



# Unitarian Universalist General Assembly

2022

## Sustainability Report



A grayscale photograph of a woman with blonde hair in a braid, wearing glasses and a KN95 face mask. She is holding a peacock feather in her hands. The image is overlaid with a white box containing the title and a list of contents. A red horizontal bar is at the top, and a teal vertical bar is on the right side.

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# About

The UUA is the central organization for the Unitarian Universalist (UU) religious movement in the United States. The faith tradition is diverse and inclusive, committed to Seven Principles that include the worth of each person, the need for justice and compassion, and the right to choose one's own beliefs.

General Assembly (GA) is the annual meeting of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). Participants worship, witness, learn, connect, and make policy for the Association through democratic process. Anyone may attend and all are welcome.



## Summary of General Assembly 2022

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| Show Dates                | June 22 - 24, 2022                             |
| Location                  | Oregon Convention Center                       |
| # Attendees:              | 1,401 in-person and 1,970 virtual. 3,371 total |
| # Exhibiting Companies:   | 54 in-person and 18 virtual                    |
| Sq Ft of exhibitor space: | 90,000 sq ft                                   |
| # of Occupied Room nights | 3,520 nights                                   |



# Scope of Work

Honeycomb Strategies (HCS) worked in collaboration with the UUA GA team to conduct a detailed assessment of all current sustainability practices and programs related to the Assembly. In addition, HCS led an Event Sustainability Team (including internal organizers and external key vendors such as show management, GSC, hotels, venue, F&B providers, exhibitors, and other key stakeholders) in writing goals and executing action plans for the 2022 Assembly.

This data can be used to compare the impacts of the 2022 GA against past years by the UUAs pre-planning efforts, the venue's ability to execute on action plans, the sustainable options provided by F&B and the depth to which the hotel partners were able to report the GA's footprint. It is understood not all impacts are under the direct control of the UUA GA planning teams, but rather under their influence.



If we don't do the basic work of defining the kind of people we want to be in language that is stable and consistent, we can't work toward stable, consistent goals.

Ibram X. Kendi  
Ware Lecturer, UUA GA 2022



# Long-Term Goals

In 2022 the UUA GA team identified five event sustainability goals which guided planning and event management decisions:

## Maintain a Zero-Waste Event

Focus on sustainable procurement, waste reduction, maximizing waste diversion, and donations.

## Maintain Carbon Neutrality

·Collaborate with all stakeholders to reduce onsite energy use, maximize the use of renewable energy. Offset 100% of UUA-GA related emissions, seeking to be carbon positive by neutralizing carbon emissions associated with waste and the production of various materials related to the event.

## Advance Stakeholder Education & Engagement

·Minimize the environmental impacts of the GA with bold, highly visible actions to reduce/eliminate waste, limit and mitigate harmful carbon emissions, limit water consumption, source food locally and donate any surplus food/goods, among other initiatives.

## Continuously Improve Sustainable Sourcing

Recognize that every decision made to produce the UUA-GA has an impact.

## Create Lasting Legacy

Create a positive social impact on Portland, OR as the host community.

These goals were largely reflective of the UUA's suggested action on SDGs and referenced for each decision made to guide event production, and as a result, hosting an environmentally responsible event.





# General Assembly Impacts

Not all consumption is created equal, but all consumption can be monitored and reduced. Overall, the Assembly's carbon impact was low. There is opportunity to decrease energy use by utilizing space more efficiently. The halls were large with empty space left to be cooled and lit, which resulted in avoidable energy use.

Municipal solid waste landfills are the third-largest source of human-related methane emissions in the U.S.

## Key Environmental Impacts\*

| waste        | energy         | water              | carbon        |
|--------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------|
| 6.58 US Tons | 470,423.52 kWh | 157,572.71 gallons | 880.17 MTC02e |

## Per Participant Impacts (in-person only)

| waste    | energy     | water          | carbon     |
|----------|------------|----------------|------------|
| 9.40 lbs | 335.78 kWh | 112.47 gallons | .63 MTC02e |

\* Total carbon emissions include virtual attendee impacts. Total energy and water include impacts from Hyatt host hotel.



