

The **Green** White Paper:

Sustainability in Meetings
and Events



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Corporate responsibility around sustainability is deemed a necessity, however, it has confused meanings across organisations, sectors, departments and even individuals. It was therefore important that when we started looking at the subject that we took a step back and looked at the broader picture clarifying what it means and define what best practice is.

Background

If we're being honest there's a chance that we started on this in a hope that we'd be able to deliver a clear set of guidelines and make a difference in this area. However, it quickly became clear that we'd never manage that and every question we addressed invariably posed another, which isn't necessarily a bad thing.

So in setting the scene, we will never claim to have all the answers in this document but hopefully it starts a bigger conversation and greater engagement across the meetings & events world about what sustainability is, how it differs from CSR and most importantly we hope to provide a few simple tools that everyone can add to their daily lives that will make a difference, no matter how small.

Throughout this paper you'll see a number of pie charts. These detail the results of research we conducted from over 350 event professionals at both a corporate and agency level painting an interesting picture of the levels of adoption and awareness around this subject, we'll revisit this research in 2019 and see how the results evolve.

If you have any questions about it or would like to contribute to the conversation please email hello@bcdme.com

Summary

Approaches to corporate sustainability in the meeting and event industry have evolved over the last two decades, from a desire to create a key differentiator to a need to monitor and report on progress.

The recent adoption of event sustainability standards suggests the practice has moved from a niche activity to a mainstream planning strategy. But has “event sustainability” truly arrived as a standard business practice? And in an era when human rights and climate change are of more concern than ever, is there more the meeting and event industry could be doing?

This paper investigates what has happened in the meeting and event industry since the adoption of event sustainability standards in 2012. Asking how the scope of sustainability has changed, and who in the supply chain has taken the lead for upholding key principles. Leading practitioners will be profiled, with examples and guides to implementing best practice. Conclusions will be drawn as to the state of sustainability in meetings and events, and projections made for what the future holds.

Sustainability Defined

Sustainability has been defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs¹.

Seems like a fairly straightforward concept to get behind, right? We need things, but we get them within the limited resources that we have, while respecting the fact others have needs too. In business--and events--sustainability requires balance between people, planet and profit with a goal of maximising benefits for all.

If only it were that easy! Alas, sustainability is a complicated topic. And can become a source of confusion when organisations define it in different ways. A helpful first step for meeting and event professionals is to discuss assumptions:

- What does sustainability mean to you?
- And how might it be different from corporate social responsibility (CSR)?

¹ United Nations, 1992.

Corporate Responsibility is deemed a necessity, but it has different meanings for organizations, sectors and even departments. Take a step back and the broader subject of sustainability perhaps suffers from a lack of understanding. What’s clear is that there are urgent and timely issues involved that need constant re-evaluation.

BCD Meetings & Events are not experts in Sustainability, but we are experts in meetings and events. And we know that Sustainability can be neglected by the industry and its clients.

This document is packed full of research, advice and action points. It has been produced to trigger reactions; start conversations, and rally its readers to make positive changes in business practice.

Devote time to reading and digesting it, and you can help create a brighter future.

The difference is important when you consider how the two ideas are contrasted below:

	Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	Sustainability
Time frame	Short term	Long term
Perspective	Looking backwards	Planning for the future
Scope	Philanthropy, charity and volunteer work	Economic, environmental and social impacts caused by day-to-day activities
Integration	Add-on, optional	Embeds values in business strategy
Event examples	Involving participants in a volunteer project, such as a community clean-up	Having a plan to measure and reduce solid waste generated by your event

BCD Travel

BCD M&E’s sister company BCD Travel are developing their efforts in this area and has adopted the following definition of sustainability for their operations: “Ethical management of our environmental, social and financial responsibilities to ensure our ongoing business success—without limiting options for future generations.”

This definition puts sustainability at the heart of the company’s Strategic Direction. This is important, as it elevates the idea of sustainability above “green business” and “corporate responsibility”. It permeates into all business activities.

BCD Travel has singled out three main principles that foster a better workplace, a better business and a better world—both in the company’s internal initiatives and service offerings.



A better workplace

We give our people tools to fulfil their potential, and we protect them from unreasonable health and safety risks



A better world

Protecting the environment through social investment and positive change in our communities



A better business

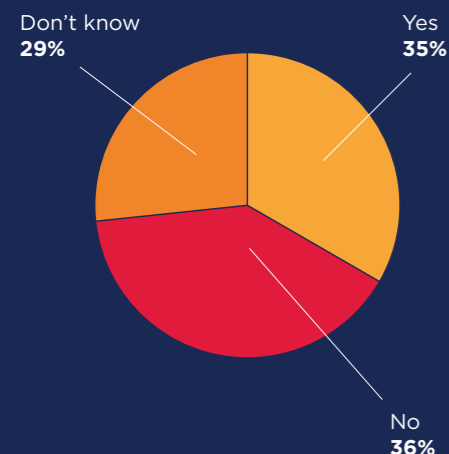
A secure business environment and ethical business practices

Event Sustainability

A Brief History

Sustainable events are not new, but they have had an up-and-down journey. Research shows a resurgence of interest in sustainability among meeting and event professionals since the 2008 financial crisis. A 2018 study² indicates 61% of UK event professionals have seen an increase in the importance of CSR over the past 12 months. This is an improvement over 2017 when more than half of corporates surveyed said they didn't actively apply a CSR policy to their events.

Do you actually add a sustainability element to your events?



Stage 1: 2000-2005 Green Event Tactics Address On-site Impacts and Add Flair

"Green events" made their grand entrance nearly 20 years ago. Early steps saw associations such as the Events Industry Council (formerly the Convention Industry Council) and Meeting Professionals International spotlight the topic by releasing the industry's first best practice and policy guidelines to organisers and suppliers. The focus during this stage was largely on "Planet" and easy steps to reduce onsite environmental impacts.

Stage 2: 2005-2010 Event CSR Builds Brands and Creates Legacy

Initial interest in green meetings was followed by an explosion in "event CSR" which saw many organisers enhance their meetings and events by integrating volunteer experiences. This focus on "People" saw events give back through service activities that generated positive public relations, affirmed brand values, and promoted customer loyalty. While event CSR added a social dimension to onsite environmental responsibility efforts, most organisers were yet to create systematic management approaches, complete with the formal policies, objectives and supply-chain management that have come to define event sustainability today. However, that was about to change.

² Conference and Incentive Travel and Guinness World Records, 2018.

Stage 3: 2010-Today Sustainability Management Systems Improve Business Processes and Outcomes

Momentum toward sustainability came to a crashing halt following the financial crisis. The reality of "Profit" hit home for many event professionals as optional green and CSR programmes fell victim to budget cuts. It has taken some time, but event organisations have emerged from the crisis smarter and wiser, with a deeper appreciation of how business success relies on the interaction between all three pillars of sustainability: people, planet and profit.

ISO 20121--the International Sustainable Event Standard--was introduced in 2012, closely followed by the Global Reporting Initiative Event Organizers Sector Supplement and the APEX-ASTM Environmentally Sustainable Event Standard. Developed in collaboration with the meeting and event industry, these standards joined other pre-existing green hotel and venue certifications, such as LEED®, Green Key and Green Globe. Collectively, standardisation has helped meetings and events evolve beyond short-term green and CSR activities to embrace sustainability in a more holistic, objective-oriented way.

