



Guides for youth NGOs



SUSTAINABLE PRINCIPLES

Environmental youth organisations work on topics of environmental protection and raising awareness about environmental issues. They unite young people who are passionate about protecting our planet and maintaining its resources. Therefore, it is especially important for such organisations to ensure that they stay true to their mission and values and **follow environmentally-friendly practices** in their work.

However, youth organisations focusing on other topics should also consider adopting environmental principles and setting the example for all young people to care about the environment and its resources. It is the responsibility of every organisation and company to ensure that they are not using more resources than necessary and that they aim to be as environmentally-friendly in their work as possible.

This guide will give you some ideas on how to establish and follow environmental principles in

your organisation and some practical tips on staying environmentally-friendly.

SUSTAINABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The topic of environmental principles and environmentally-friendly practices is closely connected with the terms of “sustainability” and “sustainable development”.

“**Sustainability**” can be defined as “the ability to continue a defined behavior indefinitely”. (1)

“**Sustainable development**” is the process which aims to reach sustainability. The most famous definition of sustainable development is taken from the report “Our Common Future” by the UN World Commission on Environment and Development: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (2)

(1) <http://www.thwink.org/sustain/glossary/Sustainability.htm>

(2) <http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-02.htm>

Sustainability is based on three pillars:

- **"Environmental sustainability** is the ability to maintain rates of renewable resource harvest, pollution creation, and non-renewable resource depletion that can be continued indefinitely.
- **Economic sustainability** is the ability to support a defined level of economic production indefinitely.
- **Social sustainability** is the ability of a social system, such as a country, to function at a defined level of social well being indefinitely."
(3)

So, how can these pillars be connected to the work of your organisation? To promote sustainable lifestyle your organisation should also follow certain environmental principles.

Why is it important to have such principles?

- They help maintain the image of your organisation – taking accountability as an environmental organisation.
- They serve as a set of rules for your organisation's everyday management.
- They help your organisation to stay coherent and true to organisation's values.
- They serve as a guideline for the environmentally-friendly management of office and projects.

For a start, you can use the following **guiding principles**:

- Living and working with less - using secondhand materials, reusing, borrowing, etc.
- Reducing the consumption of resources: energy, water, chemicals, producing less waste.
- Using green alternatives.
- Encouraging and educating others.(4)



ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY PRACTICES

Here are some practical tips on making your organisation even more environmentally-friendly.

Paper

- Re-use paper from both sides or save 'scrap' paper for using the clean side later.
- Avoid printing documents as much as possible.
- Buy recycled paper and in case it is not possible, paper from FSC certified sources.
- Find eco-friendly alternatives to usual paper - hemp paper, unbleached paper, etc.
- Use whiteboard at meetings and projector instead of flipchart paper.
- In case you have to use flipchart paper, use it from both sides.
- Use old posters for flipcharts.
- When printing documents, use smaller font to save space.
- You can also use environmentally-friendly fonts which save ink when printing.
- Unsubscribe from printed newsletters and magazines and get online subscriptions instead.
- When you prepare publications and booklets, think if you really need to print them or it is enough to have an online version.
- In case you need to print the publication, choose space and size smartly, so you don't use more paper than you need. Print only the necessary amount of copies - better to give them away than storing the publication for years.

(3) <http://www.thwink.org/sustain/glossary/Sustainability.htm>

(4) http://www.iynf.org/download/green_toolbox/GreenToolbox.pdf



ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY PRACTICES

Energy

- In winter heat the building to maximum 21°C - start heating when people arrive and turn it off one hour before leaving the office.
- In summer, cool the building only when it is necessary, if there are people in the office and not lower than 24°C.
- Use curtains or blinds in summer to reduce the hot temperature.
- Insulate the office building to reduce the need for heating.
- Choose venues for your activities which use renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power, geothermal energy, etc.
- Use as much natural light as possible during your activities.
- Use electrical appliances with energy efficiency: turn off computers from plugs when leaving the office, don't use screen savers and the brightest settings on the computers.
- Turn off lights in every room which is not used.
- Choose venues which have sensory lights.
- Use energy efficient light bulbs.

Water

- Make sure there are no leaks in any water appliances and equipment.
- While washing the dishes, use a water saving technique (for example first fill in the sink with wash water, wash the dishes and rinse them with water in a different bowl to avoid running water) or energy efficient dishwasher.
- Cool the drinking water in the fridge instead of running the tap to get cold water.
- Use drinkable tap water in your office and at your events instead of bottled water.
- Ask the participants to use the same cup or glass during the whole duration of the activity - so that the venue does not have to wash a lot of cups all the time.
- Install tap aerators to save water.
- Use environmentally-friendly or naturally based cleaning products: baking soda with vinegar, etc.

Food

- Go vegetarian or vegan! Provide only vegetarian meals at your events and encourage your colleagues to follow vegetarian diet (at least in the office).
- Buy organic and fair trade products for your office and activities: tea, coffee, etc.
- Prepare food for your activities from local, seasonal and organic products.
- Minimise food waste - invite the participants to take less food (if they cannot finish their portions), let the participants serve food for themselves.
- Store food carefully so it does not get spoiled fast.
- Ask the venue to recycle food or give leftovers to farm animals.
- Use catering services which provide environmentally-friendly services and follow ethical rules.





