

MEET BETTER

167 Easy Ways

to Make Your Events More
Environmentally and Socially Responsible

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LETTER TO OUR READERS

Dear Reader,

In recent years, we've seen a great evolution towards sustainability in the meetings and events industry. It's been exciting to be a part of it, even though it has taken us in unexpected directions. When we first started out as event professionals we envisioned going to galas, not dumpster diving. We thought we'd be admiring the chandeliers, not asking about the light bulbs. We thought that our concern at banquets would be waist management, not waste management. All of this has given us some good insights and practical know-how that we want to share with you to help you get started in sustainable events.

This book is all about getting started. These are the easy, low-hanging fruit to make your event more environmentally and socially responsible. This book is not intended to be all-encompassing, but it is intended to help you to take your first step (or 167 first steps). Hopefully, it will help spark an excitement for sustainable events that will encourage you to continue on the path.

This book has three sections: the first considers how to integrate sustainability into the core elements of meeting planning and covers the logistical aspects of planning an event. From there, we consider how program elements can reflect sustainability. We wrap up with a next steps section that is all about helping you to take sustainability further in your events and organizations.

THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU IF YOU ARE:

- ✓ Looking for demystified, practical advice about sustainable events
- ✓ Excited about sustainable events and need a place to start
- ✓ Wanting to make your organization an industry leader
- ✓ Assigned to "green our meetings" and need a roadmap
- ✓ Looking for new ways to attract event sponsors
- ✓ Needing to find new cost savings opportunities
- ✓ Wanting to engage with your event participants in a new way
- ✓ Wanting to expand your skills as an event professional
- ✓ Wanting to reduce the environmental footprint of your event
- ✓ Wanting to give back to the community
- ✓ Wanting to impress your boss or clients with your achievements
- ✓ Wanting to take meeting design to the next level

Thank you for reading!

Mariela, Shanna and Nancy

PART ONE:

CORE ELEMENTS



**Food and Beverage
Planning**



**Food and Beverage
Service**



Site Selection



Waste Management



**Transportation
and Travel**



**Onsite
Management**



Purchasing Practices



FOOD *and* BEVERAGE PLANNING

- 1. Donate leftover food.**

Some venues or caterers may have concerns about liability, however, many laws protect food donors. Contact the food bank to confirm local regulations and practice safe food handling.
- 2. Serve seasonal food from local farms and vendors.**

Buying locally supports the community's economy and typically results in fresher food. It also helps to reduce your food miles, though this is only one factor in determining the environmental impact of your menus. 83 percent of the average US household's carbon footprint for food comes from growing and producing it. Transportation is only 11 percent.¹
- 3. Be flexible and allow the chef to make decisions that meet your budget and sustainability goals.**
- 4. Ask your chef to minimize air-freighted food.**

Pay particular attention to fish and tropical fruit. These can significantly increase the carbon footprint of your menu.
- 5. Carefully order food to minimize waste.**

Very often, event planners guarantee numbers across the board for all functions. Instead, cross-check with arrival and departures and past history to make adjustments for each meal function.
- 6. Make food and scheduling choices that consider health, faith and values of participants.**

As meeting and event professionals, part of our work involves creating environments that are welcoming to all participants. Anticipating and preparing for your participant's needs, whether they be for healthy options, menus that meet faith requirements or offering alternatives such as vegetarian menus will go a long way to creating this welcoming environment. Also consider reducing the number of courses from four to three, and serving smaller portions.
- 7. Create sustainable menu themes such as Meatless Monday, or a Blemished Buffet.**

High quality food is often discarded for being imperfectly shaped or blemished. In 2013, the United Nations chose to highlight this issue by serving a five-course meal made from food that was considered to be reject-grade by the standards of European buyers. The event was for 500 delegates at a week-long United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) event in Kenya.²
- 8. Ensure all seafood meets requirements of a program such as Seafood Watch, Ocean Wise, or the Marine Stewardship Council.**

It's important to reconfirm sustainable choices close to the event date as the ratings can change due to stock levels.
- 9. Choose chicken or vegetarian instead of beef.**

Different foods have different water and carbon footprints. It can take over three times as much water to raise one kilogram of beef compared to one kilogram of chicken.³
- 10. Serve fairly-traded coffee, tea and chocolate.**
- 11. Make meat choices that are more sustainable such as grass fed, no antibiotics or hormones, certified organic and/or humane, cage free and free range.**



WHERE DOES YOUR FOOD COME FROM?

