

By Zet Baer

PLAN

with a

Lighter

Footprint

To meet new environmental standards, festival organizers must plan well and recruit green participation from everyone involved in the event.

Stroll down the calm, shady streets of the historic King William neighborhood near downtown San Antonio, Texas. On most days, you'll be transported to the 19th century by the sight of beautifully restored, Victorian-era homes and well-tended gardens. You won't see many people about, maybe a few neighbors in their yards and a handful of tourists with walking maps in hand. But on one Saturday in mid-April each year, the scene changes drastically. A teeming swarm of approximately 50,000 visitors overrun the 16-block area of the neighborhood, normally home to fewer than 250 households and businesses. The hordes are there to enjoy the King William Fair, a daylong event that caps Fiesta San Antonio. Fiesta is the city's annual 11-day celebration, featuring multiple parades, parties, fundraisers and festivals. The King William Fair is a family-oriented festival and families come out in abundance. A parade kicks off a day filled with food and art booths, entertainment stages, a kids kingdom and other merriment.

That Was Fun – Now Clean It Up

The fair closes at 6:00 p.m., and for 43 years, the King William Fair Committee has been committed to returning the neighborhood to its normal, clean and exquisite self before noon of the following day. As attendance has grown exponentially, so has the cleanup process. In 2011, the King William Fair accepted the added challenge – working within the guidelines of a new City of San Antonio Green Events Ordinance, an initiative which seeks to minimize the environmental impact of large, scale public events.

Like governments and municipalities across the globe, the City of San Antonio is requiring event organizers to implement sustainable practices to control the impact of large outdoor gatherings. The King William Fair was eager to comply with the city's requirements, understanding the ground-level implications for everyone involved with the festival.

Meeting the Goal

The 2011 King William Fair met the Green Events Ordinance guidelines, thanks to the diligent and enthusiastic support of the neighborhood association, volunteers, vendors and sponsors. In preparing for next year's Fair and beyond, the Fair has made plans to shrink environmental impact even further, with the long-range goal of reaching Zero Waste Management.

In order to reach these desired outcomes, fair staff and volunteer leadership

are examining every area of their operations and learning from the best practices of other festivals across the country.

Though each of our events differ in size, style, geography and demographics, there are some shared approaches that I believe can be used by festival and event organizers, no matter what city or country they are in. The best advice is to start where you are and not take on more than you and your team can handle.

FOUR STEPS TO A GREENER EVENT

1. Start Now

Meaningful change will affect every part of your planning and operations, and it will require buy-in from everyone involved with the event (see "Buy-In Chart"). Build a culture of possibility thinking, starting with your board and core staff and working through the various stakeholders. Almost everyone will happily agree to the importance of "going green," but it's vital to go beyond the level of cordial nods and into the realm of planning and implementing change. Identify and enroll the key individuals needed to create support for the additional expenditures of time, talent and resources required to implement modified procedures.

Make a commitment to a greener event and make it part of your planning from day one. Develop a policy statement that establishes long-range goals and immediate objectives. Lay out your vision in concrete, achievable terms to help everyone understand the benefits that will result from supporting this effort. Be sure to solicit feedback and suggestions, for others may have ideas and resources you haven't identified yet.

2. Manage Your Footprint

Examine everything your festival buys, uses, consumes and disposes: electricity, publicity materials, transportation, infrastructure, communications, signage, food and drink containers, tickets, and tokens. You have direct control over some; others come under the purview of the vendors, subcontractors and governmental agencies. All of the materials used to produce your festival have an impact on overall usage of resources, and should be considered carefully. To what extent can the volume of these be reduced?

- Begin with *waste prevention and reduction*. Are your materials biodegradable,

reusable or recyclable? Instead of paper tickets, how about using the new tokens that are made of biodegradable potatoes? Utilize email, social media and the Internet to reduce printed materials. Use two-sided printing for handouts, biodegradable bags for recycling, recycled paper and vegetable/soy inks for handouts. Reduce the amount of copying and printing around the office.

- The King William Fair had a neighbor who developed an App for smart phones that allowed guests to look at a map of the grounds, scan the entertainment schedule, find their favorite beverage, view the parade route and the mass transit schedules. This allows us to significantly reduce the number of printed programs.

