

# Sustainable events tools review



This review is intended for event organisers. Its purpose is to aid your decision making process if you are considering ways to improve your event's sustainability. The review analyses four leading sustainable event resources and services, summarising how they work and who they are suitable for.

The following four options have been selected for review based on their considerable potential to help improve your event's sustainability performance:

- EPA Victoria's Carbon and Ecological Footprint Calculator
- Sustainable Living Foundation Event Planner
- Sustainable Event Management System
- Climate Friendly (a carbon offset provider)

While we found some overlap in function between the four resources and services, each has a unique and useful offering.

*Information in this review was current in May 2009 and is subject to change.*

## A quick snapshot

Name	Organisation type	Cost	Suitable for...	Key benefits	Data analysis provided
<b>EPA Victoria Ecological Footprint Event Calculator</b>	Government	Free	Beginners	Approximately summarises your event's impacts	✓
<b>Sustainable Living Foundation Event Planner</b>	Not for profit	Free	Any event organiser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self evaluation</li> <li>• Event guide</li> <li>• Events directory</li> <li>• Interactive hub</li> </ul>	X
<b>Sustainable Event Management System</b>	Commercial	Varies	Large/multiple event holders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional data management</li> <li>• Auditing services</li> <li>• Industry benchmarks</li> <li>• Sustainability reporting</li> <li>• Certification labels</li> </ul>	✓
<b>Climate Friendly</b> (carbon offset provider)	Commercial	Varies (technicians are \$200/hour)	Any event organiser (particularly larger events)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimal effort required</li> <li>• Quality assurance</li> <li>• High international standards</li> </ul>	✓

## EPA Victoria Ecological Footprint Event Calculator

**Organisation type:** Government

**Cost:** Free

**Key benefits:** Approximately summarises your event's impacts

**Suitable for:** Beginners

**Website:** [www.epa.vic.gov.au/EcologicalFootprint/calculators/event/introduction.asp](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/EcologicalFootprint/calculators/event/introduction.asp)

### What is Environment Protection Authority Victoria?

The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) is a state government authority aiming to protect, care for and improve our environment.

### What is the EPA Victoria's Ecological Footprint Event Calculator?

The Calculator is an online tool that provides a general summary of the environmental impacts of your event in terms of carbon emissions and 'global hectares' consumed (ie. the ecological footprint).

### Who is the Calculator suitable for?

The Calculator is a good starting point if you haven't considered your event's environmental impact before. It will highlight which areas of your event create the most impact, and an estimation of overall impact. The 'tips for improvement' page is also useful if you are new to this area.

### How does it work?

The calculator requires you to enter information on the following categories:

- General
- Venue
- Accommodation
- Catering
- Print/promotional items
- Travel
- Recycling/waste.

Your event's footprint is calculated in units called 'global hectares'. This is a universal measure that takes into account the earth's productive potential, the demand for produce and differences in land types.

Your results will be displayed in charts and tables.

In producing these results the Calculator uses many assumptions. For example, food related impacts are calculated from dollars spent only. It's important to remember the results are an approximate guide only.

### What kind of data is required?

The Calculator requires data in a variety of formats - from dollars spent on items and kilometres travelled, to electricity consumption in kilowatt hours.

*Tip:* We recommend you review the required data categories before running your event, so you can keep accurate records along the way. Trying to gather the data after the event is often difficult and time consuming.

### What other functions does the Calculator have?

The Calculator also allows you to make 'targets' and provides basic 'tips for improvement' for each key event area.

*Tip:* If you only want to look at your event's greenhouse gas impact, EPA Victoria is aiming to release a Carbon Footprint Event Calculator.

For further information on the calculator's methodology and assumptions, visit [www.epa.vic.gov.au/ecologicalfootprint/about/howitworks.asp](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/ecologicalfootprint/about/howitworks.asp)

### What other resources are available on the website?

- A downloadable event 'checklist' to help get you started.
- Questionnaires for delegates, suppliers and the venue for planning ahead.
- Links to other useful sources of information and organisations that can help you understand your event impacts.