CERTIFIED ORGANIC

Certified organic foods are grown and processed according to federal guidelines addressing factors such as soil quality, animal raising practices, pest and weed control and the use of biologically based farming methods. Look for assurance by USDA, QA, or a reputable verifier in your region.

NATURAL

In some regions, including Canada and the US, there are guidelines for the use of the term “natural” that include requirements for minimal processing and no added ingredients. However, it can mean a number of different things and does not provide assurances.

FREE RANGE OR FREE ROAMING

Free range animals have access to the outdoors at least part of the day. This term may mean different things depending on prevailing standards.

FREE RUN

Allowed to run freely in an indoor area and not kept in cages.

ANTIBIOTIC FREE

Meat or poultry must have sufficient documentation provided by the producer to the local verifying authority (such as the USDA) demonstrating the animals were raised without antibiotics.

CHEMICAL FREE

Food or drink free from or produced without the use of artificial chemicals.

FAIRLY TRADED

Small farmers are paid a fair market price that enables them to improve their standard of living.

GMO-FREE FOODS

Foods that do not include genetically modified organisms.

**“IF YOU CAN'T PRONOUNCE THE INGREDIENTS,
DON'T EAT IT.”**

—*Common Sense*

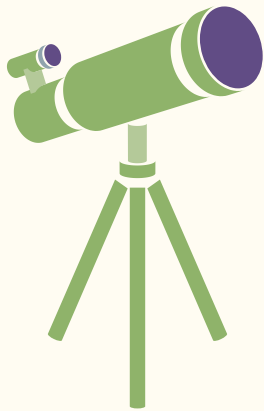


Site SELECTION

- 24. Use a green building as your venue.**
Keep an eye out for programs to reduce waste (composting and recycling), energy (efficient bulbs and occupancy sensors), and water (low flow faucets, toilets and showers). Alternatively, look for LEED® certified buildings.
- 25. Use a green hotel for guest rooms.**
Check for third party certification such as Green Key, Green Seal, EarthCheck, ISO 14001, APEX/ ASTM Environmentally Sustainable Event Standards.
- 26. Select accessible venues.**
Ask for verification of compliance with regulations related to accessibility. In the US, ask for proof of compliance with ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) regulations. In other countries, confirm if regulations are federal, state/provincial/regional or municipal and verify compliance.
- 27. Ask the Destination Management Organization (DMO) / Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) for a list of green vendors including local talent, artisans, restaurants, shopping, décor, etc.**
- 28. Make sure hotel rooms have a linen reuse program that they actively honour.**
- 29. Request recycling bins in guest rooms.**
One hotel used specially-marked brown paper bags to pilot the program before going to the expense of bins. It was such a success, they invested!
- 30. Select a hotel with guest amenity dispenser for soap and shampoo.**
Alternatively, ask if they participate in a donation program for partially used amenities, or ask participants to bring their own soap and shampoo.
- 31. Request in-room coffee service with no polystyrene cups or single-serve pods.**
Single serve coffee pods can cost \$50 USD per pound, and creates a lot of landfill.¹²
- 32. Consider airlift to destination and proximity to participants.**
If possible, choose a site that minimizes air travel for participants.
- 33. Select venues in close proximity to each other to encourage walking.**
- 34. Ask your venue if they use renewable energy sources.**
Renewable energy sources may include wind, solar, hydro and geothermal.
- 35. Ensure that non-smoking space is available and designated smoking areas have air filtration and ashtrays.**
- 36. Look for existing building features such as digital signage, rigging points, greenery, natural lighting and carpeted expo space that will make it easier to use sustainable materials.**
- 37. Ensure the venue uses environmentally-friendly cleaning supplies and confirm that staff is properly trained in their use.**
This may include Green Seal or EcoLogo certified products.

