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CANADA REDEFINING SUSTAINABLE EVENTS PLANNING

— NOVEMBER 2023 —



A Trendsetter for Sustainable Business Events

In today's world, sustainability isn't just a buzzword – it's a way of life, encompassing environmental, economic, and social aspects.



Within the dynamic business events sphere, sustainability has taken a prominent role, with Canada emerging as a leading sustainable events destination. This supplement explores Canada's commitment to sustainability in the meetings industry, delving into innovative initiatives like 'Innovate Canada,' highlighting eco-conscious practices in cities across the country, and providing useful, concrete tips to organize sustainable events.

DEFINING SUSTAINABILITY: BEYOND THE ENVIRONMENT

When it comes to sustainability, three interlinked dimensions of equal importance have been identified (all of which are on Canada's priority list): environmental, economic, and social sustainability.

Environmental sustainability focuses on reducing ecological footprints, conserving resources, minimizing waste, saving energy, and protecting natural habitats. For the business events industry, this includes initiatives like eco-friendly transportation, zero-waste policies and carbon offset programs - amongst others.

Economic sustainability, on the other hand, requires responsible financial management, fair labor practices, and long-term economic benefits for local communities. It involves cost-effective event planning, supporting local businesses, and reinvesting profits for communal welfare.

Finally, social sustainability emphasizes preserving and celebrating local cultural heritages, fostering cultural exchanges, and respecting local traditions, promoting diversity, inclusivity, and authentic local experiences.

"We often focus on the environmental aspect of sustainability, but it's important to recognize the societal and economic dimensions as well. In Canada, our socio-cultural angle holds immense significance due to our diverse cultural landscape, encompassing Indigenous, French,

and various ethnic backgrounds. We aim to foster the thriving of each culture within our environment, incorporating Indigenous content into events and conferences, supporting local businesses, and incorporating cultural elements like moccasins into our offerings. Therefore, the social, cultural, and economic facets of sustainability hold equal significance alongside the environmental dimension,” says Virginie De Visscher, Executive Director, Business Events, Destination Canada.

The meetings industry has increasingly been embracing sustainability due to growing delegate demand, stricter government regulations on emissions, cost savings, and rising awareness. Sustainable practices enhance a destination’s reputation, attract more sponsors, and improve cost management, making sustainability a vital element for the industry’s long-term viability.

LEADING THE WAY AS A SUSTAINABLE EVENTS DESTINATION

For some time, Canada has been itching to find ways to incorporate sustainable practices in the business events sector. It has emerged as a frontrunner in this quest, offering a model for others to follow. This vast and diverse nation, known for its stunning natural beauty and rich cultural tapestry, has made remarkable strides in embracing sustainability for events organized both by and at the destination. *“Our goal is to attract events that not only reduce environmental impact but also catalyze economic growth, thereby contributing significantly to the broader picture of sustainability and tourism impact,”* says De Visscher.

But what sets Canada apart? The country’s commitment to environmental sustainability is evident in its vast protected areas, sustainable tourism initiatives, and conservation efforts. From the majestic Rocky Mountains to pristine coastlines, Canada boasts a rich tapestry of natural wonders that serve as a backdrop for sustainable events.

Canadian cities offer a range of green venues that prioritize energy efficiency, waste reduction, and sustainable design (*more on this pages 7 to 9 of this supplement*). These venues are equipped to host eco-friendly events without compromising on comfort or technology. That infrastructure is matched with a well-developed transportation system, which makes it easy for attendees to access events with minimal environmental impact.

On a social level, Canada’s multicultural society and strong commitment to inclusivity make it a welcoming destination for events that celebrate diversity and cultural exchange. As for the economic aspect, Canada is a leader in clean technology and sustainable practices, which is reflected in the country’s event industry. Cutting-edge innovations in event planning, transportation, and energy conservation are driving sustainable event practices forward.

Facing the challenges that arise in the field, in particular the world’s rapid temperature increase, De Visscher applies a rational attitude: *“During the pandemic, we observed the essential human need for connection. In-person gatherings drive innovation and enable us to tackle challenges collectively.*





Meetings also play a crucial role in promoting socio-cultural sustainability by showcasing different cultures and supporting the local economy. In essence, we strive for a balanced approach, reducing our environmental footprint while increasing our socio-cultural and economic «handprints» to create a net positive impact.”

