

MINIMUM STANDARDS 2017



Sustainable Catering and Food and Beverage Operations

Minimum standards for providing and evaluating food and beverage services and products for sustainable meetings, exhibitions, trade-shows, conferences or other events. This standard applies - but is not limited to, the provision of catering services and products.



Minimum Standards 2017

SUSTAINABLE CATERING AND FOOD AND BEVERAGE OPERATIONS

Overview:

These minimum standards are intended for providing and evaluating food and beverage services and products for sustainable meetings, exhibitions, trade-shows, conferences or other events. This will include, but is not limited to, the provision of catering services and products associated with the event.

This guideline focuses primarily on the management, reduction or elimination of environmental impacts arising from the provision of catering activities

Interpretations

For the purpose of this standard, the following interpretations apply:

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| “antibiotic free” | food products that are sourced from animals that are not administered antibiotics at any point in their production life. |
| “bio-based” | a product determined to be a commercial or industrial product (other than food or feed) that is composed of in part – or whole, of biological products or renewable domestic agricultural materials (including plant, animal or marine materials) or forestry materials. |
| “biodegradable” | capable of decomposing under natural conditions into elements found in nature |
| “cage free” | birds or poultry not confined to cages or artificial facilities and which have access to open areas during their production life (see also free-range) |
| “compost” | a stable humus material produced through a natural composting process |
| “compostable” | capable of undergoing biological decomposition in a compost or waste site |
| “contractor” | a person or organisation hired to perform services on behalf of an organiser or general services contractor |
| “diversion rate” | the percentage of waste materials diverted from landfill or other traditional disposal methods to be recycled, reused or composted |
| “environmentally preferable” | products or services that have a reduced effect on human health and the environment when compared with competing products or services that serve the same purpose. |
| “environmentally sustainable” | components, functions or systems that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. |
| “event organiser” | see “planner” |
| “fair trade” | products or services which meet any of the following principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where fair and equitable prices are paid for the product or service • Produced or provided under fair labour conditions • Obtained directly from their source manufacturer without intermediaries (direct trade) • Procured from democratic and transparent organisations |

- Those which contribute directly to community development, and
- Those which are produced in an environmentally sustainable manner.

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| “feedstock” | source material used in the manufacture process |
| “FOG” | an acronym for animal and vegetable fats, oils and grease which are a natural by-product of the cooking and food preparation process |
| “free range” | any bird or poultry product which has unrestricted access to the natural environment for ‘an undetermined period of time each day’. |
| “full service operations” | facilities which provide food and beverage service to customers at tables, counters or booths |
| ‘grain/grass fed’ | meat which is sourced from ruminant animals (including cattle, sheep or pigs) which has been raised on a lifetime diet of 100% grass, grain or forage and which have access to pasture during most times of their production season |
| “over-production” | a form of waste resulting from poor planning or wasteful production process |
| “planner” | person whose job it is to oversee and arrange every aspect of an event. |
| “post –consumer” | products that have been reclaimed or reused from products that have already served the intended end-use as consumer goods |
| “pre-consumer” | products that have been reclaimed from the manufacturing process which have not served their intended use as a consumer item |
| “recovered materials” | waste materials and by-products which have been recovered or diverted from the waste stream other than those derived from a manufacturing process |
| “recycle” | recovering or reprocessing materials for use in the form of raw materials (feedstock) in the manufacture of new consumer products |
| “recycled products” | products that contain pre- or post-consumer materials as all or part of their feedstock |
| “renewable materials” | substances derived from a living tree, plant, animal or ecosystem which has the ability for self-regeneration |
| “seasonal food” | food which can be grown in the bio-region or eco-region in which it is served at the time it is available without the use of greenhouse or artificial growing process, heat or light |
| “shade grown” | coffee which has been grown under the canopy of a medium height, with a minimum percentage of shade cover and an average number of species of shade trees per unit of area (also known as bird-friendly) |
| “slow food” | food that is produced or prepared in accordance with local culinary traditions, typically using high-quality locally sourced ingredients. It refers to a lifestyle that connects food consumption to wider social, ethical, lifestyle, political, environmental and spiritual elements. |
| “stakeholder” | individuals, organisations or other entities that directly affect or are directly affected by the planning and execution of a specific event |
| “supplier” | a provider or vendor offering facilities, products or services – or a combination thereof |