Single use bottles are a big source of waste. To reduce the amount of recyclables, invite guests to bring their own personal bottles and refill them at beverage stations around the grounds. Bumbershoot, Seattle's Music and Art Festival, offers free refills to those who bring their own; other festivals charge a minimal fee.

Can you identify alternative sources that could supply more ecologically sustainable materials than the ones you have used in the past?

- Consider *waste management* and recycling. Research waste collection companies in your area and find a good waste management partner. Determine what you are going to recycle at your event. Predict the waste stream and plan to mitigate. Alison LeRoy of the Dublin (Ohio) Irish Festival (105,000 visitors) recycled 8.3 tons of paper, aluminum and plastic this year. Susan Meyer, Special Events Coordinator for the Milwaukee Art Museum says their patrons are very willing to use recycle bins – 25 percent of the waste leaving their grounds is recycled.
- Compostables. You can set up a system for gathering compostable food scraps from vendor prep and consumer compost in your recycling stations, but you need to find a partner who will take the compostable refuse. And you can compost more than you think – some authorities require events to use corn-based compostable service ware.
- Put a team of volunteers in place to staff your recycling stations to facilitate proper sorting and prevent cross contamination. The City of Norfolk (Virginia) trains "Recycling Ambassadors" to oversee recycling stations and impart information to festival patrons.
- Have a plan in place to take excess unsold food to a food bank or a shelter.
- Make it easy for your guests! Signage is key to your success. Once your guests are on site, let them know how and where to recycle. Keep your signage consistent and authoritative.

- Keep consistent with your containers
 - if your community already provides residential recycling in a blue or green bin, consider using the same color. Better yet, get your local collection agency to donate the same residential containers that your attendees already know and use. Many have had good success with Clear Stream brand containers, which hold a clear bag in a simple wire frame with a top that indicates holes for plastic bottles or aluminum cans.
- Look at your event's *energy management* across the board. In San Antonio we can purchase credits for wind power through our public utility company. Can you use more fuel-efficient vehicles for the parade and your staff? Is it possible to convert amusement rides to energy powered by alternative fuel?
- How can you *reduce the overall miles traveled* to your event? Promote carpooling, biking, walking and use of public transit. Provide shuttle service from public transit stops or parking lots. Contact your local transit company about providing park and ride service from outlying locations. Create a carpool or rideshare program and offer discounts for those who participate. Provide amenities for bicyclists. At the King William Fair a local bicycle repair shop offered to set up a bike valet service at our event. We provided a secure space for them and they provided staffing. This was a win-win for everyone. The guests were able to ride right up to an admission gate and feel safe about leaving their bike for the duration of their time at the event.
- Bumbershoot in Seattle measures carbon offset options and partners with Green Mountain Energy Company, which donates the total number of CAR certified carbon offsets to make travel by the visiting entertainers 100 percent carbon neutral. This initiative offsets approximately 219 metric tons of CO2 emissions and has the same positive environmental impact as not driving a car over 535,000 miles, recycling more than 193,000 pounds of newspaper, or the carbon absorbed by over 724 trees in their lifetime.

3. Create Partnerships

Work within your community to create the partnerships that will make your event successful. Volunteers can be recruited through many avenues:

- Many corporations have volunteer teams designed to work public events
- Civic organizations, 4H clubs and scouts are all seeking opportunities to serve
- High school and college students often need community service hours as part of their academic requirement. Consider providing incentives for your

volunteers, such as free admission, a volunteer rest station, t-shirt or complimentary food and beverages. The Kerrville (Texas) Folk Festival has special t-shirts printed for their "Sanitation Crew," and has built a special place of honor for that group in their culture.

Special sponsorships supporting your green initiatives provide an opportunity for local businesses to promote their name and brand. The burgeoning market of "Green" companies is a perfect place to find allies in your effort to conserve resources and manage impact.

4. Educate and Empower Your Guests

Use your platform to educate your guests, vendors and – through your event promotions and public relations – the community at large. The success of your sustainable program lies with your event guests. As you advertise the festival, let the audience know in advance what you are doing. Shape your message to the demographics of your population – if your community has already made recycling part of its routine, you may not need to do much in advance. If people are still learning about recycling, you may need to be more assertive. In addition to advertising and public relations, use your website and social media, such as Facebook and Twitter to help you spread the word.