# Waste Impacts

One of the biggest challenges in delivering a truly sustainable event is effective waste management; the very nature of the industry makes it hard to avoid. The UUA GA Event Sustainability Team put in an impressive amount of time to identify areas of the Assembly's production which may pose a risk to reaching the five 2022 GA sustainability goals. This pre-planning allowed the team to take action and find solutions long before the GA started.

Green Team members working a Sustainability Station at each meal area along with additional bus bins for collection of food waste were the perfect solution for divert food waste out of land and to a commercial compost facility and were a great complement to the two bin system for land fill recycling found throughout the facility.

The Sustainability Stations were very well labeled and allowed for plates and waste to be handed off for the Green Team to sort into the correct landfill, recycle or compost bin. The Green Team ensured there was no contamination to each stream.

UUA did an excellent job avoiding single use plastic throughout the Assembly. Almost all cups were glass, service ware, most plates and cutlery were reusable, and napkins were cloth. On the buffet lines, nothing was pre-packaged and condiments were bulk. By choosing reusables, UUA eliminated a common waste stream seen at many events.

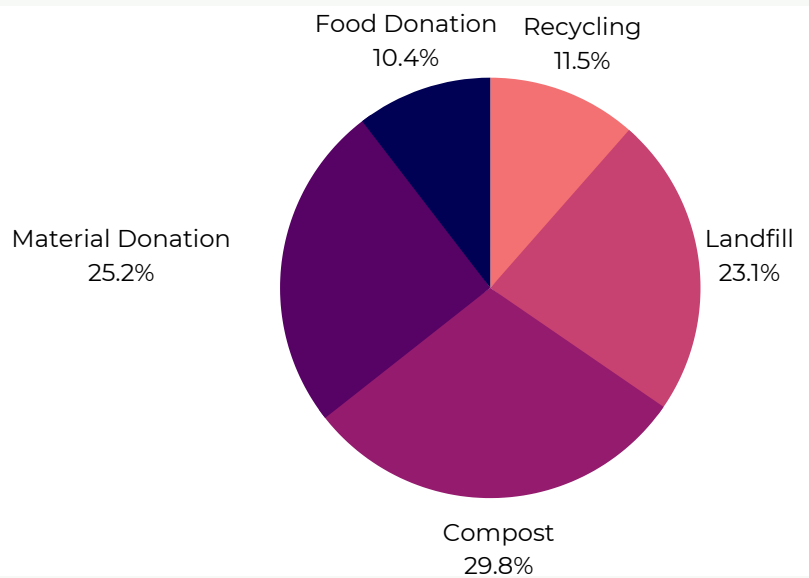
Private coffee shops and snack bars are commonplace in convention venues. What can prove challenging is aligning their practices with events goals around waste and consumption. The UUA Team was able to build a relationship with Portland Coffee Roasters around the need to reduce waste and thus single use cups during the GA. Attendees were offered reusable mugs for to go coffee eliminating what could have contributed to a lot of waste generation onsite.





Having partners that align with the GA's waste goals was a key factor in for low waste event. The OCC, Heritage and our Green Team volunteers helped to sort cardboard, mixed recyclables, as well as compostable materials away from the landfill. While a 77% diversion rate is impressive for any event, we were expecting this number to be in the 90% range. We reviewed the data and talked with the OCC waste hauler about landfill numbers, which we felt were high. Ultimately we had no way to confirm if additional items were somehow added to our landfill stream. In the future we will be more diligent to get a more accurate make up of what ended up in our landfill stream.

DIVERSION RATE:  
**77%**



Exhibitors contribute a great deal to the feel of each GA. Many exhibitors were present to educate and most had a call to action which contributed to the positive social impact goal for the Assembly. Along with bringing in little waste, they also did not leave much waste and just a couple had items to donate. Items for donations went to the local UUA and a vet's event which was loading in next to the OCC.

Exhibitors and Vendors





# Managing Carbon Footprint

The UUA GA has committed to offsetting emissions related to event production covering Scope 1, 2 and 3.

