



TED Race to Zero

Progress Report: 2019-2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TED's climate goals as part of the SME Climate Hub and Race to Zero initiative are to:

2030 target

Halve operational greenhouse gas emissions relative to 2019 levels.

2040 target

Achieve net-zero for operational and event emissions.

PROGRESS TOWARD TARGETS: 2019-2024

Operational Emissions (2030/2040 target applies)

Includes: Scope 2 and Scope 3 emissions related to office operations, [TED.com](https://www.ted.com) and non-event-related business travel by staff

- **Reduction target achieved for total operational emissions:** Down 58% over 2019 without relying on offsets.
- **Reduction target on-track for per-employee emissions:** Down 43% over 2019 without relying on offsets.

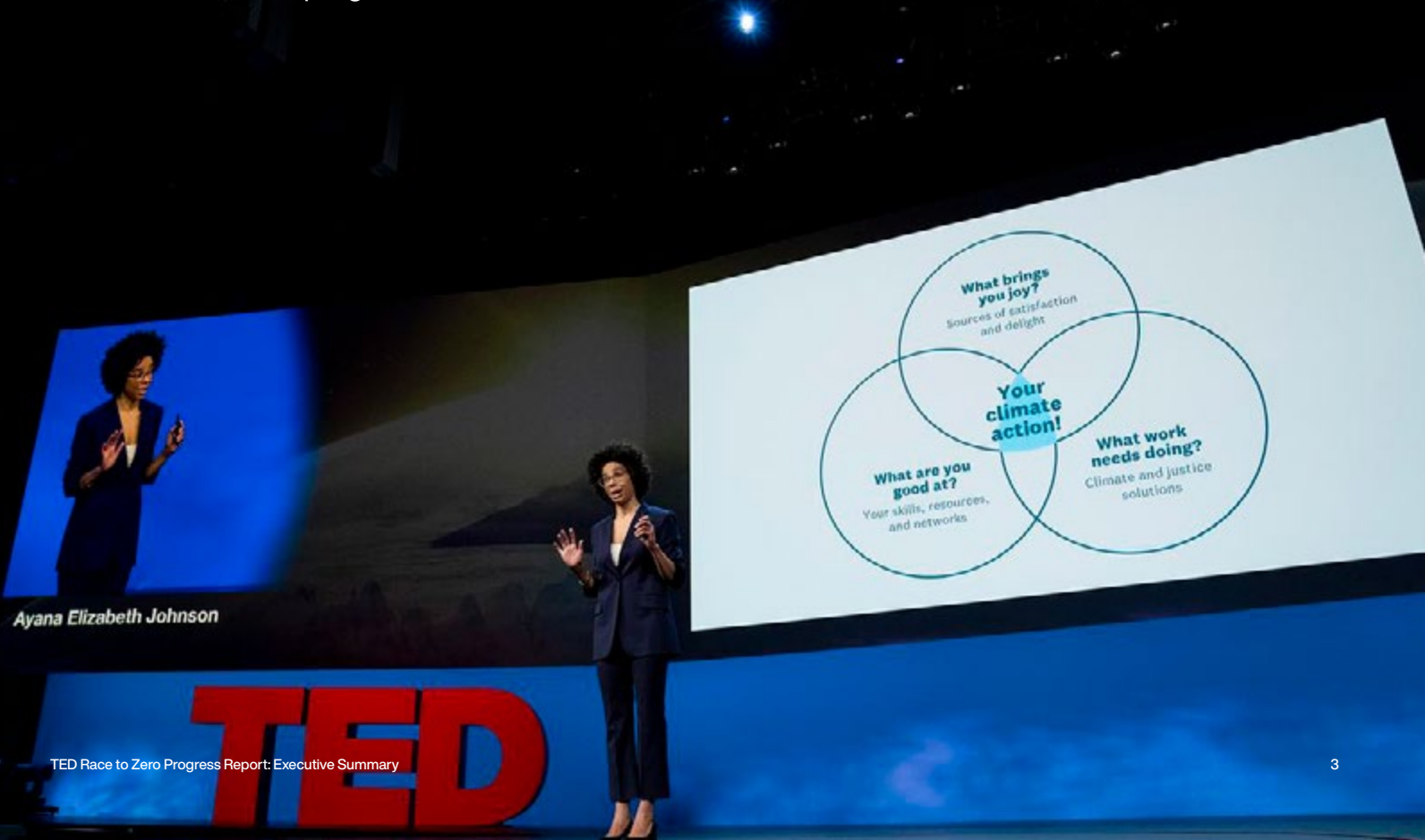
This is largely due to reduced business travel post-pandemic and a shift to remote work.

