

Guide:

Sustainable Book Fairs

Julie's Bicycle
CREATIVE • CLIMATE • ACTION

Institut de l'Ecoedició
FOMENTA, CERTIFICA I DIFON LA SOSTENIBILITAT EDITORIAL

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Guide: Sustainable Book Fairs

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This document has been prepared by Julie's Bicycle in collaboration with the Institut de l'Ecoedició.

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Institut de l'Ecoedició

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Institut de l'Ecoedició ensures the promotion, dissemination and verification of environmental sustainability in the world of books in Catalonia. Its objective is eco-publishing: an innovative way of managing publications with sustainability criteria.

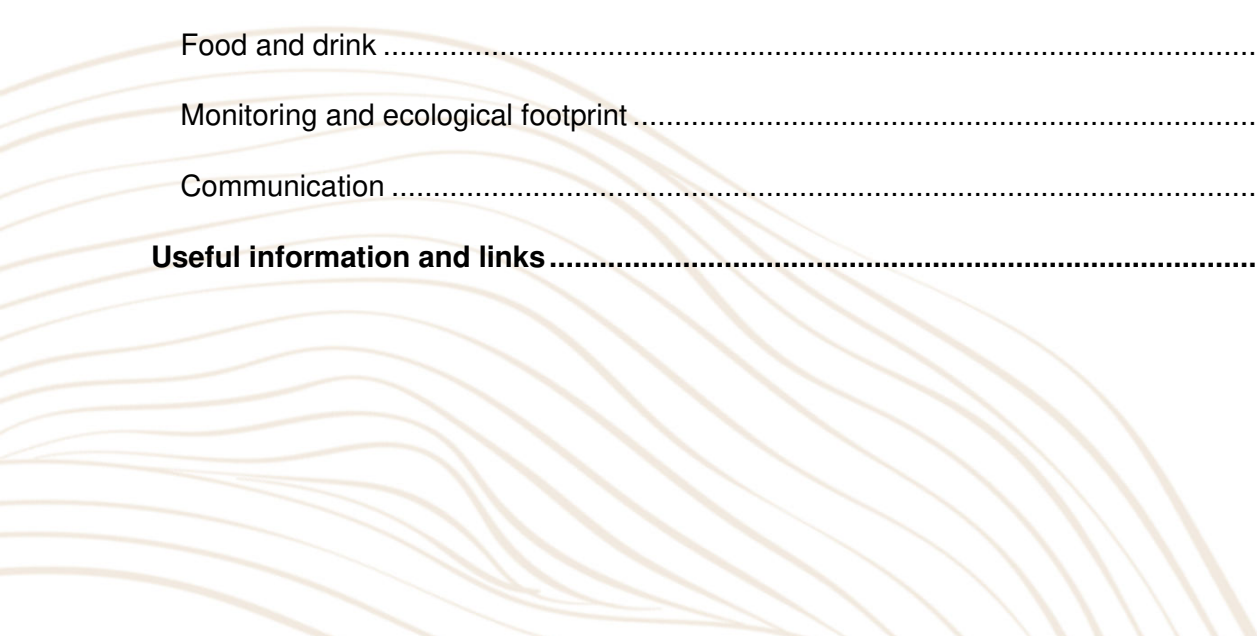
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What is this guide for?

Book fairs are an essential space for communities to connect, share stories and knowledge, and discover new creative works through literature. Faced with the urgency of climate change and the depletion of natural resources, sustainability and climate action have become key issues driving significant changes in the publishing world and the entire publishing value chain.

Created by Julie's Bicycle in collaboration with the Institut de l'Ecoedició, this guide and checklist is intended to help and motivate book fair organisers to hold more sustainable, climate-resilient events. We also engaged with the Sabadell Book Fair, the Madrid Book Fair, the Guadalajara Book Fair, the Las Preses Book Fair, the Mantova Literature Festival, and other festivals including the Galician Sin Sal Festival, who all provided inspiring case studies and reflections on their rich experiences. Some of the fairs have developed and implemented measures reducing their impact; others go further, generating new ways of acting by requiring participating publishers to make an environmental commitment in how they produce, distribute, and sell books. To avoid greenwashing, the sector must deeply rethink practices and ensure they are verifiable and sustained over time.

Eco-publishing is an innovative way of managing publications according to sustainability criteria, including calculating, minimising, and communicating the environmental impact of books. To calculate the footprint of the books, indicators include the carbon footprint (g CO₂ equivalent), waste generated (grams), water (litres), energy (MJ), and consumption of raw materials (grams).

