



SUSTAINABLE EVENTS GUIDE



Brisbane City (Treasury Building)

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Grass Tree (Xanthorrhoea)

INTRODUCTION

This guide has been developed to support Griffith faculty, staff, and student groups in planning and delivering more sustainable university events. It outlines key considerations and actions that can be applied across a wide range of activities, from seminars and symposia to orientation programs, workshops, and other social or community events.

Developed as part of Griffith's [Sustainability Strategy 2023-2030](#), the guide supports the priorities outlined in the [Creating a Brighter Future for All - Griffith Strategy 2025-2030](#). It encourages planners to consider both environmental and social impacts when organising events, including responsible resource use, waste reduction, and inclusive practices that contribute to thriving communities.

The guide includes checklists and links to additional resources to assist with sustainable event planning and advancing the University's work towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).



WHAT IS A SUSTAINABLE EVENT

A sustainable event considers environmental, social, and economic impacts throughout all stages of planning and delivery. At Griffith, these events aim to reinforce the University's commitment to a more sustainable world by demonstrating leadership in how we operate and engage through our values and actions.

Events can support these goals by:

- Minimising environmental impacts, including considerations of:
 - Waste
 - Energy
 - Water usage
 - Habitat and local communities
 - Responsible procurement
- Providing opportunities and options to ensure your event is inclusive and accessible*.
- Communicating clear sustainability actions and encouraging responsible behaviours through pre-event communications, event signage, messaging, and materials.

* This guide incorporates elements of the [*Inclusive Futures: Reimagining Disability Accessible Events Checklist*](#), which outlines best practice for planning, delivering, and evaluating inclusive events. We strongly recommend using this resource alongside the Sustainable Events Guide for a more comprehensive approach.

PLANNING A SUSTAINABLE EVENT

When planning a sustainable event, small decisions can add up to significant impact. Start with what is achievable and build on your efforts over time. One of the first decisions to make is the event format.

In-person events offer unique benefits such as stronger networking opportunities, enhanced engagement, and support for local suppliers and communities. However, consider whether a **virtual or hybrid** format could achieve the same objectives. These alternative formats help reduce travel emissions and increases accessibility for participants in different locations.

Where an in-person event is required, consider the following areas:

- **Location and Access**
 - Venue selection
 - Accommodation (*if required*)
 - Flights (*if required*)
- **Food and Event Materials**
 - Locally-sourced and ethical catering
 - Reducing event materials
- **Waste and Resource Management**
- **Sustainable Events Certification**
- **Carbon Footprinting and Offsetting Events**





LOCATION AND ACCESS

Venue Selection

Choose a venue that is convenient for the majority of participants. Consider likely travel patterns and prioritise on-campus venues or regional hubs that support public or active transport. Use the following steps to guide your decision:

1. Identify travel and location

Identify where most participants are coming from (e.g. Gold Coast, Logan, or Brisbane City campuses) and choose a central location to reduce overall travel distance and emissions.

2. Check transport options

Ensure the venue is easy to get to by public or active transport (e.g. buses, trains, trams, walking or cycling). Consider if the location is suitable for carpooling and has access to EV charging stations where possible.

3. Check accessibility

Ensure the venue meets accessibility standards, with ramps, lifts, accessible toilets, and hearing support. Consider additional inclusive spaces such as parenting or prayer rooms, where available.

4. Review venue sustainability practices

Check for recognised sustainability certifications or ratings (e.g. Green Globe, B-Corp, Green Star or EarthCheck) to help identify and verify environmental practices. Ask if the venue has measures in place such as:

- Waste and resource recovery practices (e.g. recycling and composting systems, limited use of single-use items).
- Low or renewable energy (e.g. energy-efficient lighting and equipment)
- Responsible water consumption practices (e.g. water refill stations).





Accommodation (if required)

Apply the sustainability considerations outlined in Venue Selection and prioritise locations close to the venue and/or key facilities (e.g. supermarkets and restaurants). Communicate these recommendations to attendees as part of the event marketing and publicity. If accommodation options are further away, consider organising shared transport (e.g. scheduled buses) to reduce in individual travel emissions. Utilise the [Environmental Impacts of Travel website](#) to provide extra information for participants.