THE CANADIAN BUSINESS EVENT SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

With education, collaboration and long-term impact as a guide, Destination Canada has taken the role of an agent of change for the country. “When I attended one of the first events that started emerging as the pandemic eased, it became clear that alongside discussions on diversity and inclusion (D & I), climate sustainability was becoming a prominent topic. At an engineering conference I attended, where many STEM association CEOs were present, the conversation revolved around sustainability. Nearly all of them expressed a desire to make their operations and events more sustainable. When I asked what steps they were taking to achieve this goal, they admitted that they were mainly relying on suppliers and host destinations to lead the way. They believed that having more sustainable hotels or venues would benefit them, but beyond that, they didn’t have a comprehensive strategy. This realization prompted me to take action,” says De Visscher.

In May 2022, Destination Canada launched a first-of-its-kind national initiative, the Canadian Business Events Sustainability Plan, a national effort to provide turnkey economic, social, and environmental sustainability programs to global clients in attempt to drive action and raise standards of business event sustainability across the country (and beyond). The plan is being rolled out in three phases, kicking it off with a major research project evaluating Canadian cities from within, as well as education and training opportunities provided to domestic partners from coast to coast to coast.

De Visscher explains the process: “The plan is structured in different phases, starting with crucial partner engagement. Many partners were unfamiliar with different sustainability approaches and terminology, so we began with comprehensive training. Phase one included four workshops offered bilingually over four months, covering the basics of sustainability concepts. In phase two, we sought to establish a performance baseline. We chose the Global Sustainable Destination Sustainability Index (GDS-Index) as our benchmarking tool. Importantly, I pitched this plan to our partners, urging them to invest and show commitment by contributing funds. We successfully enlisted 16 partner cities across Canada, including all major destinations.”

Echoing her comment, Alexis Kereluk, of ConnectSeven Group the managing organization for the GDS-Index in North America, says: “Canada has typically enjoyed a fairly strong reputation as sustainable and safe. However, previously there has not been a standard framework or metrics to help prove these claims and/or to provide continued improvements. Through the work of Destination Canada’s Business Events team, Canadian destinations have better access to a tool to measure themselves and work collaboratively to increase their position as holistically sustainable hosts through the GDS-Index.”

The Sustainability Plan was officially initiated in 2023, when every city participating formed a green team to inform and include the many stakeholders in the sustainability field. Initially hesitant, some partners eventually became strong advocates, embracing the plan and pitching it to their stakeholders.

“Phase three focused on storytelling, recognizing that once partners knew about sustainability initiatives in their destinations, they needed to communicate these efforts effectively. A storytelling masterclass provided coaching on sharing these stories authentically.”



Mastering Sustainable Event Planning: Insights from Destination Canada

Organizing events is a complex endeavor, demanding meticulous planning and precise execution. In recent times, sustainability has emerged as a pivotal consideration in event management, and Destination Canada’s Business Events team is putting their words into action. This year’s two editions of Innovate Canada marked their first foray into carbon-neutral event hosting.

Innovate Canada offers an exclusive and intimate platform for C-suite executives to delve into Canada’s pioneering endeavors in various key sectors.

In June, participants gathered to explore the cutting-edge advancements in advanced manufacturing in Waterloo, Ontario, while September brought a deep dive into the world of oceans in Victoria, British Columbia.

“Our inaugural carbon-neutral event took place in 2023, but the journey began in 2022 when we launched our National Business Events Sustainability Plan, recognizing the need to lead by example,” says Virginie De Visscher. *“We believed it was essential not only to talk about sustainability but also to put it into practice, sharing knowledge based on our experiences.”*

During Innovate Canada in 2022, held in St. John’s, a comprehensive baseline assessment was conducted, which led to the setting of an ambitious goal for 2023. Over the course of six to eight months, Destination Canada meticulously planned and learned. An essential step was identifying the TRACE carbon calculator, a UK-based tool tailored for business events, which aligned with the organization’s needs.

“We also selected aims based on the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to align with our event, initially choosing 12—a decision we later adjusted to focus on five specific SDGs. This refinement provided clearer targets and objectives,” says De Visscher.

Destination Canada’s sustainability approach followed a pyramid framework. They prioritized avoidance (emphasizing the importance of saying no to certain practices), reduction, reuse, and, finally, recycling. In that matter, securing partner support was, of course, a significant milestone.