This guide can be used to track actions while providing a source of inspiration across each area of impact. Use the guide as it best suits you: focus on one area first or designate different areas of the guide to different people. Consider where you can be transparent about your efforts, to share with your industry peers and learn from others. For each action, consider making a tangible 'next step' to move the action forward. For example: who do you need to talk to? When are you aiming to complete this action? How will you share your progress and success? Download the accompanying checklist in Excel format for easy editing.

Key areas

1. First steps
2. Design and materials
3. Waste
4. Digital impacts
5. Energy
6. Travel and transport
7. Food and drink
8. Monitoring and ecological footprint
9. Communication

Key impact areas

First steps

Assess your current sustainability performance and identify the critical issues for your event. This will help inform a more holistic approach to sustainability efforts that focuses on the most important areas.

Checklist	Yes	No	Next steps	Improvements since last review
Set up a team to assign responsibilities and review your most significant impacts.				
Create an environmental policy or plan for your book fair, including targets to measure performance (see Monitoring & ecological footprint).				
Communicate your initiatives to your book fair attendees, publishers, authors, and other key stakeholders.				
Request participating publishers to take measures to reduce the impact on publishing their books and measure their ecological footprint. Seek ways to motivate and incentivise publishers to follow the principles of eco-publishing.				
Dedicate programming space to promote environmental or climate justice issues (for example, through speakers at the event, specific booths selling books on those topics, roundtables, or an area dedicated to sustainability).				

Design and materials

The design of your event has a significant impact due to the production and use of materials, and the generation of waste. When designing activities and vendor stalls, consider whether you can incorporate locally made, rental or completely reusable items.

Checklist	Yes	No	Next steps	Improvements since last review
Create procurement/ sustainability policies as part of your guidance or contracts with suppliers. For events with sponsors, consider implementing ethical funding criteria to exclude companies that don't meet your fair's sustainability criteria.				
Promote reusable, rental or second-hand options for tables and booths or modular designs that can be built on-site and reused for other events.				
From the very initial design stage, consider how to extend the use of the materials and ensure they can be used for later events to increase their use.				
Review leftover communication and advertising materials from previous events (e.g. catalogues, brochures) to accurately evaluate your need for future events.				
Rethink the need for new promotional items like reusable bags and cups. Encourage attendees to bring their own!				
Look for options for reusing packaging (e.g., boxes for transporting books), using reusable bags, and/or using bags made from recyclable materials.				
Design the signage so that it can be reused at different festivals/events or across different dates, and look for alternatives to plastic-based signage.				
Consider the incorporation and signage of free drinking water fountains at your book fair and in the surrounding area.				

Design and materials

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Checklist

	Yes	No	Next steps	Improvements since last review
Evaluate your event site and materials depending on different weather events, such as heavy rain or a heat wave; make sure the materials chosen are still suitable and can be reused.				
If you have to buy new materials, use those that are certified according to a sustainability standard (e.g. FSC paper and wood, see this resource for more ; recycled items verified by the Global Recycled Standard), and/or do not contain toxic chemicals – and make sure you have the waste management systems to dispose of these materials.				
Depending on the size of the event, install portable composting toilets to reduce water and energy use.				

CASE STUDY — Feria del Libro, Madrid

FL Madrid is an industry and public-facing event that, in 2024, welcomed over a million people. It is held in the Buen Retiro Gardens, which are part of the city's historical and artistic heritage and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Currently, the organisers are working on the SO 20121:2013 Event Sustainability Management Systems standard.

Key actions:

- International Environment Day is celebrated with specific activities for both adults and children. In 2024, a small version of the LiterNatura festival was included.
- Reusing and minimising materials and signage for the assembly of booths and pavilions and using inks with lower environmental impact for signage.
- Eliminating the use of plastic cups for speakers' water.
- Working with transport and distribution companies to reduce book packaging.
- Sponsorship from the Forest Stewardship Council, a global nonprofit organisation that promotes responsible forest management around the world.
- The implementation of energy efficiency measures will result in a 50% reduction in generator use in 2025.
- The use of fuel produced from organic waste, such as used cooking oil or agri-food remains.
- The three stages of a solar-powered installation, *The Illuminated Night*.
- Promotion of public transport in collaboration with the city council, which increased the frequency of buses.

Waste When you have reduced and reused as much as possible, ensure you have accurate waste disposal facilities to contribute to the circular economy. At the event, encourage reusables and correct waste disposal (for example, recycling and composting).

