

The background of the slide features a close-up, high-contrast photograph of large, green, tropical leaves with prominent veins. The lighting creates bright highlights on the leaf surfaces and deep shadows in the creases, giving it a textured, almost abstract appearance.

Guidelines for sustainable exhibition participation

Thank you for reading this guide.

Creating a low impact trade show relies on collective effort from everyone involved. We've devised some easy actions you can take to reduce your exhibiting impact.





What is sustainability?

Sustainability means being effective today without compromising the future. It includes:

- Economic sustainability: contributing to and promoting fair economic growth; supporting innovation and entrepreneurship; guaranteeing shared wealth
- Environmental sustainability: committing to a rational use of natural resources and taking action for their renewal
- Social sustainability: promoting social justice and fighting inequality. Creating business growth while improving quality of life

SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals)

The 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development established the SDGs as a guide for action, a reference for organisations to frame their goals. Every organisation that establishes a CSR or sustainability strategy does so because they understand that sustainability is integral to their business strategy. The outcome should be to act, and to measure. Every organisation's annual report should be accompanied by a sustainability report.

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Still got questions?

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1. Stand design



When designing your exhibition stand, whether through your marketing department, or an external agency, or when preparing a tender document, consider:

- Stand construction materials
- Consumables
- Promotional materials
- Packaging
- Accessibility

All the materials you use at the exhibition, for building the stand and for promotion as well as consumables and packaging should follow the five Rs:

- **Rethink:** replace dangerous chemicals or materials with others that are less harmful to people and planet
- **Reduce:** reduce volume and weight
- **Reuse:** reuse materials
- **Repair:** repair damaged materials instead of throwing them away
- **Recycle:** give a use to materials that would otherwise be thrown away

Also ensure your stand is accessible to wheelchair users, by installing a bevel (or ramp for higher floors). Consider your stand layout and ensure wheelchair users can move around easily.



Signage

- Design and word signage so that it can be stored and reused multiple times

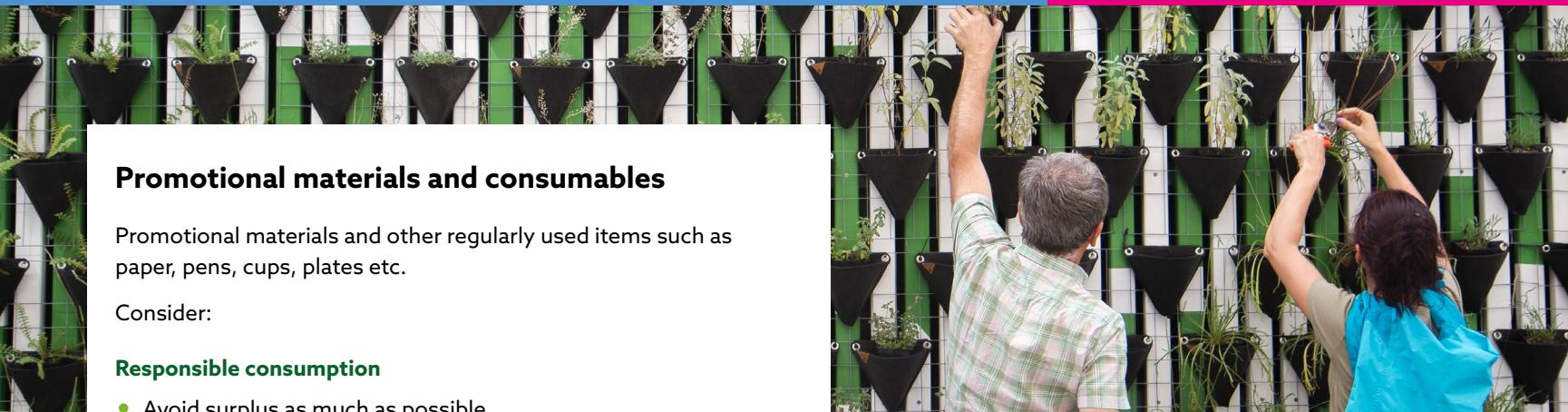
Decorative plants

- Use natural plants over faux
- Choose potted plants over cut flowers. Rent rather than buy from the floral supplier
- Plan their destination after the event (e.g. donate them to a local social organisation)

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1. Stand design



Promotional materials and consumables

Promotional materials and other regularly used items such as paper, pens, cups, plates etc.