However, while standards bring many benefits, including policy guidance, normalised practices and certification opportunities, the variety and complexity of standards related to meetings and events has led to slow adoption. Professionals are uncertain how standards work, which standard they should follow and what the return on investment might be. The Events Industry Council is attempting to reduce confusion and has identified four guiding principles³ that should underpin any sustainable event standards as a starting point:

- That sustainability is a shared responsibility between event organisers and suppliers for implementing and communicating sustainable practices
- Key environmental practices must be standard
- Primary social considerations are critical
- Sustainable events support thriving economic practices

³ Events Industry Council, 2018.

Stages in Sustainable Event History

Stage 1:

Green Meetings

Typical Goals: Short-term. Focus on trends. About efficiency, cost-saving, convenience.

Sample Best Practice: Eliminating individual disposable plastic water bottles. Introducing a mobile event application to cut paper use.

Stage 2:

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Typical Goals: Short-term. About market differentiation, brand identity, experience.

Sample Best Practice: Creating an event volunteer project, such as assembling kits for schools, disaster relief or local shelters.

Stage 3:

Sustainability Systems

Typical Goals: Long-term. About monitoring and reporting on progress against specific business objectives, maintaining social license to operate, and achieving operational efficiency.

Sample Best Practice: Integrating sustainability policy and practices into event supply chains through tenders and contracts.

Learn more: Industry associations are at work for sustainability:
Events Industry Council, Sustainable Event Alliance, A Greener Festival

Two Tools

There are a variety of guides to help meeting and event professionals along the sustainability learning curve. Two tools are of particular interest due to their broad applicability to a variety of meeting and event types: ISO 20121 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs). ISO and the UNSDGs are widely recognized across the world, and beyond the meeting and event industry. While it is not necessary to use either, participation in ISO and UNSDG networks can provide access to a community of professionals that can help make the process easier. Aligning with these tools also increases the credibility of event sustainability efforts, reducing the risk of green-washing.

UN Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, the United Nations adopted new goals directed at ending poverty, protecting the planet and promoting prosperity for all. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) provide a menu of 17 important global objectives that many corporations are using to shape sustainability plans. The goals provide a useful common language for speaking with clients and meeting and event participants about shared sustainability values.

ISO 20121

The International Standards Organization provides many management system standards that help diverse businesses integrate sustainability into their operations. ISO 20121 is one such standard that was specifically created for the meeting and event industry. Many assume ISO 20121 is designed only for use by large events, like London 2012. However, it is equally valuable to small and ongoing meetings and events, and different types of event companies, including agencies, caterers and venues. While not necessary to do so, ISO 20121 also provides certification using a third-party auditor.

⁴TerraChoice and UL Environment, 2010.

[Learn more:](#) ISO 20121 Sustainable Events

Key Term: Green-washing

Green-washing is the act of misleading consumers about the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service.⁴ Unfortunately, the meeting and event industry is vulnerable to green-washing. Consider these two examples:

A caterer purchases disposable food serviceware marketed as compostable. After using the product for a few months the caterer's composting company complains that the cups, utensils and plates are not breaking down and will have to be landfilled. The caterer contacts the manufacturer to learn the products have not been tested or certified compostable at a commercial facility. Green-washing lesson: Always verify sustainability credentials! And when it comes to compostable items, make sure they are certified and tested before purchasing them.

A meeting planner wants to be sustainable, but runs out of time to implement energy and waste reduction practices at her event. She purchases a carbon offset and promotes the meeting as green. Participants are critical the offset does not go far enough, and that the meeting should also take steps to reduce impacts. Green-washing lesson: Carbon offsets promote accountability for impacts that can't be avoided, but do not directly reduce an event's footprint. So take meaningful steps to reduce what you can first, then offset what you can't.

UN Sustainable Development Goal

How to support the UN Sustainable Development Goals at meetings and events

No poverty

Hire companies that provide training and jobs for people who experience barriers to employment

Zero hunger

Donate unserved food according to food safe guidelines

Good health and well being

Provide time and space for fitness and relaxation at meetings

Quality education

Sponsor bursaries to improve access to conferences

Gender equality

Ensure all event staff are provided equal pay for equal work

Clean water and sanitation

Opt for certified organic food grown without chemicals

Affordable and clean energy

Purchase a carbon offset that supports renewable energy

Decent work and economic growth

Create policies to ensure fair and ethical treatment of event volunteers and interns

Industry, innovation and infrastructure

Increase the life cycle of discarded materials by reducing customization and event-specific branding

Reduced inequalities

Buy fairly-traded products, such as coffee and tea

Sustainable cities and communities

Select venues that are walkable or accessible by public transport and promote alternatives to single-occupant car trips

Responsible production and consumption

Reduce use of packaging in all event supplies and provide recycling and composting onsite

Climate action

Measure the event carbon footprint to learn where carbon impacts are greatest, and could be reduced

Life below water

Require caterers serve seafood that is verified as sustainable by a credible, science-based programme

Life on land

Buy products that do not contribute to deforestation, including post-consumer recycled content paper

Peace, justice and strong institutions

Support hotels that are taking action to spot and combat human trafficking

Partnership for the goals

Communicate what your event is doing to support the UNSDGs.

[Learn more:](#) United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



Event Sustainability Today

Why Sustainability?

Meetings and Events Face Pressing Issues

More than ever before, the meeting and event industry has a role to play in addressing global and local sustainability challenges. Responsibility for action is two-fold:

- Reduce negative impacts resulting from meetings and events.
- Create successful, resilient events that achieve objectives and withstand risks.

The following section summarizes the variety of sustainability issues that relate to meetings and events.

Climate Change

A conference participant generates 176 kilograms of carbon emissions per day. That is equal to 1,233 barrels of oil consumed for a 1,000 person, three day meeting.⁵

Climate change affects meeting and event professionals in two ways. Firstly, organisers may need to create contingency plans for extreme weather events, made more likely as a result of climate change. Secondly, sustainability also demands the industry be proactive to measure and prevent greenhouse gas emissions in order to reduce its

⁵ McKinley, 2018.

⁶ Vaughan, 2018.

⁷ Grover, 2018.

contribution to climate change. Although each event is different, the top five sources of greenhouse gas emissions at events are:

- Transportation: Participant travel to and from the event, freight, onsite shuttles.
- Venue energy use: Electricity, natural gas and fuels used to power venues.
- Hotel energy use: Electricity and natural gas used to power accommodations.
- Catering: Energy used to grow, harvest, transport, process, prepare and dispose of food and beverages.
- Embodied energy: Energy used to manufacture and ship products used at meetings and events, including promotional products, signs and office supplies.

Destination selection plays a big role in determining onsite carbon footprint. Carbon impacts will be higher if the host destination relies on fossil fuel energy, rather than cleaner sources, such as hydroelectric, wind and solar power.

Learn more: The carbon footprint of events will decrease as more renewable energy is used to supplement the power grid. The EU has increased its binding renewable energy target to 32% by 2030, up from 27%.⁶ Renewables produced a record 30% of UK electricity in 2017, up from 19% three years prior.⁷ To find out how different destinations perform in terms of renewable energy visit the European Commission on Renewable Energy.