“Education emerged as a crucial SDG for us, reflecting our commitment to fostering awareness. Some partner destinations already practiced carbon offsetting, simplifying our collaboration. However, others required guidance on the process, necessitating extensive training,” De Visscher explains.

The choice was also made to offer vegetarian meals and eliminate the use of plastic water bottles. The objective behind this decision was to actively engage and educate event attendees about our sustainability efforts, all while conveying the significance of these sustainable practices. Involving attendees cultivates a sense of community, united by a shared commitment to sustainability, extending its impact beyond the event itself.

“While not every aspect could be hand-held on a larger scale, our experiences with smaller events allowed us to identify strategies that could be applied effectively. Simple measures, like reducing shuttle usage and offering meals with minimal environmental impact, remained consistent across event sizes. These efforts underscored the importance of collective action in fostering sustainability within the events industry,” concludes De Visscher.

Now, with the GDS-Index results, we are poised to monitor progress and develop a comprehensive dashboard showcasing the sustainability efforts of Canadian cities. This is actually an ongoing journey for all partners. We ignited the initial spark, but each partner will now progress at their own pace, some advancing rapidly while others take a more gradual approach. In this phase, our focus shifts to continuous coaching, training, and capacity building for all our partners” De Visscher continues.

After a long process of self-evaluation and self-change, the final steps of the plan include revisiting the clients who initially sought sustainable solutions in Canada. The idea is to present the new sustainable offerings of the partners and collaboratively look for turnkey solutions to host more sustainable events in the future. Cities across the country will now have trained staff on sustainability and use common language and messaging to promote their sustainability initiatives.

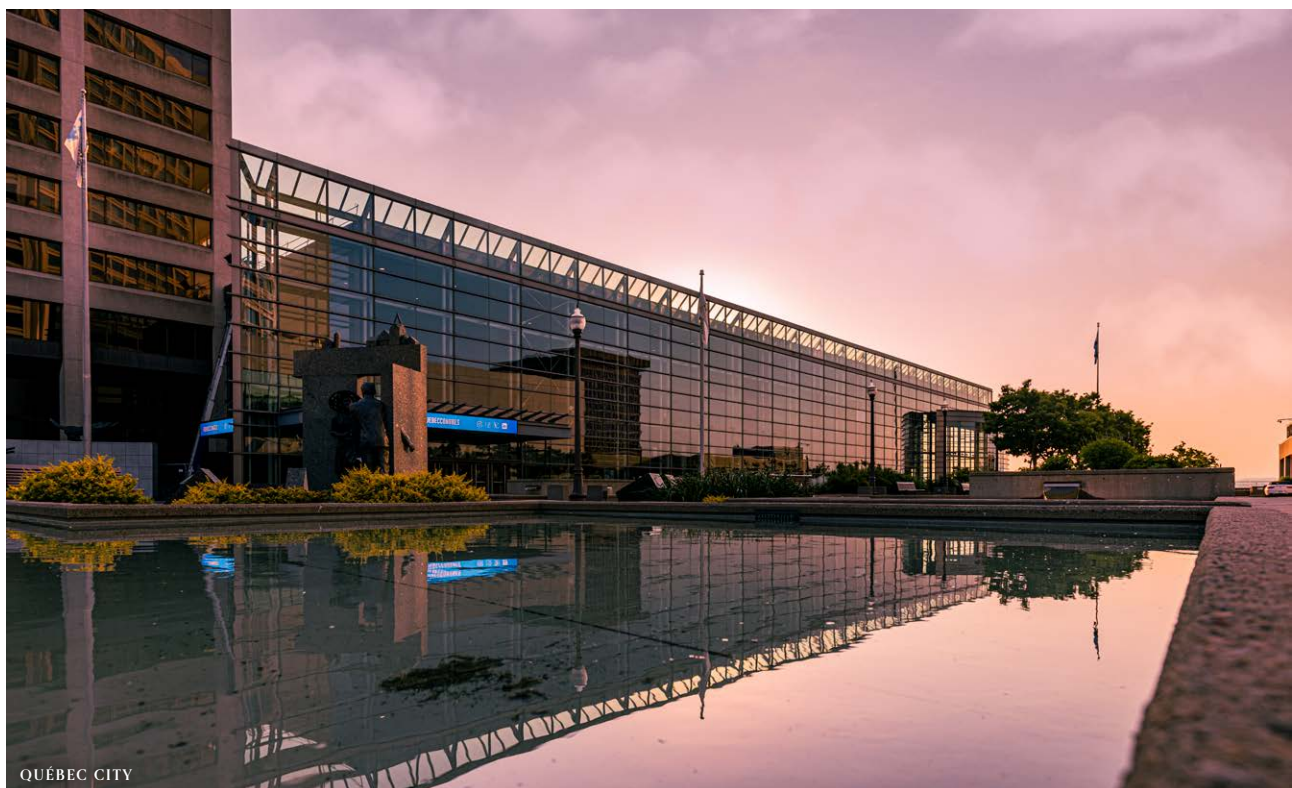
“Canada is now the country with the highest concentration of destinations participating in the GDS-Index. This is a remarkable achievement and we are seeing more of Canada investing in regenerative tourism strategies where the community, residents and environment are all considered in decision-making and growth plans. This also naturally