Consider adding a "Green Zone" as part of your overall activities, with information, activities and participation from local non-profit organizations involved in sustainable practices. In addition to providing information about conservation at your event, the Green Zone kiosks can include entertaining and resourceful exhibits about saving energy and managing waste in the home and at work.

You may want to undertake a demographic survey at your event, if you haven't done so or if it has been some time since your last one. This will provide you with more information as you begin planning for the following year. Again, college and university students can help you accomplish this.

After your event, report your measurements and your success. The hauling company can provide you with information on the tons of recycling you kept out of the landfill.

Benefits

Our events gather large segments of our populations to raise money for worthy causes, rally community spirit among our populace, celebrate our arts and perpetuate our cultures. Changing policies and processes that have been in place for decades requires the festival, its stakeholders and participants to adopt a "Culture of Possibility" – new knowledge and fresh commitment to sustainable practices. In addition to global benefits, the event community

realizes several immediate rewards:

- Minimizing waste improves the efficiency of an event and reduces hauling costs as you divert recyclables and compostables from the landfill.
- Promoting alternative transportation and using renewable sources of energy will decrease greenhouse gases emitted by your event.
- Many in your community will expect conservation from your organization, and if they don't you will be rewarded with being at the forefront of these sustainable practices.
- A successful program can create positive change within your community and increase environmental awareness.
- Our efforts to "green" our events will weave ecological stewardship and sustainable processes through the next generation of merriment.
- As event organizers, these are steps we can take to learn and implement more sustainable practices. It can save money, improve our relationship with Mother Earth and, after all, it is the right thing to do!

Useful Resources

City of San Antonio Green Events Guide

[http://www.sanantonio.gov/oep/pdf/Green%20Events%20Guide%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.sanantonio.gov/oep/pdf/Green%20Events%20Guide%20(2).pdf)

UK Sustainable Events Standard BSI 8901

<http://shop.bsigroup.com/en/ProductDetail/?pid=00000000030196056>

Making Events More Sustainable: A Guide to BS 8901

<http://shop.bsigroup.com/en/ProductDetail/?pid=00000000030202077>

US EPA Sustainable Events Guidelines

<http://www.environment.tas.gov.au/file.aspx?id=11736>

US EPA Recycle On The Go, Special Events

<http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/conserv/rrr/rogo/venues/events.htm>

Carbon Offset Provider

<http://www.carbonfund.org/>

Zero Waste Guidelines

<http://www.ecocycle.org/zwevents/DIY/index.cfm>

Buy-In Chart:

“Create a Culture of Possibility Thinking.” In pursuing a greener event and planning for the “zero waste” standard, it is important to recruit all of the stakeholders associated with the event using the following Buy-In Chart.

STAKEHOLDER	GREEN ROLE
Board of Directors	Establish vision and long-range goals, commit to support
Professional Staff	Set objectives, develop environmental stewardship policy, apply new procedures, train volunteers
Event Volunteers	Understand the commitment to a cleaner festival, staff and implement new initiatives, help communicate the green event idea
Sponsors & Supporters	Share and support the initiative and help recruit partnerships with new supporters from ecological and sustainable advocacy groups
Parks & Recreation, Government Planning	Provide consultation and support for green initiatives – excellent source of ideas and resources
Waste Management	Active participant in recycling and low-impact waste disposal
Health Department	Consult and advise regarding green contributions to sanitation, food preparation and disposal
Energy Provider (Utility)	Provide energy from a renewable source
CVB & Tourism Bureaus	Include green commitment in event description and promotion
News Media	Communicate environmental commitment, educate public on mass transit, recycling
Vendors	Use low-impact disposables, support zero waste standards
Property/Business Owners & Neighbors	Appreciate the event's effort to lighten its footprint on the area, cooperate with increased recycling and management activities
Green Non-Profits	Participate in public education (“Green Zone” info kiosks) activities, provide volunteers, advocate
Event Guests	Take public transportation or bike to event, bring reusable water containers, recycle materials, cooperate with policies
Earth	Continues to provide a habitable environment

Zet Baer is the Fair Coordinator for the King William Fair in San Antonio, TX. She can be reached at: zet@kwfair.org or 210-271-3247.