Water Conservation and Quality

Meetings and events impact water in two ways: by using it, and contributing to water pollution. Direct water use at meetings and events is primarily controlled by venue and hotel managers. And while operators can use water-conserving technology, such as low-flow plumbing fixtures, they are also vulnerable to regional water shortages. This risk was dramatically illustrated during Cape Town, South Africa's 2018 water shortage, when it was feared the city would run out of water. During the peak of the crisis, 18 of the top hotels in the city reported forward bookings were down 30%-50%. The same group of hotels reported a 10%-15% loss of revenue year-on-year equating to R90m (€6.1m)⁹. Other MICE cities at severe risk of water scarcity according to the International Tourism Partnership include Bali, Mumbai, Bangkok, Beijing, Dubai and Manila.¹⁰

The products meeting and event professionals use also take water to manufacture. For example, it takes 1.32 L of water to create one litre of disposable bottled water.¹¹ Harmful chemicals that contribute to water pollution can also be found in many items used at events: paper, name badges, graphics, promotional products, tote bags, T-shirt, cleaners and even food. Certain chemicals can affect human health where workers, such as housekeeping staff, experience on-going or significant exposures.

Solid Waste

A typical conference participant generates 1.9 kilograms of waste per day. That translates into 5,670 kilograms of waste, or roughly the weight of four compact cars, for a 1,000 person, three day meeting.¹²

Meeting and event waste is a big problem. Large quantities of disposable products can be used and it is often difficult to keep material out of landfills. And the assumption that venue recycling will automatically solve the problem is often false, for three reasons:

1. Many event materials, like polystyrene foam, vinyl, carpet and mixed material products, are not easily recycled in many cities.

2. Markets that have traditionally received recyclable paper and plastic, such as China, are restricting what they will take.

3. Recoverable waste is often contaminated with non-recyclable or non-compostable materials, resulting in landfill if special sorting is not provided.

This often means that venues recycle less than 20% of their waste with a basic recycling programme. Meetings and events achieving waste recovery rates of 50% or higher are typically investing in supplemental composting, specialised recycling and food donation.

All of this makes efforts to reduce waste at source more important than ever. The Waste Resources and Action Programme (WRAP) has been successful in advancing individual consumer and targeted business campaigns to reduce food and plastic waste in the UK. These campaigns have been so successful they have expanded to other countries, including Canada and New Zealand.

Since 2007 WRAP has provided resources to help caterers and hotels take practical steps to cut food waste. Implementation of these strategies has demonstrated a strong business case¹³ for meeting and events to "love food, hate waste":

- Caterers save \$6 for every \$1 invested in reducing food waste.
- 80% of caterers can keep their total investment in food waste reduction to below \$10,000.
- 64% of caterers recoup their investment within just one year.
- Hotels saved \$7 for every \$1 invested in reducing food waste.
- 90% of hotels can keep their total investment below \$20,000.
- 70% of hotels recoup their investment within just one year.

⁸ McIlwraith, McKinley and Zavada, 2015.

⁹ Birns, 2018.

¹⁰ International Tourism Partnership, 2018.

¹¹ Antea Group, 2015.

¹² McKinley, 2018.

¹³ WRAP, 2018

The water footprint of a conference programme, tote bag and two cups of coffee for **750 meeting participants** is equal to one **Olympic swimming pool.**⁸

WRAP has launched the UK Plastics Pact with **the ambition of making 100% of plastic packaging** in the UK reusable, recyclable or compostable **by 2025**. The Association of Independent Festivals has been the first event industry body to get on board with the campaign. Over 60 festivals have signed on to the AIF's Drastic on Plastic initiative,¹⁴ committing **to ban single-use disposable plastics** from their event sites by 2021.

¹⁴ Snapes, 2018

Learn more: Waste recovery rates throughout Europe can vary greatly and have increased on average by 13% since 2004. For more information on how well countries are doing visit the European Environmental Agency, or host city government websites.

BUSINESS MEETING

SOURCES OF CARBON IMPACTS
Building power, participant travel

SOURCE OF WATER IMPACTS
Catering, hotel and venue water use

SOURCES OF WASTE IMPACTS
Food, paper, packaging



INTERNATIONAL TRADESHOW

SOURCES OF CARBON IMPACTS
Exhibit freight, participant air travel, building power

SOURCE OF WATER IMPACTS
Catering, hotel and venue water use, embodied water in exhibit materials

SOURCES OF WASTE IMPACTS
Carpet, shrink wrap, exhibit booths, promotional items



MUSIC FESTIVALS

SOURCES OF CARBON IMPACTS
Participant car travel, audio visual, portable generators

SOURCE OF WATER IMPACTS
Catering and venue water use

SOURCES OF WASTE IMPACTS
Food, tents, camping equipment



Human Rights

According to PCMA Convene's Annual Salary survey of business event professionals, women earned 22% less than male respondents.¹⁵

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights lists fundamental protections that all people are entitled to, including equal treatment and freedom from slavery and torture. And while it is easy to assume meetings and events respect human rights, there are particular areas professionals must be vigilant about:

- **Fairness:** Principles of fairness permeate human resource management and product purchasing in the meeting and event industry. Whether through fairly traded products, or a fairly treated workforce, equal and just treatment of labour is a critical way to demonstrate organisational values.
- **Harassment:** Business events can create an environment ripe for abuse, particularly at after-hours networking functions where alcohol is served. PCMA reports 80% of meeting and event professionals have been harassed on the job. Only one-quarter of respondents reported the behaviour for a variety of reasons, including fear of retribution.¹⁶

- **Human trafficking:** Exploitative labour practices and sexual slavery are an issue of concern in the travel and hospitality industry, especially at hotels, restaurants and airports where trafficking can occur. Meeting and event professionals can help victims by recognising warning signs and knowing how to report incidents.
- **Inclusion:** While diversity in speaker panels is a common complaint at conferences, inclusion is about more than minority representation at the podium. It involves supporting welcoming destinations and creating venue and event experiences that provide equal and dignified access for everyone: regardless of race, gender identity, ability, age, and religion.
- **Privacy:** GDPR-compliance has provided an important reminder of the need to protect participant data that may be held in registration or exhibitor databases. And organiser's obligation to provide the public with the ability to control how their data is used.

¹⁵ Russell, April 2018.

¹⁶ Russell, January 2018.

Important Idea: What Are Sustainability Non-Negotiables?

Sustainability often requires trade-offs. In situations where negotiation is necessary, it is important to identify specific things that might be deal-breakers. Here is a list of common sustainability non-negotiables, or minimums:

- Verified sustainable seafood must be used
- Fairly traded coffee always provided
- No endangered species to be served
- No polystyrene products used
- No PVC vinyl products used
- No single use, disposable plastic bottles or cups
- No forced labour

Health and Safety

Accommodation and food service workers face the fourth highest risk of workplace injury in the UK, following agriculture, forestry and food, construction and transportation.¹⁷

Attention to health and safety through participant first aid, workplace safety procedures and emergency response has been hard-wired into planning for many years. However it is only recently that health and safety has been integrated with event sustainability as the list of planning issues lengthens and becomes more complicated. Today's meeting and event participants expect that event organisers will act on their social responsibility to address new health and safety risks such as:

- **Acts of terrorism:** Approximately 40% of event professionals perceive terrorism as the top risk to create a negative impact on their event.¹⁸
- **Severe weather:** Organisers and venues need to anticipate severe weather exacerbated by climate change, such as increased risk of flooding, wildfires and heat waves that can impact participant willingness to travel.
- **Civil unrest:** While peaceful protests can be safely managed, unpredictable or violent demonstrations are more difficult to plan for and can lead to reduced attendance and worse: meeting and event cancellations.

¹⁷ Health and Safety Executive, 2017.

¹⁸ Grassroots, 2018.