[Griffith Venue Hire](#)

[Griffith Room Bookings](#)

Flights (if required)

Where there is no practical land-based alternative, choose direct routes and economy class where possible to reduce emissions from take-off and landing cycles. If multiple events require travel, consider whether they can be consolidated into one itinerary. You can also use reputable carbon offset schemes recommended by [Griffith's travel guidelines](#).

[Sustainable Travel Tips](#)

FOOD AND EVENT MATERIAL

Locally-sourced and ethical catering

Select catering providers that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability. Look for practices that minimise environmental impacts while supporting positive social outcomes across the supply chain. Use the following principles to assess and compare options:

1. Support local and ethical supply chains

Engage local caterers where possible (e.g. Gold Coast-based for events on the Gold Coast) and broaden your search to nearby regions if needed. Choose providers that use local suppliers and follow ethical standards, including fair labour practices. Look for recognised certifications or initiatives where relevant (e.g. Supply Nation or Fairtrade).



2. Reduce the environmental impact of food options

Provide a balanced selection of food, with at least 50% vegetarian and/or vegan options. Ask caterers about the produce, meat, and seafood they source, and look for recognised environmental or ethical certifications (e.g. Fairtrade, Marine Stewardship Council certified seafood, Rainforest Alliance, Australian Made, Australia Grown (AMAG), or carbon neutral products).



3. Limit single-use service ware

Work with caterers to minimise single-use items and food packaging for service delivery. Prioritise reusable service ware and choose recyclable or compostable alternatives otherwise.

4. Minimise food waste

Work with caterers to set and confirm quantities based on expected attendance, allowing for some variation. Plan for responsible management of any surplus food, including redistribution or composting where available.

Reducing event materials

Apply the waste hierarchy of avoid, reduce, digitise, reuse and recycle. Avoid unnecessary event materials and prioritise low-impact options. Use the following principles to guide your decisions:

1. Minimise physical collateral

Provide registration, event, program details online where possible. Use QR codes or short URLs to direct attendees to relevant content on their devices.

If printed materials are required, engage services that use recycled or responsibly sourced materials, energy-efficient processes, and non-toxic inks and finishes. Ask about certifications such as Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), or ISO 14001, as well as carbon-neutral printing programs and waste management practices.



2. Choose sustainable merchandise and products

Avoid unnecessary or single-use promotional items and gifts. If they are required, consider local suppliers and values-led businesses, such as Supply Nation registered or certified businesses, ACNC-registered charities, or B Corp certified organisations.

When selecting merchandise or event products, choose reusable items made from recycled, biodegradable, or responsibly sourced materials where possible. Look for recognised certifications such as Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Fairtrade, AS 4736, or AS 5810.



3. Opt for reusable stalls and displays

If stalls and displays are required, hire reusable equipment where possible. If new materials are needed, choose durable, modular components that can be reused or repurposed across multiple events.

You can also utilise the [Responsible Procurement](#) website for further tips on sourcing supplies for your event.





WASTE AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Plan ahead for the waste your event is likely to generate.

Early decisions can reduce what is produced, support correct disposal and create more opportunities to keep useful materials in use. Consider the following as part of your planning:

1. Apply the waste hierarchy

Avoid and reduce waste wherever possible before considering reuse, recycling or recovery, with landfill as the last option.

Apply this approach to decisions about catering, packaging, deliveries, decorations and other event supplies.

 [Waste Guide](#)

2. Provide the right disposal infrastructure

Ensure suitable general waste, recycling and organics bins are available in convenient locations. Place bins together and use clear, consistent signage showing what belongs in each stream to support correct disposal and reduce contamination.

If your event requires additional or specialised bins, such as composting or Containers for Change collection bins, lodge a waste request through Service@Griffith (Select Campus Life > Waste Request).

3. Recover resources

Identify opportunities to reuse, redistribute, donate, recycle or compost surplus materials. Assign responsibility for collecting reusable equipment, leftover materials and other resources and directing them to the right reuse, recycling or composting option.

After the event, review what worked well and note any contamination issues, excess materials or opportunities to improve waste management at future events.