Consider:

Responsible consumption

- Avoid surplus as much as possible
- Avoid single-use non-recyclable items
- Ensure paper or cardboard is FSC or PEFC labelled
- Ensure all materials are recyclable and have one or more recycled components
- Say no to plastic! Or if there is a plastic component, it should be biodegradable and made from renewable materials, such as corn, cassava, potatoes or wheat

Responsible purchasing

- Choose local suppliers to support the local economy and reduce emissions
- Choose suppliers with socially responsible production methods, ethical and Fair-Trade sourcing to promote a social economy
- Choose suppliers that invest in R&D or start-ups to further innovation and entrepreneurship

Responsible promotion

- Consider making a charitable donation on behalf of stand visitors instead of give-aways

Packaging

- Make an accurate assessment of the materials you'll need on your stand to reduce the need for transport and packaging, and to reduce waste
- Packaging should be kept to a minimum (e.g. reduce volume by eliminating unnecessary filling; reduce waste by reducing the strapping required)
- Source packaging that can be used both when taking materials to your stand and when removing them
- Packaging material (wood, cardboard etc.) should be recyclable, made of recycled components and FSC or PEFC labelled
- Fillings should be paper or cardboard not plastic
- Textile and metal strapping should be used instead of plastic
- Never use Styrofoam as it does not degrade or break down. It goes straight to landfill and leaches harmful chemicals into the environment
- Do not use plastic film

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2. Setting up your exhibition stand

Waste

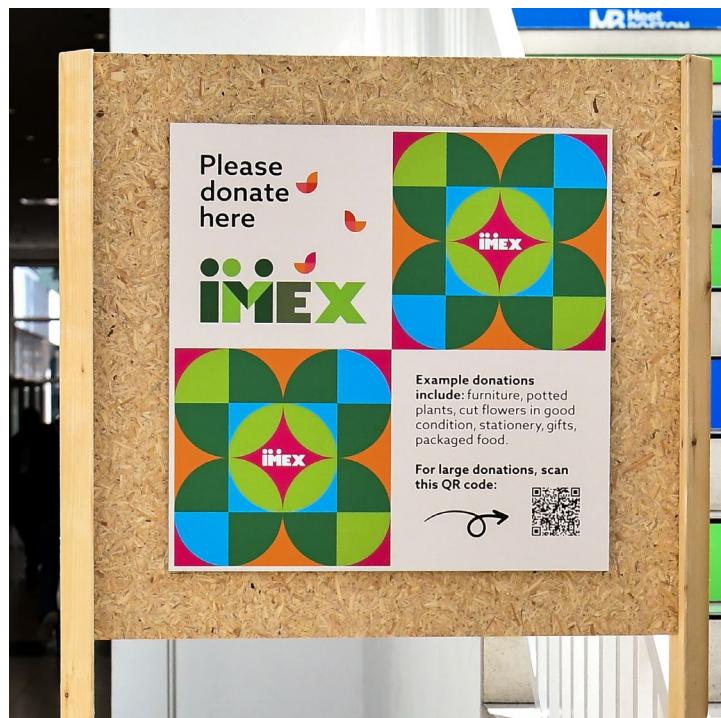
As set out in the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development, by 2025, only 40% of waste will be permitted to go to landfill, the rest will have to be recycled or recovered. This percentage will fall to 10% by 2030.

Because excessive waste and inadequate treatment of waste is one of the main environmental issues for exhibitions, it is essential at the set-up stage to:

- consider using materials or packaging that generate less waste at the end of the material's life cycle e.g. less volume or less weight
- consider using materials that can be reused at other exhibitions e.g. stand construction materials that can be reused over and over at other exhibitions
- consider using materials, which, if they cannot be reduced or reused, can be recycled by taking them to authorised recycling facilities. Ask the exhibition organiser about waste recycling

Ensure that your stand constructor is aware of the kind of waste they'll be producing and that they are responsible for its management. They should comply with the level of separation set out below, and should send all waste, except for untreatable waste, to an authorised waste management facility for reuse or recycling.

Your stand constructor must separate the waste generated by your stand into paper/cardboard, containers, organic, glass, wood, textiles or untreatable waste. All waste must be sent to an authorised waste management facility for recycling, except for untreatable waste (all waste that cannot be recycled).



Separating waste at source is vital. Contaminated waste, e.g. food mixed with paper, means all the waste goes to landfill. Place clearly labelled bins for separate waste streams to embed recycling behaviour at the throwaway point and brief your staff accordingly.

Packaging

Save packaging for later reuse. Follow the recommendations described in section 1. Stand design – packaging.

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3. Exhibition participation

Raising staff awareness

To understand what sustainability means and the impact of our behaviour, it's essential to have clear information. Before the event, ensure stand staff receive specific information about your organisation's commitment and how they can contribute to achieving it.