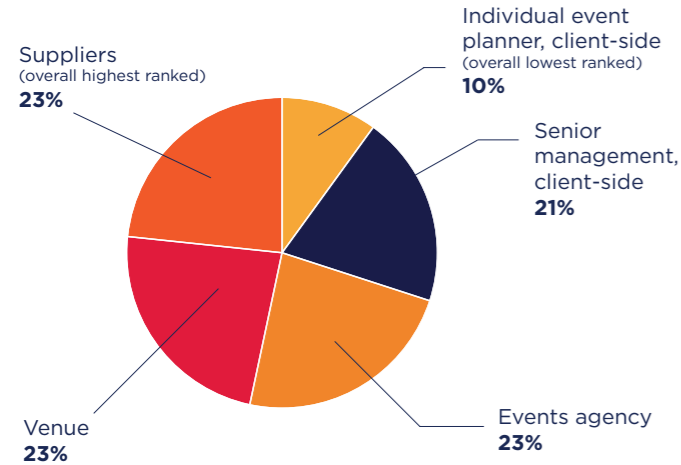


Meetings and Events Have Immense Opportunity

Event sustainability is not just about doing less harm and ensuring resilience against risks. It is also about demonstrating the value of human connections that meetings and events facilitate. And the power that the industry has to make a difference.

Learn more: Does your event company do good by working with purpose? Consider applying for a Global Good Award.

In your experience, who's actually responsible for producing sustainable events?



Share Knowledge

Meetings and events advance human capacity to address challenges and solve problems. This can happen in obvious ways. For example, medical meetings focussed on certain illnesses can help advance collaboration and research that improves understanding, diagnosis and treatment. Trade shows related to sustainable buildings or green living can help catalyse the green economy which in turn promotes greener consumption and reduced environmental impacts.

In addition to these deliberate outcomes by participants at events, organisers also mobilise behind the scenes, to share knowledge and solve problems related to event sustainability.

For example, meeting and event industry associations have recently sought to increase awareness of and act to combat human trafficking. More meeting and event professionals are expressing concern about it as a result, and individual hotels and global brands are becoming empowered to act by participating in solution-oriented programmes.

Promote Innovation

Events create connections and tools that break through barriers and improve efficiency and convenience. As an example, hack-a-thons and innovation labs involve employees, external experts and students in identifying solutions to organisational or societal challenges. These types of events can be used by businesses and associations to fulfil company or member needs by designing new products and services. Hack-a-thons may also be sponsored by business with the express aim of connecting non-profits with technology-based solutions. Such events may reward a prize purse to develop the best idea. These event programmes achieve win-wins when they create business opportunities for organisers and application developers in a way that also addresses an important cause, like food waste reduction or improving access to social services.

Strengthen Relationships

Meetings and events bring people together on the basis of shared purpose. Corporate marketing activities that have a sustainability focus allow businesses, their employees and customers to explore and act on shared interests and values. These activities can build brand loyalty and improve employee and customer satisfaction while also contributing to causes businesses, employees and customers care about. Methods for doing this are wide-ranging and include:

- Direct community action, such as volunteer programmes.
- Corporate sponsorship of events, such as charity drives, pledge runs or fitness challenges.
- Social media campaigns that invite people to share their love of brands in return for a community contribution by the brand.

Important Idea: Five Questions to Build the Business Case

Sustainability matters to today's successful organisations. And events are no different. The 2016 UN Global Compact-Accenture CEO Study includes responses from more than 1,000 CEOs, in 108 countries and across 26 industries. They found that nearly all (97 percent) believe that sustainability is important to the future success of their business.¹⁹

So why are requests for sustainable events often met with:

- This is going to cost more money.
- No one has the time to do it.
- Guests and participants won't like it.
- The client won't be happy.

Anticipate common arguments against sustainable events by asking these questions to build the business case:

- Can sustainability improve employee, client and customer relationships?
- Does sustainability provide brand value or competitive advantage?
- Can sustainability reduce costs by increasing efficiency and supporting innovation?
- Does sustainability provide opportunities for new sources of revenue, such as sponsorship or new products and services?
- Can sustainability reduce business and event risks and their associated costs?

¹⁹ Accenture, 2016.

Key Term: Social Enterprise

Social enterprises apply business strategies to improve well-being in innovative ways. They may be non-profit or for-profit organisations. Event organisers benefit from a variety of social enterprises, including promotional product providers that use waste materials to manufacture tote bags. Catering companies and hotels may also operate as social enterprises where they provide jobs to people who experience barriers to employment.

Learn more: Event professionals can learn about and get involved in preventing human trafficking through organisations such as ECPAT and The Code.

Who Is Responsible For Sustainability?

Organisers, suppliers and participants all play a role in event sustainability. And while it may seem like one person can't make a difference, quite the opposite is true. Consider these facts:

628,000 litres of water are saved by opting to serve chicken instead of beef for a 500-person banquet.²⁰

Different foods have different water footprints which vary based on animal diets, plant needs, farming methods and processing requirements. For example, it takes 75 litres of water to produce a glass of beer compared to 120 litres of water for wine. And while participant preferences are a key consideration, organisers and caterers can make a big difference by picking convenient water-wise options, such as potatoes for side dishes instead of pasta or rice, which use more water.

8,000 kilograms of landfill would be avoided if one-quarter of exhibitions held in Europe used paper instead of foam board for poster signs.²¹

Graphics suppliers play a big role in reducing meeting and event waste by researching and recommending greener products and processes. Recently suppliers have been moving away from non-recyclable foam boards to provide easel signs made from 100% cardboard, which is easily recycled at venues.

183 meals are provided for every 100 kilograms of surplus food donated from events.²²

Food donation can be challenging, requiring processes that keep perishable unserved food safe for consumption. But it is possible, and well worth the effort considering one in nine people around the world today (815 million) are undernourished.²³

²⁰ Waterfootprint Network, 2017.

²¹ Assumes 2,769 total exhibitions using 100 standard poster-size signs weighing 115 grams each.

²² Whole Earth Calculator, N.D.

²³ United Nations, 2018.



What Areas Are Connected To Sustainability?

Sustainability touches all aspects of meetings and events, providing a diverse menu of opportunities to reduce impacts and create social benefit. Here are three top best practices ideas in different logistical areas:



Experience Design

1. Feature a service or fundraising activity
2. Provide an accessibility concierge
3. Create a sponsored scholarship or bursary to support participation from under-represented audiences



Audio Visual and Production

1. Request most efficient lighting, sound and projection equipment for event needs
2. Power-off AV when not in use
3. Use reusable staging, decor and production equipment

Important Idea: Event Sustainability Objectives

While it is important to have a best practice checklist for event sustainability, it is arguably more important to have smart event sustainability objectives. Why? Let's imagine an organiser is meeting with an event team, attempting to get buy-in to create a sustainable event plan. Is the organiser more likely to get support for a long list of best practice tactics to follow? Or a single aim, such as "reducing solid waste"? Odds are the latter will be more acceptable because it's not only briefer, but it also opens the door for event teams to contribute ideas based on their area of specialisation. Clear objectives also lend themselves to measurement, which inspires specialists to consider how they can contribute to a focused, quantifiable outcome.