### What are the benefits of using calculators?

Ecological footprint calculators are most useful for understanding your event's impact in a way that is broader than just greenhouse gas pollution. They recognise that our activities can have many consequences and it is important to think more holistically about our environmental impact. The ecological footprint is a powerful conceptual tool for striving towards sustainability and requires only a modest effort to use.

## Sustainable Living Foundation (SLF) Event Planner

**Organisation type:** Not for profit

**Cost:** Free

**Key benefits:** Self evaluation, event guide, events directory, interactive hub

**Suitable for:** Any event organiser

**Website:** [www.slf.org.au/eventplanner/](http://www.slf.org.au/eventplanner/)

### What is the Sustainable Living Foundation?

The Sustainable Living Foundation (SLF) is a not-for-profit organisation committed to accelerating the uptake of sustainable living. The SLF have staged one of Victoria's largest sustainable living festivals for the last ten years.

### What is the Sustainable Events Planner?

The Sustainable Events Planner (the Planner) is a free, online, sustainable event resource. It houses a practical guide and interactive resources for those aiming to improve their event practice. The Planner was developed as a way for the SLF to respond to national and international inquiries about how they deliver their festival.

### Who is the Planner suitable for?

The Planner has a broad range of features and resources suitable for all levels, from beginners to advanced organisers.

### What does the Planner offer?

The Planner has four main sections:

#### 1. Self evaluation questionnaires

Users are provided with introductory self-evaluation questionnaires tailored to several broad event types (note: this is not an auditing or reporting tool).

#### 2. Sustainable events guide

This includes:

- event terms and sustainability definitions
- case studies
- model event examples
- sample event management templates
- links to other resources such as video workshops, forum topics and event partners pages.

#### 3. Directory

The directory offers a database of products and service providers relevant to sustainable event practice. The products and service providers are listed once they have completed an ECO-ID (a green self-assessment tool developed and monitored by the SLF).

#### 4. Hub

The hub is a space where you can ask questions, post hints and tips and find ideas on how to reduce the impact of your event. The hub includes:

- A video hub - upload and view sustainable events practices and 'how to' workshops from around the globe.
- An innovators' lab - profiling the newest technologies and practices around sustainable events.
- An event partners' page - highlighting leading events and organisations who are profiling and providing tips on their sustainable event practice.
- An event visitors' page - providing tips for event patrons on how they can contribute to reducing their impacts while at an event.

### What are the benefits of the Planner?

The Planner has potential to stimulate, facilitate and accelerate uptake of sustainable event practices. It is also dynamic enough to adapt to developments in sustainability and the events industry. As with any interactive resource, however, the value and longevity of the Planner will depend on whether the events industry itself uses it. The Planner also has a user-friendly design and unique features.

The sustainable event guide, templates and model event examples are particularly useful. With time and proper management, the Planner directory will be a powerful tool for making it easier to find sustainable event products and services.

The Planner is not a footprint calculator and it does not provide a platform for data management or facilitate corporate social responsibility (CSR) reporting for large event producers.

### What are the benefits of the Planner hub?

The hub is creating a 'community of practice' space solely dedicated to event organisers. It is a way for event organisers at all levels of sustainability experience to discuss their challenges and trade tips. The video lab allows you to 'tell your story' in a way that may influence others and create positive publicity for your event.

## Sustainable Event Management System (SEMS)

**Organisation type:** Commercial

**Cost:** Variable pricing structure

**Key benefits:** Professional data management, auditing services, industry benchmarks, sustainability reporting, certification labels

**Suitable for:** Large and multiple event holders

**Website:** [www.sustainableeventsolutions.com.au/sems.html](http://www.sustainableeventsolutions.com.au/sems.html)

### What is Sustainable Event Management System' (SEMS)?

The SEMS is an online, interactive software solution that takes a pathway approach, assisting from event evaluation and planning, through to auditing and sustainability reporting. It's consistent with the British standard (BS8901 2007), the leading, internationally recognised standard for sustainable event management systems.

