**Sustainability best practices for advertisers and agencies and their suppliers suggestions for non-mandatory rider to contracts**

Resource by Ad Net Zero

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**Corporate Sustainability - General Business Operations** (Ad Net Zero Action 1)

Every business should be measuring/quantifying their Greenhouse Gas emissions across scopes 1, 2 and 3 (which includes owned and leased assets, purchased materials and services, travel, etc.). Whether as a large company subject to regulation requiring this, or a supplier in an advertiser or agency’s supply chain, it’s important to be prepared as this continues to become tablestakes.

Companies should establish a GHG emissions baseline inventory and work toward a science-based target of net zero by 2050 or sooner, ensuring that their actions and reduction goals are in line with the Paris Climate Agreement.

We ask our partners and suppliers to share information on your sustainability plan and goals. Please download this template and fill out as much information as is available: [Enterprise Sustainability questionnaire](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fadnetzero.com%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2024%2F10%2Fgmsf-data-request-form_enterprise_.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK). Ensure education across your organization and

Summary of key steps:

1. **Measure** - Select a carbon measurement tool/platform to track emissions across all scopes of your business (direct/owned and indirect/purchased or facilitated); identify if a sustainability consultant is needed.
2. **Science-based target** - Set a net zero target for or before 2050, and ideally a near term target (reduction of 50% from a baseline year) around 2030/2035, and ideally publicly declare these using organizations such as SBTi (Science Based Targets Initiative), The Climate Pledge, SME Climate Hub, or other science-based equivalent initiative.
3. **Report, Reduce & Remove** – measure and publicly report the carbon emissions of your business on an annual basis to identify and track progress toward your goals. Identify high-quality, verified carbon offsets and carbon removal projects.
4. **Work with your clients and suppliers -** secure their support for your policies. In RFIs/RFPs, share this [Enterprise Sustainability questionnaire](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fadnetzero.com%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2024%2F10%2Fgmsf-data-request-form_enterprise_.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK) or select key questions to ask of your suppliers and partners.

Resources: [Ad Net Zero Action 1Getting Your House in Order,](https://adnetzero.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Welcome-to-Action-1-Getting-Your-House-in-Order.pdf) [Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi),](https://sciencebasedtargets.org/) [Ad Net Zero Voluntary Code of Conduct Inclusions](https://adnetzero.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Voluntary-Code-of-Conduct-Inclusions-1.pdf)

**Advertising Production & Post-Production** (Ad Net Zero Action 2)

Creatives and Producers are uniquely positioned to convey the reality and urgency of the climate crisis, inspiring action on and off screen. Embracing sustainable practices now isn’t just about reducing emissions – it's about future-proofing the way we create. Soon, sustainability will be standard practice across production and post, and by leading the shift, you set your agency apart early and help shape a new era of advertising that honors both creativity and our planet.

We ask our partners and suppliers to identify ways to prioritize sustainability in pre-production, production and post-production, to measure the carbon emissions from these activities such as with the [AdGreen](https://www.weareadgreen.org/) tool, and to ideally work toward a carbon-reduction goal specific to production. This also includes limiting travel, particularly from flights, and being mindful of how files are stored. Working with your team, clients and partners, implement as many best practices as possible from resources such as [Ad Net Zero Sustainable Production Starter Guide](https://adnetzero.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Ad-Net-Zero-Sustainable-Production-Best-Practices.pdf), training from [AdGreen Resource Guides](https://www.weareadgreen.org/resources-guides) and [Green The Bid checklists, bid specs and templates](https://www.greenthebid.earth/resources).

Summary of key steps:

1. **Have early conversations** – discuss internally and talk with vendors about your commitment to sustainability and collaborate on how to best make this a priority.
   1. Suggest the production company hire an Eco Supervisor if they don’t already have one.
   2. Suggest the production company hire one or more PAs from the community who come from lower income backgrounds. Investing in early career development in the production industry creates conditions for well-paying jobs and increases opportunities for underrepresented communities.
   3. Consider if virtual production is an option before assuming a physical shoot, especially if it requires travel.

[Ad Net Zero Sustainable Production Starter Guide](https://adnetzero.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Ad-Net-Zero-Sustainable-Production-Best-Practices.pdf), training from [AdGreen Resource Guides](https://www.weareadgreen.org/resources-guides) and [Green The Bid checklists, bid specs and templates](https://www.greenthebid.earth/resources).