Scope 1 – Direct GHG emissions that occur from sources owned or controlled by the organization

Scope 2 – Indirect GHG emissions from generation of purchased electricity consumed by the organization are the most simple and straightforward to manage.

It is Scope 3 – Other indirect GHG emissions that occur because of the activities of the organization but occur from sources not owned or controlled by the organization, where events need to seek to address impacts. For an organization to achieve net zero, emissions from all three scopes should be addressed. This is important to remember as we plan for future Assemblies. In addition to offsetting travel, the GA will have to address supply chain emissions as it constitutes a significant part of Scope 3 emissions.



As part of the GA action plan to Maintain Carbon Neutrality in 2022 and Beyond, the Team collaborated with all stakeholders to reduce onsite energy use, maximize the use of renewable energy and offset 100% of UUA GA related emissions. To align the Assembly with attendee actions, offsets were included as part of registration with an opt-out option. A very high percentage of attendees chose to keep an offset included in their registration to the GA with 95% of in person attendees and 94% of virtual attendees.



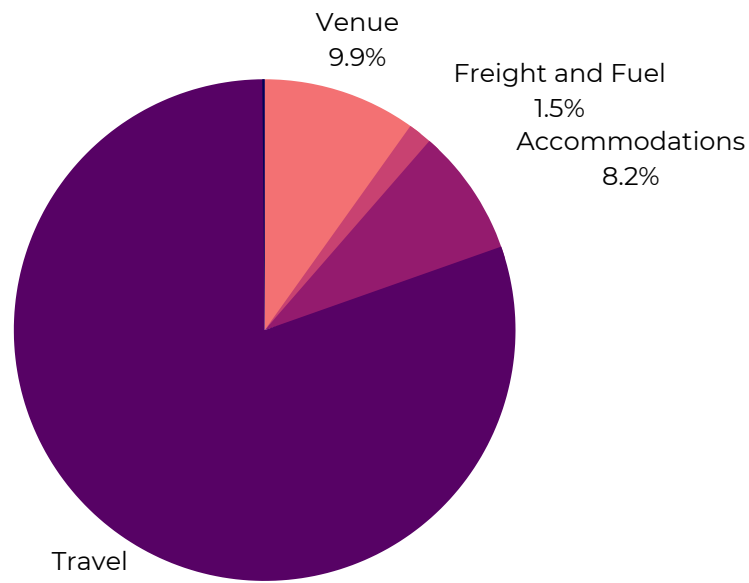
# Carbon Footprint, cont.

Mult-platform, virtual participation

The largest contributing factor to an event carbon footprint is due to attendee travel to and from the event. The virtual audience lowered the carbon footprint of each attendee by eliminating additional travel fuels and resources.

Additionally, by diverting waste sent to landfill over 2 metric tons of carbon emissions were avoided.

With a long-term goal of holding a carbon positive Assembly, the UUA strived to neutralize carbon emissions associated with waste and the production of various materials related to the event. The amount of pre-planning and collaborative nature of the Team allowed this year's Assembly to come even closer to the Carbon Neutrality goal.



In-person Attendee Impact

## Virtual Attendees Impact

Carbon emissions for attendees the joined GA by streaming or watching recorded content accounted for 1.34 MTCO<sub>2</sub>e.

**Virtual Attendee CO<sub>2</sub>e Impact**  
1.36 kg per person



**In-Person Attendee CO<sub>2</sub>e Impact**  
1,440 kg per person

\*Virtual event attendee impact calculated with <https://www.digitaleventcarboncalculator.com/>



95% of in-person attendees chose to offset their carbon impact as part of registration.



# Utilities

Utility metrics at the Oregon Convention Center were measured for all contracted dates and space, move-in through move-out in an aggregated total. The OCC generates 100% of its energy from renewable on site. There is a Tesla Solar Rooftop Array and the OCC participates in the Pacific Power Blue Sky program to offset the remaining electrical usage. This program supports renewable energy in fixed price blocks, restores and preserves native fishing habitats in Oregon through The Freshwater Trust, and provides a 54% wind and 46% solar renewable resource mix. Choosing the OCC as an event venue reduces the Assembly's carbon footprint due to the renewable energy produced onsite and the partnerships in place. Excellent choice in the OCC and a factor that should be considered whenever choosing a venue.