SUSTAINABLE EVENTS CERTIFICATION

Go a step further and have your event formally recognised for its sustainability efforts. As a member of [Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability \(ACTS\)](#), Griffith staff and students can access the [Sustainable Events Certification program](#). It follows a flexible, step-by-step process:

- Register your event through the online portal and access the digital toolkit
- Complete a set of 15 mandatory actions to establish a sustainability baseline
- Select additional actions to achieve 2-star or 3-star recognition
- Upload evidence to track and verify progress
- Undergo an audit by an accredited reviewer
- Receive certification, a digital badge, and public recognition

Events are awarded 1, 2, or 3-star rating based on the level of sustainability actions achieved and verified through a pre-event audit. If you would like guidance or support, consider [contacting the Griffith Sustainability team](#) early in the planning process.



CARBON FOOTPRINTING AND OFFSETTING EVENTS

Some events, particularly those involving travel, catering or large numbers of participants, can have a significant carbon footprint. Measuring event-related greenhouse gas emissions can help organisers understand where impacts occur and identify opportunities to reduce them.

At a high level, event carbon footprints typically consider emissions associated with:

- Participant travel and accommodation
- Venue energy use and services
- Catering and food choices
- Event materials and waste

For larger or externally facing events, organisers may choose to estimate total emissions and, where appropriate, purchase carbon offsets to compensate for residual emissions.

IMPORTANT: In line with Griffith University's [Climate Action Plan](#) and our [2029 Net Zero goal](#), the priority for all events is to avoid and reduce emissions at the source wherever possible. This includes:

- Choosing virtual or hybrid formats where appropriate
- Minimising travel distances and encouraging public or active transport
- Selecting venues with strong sustainability credentials
- Providing predominantly plant based catering
- Reducing materials, waste and water use

Carbon offsetting should only be considered after all reasonable steps have been taken to reduce the actual environmental impact of an event. Offsetting is not a substitute for good event design.

If you are interested in estimating the carbon footprint of an event, or exploring credible offsetting options where appropriate, you are encouraged to [contact the Griffith Sustainability team](#) for guidance and support. The team can provide advice on carbon accounting approaches consistent with University principles and help ensure any offsetting aligns with high integrity standards.

SUSTAINABLE EVENT CHECKLIST & PLANNING TEMPLATE

Use this document to assess your event's environmental and social sustainability outcomes. Work through each section to guide planning decisions, record actions, and complete the self-rating matrix to reflect on strengths and areas for improvement.

SELF-RATING MATRIX

- 1 - Not yet considered
- 2 - Considered, but limited action taken
- 3 - Good sustainability practice incorporated
- 4 - Sustainability embedded throughout planning

EVENT OVERVIEW	
Event name	
Event date	
Event location	
Event organiser / team	
Expected attendance	
Event format	☐ In-person only ☐ Hybrid (in-person and online)
1. VENUE SELECTION	
Does the venue support sustainable, accessible and inclusive participation? Check all that apply: ☐ Selected a venue that is conveniently located for the majority of attendees ☐ Chosen a venue that can be accessed by public transport, walking, wheeling or cycling ☐ Confirmed appropriate accessibility features and support services are available ☐ Considered opportunities to minimise attendee travel ☐ Identified options to improve participation or access through digital resources or activities ☐ Reviewed the venue's sustainability initiatives, such as recycling systems, water refill stations or energy-efficient facilities ☐ Identified any sustainability certifications or ratings held by the venue	SECTION RATING
NOTES / ACTIONS :	
2. TRAVEL & ACCOMMODATION <i>(if required)</i>	
Have opportunities to minimise travel-related environmental impacts been considered? Check all that apply: ☐ Selected preferred accommodation options close to the event venue and essential services ☐ Provided attendees with information about sustainable travel options (e.g. public transport, walking, wheeling or cycling) ☐ Organised shared transport where practical ☐ Considered carbon offset options for the event	SECTION RATING
NOTES / ACTIONS :	