Exhibits

1. Prepare a list of green tips for exhibitors
2. Request sustainable alternatives for graphics, carpet and other contractor-provided material
3. Provide a donation programme for exhibitors to re-purpose gently-used or excess items



Catering

1. Give preference to local, field-grown, in-season produce
2. Eliminate single-serving dishware or ensure disposables are composted
3. Serve fairly traded coffee and tea



Accommodation

1. Choose accommodations that have a sustainability credential, such as LEED® or ISO certification
2. Ensure the property has a visible in-room sustainability programme that guests can participate in
3. Support hotels that are participating in programmes to combat human trafficking



Branding and Communications

1. Eliminate dates and locations from branded items to promote reuse
2. Minimise use of adhesive, vinyl and polystyrene graphics which are not recyclable at most venues
3. Source promotional products from social enterprises or companies that have a code of conduct for health, safety and fair labour



Destination

1. Host a local, sustainable dine-around
2. Prepare a wellness guide for participants that features parks, exercise and relaxation opportunities within walking distance
3. Source gifts from indigenous artists



Venue

1. Choose a venue that has a sustainability credential, such as LEED® or ISO certification
2. Opt for a venue that is purchasing clean energy, or is willing to purchase it for your event
3. Pick a venue with a strong recycling programme that will help keep waste from landfills



Travel

1. Offer the option to attend remotely
2. Choose walkable and public transport-accessible venues and hotels
3. Provide a carbon offset

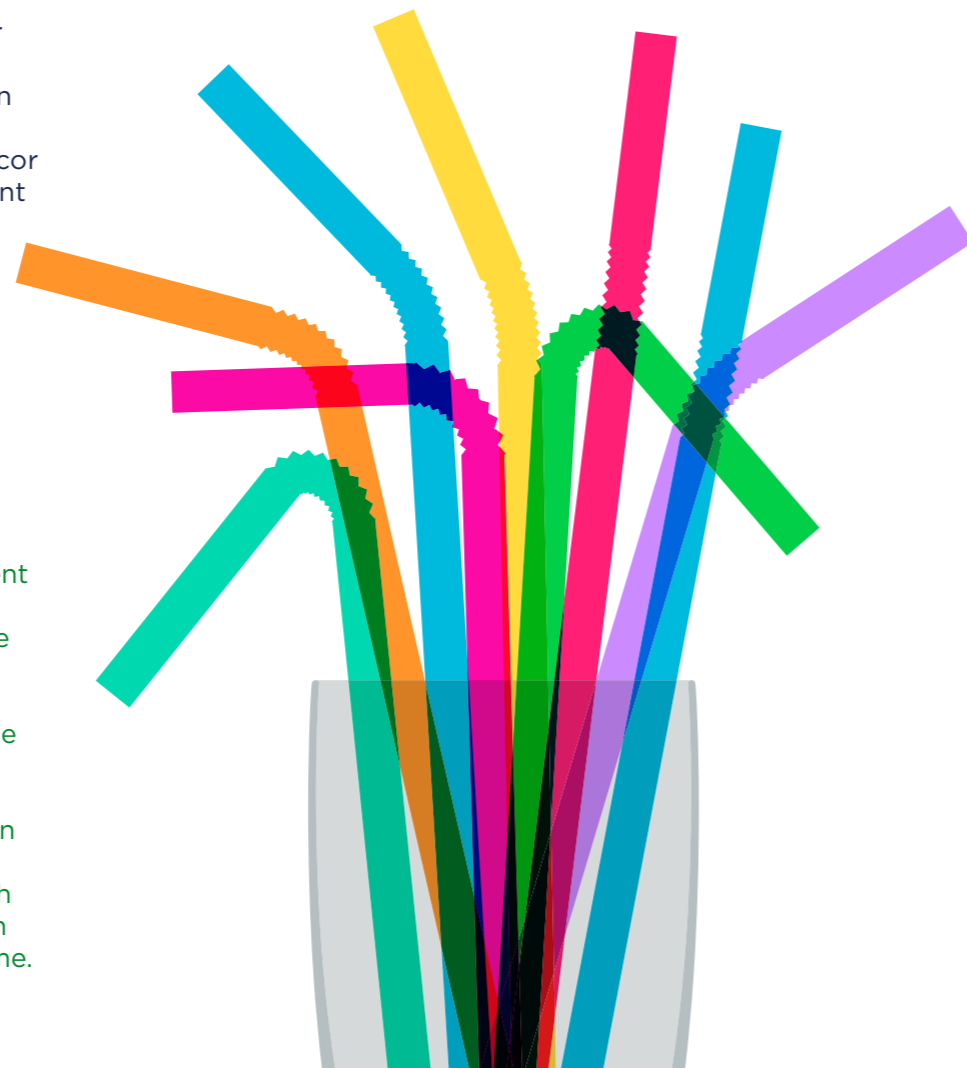


Onsite

1. Choose a badge system that reduces use of disposable plastic
2. Provide downloadable collateral via an event mobile app or website
3. Implement an anti-harassment policy and share it with participants.

Thinking about what you've seen; what's the best example of a sustainable initiative at an event?

"Our US office donate the left over food to a charity. There's not enough elements in events that are sustainable currently. The industry needs to get better."



Where to Start?

Integrating sustainability into an event can feel overwhelming. Asking a few key questions at the start can help make the process more manageable.

What issues are most important?

There are many sustainability issues. But time to plan is short! How to prioritise? The following questions can help event professionals focus on the most important things first.

- What do organisers, customers or event participants care about? Consider adding a question to your evaluation that uncovers important topics.
- Is the meeting or event vulnerable to criticism in certain areas where impacts are large or very visible? Social media monitoring may reveal criticisms participants have about topics ranging from discrimination to food waste.
- Does the type of event dictate unique issues? The purpose of the gathering or host organisation may spotlight issues of focus. For example, is the sponsor in a line of business that cares about water, climate or health and wellness?

What can be controlled?

The meeting and event industry could be criticised for asking a lot of questions about sustainability, but failing to use the answers when making planning decisions. In truth, some event sustainability choices are outside of the control of planners and suppliers. For example, participants can be encouraged to choose public transport and walk by making venues conveniently accessible, but transportation choices are ultimately at the discretion of attendees. Still, planners and suppliers are able to use their buying power more effectively to support sustainability.

These questions can help assess what an individual planner or supplier can do:

- Are tenders or legally binding agreements used? Supply chain management is a powerful tool to promote sustainability. Consider focussing on contracted products and services where negotiating power is greatest and sustainability expectations can be put in writing.
- What makes sense to do in the short and long-term? Start with decisions that will be made within the next quarter. Note important milestones in the future when control over longer-term planning decisions increases.
- Can influence be increased by providing incentives, using deterrents, or forming partnerships? Carrots and sticks can be useful tools to negotiate for sustainability. For example, a supplier might be in a better position to provide sustainable products if they secure a longer-term agreement. Participants may also be encouraged to join in sustainability efforts if they feel rewarded through prizes or acknowledgment.

What resources exist?

Inevitably, most event sustainability efforts succeed or fail on the basis of two questions:

- How will it be funded?
- Who is going to do the work?

The meeting and event industry has inherited an economic model similar to most industries, where the environmental and social costs of doing business are rarely measured or accounted for in budgets. This traditional way of thinking has prevented sustainability from becoming a core line-item on event budgets, often relegating it to an optional activity that is the job of volunteers and dependent on sponsorship funding.

However, meeting and event organisations that are making long-term, serious commitments to sustainability are beginning to designate core funds from event planning and/or corporate responsibility budgets to ensure event sustainability plans are consistently in place. When inventorying resources to evaluate if event sustainability is “nice” or “necessary” to have it is important to keep a few realities in mind:

- Sustainability does not always cost more and may present cost savings. If higher fees are quoted for sustainability ask why so you can assess the facts related to premiums.
- Sustainability is a specialised skill-set in the event industry. And while it may be appropriate to use volunteers for some tasks, effective event sustainability management systems require dedicated, paid staff.
- The social cost of carbon is a tool used to help quantify the economic cost of climate change impacts in terms of food scarcity, environmental damage and human health. The social cost of carbon has been estimated at €34 per ton²⁴. That puts the social cost of carbon for a 1,000 person, three day meeting at approximately €19,700.
- Many countries are considering putting a price on carbon as a way to require businesses to internalise the economic cost of climate change. This is designed to help these countries meet their climate goals under the Paris Agreement. Companies, such as Microsoft, Novartis and ConocoPhillips, have been early adopters of this idea by placing an internal price on carbon ranging from €5 to €86 per metric ton²⁵. In the case of Microsoft, each department pays a fee that reflects the amount of energy they use. Microsoft uses carbon funds to invest in green energy, energy efficiency upgrades and offsets.