Additional resources: [Producers Guild of America Green Production Guide](https://greenproductionguide.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/PGA-Green-Unified-Best-Practices-Guide-REV.pdf), [Green The Bid,](https://www.greenthebid.earth/complete-production-manual-3) and [Made In NY](https://bwiny.org/made-in-ny-pa-training-program/overview/) Production Assistant Training.

1. **Reduce emissions** – Focus on key areas that can keep emissions (and often budget) lower:
2. **Travel** (especially flying):
   1. Whether constructing a set, or shooting on location, consider shooting local, if possible, to reduce travel emissions.
   2. Talk to your team and clients EARLY about who is absolutely needed to attend the set. We recommend from the agency side the lead creatives (2), Producer (1), Account lead (1), client representative/decision-maker (1). The production company will be required to provide virtual viewing for those who will not be in person for milestones such as callbacks, wardrobe fittings, and shoot days:
3. **Catering and materials**:
   1. Either have a meat-free menu, or a limited meat menu that does not include beef items. By switching from beef to a vegan option, you can reduce [emissions by 94%](https://www.weareadgreen.org/reports).
   2. Seek vendors that can provide zero waste options such as re-usable serve ware, silverware, etc., recycling, and pickup of other large items.
   3. Aim for **zero waste** sets. Use a partner such as [EcoSet](https://www.ecoset.la/) to facilitate.
4. **File storage and data/energy usage:** The Agency Producer should have early conversations with their vendors about storage of files, and ensuring re-use of enterprise-class hard drives and avoiding unnecessary duplicate storage between cloud and physical. Using hard drives as single-use items contributes to unsustainable mining practices. See the [Hard Drive Re-Use Best Practice Guide](https://adnetzero.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Rev-Hard-Drive-Best-Practices-Report.pdf)
5. **Transport & energy sources:** choose renewable energy and electric where possible, limiting use of diesel-powered sources.
6. **Measure emissions from production** - You can’t manage what you can’t measure! The Agency Producer should work closely with the production and post vendors to track carbon emissions using the [AdGreen](https://www.weareadgreen.org/carbon-calculator) carbon calculator, or a similar tool.

**Media** (Ad Net Zero Action 3)

As the biggest part of advertising’s carbon footprint, it’s important to measure, manage, and reduce the emissions that come from media.

There are many tools and technologies already being used to measure and reduce emissions from media, considering data use and and Ad Net Zero is continuing to develop the [Global Media Sustainability Framework](https://adnetzero.com/news/ad-net-zero-announces-global-framework-to-measure-medias-carbon-emissions/), a Life Cycle Assessment for six core media channels, the first iteration of which was announced in June 2024. This is a voluntary set of standards to measure emissions from media planning and buying, with the intention that companies can then understand, more accurately quantify, and reduce these emissions through their media planning.

Implement best practices for planning and buying of media found in the [Guide to Sustainable Media](https://adnetzero.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Guide-to-Sustainable-Media.pdf) (10 actionable steps across various media channels) and [IAB Tech Lab Sustainable Programmatic Guide](https://iabtechlab.com/standards/sustainability/) (more specific to DSPs and SSPs).

Summary of key steps:

1. **Sustainable supplier selection and infrastructure:**

* Build a Sustainability-Assured Media Partner list. The biggest decarbonization effort that can be achieved for the media industry is to use sustainable suppliers in the media value chain.
* Streamline your media value chain and technology. Be selective in the technologies used to support your digital media campaigns and look to streamline wherever possible.

1. **Optimize assets for media decarbonization:**
   * Consider ways to reduce, reuse and recycle your creative assets. Industry-wide data shows that many advertisers create more assets than they will use.
   * Compress and consider length of digital creative formats. Longer form assets and heavy file sizes generate greater GHG output. We suggest compressing your digital creative files and consider shorter formats to lower your footprint.
   * Stream content and landing destinations versus preload. Preloading both landing pages and ad creatives in digital puts great demand on the server energy. Avoid auto-play as a default setting.
2. **Sustainable media planning and buying:**
   * Optimize flighting to include off-peak energy periods.
   * Streamline and optimize data usage. How data is stored and transacted should be examined to do so in a way that is as energy efficient as possible.
   * Look for sustainability in print such as responsibly sourced paper and recycled materials in the printing process.
   * Look for sustainability in out-of-home. The more sustainably they are built and maintained, the more impact they can have in long-term GHG reduction.
   * Consider emissions data in media measurement models. A balanced scorecard can drive transparency in investment choice.

