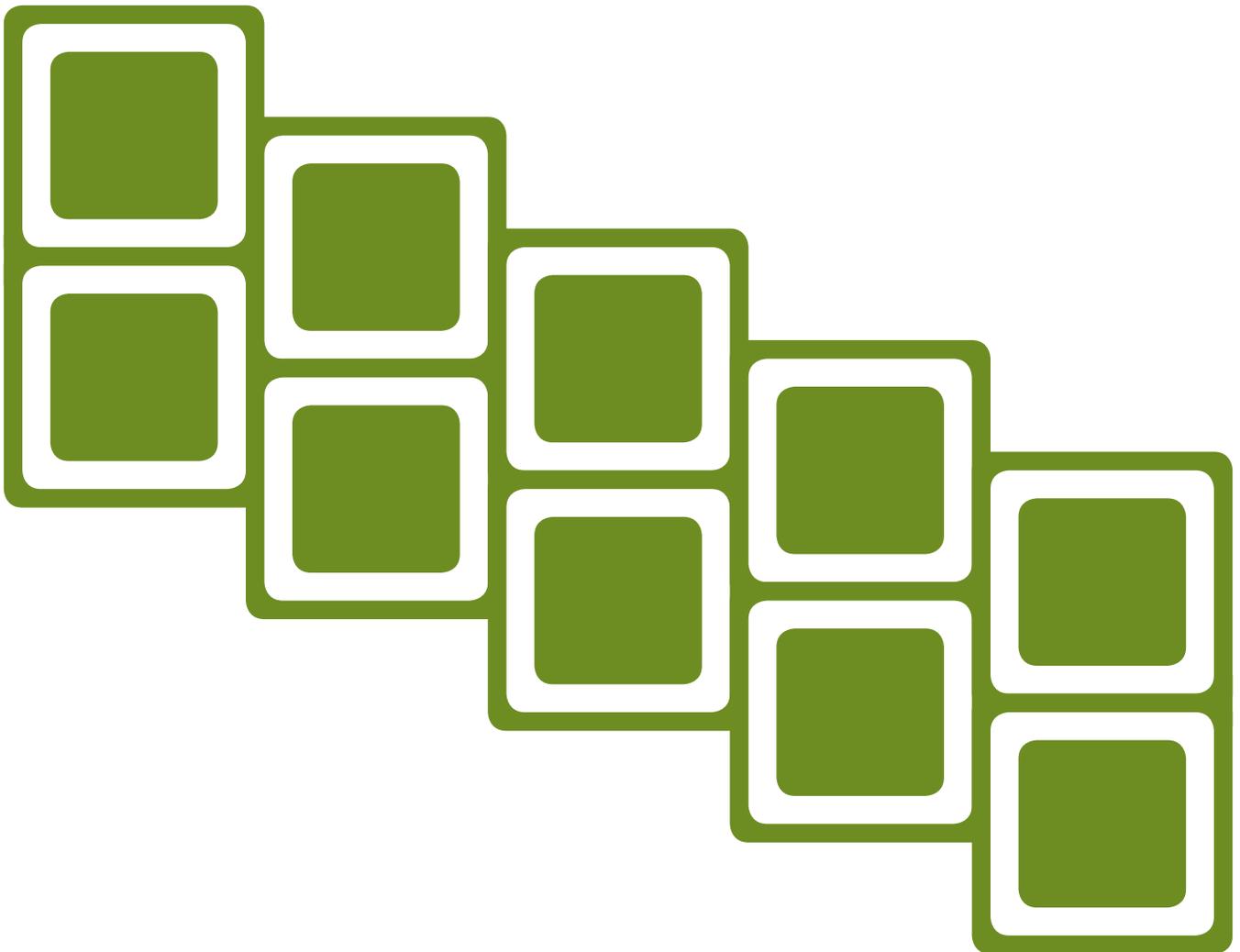


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Sustainability and Summer Sessions: Experiences from UH Mānoa's Sustainable Summer Day '16

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Abstract

In advance of the International Union for Conservation of Nature's World Conservation Congress 2016, the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Summer Sessions offered an array of programs under the theme "Sustainable Summer '16." The theme included credit courses, a certificate program, hands-on environmental activities, films, and a lecture series focusing on conservation and sustainability. The highlight was Sustainable Summer Day—a free festival for the campus community and general public, which will be the focus of this paper. The paper describes planning steps and marketing efforts, discusses general outcomes, lists key takeaways, and introduces an idea to get the community involved in summer sessions through sustainability education.

Background

The World Conservation Congress of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is held every four years and brings together thousands of participants from the field of sustainability and conservation. The world's largest conservation event took place in fall 2016 in Hawai'i, the first time it had been hosted by the United States. In advance of the congress, the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UH Mānoa) Summer Sessions partnered with the IUCN and presented a variety of programs and events during the second half of the summer term (July 5 to August 12) that benefited both students and the general public. In addition to weekly hands-on environmental volunteer activities that were offered in cooperation with community and university groups, undergraduate and advanced high school students had the opportunity to receive a certificate of completion that was jointly issued by UH Mānoa and the IUCN. Requirements were the completion of two (one for high school students) pre-approved summer courses with a focus on sustainability and participation in three or more Sustainable Summer events. A reflection paper on each of the events had to be submitted as well. In addition, a free weekly lecture series informed students and the general public about conservation-related topics. The highlight of the summer program was Sustainable Summer Day, held on the UH Mānoa campus on Sunday, June 26, 2016. The free event provided attendees with the opportunity to learn about sustainability and conservation, to participate in an array of theme-related activities, and to make a commitment for the planet's future in a fair-like atmosphere.