GA Exhibitor Set Up



OCC Solar Array



# Sustainable Procurement

Some of the most meaningful impacts we have on show site are directly related to the items chosen in the pre-planning process months before the event and exhibit halls open. Making the most sustainable choice can come in many different forms. In some cases, we aim for elimination completely, like single use plastics. In other instances, it makes more sense to choose items that have better reuse options over recyclability. There are also opportunities to choose materials which have a lower carbon footprint than others, like plant-based foods over animal products or choosing low VOC carpet. There is no “right way” to make sustainable procurement decisions, however being thoughtful about the end-of-life options for what we choose can lead us to the most sustainable solutions.

## Exhibitor Hall

Many convention events choose to carpet the hall which greatly impacts the waste measurements of a show. The Assembly chose to carpet only the aiseways and did not cut custom carpet shapes which allowed all 3,780 sq.ft. of the carpet and padding to be re-rolled for re-use. The pipe and drape option to build out the exhibitor hall eliminated the need for custom, single use booth graphics and building resources. While most event breakdowns will have piles of mixed materials contaminating the potential for recyclability, the OCC rolled out large, well labeled bins for waste collection and recycling to ensure there was no contamination. The Team did a fantastic job talking through when and how waste will be handled at the breakdown of the Assembly.



Labeled bins for waste sorting of GA breakdown



Furniture donations from show floor



## Food and Beverage



As attendee's food needs become more specific, options with small carbon footprints reduce. The Assembly food and beverage team excelled at providing a variety of food items to meet most dietary needs not at the sake of the environment. No pre-packaged food was provided and items were clearly labeled.

The buffet style set up reduced food waste over plated meals. OCC staff plated the food options for each attendee and clothes napkins were rolled around reusable cutlery. The OCC food and beverage team delivered a higher percentage of food items from local and regional source. Of the 37 food items tracked, 78% were local, 22% were regional, 70% were fresh ingredients and 19% were certified organic. There is opportunity to reduce the amount of food waste as 3420 lbs of food was composted and 1700 lbs was donated.

Plant based food and beverage options are a great choice as they have a lower carbon footprint and produce less greenhouse gas than animal products. This change will contribute to both the sustainable sourcing and carbon neutrality goals of the UA. There is a future opportunity to look at the carbon footprint of items provided. For example, it takes 463 gallons of water to produce four ounces of beef and 180 gallons for the same serving of pork. Four ounces of sweet potatoes uses 12 gallons of water, onions use only eight gallons.\* Beyond the lowered resource footprint of plant-based food products, this diet boosts our health, reduces animal suffering, helps alleviate world hunger and helps protect the world's biodiversity.



Buffet set up



Bulk condiments





# Education and Engagement

Stakeholder education is a key aspect of a successful sustainable event management strategy. While the explicit goal of the GA was around waste and sustainability, the Assembly successfully educated and engaged the community around justice, equity, diversity and inclusion as well.



## JUSTICE

The justice efforts broke down divisions and honored the interconnectedness of all life and justice issues. When the U.S. Supreme Court's Roe v Wade judgement came down during the Assembly, the entire congregation mobilized and changed the course of the GA to support the local community rallies and opened rooms for therapeutic conversation.

## EQUITY

The UUA's compassion for all humans was front and center in the general sessions as all points of view were heard in a safe and just environment. Equity was not only a word used but also an action taken to welcome all to the GA.

## DIVERSITY

The diversity of the attendees was seen in both forms of attendance. There was a teen room and meeting just for this age group and attendees were acknowledged no matter their race, genders, how they represented or sexual orientation. The conscious effort to have conversations about diversity inclusion in the sessions speaks to the UUA's commitment.