Best Practices for SITE SELECTION

Selecting a site that helps you to meet your sustainability goals is one of the most important steps towards making your event more socially and environmentally responsible.



BEST PRACTICES

TO WATCH FOR^{9, 10}



PEOPLE



WATER



WASTE



ENERGY

Hotel Guest Rooms

- Training in identifying and reporting human trafficking
- Linen and towel reuse programs
- Bulk amenity dispensers
- Amenity donation program
- Occupancy or key card sensors

All event spaces

- Accessible
- Anti-harassment policy
- Health and safety records
- Diversity and inclusion policy
- Low flow fixtures
- Water smart landscaping and grounds maintenance
- Recycling
- Composting
- Donation program for food, event materials and other goods
- Efficient lighting
- Sensor-activated HVAC system
- Green energy purchasing and carbon offsets

DID YOU KNOW?

Clean the World is a charitable organization that collects, sanitizes and distributes used hotel amenities (such as soap) to help fight hygiene related illnesses around the world. As of December 2014, Clean the World has eliminated more than 645 metric tons (1.4 million pounds) of hotel waste from polluting local landfills and has helped save lives by distributing more than 12 million bars of soap to more than 65 countries worldwide.¹¹

PART TWO:

PROGRAM ELEMENTS



Meeting Design



Tradeshows and Exhibits



Community Service
Projects



Event Marketing



Participant Actions



Share Your Story



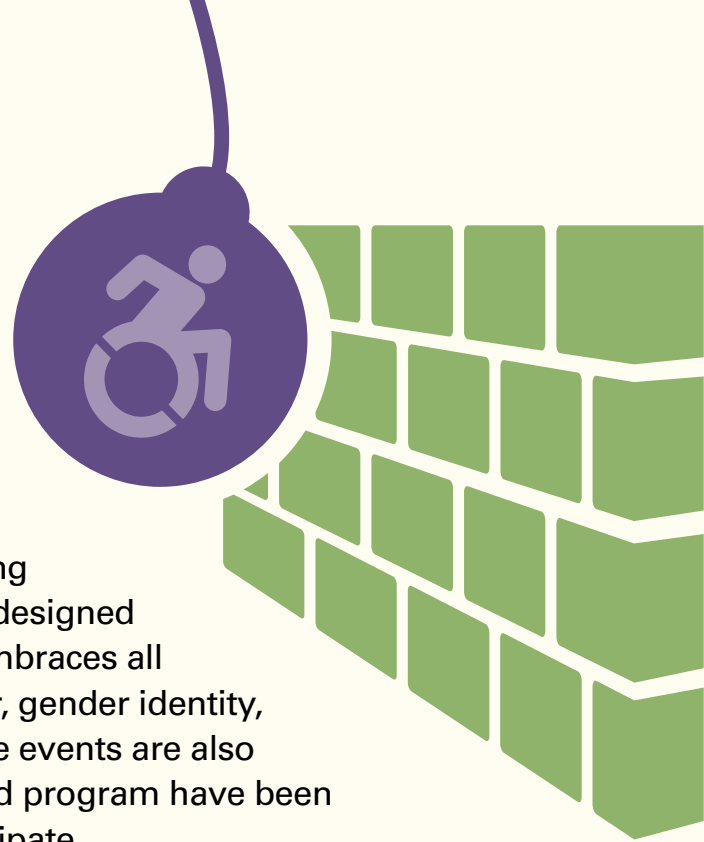
Sustainability-
focused Sponsorship
Opportunities



