



Best Practices | Sustainable Meetings Management

Detailed Reference 4 Guide to Responsible Groups and Meetings including Volunteerism

“Green Meetings” have been defined as meetings that incorporate social and environmental considerations throughout all stages of the planning process and delivery in order to minimize negative impact on the environment. Making key choices at every phase in the process can significantly reduce the environmental impact along with offering opportunity to reduce overall costs.

Meetings and events provide meaningful opportunities to incorporate and showcase your company’s commitment to sustainability goals. To build a responsible meeting or event, green standards can be incorporated as well as community involvement and volunteerism.

There are numerous white papers, Websites, articles and books dedicated to the subject of green meetings along with various organizations that support reducing the carbon footprint of events. This section will cite a few of these sources and each company, based on their sustainability objectives and culture, can customize a policy and deliver to the standards that best suit your meetings and events. The goal of the GBTA CSR Toolkit is to provide a point from which you can get started in strategically developing a groups and meetings program that incorporates corporate social and environmental sustainability and that best suits your company’s objectives.

This chapter will assist you in getting started by illustrating corporate responsibility concepts that can be woven into your strategic meetings management program. The components of a strategic meetings management program combine policy and strategy in the following areas:

- Technology
- Registration of Meeting/Event
- Approval process
- Sourcing/Procurement
- Planning/Execution
- Reconciliation
- Data Analysis/Reporting



Technology

Technology is the driving component in a best-in-class strategic meetings management program. The question is “How can you leverage your meeting technologies to deliver against a responsible and sustainable meetings program?”

Meeting Management Tool

The simple use of technology to replace paper in your processes is the most obvious benefit; however meetings management technology can be leveraged in various ways. For example, promote sustainability practices in the internal meeting registration process by including a green meeting standards policy for each event registered. If you have multiple sources of meeting event planning in your company, where meetings are registered and information captured for reporting and approval, incorporate levels of green standards that should apply to the meeting based on scope, number of attendees, etc.

Online Booking Tool

The airline travel component can be one of the largest contributors to the carbon footprint of a meeting or event. Realistically, there is not much that can be done to reduce your company’s footprint unless there is awareness on the attendee’s part of what that footprint may be. Most online booking tools incorporate CO₂ emissions measurements into the availability displays. This allows the attendee to not only consider the cost of the airline ticket but whether or not one flight has less impact than another based on aircraft type and routing. Depending on your chosen method of calculating your company’s carbon footprint, reports can be downloaded based on the actual footprint before and after your event. The fact that there is visibility oftentimes will educate your attendees on their personal impact. There is controversy in the area of airline carbon footprints versus lowest airfare policies that may be in place for the meeting. There is a balance that must be achieved that usually can be done by requiring advance purchase that usually will provide the lowest airfare regardless of routing. Based on the meeting destination and prevailing airfares, you can set policy to achieve that balance.

Meeting Calculators

Included in this chapter are hyperlinks to various meeting carbon calculators. Some are basic calculators while others are quite complex. Based on your company’s goals, you will want to investigate these and others to determine which calculator will best suit your needs and use it consistently to determine the carbon footprint pre- and post-event.

Communication Technology

Communication technology can be defined as any tool that allows you to communicate – before and during the event – with your meeting attendees. There are numerous ways to create awareness through hand-held technology that can be an integrated into your communication strategy. Eliminating paper in your communication strategy can easily be supplemented due to the increasing use of PDAs. In light of the interest in public social networking sites, you can also set-up a Facebook page for the event that defines your sustainability initiatives to the attendees or incorporate Twitter on-site to capture “good green citizen” behavior.

Virtual Meetings

In this chapter we will concentrate on the face-to-face event, however virtual meetings should be a component of your strategic meetings management approach as they will continue to be a driving factor in your meeting portfolio. For further insight into virtual meetings, see Detailed Reference 5: A Guide to Technology Solutions.