You can find further details in Ad Net Zero’s [Guide to Sustainable Media](https://adnetzero.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Guide-to-Sustainable-Media.pdf) and [IAB Tech Lab Sustainable Programmatic Guide](https://chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://iabtechlab.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/FINAL-Sustainability-Starter-Guide-2.pdf).

**Events and Activations** (Ad Net Zero Action 4)

Events are a significant marketing vehicle and have a significant carbon footprint through both physical aspects and audience travel. (It’s estimated that 10% of global carbon (CO2) emissions come from the events industry. [[ClimateTrade](https://climatetrade.com/how-to-make-carbon-neutral-events-a-guide-to-sustainable-event-planning/)] That’s 3x more than aviation, or the ad industry. [[Campaign Asia](https://www.campaignasia.com/article/media-industrys-pollution-equivalent-to-aviation-study-finds/480327)])

Emissions from events are a part of scope 3 emissions and should be measured and managed along with other aspects of a business’s footprint. And thoughtful, sustainable experiences drive stronger brand loyalty! We expect partners to take steps to reduce the carbon impact of events through using a calculator and best practices such as from [isla](https://weareisla.co.uk/). Ad Net Zero and isla have developed this [Sustainable Events Guide](https://adnetzero.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Ad-Net-Zero-x-isla-Sustainable-Events-Guide.pdf) as a resource for the industry.

Ad Net Zero is also working with industry awards bodies such as Cannes LIONS, to build in sustainability criteria into the award entries across all categories - see more at [Cannes Lions Awards entry guide: Sustainability question](https://www.canneslions.com/awards/awards-support/awards-entry-guide#sustainability-question). We expect partners to include information about the sustainability of a campaign in any entry, whether related to operational emissions impact and/or how the content helps to promote more sustainable behaviors.

Summary of key steps for awards:

1. **Follow event sustainability best practices** (see below)
2. **Incorporate sustainability as a priority throughout the award submissions, criteria and categories**

* Entries: Ask about the sustainability goals and reporting of the submitting organization(s), the carbon footprint of the campaign/activation, and any sustainability themes/goals promoted by the work
* Incorporate information in the judging guidance and promotional materials
* Avoid siloing sustainability only as a dedicated category, without efforts to embed sustainability questions in the other categories

Summary of key steps for events:

1. **Manage staff travel emissions:**

* No first class, limit business class, focus on trains, if possible.
* Virtual meetings where possible.
* Incentivize public transport and ride sharing.

1. **Prioritize digital solutions:**

* Leverage QR codes and apps to minimize printing.
* Choose LED signage.
* Prioritize reuse with any printed materials.

1. **Curate thoughtful menu options:**

* Use local suppliers and in-season produce.
* Offer more plant-based options.
* Communicate the environmental impact of menu choices.

1. **Reduce waste:**

* Don’t over-order food, select vendors who can properly dispose of waste, whether compost, or donate fresh foods to a local charity.
* Eliminate single-use serveware, set expectations ahead of time.
* Prioritize modular builds, donate locally if not reusable.

1. **Rethink swag:**
   * Offer donation to charity of digital alternatives to physical items.
   * Choose upcycled of 100% recycled, practical and reusable items.
   * Minimize over-ordering and choose opt-in
2. **Keep it local:**
   * Avoid shipping costs and emissions.
   * Establish a procurement radius to prioritize local suppliers and staff.
   * Support the local economy.
3. **Prioritize renewable and energy efficient:**
   * Choose energy efficient and ideally sustainability-certified venues.
   * Make sure equipment is as energy-efficient as possible.
   * Choose battery, hybrid, solar and biofuel options over diesel.
4. **Address audience travel:**
   * Prioritize locations that are proximate to most, limiting air travel.
   * Track where and how attendees travel.
   * Encourage low-carbon travel, arrange group transport.
5. **Measure emissions and commit to an event sustainability plan:**
   * Use a robust measurement tool designed for events such as [TRACE](https://traceyour.events/) by isla.
   * Integrate new questions and procedures into event project plan.
   * Invest in education for both your team and suppliers.