Meeting DESIGN

- 83. Re-evaluate if past practices now have better alternatives.**
- 84. Plan room layouts for mobile accessibility devices.**
Don't forget to leave wide enough aisles and equal and convenient seating areas for participants with accessibility needs.
- 85. Design program in consideration of participants with special needs.**
Examples include: Providing captioning, translation, assisted listening devices and sufficient lighting.
- 86. Include sustainability topics and experts in the event program.**
- 87. Prepare a budget that tracks sustainability savings and cost.**
- 88. Design schedule with sufficient time for individuals to practice their wellness and faith activities.**
- 89. Offer a virtual option to your participants.**
This can increase your audience and allow greater flexibility for attendees to meet their time, money and environmental needs.
- 90. Select dates that don't conflict with religious holy days or festivals.**
- 91. Use creative alternatives to encourage walking.**
Consider providing live entertainment along walking routes. To promote safety, recommend that participants walk in groups along the most direct and well-lit routes.
- 92. Include questions about sustainability in the Call for Presentations.**

BREAKING DOWN PARTICIPATION BARRIERS



As event designers, the choices that we make affect both the reality and the perception of inclusivity of our events. Here are a few easy ways that will start you on the path towards making your events more inclusive. An inclusive event is designed for all people to be able to fully participate, and embraces all forms of diversity, including ethnicity, age, gender, gender identity, disability, sexual orientation and religion. Inclusive events are also accessible, meaning that the services, facilities and program have been designed for people with disabilities to fully participate.

PLANNING:

- Ask your participants what they need to be fully included.
- Allocate budget funds or secure a sponsor for accessibility requirements.
- Seek out suppliers with experience working with diverse groups and audiences.

FACILITIES:

- Ask for verification of compliance with relevant accessibility regulations. For example in the US ask for verification of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance.
- Ensure that all routes to, from and between event spaces are accessible and clearly marked, free of obstructions and direct.
- Personally inspect rooms, washrooms, elevators and other public spaces for accessibility considerations including ramps, door openers, wide doorways, sharps disposals, braille signage and easy to reach elevator buttons.

ROOM SETUPS:

- Provide space for mobility device users to circulate easily in the meeting space and accessible seating areas throughout the area with easy to reach electrical outlets.
- Ensure that lighting and sound levels are at the needed level for all forms of visual and auditory communication.
- Check that registration, front desk and other public use areas have lowered table heights.

COMMUNICATION:

- Offer materials in alternative formats such as large print, braille, captions or audio recorded.
- Offer sign-language interpretation, real-time captioning and assisted listening devices based on the needs and requests of the participants.
- In consultation with the user and sign-language interpreter, provide appropriate space, lighting and sight lines for interpretation.

continued

SPEAKERS:

- Consider diversity in speaker selection.
- Include accessibility, diversity and inclusion as education topics.
- Provide accessible stages, lecterns and audiovisual equipment.

TRANSPORTATION:

- Ensure that there are sufficient accessible transportation options from arrival points to your event venue.
- Limit the need for transportation by selecting venues in close proximity to each other.
- Offer accessible transportation options between event venues.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE:

- Provide clearly-labeled food options to meet faith-based, medically-based and values-based needs.
- Minimize the use of buffets or provide stations that are designed for users of mobility devices.
- Develop strategies with your food service provider to avoid cross-contamination of allergens.

SCHEDULE:

- Select dates that don't conflict with dates of religious or cultural significance.
- Schedule meal times and provide space for participants to observe faith-based practices.
- Provide long breaks for the benefit of persons with disabilities to traverse between locations, nursing parents and service animal relief.

MARKETING:

- Select diverse images that are suitable to the audience and use colors that are not culturally offensive.
- As part of the registration forms, ask if the participant has accessibility-related needs.
- As part of the event evaluation, ask whether or not the facilities and the program met accessibility requirements.

RESOURCES:

- Provide information about mobility device rentals and accessible transportation providers in pre-event marketing and materials.
- Have information about outdoor areas and veterinarians for service animals readily available.
- Have information about places of worship readily available.

All of this is just a start to breaking down the barriers to participation.