Checklist	Yes	No	Next steps	Improvements since last review
Analyse your waste and determine both the largest source of waste, and where you can reduce or remove hard-to-recycle materials.				
Work with your local authority to increase the type and extent of waste collection services for the event.				
Make your event free of single-use plastic.				
Provide clear signage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for visitors, about which bins are available • for vendors to reduce waste during set-up, book packaging, and take-down. 				
Donate any materials that you won't reuse after the event.				

CASE STUDY — LITERAL Fair, Barcelona

LITERAL Fair brings readers, authors, and publishers together for conferences, readings, and arts events in Barcelona. The fair hired an environmental consulting firm to evaluate and improve its sustainability options and is working on a full carbon calculation of the event.

At events across the fair:

- Online communication is used to avoid posters, and people are also encouraged to arrive by public transport.
- They aim to rent rather than buy and, in turn, work with cooperative suppliers wherever possible (for food, rental of materials and structures, etc.).
- Materials such as signage, lanyards, badges, tarpaulins, etc. are reused wherever possible.
- Where possible, they use solar-powered generators.
- Selective waste collection is carried out during the fair.
- Signs are placed in areas with water taps, asking visitors to be responsible with their water use.
- They create their own merchandise, using ecologically-friendly cotton and minimal plastic.

When considering programming:

- Authors who publish on sustainability and/or environmental themes across small and large venues are given priority.
- Each edition addresses a theme or idea, and the 2021 edition focused on environmentalism. This involved additional talks on this topic and concrete actions to promote the theme.
- Talks on eco-publishing are regularly scheduled in the professional space.



Image: Celebrate Literal Barcelona

Digital impacts

Digital impacts refer to all our digital activity: the energy and water consumption of data centres, transmission networks, and the devices we use daily, as well as the minerals and materials used to make those devices.

Checklist	Yes	No	Next steps	Improvements since last review
Carefully decide how much of your online and social media content are necessary and analyse the number of users who download and/or view them.				
Review what digital equipment you need for your fair and develop a plan for information management to reduce impacts.				
Extend the life of your electronic devices as much as possible through maintenance and repair, and ensure you properly recycle at the end of their life so the materials can be reused.				
Optimise your computer use and save only the necessary files, photos, videos, and emails. Adopt an information management policy for your online presence.				
Turn off electronic devices when not in use.				

Energy

Identify energy efficiency measures and monitoring to reduce energy demand and raise awareness of your efforts. Combine it with increasing your use of renewables, and it could be a robust measure to reduce emissions and save costs long-term

Checklist	Yes	No	Next steps	Improvements since last review
Complete an accurate energy assessment to avoid over-surplus and report on progress.				
Specify energy-efficient lighting requirements (e.g., LEDs, schedules for turning lights off when unused).				
Connect to the grid, switch to a green energy tariff, and/or generate electricity (e.g., portable solar panels).				
If using generators, explore biodiesel or hybrid options.				
Choose greener locations or portable shade structures in case of weather extremes (e.g. heatwaves).				

CASE STUDY — Ecoeditat Book Fair, Sabadell

The Institut Ecoedicio was founded to improve the sustainability of publishing. It hosts the Ecoeditat Book Fair in the Catalan region of Sabadell, Spain. The fair highlights literary works, publishers, speakers, and workshops, including ecology and environmental issues in the programming.

Key actions:

- All books showcased have been printed locally, and most have the Institut Ecoedicio 'book seal': local production, use of FSC paper, and calculation and communication of the book's environmental footprint.
- The organisation provides tents, tables, and furniture to minimise the transfer of material and consequently the event's carbon footprint.
- It's entirely solar-powered - an Ecoflow Delta Pro solar energy generator with a 400W solar panel was rented to power the sound equipment for a small stage.
- An event programme that included informative activities to raise environmental awareness and talks on eco-publishing
- The extensive promotion of public/shared transport to both the public and event speakers.



Travel and transport

Visitor travel is often the largest source of emissions associated with events. Encourage and incentivise public and active transport use, and consider low-carbon ways to transport materials.