Registration of Meeting/Event

In addition to incorporating policy into your meeting event registration process at the planner level you need to consider the options to leverage attendee registration to achieve a successful sustainable event. Meeting registration at the attendee level is your first and most powerful communication tool. When setting up your registration Websites, consider including the following:

- Provide an average attendee carbon footprint
- Describe the greening efforts that you have outlined for the event
- Set your company’s expectations as to expected attendee behavior and contributions to reducing the overall footprint (see Detailed Reference 2: A Guide to Demand Management and Influencing Traveler Behavior)
- Incorporate registration for a CSR activity
- Include any materials available and ask attendees to load onto a personal jump drive. Set the expectations of what materials are critical to the meeting. Sometimes it is not possible to eliminate all need for paper documentation and this instance, the attendees can print just what they need and not only reduce printing costs but eliminate waste.
- Ask for interested attendees to enroll as “green ambassadors” to assist in identifying areas for improvement when they are on-site. Getting attendees involved in the overall objective can deliver to a much higher success rate in your efforts.



Approval Process

The standards that you have incorporated into your meetings approval process can be extended to include buy-in from your meeting stakeholders. After a meeting/event is approved, it is recommended that you communicate your efforts especially if there is a financial impact, positive or negative, to the greening of the event. The stakeholder should be aware at the outset of the overall impact they can have on the delivery of a successful sustainable event. Only you know the tolerance for change in your organization, and support and buy-in at the stakeholder level can be critical. For example, if you intend to move materials from hand-outs to jump drives or memory sticks, make sure the presenters are aware and you have their support. If bottled water is being eliminated for the first time, share the value of this change not only from an environmental perspective but from a financial one. And most importantly, if you are going to incur any additional expense due to CSR and greening efforts, define and show their value.

Most meeting stakeholders will appreciate your communication on these efforts and can offer other ideas that you have yet to consider. Everyone at every level should take ownership in helping to have successful, sustainable events.

Sourcing/Procurement

The entire meetings process is procurement at its most fundamental level. Many vendors are incorporating green into their value portfolio. In these instances, the benefits are obvious. Others have yet to undertake the initiative and you are faced with procuring based solely on price. Focus on the vendors that will be responsible for contributing the highest average of your overall footprint.

Some of the components in meeting procurement that need to be considered are:

- City site selection
- Hotel/venue selection
- Ground Transportation
- Production/Audio Visual
- Catering/Food & beverage
- Entertainment
- Leisure activities
- Materials and supplies

Create a list of questions that you can use for all like vendors or venues. Determine what is most important to you. Do not be overwhelmed by the task of securing the

“greenest” location or product. Green procurement policies may already be a part of your company’s overall strategy. If you are not in procurement, ask the questions of those that are procuring products and services outside of your department for their input. You may discover policies, vendor questions and other processes that are already in place.

To get you started, consider adding the following measures to your strategic sourcing process:

- Share your company’s CSR objectives and/or policy with bidding vendors
- Request that the vendors include their company’s CSR objectives or policy
- Include a question in the RFP process that allow you to measure eco-impact
- When comparing responses from vendors, give the same consideration to their eco-responses as you would to the financial components
- Include Service Level Agreements (SLAs) in hotel/venue agreements that deliver to your green standards. Include financial penalties and incentives for their delivery to the SLAs
- Require reporting on environmental impact post-event based on agreed measurements

Incorporate the 5 “R”s in all your procurement endeavors:

- Reduce
- Re-use
- Re-purpose
- Recycle
- Reclaim

For further recommendations on best practices for the various meetings suppliers and vendors that you will be working with to organize your meetings, please follow this link to our **CSR Green Meeting Planning Best Practices Document**.