requires multi-sectoral and cross-functional collaboration in order to execute.” says Kereluk.

The overarching objective of the Sustainability Plan is to drive significant change by deepening awareness of the multifaceted impacts that events can have on the environment, society, and the economy in diverse locations. Beyond advancing sustainability in events across Canada, Destination Canada also commits to serving as a global model. The intention is to showcase to clients that sustainable events can be effectively organized, ensuring a positive experience for all stakeholders involved.

Canada’s nationwide programs in regenerative events and tourism are set to bring about positive changes in destination management, supply chain management, environmental stewardship, and D & I As Kereluk puts it, *“there will be many more opportunities for planners to access impactful suppliers, partners, and tools, as well as incredible opportunities for collaboration and innovation.”* These initiatives are expected to open doors for association planners to connect with impactful stakeholders and leverage innovative resources.

“Canada has the foundation, tools, skills, and support in place to help associations further the sustainability and legacy of their conferences - creating a positive impact in host communities and the environment long after the event ends,” she concludes.



Highlights of Sustainability Initiatives Across Canadian Cities

Destination Canada has a good grasp on what fuel the sustainability train needs in order to keep moving. Destinations across the country are on board to make the necessary adjustments so that business meetings arriving in Canada find an already fertile ground to organize their event responsibly.

City by city, both destination organizations and conference centres are already undertaking ambitious initiatives that make hosting sustainably simple for international associations. From Victoria in the West to St. John's in the East, the following is but a mere snapshot of the important work done in Canadian cities on the sustainability front.

EDMONTON'S COMMUNITY FOCUS

The city's EXPO Centre is a beacon of environmental awareness and responsibility. Part of its sustainability strategy is to support local suppliers so that the food arriving at the venue is sourced with significantly less cost and lower emissions associated with food transportation. In fact, 35% of the ingredients come from Edmonton-area producers, allowing the centre to reinvest over \$400,000 back into the local economy.

In line with the venue, the city's Destination Management and Marketing Organization, Explore Edmonton, is committed to offering visiting events socially and environmentally sustainable choices. Through their Responsible Events Program, the team provides tangible options for planners that not only align with their event's objectives, but can be rolled out regardless of event size, type, or budget.

Aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), the Program looks to contribute to the social and environmental benefit of the Edmonton community. Giving donations of coats or tools to local schools, or allocating time to clean up the city are some of the social initiatives on the menu, whereas tracking an event's carbon emissions and participating in a post-event waste audit are but a few examples of the environmental sustainability actions.

GREEN INCENTIVES AT PALAIS DE CONGRÈS DE MONTRÉAL

This world-class venue, in the heart of Montréal, is known as a leader in environmental initiatives. In 2016, Palais launched the Urban Agriculture Lab promoting the

greening of its 3,000 sq.m. roof through an experiment in sustainable development.

The project comprises of Culti-VERT - showcasing green roof technologies and techniques for vegetable gardening in container - and VERTical, the urban farming project that presents a new vertical-agriculture technology, using free-standing structures equipped with experimental tarps.

