

SUSTAINABLE EVENT GUIDELINES

A practical guide for outdoor event organisers in the City of Yarra



Yarra City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the Traditional Owners and true sovereigns of the land now known as Yarra. We also acknowledge the significant contributions made by other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to life in Yarra. We pay our respects to Elders from all nations and to their Elders past, present and future.

Table of Contents

1. Planning your event	3
Think circular from the start	3
Site selection	4
Equipment: Hire don't buy	4
Choosing your suppliers	4
Working with vendors	5
2. Waste, water and food	5
Waste.....	5
Food waste	6
Water	6
3. Energy, transport & emissions.....	6
Energy	6
Transport	7
4. Equity, Country and community.....	7
Acknowledging Country.....	7
Accessible and inclusive design	7
Community partnerships.....	8
5. Measuring your impact	8
Track what matters	8
Reporting	9
6. Additional resources	9
7. Sustainable Events Checklist	13
Starting off in sustainability	13
Better practice.....	13
Major events	14

About this guide

This guide is for anyone organising an outdoor event in the City of Yarra, from community markets and festivals to activations and public gatherings. It provides practical, accessible steps to help you reduce your event's environmental impact from the planning stage through to delivery and reporting.

This guide responds to the City of Yarra's Climate Emergency Plan 2024-2030 which calls for practical action to cut emissions, reduce waste and support a circular economy.

What is a sustainable outdoor event?

A sustainable event is one that is planned and delivered to minimise harm to the environment, reduce waste and emissions, and create positive outcomes for the community. It avoids single-use items, makes low-carbon travel easy, and uses materials responsibly.

Why are sustainable outdoor events important?

Every outdoor event leaves a footprint, which means the way it's planned and run makes a real difference. Embracing sustainable practices reduces waste sent to landfill, lowers carbon emissions, and minimises impact on outdoor spaces. Beyond the environmental benefits, sustainability can also open doors to additional grant funding and council support, while strengthening your event's reputation with the community, local council and sponsors.

Key areas covered in this guide:

- Planning with sustainability in mind
- Waste, food and water management
- Energy, transport and emissions
- Equity, Country and community inclusion
- Measuring and reporting your impact

1. Planning your event

Think circular from the start

Circular economy thinking means thinking ahead so your event creates as little waste as possible. At every stage ask: Can this be reused? Can we hire instead of buy? Can this material come back into use?

The five principles

- **Refuse & reduce:** Eliminate single-use items, unnecessary packaging and non-essential giveaways from the outset.
- **Reuse & repurpose:** Design for reuse: cups, signage, infrastructure, and décor. Repurpose materials across multiple events.
- **Repair & restore:** Choose durable items that can be maintained and used again rather than replaced.
- **Recycle & recover:** Ensure remaining materials are correctly separated and captured for recycling or composting.
- **Regenerate:** Support natural systems through composting, protecting green spaces, and reducing emissions.

Case Study: Smarter Signage

As an annual event, Carols in the Park relied on freshly printed signage each year. Banners, directional signs and event boards were produced carrying that year's dates and program details and then thrown out once the event wrapped up. But what if the signs didn't have to change? Rethinking this process, organisers designed durable, reusable banners and signs to focus on key details only - the event name and location - while annual dates, times and programming information was moved to a dedicated event website. Over several years, these actions reduced printing costs and waste to landfill as well as the event's overall environmental footprint without any noticeable impact on the attendee experience.

The circular thinking principle: design out waste at the source by creating resources intended for reuse from the start, rather than disposing and replacing them each year.

Site selection

Before you book a site, consider its environmental context and the season.

- Identify risks to soil, water, and wildlife, particularly for [parks and open green spaces](#).
- Avoid sensitive natural habitats; plan foot traffic to protect vegetation.
- Consider weather and seasonal conditions and their impact on infrastructure needs.

Weather and seasonal conditions shape what infrastructure you need to bring in and how much of it. For example, choosing a site with natural tree canopies, or timing the event during cooler months where possible, can reduce the need for additional marquees and shade structures – more equipment hire can mean more transport and more energy use.

As weather extremes are likely to become more severe, adapting to a changing climate will assist event organisers to continue to run successful events into the future.