Promotional materials

- Before ordering new promotional materials, make a good research of your target group and decide if you really need to make these materials and if yes, decide on the amount which will be used and distributed fast.
- Choose environmentally-friendly and organic materials: recycled plastic, aluminium, organic cotton, bamboo, accredited wooden products.
- Choose recyclable materials and materials safe for health.
- Pay attention to the producer of the materials: order the merchandise from companies which provide fair and safe conditions to their workers.
- When sending your materials, avoid using air transport.
- Send promotional materials in big packages and to the right target group who will really use them.

Transport

- Develop a travel policy for your organisation and specify the rules of travel which have to be followed by employees, volunteers and participants.
- Develop a strict rule about flying - for example, it can be allowed to fly only if travelling by land takes more than 24 hours.
- Encourage your employees to use public transport, bicycle or walk to work.
- Oblige participants to offset their CO2 emission if they take plane to your projects.
- Inform participants about the most environmentally-friendly ways to reach the venue.
- Purchase products from local companies and organise one-time deliveries.

Venue

- Find the venue which is easy to reach by public transport.
- Choose the venue which has the same values as your organisation.
- Support small organisations and farmers rather than staying at corporative venues.
- Choose the venue which provides vegetarian, organic food.
- In case the venue provides towels, make sure they are not changed every day.
- The venue should have adequate recycling facilities.
- The venue should have energy saving system and use renewable energy sources.

Waste management

- Use as little as possible and produce as little waste as possible.
- Re-use the materials and upcycle the old things.
- Recycle waste at your office and on all of projects: paper, plastic, aluminium, organic waste, glass.
- Explain the recycling system to the participants at each event.
- Install a composting system in your office.
- Invest in high-quality products which will last longer.
- Buy green electronics and take care of the equipment.
- Organise swap events.

Financial management

- Choose ethical banking.
- Apply for grants and funding to ethical donors who are not involved in environmental degradation, child labour, unfair treatment of workers, etc.
- Use alternative funding: crowdfunding, social entrepreneurship, etc.

HOW TO FOLLOW ENVIRONMENTAL PRINCIPLES?

How can you make sure that your organisation is performing at your best and following environmental principles and sustainable practices? Here are some of tools which you might find useful:

- **Sustainability Policy**

You can form a working group consisting of several people who know the organisation well (for example board members, employees, active volunteers). This group can create a **document with guiding rules** on how the NGO should organise the activities in the most environmental way. The policy can include points on accommodation, travel, use of water, energy, materials, waste, etc.



After the working group prepares the final draft of the policy, it should be shared with the main stakeholders of the organisation and then approved by the highest decision-making body of your organisation (for example General Assembly).

It is important to **develop the implementation plan** of the policy and keep the document updated and relevant to the objectives of the organisation.

- **Eco-mapping of the office**

Eco-mapping is a great tool to analyse and manage the environmental performance of the organisation. It is a **self-evaluation practical method** which involves all employees in the office. Eco-mapping allows to gather data about the current situation and **set priorities and identify points for improvement**. You can select one person from your office who will coordinate eco-mapping or hire an external expert who can arrange it. Besides the office, you can also organise eco-mapping of a venue of your next activity.

Main **steps** of eco-mapping:

- Create a map of your office.
- Create several copies of the map for different points: water, soil, air, odours, noise, dust, energy, waste, risks.
- Collect the information with your colleagues.
- Identify environmental problems and points for improvement.

You can check more detailed information here: www.eco-forces-bgtr.eu/documents/ecomapping/GUIDE_maps_emas-easy-en.pdf

- **Internal Audit**

Internal Audit is a tool to **review the work of the organisation** (for example the work of secretariat and board) and monitor if the organisation follows the environmental principles and sustainability policies.

Make a call for 2-3 people from your members who would like to audit the one-year work of the organisation. You need to prepare the documents for the audit: questionnaires about projects, office work, etc. People responsible for projects need to fill in the forms and answer questions about logistics, including use of materials, venue, travel, etc.

After the auditors review the forms, they can prepare a **report for the whole organisation**.

Internal Audit is a great way for your organisation to involve its own members in making sure that you follow environmental principles and stay true to your values.

- **Sustainability Committee**

Another similar way to monitor the environmental performance of the organisation is to set a Sustainability Committee. This can be a group of people who meet regularly to **assess the work of the organisation and identify points for improvement**. The committee can report at meetings of the board and secretariat.

Funded by:



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE



These were some of the ideas from us on how to ensure that your organisation follows environmentally-friendly practices and sustainable principles - we hope that many youth organisations will take it as inspiration to come up with their own ideas.

BY NATALIA LUCHKO

REFERENCES:

Green Toolbox, International Young Naturefriends, Prague, 2012

Organising environmentally-friendly events, Antra Pētersone, Maija Ušča, Agita Pusvilka, Santa Krastiņa, Latvia, 2015

Environmental Management Systems, Jürgen Paeger, 2010

This guide was created in 2016 in the frame of the YEE project "Sustainability in NGOs"



www.yeenet.eu