to plan for and avoid unintended impacts on nearby residents.
- ☐ Provide event information in multiple languages; at a minimum, in Spanish.
- ★ ☐ Strive for diversity among speakers, the planning committee and attendees, in terms of race, ethnicity, age and gender.
- ☐ Consider donating a portion of your event sales to local human service or environmental nonprofits or charities.
- ☐ Support minority and women-owned businesses, especially those which already support sustainability.
- ☐ Clearly communicate your commitment to inclusivity for all community members, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc.
- ☐ Establish a process whereby attendees can request special accommodations, if needed, and ensure to provide them once requested. Accommodations may include a sign language interpreter, captioning, no registration costs for nurses/assistants for disabled attendees, event information available in ADA format and in other languages, etc. You can provide this option in your online registration.

- ☐ Ensure your event location is physically accessible to all, selecting venues with ADA-compliant access.
- ★ ☐ Identify and address barriers to participation for underrepresented groups in the community. Conduct research to understand why their participation has been limited in previous events and work to reduce these barriers, such as expensive tickets, event timing, accessibility, transportation logistics or costs, lack of childcare, lengthy events, inadequate refreshments, etc.
- ☐ Host affordable or free events, offer discounted tickets or scholarships to reach a diverse audience, low-wealth residents, and other underrepresented community members.
- ☐ Choose venues in neighborhoods of underrepresented populations or consider attending an event already planned in those communities to engage with them where they are.
- ☐ Create opportunities for youth to participate in the event, either as volunteers or for professional development purposes such as shadowing.
- ☐ Actively recruit participants and volunteers from local underrepresented groups. Include representatives from those groups on the planning committee to ensure an inclusive event design from the beginning. Consider providing stipends to enable low-income participants' involvement.

### 10) EVALUATE AND REPORT RESULTS

- ☐ Thank all stakeholders and partners involved, including attendees, for participating and supporting your sustainability goals.
- ★ ☐ Meet with stakeholders to determine whether goals were met. Share your successes publicly.
- ☐ Encourage feedback from stakeholders, staff, volunteers, and attendees to improve target achievement in future iterations of the event.
- ☐ Please take our [Sustainable Event Guide Survey](#) after your event to share the implemented strategies and results. Those who complete the short survey may be recognized for their efforts and featured on City social media or webpage.