Planning and execution

Once you have set the goals and incorporated sustainable procurement into your meeting planning strategy, the execution is simply a matter of logistics. As a strategic meetings manager, it is your responsibility to educate the planning team on how to deliver, refine and grow your sustainable meeting practices. Consider evaluating planner performance on their sustainability knowledge. There are numerous organizations that support education and provide up-to-date resources, for example MPI, PCMA or GMIC.

Consider scheduling at least one brainstorming session per meeting specifically focused on sustainability efforts. Topics may include:

- Discuss attendee demographic and their awareness level
- Determine venues ability to deliver to SLAs
- Walk through the flow of the event to help determine if there are components for opportunity
- Discuss opportunities to include volunteerism and/or community involvement (see Volunteerism in this chapter)
- Decide on metrics you will use to measure success
- Define procurement of green products and how they will be used
- Brainstorm to add at least one new sustainability component to each event
- Determine best approach for offsetting, if that is your company's objective

The incorporation of sustainability is attainable in all logistical components. If your planning team is educated and engaged, they will be your best resource in expanding your green meeting standards.

Reconciliation

The most obvious and attainable approach to sustainability in this component is the elimination of paper wherever possible. Require electronic invoices from all vendors. Review any SLAs that you may have negotiated to determine if the sustainability goals were reached. Is there opportunity for vendor incentives or penalties, based on your negotiated agreement?

Data Analysis/Reporting

As you are closing your meeting, there are various types of measuring and reporting analyses that can be incorporated into the process.

- Determine the actual carbon footprint based on data standards you have adopted for measurement
- Report on offsetting efforts whether it be financial support from your company or collected from the attendees at the meeting
- Develop an analysis of the impact of green initiatives as it compares to the financial impact, positive or negative
- Identify areas for opportunity or elimination, based on success at the delivery level
- Incorporate carbon footprint and financial data into year over year reporting to assist in setting new goals

Adding meaning to meetings

In addition to incorporating environmental sustainability as part of the strategic planning process, many corporations are incorporating a social or volunteer event into corporate meetings to foster collaboration and teamwork among meeting attendees and to give back to the host community. This aspect of CSR can be called many different things such as “voluntourism”, “volunteerism” or “volunteaming”, but the overall goal is to have a meaningful influence in the community in which the meeting is held and with the meeting participants.

According to the GBTA CSR Committee presentation entitled Sustainable Meetings and Events (2009), the roots of volunteerism can be traced to the creation of the Peace Corps in 1961.

Volunteering timeline:

1960s	Service learning
1970s	The boom of study-abroad programs
1980s	Ecotourism
1990s	Volunteer vacations
Present	With the occurrence of September 11 (2001), the Tsunami (2004) and Hurricane Katrina (2005), Voluntourism has surged in popularity among tourists and businesses alike



It is predicted that CSR will contribute to the growth of volunteering programs around the world.

By adding a volunteer event, not only can a company have a positive impact on the community in which the meeting is being held, but these projects can also have numerous benefits for the company, employees, and even customers. A corporation should start the process of organizing a volunteer event by defining what purpose the event will serve.

According to Voluntourism.org, a volunteer event can have many purposes:

1. A recruiting edge – Companies that have a formal volunteer program in place find it can be an important recruiting edge over similar companies without such a program
2. Teambuilding – Allows employees and customers the opportunity to interact with each other and develop important and meaningful relationships that will last much longer than the actual event
3. Leadership – Allows employees to take the lead and gain valuable experience in a relatively safe and risk free environment
4. New Skills – Allows employees to learn new skills or perspectives that may be useful in the workplace
5. Social Responsibility – Allows a company a way to demonstrate its core values or commitment to CSR
6. Promotions and Public Relations

Determine success and measure

Once a company has determined the event goal, the next step is to determine what success will mean for the company and how that success will be measured. For example, success could be having 10 percent of convention attendees participate, raising a pre-determined amount of money or favorable survey responses.