Resources: [Ad Net Zero x isla Sustainable Events Guide,](https://adnetzero.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Ad-Net-Zero-x-isla-Sustainable-Events-Guide.pdf) [proseed best practice framework](https://proseed.events/), and [TRACE 6 ways to reduce your event carbon footprint](https://traceyour.events/six-ways-to-reduce-your-event-carbon-footprint/).

**Advertising’s Messages** (Ad Net Zero Action 5)

In advertising we have the privilege and power to influence positive change on and off camera by normalizing climate action and behaviors that are scientifically proven to reduce carbon emissions. We commit to—and expect our partners to support—use advertising’s abilities to support more sustainable behaviors through both background and foreground creative choices (implicit and explicit messages). When we depict climate-friendly actions on-screen (and off) as common, normal, and expected, viewers will be more likely to make positive change.

There are many resources and case studies to help agencies and the industry along this journey:

* The [Campaign Ad Net Zero Awards](https://www.campaignadnetzeroawards.com/) showcase the best examples of more sustainable advertising and build a case study library, consolidating these into [casebooks](https://adnetzero.com/resources/?tax%5Bresources_categories%5D%5B%5D=54) – found on Ad Net Zero’s Resource Hub.
* Ad Net Zero’s *Every Brief Counts* is an actionable and easy-to-digest toolkit which curates the most impactful, science-backed sustainable behaviors, providing strategists, creatives, producers and account teams with knowledge and examples of what these can look like in advertising. The toolkit is not yet publicly available – please reach out to <mailto:hello@adnetzero.com>for more information, or check AdNetZero.com/Resources.
* Purpose Disruptors [#ChangeTheBrief](https://www.changethebrief.org/) platform provides an on demand and face to face learning program, offering insights and expert advice at a category level on how we can adapt our work to promote more sustainable choices and behaviors in line with a zero-carbon world.

It’s important to educate teams on greenwashing as part of these efforts:

* US-based resources: [Institute of Advertising Ethics GreenShield training](https://www.iaethics.org/green-shield) (free).
  + Government documentation: [Green Guides | Federal Trade Commission](https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/topics/truth-advertising/green-guides), [What Companies Need to Know About California’s AB 1305](https://corpgov.law.harvard.edu/2024/11/14/what-companies-need-to-know-about-californias-ab-1305/)
* UK- and EU-based resources: [ASA guidance on environmental claims](https://www.asa.org.uk/) (UK)
  + [Green Claims Code](https://greenclaims.campaign.gov.uk/) (UK)
  + [Green claims - European Commission](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/circular-economy/green-claims_en)
* Location-agnostic overarching principles and resources: [Global Guidance on Environmental Claims 2022 - World Federation of Advertisers](https://wfanet.org/knowledge/item/2022/04/04/global-guidance-on-environmental-claims-2022); [Creatives for Climate GreenSwatch toolkit](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60c3fcb322f1bc439c03cf25/t/6488943f6197c50273f42583/1686672461039/Greenwash+Swatch+Toolkit.pdf)

Summary of Key steps:

1. Engage in training and resources for strategists, creatives and account teams – educating on sustainable behaviors and avoiding greenwashing.
2. Ensuring ads reflect climate reality and support/promote more sustainable behaviors to drive positive change for our planet.
3. Avoid misleading environmental claims and greenwashing. Note that greenwashing is very specific to each country as to the guidance and regulation.
4. Celebrate the industry’s best work through the [Campaign Ad Net Zero Awards](https://www.campaignadnetzeroawards.com/winners-2023).

Sustainable Behaviors summary from #ChangeTheBrief:

1. Eat better: one of the easiest and most significant ways to lower GHG emissions globally is by promoting and normalizing conscious eating habits. Ex: eat more plants, cut down on meat, choose sustainable food, eat local, seasonal food, waste less food and use leftovers.
2. Buy better: make more thoughtful, conscious purchasing decisions, collect experiences, not just things, go plastic-free packaging, share, reuse, repair before you buy, ask more questions when you buy.
3. Travel better: fly and drive less, use more public transportation, walk, or bike, go virtual for business.
4. Use less: save water when washing and cleaning, wash clothes less on shorter, colder cycles, switch to renewable energy for heat, electric, gas, and save energy wherever you can.
5. Waste less: reduce, reuse, recycle, repair, say no to unnecessary plastic, don’t litter, compost.
6. Protect nature: discover the wonders of the natural world all around, save the bees, protect trees, wildlife and natural spaces, vote for action.