## INCLUSION

From the fragrance free seating, to the mediation rooms, electric carts for those not very mobile to get around, very well thought out and communicated avenues for voicing grievances, food choices for all attendees and multiple levels and ways to be involved with the GA all created an enormous show of inclusion. General Assembly is open to in-person and virtual attendees. This year there were 1,401 in-person and 1,970 virtually for a total of 3,371 total registrants. The virtual option increased accessibility and removed barriers to attendance for those balancing responsibilities as parents, guardians, care-givers, students, and those with disabilities.



# Key Performance Indicators

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| Energy use (kWh)                                | 470,423.52 |
| Renewable energy Use (%)                        | 24%        |
| Water use (gal)                                 | 157,572.71 |
| Landfill waste (US tons)                        | 1.44       |
| Recycling waste (US tons)                       | .77        |
| Compost waste (US tons)                         | 1.99       |
| Total waste (US tons)                           | 6.58       |
| Total waste per participant (lb)                | 9.40       |
| Donated materials (lbs)                         | 97         |
| Donated food (lb)                               | 1,700      |
| Event Waste Diversion Rate (%)                  | 77%        |
| Waste diversion improvement over CC average (%) | 11%        |
| Percent of carbon emissions offset              | 100%       |

## PERFORMANCE

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| Total signage production (sq ft)               | 9,826.30 |
| Sustainable signage produced (%)               | 100%     |
| Signage returned to inventory (%)              | 100%     |
| Hotels within 1 mile walking distance (%)      | 100%     |
| Mobile app downloads                           | 87%      |
| Local fresh food (<100 miles) (% by weight)    | 68%      |
| Regional fresh food (<500 miles) (% by weight) | 32%      |
| Organic food (% weight)                        | 19%      |
| Fresh Goods (% by weight)                      | 82%      |



# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Reporting on the SDGs is an important step for events to communicate to their stakeholder, the commitment to contributing to the achievement of these Global Goals; claiming accountability and responsibility to take the necessary actions and measuring progress over time. The UUA emphasizes an intergenerational approach to mobilizing the entire global population behind the UN SDGs. The GA is an example of the high value which both youth and older persons can bring to implementation of the SDGs by being agents of social change.



**Goal:** Continuously Improve Sustainable Sourcing recognizing that every decision made to produce the UUA-GA has an impact.

**Action:** Insist on local, region, organic produce and vegetarian options at every meal.



**Goal:** Create a Positive Social Impact & Lasting Legacy to the Host Community

**Action:** Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

**Action:** Streaming of content for virtual attendees







**Goal:** Advance Stakeholder Education & Engagement to minimize the environmental impacts of the GA with bold, highly visible actions to reduce/eliminate waste, limit and mitigate harmful carbon emissions, limit water consumption, source food locally and donate any surplus food/goods, among other initiatives.



**Action:** Rail passes offered to attendees, 1080 were utilized by 77% of the attendees.

**Action:** Youth programming which included a rally outside the OCC.

**Action:** Streaming of content for virtual attendees



**Goal:** Maintain Carbon Neutrality by collaborating with all stakeholders to reduce onsite energy use, maximize the use of renewable energy and offset 100% of UUA-GA Related Emissions, seeking to be carbon positive by neutralizing carbon emissions associated with waste and the production of various materials related to the event.



**Goal:** Maintain a Zero-Waste Event with a strategic focus on sustainable procurement, waste reduction, maximizing waste diversion, and donations.

**Action:** Buffet minimized food waste over plated meals.

**Action:** Streaming of content for virtual attendees



**Goal:** Advance Stakeholder Education & Engagement to minimize the environmental impacts of the GA with bold, highly visible actions to reduce/eliminate waste, limit and mitigate harmful carbon emissions, limit water consumption, source food locally and donate any surplus food/goods, among other initiatives.

**Action:** Education on climate from exhibitors and general sessions.





## UUA GENERAL ASSEMBLY MULTIPLATFORM / PORTLAND • 2022

# Thank you

This report was prepared with the cooperation of the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly, Oregon Convention Center, Heritage Exposition Services, and Levy Restaurants. Thank you for your kind assistance.

Professional Photos by Nancy Pierce and Marilyn Nieves, courtesy of UUA GA.



Prepared by



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