



Sustainable Events Guide

Victoria Conference Centre

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The Victoria Conference Centre is located on the homelands of the Songhees Nation and the Xwsepsum Nation

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Hosting a Sustainable Event

The Victoria Conference Centre (VCC) is an environmentally friendly venue that has sustainability at the forefront of its operations. This guide includes principles, policies, and actions to address key impact areas for events, serving as a valuable resource for event planners at the VCC. The following tips for hosting a sustainable event at the VCC will be further elaborated upon throughout this guide.

Communications & Marketing

- Go digital with an event app
- Share goals and results
- Provide sustainability guidance

Procurement

- Minimize swag
- Buy sustainable
- Support local
- Support Indigenous

Transportation & Accommodation

- Stay local & sustainable
- Prioritize low-emission transportation methods

On-site Operations

- Go zero waste
- Enhance refreshment access
- Promote sustainability with exhibitors

Go Carbon Neutral

- Measure, reduce, offset

Social Sustainability

- Impact and legacy
- Accessibility

Low Impact Events at the VCC

Carbon Neutral

All venue emissions including energy, water, waste and stationary are offset. Since 2012, the venue has decreased their carbon footprint by 51%.



Biosphere Certified

The VCC was the second conference centre in North America to become Biosphere Certified.



BIOSPHERE
SUSTAINABLE

Boma Platinum

The VCC operates to the platinum level of BOMA Best's Building Environmental Standard.





Communications & Marketing

Did You Know?

Hosting a sustainable event can significantly enhance your communications and marketing efforts. By prioritizing sustainable practices, you not only attract sponsors, funders, presenters, and participants but also demonstrate your commitment to environmental responsibility, distinguishing your brand from others.

Case Study

At the IMPACT 2024 Conference, the [Whova App](#) was utilized to successfully facilitate attendee networking, interaction, and gather feedback.

Sample Goals

- Tree Free: Go digital and when needed use 100% Post Consumer Recycled Content paper for printing
- App Sponsorship: Provide exclusive sponsorship of the app as a sponsor benefit
- Track Goals and Results: Measure engagement from sponsors, funders, presenters, and participants
- Provide Sustainability Guidance: Create resources, best practices, and training materials to support your team and stakeholders in adopting sustainable event practices

Go Digital with an Event App

Using an event app significantly reduces carbon emissions by eliminating the need for physical shipping of materials. Waste is minimized by replacing paper-based resources with digital alternatives, thereby promoting a more sustainable approach to event management.

- Save printing & shipping costs allowing for instant content changes and eliminating costly reprints
- Generate revenue through digital sponsor promotions, utilizing website advertisements and sponsored emails, rather than printed materials
- Incorporate interactive session tools into the event, such as polling, Q&A, and word clouds
- Collect instant feedback on sessions creating valuable data sets for future planning
- Provide a platform for attendees to network
- Create easily accessible speaker profiles
- Allow for instant messaging to all attendees with updates during the event

Share Goals & Results

Communicate your sustainability goals to your venue, accommodation providers, caterers, suppliers, and attendees. Collect attendee feedback using your event app during the event, or send out a post-event survey to provide attendees with the opportunity to give their input on the sustainability initiatives they saw and ones they might like to see implemented in the future.

Provide Sustainability Guidance

Invite vendors, exhibitors, attendees and clients to engage in responsible practices by providing guidance where appropriate. Examples of this may include:

- Adding sustainable practices in vendor agreements (e.g. only compostable food packaging, no bottled water, limit swag, responsible for own signage waste)
- Incorporating sustainable practices into attendee communications and messaging (ex. promote green accommodation and transport options, feature local businesses, highlight waste reduction initiatives)

Procurement

What we buy plays a huge role in our impact on the environment. Consider if the items are necessary and whether they can be reused or recycled at the end of their life. Additionally, renting items such as decorations for events can be a great way to minimize costs and waste.

Minimize Swag

Prioritize gifts that are useful and responsibly sourced. Aim for one to two items only per delegate to reduce waste.

[Fairware](#) creates sustainable and custom promotional products with brands across North America.

Buy Sustainable

Select products that follow these sustainable principles:

- High in recycled content
- Compostable & recyclable
- Reusable
- Locally sourced
- Green certified
- Fair trade

Support Local

Locally owned, independent businesses create vibrant communities. Think Local First businesses are at least 51% independently owned on Vancouver Island and fiercely committed to each other and Victoria.

[Think Local First](#) is a non-profit that is committed to encouraging people to support local businesses in Greater Victoria.

Support Indigenous

By purchasing from local Indigenous-owned businesses, who have sustainability and social responsibility rooted in their business practices, you can procure items that are sustainable with a rich cultural history.