Logistics

It can take a lot of coordination to plan a successful volunteer event but there are resources available that offer assistance. A destination management company or full-service meetings management companies can help with ideas, assistance and logistics planning. The local organization that is benefiting from the event can also assist as can the local convention and visitors bureau.

Feedback

Request feedback from the participants and where possible incorporate suggestions to improve the next event and make it even more memorable.

Success Stories

1. Maritz Global Sales Meeting – Maritz moved its Global Sales Conference from its corporate headquarters in St. Louis to New Orleans in May 2006. By moving the sales conference to New Orleans, Maritz salespeople reported back to thousands of clients that New Orleans is alive and well, encouraging clients to book future business in the city. Over 300 Maritz salespeople spent a day mulching, painting and sprucing-up City Park's Carousel Gardens, a 1,300-acre park in the center of New Orleans that had been under four feet of water during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.
2. Continental's FAM Trips to Nicaragua – Many companies encourage employees to take part in projects that give back to the community they work in, however, some companies are taking it a step further and involving customers in these events. For several years Continental has taken corporate and agency partners on a FAM trip to Nicaragua. A portion of the trip is dedicated to helping deserving organizations in Nicaragua. Marc Marling recently participated in one of these trips:

Marc Marling: I have just returned from one of the more life-changing events I have ever experienced; an experience taking me away from home for three days but impacting me forever. From the moment we arrived in Managua, I knew this was no ordinary trip. What brought us together and built bonds was helping those significantly less fortunate than ourselves. Think about this for a minute: Continental brought me on a trip where I did back-breaking work – hauling around 50kg sacks of rice, beans and sugar; I was swarmed by malaria-infected mosquitoes, standing for hours in temperatures with humidity equivalent to Houston in the summer (something I am sure you can appreciate) but without the benefit of air conditioning. Yet, I am not complaining. In fact, just the opposite – my opinion of Continental Airlines and its employees has never been so high. In the end, the participants on this trip raised over \$11,000 for the purchase of food, school uniforms, water filtration equipment and to help start a farming school and bakery in a very poor area. The participants brought soap, shampoo, toothbrushes, toothpaste, clothing, toys and shoes numbering into



the thousands to hundreds of families in and around Managua. Your customers will remember you when you take them to a football game in a luxury box but they will never forget you when you change their lives.

3. Marriott Hotels Spirit to Serve – Since 2005, Marriott has adopted a “Spirit to Serve” philosophy. One way Marriott displays this commitment is by bringing in meeting planners from around the country incorporating community service in all educational trips.
4. Ritz-Carlton has developed a Meaningful Meetings program which offers groups carefully researched volunteering options to easily incorporate into a meeting. The hotel chain offers volunteering options that include programs as short as two hours, half-day programs, and full-day programs.

Resources and additional links

These suggested Websites provide more specific information on adding a community service event to corporate meetings and help with the overall planning. Check with the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVBs) in the town where the meeting is being held. Numerous CVBs have compiled a list of organizations and contacts and some are adding a volunteerism section to their Website.

- <http://www.visitseattle.org/meetings/voluntourism/resources.asp>
- <http://corporate.ritzcarlton.com/en/About/Community.htm>
- <http://www.marriott.com/corporateinfo/social-responsibility/default.mi>
- <http://www.voluntourism.org>
- <http://www.tourismcares.org>

Resources for additional information on “green” meetings strategies and planning include:

- [Convention Industry Council Green Meeting Report](#)
- [American Institute of Architect’s Green Meeting Guide](#)
- [Environmentally Sound Organization of Events](#)
- [LEED Green Venue Selection Guide](#)
- [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Green Meeting Guidelines](#)
- [Environment Canada Greening Meetings](#)
- [National Recycling Coalition’s Green Meeting Policy](#)
- [Green Event Source Book](#)

- [BlueGreen Meetings](#)
- [GMIC – Green Meetings Industry Council](#)
- [MeetGreen](#) developing and implementing green practices for meetings and conferences: [\(MPI\) Meeting Professionals International](#)
- [Green Globe](#)