Checklist	Yes	No	Next steps	Improvements since last review
Hire services from local companies, whenever possible, to minimise transportation distances.				
Instruct suppliers on optimising route planning and using zero-carbon modes of transportation.				
Choose the location of your book fair based on the public transportation accessibility and communicate these options (e.g. route maps for visitors and exhibitors, availability of bicycle parking, nearest train, bus, or tram station, wheelchair access).				
Incentivise sustainable travel for your visitors, exhibitors and authors (for example, discounts or vouchers to use at the book fair).				
Collaborate with the local authority at your location to improve low-carbon hiring offerings (e.g. bike share schemes) and EV chargers.				
Conduct a travel survey to understand where and how exhibitors, staff, and visitors travelled to your book fair.				
Consider online event opportunities to connect with your community (locally and/or globally) while reducing your carbon footprint, but keep your digital environmental impact in mind as well.				

CASE STUDY — Les Preses Book Fair, Catalonia, Spain

The Les Preses Book Fair has implemented a series of environmental sustainability criteria that position it as an event committed to protecting the natural environment and reducing its ecological footprint. The meeting highlights literature and celebrates the cultural identity of Les Preses's rural environment, reinforcing the connection between the local and global and supporting the decentralisation of events from major cities. Below is a summary of the main measures adopted by the organisation and participating publishers.

Key actions:

- **Local printing** was a requirement for all books exhibited at the fair.
- **Letter of commitment to eco-publishing.** Participating publishers sign a letter of commitment to the principles of eco-publishing, which promotes local printing of titles, the use of recycled or FSC-certified paper, non-toxic inks, and communication of all these principles to the reader.
- **100% renewable energy.** Throughout the event, the use of energy from 100% renewable sources is guaranteed, specifically through two Ecoflow Delta Pro portable power stations.
- **Reduction of waste materials.** Single-use products have been eliminated as much as possible, and reusable alternatives are promoted significantly.
- **Segregated waste collection.** A comprehensive waste collection system has been implemented, which facilitates the correct segregation of waste at source and promotes recycling by providing collection points for paper, plastics, glass, and other materials.

Food and drink

Carefully choosing food and drink suppliers for book fairs offers the opportunity to reduce food waste, support the local community, reduce packaging, and reduce emissions from food production and transport.

Checklist	Yes	No	Next steps	Improvements since last review
Set minimum environmental standards for sourcing food and drink (e.g. animal welfare standards; supporting local, seasonal, and organic produce; choosing sustainably certified suppliers)				
Increase the amount of plant-based food options available in place of meat, and normalise these options through advertising and product placement				
Implement reusable systems instead of single-use, and encourage visitors to bring their own drink cups or containers where possible.				
Provide information to help concessions source food and drink to meet your standards (e.g. an approved wholesaler list, and information on reusable packaging).				
Ensure surplus edible food is redistributed and all other items composted to avoid food waste.				
Provide water refill stations and encourage the use of reusable water bottles.				
Ensure cleaning products used across the event are easily biodegradable and don't contain toxic ingredients.				
If your book fair is in a closed space, collaborate with building management to consider water-saving measures, taking into account hygiene and safety measures.				

CASE STUDY — Festival Sinsal

This music festival is celebrated over three days on the island of San Simón (north-west Spain), and has a solid commitment to sustainability since the publication of its initial impact reduction plan in 2018. In 2024, the festival decided not to place trash cans on the island, with festival waste collected and separated at a single point, called Point R. Glasses, plates and other reusable objects used during the festival are also collected at this point to support the festival's reusable systems. The festival carried out significant communication efforts to illustrate that each person is responsible for their own waste. Sinsal endeavours to create mutual commitment and shared effort between the festival, the public, collaborating stakeholders and sponsors.

CASE STUDY — Festivaletteratura, Mantua, Italy

The first international literary festival in Italy, Festivaletteratura is a major event over 5 days that attracts more than 130,000 people.

Since 2010, the festival has dedicated a section of the programme to environmental issues. In 2019 the festival joined the project C-Change, and with the support of Julie's Bicycle and others involved, they were prompted to conduct a full analysis of the festival's carbon footprint (1,104.4 tons), which helped revitalise the festival's sustainability efforts.

The festival published its Climate Action Plan in 2021, including actions such as:

- 100% renewable energy for new installations
- Electric vehicles available for installations
- Hybrid cars and bicycles for authors, staff and volunteers
- Vegetarian meals for staff and guests
- Use of FSC-certified typography and FSC paper
- Supporting the planting of a forest with over 1300 plants in the Po floodplain in Italy
- Sharing materials and creating a buying group to afford more ethical merchandise
- Training staff with the carbon literacy methodology

Monitoring and ecological footprint

As you implement changes, it's important to measure what works and compare your book fairs over time.