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| “sustainable agriculture” | an integrated system of plant and animal production practices with a site-specific application that over time satisfy human food and fibre needs; enhance environmental quality and sustainability and which makes the most effective use of non-renewable resources |
| “sustainable food” | food which is produced in such way that is healthy for consumers and animals; does not harm the environment; is humane for workers; respects animals; provides a fair living wage for farmers and supports and enhances local community life |
| “vegan” | food which excludes all forms of animal products including meat, fish and poultry, eggs, dairy and their derivatives including gelatin and whey |
| “waste” | discarded residue for disposal or recovery |

Minimum Standards

I. Sustainable Operations and Management

- a) The event organiser shall:
 - i. have a written environmental sustainability policy and performance criteria related to food and beverage service at the specific event which addresses all the applicable environmental characteristics related to associated procurement, management, resource use, waste and community involvement issues
 - ii. ensure that all appropriate personnel are made aware of, and can communicate effectively, about the environmental objectives of food and beverage operations;
 - iii. distribute a written copy of the event sustainability policy and objectives, and provide exhibitors, vendors and suppliers with such information by at least an exhibitor prospectus or e-newsletter or website;
 - iv. require that energy-efficient equipment be sourced where equipment is brought-in for an event;
 - v. establish the dietary preferences of prospective participants prior to the event and ensure that the menu content addresses specific cultural, religious or dietary expectations in order to minimise or avoid waste;
 - vi. ensure that timeous and accurate information is provided to the service provider to avoid overproduction or waste associated with the provision of food or beverage.
- b) The Service Provider/Contractor shall:
 - i. ensure compliance with the Event Sustainability Policy terms and obligations as specified by the Organiser;
 - ii. ensure that all service personnel and staff are aware of the sustainability objectives of the event and that they adhere to prescribed measures in respect of resource consumption, waste and procurement practice;
 - iii. take all reasonable measures to ensure sustainable preparation, service, storage and disposal of food and beverage items during the event;
 - iv. minimise waste associated with packaging and ensure the correct waste disposal measures are implemented for various waste streams;
 - v. ensure timely and accurate data related to catering requirements is obtained and acted upon before and during the event;
 - vi. ensure that all relevant regulations, by-laws and health standards are complied with at all times.

II. Social and Cultural Criteria

- a) The event organiser shall where possible ensure that left-over food is donated to the local community or non-profit organisation to the extent allowable by local health codes, regulations and relevant cultural or religious beliefs.
- b) The Service Provider/Contractor shall ensure that all food and beverage items are prepared and served in accordance with prescribed social, cultural or religious conditions as may be required.

III. Economic Criteria

- a) The event organiser shall require that:
 - i. a minimum of 50% of all food and beverage supplies are purchased locally or from local suppliers.

- b) The service provider shall;
 - i. as far as possible ensure that menu's and catering requirements are compiled with due regard to seasonality, availability and local content to reduce transport costs and to increase local procurement beneficiation;
 - ii. demonstrate a commitment to the use of local community members for staffing and other services;
 - iii. demonstrate a commitment to development and transfer of skills to local staff during the event;
 - iv. demonstrate a commitment to comply with the applicable sectoral minimum wage for employees and casual staff.