Walking the Talk at GBTA

As part of the 2009 Convention planning, the Global Business Travel Association worked with a third-party green meeting consultant to establish a program baseline and collect recommendations and actions to help minimize the negative environmental impact of the three-day event. Some of the recommendations provided by the consultant included donating unused food items and offering pedi-cabs for transportation between events. In addition to collecting recommendations, GBTA had the company review their planning efforts and the output of its annual Convention in order to create a program baseline and benchmark efforts against other conventions of similar size. Going forward, GBTA will be able to use this baseline information to report back on the progress being made within the sustainability space as it relates to annual Convention planning and delivery. It is critical to establish a program baseline since you cannot manage what you do not measure.

As a next step to further incorporate CSR efforts into convention planning, GBTA added a volunteer event to its annual convention in Houston in August of 2010 for the first time. GBTA partnered with Star of Hope Mission. Star of Hope serves approximately 1,000 homeless men, women and children each day. The volunteers painted and landscaped for several hours over the weekend before Convention’s opening reception. This opportunity allowed for additional networking and teambuilding time for Convention attendees and allowed GBTA and attendees to give back to the host city and surrounding community. Kudos to GBTA for taking these important first steps and showing a commitment to sustainability!

Best Practices Sustainable Meetings Management

In order to plan and execute a successful meetings program that incorporates corporate social and environmental sustainability it is imperative to source – and trust – each supplier in the chain. Below is a list of practices you should request from your suppliers as your planning takes shape.

Request these practices from food and beverage suppliers:

- Serve water and other cold drinks in pitchers rather than individual containers
- China service or biodegradable disposable service ware rather than paper or plastic service ware
- Serve condiments in bulk containers whenever possible
- Use cloth napkins whenever possible
- Use coasters instead of cocktail napkins. If paper napkins are required they should be made of post-consumer recycled paper
- Use re-usable, edible or living decorations
- Use fair trade coffee
- Purchase any seafood according to the “Good” or “Best Alternative” choices under the Monterey Bay Seafood Watch Program (if based in the U.S.)
- Donate leftover food to the degree possible within safety and health regulations, and the Good Samaritan laws
- Provide sustainable food as defined below:
(local defined as grown within 100 miles)
 - o First preference – local and organic/natural
 - o Second preference – local, non-organic
 - o Third preference – organic, non-local
- Supplier to provide collection bins and staffing necessary to recycle all glass containers, aluminum and steel cans, plastic bottles, table coverings, paper (newspaper, cardboard and other office paper), and grease
- Provide all paper supplies with the highest post-consumer recycled content available
- Use environmentally responsible cleaning products for kitchens

Request these practices from venue suppliers:

- Minimize energy use by reducing the lights, power and heating and air conditioning during move-in and move-out times in the exhibit hall and turning off lights in meeting rooms when not in use
- Minimize water use by utilizing limited-flow faucets and toilets
- Purchase green or renewable energy
- Provide collection bins and staffing necessary to recycle all glass containers, aluminum and steel cans, plastic bottles, table coverings, pallets, paper (newspaper, cardboard and other office paper), and grease
- Provide all paper supplies with highest post-consumer recycled content available
- Environmentally responsible cleaning products for carpets, floors, kitchens, and bathrooms
- Clean parking lots, sidewalks and driveways without the use of two-cycle combustion engines
- If the meeting venue is also a food and beverage supplier, request same practices noted above

Request these practices from hotel suppliers:

- Provide a recycling program (recycling paper, plastic, glass, aluminum cans, cardboard and grease) for entire hotel including sleeping rooms and meeting space
- Provide clearly marked recycling containers in common areas including lobby and guest rooms unless the hotel sorts and recycles
- Instruct housekeeping staff to shut blinds and turn down the heat/air conditioning and turn off lights during the day in rooms while attendees are gone
- Implement a towel and sheet re-use program
- Instruct housekeeping staff to not replace consumable amenities daily unless they are gone. Participate in an amenity donation program if available locally
- Use cleaning products that do not introduce toxins into the air or water
- If hotel is also providing food and beverage services, see above section regarding practices related to food and beverage