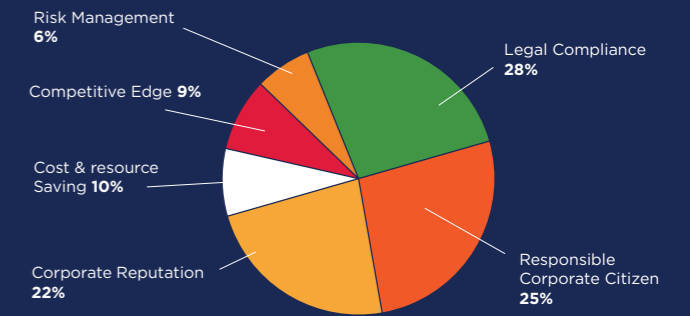
²⁴ Environmental Defense Fund, N.D.

²⁵ Camuzeaux, 2016.

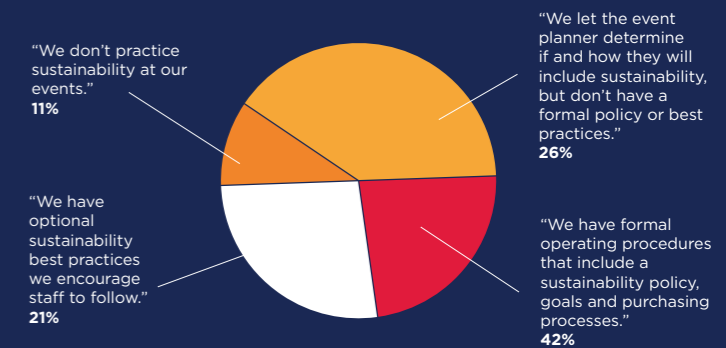
What sustainable elements do you add to your events, and how you measure success?

“We always suggest sustainable products and or recommend ways to upcycle exhibit materials”

What are the most important benefits to your organisation of holding sustainable events?



Which best describes your organisations' approach to sustainability?



Which elements of sustainability would you like to introduce to your event?



Important Idea: Paying The Event Sustainability Bill

Sometimes, sustainability does cost more. Particularly if a sustainable product is not widely available on the market, or added time is needed. However, it is possible to grow resources in a variety of ways:

- **Sponsorship:** These are a good fit for activities that can be branded, such as volunteer programmes, food experiences, carbon offsets, recycling stations, and giveaways.
- **Budget:** Consider allocating a percentage of budget to support philanthropic causes, or core programmes, like zero waste teams.
- **Ticket sales/registration:** While it is important to keep costs-to-attend low, it is also possible to bake some sustainability expenses into registration or admission fees. Some sustainability programmes, like carbon offsets, cost less than a pound per participant to implement.
- **Grants:** Temporary financial support may exist through government or foundation programmes. This short-term funding may not be suitable for core activities, but can increase capacity for companies to research, develop and test sustainability solutions, such as new product materials or measurement technology.

Seven Steps To Start

Based on its own experiences, BCD M&E's sister company BCD Travel recommends seven steps to getting any sustainability programme off-the-ground:

- 1** Get executive buy-in. Ensure company leaders incorporate social responsibility into global business strategy.
- 2** Create a cross-functional sustainability leadership team. To maintain ongoing support, assemble an executive sustainability committee made up of leaders from across the organisation.
- 3** Engage and educate employees. Employee participation in sustainability doesn't happen automatically. Use educational programmes to win support.
- 4** Be global and local. It's essential to have employees in each country committed to the success of the global programme.
- 5** Tap into industry best practices. For companies just getting started, begin with the priorities that third-party frameworks, such as ISO 20121, recommended.
- 6** Be realistic. It takes time and effort to implement a global sustainability programme. Plan a phased approach from the start.
- 7** Don't reinvent the wheel. Emulate companies that demonstrate sustainability success. The United Nations Global Sustainability Goals and United Nations Global Compact website offers information on thousands of businesses, including BCD Travel, who are committed to the world's largest sustainability initiative.



Leadership Snapshots: QO Amsterdam

Success in sustainable meetings and events relies on innovative suppliers who share organizers' commitment to the triple bottom line. BCD M&E turned to Marlon Roosblad, Marketing Manager at the QO Amsterdam, to discuss what defines cutting-edge sustainable hotel management.

What makes the QO Amsterdam unique?

Every aspect of the QO has been designed to significantly enhance the guest experience while reducing the hotel's environmental impact. We want to show it is possible for travellers to enjoy the most innovative, luxurious appliances and technologies as well as the healthiest food, and still affirm that they care about our planet.

Can you share examples of how you have accomplished this?

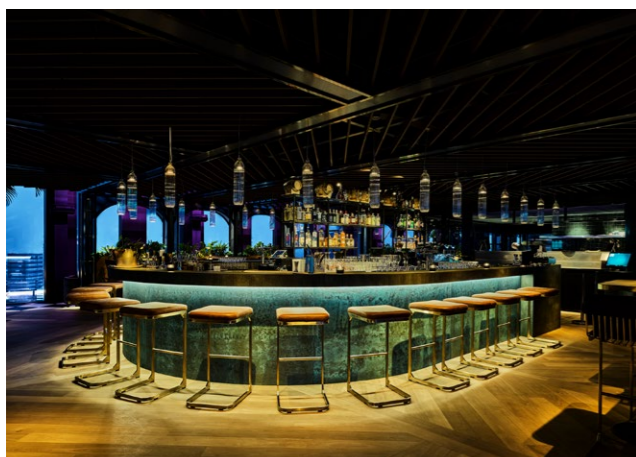
QO Amsterdam is a unique 'living building'. This concept means more than just ticking a few eco-friendly boxes: it runs throughout the building, products and operations. At times it will be clear to see and other times it isn't noticeable at all.

The hotel has innovative features which support a goal to become LEED® Platinum certified, the highest standard for green buildings. This includes an intelligent facade with 1,638 fully-responsive thermal panels that respond to the climate outside. 80% of the hotel's lighting comes from natural daylight through the use of floor-to-ceiling windows. Both of these features mean the hotel operates in an energy efficient manner. And we are proud to be powered by Dutch wind energy. Grey water recycling reduces the property's water use by 42%. And the furnishings have been thoughtfully sourced, including carpet made of 100% recycled fishing nets. We even have a greenhouse on the roof that provides ingredients for dishes prepared onsite.



IHG understands the impact of its operations on the environment and takes active steps to manage it. Through the IHG Green Engage™ system, a global standard across IHG's 5,500+ hotels, properties are able to report their energy, carbon, water and waste use: minimising their overall utility costs and environmental impact. The tool recommends more than 200 action items called 'Green Solutions' and implementation plans, that support hotels to create environmental action plans and targets with a number of these solutions focusing on sustainable meetings and event management.

Recently, IHG committed to remove plastic straws from its global estate by the end of 2019 - eliminating an average of 50 million single-use plastic straws from its hotels per year, as part of broader efforts to reduce plastic waste.