3. LOCALLY-SOURCED AND ETHICAL CATERING	SECTION RATING
Have catering decisions been made to minimise environmental impacts and food waste? Check all that apply: ☐ Selected a a supplier local to the event location ☐ Included at least 50% vegetarian or vegan menu options ☐ Requested reusable or hireable service ware instead of disposable items ☐ Considered opportunities to minimise attendee travel ☐ Identified sustainability certification, ratings or commitments held by the caterer ☐ Planned for the prevention, donation or redistribution of surplus food	
NOTES / ACTIONS :	
4. REDUCING EVENT MATERIALS	SECTION RATING
Have event materials, merchandise and displays been selected to minimise waste and support responsible procurement? Check all that apply: ☐ Reduced or avoided printed materials by using digital alternatives where practical ☐ Selected recycled, responsibly sourced or low-impact materials for printed items ☐ Identified sustainability certifications, ratings or commitments held by suppliers ☐ Avoided unnecessary merchandise, giveaways or promotional items ☐ Selected reusable, durable or responsibly sourced merchandise and/or gifts ☐ Considered values-led suppliers (e.g. Supply Nation registered businesses, ACNC-registered charities or B Corp certified organisations) ☐ Hired, reused or repurposed stalls, displays and event infrastructure where practical	
NOTES / ACTIONS :	
5. WASTE & RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	SECTION RATING
Have opportunities to avoid waste and maximise resource recovery been identified? Check all that apply: ☐ Identified the waste and resource streams likely to be generated ☐ Arranged appropriate bins, signage and collection services ☐ Planned for the reuse, redistribution or donation of materials ☐ Considered opportunities to minimise attendee travel ☐ Confirmed recycling and composting options are available ☐ Assigned responsibility for waste and resource recovery	
NOTES / ACTIONS :	

SELF-RATING SUMMARY

Copy each section rating into the table below. Use this summary to reflect on strengths and areas for improvement.

SELF-RATING MATRIX

- 1 - Not yet considered
- 2 - Considered, but limited action taken
- 3 - Good sustainability practice incorporated
- 4 - Sustainability embedded throughout planning

SECTIONS	RATING
1. Venue Selection	_____ / 4
2. Travel & Accommodation (if required)	_____ / 4
3. Locally-Sourced and Ethical Catering	_____ / 4
4. Reducing Events Materials	_____ / 4
5. Waste & Resource Management	_____ / 4

REFLECTION

Which areas demonstrate the strongest sustainability outcomes?

Which areas require further attention or improvement?

PRIORITY ACTIONS

What are the three most important actions you will take to improve the sustainability of this event?

1.
2.
3.

SUPPORT & RECOGNITION

☐ I would like support from the Griffith Sustainability Team to deliver this event sustainably.

☐ I would like to explore ACTS Sustainable Events Certification.

OTHER RESOURCES

The following resources provide additional guidance to support the planning and delivery of sustainable, inclusive and accessible events at Griffith University.

STRATEGY & CERTIFICATION	
Griffith's Strategy 2025-2030: Creating a Brighter Future for All	https://www.griffith.edu.au/office-vice-chancellor/strategic-plan
Griffith University Sustainability Strategy	https://www.griffith.edu.au/sustainability/sustainability-strategy
ACTS Sustainable Events Certification	https://www.acts.asn.au/what-we-do/sustainable-event-certification/
INCLUSIVE, ACCESSIBLE & CULTURALLY RESPECTFUL EVENTS	
Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country Guidelines	https://brandhub.griffith.edu.au/resources/assets/first-peoples/welcome-to-country-guidelines
Guidelines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Terminology	https://brandhub.griffith.edu.au/resources/assets/first-peoples/guidelines-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-terminology
Inclusive and Accessible Events Checklist	https://inclusivefutures.griffith.edu.au/inclusive-and-accessible-events
Researching Creatively and Sustainably	https://www.griffith.edu.au/research/arts-education-law/creative-arts-research-institute/themes#futures
Multi-Faith Centre (Brisbane South, Nathan)	https://www.griffith.edu.au/engage/community/multi-faith-centre
Prayer Room Locations	https://www.griffith.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0024/167064/CHAP_PrayerRooms2021_210x297mm_A4_CMYK_02.pdf
VENUE SELECTION & BOOKINGS	
Griffith Venue Hire	https://www.griffith.edu.au/room-bookings/venue-hire
Griffith Room Bookings	https://www.griffith.edu.au/room-bookings
EcoCentre Room Bookings	https://www.griffith.edu.au/griffith-sciences/ecocentre
TRAVEL & TRANSPORT	
Environmental Impacts of Travel	https://staff.griffith.edu.au/working-at-griffith/travel/travelling-for-university-business/environmental-impact-of-travel
PROCUREMENT	
Responsible Procurement	https://staff.griffith.edu.au/working-at-griffith/finance-and-planning/spending-money/procurement-and-supply