The SEMS methodology and reporting structure also align with the Corporate Responsibility Index (CRI) and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), two international reporting initiatives.

### Who would SEMS be suitable for?

SEMS was developed for a broad range of users including government, private enterprise, the event and meetings industry, producers, organisers and NGOs.

### What is SEMS designed to do?

It's a comprehensive event sustainability tool designed to:

- develop a sustainability policy for your event
- plan your events to comply with your policy
- help you conduct a self assessment
- enable pre and post event auditing
- facilitate analysis of sustainability performance
- facilitate reporting against industry benchmarks.

### How does SEMS work?

#### 1. Sign up

When you sign up for SEMS you receive a login and password gaining access to the system. You will be provided with a home page, an administration section, a support request page and a 'my details' page. You can upload your own sustainability policy so all employees, subcontractors, suppliers and producers can view it, or you can create a simple one using the 'SEMS sustainability wizard'.

#### 2. Event dashboard

Once you've entered details of your event, various options are displayed in a new page, the 'Event Dashboard'. The tool guides you through a series of qualifying questions to tailor your assessment to your specific event. A flowchart is displayed so you can monitor your progress.

#### 3. Event assessment

The assessment is divided into 'segments' of event production. These segments are broadly split between the event organiser's office and the event itself. The tool covers segments, from standard energy, water and travel questions to more progressive areas such as innovation, sustainable building design and community participation.

After answering each question you can leave comments and upload evidence relating to your response (required if you want to be audited). You will also be directed to relevant educational resources and support links.

#### 4. Your sustainability score

Once you complete the assessment, you will receive a score from 0 to 100 (where 100 is highest) on your sustainability performance. Each segment in the assessment questionnaire has a relative sustainability weighting (the details of which can be viewed online). This is to reflect its importance in the overall scheme of your event. Each question is also assigned a star rating.

For example, purchasing power from renewable sources rates at 4.5 stars, whereas providing bicycle facilities for patrons rates at 1 star. So there's a 'hierarchy of potential' for making improvements to your practice. It's important to remember that the 'score' is not a reflection of the size of your ecological or carbon footprint, but rather a measure of how sustainably your event is being produced.

## Sustainable Event Management System (SEMS) *continued...*

### 5. Reporting

On completing the self-assessment you can download an automatically generated report. More detailed and customised reports are provided when your event is audited. Auditing of your self-assessment is offered through the system at both a pre and post-event level.

### 6. Certification

Depending on the 'score' approved by auditors, you may be eligible for different levels of certification (benchmark, best practice and beyond best practice labels) to use for your event marketing, reporting and obtaining sponsorships.

### What are the benefits?

#### 1. A unique service

SEMS is an advanced service that provides benefits for organisations that run many or large events and can afford to use the system. While some elements of the SEMS package may be available elsewhere (auditing and reporting services, event impact calculators), SEMS is unique as it brings together the core areas of sustainable event management into a tailored, industry benchmarked and global standards aligned solution.

#### 2. Professional, innovative and transformative

It provides a user friendly, powerful and professional platform for data management, event assessment and reporting. Perhaps most innovative about SEMS is the way it significantly eases the process of integrating sustainability into all areas of event management.

A key feature of SEMS is that an unlimited number of users can access the system with different levels of 'user permissions'. This means you can delegate different questions to relevant team members, as well as to subcontractors and suppliers. So, all those involved are exposed to sustainable ways of operating. It also helps ensure that responsibility for driving sustainable operations is not limited to one person.

The SEMS tool aims to help you create a 'whole of business' focus on sustainability. However, the level of managerial commitment will ultimately determine what you can achieve.