Sustainable Summer Day

Planning Process

Combining sustainability and Summer Sessions is not a new idea at UH Mānoa. In 2009, Summer Sessions offered the "Sustain Your Brain" series, which consisted of non-credit workshops, films, and a speaker event. Although Summer Sessions could partially build on these experiences, developing a full-day sustainability fair was a new learning experience. Starting in fall 2015, the planning team, which consisted of key Summer Sessions staff, met on a weekly basis. From this team, a project manager emerged who was responsible for organizing steps and tasks and who also served as a point of contact for the group. The first planning step included a brainstorming phase on the overall event goals. In addition to promoting Summer Sessions and the upcoming IUCN Congress, the intent of the event was to motivate and inspire people through environmental learning opportunities and conservation-related activities. It was also designed as a free, unique, and sustainable event. Based on the goals, the decision was made to target both the campus community and the general public.

As a next step, the team researched the sustainability field in Hawai'i, created a contact list of campus and community organizations, and developed partnerships. In various meetings, the partners shared their expertise and helped to generate an outline for a sustainable and minimal-waste

event. For example, exhibitors were encouraged to minimize paper handouts and to be mindful about give away items. The food vendor was required to use compostable utensils and to provide locally grown lunch options, including vegetarian. In the event announcements, fair attendees were encouraged to bring their own water bottles that could be filled up at water stations.

In the next planning phase, the structure of the day was generated and built around the chosen day of the week. Since the weekend provides greater possibilities to attract the general public, and no parking fees apply on Sundays, that day appeared to be the most suitable choice. In addition, a web search of local event calendars revealed that no other sustainability event would be taking place on the chosen date. However, as the UH Mānoa campus is typically empty on Sundays, increased planning and marketing efforts were necessary. To create an appealing program for attendees of all age groups, the team met with student groups, held brainstorming sessions, attended various sustainability events and meetings, and came up with a program and marketing outline that incorporated the gathered ideas.

Marketing and Promotion

To be in line with the theme, Outreach College's marketing department created a Sustainable Summer '16 logo that consisted of a water drop and a native Hawaiian fern. This logo was used for all summer marketing and promotional strategies, such as the Sustainable Summer Day flyer, which presented program highlights and schedule specifics. To create an additional incentive, the flyer incorporated a smoothie voucher that could be redeemed at the event. The flyer was distributed on campus and the community, including in student housing and public libraries, and sent as a pdf to campus departments, exhibitors, and other sustainability organizations, who shared the information on their social media pages and within their networks.

A Sustainable Summer '16 website was also created. Linked from the regular Summer Sessions homepage, this website informed visitors about the various theme highlights and Sustainable Summer Day. In addition to schedule and parking information, an interactive event map, created by one of the partners, presented the event layout.

The sustainability theme was also marketed through press releases, social media, and in local event calendars. Summer Sessions participated in various events throughout the spring and summer, such as UH Mānoa's Earth Day and the Summer Registration Kick-Off fair, and gave away promotional items. This included a Sustainable Summer '16 reusable tote bag made out of recycled plastic and a T-shirt. To use the shirt as a paper-free marketing strategy and make it attractive to wear, a high-quality fabric and a modern design were chosen. Outreach College staff and student assistants also wore the T-shirt on Fridays and at specific events prior to the summer (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Sustainable Summer '16 T-shirts worn at Sustainable Summer Day

Exhibitor Recruitment

Selected sustainability organizations from the campus and community were invited by email to have a table at no charge to them at Sustainable Summer Day. Summer Sessions provided table space, tents, and chairs but prohibited sales. Exhibitors were encouraged to provide participants with information about their work and with options for further involvement (e.g., volunteer opportunities).

A Free Program for Everyone

The reserved campus space was divided into three segments:

1. Exhibitor and stage area
2. Activity and Summer Sessions area
3. KIDS FIRST! Sustainable Summer Film Festival area

The central point of the event was the exhibitor and stage area. In addition to exhibitor booths, a student group organized a free bike-repair station, and local musicians entertained the audience throughout the day. The stage was also used to announce program highlights and Summer Sessions information.