Use the [South Island Indigenous Business Directory](#) to identify Indigenous-owned businesses in the Victoria area



Did You Know?

Emissions from food production account for roughly one third of human-caused greenhouse gas emissions? Choosing plant-based proteins for your event menus is the most efficient way to reduce emissions from food. Swap red meat for plant-based proteins, or to lower-carbon proteins like chicken or salmon. Opt for plated lunches over buffet - this can reduce food waste by 30%!

Case Study

At the IMPACT 2024 Conference, the event planning team selected meals that blended both vegetarian and low carbon options. By measuring the carbon footprint of the curated meals, delegates were informed about how their choices contributed to lower carbon emissions, while also being educated on the environmental impact of food choices.

Pro Tips & Sample Goals

- [Develop responsible purchasing guidelines](#)
- Print signs without dates so they can be reused year after year
- Source responsible Swag and Gifts (1-2 item max per person)
- All suppliers to be local, sustainable or Indigenous
- Menu includes mostly plants and only low-carbon proteins (legumes, poultry, seafood)

Plant Rich Menus

Ask the Fairmont Empress about highlighting locally sourced vegetables and choose low-carbon proteins such as poultry, seafood, and legumes.



Transportation & Accommodation

Did You Know?

Air travel can account for more than 80% of the footprint of a conference. Encouraging attendees to travel by ferry or coach bus instead of flying can reduce transportation emissions to and from your event. If flying is required, aim to take the most direct routes and opt for economy ticket class.

Pro Tips

- Promote key transit, cycling and walking routes to your venue and accommodations
- Track and collect data on all travel associated with your event including flights and ferry rides.
- Transit passes are offered to all conference delegates through the visitor's centre, see more information [here](#).

Sample Goals

- Offset all travel emissions
- At least 50% of delegates use low-emission transportation methods during the event
- Partner with Biosphere Certified or carbon neutral accommodations

Stay Local & Sustainable

Select and promote responsible accommodation partners that are carbon neutral or Biosphere Certified, offer on-site EV charging, provide bike/scooter rentals, and are in close proximity to the venue. Use the following links to find and choose accommodation partners that put sustainability at the forefront of their operations.

[Destination Greater Victoria Sustainable Accommodations](#)

[Biosphere Certified Accommodations](#)

Prioritize Low-Emission Transportation Methods

Encouraging attendees and staff to travel sustainably during their stays can dramatically reduce the events' carbon emissions, while providing a deeper experience of the destination. Partner with [Evo Car Share](#) for electric or hybrid transportation, and encourage carpooling or bulk transportation over individual vehicles.

- Display signage to direct visitors to bike parking and nearby bus stations
- Display nearby transit service routes and scheduled services

If you are offering group transportation to your attendees, consider booking coaches or taxis that are electric, or offset the emissions associated with this transportation.

On-Site Operations

Go Zero Waste

A zero-waste event reduces waste and diverts recyclable and compostable materials from going into landfills.

- Set a zero-waste goal and share with partners and attendees
- Prioritize reusable items over the provision of single use items whenever possible
- Partner with a local non-profit, such as [Soap for Hope](#), to increase recovery from delegates
- Hire an event waste diversion representative for your event. Providers include [The Diverters Foundation](#) or [The Sustainable Fox](#). These waste auditors can also help you calculate your waste diversion rate
- Order [Terracycle boxes](#)
- Display appropriate waste sorting signage and have ample composting and recycling options available
- Encourage vendors to buy in bulk and source compostable/recyclable/reusable products

[Project Zero Waste Audit Tools](#) - designed to assist businesses in understanding their current waste volumes, streams, diversion rates, and associated costs

Enhance Refreshment Access

- VCC provides water refill stations. Consider having reusable water bottles for purchase (or as event swag!)
- Display appropriate signage to direct visitors to water stations
- Ensure that any cups used for coffee, juice, or other refreshments are reusable

Promote Sustainability with Exhibitors

- Include sustainable initiatives in agreements that share clear goals and set expectations
- Explore the [Events Industry Council Sustainable Event Standards](#) to identify goals and expectations to share with exhibitors, food and beverage, and other relevant event partners



Did You Know?

The key to low-impact event operations is planning ahead. Once your event is up and running, there is little time to think about recycling bins. Connect with your VCC event manager to discuss sustainable initiatives you would like to see implemented at your event.

Pro Tips

- Develop a zero-waste plan and consider how to eliminate or divert all waste from landfill
- Update vendor agreements to include participation in green initiatives such as compostable packaging, going zero-waste, etc.