IV. Environmental Criteria

- a) The event organiser shall ensure that:
 - i. energy efficient practices are in place to reduce energy consumption associated with food and beverage operations;
 - ii. all necessary precautions are taken to minimise and avoid excessive smoke, emissions and other pollutants that may be associated with the preparation of food;
 - iii. effective and appropriate measures are taken to minimise unnecessary water use and to ensure the safe and appropriate disposal of liquid waste;
 - iv. paper menus and printed material shall be made from recycled content and where possible, printed with bio-derived inks. The items must be identified as such.
- b) The Service Provider/Contractor shall ensure that:
 - i. drinking water is supplied in bulk dispensers or jugs and that no single-use bottles or containers shall be made available unless specific local conditions require;
 - ii. condiments are served in bulk containers unless specific local conditions require single-serve packaging to be made available;
 - iii. food waste is avoided through effective planning and waste reduction practices;
 - iv. all surplus, non-reusable food is composted or converted to its nutrient base for agricultural use wherever possible;
 - v. a waste recycling programme is implemented and practiced across all food preparation, service and disposal areas;
 - vi. kitchens and food preparation areas are provided with waste bins that allow for the separation and recycling of organic and non-organic waste;
 - vii. a minimum of 25% of all food products sourced for the event shall constitute local, organic or sustainable – or any combination thereof;
 - viii. a minimum of 50% of all food items shall be seasonal with regards to the geographic location of the event.
 - ix. all seafood for the event shall be sourced in accordance with the SASSI guidelines and/or recognised as sustainable or obtained from sustainable sources;
 - x. a minimum of 25% of all non-food items used in food service or food preparation shall be certified as environmentally preferable or environmentally friendly;
 - xi. coffee used for the event shall be certified organic, Bird Friendly, Rainforest Alliance, Fair Trade certified or independently certified as such;
 - xii. vegetarian or vegan main course alternatives shall be made available at all meals in accordance with the needs and expectations of the participants;
 - xiii. food products containing genetically modified organisms, antibiotics or hormones shall be avoided and where unavoidable, shall be identified for the consumer as such;
 - xiv. menu items that could result in or give rise to any allergic response (such as nuts; lactose; etc.) shall be identified as such to the consumer;
 - xv. all full-service operations shall provide reusable utensils, napkins, crockery, glassware table coverings and serving ware;
 - xvi. where non-reusable utensils, napkins, crockery, table coverings, glassware and serving ware is unavoidable or inappropriate, effective and adequate recycling and collection facilities shall be provided;
 - xvii. where take-out or concession packaging is used:
 - a) the items must be recyclable;
 - b) the items must indicate the recycled material content by percentage (with a minimum of 50% being required);
 - c) the items must be compostable/biodegradable or bio-based, or
 - d) the items must be manufactured without the use of chlorine.
 - xviii. non-biodegradable or expanded polystyrene products may not be used for food presentation, sale or storage;
 - xix. all garnishes, centerpieces and decorations must be capable of being eaten, donated, recycled, reused, planted or composted.

Part Two – Interpretation Guide for this Standard

Implementing the Standard is in many instances a simple, organisational process, but the following interpretations of the Standard will assist in this regard. In all instances, these are for illustrative purposes and should not be regarded as the definitive practice.

I. Sustainable Operations and Management

Food and beverage – and catering in general, are an integral part of any event. Whether the need is for small, intimate dining or large-scale commercial catering, the impacts of this aspect of eventing are quite considerable. Catering involves the use of resources such as water and energy, while the waste and emissions associated with this element can sometimes be quite severe. Seasonality and local procurement are important factors in the catering process, and the economic impacts associated with food and beverage service at events have significant benefits for local suppliers.

In addition, the catering aspect of any event requires close cooperation between the Organiser and Service Provider/Contractor involved. Understanding the clients' needs and expectations avoids unnecessary food waste and sustainable events require that caterers understand the need for careful planning with regards food type, menu construction, preparation methods and volumes to ensure the least possible waste.

Sustainable catering for events starts at the inception stage with the development of a **Sustainable Vision Statement** which outlines and establishes the 'rules of engagement' in respect of the overall sustainability objectives of the event.

a) The Organiser is the lynchpin around which sustainable events are created. The Organiser usually contracts additional services such as caterers and other specialised services, so establishing the sustainability objectives and 'rules' in advance is critical to the rest of the process.

- i. The exhibition Organiser is expected to develop a Statement (or Policy) which defines the sustainability objectives of the event, including details on who is responsible for any specific element of the policy and the expectations of the Organisers. This Policy must be made known to all personnel involved in the event, and the Organiser is responsible for ensuring that everyone is aware of the sustainability objectives, and of their roles in achieving these.