### 3. Teething issues

The value gained by being able to compare your performance against others (ie. industry benchmarking) will depend on usage of the tool. SEMS is also a little inflexible if you want to take responsibility for more advanced impacts. For example, the SEMS event assessment questionnaire does not allow freight transport data to be included (unless separately sent to the auditors for inclusion in a report).

However, it does allow you to record sustainability initiatives that don't fit the categories provided, so the information isn't lost. These extra activities can also be taken into account by the auditors and may improve your certification level.

Clearly defined boundaries (eg. it takes some time to discover that freight transport data currently can't be entered) and an online industry forum or networking space could be useful additions to the SEMS tool.

## Climate Friendly

**Organisation type:** Commercial

**Cost:** Offset costs variable. Technicians are \$200 per hour (though these costs are built into your offset purchase).

**Key benefits:** Minimal effort required, quality assurance, high international standards

**Suitable for:** Any event organiser, particularly larger events

**Website:** <https://climatefriendly.com/>

### Who is Climate Friendly?

Climate Friendly is a self-labelled 'profit for a purpose' company offering carbon-offsetting services to grow the renewable energy industry.

Climate Friendly were ranked the number one Australian offset provider by Carbon Offset Watch in 2008. Their services utilise only Voluntary Carbon Standard (VCS) credits, Gold Standard credits and Australian GreenPower certificates. Climate Friendly's commitment is to fund projects that:

- address the root cause of climate change: fossil fuel emissions
- prevent greenhouse emissions (ie. keep carbon in the ground)
- are additional (ie. go beyond business as usual)
- are independently verified for quality
- have a 'real time' impact (ie. they offset your emissions close to the time you emit them)

The company currently purchases renewable energy credits from wind farms based in China, India, Thailand and Turkey (see [www.climatefriendly.com/projects](http://www.climatefriendly.com/projects) for more information).

### What does Climate Friendly offer?

Climate Friendly offers offset packages based on average impacts for small, medium and large events. This approach removes the need for data collection and avoids consulting fees.

They also offer tailored event footprint calculation solutions for larger events. This process involves completing a data collection form with specific information on your event's emissions. This tool provides a clear outline of the 'system boundaries' of your event. This is about determining the scope of the impacts your offset will address.

Climate Friendly's technical analysts will then calculate your event's carbon footprint and provide a detailed report. You will also receive various offset options and marketing support.

### What are the benefits?

#### 1. Quality assurance

Climate Friendly offers a quality assured product that can be depended on to generate genuine emissions reductions and provide good mileage for marketing your event. Their offset options are also 'co-benefit' oriented, meaning their projects have positive side benefits (social, economic or environmental) beyond just reducing emissions.

#### 2. High international standards

Climate Friendly is committed to maintaining high international standards and supporting quality assured projects. They would rather you actually offset your impact than invest all your time and money in detailed carbon footprinting. This is reflected in their service cost structure - the cost of their technical analysts (\$200 per hour at the time of review) is built into the cost of your offset purchase.

While the simplified options mean less time-consuming data collection, the accuracy of your event's carbon profile can be limited.

#### A little bit about carbon offsets...

We think there's more to sustainability than just carbon emissions – for example, your event's water usage, toilet waste and the food used in your catering all have impacts on the environment. Also, if you're thinking about offsetting your event's carbon impact, it's important to remember that this should not replace efforts to improve your event's environmental performance.

We recommend you try and reduce emissions related to your event as much as possible first. Not only are you minimising your impact you'll also reduce any need (and cost) of offsetting. Ultimately offsets compensate for your greenhouse gas emissions but don't stop them from happening.

There are over 60 organisations currently offering offsetting services throughout Australia, the quality of which vary considerably. We recommend that you research the issues and options surrounding carbon offsets. The Carbon Offset Guide ([www.carbonoffsetguide.com.au](http://www.carbonoffsetguide.com.au)) and Carbon Offset Watch ([www.offsetwatch.org.au](http://www.offsetwatch.org.au)) are independent resources and both provide useful information when researching offsetting your event.