For more information, see the following resources:

- Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister - Event Planning – Access Checklist: Issues which may impact on people with disabilities. http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/access_checklist_28_05_pdf.pdf
- US Department of Justice – Accessible Information Exchange: Meeting on a Level Playing Field <http://www.ada.gov/business/accessiblemtg.htm>
- US Department of Transportation – Checklist for Planning Accessible Meetings and Events <http://www.dot.gov/citizens/disability/checklist-planning-accessible-meetings-and-events>
- Council of Ontario Universities – Accessible Event & Conference Planning <http://www.accessiblecampus.ca/aoda-everyday/reference-library/accessible-event-conference-planning/>







Sustainability Focused **SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES**

Sustainability initiatives are great not only for saving money through efficiency, but also for generating sponsorship revenues. Many organizations are interested in associating their brand with environmentally and socially responsible practices. Here are some ideas of sponsorship opportunities that can be offered:

- 138. Reusable mugs and water bottles**
- 139. Recycling program**
- 140. Walking challenge**
- 141. Solar or bike recharging stations**
- 142. Water stations**
- 143. Fairly-traded coffee or food experiences**
- 144. Transit waiting room lounge**
- 145. Bike share program**
- 146. Green transportation program**
- 147. Wellness area or program**
- 148. Community service project**
- 149. Virtual program or live-streaming**
- 150. Badge back program**
- 151. Shoe check (for comfortable walking shoes to business shoes)**
- 152. Youth or student program**
- 153. Green game that rewards people for sustainable actions**
- 154. Scholarships**
- 155. Alternative options to a conference bag**
- 156. Green power**
- 157. Carbon offset program**

Sustainable Event Sponsorship:

IT'S A WIN, WIN, WIN, WIN SITUATION

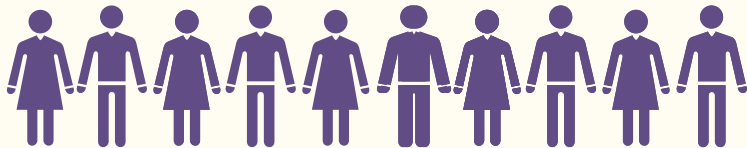
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| SPONSORS:  Gain marketing exposure and align their brand with sustainability. | MEETING ORGANIZERS:  Gain sponsorship revenue to offset costs and contribute to their bottom line. | PARTICIPANTS:  Gain an enhanced event experience. | PLANET:  Gains an improved environmental impact. |
|---|--|--|--|

EXAMPLE: Sustainability Sponsorship In Action



If

100



PARTICIPANTS

AT AN EVENT

USE



enough energy could be saved to run **200** HOURS
an average American household for

...not to mention 200 one-time use water bottles will be

DIVERTED FROM THE LANDFILL³²

PART THREE:

THE NEXT STEPS



Sustainability Strategy

RECIPE FOR

an Event Sustainability Policy



Prep: Check for **ISSUES**

Before writing your policy it's a good idea to check the cupboards for event sustainability problems that might be hanging around. For example, does your event generate a lot of waste? Or take place in a sensitive outdoor environment? Shape your policy to address your unique opportunities and challenges.



Assemble 1 part **VALUES**

List principles that convey the big-picture intentions of your policy. Think single words that are clearly understood that convey the spirit of what you want to accomplish. Examples include: Inclusivity, Stewardship, Transparency, and Leadership.



Mix in 3 parts **GOALS**

Your policy will need specific objectives that are measurable, achievable and realistic. This might include: Reducing solid waste, enhancing participant experiences, or providing local community benefit. Focus on simple verb-object statements that you can control and measure outcomes for.



Bake using the following **TOOLS**

While your policy can be a short one to two page document of commitments, it is implemented in a variety of ways. Act on your policy by:

- Including it in tenders and contracts.
- Adding it to employee hiring and reviews.
- Reflecting it in any speaker, exhibitor or participant codes of conduct.
- Integrating it with event communications and social media.