



## The Greening of Festivals, Conferences & Events in 2021

2020 was certainly not a good year for in-person festivals, conferences or other events! 😞

As bad as this has been financially for the industry, so many tourism businesses are developing creative and innovative ways to sustain themselves. They're adapting and expanding certain areas of their businesses, such as outdoor seating and increased take-out food and beverage services. And COVID safety precautions originally caused the industry to become somewhat "more wasteful" because of all of the disposables and extra precautions that were deemed necessary. But now operators have adjusted to new norms and realized what safety precautions are completely necessary -- and that being wasteful is not necessarily a COVID safety requirement!

And conference and event planners are learning and being creative too! Conference planners made incredible strides in pulling off virtual conferences, and some events did continue by creatively going to carry-out / drive-thru approaches or other safe / dispersed people options.

***Moving forward, the tourism industry will look very different; and it will not simply revert back to the old ways. The industry will incorporate the innovations and the lessons learned, and it will be stronger and better in the long-run.***

Festivals, conferences and events will return in some capacity in 2021. They will be different for sure, but they can still be **GREEN EVENTS** through thoughtful planning and implementation. Many of the same basic principles will continue to apply for making your event a sustainable one – and so please continue to reference the [Virginia Green Guide for Sustainable Events](#) and the checklist for green events on our website.

### And yes, you can still certify your event as a Virginia Green Travel Event in 2021!

Whether you are in-person, virtual, drive-thru/carry-out or some other hybrid event, incorporate sustainable practices where you can. **Email us a bulleted list of what you're doing to [VirginiaGreenTA@gmail.com](mailto:VirginiaGreenTA@gmail.com) and we will jointly promote your efforts to be green.** Reference the GUIDE (above), but here are a few additional ideas to consider for virtual and hybrid events.

#### ❖ VIRTUAL EVENTS / CONFERENCES

- **Encourage "on-your-own" clean-ups** or other volunteer opportunities for individual attendees, and provide opportunities for sharing experiences, data, photos and videos.
  - If safe, organize an outdoor clean-up or other opportunity for local folks to attend.
- **Consider the reduced environmental footprint of your event.** Travel, wastes, energy, water use. Even if you haven't done so previously, you can even calculate (or estimate) the wastes avoided, in addition to impacts from travel and energy and water used. Additionally, you might assess the greenhouse gases avoided by using a [greenhouse gas emissions calculator](#). While virtual, you can share these reductions; and once again in-person, your organization can set goals for minimizing these impacts.



[www.viriniagreen.net](http://www.viriniagreen.net)  
**804.986.9119**  
[VirginiaGreenTA@gmail.com](mailto:VirginiaGreenTA@gmail.com)

- Consider the increase of [power use for a virtual event](#) from increased server and computer needs. While a virtual event significantly decreases energy use overall, there is incremental power increase at this level.
- [Renewable Energy Credits](#). You may choose to “offset” the impacts this through a nominal purchase of “green power” to support renewable sources.
- While virtual, it would be relatively “easy / affordable to make the event a “zero emissions / zero wastes” event – and you could promote that concept and make a goal to “stay net zero” for your future in-person event.
- Use the virtual format as an opportunity to feature sustainable practices and habits in our daily lives.
- Promote environmental organizations (like the [Virginia Green Travel Alliance](#) 😊) and consider donations from reduced event costs.
- Donate tickets or other event-related perks to environmental organizations to help them jointly promote your event.

#### ❖ DRIVE-THRU / CARRY-OUT EVENTS

- Schedule pick-ups to stagger traffic and reduce congestion and emissions.
  - Encourage carpooling (within their bubbles) and multiple order pick-ups.
- Take-out packaging
  - No polystyrene containers.
  - Do not use plastic bags. Use paper bags or encourage participants to bring their own reusable bags.
  - Use cardboard or paper-wrapped foods when possible.
  - Avoid plastic containers, but if they are used, encourage rinsing and recycling when recycling is provided for these materials locally.
  - Choose compostable materials when possible.
  - Clearly communicate that you only provide utensils/condiments/napkins upon request. Most visitors are likely be taking food back to their homes.
- Do not provide straws for beverages or only provide “upon request”.
- Do not use helium-containing balloons for decorations or other promotions.
- Encourage composting if you are providing compostable disposables. Some communities may offer compost collection opportunities and some items can be composted at home.
- Provide for collection of certain items for recycling (bags, electronics) or donations (clothes, can goods)
  - Encourage participation such as "bring your plastic bags", in exchange for a giveaway (perhaps a reusable utensil/straw).
- Don't forget to RECYCLE everything that you can “back-of-the-house” before, during prep and clean-up.
- Offer links to companies that provide green products, reusable straws, compostables, etc.
- Again, reference the [Virginia Green Guide for Sustainable Events](#) for whatever ideas might be applicable.

## ***But also...what has worked well for you?***

Please let us know about your creative ideas for making your events as green as possible, even during this time of COVID restrictions! Please send ideas to [VirginiaGreenTA@gmail.com](mailto:VirginiaGreenTA@gmail.com)! We will add to our list and even highlight on social media.



[www.viriniagreen.net](http://www.viriniagreen.net)  
**804.986.9119**  
[VirginiaGreenTA@gmail.com](mailto:VirginiaGreenTA@gmail.com)