Event Emissions (2040 target applies)

Includes: Scope 3 emissions for events organised and paid for by the TED Conference team, including staff and speaker travel (participant travel is excluded)

- **Net-zero target may be on-track for total event emissions:** Down 54% over 2019 without relying on offsets, however, total event emissions fluctuate year-to-year depending on the number and size of events held.
- **Net-zero target is on-track for per worker event emissions:** Down 30% over 2019 without relying on offsets, primarily due to event design innovations.

Note that participant-related travel emissions are tracked and mitigated, but are not included in reduction or net-zero targets. TED is not purchasing offsets toward net zero targets currently, but does apply an internal carbon fee to 100% of operational and event emissions. This fee supports grants to grassroots emissions reduction programs in communities where our events are held.



KEY SUCCESSES

Improved Tracking and Accountability:

- Comprehensive emissions inventory using the Greenhouse Gas Protocol.
- Clear inclusion of both owned and reported emissions (even those outside TED's control).

Event Design Innovations:

- Prioritising plant-forward menus and reducing food waste.
- Minimising plastic use in catering, signage and activations.
- Improving local sourcing and reducing freight.
- Reducing use of portable generators that use fossil fuels.

Meaningful Impact Partnerships:

- Actively seeking and providing opportunities at events that benefit local social enterprises and charities.
- \$490,000 awarded to five local climate projects, including peatland restoration, Indigenous housing retrofits, clean energy job programs and urban greening.

NEXT STEPS

- Launch a carbon-conscious travel policy.
- Integrate sustainability into all future event location decisions.
- Develop a strategy to influence sustainability at TEDx and other partner events.
- Partner with future destination stakeholders to ensure sustainability is integrated into TED Conference planning beyond 2026.
- Explore carbon removal projects for mitigation.

LESSONS LEARNED

- 1. Better data = better strategy:** Accurate and comprehensive emissions reporting improves insights and progress toward goals.
- 2. Eco-efficiency matters:** Because total emissions vary depending on the number and size of in-person events held, consistent effort to reduce per worker emissions at events is a top priority.
- 3. Local conditions support sustainability:** Events in cities with strong sustainability policies and low-carbon infrastructure are easier to decarbonize, making destination selection a critical decision.
- 4. Control is limited, and systemic influence counts:** TED is able to control event planning decisions it pays for, such as catering, freight and staff travel associated with its major global events. Although influence over attendee travel and partner choices is limited, TED reports and mitigates these impacts to further awareness and action.





INTRODUCTION

At TED, we believe that in-person events have a crucial role to play in how we work effectively together to build a better future. At the same time, we acknowledge that in-person events can have a sizable carbon footprint and we're continuously working towards reducing ours.

Since launching the [TED Countdown](#) initiative at the end of 2019, TED has embraced the challenge of designing all TED events in climate-conscious ways that create a better, more livable world for everyone.

This work includes joining the [SME Climate Hub](#) and reporting on our progress to halve our greenhouse gas emissions before 2030 and achieve net zero emissions before 2040. This report provides a transparent snapshot of our journey and priorities for future action.

TED is committed to sharing event content widely and freely in order to maximize our positive impact far beyond the audiences who enjoy TED Talks live in-person for the first time. For more on how TED captures and shares big ideas today in order to shape a better tomorrow please see [TED's 2024 Impact Report](#) and the [TED Countdown Overview and Impact Report 2024](#).

Action Steps: 2018-2024

TED's journey to reduce emissions and create positive impact in event host communities has achieved several important milestones so far.