Equipment: Hire don't buy

Temporary events don't need permanent purchases. Hiring reduces resource use and gives you access to well-maintained, quality equipment.

- Hire staging, fencing, marquees, furniture, lighting, audio visual (AV), and power equipment.
- Use hire companies that maintain and reuse equipment across multiple events.
- Design bump-in/bump-out processes that protect materials for future use.

Bump in and out isn't just a logistical task, it's an opportunity to protect equipment and other assets. For example, instead of throwing fragile Christmas decorations at the back of a van where they're likely to be lost or damaged, packing them carefully in a durable container will mean they're protected and can be reused the future years.

Choosing your suppliers

Your suppliers shape much of our event's footprint. When selecting vendors and service providers, consider:

- Starting local: local businesses are often more flexible and willing to work with your sustainability requirements.
- Ask suppliers if they offer reusable, repairable, or recyclable products?

- Choose suppliers who already operate sustainably: social enterprises and independent food vendors often have sustainability already built into the way they work.

Prioritise local suppliers to reduce transport emissions and support the local economy

Working with vendors

Set clear sustainability expectations with food and beverage vendors from the start.

- Prohibit single-use plastics (bags, cutlery, polystyrene containers).
- Encourage reusable or compostable packaging.
- Consider investing in event-wide reusable cup and crockery systems.
- Support vendors to share infrastructure such as washing stations, shared crockery, and clear bin systems.

Providing shared infrastructure such as reusable cups, crockery and wash stations will reduce an event's environmental footprint by significantly reducing waste. These systems can be more expensive and require additional event staff or volunteers to collect, wash and return serving ware to vendors. Consider trialling them at larger events or where budget and scale allow.

2. Waste, water and food

Managing waste, food and water is at the heart of creating more sustainable outdoor events. Think beyond disposal - from minimising packaging and preventing food waste to choosing reusable crockery and cutlery and planning for water conservation. These essential elements can shift from being sources of waste to opportunities for smarter, more responsible event delivery.

Waste

Effective waste management starts with event planning and purchasing decisions.

- Set a clear goal (e.g. zero waste to landfill) and communicate it to all vendors and staff.
- Align your waste streams with council systems: For events funded by the City of Yarra, general waste, recycling and organic services can be coordinated.
- Plan for a post-event waste audit to understand what worked and what to improve.

Bin station design

Well-designed bin stations are essential. If they're confusing, they won't be used correctly.

- Group waste stations into landfill, recycling, and organics bins together in one spot.
- Place stations in high-use areas such as food zones, entry/exit points.
- Use clear, visual labels that show actual event items (not just text).
- Keep lids open or use clearly shaped slots to reduce hesitation.
- Staff stations with trained volunteers during peak times.

For advice on waste management or setting up a waste audit contact waste@yarracity.vic.gov.au

Food waste

Food planning should reduce waste before it happens.

- Work with vendors to forecast demand and avoid overproduction.
- Encourage flexible portion sizes and made-to-order options.
- Promote plant-based menu options, which typically have a lower environmental impact.
- Eliminate single-use crockery and cutlery and use reusable systems instead.

Composting

Food scraps and compostable materials should be returned to the earth, not landfill.

- Provide clearly labelled organics bins at every food area.
- Use compostable packaging and educate patrons about disposal.
- Partner with a local composting provider to process food waste correctly.

Food rescue

Avoid sending edible food to waste. Organisations like [OzHarvest](#) and [SecondBite](#) can collect surplus food from events.

- Contact a food rescue partner before your event to make arrangements for collection.
- Brief vendors on donation procedures and food safety requirements.

Water

- Install free water refill stations to eliminate bottled water sales.
- Encourage attendees to bring reusable bottles in pre-event promotion.
- Avoid single-use bottled drinks where possible.
- Manage wastewater and grey water responsibly to protect surrounding environments.

3. Energy, transport & emissions

Energy use and transport are often the largest contributors to an outdoor event's carbon footprint. Prioritise renewable energy, low-emissions options, and smarter travel choices to significantly reduce environmental impact.

Energy

Understand what power is needed, when, and where and then design the lowest-impact solution.

