Project Impetus

Every year students, faculty, staff, and residents of the Indiana University, and greater Bloomington community plan and execute hundreds of events. These events enrich the lives of the participants and create opportunities for celebration and the sharing of information. Unfortunately, these events are also a hotbed for breeding unsustainable practices, damaging the Earth’s already delicate climate. Now is the time to change those behaviors by researching and implementing sustainable alternative practices to traditional event planning methods.

A new perspective in the goals of event planning throughout the community must be furthered. As such, events must not be graded not only on their success as an individual event, but on their impact to the Earth. As well, we must develop a system to educate interested individuals on green event coordination best practices as well as a way to measure success.

Overview of the Project:

In answer to those needs, we have created an Integrated Online Green Event Coordination System. Here users can view the green event guide, register and rate their event, and upload videos, photos, and more. The system was developed as a one stop shop tool, for users to find answers and give answers to sustainability related event planning questions. Additionally, the system was designed to change and grow as more is known about sustainable event coordination.

How the project was developed

Step 1: Creating a Green Events Guide

The first thing that needed to be done in this process was to create a green event coordination guide which would lead readers through the process of event planning, and steer them towards making greener choices. The purpose of the guide was not to force individuals to green their event, nor to propose absolute solutions. Instead it was designed with the uniqueness of the event, the individuality of the planner, and tiers of greenness in mind. In this way, it presents the user with many options for a similar concern and the reader can choose what they would like to do, in order to green their event.

Much research had to be conducted in order to present the reader with options. As such, other schools manuals, event reports, and current sustainability related research, and local vendors were consulted during the research for this guide. As such, the guide became a meeting point for scientific research, local practice, and national practice, and is more comprehensive than any other University sustainable event planning guide.

After the research was conducted, the guide itself had to be formed. The structure of the guide, was formed as a way to lead an individual through the entire event planning process. It details pre-planning, day-of, and the aftermath of any event. Additionally, it touches on the main components of event coordination: venue, set-up/technical needs, catering, printing, décor, recycling, carbon footprint, and clean-up.
Foremost, the guide defines green event ideals, and introduces those ideals to the user in its first chapters. The guide defines a green values in the following way:

An ideal event will, wherever possible, exude the values of sustainable practices in the following ways:

• Minimize its carbon footprint.
• Utilize local products, goods, and services.
• Use organic and seasonal, local foods whenever available.
• Minimize water waste.
• Use recycled, recyclable, and biodegradable products, and goods where possible.
• Incorporate the values of sustainability, into the pre-planning, execution, and aftermath stages of all event coordination.

The chapters following, incorporate these values into all stages of the planning process, and give the reader quick-tips, helpful resources, and check-lists to help summarize the chapters, and increase usability.

**Step 2: Creating a rating system**

As the guide was developed, it became clear that there needed to be a way for users to quantify and qualify their success in using the guide. The green events rating system became an answer for that need.

The rating system was created to be an online format, in which users could log-in to the system, register their event(s), complete a questionnaire, and finally get a green rating for their event. Additionally, the system was meant to be an obvious sister component to the guide. The idea being, that if one read the guide and utilized the suggestions presented, the user would get a relatively high green rating for their event.

The rating system is controlled for size and scope of an event, so that small scale events, are not graded against large scale events. The rating system is also unique in that each event is graded out of its distinctive 100%. If an event does not have a component, like food, those questions are taken away from their possible 100%, and the user is presented with a rating based on how many possible green efforts they could have made, for that particular event, and not how many possibilities exist in general.

Finally, there is an archival component, which allows the user, when the event is complete, to save, and archive the record of it within our system. The archived event is then placed on a list of archived events that other users can view for inspiration, and tips.

**Step 4: Integrating the Guide and the Rating System**
As a final step to the project, the Green Event Coordination Website was built to house both the guide and the rating system. It was meant to be a one-stop-shop for users, where they could access and read the guide, register their events, and rate their events.

Another unique component to this system, is the integration of a social media component which would allow users to upload videos, photos, and links regarding their event. It was thought that in allowing the users to upload this material, each archived event would then act as an example of a green event, and give coordinators a forum for information sharing and gathering. If an event coordinator wanted an idea for a caterer or printer that was willing to meet sustainability needs, they might be able to find an example in a past event.

Finally, the online system will run as BETA for the Fall 2010 semester. We know that the system is not perfect, and has not been tested by real users. As such, it is important that we gather feedback and comments from those users, and improve the system over time. After the BETA run, improvements will be made, and the system can be released to a wider audience.

Steps for the future:

The online guide, as with the entire project, is meant to be a work in progress: Research and practice regarding sustainable methods change regularly, and IU’s ability to utilize some resources changes. For example, if IU purchases and implements a commercial composter for biodegradable dinnerware then our stance in the guide might be change to reflect that new capability. In general, the following things must be monitored and potentially changed regarding the guide:

1. Revision:
   a. Based upon new research, or new capabilities
   b. More local links
   c. More resources added

2. Must be tested, in its online version, for user friendliness

3. Must address new questions that are brought up by test users.

The Online Rating and Archival System must similarly be updated to reflect:

1. New research and practices
2. Feedback from test users
3. New capabilities within the community

Finally, the overall system could not only be utilized by coordinators themselves, but also by a consulting core. The core would, ideally, consist of 3–4 individuals who would be responsible for using the Green Event Coordination System to:

1. Host workshops and learning opportunities regarding green event coordination, for students, faculty, staff, and community members.
2. Act as individual consultants for planners who come to them wanting assistance in greening their event.
3. Audit registered green events.

Conclusion

The Green Event Coordination System was developed to be a fully integrated online tool consisting of the green event guide, the online rating system, and the social media component. The goal is to present planners with green choices, and allow give them the freedom to create and craft an event that suits their needs, and meets their sustainability goals. The components of the system were meant to work in tandem, and to be useful tools for coordinators. In the future, feedback from test users of the BETA System will be integrated into the system to make it more complete, user friendly, and functional. Additionally, a green event consulting core would aid individuals and groups in utilizing the system, and greening events.