Develop and make available published environmental objectives and performance criteria related to the specific event that address all the applicable environmental characteristics as described in this specification (sustainable operations and management; social and cultural; economic and environmental), related to the specific event and include these objectives in the RFPs.

The Policy must be published and accessible (printed or electronic) and it must express the organisers' commitment to managing the impacts of the event and its' activities in a sustainable and responsible manner. The Policy should address the following commitments specifically:

- to the responsible use and management of water, energy, waste and emissions
 - to the use of sustainable and responsible products and services and Service Providers;
 - to the use of local community members and
 - to a process of continual improvement.
- ii. In addition to this, everyone involved in the event must be made aware of the Policy and of the measures that have been (are being) taken to achieve the objectives themselves. All staff associated with the preparation or service of food must be made aware of the Policy and the measures that have been taken to address sustainability in the catering process.
 - iii. The Sustainable Vision Statement (Policy) must be freely available and visible as part of the overall catering process. Where specific measures have been taken to procure or serve sustainable products, this should be made known to delegates, visitors and clients, while a selection of appropriate and relevant alternative dishes and offerings should be available to meet the needs and expectations of the public.
 - iv. Although many venues and facilities have their own catering and food preparation facilities, every effort must be made by the Organiser to ensure the efficient use of energy during the preparation and service process. This will

entail an understanding of the extent to which energy efficient equipment is available and used, and in cases where equipment is being brought 'on-site' by the Contractor, ensuring that energy efficient equipment is sourced. It also requires close monitoring of the use of equipment and Service Providers and Contractors must be required to minimise consumption through effective management of equipment as far as possible.

- v. Food waste is a reality at many events, but in most cases this is as a result of a lack of accurate information being obtained by the Organiser during the pre-event process or even during the event itself. By understanding the catering and beverage needs of the client (and attendees; visitors; delegates; etc.) in the planning stage, more accurate menu planning and preparation is possible. The Organiser needs to understand the food choices; allergies; numbers and exact catering expectations prior to the event, and to communicate this to the Service Provider/Contractor in a timely and accurate manner.
 - vi. During multi-meal events (events that require more than a single meal or catering intervention), Organisers should monitor and manage daily catering numbers effectively to ensure that their Service Provider/Contractor prepares the correct amount of food, and minimizes potential waste.
- b) Although the Organiser may have developed – and is promoting a sustainability Policy, the Caterer needs to understand the objectives of the Organiser and ensure that they accommodate the requirements in their processes (from planning to procurement and preparation). The close relationship between these two parties is critical to any successful, sustainable catering process.
- i. The Service Provider/Contractor must ensure that the obligations or standards that the Organiser has established are adhered to in all respects. Where the Policy requires a specific standard that cannot be met (for example local content; seasonality; specific menu requirements), it is the responsibility of the Service Provider/Contractor to raise this with the Organiser prior to the event itself.
 - ii. All staff associated with the catering element of the event need to understand their obligations and the requirements of the Policy. They need to appreciate their role in resource minimisation and the need for responsible and sustainable preparation processes.
 - iii. The Service Provider is expected to take all reasonable measures to ensure sustainable preparation, service, storage and disposal of food and beverage items during the event. This will require knowledge of the Organiser's expectations and where applicable, the range and capabilities of the catering equipment that is available. By for example, not having adequate chilling or holding facilities for a cold starter, food safety is compromised and unnecessary waste is created by the caterer. The same could be said for events that require a specific menu item that requires the caterer to import it or bring it in from a distance at increased cost.
 - iv. The Service Provider/Contractor must make every effort to minimise the waste associated with packaging during an event. This will include procurement of items in bulk rather than individual packaging and avoiding the use of portion pack items as far as possible. All packaging should be separated for recycling.
 - v. Just as the Organiser is responsible for ensuring timely and accurate information is provided with regards to catering requirements and numbers, the Service Provider/Contractor is just as responsible for ensuring that this is obtained prior to preparation of food. While beverages and sealed catering items can be returned to suppliers after the event, prepared food cannot and every effort must be made to ensure the least possible waste takes place during sustainable events. It also ensures that pre-planning of the menu takes place with due regard for seasonality; availability and demand.
 - vi. The Service Provider/Contractor must take all reasonable measures to ensure that relevant regulations, by-laws and health standards are complied with at all times. This includes ensuring the 'cold chain' of supply and the safe and healthy sourcing, storage, preparation and service of food products. The correct disposal of waste associated with catering must be applied by all personnel.