What do you think has contributed to the success of your sustainable hotel?

The design of QO Amsterdam has been a team process. Many people have shared ideas to contribute to our vision: architects, owners, employees, guests and the local community. We've tried to approach the project as being more than creating a leading hotel, but a way of life people can point to as an innovative example of what can be done when the community works together with the hospitality industry and visitors.

We've also remained dedicated to the goal of connecting people to each other. We're a conduit for guests to experience the best of Amsterdam and its sustainable lifestyle, starting when they arrive at our property. Our public space, meeting rooms and guest room technology are social by design, fostering connections with our team, other meeting participants, the neighbourhood, its food and lifestyle.

Why adopt a business model for hospitality that embraces sustainability?

Hospitality has a role to play in establishing norms about how guests interact with the local community. And we play a critical part in shaping the experience visitors have in our city, and the stories they tell others about that experience. The QO employs sustainable building innovation as a tool to better the community, the guest experience and, as a result, our business. The building's unique design and operating details help achieve all three: wedding the architecture of space and materials, with people, community and business. This is the cornerstone of our unique brand.

- ▶ The QO is an IHG hotel, opened in 2018 and located at Amstelvljetstraat 4 in Amsterdam. It offers 288 rooms, 8 unique event areas, Dutch Cuisine restaurant Persijn and skybar Juniper & Kin. Positioned within 10 minutes from city centre and the RAI, 20 minutes from Schiphol Airport, and within 10 minutes from the Johan Cruyff ArenA, Ziggo Dome and AFAS Live.



Grey water recycling reduces the property's water use by 42%.

What's Next for Event Sustainability?

Six Things The Meeting And Event Industry Needs

While there is much individual event professionals have done and can continue to do to improve sustainability, the help of government, other industries and professional associations is needed to break through larger barriers that impede progress.

The meeting and event industry needs help in the following priority areas to continue to address sustainability issues:

1 Best-in-class sustainability products:

While there are sustainable alternatives for many event supplies, continued innovation is needed. The following event-related products are ripe for further research and development to reduce waste: carpet, carpet covering, shrink wrap, banners and adhesive graphics. New and creative products that also support charitable and social causes are of value.

LEARN MORE
Looking for an event product that also does social good? Checkout BCorps.

2 Low-carbon event destinations and venues:

Many progressive cities provide low-carbon, low-waste venues for events. Others lag behind. Convention Bureaux (CVBs) have a role to play by urging local governments to join progressive sustainable city networks, such as the Global Destination Sustainability Index, that helps Destinations, Convention Bureaux, event planners and MICE suppliers drive the adoption, promotion and recognition of responsible practices in the business tourism and events industry.

LEARN MORE
Global Destination Sustainability Index, C40 Cities, Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy

3 Clean, efficient energy:

Utilities, governments and transportation industries decide what powers the grid and the vehicles events rely on. Governments and utilities can support the event industry's drive for lower carbon meetings by pursuing aggressive renewable energy goals. The transportation industry can also assist by advancing cleaner, efficient fuel standards and accelerating the adoption of electric vehicles.

LEARN MORE
Energy systems are complicated. Get simple explanations about renewable and other energy sources at Student Energy.

4 Health and safety:

Event professionals care about participants, employees and immediate vendors by providing safe and healthy event environments. But beyond these direct relationships it can be hard to ensure remote suppliers are providing similar conditions for their workers. Substandard labour practices for farm and factory workers globally is of particular concern. Here the event industry relies on labour associations and production and manufacturing industries to ensure codes of conduct that protect workers are developed and followed.

LEARN MORE
Fair Labor Association

5 Fairness and inclusion:

Many jurisdictions have laws that protect minorities and ensure inclusion of those with unique needs and perspectives. However, some locations lack protections, or worse, have laws that enable discrimination. Event professionals want guests to feel welcome, and can support the work of governments to enable equal inclusion and freedom of expression.

LEARN MORE
The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Meeting Professional's Association (LGBTMPA) is an organisation committed to the professional advancement of LGBT meeting professionals and diversity and inclusivity throughout the profession.

6 Measurement Tools:

Proving return on investment in event sustainability is a challenge. There is no common method for how to measure event impacts, and many tools that assist with measurement are proprietary. Event sustainability would advance if industry-endorsed measurement tools that track accepted indicators for sustainability, such as waste, carbon emissions and volunteer hours, were freely available.

If you could change one thing to make sustainability at your events easier, what would it be?

"Sustainability needs to become "front of mind" and requires proper prior planning".



Fifteen Things To Do Now

In the end, there's nothing to it, but to do it! And event professionals have an opportunity to start now. The steps can be small, or ambitious: they all matter and make a difference. Here are a few quick-start ideas:

1. Identify one or more sustainability topics to learn about. Possible subjects might include human trafficking, accessibility or climate change. Designate 30 minutes a week to read up on that topic and how it applies events.
2. Add sustainability as an agenda item to internal event planning meetings. Use this time to discuss client needs related to sustainability, and share resources, ideas and challenges.
3. Select one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and brainstorm one way to address it at an event. Have more than one recommendation? Summarise ideas and share them as an internal resource.
4. Join a campaign! Combining forces with others can help gain access to resources and a community of mentors that could partner in event sustainability efforts.

Learn more: Care about curbing plastic at events? Check out the Association of Independent Festivals' Drastic on Plastic campaign.

5. Host a Sustainability Happy Hour for an event team with the purpose of generating creative ideas for an event sustainability plan. Consider providing organic food or local craft beverages to promote attendance and stimulate discussion.
6. Create an incentive that rewards team members who take action to support sustainability goals. It could be simple, such as a thank you gift card, green team wrap party or post-event merit awards. Or recognition could be more formal, such as written endorsements in employee reviews.
7. Think of two or three supplies that are frequently used at events. Signs, name badges and paper products are a good place for organisers to start. Ask suppliers to research a more sustainable option for each and shift purchasing to make the green choice standard, so customers have to opt-out of the responsible choice.

Learn more: Find more sustainable products and assess how responsible they are by using the EcoLabel Index

8. Adapt a sustainability preference clause into request for proposals and contract templates that requires vendors provide their sustainability

policy and best practices. Use this information in decision making and planning.

9. Create a Stop Doing List for Sustainability. Make it simple. List things to phase out that create waste, for example.
10. Eliminate dates and locations from event branding.
11. Research and include green travel tips on the event website, including how to take public transport to and from the venue.
12. Let people know when event products are sustainable by communicating verified recycled content, organic and fair trade credentials on the items themselves.

Key Terms: Sustainable Food

From "natural" to "organic", sustainable food terms are confusing. But they are important to understand if we are to improve sustainable catering at events. **The Lexicon of Food** provides a place to learn about and discuss common, and less common, food sustainability terms so that you can make more informed menu choices. Here is a quick primer on a few commonly used terms.

