

A More Sustainable ASLE: Conference Goals and Objectives

Part of ASLE's mission is "to promote the understanding of nature and culture for a sustainable world." To fulfill its mission, ASLE is committed to "maintaining and advocating ecologically sustainable practices." In its strategic plan goals, ASLE lists "improve the environmental sustainability of the organization" and "explore how innovative conferences and symposia can help us fulfill our mission."¹

One way in which to improve our environmental sustainability is through innovative actions in the planning of our biennial conferences, taking into consideration the environmental as well as social and economic impact the conference has on both the ASLE and local conference communities. Minimizing our carbon footprint through reduction in resources used and waste produced, contributing to the health of the local community by drawing upon their resources, and fostering the social, intellectual, and cultural growth of the ASLE community through a commitment to diversity and innovation are values connected to sustainable practice.

With this mission, these goals, and these values in mind, we propose the following initiatives be pursued in planning ASLE biennial conferences:

Planning and Communications

- Emphasize ASLE's commitment to a green/sustainable event on the conference website by listing steps we are taking to make the event green/sustainable on the website, highlighting features of the host campus and community that are sustainable, etc.
- Provide a list of steps conference attendees can take to reduce their carbon footprint, including resources.
- Invite conference attendees to share their ideas for reducing individual footprints online.

Venue/Facilities

- Gather information about the conference facilities (dorms, hotels, session venues) to share with attendees with respect to the following considerations:
 - LEED certification or other modifications to reduce the carbon footprint (e.g., energy-saving lights, recycling opportunities, AC that can be controlled to reduce energy consumption, energy STAR equipment)
 - Natural sunlight exposure (to reduce the need for reliance on electricity)
 - Accessibility for people with various disabilities

Audio, Visual, Lighting, and Technical Needs

- Work with conference hosts to perform set up using as little energy as possible (e.g., during the day when natural daylight can replace electrical lights)
- Request information on campus labor pool for set up and technical assistance (e.g., students? Local?)
- Find out if the equipment we will use can be placed in low energy modes/turned off when not in use

Menu, Catering, Food

- Find out what our local, seasonal, and organic food options are on campus and in the community and share this information on the website for conference attendees
- For catered meals (e.g., banquet), try to plan a predominantly vegetarian menu (with vegan, gluten-free, and other dietary options); if serving meat or fish, seek the most sustainable options
- Find out if host institution provides, or could provide, clearly labeled landfill (incinerator??), recycling, and compost receptacles—work with waste management or the physical plant

¹ Quoted from the ASLE Strategic Plan 2009, <http://www.asle.org/site/about/policies/strategicplan/>

- Encourage conference attendees to bring their own water bottles and coffee mugs and make sure there are convenient places for refills (water fountains, pitchers, coffee stations, etc.)
- Request the following for any catered meals (e.g., banquet) and find out if the on-campus dining facilities have these options so that we can inform attendees:
 - serving, when possible, in bulk rather than individually packaged servings
 - reusable dinnerware, or if necessary, compostable/biodegradable dinnerware
 - reusable napkins, or at least recycled ones; tablecloths should be washable or reusable

Printed Materials

- Encourage online registration for conference and all associated events
- Create an online forum for individuals to post their handouts (while still providing accessible formats for persons with disabilities on request)
- Minimize the amount of printed material handed out at the conference, providing online resources instead
- For printing at the conference, work with hosts to identify available printers that have energy-saving modes and use recycled paper
- For print materials that we distribute (folders, name tags, conference program, etc.) try to print using sustainable resources (recycled paper, soy-based inks, local vendors)
- Encourage conference guests to patron local sustainable/green businesses for printing needs (and provide a list of those places online)
- Encourage conference attendees to bring their own nametag holders; provide a limited amount but have a place for recycling them for future use
- Print, and encourage printing that is, double-sided, 1.5 spacing instead of double, 11 pt font instead of 12, .75" margins instead of 1", etc.

Décor (Flowers, Displays, and Decoration)

- Minimize or eliminate décor for conference events; preference for reusable décor and centerpieces.
- Use re-usable signage (e.g., white boards) whenever possible

Event Staff

- Meet with event staff to emphasize our commitment to hosting a green event; designate someone to communicate our wishes and work with staff to reduce waste and energy use

Carbon Footprint

- Consider, if feasible, estimating the conference's carbon footprint and posting this on the conference registration site
- Provide resources online for conference attendees to offset the conference footprint through donation, volunteer time, etc.

Field Trips/Local Attractions

- Highlight trips, vendors, and attractions that are eco-friendly and contribute to sustainability
- Provide information about accessibility and accessible options for those with disabilities

Transportation

- Work with on-site planners to arrange shuttle services and group transportation
- Provide an online forum for people to arrange group transportation/carpooling in advance

Clean Up

- Find out if there is some place local we can transport compostable material, recyclables, etc.
- Ask event staff to use organic cleaning products when possible
- Find out from host institution's waste management facilities what they do to reduce waste and facilitate recycling and share this information with conference attendees online

By working to make the ASLE biennial conference as sustainable as possible through the efforts of the conference planners, host institution, and membership, we are enhancing the sustainability of the organization as a whole.

These are some suggestions of ideas to send to conference attendees or post to the conference website:

10 Things You Can Do to Contribute to a More Sustainable Conference:

- Be mindful of how many times you print your conference paper, and print only necessary documents employing smaller margins, duplex printing, and other strategies to reduce paper and ink consumption
- Consider posting handouts to a website rather than printing copies to distribute
- Shut off lights and technology in academic and residence rooms when not in use
- Bring your own coffee mug or water bottle and make use of refill stations
- Patron local and/or sustainable businesses for your needs while in town
- Bring your own nametag holder or be sure to recycle the one you receive at the conference so we can reuse them
- Walk, bike, or make use of public transportation while in town
- Make use of recycling receptacles on campus
- Reduce food waste and minimize consumption of heavily packaged foods
- Offset your carbon footprint for the conference by contributing through donation or volunteer time to a sustainably-minded organization you respect