

## INTRODUCTION

Stiftung Mercator supports ambitious climate action. For over ten years it has been providing funding for projects that highlight ways out of the climate crisis and promote the sustainable use of limited resources. Besides such project work, any credible engagement with the climate crisis also means ensuring that our own work processes are as sustainable as possible. Stiftung Mercator's goal is therefore to establish a sustainable organizational culture. We are also keen to help ensure that our projects are implemented in an eco-friendly manner. These guidelines contain straightforward tips for sustainable project management when it comes to office supplies, events and business travel. We are of course aware that every organization comes with its own specific circumstances and possibilities, which is why the following recommendations are intended merely as guidance. Although this publication focuses on ecological sustainability, it goes without saying that we also take social sustainability and responsible corporate governance very seriously.

## **1 OFFICE SUPPLIES**

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The acquisition of equipment and the way it is used offers the greatest scope for reducing emissions when it comes to office supplies. If new electronic devices such as laptops or printers need to be purchased for a funded project, opting for refurbished equipment is not only a more sustainable but also a less expensive alternative to buying new devices. Certification such as that provided by TCO Certified and the energy efficiency class indicate which devices are particularly eco-friendly. Leasing is also an option if large photocopiers or other such equipment are required. The advantages of leasing schemes is that the devices and their individual components are recycled by the manufacturer and that toner and paper levels are centrally and digitally monitored. Regular servicing of all electronic devices can prolong service lives, making it unnecessary to purchase new equipment. If a device does break down, check before scrapping it whether it could be repaired or whether individual components are still functional and could be kept as spare parts. If this is not the case, the device should be properly disposed of as electronic waste. Staff can also ensure that they use their electronic devices sustainably in their daily work by enabling for example the power saving mode or a time-activated screen saver. Further tips and guidelines for green IT are available from [Green IT](#).

With a view to reducing other types of material consumption in the office, printing should be minimized, with data being stored and transmitted in digital form instead. However, since digital data also generate emissions, only essential data should be stored and servers should be regularly cleaned of “data garbage”. The obvious choice for documents that require a signature is an e-signature to avoid the need to print out and scan handwritten signatures. As far as possible, double-sided black-and-white printing should be defined as the default setting for all unavoidable print processes.

### **1.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OFFICE SUPPLIES AT A GLANCE**

- Buy refurbished rather than new devices
- Check out options for leasing equipment
- Pay attention to environmental and energy efficiency certification (e.g. TCO Certified)
- Service electronic devices regularly to extend their service lives
- Before disposing of defective equipment, check whether repair is possible or keep any functional components as spare parts
- Properly dispose of defective devices as electronic waste
- Use computers in power saving mode and set a time-activated screen saver

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- Avoid printing wherever possible, storing and transmitting data in digital form instead
- Regularly clean servers of “data garbage” to lower energy consumption
- Use an e-signature to avoid printing and scanning documents signed by hand
- Define double-sided black-and-white printing as the default setting

**2 EVENTS**

When it comes to event management, it is advisable to consider sustainability at an early stage in the planning process. Ahead of any event, always work out whether its objective could also be achieved without any significant reduction in quality if the event were to take place in a digital or hybrid form. Although they involve more equipment, online formats tend to be the more sustainable alternative because emissions-intensive travel to and from the event is not necessary and catering is not required.

If a face-to-face event is to be held, its location and time should be chosen with public transport links in mind. Ideally, the event should take place close to a major railway station and at a time that will allow participants to easily travel to and from the venue by bus or train.

The choice of caterer is another important way to reduce the event’s emissions and carbon footprint. Here too it is important to think in advance about whether catering is in fact necessary or whether the event is short enough to dispense with it completely (in its internal sustainability guidelines, Stiftung Mercator has defined a target of four hours as the minimum duration for an event with cold catering; hot food is provided only at all-day events). If this is not the case, the dishes selected should ideally be as meat-free as possible, with preference given to regional, seasonal, organic and fair-trade ingredients<sup>1</sup>.