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- 2018**
- A waste audit of the 2018 TED Conference in Vancouver shows that 80% of event waste was recycled, composted or donated.
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- 2019**
- TED launches an internal sustainability effort with a staff-led workshop.
 - TED's New York staff conduct the first office waste audit, leading to improved recycling practices.
 - TED introduces [TED Countdown](#), a global initiative focused on amplifying and accelerating solutions to the climate crisis.
 - TED offsets the 2019 TED Conference by purchasing credits from the Great Bear Forest Carbon Project in British Columbia.
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- 2020**
- For the first time, TED measures the carbon footprint of its major events, office operations, business travel and TED.com.
 - TED joins the Race to Zero via the SME Climate Hub, committing to cut its carbon footprint 50% by 2030, compared to 2019 levels.
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- 2021**
- The Countdown Summit in Edinburgh sets new sustainability standards with a 100% plant-based menu, zero-waste stage design and 88% of waste diverted from landfill. Event donations support local charities.
 - The TED Foundation launches a climate grant program for host cities. The first grant funds peatland restoration at Airds Moss near Edinburgh.
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- 2022**
- The first in-person TED Conference since the pandemic introduces new sustainability efforts. Bulk snacks reduce packaging waste. A reusable coffee cup program by Mugshare avoids 13,500 single-use cups. A new gifting system lets attendees choose items in advance to cut waste and shipping. Refreshments are dispensed at a bespoke bar created from 26,454 recycled chopsticks by ChopValue, a local social enterprise.
 - TED begins surveying vendors on their environmental, diversity and equity practices to guide procurement decisions.
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- 2023**
- Venues for the second Countdown Summit in Detroit pilot several new initiatives, including a compost and recycling program in partnership with Midtown Composting that recovers 78% of waste from landfill and a food donation program that provides 2,500 hot meals to veterans in the city.
 - The Greening of Detroit receives a climate grant to support urban tree planting and youth nature programs.
 - TEDWomen cuts freight emissions by 84% through local sourcing and reduces venue emissions by 58% by limiting generator use.
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- 2024**
- Carbon labels are added to lunches at the TED Conference with help from Klimato. This education campaign, combined with the elimination of beef and lamb from event menus, has helped reduce the carbon impact of meals at this conference from 15 kg to 8 kg per person per day.
 - The TED Conference reduces food waste by 69% and total solid waste by 56% compared to 2022.
 - New climate grants at the TED Conference support energy efficiency programs for Indigenous housing in British Columbia and clean energy training programs in Vancouver.
 - TEDNext awards a climate grant in Atlanta, Georgia, funding scholarships for the Just Energy Academy, a program advancing climate justice and energy equity in the U.S. South.
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Methodology

In 2020, TED completed a greenhouse gas inventory using 2019 as the baseline year. This choice reflects a “typical” year of operations before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted in-person events in 2020 and 2021.

Emissions were measured using the Greenhouse Gas Protocol, covering:

- **Scope 1: Direct emissions**
- **Scope 2: Indirect emissions from purchased energy**
- **Scope 3: Emissions from the wider value chain**

All emissions are reported in carbon dioxide equivalents (CO₂e). Flight emissions include a Radiative Forcing Index (RFI) of 1.9 to account for the greater impact of emissions at high altitudes.

Where available, location-specific emissions factors are used. For example, the TED Conference in Vancouver uses transport and energy factors from the Government of British Columbia. Hotel stays are calculated using city-specific data from the Hotel Carbon Measurement Initiative. Factors from the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero (UK) are used for flights, and in the absence of local/regional factors. Additional sources include Klimato for catering and the Trace calculator for materials, graphics and overlay.

Data comes directly from TED staff and suppliers. When exact data isn’t available, conservative estimates are used. For instance, primary venues often provide direct energy data via metering, while secondary venue impacts are estimated based on square feet and occupancy time.



Emissions Boundaries and Accuracy

TED set its emissions boundary based on principles of operational and financial control. This is straightforward for office operations but more complex for events.

TED includes events directly run by the TED Conference team—such as the TED Conference, TED Women, TEDNext and TED Countdown Summits—since we manage and fund them. Franchised and partner events which are organized and paid for by others, like TEDx, are excluded.

Business travel is handled similarly. We include all travel and hotel stays for staff and speakers that TED pays for. Travel and accommodation for other attendees, which TED does not control or fund, are excluded from our reduction targets. However, we still measure and mitigate these participant emissions for events we produce, as our planning can influence attendee choices.