Sample Goals

- Achieve a 90% diversion rate
- No single use bottled water on-site
- Provide water stations and reusable cups for coffee & other refreshments
- 100% of vendors/exhibitors agree to low-impact practices

Go Carbon Neutral

Did You Know?

The Victoria Conference Centre has been measuring and reducing its carbon footprint since 2009, and achieved carbon neutrality in 2019 by offsetting all emissions associated with the venue operations. In general, the process of achieving carbon neutrality begins with measuring your emissions and establishing a baseline, implementing emission reduction initiatives, and offsetting the remainder of emissions as the final step.

Pro Tips

- Identify the data that you will need to track and how you will collect it. Refer to the [Carbon Neutral Events - Data Worksheet](#) to start

Sample Goals

- Measure the emissions associated with your event and create a baseline carbon footprint
- Reduce the emissions associated with your event by following the best practices and resources found in this guide
- Offset your remaining emissions and achieve carbon neutrality for your event

What is a Carbon Neutral Event?

When an event is carbon neutral, the amount of emissions produced by the event (tCO₂e) are equal to the amount of emissions that are offset. This means that there is a balance between the carbon that is emitted and absorbed from the atmosphere in carbon sinks.

Measure

Track all transportation emissions associated with your event including flights, buses, taxis and shuttles. Measuring the carbon footprint of your event will help identify opportunities to reduce the impact of future events. This also allows you to track emissions reductions year after year if your event is held annually.

Engage the services of [Synergy Enterprises](#) to measure your events' emissions and help you choose an offset provider.

Reduce

Identify opportunities and actions you can take when planning your event to reduce emissions in various areas such as energy use, catering, or transportation. For example, minimize transportation by encouraging car-pooling, and offering digital attendance. Reduce emissions from the food served at your event by opting for low-emissions proteins.

Offset

- Offset your carbon emissions by supporting a carbon offset project that aligns with the mission of your organization. Depending on the offset cost and flight distances, costs could range between \$5 and \$30 per attendee (based on an offset cost of \$20 per tonne).
- Build in an eco-fee to the event ticket cost to cover flight offsets.
- Create a “Carbon Neutral Sponsor” option to cover offset costs.

Impact & Legacy Program



In collaboration with Destination Greater Victoria, an “Impact and Legacy Program” has been developed for events being hosted in Greater Victoria. This program aims to transition from merely reducing the negative impacts of events to fostering positive legacies.

An important aspect of this program is encouraging event organizers to incorporate [Group Volunteer Activities](#) with local non-profit organizations into their events to provide a positive impact in the community and give back to the destination. These opportunities range from engagement at the event to participating in conservation or restoration activities out in the community.





Inclusive Venue

Did You Know?

Incorporating feedback from individuals with lived experiences is crucial to complying with the Accessible BC Act. VCC actively seeks out this input to guide accessibility improvements. Please write to accessibility@victoria.ca for questions on accessibility at VCC.

Pro Tips

- Engage with people with lived experiences in event planning and decision making to ensure that diverse community needs are met
- Use local demographic data to understand the needs of your audience and tailor services accordingly. See the City of Victoria Equity Community Profile at [Inclusive City | City of Victoria](#).
- Stay informed about best practices in accessibility and inclusion by exploring city strategies

Sample Goals

- Achieve [RHFAC Certification](#)
- Enhance meaningful access and expand beyond physical accessibility
- Improve accessibility and inclusion by establishing systems to monitor accessibility feedback and accommodation requests

Victoria Conference Centre: Commitment to being an Inclusive Venue

At the Victoria Conference Centre, a priority and commitment is making the venue inclusive and accessible for all. This creates a welcoming, respectful, and empowering environment. With support from the City of Victoria and Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) at the City of Victoria, the VCC has adopted innovative practices and standards to make the facilities more accessible and inclusive.

Our Key Initiatives

- Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification (RHFAC) - the VCC has achieved this certification that rates and certifies the accessibility of buildings based on national standards.
- GoodMaps Navigational App - assists visitors with cognitive and learning disabilities to navigate spaces independently.
- Sensory Inclusive Certification - The VCC will accommodate visitors with sensory needs by providing sensory bags, quiet spaces, and training to support guests with sensory sensitivities.
- Welcoming Sticker Program - a visible commitment to pledge to equity and inclusion.
- Capacity Development & Engagement with People with Lived Experiences - in collaboration with the Office of EDI, the VCC consults with the City's Accessibility Advisory Committee and undergo training on inclusion and accessibility.