To avoid food waste, the number of participants can be ascertained by requiring them to register for the event. Even though registration may not be binding, it nonetheless permits a more precise estimate of the ultimate number of participants and thus of the amount of food that will be needed. If any food is left over after the event, it can be distributed among the participants in takeaway boxes. Leftovers not suitable for consumption will be disposed of by some caterers in food waste bins that go to biogas or composting plants. It is important to clarify with the caterer in advance whether they practise this form of sustainable disposal. Generally speaking, however, it is advisable to avoid waste as far as

<sup>1</sup> Recommendations for sustainable catering services in Essen or Berlin can be obtained from the event management department at Stiftung Mercator

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possible, for example by opting for reusable crockery and using tap water rather than bottled water.

The same applies to any gifts that may be handed out to participants at the end of the event. Instead of the usual pens and notepads, which most people have at home anyway, vouchers for example can be given.

Sustainable events, especially if they involve sustainable catering, tend to incur additional costs. Stiftung Mercator's project partners are urged to take this into consideration when planning event funding and to factor such additional expenses into the total amount when applying for funding.

Further tips and ideas for sustainable event management can be found in these [Guidelines](#) issued by the German Environment Ministry (incl. a [checklist](#)).

### 2.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EVENTS AT A GLANCE

- Give preference to digital or hybrid formats for face-to-face events
- The location and time should be chosen to allow participants to travel to and from the event by local public transport
- No catering during short events (lasting less than 4 hours); provide hot food only at all-day events
- Choose sustainable dishes (ideally vegetarian/vegan, or containing as little meat as possible, regional, seasonal, organic, fair trade)
- Prior registration of number of participants to more precisely assess quantities of food required
- Distribute leftover food to participants
- Select caterer with sustainable disposal concept (disposal in organic waste bins)
- Avoid disposable products, e.g. crockery
- Avoid packaging waste (even if it can be recycled), e.g. by providing tap water rather than bottled water
- Select sustainable gifts, e.g. vouchers instead of items of stationery
- Give early consideration to the additional costs involved in sustainable events when planning the project funding

## 3 BUSINESS TRAVEL

As with event management, avoiding emissions should also be given preference over reducing emissions when business travel is necessary. If the need for a business trip arises, it should first be checked whether the purpose of the trip could not be achieved in another way, e. g. in a telephone call or online meeting. Short-term stays should also be avoided. Through early and systematic travel

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planning, it may for example be possible to schedule back-to-back meetings that would otherwise have necessitated two trips.

Local public transport is the lowest-emission form of travel and should be given preference over any kind of individual travel. If the trip involves distances that can only be covered by plane, however, Stiftung Mercator recommends a minimum stay of one day for every 750 km flown. Short-haul flights, including all inner-European flights, should be avoided wherever possible.

Project partners are urged to offset their travel emissions and can include the additional costs of this in their financial planning (this should be entered in the format template Finance plan → Material Costs → Travel costs). In some cases, it is possible to offset emissions directly when booking the trip, either via the provider in question or via external service providers.

As the various options for offsetting emissions differ considerably in quality, it is important to make sure that the provider in question is reputable, for example by checking their Gold Standard certification. The [emissions calculator](#) on offer from German rail operator Deutsche Bahn can help you keep track of your own emissions. When selecting a hotel, make sure that it has an appropriate sustainability concept (if so, this will normally be visible on the hotel's website) and that it is well connected to the local public transport network.

### 3.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUSINESS TRAVEL AT A GLANCE

- Wherever possible, arrange online meetings as a substitute for business travel
- Avoid short-term stays (rule of thumb for air travel: at least one day at destination for every 750 km flown)
- Schedule meetings together so that they can be accomplished in as few business trips as possible
- Give rail and public transport preference over any kind of individual travel
- Wherever possible, avoid short-haul flights (incl. all inner-European flights)
- Offset travel emissions when booking or via external service provider (make sure service provider is reputable, using for example the Gold Standard for carbon offsets)
- Select hotels with a sustainability concept and good public transport links