As a guide, you can ask them to:

- consume natural resources responsibly - turn off taps, lighting and equipment when not in use
- immediately alert the organiser or venue staff of any leaks (e.g. water or gas)
- at the end of each day, put any waste (paper/cardboard, packaging, organic, glass and untreatable) into the dedicated bins
- find out about the venue's separation and waste collection system

Materials

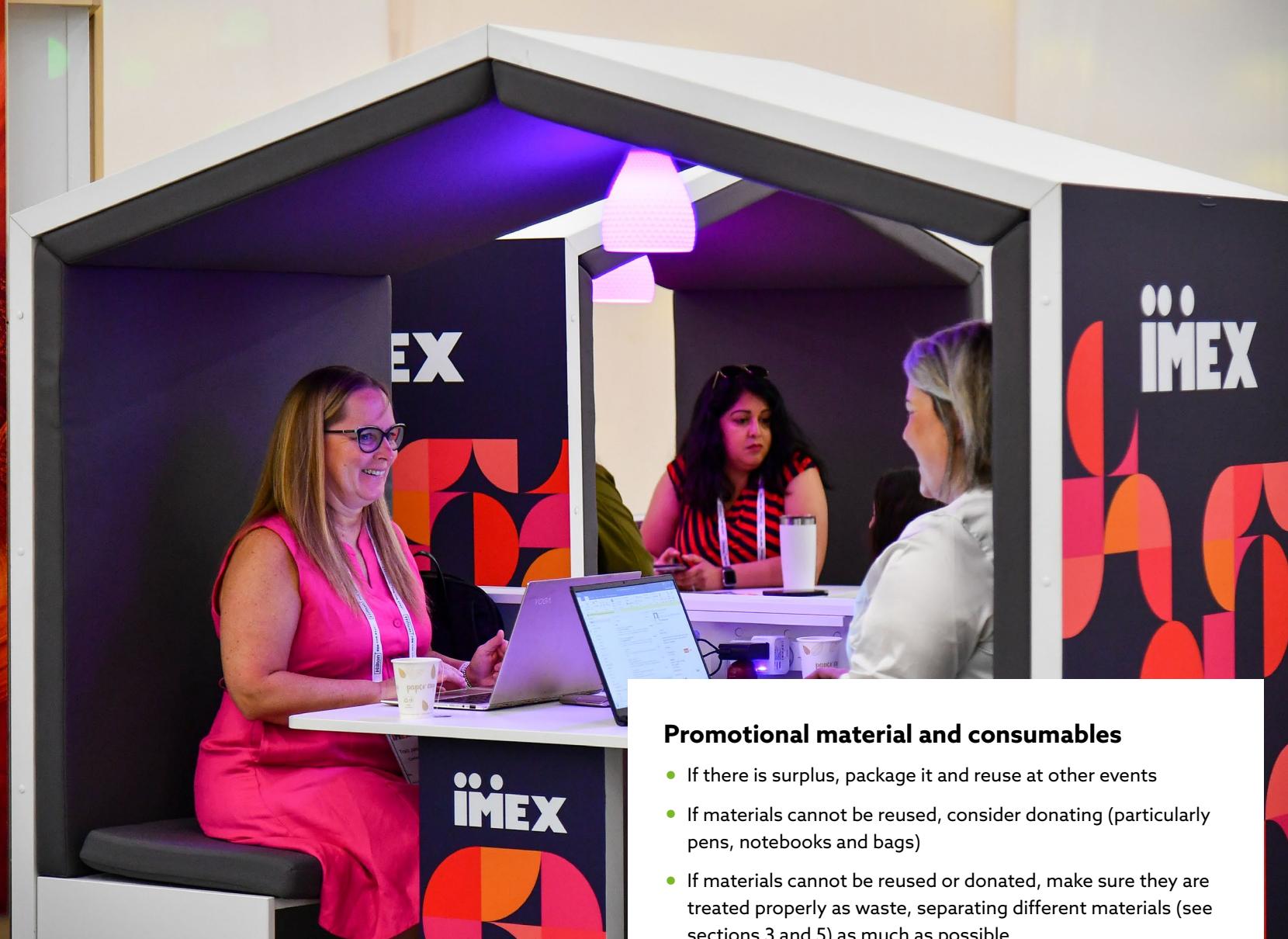
- Control the distribution of promotional material. If you can avoid it, don't print. Your objective is to promote your organisation, not to fill up waste bins
- Create QR codes instead of printed company information
- If you must print, specify forest-friendly paper stock and non-toxic inks
- Make sure there is a destination for unused material. You'd be surprised to know the value that many materials have for social organisations. It's all about finding the right place.



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4. Removal of materials before breakdown



Promotional material and consumables

- If there is surplus, package it and reuse at other events
- If materials cannot be reused, consider donating (particularly pens, notebooks and bags)
- If materials cannot be reused or donated, make sure they are treated properly as waste, separating different materials (see sections 3 and 5) as much as possible.

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5. Breakdown



Breakdown, together with the set-up period, produces the most waste.

Waste:

Although your exhibition stand can be set up and dismantled by your stand constructor, you must also take responsibility for the process being carried out sustainably. Incorporate the actions below or ask your stand constructor to comply with them.

