

A Vision for Sustainability and Inclusion: Uniting Diverse Stakeholders in Healthcare

How One Event's Focus on Sustainability and DEI Helped Advance Equity and Representation.



About the Client

Our client is a leading biotechnology company specializing in cancer drug and therapy development.

The Challenge

At AAO, the world's largest ophthalmology conference, our client sought to create a reception and fireside chat that would bring together a diverse group of stakeholders—including African American, Hispanic, and LGBTQIA+ ophthalmologists, as well as mentors and DEI advocates.

The goal? To foster conversations on health equity, career advancement, and representation in a specialty where diversity has historically been limited.

Because AAO was held in Chicago—one of the country's most diverse immigrant hubs—our client also wanted the reception to take place in a marginalized community while exclusively supporting minority- and women-owned businesses.

From venue selection to catering, décor, and partnerships, every detail needed to reflect this commitment. The event had to:

- Partner exclusively with minority- and women-owned businesses
- Use philanthropic-minded suppliers
- Deliver a stunning, autumn-inspired aesthetic
- Provide an engaging, high-quality experience that reinforced the client's industry leadership in DEI
- Leave a lasting impact on attendees

The Solution

The Venue: A Space Rooted in Sustainability

We selected Six10, the event space at the Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership, for its alignment with sustainability and social responsibility. It offered:

- Silver LEED Certification for environmental design
- 100% renewable energy usage
- 50,000+ sq. ft. of mission-driven event space

Food & Beverage: A Commitment to Sustainability

We partnered with Paramount Catering, a woman-owned, green-certified catering company with a strong focus on sustainability and diverse hiring practices. Their farm-to-table approach, food waste reduction efforts, and sustainable sourcing made them the perfect fit.

Sustainability in Action:

- Composting onsite & at events
- Food donations to local non-profits
- Locally sourced ingredients from farm partnerships
- On-site greenhouse growing 70+ herb varieties
- Compostable disposables & reusable serveware options
- Eliminating single-use plastics
- Upcycling used cooking oil into biodiesel

To further reduce waste, we opted for culinary stations and passed food instead of buffet-style service. This approach encouraged portion control, minimized food prep waste, and promoted the use of reusable plates and utensils.

Following the event, Paramount Catering composted the unusable food and donated the remaining food to a rescue service, providing surplus meals to local non-profits. By focusing on food waste reduction, reusable serveware, and food donations, we significantly lowered the event's carbon footprint—a win for both our client and the environment.

Decor & Florals: Supporting Local Businesses

To bring the autumn-inspired aesthetic to life, we partnered with Stella Grey Blooms, a woman-owned Chicago-based florist. Stella's background in fashion and interior design shaped her unique approach to "floral art," creating textured, vibrant arrangements that seamlessly complemented the event's theme—all while staying within budget.

Art & Community: Bringing the Gallery to the Event

Initially, our client hoped to host the reception at a Black-owned art gallery in Bronzeville, one of the largest African American art districts in the country. However, logistical challenges made this difficult. Instead, we brought the gallery to us—curating and installing a selection of artwork at the event, complete with information about the gallery and

its mission. This creative solution ensured the event still honored the community and highlighted the importance of representation in the arts.

A Diverse, Inclusive Event Team

We assembled a diverse onsite team to reflect our client's focus on DEI, ensuring a mix of backgrounds and perspectives to authentically represent those values.

The Outcome

Client Impact

By sourcing minority- and women-owned partners and integrating sustainability at every level, we helped our client deliver a high-impact experience that resonated with attendees and showcased their leadership in DEI.

The reception was a great success, and we are excited to make it even bigger and better next year. We loved the special touches featuring local vendors and hope to bring that same energy and creativity to next year's AAO.

Lessons Learned

Working with small businesses for corporate events required flexibility and proactive communication. Since some were new to large-scale corporate events, we gave them extra time to respond and adjust while setting clear expectations and following up.

With the right collaboration and legal guidance on contracting, they proved to be valuable partners. Working with smaller suppliers not only supported local businesses but also offered more flexibility in pricing—helping to optimize the event budget.

Measuring and Tracking DEI and Sustainability

To ensure accountability and progress, we provide quarterly reports on diverse supplier spending across all the events we manage. These insights enable our client to quantify and showcase the real-world impact of their DEI and sustainability efforts. By aggregating supplier data, they can effectively demonstrate how their event investments drive meaningful change and align with their broader corporate responsibility goals.