Power sources

- Connect to mains electricity where available, particularly at sites with a renewable energy supply.
- Avoid diesel generators where possible and choose battery storage systems charged from renewable sources, or hybrid generator systems.
- Seek out solar-powered systems for lighting towers, small stages, and phone charging stations.

Reducing energy demand on site

- Use LED lighting and energy-efficient equipment.
- Schedule power use to avoid unnecessary idle time.

- Turn off equipment when not in use and brief vendors and staff so that everyone's on board.

Transport

Make low-carbon travel the easy choice to reduce event emissions.

- Promote public transport routes (train, tram, bus) in all event promotion.
- If possible, instal clear directional signage from transport hubs to the event site as well as within the event site.
- Offer secure bike parking and highlight nearby cycling routes.
- Include travel tips in ticket confirmations, your website, and social media.

It's easy to get around Yarra sustainably. Visit yarracity.vic.gov.au for local options.

Event logistics

- Consolidate deliveries and reduce trips where possible.
- Prioritise local suppliers.
- Allocate priority parking for electric vehicles.

4. Equity, Country and community

Sustainable outdoor events are not only environmentally responsible, they're inclusive and reflect and respect the diversity of the communities they serve.

Acknowledging Country

All events in the City of Yarra take place on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. Acknowledging this connection is a meaningful starting point.

- Include a Welcome to Country where possible, delivered by a Wurundjeri elder or representative.
- Ensure any Acknowledgement of Country is accurate, context-specific, and not used as a formality.
- Consider inviting First Nations people to participate in event planning including programming, design, and decision-making.
- Ensure cultural knowledge is shared with permission and appropriately attributed.

Reach out to the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation www.wurundjeri.com.au

Accessible and inclusive design

A well-organised event is one that is welcoming and comfortable for everyone.

- Provide step-free access, accessible pathways, and accessible seating throughout the site.
- Ensure accessible toilets, quiet spaces, and clear signage are available.
- Consider sensory needs: noise, lighting, and crowd density.
- Offer inclusive communication using plain language and multilingual information where relevant.

Visit yarracity.vic.gov.au for accessibility planning guidance and the event planning toolkit.

Community partnerships

Consider working with local organisations, community groups, and social enterprises to shape and deliver the event.

- Collaborate with groups representing diverse communities in Yarra.
- Support local participation through programming, employment, and buying local.

Working with the local community can support benefits flowing back to the community, economically, culturally, and socially.

5. Measuring your impact

Track what matters

You don't need complex tools to measure your event's sustainability performance. Start simple and build over time. Focus on a small number of meaningful indicators.

Suggested metrics to track

Waste

A waste audit helps you understand what actually happened with your waste to plan better next time.

- At minimum document bin fullness and note what types of items ended up in the wrong bins. At the end of the event, before bins are emptied, take a photo of each bin and note how full it is and whether contamination is visible.
- For a more detailed audit, weigh and categorise materials from each waste stream.
- **A simple metric to track:** the ratio of landfill waste to recycling and compost. The goal over time is to see landfill shrink as a proportion of total waste.
- **Web search:** Try *free waste audit guidance and templates for community use, Melbourne*.

Many waste and recycling providers offer waste auditing services. The City of Yarra's waste team can also provide advice.

For waste audit advice contact waste@yarracity.vic.gov.au

Energy

- Total power used and the source (grid, solar, generator).
- Solar/battery, hybrid and bio-diesel generators are sustainable options however they may be more expensive options.
- A generator fuel log is the most accessible tool for small to medium-sized events. Record the fuel level at the start and end of the event, noting the generator size and fuel type and calculate litres consumed. This gives you a consistent baseline across events. For hired generators, ask the hire company for the unit's fuel consumption rate.
- For events with access to grid power, a simple, low-cost, plug-in energy monitor can track kilowatt hours consumed across an event.
- **A simple metric to track:** litres of fuel or kilowatt hours consumed per 100 attendees.
- **Web search:** Try *free energy audit tools for sustainable outdoor events Melbourne*.

Transport

- Estimated proportion of attendees travelling by public transport, bike, or on foot.

- A short attendee survey is a practical tool. A paper or preferably QR code survey asking people how they travelled to the event and where from takes less than a minute and gives you meaningful data on transport emissions. Google or Microsoft Forms are easy to use and results are automatically collated.
- **A simple metric to track:** percentage of attendees who arrived by walking, cycling or public transport.