II. Social and Cultural Criteria

Catering for any event can be fraught with challenges – from cultural and religious preferences and avoidances, to health, safety and disposal challenges. Sustainable events take all of these into account so as to ensure the least possible impact socially or culturally, and it is incumbent upon both the Organiser and the Caterer to ensure the least possible impacts are experienced.

While there are strict distribution regulations with regards left-over food, these are generally limited to issues related to health and food safety rather than designed to avoid providing local communities with food after an event. In the case of prepared food, any items that require reheating or which could pose a health risk as a result of the lack of refrigeration, such excess food should be composted or mulched rather than donated – unless the chain of heat/cold can be assured. However, ‘neutral’ items such as cakes, pastries, sandwiches, salads and similar items can be donated to local schools and organisations (including feeding schemes) rather than being trashed. Where raw food such as vegetables, breads, unopened dairy products, sealed meats, canned goods and other perishables are available, they should be donated rather than trashed. The Organiser should – as part of the initial scoping process, have identified organisations and recipients for excess food items, and these products could form part of a legacy initiative for the event itself.

Care should always be applied to food donations, including being aware of the religious status of recipients (donating canned pork to a local Islamic organisation could be insulting) and the dietary and cultural norms of the community.

Just as with the example of food donations, the preparation and service of food and beverage items by the Service Provider or Contractor must take into account the prevailing social and cultural norms of the community and the target audience being catered for. An example of this would be catering for a generally Halaal event but not adhering to any of the religious or social controls and procedures required. In the same way, serving food as religiously tolerant knowing that the preparation and processes used were not in accordance with prescript is unethical and socially unforgivable. Unless meals are prepared in accordance with tradition, the use of Halaal, Kosher and other labels must be avoided at all costs.

In the same vein, care must be taken to ensure that terms such as Vegan; Vegetarian; Nut Free; etc. should be avoided unless the processes used to prepare these items is in accordance with accepted practice. Labelling foods with specific tolerances or a religiously compliant status must also be done with care and attention to ensure that the least possible contamination takes place between these products and the general selection that is made available.

3. Economic Criteria

Food and beverage can sometimes account for as much as 50% of the total expenditure of an event, so the economic impact of procurement of this component of an event on local suppliers can often make a considerable difference to local economies. Sustainable events aim to ensure the highest possible beneficiation of local businesses and communities, and the selection and procurement of food and beverage items should receive particular attention.

Organisers should prescribe to their Service Providers/Contractors that a minimum of 50% of all catering products be sourced locally as far as reasonably possible. When calculating ‘local’, suppliers in a radius of 30-50 kilometres from the venue or event location in urban areas is the norm, while this could extend to as much as 150 kilometres in the case of rural events. There will be instances where specific menu items are not available locally, but these should be the exception rather than a rule. The use of local staff and manpower is another area in which event Organisers can contribute to the local economy of their events and local service and preparation staff should be given priority over staff being brought from outside the economic area of the venue. In many cases, staff are provided by the venue, and this generally meets the requirement for local content.

Service Providers/Contractors also have a responsibility to ensure local content and local economic beneficiation. In addition to the need to ensure a minimum of 50% local sourcing, caterers are required to consider the local staffing requirement for all non-skilled activities, but at the same time – and particularly in rural areas, to make an effort to raise the skills levels of local staff by providing opportunities for local cooks, chef’s and other ‘skilled’ staff. Local community organisations, small hotels, training centres and other initiatives can help identify individuals that could benefit from this kind of exposure, and together with the Organiser, Service Providers should make an effort to meet the requirement.