Digital assets—such as TED Talks online—are also considered. Although they're free for users, we treat them similar to a product in our Scope 3 emissions accounting.

The following table outlines what is included in TED's emissions boundary. "N/A" indicates emissions that do not exist or are outside of the boundary. Any source estimated to make up at least 1% of TED's total emissions is considered essential. Some sources of emissions may not contribute 1% of emissions, but are included given their high visibility or concern among interest groups.

Data quality reflects how reliable the information is. High-quality data comes directly from suppliers and uses well-researched emissions factors. If data is lacking or very uncertain it may be excluded. As data has improved, more emissions sources have been added, as is the case with live streaming and event activation build materials, both of which were included after 2019.

SCOPE	ACTIVITY	ESSENTIAL	DATA QUALITY	INCLUDED
SCOPE 1: Direct Emissions	Stationary combustion	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Fugitive emissions	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Mobile combustion	N/A	N/A	N/A
SCOPE 2: Purchased Energy	Leased office and theatre space in New York City	Yes	Good	Yes
	Leased storage and office space in Vancouver	Yes	Good	Yes
	Remote worker offices	Yes	Medium	Yes
SCOPE 3: Value Chain	Purchased goods and services: office and event-related	Yes	Medium/Low	Yes
	Capital goods: TED Theatre in Vancouver	Yes	Insufficient	No
	Fuel and energy-related: venues, generators	Yes	Good	Yes
	Transportation and distribution: freight, shipping, event transfers	Yes	Good/Medium	Yes
	Waste generated in operations: office and event-related	No	Good/Medium	Yes
	Business travel: Staff and speaker transportation and hotels	Yes	Good	Yes
	Employee commuting	No	Medium	Yes
	Leased assets	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Products: TED Talks online	Yes	Low	Yes
	Franchises: TEDx	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Investments	N/A	N/A	N/A

Management Framework

Action at TED events focuses on four key areas:



Meals: providing plant-based food and beverage options and practicing food donation and organic waste composting



Mobility: avoiding long distance and air freight and providing housing and activities that are walkable or accessible by transit



Materials: using reusable materials as a first preference, reducing use of disposable plastic and practicing comprehensive recycling



Meaningful impact: buying local, supporting social enterprises and investing in locally-led climate mitigation projects

Progress to Date

TED tracks emissions reductions in two main areas: office operations and event production.

Office operations include all Scope 2 emissions, [TED.com](https://www.ted.com) and business travel not directly associated with a TED event. Ignoring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, operational emissions are relatively stable year-to-year, and vary minimally based on TED's event calendar.

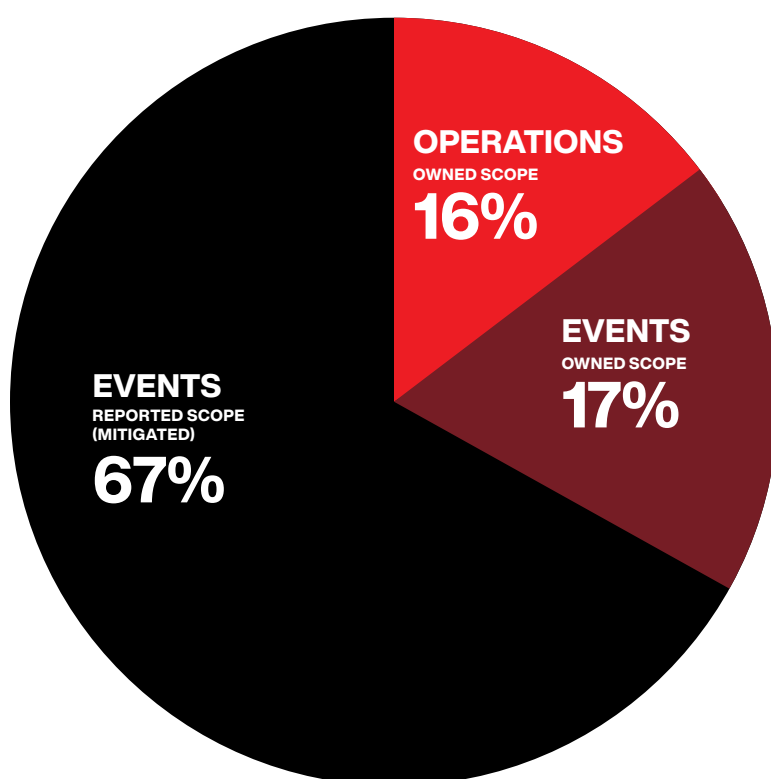
Event emissions cover those events directly managed by the TED Conference team and can vary year-to-year based on the number and size of events held. Event emissions are analysed through two lenses:

1. Events (owned scope): Onsite production, including staff and speaker travel and accommodation
2. Events (reported scope): Participant travel and accommodation

This breakdown helps TED distinguish between Scope 3 emissions we control and include in our reduction targets (e.g., travel we pay for) and Scope 3 emissions that we don't own but still report and mitigate (e.g., participant travel influenced by our planning). By grouping emissions this way, TED can better manage its direct impact while also understanding and reducing the broader effects of its events.

The following graph illustrates the relative size of emissions in these categories.

SHARE OF EMISSIONS THAT ARE OWNED VS REPORTED: 2024



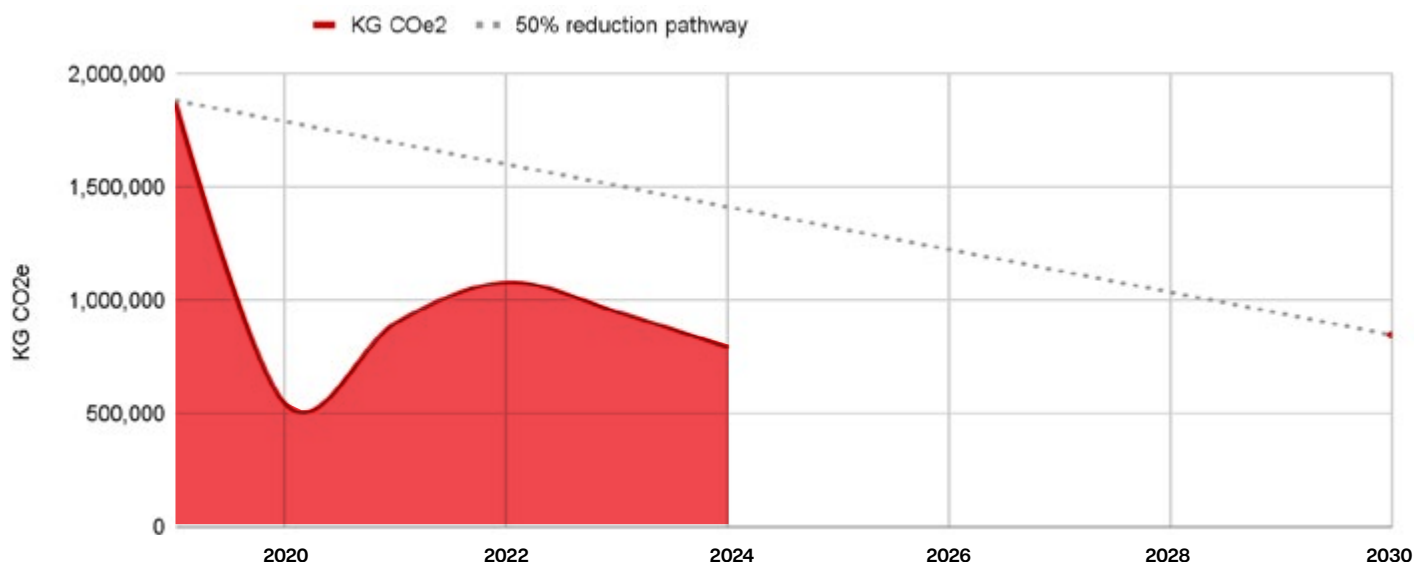
While total and per worker emissions decreased from 2019 to 2024, suggesting overall progress, event data can cause oscillations that are discussed in more detail below.