Food waste

- Volume of surplus food rescued versus sent to landfill.
- Ask food vendors to weigh their initial and leftover stock levels using a basic set of kitchen or bathroom scales. This gives a rough but useful picture of food waste across the event.
- **A simple metric to track:** estimated kilograms of food waste per vendor, and whether unsold food was donated, composted or disposed of.

Reporting

Share your results with vendors, partners, and attendees. Honest, balanced reporting builds trust.

- Use plain language and avoid jargon and overly technical terms.
- Highlight both achievements and areas for improvement.
- Be clear about what you measured and what you estimated.

Sharing what you've learned, including what didn't work. This helps the whole event community improve.

6. Additional resources

Useful websites and contacts

The resources and suppliers listed below are suggestions for your sustainable event. They are not officially endorsed by the City of Yarra.

City of Yarra

- [Event Planning Toolkit](#): outlines the key elements of planning and running an outdoor event in Yarra.
- [Events in Public Spaces Permit](#): You need an Event in Public Spaces Permit for events in Council-owned or managed parks, open spaces and roadways. All events covered in Yarra's Events in Public Spaces Policy need a permit.
- [Yarra's circular economy](#): Learn about circular economy principles, Yarra's circular economy map and other handy hints.
- [Climate Emergency Plan 2024–30](#): a roadmap to achieve net-zero emissions across the municipality by accelerating the transition to renewable energy, sustainable transport, and a circular zero-waste economy.
- [Travel sustainably in Yarra](#): Information about getting around Yarra sustainably – by foot, bike, public transport or car sharing.
- [Diversity and inclusion](#): Learn more about the vibrant and diverse communities in Yarra.
- For waste enquiries including advice on recycling and waste audits **email: waste@yarracity.vic.gov.au**

Victorian State Government

- [Victorian single-use plastics ban](#) (prohibited items): Learn about the problematic single-use plastics that are now banned from sale or supply in Victoria.
- [EPA Victoria](#) (noise, waste, water runoff guidelines): Helps organisers plan sustainable outdoor events by providing critical guidance on the General Environmental Duty, permitting requirements for noise, and site pollution management. Guidance to ensure event compliance with Victorian environmental laws, reducing ecological footprints and minimising community disruption.

Other useful guides

- [Green Music Australia's Sound Country Green Artist Guide](#): A free downloadable guide designed for the music industry but containing lots of useful information on how to improve environmental performance – from events, energy use, tours and transport, to merchandise, packaging and waste. The guide encourages leading by example and bringing audiences along to create deep, cultural change.
- [City of Melbourne Sustainable Event Guide Quick Guide](#): a succinct guide to help event organisers take action on climate change and reduce the true impact of events on the environment. Note that some compliance information is specific to the City of Melbourne.
- [Greening Your Event: Sustainable Event Management for a Brighter Future](#)

Free online tools

- [The Carbon Calculator](#): to estimate your carbon footprint and find out how much you need to offset to compensate for your greenhouse gas emissions.
- [Green Events Tool](#): A free, web-based assessment platform created by the UN to help planners measure, promote, and evaluate event sustainability, covering areas like transport, waste, and energy.

Food

Local to Yarra:

[Gleadell Street Market](#): A fresh food market located on Gleadell Street Richmond that runs every Saturday, 7am to 1pm.

Catering: Social Enterprises

- [STREAT](#) (Collingwood): a local, leading social enterprise supporting young people across Melbourne. They offer catering services and pre-vocational training. Get in touch to discuss event opportunities.
- [ASRC Catering](#) (Fitzroy North): an award-winning social enterprise of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre that creates pathways to employment for people seeking asylum. They offer training, mentoring and paid work through their catering and event services.
- [Crafted Culture / SisterWorks](#): Social enterprise catering in Melbourne by Crafted Culture, based in Carlton North, is part of SisterWorks and operates as both a catering service and a social enterprise café. Catering services include corporate events, office catering, and community functions.

Catering: First Nation

- [Jarrah Catering](#): a proud Aboriginal company built on a shared commitment to Indigenous business development, career development and advancement, including key community engagements and initiatives across Victoria.