Request these practices from ground transportation suppliers:

- Plan efficient routes and schedule shuttles during peak hours
- Source shuttle providers that operate greener fleets. This means operators may:
 - Use new, clean engine technologies and low-sulfur diesel
 - Hybrid engine technology
 - Bio-diesel (B20 grade)
 - Adopt environmentally responsible maintenance procedures:
 - Recycle used oil, batteries, antifreeze and tires
 - Minimize idling and the use of air conditioning especially when no passengers are in the vehicle

Request these practices from communication/marketing suppliers:

- Electronic ticketing and reservation systems
- Online registration
- Electronic rooming lists, room layouts and banquet event orders
- Online program/agenda
- Online exhibitor kits
- Digital signage
- Downloadable speaker presentations & handouts
- Electronic event evaluation

Use of printed materials should be avoided as a priority. If printing is required printers should be requested to:

- Use post-consumer recycled content paper (minimum 30%) that is unbleached, or bleached without chlorine
- Use vegetable-based inks
- Print double-sided

Request these practices from services contractors:

- Reduce the lights, power and heating and air conditioning during move-in and move-out times in the exhibit hall
- Provide online exhibitor kits/service
- Use pre-cut, to length, non-vinyl tabletop, wooden tables and biodegradable trash can liners
- Use booth headers made from renewable forest byproducts with water-based ink
- Use signage products made of environmentally responsible, recyclable components with applied and removable water-based graphics
- Use lighting that is Energy Star Saver approved with T-8 ballast and bulbs – using 30% less energy
- Use re-usable signage and graphics in registration counter/kiosks
- Use re-usable magazine bins. Print logos with water-based inks. Shelves should be made of renewable resources or certified forest products and may not contain tropical hardwoods or endangered wood species
- Use carpet made from recycled materials that are fully recyclable
- Use natural gas fork lifts and hand carts to move exhibitor freight in and out of the show to assist in the air quality
- Re-use shipping and packing materials. Make biodegradable shipping and packing materials available to exhibitors and show management
- Partner with a local contractor to manage and use local labor
- Minimize transportation to and from show site. Use bio-diesel-fueled or alternative fuel trucks
- Provide and manage donation area for exhibitors to collect donated items
- Participate in venue recycling program



Request these practices from exhibitors:

- Participate in the facility's recycling efforts by ensuring they recycle cardboard, freight boxes and plastic wrappings and other recyclable items during move-in and move-out
- Make a conscious effort to minimize packing materials
- Use environmentally responsible packing materials that are reusable, recyclable or biodegradable
- Avoid large quantities of collateral and offer to send information upon request. Avoid dated material and use electronic methods
- Print materials using soy/vegetable-based ink and post-consumer, recycled paper (minimum 30%)
- Provide giveaways made of recycled, responsibly grown natural fiber, and non-toxic and biodegradable materials. Ensure giveaways are useful, not merely promotional in nature. Any food (candy, etc) should be sustainably grown, processed and packaged Giveaways with some imagination could also be electronic:
 - o free registration and free number of songs for MP3 player
 - o free online subscriptions
 - o free Internet access
 - o free Satellite TV
 - o free Satellite radio
- Do not provide gift items made from endangered or threatened species
- Design booths and displays using environmentally responsible materials and energy efficient lighting if applicable
- Use signage that is reusable, made of recycled materials
- Use local staff in booth if possible
- Minimize transportation to and from show site. Use bio-diesel or alternative fuel trucks
- Inform and train staff about the environmentally responsible practices to be implemented during the show
- Participate in the exhibit donation program by providing any materials that are eligible for donation