Case Studies

Canadian Anesthesiologist's Society

[The Canadian Anesthesiologist's Society](#) held their 2024 Annual Meeting at the VCC, where they introduced various sustainability initiatives and guidelines. These included:

- Paperless programs & mobile app, reduced printed signage
- Sustainable stationary including pens made from recycled materials
- Minimizing disposable takeaway containers and providing biodegradable/recyclable packaging
- Sourcing local and organic ingredients for food menus



Impact Conference

[IMPACT Sustainability Travel & Tourism Conference](#) is held annually at the VCC and brings together tourism professionals from across the country to convey the importance of positive tourism development. The conference is fully carbon neutral. Additional sustainable actions include:

- Intentionally planned low-carbon menus & 100 plant-based lunches. The emissions associated with meals were presented to delegates to bring awareness to these sustainable choices
- Printed pamphlets and agendas replaced with event app/web platform
- Event footprint calculated annually to identify areas to reduce emissions
- Choosing suppliers & venues committed to sustainability or are carbon neutral
- Lanyard libraries - lanyards returned to venue and reused
- Locally-sourced and useful speaker gifts



BC Tourism Industry Conference

The [BC Tourism Industry Conference 2024](#) guided their event planning with an action plan aligned with the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#). Organizers aimed to minimize the events' carbon footprint, engage and educate, and give back to their host communities. The conference incorporated circular economy principles into planning, donated to projects contributing to a sustainable visitor economy on Vancouver Island, and worked with Fairmont Empress to offer a plant-forward and low-carbon menu.

The planners asked delegates to:

- Bring their own reusable bottles
- Commit to low emissions transportation methods
- Return badges at the end of the conference



**BC TOURISM
INDUSTRY
CONFERENCE 2024**
Shaping Our Future Together

Resources

Communications & Marketing

[Whova](#)

[Sugar Sheet Paper](#)

Procurement

[FAIRWARE](#)

[Think Local First](#)

[City of Victoria Sustainable Takeout Guide](#)

[BC Green Business Member Directory](#)

[South Island Indigenous Business Directory](#)

[BCTSN Responsible Purchasing Guidelines](#)

Transportation & Accommodation

[Destination Greater Victoria Accommodations](#)

[Biosphere Certified Accommodations](#)

[Evo Car Share](#)

On-Site Operations

[Soap for Hope](#)

[Terracycle boxes](#)

[Project Zero Waste Audit Tools](#)

[The Diverters Foundation](#)

[The Sustainable Fox](#)

[City of Victoria Waste Reduction Plan](#)

[Events Industry Council Sustainable Event Standards](#)

Go Carbon Neutral

[Synergy Enterprises](#)

[Ostrom Climate Solutions](#)

[Carbon Neutral Events - Data Worksheet](#)

Impact and Legacy Program

[CSR activities](#)

Inclusive Venue

[Inclusive City | City of Victoria](#)

[RHFAC Certification](#)

Food Donation Programs

[Second Harvest](#)

[The Mustard Seed](#)

[Too Good to Go](#)

Event Material Donation Programs

[Victoria Women in Need Community Cooperative](#)

[Salvation Army](#)

[SUPPLY Victoria Creative Reuse Centre](#)

[Thrift/Craft Alternative Art Supply](#)

[Habitat for Humanity ReStore](#)



Checklist For Event Planners

Communications & Marketing

Set and communicate your sustainability goals to your team, venue, accommodation providers, caterers, suppliers, and attendees

Use an app or mobile friendly web platform for digital dissemination including agendas, schedules, and worksheets

Invite vendors, exhibitors, attendees and more to engage in responsible practices and provide guidance where appropriate

Procurement

Prioritize event gifts that are long-lasting and responsibly sourced

Support local, sustainable, and Indigenous-owned businesses

Request a plant-rich menu highlighting locally sourced vegetables and low-carbon proteins

Transportation & Accommodation

Track and collect data on all travel associated with your event, including flights and ferry rides

Select and promote sustainable accommodation partners

Promote key transit, cycling and walking routes to your venue and accommodations

On-Site Operations

Develop a zero-waste plan

Update vendor agreements to include participation in green initiatives such as compostable packaging, going zero waste, etc.

Connect with your VCC event manager to discuss sustainable initiatives you would like to see implemented at your event

Go Carbon Neutral

Measure the emissions associated with your event and create a baseline carbon footprint

Reduce the emissions associated with your event

Offset your remaining emissions and achieve carbon neutrality

Social Sustainability

Partner with local nonprofit organizations to participate in conservation or restoration activities out in the community

Engage with people with lived experiences in event planning and decision making to ensure that diverse community needs are met

Stay informed about best practices in accessibility and inclusion by exploring city strategies