	Total emissions 2019	Total emissions 2024	% Change
OPERATIONS SCOPE			
Owned (subject to reduction target, mitigated)	1,881 tonnes	791 tonnes	-58%
	5.4 tonnes/employee	3.1 tonnes/employee	-43%
EVENTS SCOPE			
Owned (subject to reduction target, mitigated)	1,784 tonnes	826 tonnes	-54%
	2.3 tonnes/worker-speaker	1.7 tonnes/worker-speaker	-30%
EVENTS SCOPE Reported (mitigated)	5,998 tonnes	3,231 tonnes	-46%

Operations Scope

The graph below shows TED's emissions reduction progress for office operations, non-event business travel and TED.com. Emissions have dropped sharply, mainly due to a lasting decline in business travel after the pandemic. A shift to remote work has also contributed, even though at-home office energy use has been included since 2020. TED.com emissions appear to be falling, but this is mostly due to better data accuracy. If business travel remains low, TED is on track to meet its goal of cutting operational emissions by 50% by 2030.

TED'S OPERATIONAL CARBON FOOTPRINT 2019-2024



Note: Emissions for TED.com in 2019 and 2020 are expected to significantly over-estimate emissions impact and have been removed to avoid the appearance of a higher baseline and softer reduction target. Data from TED.com is included from 2021 onward. Data for remote office work was added in 2020.

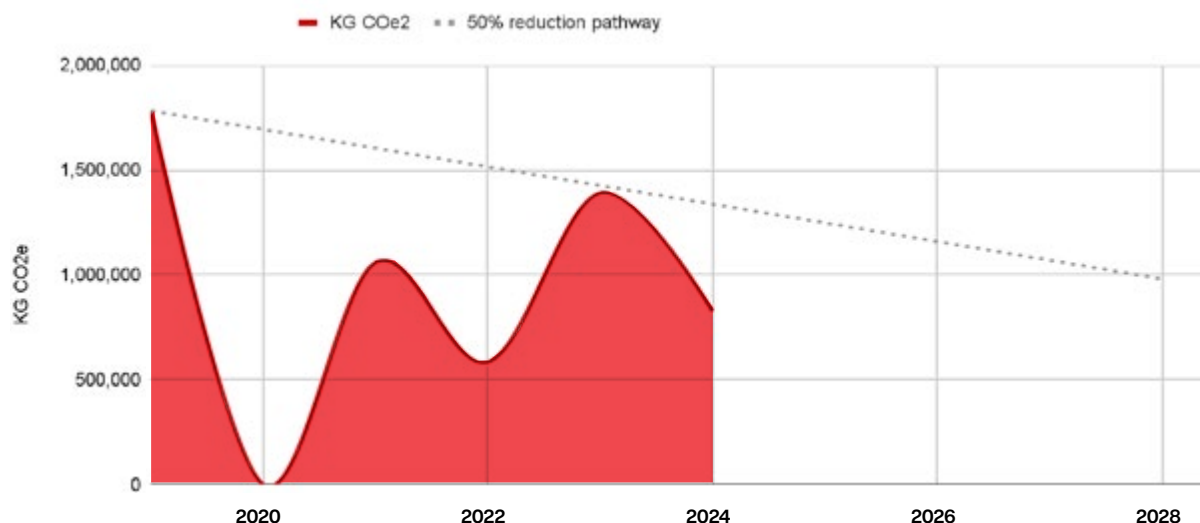
Event scope

TED's event emissions include onsite production, as well as staff and speaker travel and accommodation for events directly organized by TED.

Since the pandemic, emissions in these areas have fluctuated with the number of events each year. For instance, 2019, 2021, and 2023 each had three major events, while 2022 had one and 2024 had two.

When comparing similar years, emissions are rising post-pandemic, but are below 2019 levels. This is true for total and per worker event emissions. While TED is unlikely to reduce event emissions by 50% by 2030, net zero by 2040 remains possible.