- **Organic:** In general terms organic farming uses natural inputs that enhance soil fertility. That means nothing is used that might prove harmful to the air, the water, or the soil. Organic certification varies by region and provides technical reassurance that approved methods have been used to grow, store, process, package and ship produce. The Soil Association and U.S. Department of Agriculture provide two common organic certifications.
 - **Fair Trade:** Fair trade was conceived as a way to address injustice in the conditions of small-scale farmers in developing countries. Event-related products associated with fair trade include coffee, tea, chocolate, flowers, bananas and handcrafts. There are many labels to certify fair trade relationships. Their common intention is to help farmers stay on their land, build stronger rural communities, and not be forced to work on the plantations of big food corporations.
 - **Humane:** Humane practices ensure livestock, such as chickens, cows and pigs, are provided with a nutritious diet, sufficient space to graze, access to shelter and a resting area, raised without the use of subtherapeutic antibiotics, and the ability to engage in instinctive behaviours. Certified Humane is a food label administered by Humane Farm Animal Care.
13. Prepare a few sustainability fun facts to share via social media. Please borrow any from this white paper!
 14. Create a sustainability sponsorship menu to grow financial capacity to pursue new sustainability ideas.
 15. Research if an event has a code of conduct. If not, create one. If one exists, review it to ensure it covers important situations that might arise related to harassment, inclusion, fairness and safety.

Interview with Brittany



1. Can you briefly describe your role and how it relates to sustainability at BCD?

I am personally passionate about sustainability and have been implementing various practices at home. As VP, Global Marketing, I am continually looking for stories to tell on how BCD is championing sustainability within our organization. I am also quite interested in how we assist our clients in driving sustainability initiatives within their meetings and events' programs. Additionally, it is a topic that we should continue to increase awareness on to share best practices and learn new efforts we can put in place—hence, the production of this white paper.

2. Why do you feel sustainability is an important issue to consider in the M&E industry?

Not a day goes by where we are not reading a headline about an issue rooted in sustainability—like the nearly unfathomable amount of waste in our oceans. These issues directly or indirectly impact every person on this planet. We all have a part to play in practicing sustainability efforts in our day-to-day lives whether at work or at home. In our industry, sustainability-based programs or activities are a win-win for clients and can be a focused add-on to engage attendees and create a rich experience at the benefit of our planet, a local community, etc. Their meeting or event can have a bigger purpose beyond the business objective.

3. Do you find your customers care about sustainability? How do you know?

Yes. Our account teams continue to see increased interest and demand around incorporating sustainability into their meetings and/or events. Whether it is an event with a 'giving back' element, a request to ensure food is locally sourced and equipment is recycled or

a combination of all three, sustainability is often top of mind in the planning process. Which is one of the reasons we've produced this whitepaper—to encourage more interest and prompt "what can I do" type questions.

“Not a day goes by where we are not reading a headline about an issue rooted in sustainability—like the nearly unfathomable amount of waste in our oceans. These issues directly or indirectly impact every person on this planet.”

4. What sustainability accomplishment are you most proud of at BCD M&E?

This is difficult to pinpoint, but our rebuilding efforts in Haiti are often top of mind. The Haiti project's mission is to offer a high-quality education for children living in extreme poverty. Our employees have rallied around raising funds and visiting the country to help in rebuilding efforts. Another initiative, happening in EMEA, is focused on collecting old reading glasses for a charity that distributes them across the developing world. So far, we've collected 754 pairs, which is potentially 754 people who have now been given the gift of better eye sight.

5. How is BCD M&E presently approaching sustainability in M&E?

There are various activities happening at a global, regional and local level across our business. Some aspects are smaller, every-day type activities such as paper-free offices and recycling initiatives. Other aspects are more

specific and benefit targeting communities such as recycling old reading glasses to be sent to the developing world. In all efforts, we work very closely with our sister company BCD Travel and champion global BCD-wide initiatives as well.

6. What is your latest sustainability challenge at BCD and how are you working to address it?

I don't think it is a challenge but a continued need around education, learning more and asking questions. We offer various training opportunities within BCD for our employees, but I think we can always do more to keep sustainability top of mind—like producing thought leadership and continuing to ask questions of what else we can do.

7. What are the most important lessons you have learned related to sustainability that would help an event professional just starting the journey?

Keep questioning. It's easy to assume that you know best practice, but as we've demonstrated here, we all need to keep challenging the status quo for the benefit of the planet and communities worldwide.

8. Can you describe a few elements of your ideal sustainable meeting or event? What would make you go “Wow! That's progressive!”?

I think a combination of multiple layers would be extremely impactful and ensuring the event communications call out each practice and why it is important. Here are a few examples: A mobile for registration and onsite communication needs like agendas, etc. allowing you to go paper free. All attendees travel by shuttle service/public transport rather than cars. All food and drinks are locally and sustainably sourced, and all waste is given to a local food bank or used in biomass generators. Every single material used is recycled or repurposed. An element of giving back to the local community is a focused add-on activity for all attendees. And, finally, a talk from a sustainability expert as to how really small things can make a big difference—calling to attention the practices implemented during the days onsite.

9. When it comes to event sustainability, professionals are trying to address challenges that are complex in a situation where they can't directly control all the factors impacting success. Thinking of the event context, what is one thing you wish would change that would make the road easier?

Sometimes it is best to keep it simple. For example, recycling seems so matter-of-fact, but it is crazy just how little of it actually happens. These simple initiatives can be implemented at every single event.

10. Is the M&E industry making progress on sustainability? Are we there yet? Or is there more we could do?

I don't think we will ever be “there.” Progress continues to be made, but there are new issues popping up every day. This isn't to say we should be discouraged, but we should be conscious of our efforts and driven to continue doing as much as we can—personally, professionally and for our customers. We will never be done, but we can continue to be successful in making a difference no matter how big or small.

Brittany Brocious

VP, Global Marketing & Brand Engagement



Conclusion

Event sustainability approaches have evolved significantly over the last 20 years, from efforts to go paperless to ambitious programmes that inch closer to zero waste. During this time experience has shown event sustainability can cut costs and improve public relations and operational efficiency.

So what's next?

No doubt many dedicated individual planners and suppliers will continue to diligently implement better practice at their meetings and events on a daily basis. And adapt planning procedures to confront the escalating risks climate change and other sustainability issues present. We salute those fighting this good fight, and are grateful for the leading example that demonstrates what is possible to others starting the journey.

While a single white paper can neither describe nor solve the complex sustainability challenges meetings and events face, we hope ideas proposed give you pause to think about important questions, such as:

- What sustainability issues do you care about?
- How can and do you act on your sustainability values as an event professional?
- Can you measure the impact your actions have?

This white paper also serves to spark conversations about additional steps meeting and event industry associations could take to act on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, such as:

- Research: What gaps in event sustainability knowledge exist and can they be filled? For example, while isolated case study data is available, the industry is yet to broadly verify the business costs and benefits of integrating sustainability into planning.
- Professional development: Are meeting

and event professionals adequately prepared to address the UNSDGs through training that they receive? Sustainability has been adapted into some professional accreditations and pre-professional certificate programmes, but is not mandatory and should be updated to include the UNSDGs.

- Resources: Could progress be accelerated if associations provided tools to help planners and suppliers get the sustainability job done? An industry-endorsed, non-proprietary measurement tool would help professionals consistently measure the environmental footprint of events as well as the social benefits derived from CSR activities.
- Commitment: Can the meeting and event industry present a unified front to speak up for the UNSDGs and commit to industry-wide action? Meeting and event industry associations have cheered sustainability legacies from the sidelines for many years. But in spite of positive legacies in niche areas, the industry is yet to make a broad and firm commitment to specific waste or carbon reduction targets. Until this is done, fragmented efforts will experience limited success. And the industry will be perceived as a sustainability laggard, not a leader.

The sustainability challenge is indeed large. But it is also an exciting and fertile ground for new and creative ideas that can drive meetings and events forward to generate more value and rewarding experiences. The next decade promises to be an exciting period of progress if we act to embrace the sustainability opportunity.

Get in touch hello@bcdme.com

How are you acting on sustainability at your meetings and events?

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The **Green** White Paper

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