Food rescue:

- [OzHarvest food rescue](#): food items must be kept safe until the collection. Get in touch to see if excess food from your event is suitable for food rescue.
- [SecondBite food rescue](#): a minimum donation of half a pallet of food is required for collection.

Food waste: Commercial composting

- For food scraps, spoiled produce, and compostable serve ware, establish an Organics (FOGO) bin system rather than sending waste to landfill.
- FOGO bins can be arranged via Yarra's waste contractor for Council supported events.
- Commercial collection contractors include [KS Environmental](#), [Cleanaway](#) and [Compost connect](#).

Reusable Serving Ware & Systems:

- [Green My Plate](#): provide washable, reusable plates and bowls for food vendors.
- [B-Alternative](#): social enterprise providing crockery hire systems for parties, weddings and music festivals including waste educators.
- [Bettercup](#): provider for scaling up reusable cup systems at Melbourne-based music festivals, stadiums, and public arenas.
- [Party kit network](#): for parties and small-scale events. Network members include the [Richmond](#) and [Collingwood](#) Toy Libraries.
- **Wash Stations**: Hire 'Wash Against Waste' mobile dishwashing facilities from providers such as the [Melbourne Farmers Markets](#) or [B-Alternative](#). They typically include a commercial dishwasher, marquee, and reusable dishware to eliminate single-use plastics.

Waste

- For waste enquiries including advice on recycling and waste audits email: **waste@yarracity.vic.gov.au**

Compostable/Recyclable packaging and serving ware:

- Under Victoria's single-use plastics ban, conventional plastic and PLA (bioplastic) plates, cutlery, and straws are banned.
- Some providers of biodegradable or recyclable food packing and serving ware are: [Pinnacle Packaging](#), [Pakio](#) and [BioPak](#).

First Nations

- [Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation](#): serves as the official representative body for the Traditional Owners of Greater Melbourne. They provide a wide range of services including cultural heritage management, cross-cultural education, environmental land management, and traditional ceremonies.

Transport

- [Bicycle Victoria](#) hires [bike parking, racks and rails](#) and has guides on [riding routes into Melbourne](#).
- [Information](#) about the safest pedestrian crossings and local bicycle paths in Yarra so attendees can easily navigate the inner-city terrain.
- Promote [car sharing](#) to travel to your event in the City of Yarra. Commercial car-sharing providers operating in Yarra include [GoGet](#) and [Flexicar](#).

Energy

- Grid power City of Yarra: The City of Yarra has a variety of parks and reserves that can be booked for outdoor events, most of which are equipped with power bullets enabling connection to grid power. The City of Yarra provides 100% renewable energy for grid-supplied electricity.
- Battery banks: Smaller scale events may consider using 100% renewable energy (sourced from solar) used to recharge battery banks. These can often be paired with mobile solar panels to enable recharging during the day. Some providers include [Off-Grid Hire](#) and [Event Essentials](#).

- Hybrid options for larger scale events may include a backup diesel motor. These systems automatically switch between power sources to ensure continuous operation at night or during poor weather. Suppliers include [Kennard Hire](#) and [Aggreko](#).
- Biodiesel & Biofuels: For large-scale power requirements (e.g. large stages) where solar power alone isn't enough, biodiesel is a transitional low-carbon alternative. It significantly reduces greenhouse gas emissions compared to standard fossil fuels so opt for biodiesel/fuel if possible.

Grants

- The City of Yarra offers targeted community and climate grants to support local, grassroots events with an environmental and sustainability focus. Funding primarily runs through Yarra Community Grants, Climate Action Grants, and subsidised venue programs.
- [Climate Action Quick Response Grants](#): Provide up to \$4,000 to fund small projects and one-off events that accelerate climate and environmental action at the local level.
- [Yarra Community Grants](#) (Small, Medium & Large): This program frequently supports events that benefit the Yarra community and align with Council's climate and sustainability goals.
- [Town Hall Subsidy Grants](#): If you plan to host your sustainable event in a City of Yarra town hall (like Fitzroy, Collingwood, or Richmond), not-for-profit groups can apply for generous subsidies to drastically reduce venue hire costs.