Your goals are:

1. Reduction of volume and weight of waste generated

2. Recovery

3. Waste separation

Particularly as time allowed for breakdown is very limited, planning is essential.

1. Reduce the volume and weight of waste generated.

When planning your participation, think of the benefits of producing a stand that you can reuse at multiple events, not just for better sustainability, but also for cost efficiency.

If the whole stand is being reused, follow the packaging and transport guidelines from sections 1 and 7.

If the whole stand is not being reused, consider partial reuse. Analyse stand components to determine whether there are any that can be reused (e.g. wood, aluminium, cardboard, screws, tarpaulins, lighting, wiring, carpets, plants etc.). If materials will not be reused by your organisation find out if they can be donated. Textiles can be donated to social organisations to produce other materials/products (e.g. tarpaulins can be recycled to make bags), natural plants can be sent to local social organisations to be replanted. Unused food can also be donated.

2 and 3. Recovery and waste separation

Ask your stand constructor what materials will be recovered. Often single-use laminate flooring can be recovered to be reused as underlay for new stands. Materials that cannot be reused or have to be disposed of must be managed as waste.

Stand constructors are responsible for the correct disposal of stand waste. They should comply with the level of separation described below and send all waste, except for untreatable waste, to an authorised waste management facility for reuse or recycling.

The stand constructor must separate waste generated during breakdown into the following categories: paper/cardboard, containers, organic, textiles, glass, wood, PVC and untreatable waste. All of these must be sent to an authorised waste management company for recycling, except for untreatable waste (all waste that cannot be recycled).

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6. Catering

Food consumption and treatment of surplus and waste are particularly important parts of sustainable exhibition participation.

Plan the amount of food and beverage ordered carefully, taking stand staff and visitors into account and focusing on responsible consumption.

- Inform the catering company of the daily forecast of stand visitors to avoid generating unnecessary food surplus
- Don't plate or unwrap food before needed. Once opened and offered to visitors, it cannot be donated
- Donate food surplus (which should be minimal if an accurate daily forecast is made) to local social organisations for distribution to people in need
- Consider food allergies and intolerances, and identify and label products that may cause them
- Pay attention to food miles. Offer organic and/or locally produced products and label them accordingly
- Vegan, halal or kosher options should be offered if you expect visitors with these dietary requirements
- Don't include red meat on your menu without knowing its environmental impact. Offer white meat, cheese and other protein sources instead
- Introduce more vegetarian and vegan options - participants expect a variety of healthy and nutritious food
- Introduce waterwise menu options, and explain the reason and the benefit for the environment
- Ask the catering company for glass, china and reusable cutlery. Avoid plastic cups and any other single-use plastic

- Don't mistake takeaway paper cups for recyclable cups. The inner lining is often plastic making them non-recyclable. Specify china or 100% compostable cups
- Don't use or offer single-use plastic water bottles
- If reusable catering packaging and containers are not available, single-use packs and containers must be made of natural fibres such as bamboo or corn starch, or at least be made of recycled materials and manufactured sustainably (e.g. certified under the ISO 14001/EMAS international standard; labelled FSC or PFCE; labelled Ecolabel, AENOR Environment, Germany's Blue Angel, Norway's Nordic Swan, Natura 2000 product or EPD)
- Use bulk dispensers or drinks jugs
- Ask visitors to bring their own reusable water bottles and carry cups



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7. Transport



Staff travel

- Where possible, staff should travel by train. If travelling by plane, choose airlines that strive to reduce the environmental impact of their flights (e.g. more efficient planes, lighter planes, planes that emit less greenhouse gas, using compostable or glass containers rather than plastic on board, carbon footprint compensation schemes, recycling on board waste) and that collaborate with social organisations
- At the destination, travel to your hotel and around the destination on public transport or exhibition shuttle buses
- Choose accommodation with an easy public transport route to the exhibition, or choose accommodation that has shuttle buses to the exhibition
- If you use your own car, consider ride-share
- For car rentals, choose electric or low-emission

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8. Take Action

Be proud of your sustainability efforts and share your stories and achievements. Lead by example and champion your success!

A guide to sustainable stand construction

We've created an additional guide for you to share with your stand constructors to encourage them to design your stand in the most sustainable way. The guide covers stand design and construction, set-up, breakdown and waste reduction.

[Download the guide here.](#)

Share your learnings

We'd love to hear about your best practices in sustainable exhibiting. If you'd like to share examples or new ideas with us, please post them [here](#).



Sign up to our People and Planet Pledge

We encourage all exhibitors to support the IMEX People and Planet Pledge. By committing to four simple actions, you can help us make a difference for the people attending the show and reduce our environmental impact. Make your pledge [here](#).



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