In the activity area, Summer Sessions organized several tents, in which participants could learn about the summer term and Outreach College, enter a raffle to win a gift basket donated by an organic supermarket, and spin a wheel to win Summer Sessions promotional items that matched the sustainability theme—Sustainable Summer '16 T-shirts and tote bags, microfiber cloths, and sunglasses were given away. Summer Sessions also invited fair attendees to make a written sustainability commitment on a stylized taro leaf—a plant that is deeply embedded in the history and culture of Hawai'i and that provides an example of traditional sustainable methods of agriculture (Figure 2). As a thank you, participants received vegetable seedlings grown by members of the planning team. To avoid plastic containers and to keep the costs low, biodegradable toilet paper rolls were utilized as pots for planting the seeds. The seeds were donated by one of the partner institutions. Summer Sessions also organized a kids' tent in which children could have their faces painted and create no-sew tote bags out of used T-shirts donated by Outreach College staff and local organizations. Unused T-shirts were donated to a homeless shelter after the event. Further program points in the activity area included yoga, tai chi, a succulent-growing workshop, a disc golf tryout, and a climate change learning activity for children. In addition, a campus walking tour of threatened and endangered plants was organized by a partner organization but had to be cancelled due to resource issues. In the activity area, fair attendees could also purchase food and redeem the smoothie vouchers at the food vendor tent.

Another program highlight was the KIDS FIRST! Sustainable Summer Film Festival. Throughout the day, families and children of all ages could choose from a rich variety of films and short films focused on sustainability and conservation. The films were shown in the UH Mānoa Art Auditorium.



Figure 2: Commitment board

Ideas that Worked and Areas for Improvement

A structural idea that turned out to be beneficial was the collaboration between Sustainable Summer Day and the 10th annual KIDS FIRST! Film Festival. KIDS FIRST! is a project of the Coalition for Quality Children's Media organized through Outreach College on an annual basis. Various films that are generally free of gratuitous violence as well as race, gender, or religious bias are shown on four Sunday afternoons every summer (Chismar & Brandman, 2014). Since Sustainable Summer Day was also being held on a Sunday, the two events were combined. A benefit of this approach was that the target audience and thematic focus of both events complemented each other very well, which made a combined marketing and promotion strategy possible. As a result, fewer financial and human resources were needed. In addition, the two events generated foot traffic for each other, which had a positive impact on the overall number of event attendees.

The development of partnerships was another valuable strategy. The partners shared their time and expertise and helped to plan an event that was thoroughly in line with the overall theme. Other partners contributed through donations, which benefitted the event attendees.

The most successful program points were the commitment board and the vegetable seedling giveaway, followed by the face painter and the tote bag-making activity. The free smoothies were also well received.

Positive feedback was received about the promotional items, especially the T-shirt, which people wore beyond the event. The soft texture and the light blue color were especially highlighted.

A planning step that turned out to be beneficial was the development of an emergency and backup contact list that the team had generated prior to the event and that helped with reacting to certain challenges faster. The list included volunteer backups, emergency contact numbers for all people involved in the event, and venue alternatives that could be used in case of weather changes. Although unforeseen issues occurred during the event, such as a short period of rain and an accidental double-booking of one of the venues, the team was able to resolve the issues quickly.

Areas for improvement include event visibility, layout, and information. Although Summer Sessions tried to gain visibility as the event host through marketing materials, stage announcements, and the coordination of various booths, comments were received that the host organization was not visible enough. In addition, some fair attendees had difficulty finding the different activity locations because the three event areas were separated by emergency fire lanes. To address these issues, strategies for increasing visibility and information through, larger banners, clearer signage, and a more condensed event area, for example, should be taken into consideration for future events.

Outcome and Results

About 400 people attended the fair, and around 610 attendees (multiple headcounts possible) participated in the KIDS FIRST! Sustainable Summer Film Festival, which exceeded the initial target size of 300 participants. The latter estimate was based on prior event experiences and the decision to create a weekend event. A total of 23 exhibitor groups attended, including the National Host Committee for IUCN World Conservation Congress Hawai'i 2016. About 100 people made a commitment and received a free vegetable seedling. A similar number of free smoothies were given away. In the kids' tents, more than 45 tote bags were made and about 40 kids had their faces painted. The tai chi area and the succulent workshop were each attended by about 20 people. About 30 Outreach College staff members volunteered, and the overall event costs were \$5,400 of direct expenses, which included artists' and activity instructors' expenses, tent and sound equipment rental costs, as well as the giveaway smoothies.

Overall, Sustainable Summer Day received very positive feedback from exhibitors and attendees during and after the event, and requests for an annual event were made. Outreach College is currently evaluating the requests. The National Host Committee for the IUCN World Conservation Congress conveyed the following message: "Mahalo for allowing the National Host Committee for the IUCN World Conservation Congress to host a booth at Sustainable Summer Day. Your team

did a fantastic job coordinating the event and planning the activities for the day! So thankful to have been part of the festivity.”

Conclusion

The following takeaways emerged from our experience of developing a sustainability summer event that caters to both students and the general public:

- Build partnerships, collaborate, and learn from best practices.
- Stay within your theme.
- Everyone likes freebies, so invest in appealing promotional items.
- Plan with enough staff and backup staff, and have an emergency plan in place.
- If you create a community event, do not underestimate the importance of children’s activities.
- More signage is better. Be visible at your event.

References

Chismar, W. G., & Brandman, A. (2014). Summer film festivals for kids: Building fond memories and brand identity. *Summer Academe*, 8, 2–9.

Biographies

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