7. Sustainable Events Checklist

This checklist is divided into three sections: Easy to do; Better practice and Major events. The sections cater for different event scales and organisational capacity but feel free to draw from any or all sections.

Starting off in sustainability

This section suggests some sustainable event fundamentals that can be achieved with minimal cost and planning.

WASTE & RECYCLING

- ☐ Set up clearly labelled bins: landfill, recycling, and compost & use colour coding
- ☐ Choose reusable or compostable serving ware and packaging : avoid single-use plastics for cups, plates, and cutlery
- ☐ Place a volunteer at bin stations: this helps prevent contamination and guides attendees
- ☐ Request a small skip or extra council collection: book in advance with your local council

COMMUNICATIONS

- ☐ Promote the event digitally: use email, social media, and QR codes instead of printed flyers
- ☐ Share sustainable transport options clearly: highlight tram, train, bus & cycling routes to the venue
- ☐ Encourage attendees to BYO water bottle: highlight this in pre-event communications

CATERING

- ☐ Offer a plant-based menu: even one or two vegetarian/vegan options reduces emissions
- ☐ Source food from local producers: Local markets such as the Gleadell Street Market in Richmond or catering social enterprises are great starting points
- ☐ Order realistic quantities to minimise food waste: work with vendors or caterers to estimate portions accurately

LOCATION BASICS

- ☐ Choose a site with existing infrastructure: parks with water, power, and waste facilities reduce impact
- ☐ Book a water refill station: partner with City West Water as sponsors or hire portable fountains

Better practice

Consider going further in the areas of renewable energy, active transport, equipment hire and post-event reporting.

ENERGY

- ☐ Use LED lighting throughout the event: significantly reduces energy consumption vs halogen
- ☐ Source a solar or battery-powered generator: this avoids diesel generators
- ☐ Calculate your event's carbon footprint and consider options to offset: Look into tools such as [Greenfleet](#) or [Carbon Neutral](#)

TRANSPORT

- ☐ Partner with a bike share scheme: Melbourne Bike Share or Lime e-bikes encourage sustainable travel
- ☐ Encourage car-pooling and car sharing: both options represent cost savings to patrons and lower overall emissions
- ☐ Arrange a shuttle from a key public transport hub: Particularly useful for events in outer Melbourne parks

PURCHASING

- ☐ Hire equipment rather than buying new: tents, tables, and staging can all be hired locally
- ☐ Use biodegradable or natural event decorations: avoid single-use decorations /installations
- ☐ Source merchandise and signage from local printers: look for FSC-certified paper and water-based inks

REPORTING

- ☐ Track waste diversion rates on the day: weigh or estimate landfill vs recycling and compost volumes
- ☐ Share a post-event sustainability summary: even a brief social post builds community accountability

Major events

This section is suited to large-scale major events, such as street-based festivals and events.

PLANNING

- ☐ Appoint a dedicated sustainability coordinator: responsible for green targets across all event elements
- ☐ Create a sustainability plan aligned with the City of Yarra's guidelines: see [event permit](#) and these sustainability guidelines
- ☐ Set measurable targets before the event: e.g. 80% waste diversion rate, 100% renewable electricity

WASTE AT SCALE

- ☐ Engage a certified waste management partner: companies like Cleanaway, Solo Resource Recovery and CIA offer event services
- ☐ Implement a full circular economy approach: coordinate with vendors on packaging standards and take-back schemes
- ☐ Commission a post-event waste audit: this quantifies outcomes and informs future event planning

ENERGY & INFRASTRUCTURE

- ☐ Power the event entirely from renewables: negotiate green energy supply or use solar/battery microgrids
- ☐ Specify low-emission transport in vendor contracts: require suppliers to use electric or hybrid delivery vehicles where possible
- ☐ Use modular, reusable staging and signage.

COMMUNITY & LEGACY

- ☐ Partner with a local environmental organisations and social enterprises: e.g. Sustainability Victoria, Greening Australia, or a local Friends group
- ☐ Integrate an environmental education component: workshops, activations, or signage that engage attendees on sustainability
- ☐ Leave a tangible environmental legacy: tree planting, habitat restoration, or a community garden contribution
- ☐ Share learnings with event partners and broader event networks: this contributes to city-wide learnings and builds your event's reputation