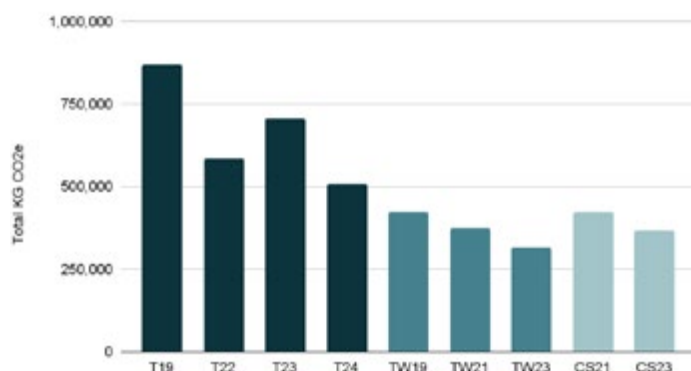
TOTAL EVENT EMISSIONS: 2019-2024



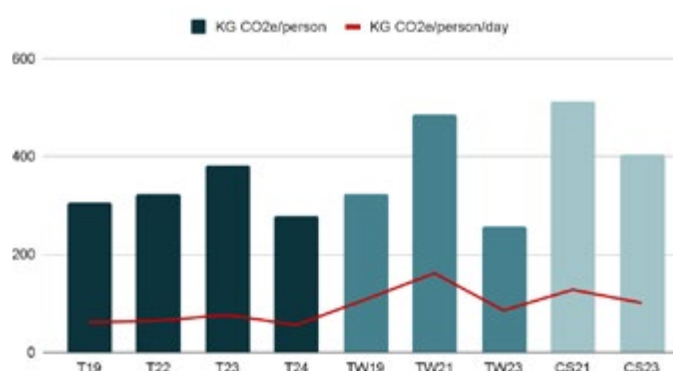
While overall trends highlight challenges ahead, progress at events that have recurred within the reporting period is evident if we look below the surface. Across the TED Conference, TEDWomen and TED Countdown, both total and per-participant emissions have decreased—even as staffing, speaker numbers and logistics have stayed largely the same.

This shows that while the number of events and participants drives total emissions, consistent improvements in areas like meals, transport and materials are effectively reducing the impact of producing recurring events on a per participant basis.

TOTAL EMISSIONS PER EVENT



CARBON INTENSITY OF EVENTS



Mitigation

In addition to reducing emissions from operations and directly managed events, TED also measures and mitigates emissions from participant travel and accommodation (excluding TEDx). While TED doesn't control attendee travel or partner event decisions, these emissions are reported to ensure transparency about the broader impact of TED events.

Instead of purchasing offsets, TED uses a unique mitigation strategy aligned with the TED Countdown mission to advance climate solutions in the areas of energy, transport, food, materials and nature. An internal carbon fee is applied to total annual emissions and the funds are used to support locally led climate justice projects in the cities where events are held.

Between 2021-2024 the TED Foundation provided USD \$490,000 in climate grants to five organisations leading climate action programs in four host destinations. This includes:



1. The restoration of the Airds Moss peatland outside of Edinburgh, Scotland by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (2021).
2. Tree planting, job training and nature-based education for youth programs by the Greening of Detroit (2023).
3. Two new staff positions to enable the Aboriginal Housing Management Association to activate deep energy retrofits for Indigenous housing in British Columbia (2024).
4. Strategies to enable convening and story-telling by the Sustainable Workforce Coalition, helping to promote a green energy transition in British Columbia (2024).
5. The Just Energy Academy, a seven-month leadership program convened by the Partnership for Southern Equity, designed to educate and empower the next generation of energy equity and climate justice leaders in Georgia and Alabama (2024).



Next Steps

TED has made progress in cutting emissions—both overall and per employee. Staff efforts to lower onsite impacts have been supported by a sustained drop in business travel. However, the growing number of TED events, more in-person attendance and shifts to locations with limited low-carbon event services make it challenging to reach our goal of halving total emissions by 2030.

As we enter the second half of this 10-year goal, TED will continue to provide critical opportunities for our community to convene, converse and collaborate, while driving down emissions as much as possible by:

1. Establishing a business travel policy that weighs carbon impact and promotes low-carbon travel.
2. Making sustainability a key factor in choosing event locations.
3. Integrating sustainability language into event contracts.
4. Working with destination partners to reduce emissions at the TED Conference in 2027 and beyond.
5. Continuing to cut impacts related to meals, mobility and materials at TED events.
6. Creating a strategy to track and reduce emissions from events not run by the core TED team (e.g., TEDx, TEDAI, TEDSport).
7. Exploring the use of sustainable aviation fuel for flights.
8. Considering climate projects that remove or store carbon.

Thank you.

For further information please contact
Kyle Shearer, Director of Event Operations
kyle@ted.com