4. Environmental Criteria

There are obvious environmental impacts associated with catering and food and beverage operations. These extend from relatively mild emission impacts to the more complicated and extensive impacts associated with energy and water use and the creation of waste. Sustainable events address each of these impacts in a number of ways – recognising that many are unavoidable, but still committing to reductions and improved management systems.

The event Organiser holds overall responsibility for the environmental impact of events, and it is important to ensure that adequate measures are in place to address the many challenges that exist. This starts with the Sustainability Strategy Policy which identifies the various impacts and makes provision for their management, and ends with direct monitoring to ensure the procedures and mitigating factors are being applied correctly by all contractors and service providers. Energy remains perhaps the most significant and unavoidable impact, and every effort must be made to ensure responsible consumption by whatever means. Where the catering services are provided by – for example, a hotel or permanent facility, understanding the efforts being made by the venue to minimise energy consumption is important. Ensure that energy consumption readings are taken before and after the event to allow for calculation of consumption into the overall event footprint and encourage management of the facility to work with you to minimise consumption. Where off-site preparation takes place, apply the same principle (for example where the preparation is done in an off-site facility out of 'scope' of the event itself) and where on-site temporary facilities are being used, effort should be made to use the least impactful energy source – and responsibly.

The same would apply to water consumption – for preparation and for cleaning, and care should be taken to ensure that waste is avoided at all times. Emissions from the preparation process are unavoidable, but can be minimised through the choice of energy (for example gas instead of wood) and ensuring effective ventilation of facilities in general. Where menus are used for guests, consider the type of menu that is presented and look at materials that increase the potential for recycling.

From a Service Provider/Contractor position, there are many ways to minimise environmental impacts and a large number of these are related to the procurement process itself. Reduced packaging; using bulk products; minimising single-serve items and other procurement strategies all contribute to lower waste levels – while some even help protect the environment in other ways. Bottled water remains a contentious and debatable subject with many offering this as a standard menu item. But the impacts associated with bottled water relate to the use of valuable underground resources and the waste created by the bottles themselves. Where possible, water should be served in jugs or from bulk dispensers rather than individual bottles, but the type of event will dictate the most effective method.

Another waste stream relates to packaging. The use of polystyrene products for take-away or service should be avoided as most of this material is non-recyclable, but as new generation packaging appears, Service Providers should check the recyclability of the packaging as a guide. Single-serve sachets and packets (sugar; tomato sauce; vinegar; etc.) all pose litter and waste impacts and as far as possible, these should be avoided in favour of bulk servings (sugar bowls; salt and pepper cellars; bottles and bowls, etc.). Cutlery and tableware should be selected to suit the event itself, with the use of plastic items being avoided as far as possible.

Sustainable product selection is a direct impact that caterers can address through procurement practice. Seafood should only be sourced in accordance with the SASSI 'Green' or 'Orange' ratings and from reputable suppliers, while the use of organic meat and vegetables should take precedent over 'battery-fed' or commercially farmed products that tend to have high levels of chemicals and additives. Local produce is always preferable to products that are imported and the use of seasonal products reduces the need for importation and their associated emissions.

Waste separation at source is a management strategy that must be applied at all events. By ensuring wet (organic) and dry (non-organic) waste is separated at the point at which it is created (preparation kitchens; plate clearing stations; etc.), higher levels of recycling are possible. Separate bins for wet and dry (and for separation of glass, cans, paper and other items as well) is a recommendation in all food service operations, as they increase the ability of the waste contractor to recover separate waste streams – and therefore increases their benefit. Effective planning also contributes to less opportunity for over-production, and this also reduces the amount of food that is 'binned'. Food waste can be used for composting by local community organisations and Service Providers should consider contracting specialist companies to handle this waste on their behalf. Bokashi bins and Vermiculture farms in particular are a good way to process this waste for local initiatives. The key to waste management is planning-for and managing the processes that lead to waste, so consider all the ways that your event creates waste, and develop strategies to address these.