

Sustainable Business Network

2004 Guide to Sustainable Conferencing

A typical 5 day conference for 2,500 attendees will go through 90,000 cans or bottles, 750,000 cups and 87,500 napkins (source: Meeting Strategies Worldwide, 2003).

Any event can be successful as well as sustainable. Conferences are designed to deliver information to delegates which usually involves considerable amounts of paper and other resources. It is important to strike a balance between excessive resource usage and providing delegates with the information they require. We not only have a responsibility to be environmentally conscious, we have an opportunity to make a very real difference when organising any sized event. Through the choices we make in venue selection, hotel accommodation, communications, logistics, food and beverage and transport, we can conserve resources on a significant scale as well as increasing your financial profit. And, we can enhance the attendee experience by empowering them to do the same as individuals.

The following broad topics should be considered when organising a sustainable event. Some suggestions will be easier to implement than others, although consideration of as many as possible should be given. The suggestions given by SBN under each topic are general only and there are many excellent resources on the internet to add to these.

- Venue – choosing a site
- Food & Beverage
- Printed Materials
- Transport (ie carbon neutral)
- Event materials (name tags, pads, pens, satchels, conference papers)
- Hotel accommodation

The SBN National office can help you with names of suppliers who can provide products and/or services in making your event sustainable.

VENUE

When choosing a site for your event, ask the hotel or conference centre if they have an environmental management policy in place which includes recycling programmes, energy efficiency, water conservation and environmental purchasing measures. It is also important that the venue's staff are committed to working with you in ensuring that all your requirements are met. Ensure that all of the venue's contractors are also committed including the caterer. Use native plants (including fruits, vegetables) for decoration instead of exotics.

FOOD & BEVERAGE

Bring your caterer on board as early as possible. Tell them of your commitment and vision to green your event as much as possible. The earlier you get their buy-in, the easier it will for them to source organic food which doesn't impact hugely on your budget. Discussions with your caterer should include:

- Locally made products – to support our local manufacturers and producers
- Organic produce and beverages to be used where feasible. This not only benefits the delegates but supports local organic growers:
- Fish – must be approved by the Good Fish Guide
- Chicken & Meat – ideally will be organic or free range options
- Plenty of fresh fruit – preferably organic and locally grown
- Breads – locally and organically made. Also allow for gluten-free attendees.
- Fair Trade options – this is especially relevant for coffee and teas
- Eliminate garnishes that most likely will not be eaten, such as lettuce under other foods, sprigs of parsley, etc
- Disposable items should not be used unless they are biodegradable and a reusable option is not identifiable
- No Styrofoam (ie plates or cups)
- Surplus food donated to a charitable organisation if feasible under Food Regulations
- Drinking water to be provided in pitchers with glasses (do not use bottles of water)

- Condiments are to be served in reusable jugs, sugar containers, etc. No individually wrapped packages of sugar, salt, etc.
- Cloth napkins or recycled paper napkins should be provided instead of paper napkins
- Recycling containers should be placed strategically for disposal of napkins, food scraps.

PRINTED MATERIALS

General Requirements

- Always use or specify to your printer that you require recycled paper – all printed materials should list the amount of recycled content on the paper
- Always use double-sided printing and photocopying
- Always use vegetable-based inks
- Do not use fluorescent coloured paper because it is hard to recycle
- Limit the use of glossy paper

Promotional Materials

- Conference promotional notices and materials should be sent electronically wherever possible – this will avoid excessive paper usage, printing costs and postage.
- Paper copies of information should be distributed when required, but not as standard, when electronic copies are unsuitable or inaccessible
- Ensure all paper waste is collected and recycled at the venue – provide paper recycling bins
- Ensure that all printed promotional material is printed on recycled paper using vegetable based inks
- Discuss with sponsors alternative ways of including promotional material in the conference bags
- Offer secure online registration and confirm all registrations by email
- Your event signage at the venue should also be printed on recycled paper using vegetable based inks – be innovative and imaginative – hang sponsors signs from the ceiling of the venue instead of using glues, velcro heavy printed card to the fronts of lecturns promoting the event and sponsors, etc

- Do not use PVC for signage

Event Materials

- Conference bags – copies of presentations, papers, and other information should be provided electronically (email and website). If it is necessary to provide delegates with a bag, ensure that it is made of sustainable products and that it can be reused.
- Pens & Pads – Attractive pens made with the environment in mind are now available from several NZ suppliers. Pads should also be made up of recycled paper – this is an excellent handout to have your sponsors printed on the pads – ensure you use vegetable based inks.
- Name tags – it is best to use the standard “business card” sized name tags that clip your pin to your lapel. There are other name tags available which are made from PVC but these should definitely not be used. If printing your name badges in-house, ensure that they are printed on recycled paper.

TRANSPORT

- Delegates should be encouraged to use public transport, or if this is not possible, carpool with other delegates – provide details of local public transport solutions in pre-conference material
- Encourage all to car share by identifying and co-ordinating delegates coming from similar regions
- Promote shared taxi usage by delegates arriving at the airport at similar times (or shuttle bus)
- Charging a voluntary fee (eg \$25) per registrant to offset carbon emissions in holding the conference. This would be used to plant trees and/or other schemes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

HOTEL ACCOMMODATION

- Promote and use Green Globe 21 hotels or hotels that practice environmental best management practices within close proximity of your conference centre

- As with the caterer, visit the hotels you intend to use to discuss if they have an Environmental Management Policy in place. There are many initiatives that Hotels can take to reduce their impact on the environment, such as:
- Implementing a linen/towel re-use programme by changing the guest's towels and bed linen every 2 days instead of every day
- Instruct housekeepers not to replace consumable amenities unless they are empty (e.g. shampoo, soap, conditioner, containers)
- Energy efficiency in the rooms - instruct staff to shut the blinds, turn down the heat, and turn off the lights in rooms during the day while guests are gone.
- Recycling – do the rooms have separate containers for separating recyclable materials from non-recyclable
- Offer guests the option of declining delivery of daily newspapers
- Does the Hotel have an Environmental Purchasing Policy – does it purchase products manufactured with recycled materials, or use cleaning and washing products that are non-toxic

We hope the above have given you some ideas to think about when organising your next event. There are many more items to consider like getting your sponsors, exhibitors, presenters and delegates on board and the following additional resources will be able to elaborate on these.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Green Globe New Zealand Email Mereana Mills on newzealandoffice@greenglobe21.com
- BlueGreen Meetings www.bluegreenmeetings.org
- Green Hotels Association www.greenhotels.com
- US Environmental Protection Agency's Green Meetings Initiative www.epa.gov
- GreenBiz.com's "It's Easy Being Green! A Guide to Planning and Conducting Environmentally Aware Meetings and Events" www.greenbiz.com
- CERES – Green Hotel initiative www.ceres.org/out_work/ghi.htm