Checklist	Yes	No	Next steps	Improvements since last review
To understand the carbon footprint of your project use a tool like the Julie's Bicycle CC Tools or similar and input: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kilometres travelled and mode of transport • Energy usage from electricity meter readings before and after the event • Water consumption • Materials used and reused • Weight of waste and recycling 				
Track actions and changes against your environmental plan (see Section 1).				
Set a <i>carbon budget</i> for your book fair.				

What is a carbon budget?

In the same way that we set economic budgets, we can create a carbon budget, where carbon dioxide (CO₂) represents the 'money' we can spend when we consider the emissions of all our actions: movement of materials and people, production of materials, energy consumption, etc.

Initially, you might only consider the most significant impacts that are the easiest to calculate, but each year you can try to be more precise and comprehensive in your budget. It's essential to evaluate your budget and reduce it over time (like we do if it was money). At the end of this guide, you'll find tools and guides to support the creation of a carbon budget.

Communication

Communicating your commitment to sustainability is essential both internally and externally. Internally, it helps the adoption of sustainable behaviours and encourages all participants to join in on sustainability goals. Externally, it demonstrates your intentions to the value chain and your commitment to the book industry, encouraging wider adoption of sustainable practices.

Checklist

	Yes	No	Next steps	Improvements since last review
Ensure your communications on sustainability align with your reporting, planning, and environmental management of your fair.				
Develop and implement a concise communications plan based on the event's environmental priorities. This plan should include assigning responsibilities and preparing messages adapted to different media.				
Evaluate your environmental performance in comparison to your original objectives. Document helpful practices, sustainable suppliers and other useful learnings for inclusion in an environmental report to share either internally or publicly.				
Once the team collects data on reducing environmental impact, analyse and share it. Prepare a press release for the local press and the book industry.				
Share your learnings and information about green suppliers with your colleagues and networks.				
Create a sustainability area on your website with examples and case studies.				

CASE STUDY – Guadalajara International Book Fair

The Guadalajara International Book Fair (FIL Guadalajara) in Mexico brings together nearly one million people each year. They have been working across three main sustainability areas since 2015 – transport, energy, and waste – and illustrate how consistent focus and constant improvement can create a sustainable festival over time. The cultural programme is dedicated to reflecting on climate change, including symposiums, sustainable resources for festivals (the Circular Culture Manual), production of a video and environmental forums.

Key areas:

- Creation of two new bus routes to encourage people to use public transport.
- Collaboration with fair staff to separate and process different waste streams.
- 70% printed on FSC certified paper and reused and/or donated material.
- Organisation of environmental programming and activities with schools.
- Reforestation projects financed to offset their carbon emissions.

In 2023, FIL Guadalajara measured:

- 741,420 litres of water used.
- 107.12 m³ waste generated.
- 312.66 tonnes of CO₂ produced.

Useful information and links

Carbon calculators

bookDAPer	Specific tool for the publishing sector. It is a very intuitive calculator that identifies and quantifies the environmental impacts of editorial products during the design phase and before their sale. It automatically creates an environmental label with all the information (energy, water and raw material consumption; as well as CO2 emissions, waste generation and savings generated). This label means the calculator is both minimising the impacts of editorial production, and informing the reading community of the environmental impact of publications. Currently, the tool is available in Catalan, Spanish, English and French and can be used to calculate the impact of books and magazines in offset and digital printing.
Canvi climàtic	GHG Emissions Calculator and guide that can calculate the carbon footprint of organisations, estimate emissions associated with an activity, and model the reduction in emissions that can be expected when an action is implemented.
Creative Climate Tools	Carbon calculator and environmental impact reporting tools designed for cultural organisations and artists to measure energy use, water consumption and waste generation, among other data. The aim of the CC Tools is to assist entites to understand and measure the impact of buildings, offices, events and typical production processes across the cultural sector.

Reports and Guides for Sustainable Events

REDS	Report (Español): Culture and Sustainable Development: Contributions to the Debate on Culture and the 2030 Agenda
Government of Catalonia	Guide to Organising Sustainable Events
Barcelona Tourism	Guide to Sustainable Events in Barcelona (English / Español)
Metodología Erronka Garbia	Manual for organising environmentally sustainable events (English / Español)
Junta de Andalucía	Calculating the carbon footprint of sustainable events

Eco-Edition Guides: reducing the environmental impact of book publishing

[ICEC 2024 Ecoedition Guide](#), [Bona Ecoedició Manual](#), [Manual of good Ecopublishing](#), [Eco-edition. A public guide to criteria and tools](#), [Manual on Eco-edition – Junta de Andalucía](#).

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