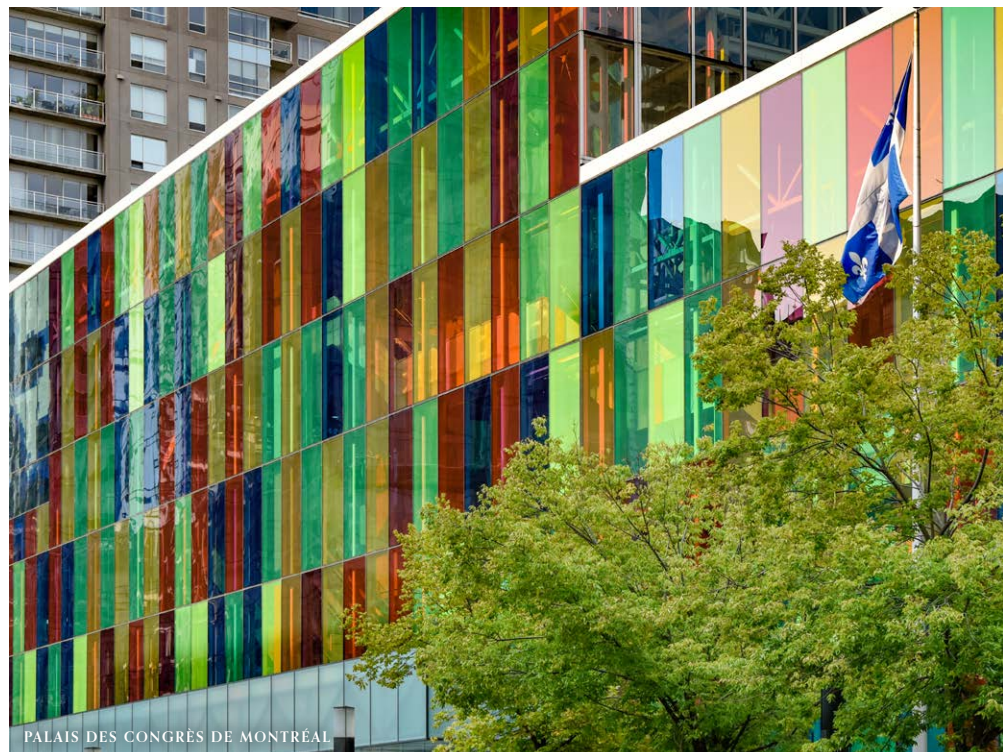
Palais de Congrès de Montréal has also collaborated with Business Events Montréal to offer event planners and other stakeholders the opportunity to opt for sustainable practices. Discounts of up to 10% on rental fees are in place for sorting waste or choosing local suppliers, for example, under the "Eco-Conditionality Policy". What is more, the venue has launched Palais Boréal, a multifaceted initiative that offers clients opportunities to reduce their event's environmental impact. It's a five-step program that facilitates planning and hosting a carbon-neutral event, with tools for instantly

offsetting travel with carbon credits that are Gold Standard certified.

METRO TORONTO CONVENTION CENTRE BUZZES WITH SUSTAINABILITY

Metro Toronto Convention Centre (MTCC)'s sustainability policy has placed focus on pollination and waste management among other things. The South Building of the Centre is home to 6 beehives (each home to 50,000 bees) which help support the preservation of essential pollinators in Toronto and produce honey for the venue's culinary team to use.

Furthermore, MTCC reduces its environmental footprint by diverting 90% of event waste from landfill and by decreasing its energy consumption. It was the first in North America to collaborate with the app Voyage Control to reduce CO₂ emissions during event move-in and move-out and the first in Canada to give customers the option to use clean energy with Bullfrog Power, proving its commitment to zero-waste events.



WASTE & HEAT SYSTEMS THRIVE AT VANCOUVER AND QUÉBEC CITY CONVENTION CENTRES

From East to West of the country, the goal is the same: sustainable event organizing. Being home to the world's first double LEED® Platinum certified convention centre, means that Vancouver is on top of its game in terms of sustainability.

Part of the venue's highlights include its roof (which features more than 400,000 indigenous plants) and a seawater heating and cooling system (which takes advantage of the adjacent ocean to sustainably adjust the venue's temperature), while it boasts a black water treatment plant which recycles grey and black water.

At the Québec City Convention Centre, waste management is top priority. The venue's well-trained team oversees the sorting and weighing of waste and compostable materials produced at an event, and finds ways to recover them with

various partners, striving for a recovery rate of 80%. For the venue's clients, this service is free of charge and included in the contract. Event planners can get all the help they need to find solutions to reduce waste when planning their eco-friendly events.

FROM OTTAWA'S FOOD MANAGEMENT TO VICTORIA'S OFFSETTING

On top of its environmental responsibility policies (heat and waste management, low-flow plumbing), the Shaw Centre in Ottawa is dedicated to making a meaningful impact on its community by collaborating with Mealshare and FoodRescue, an offshoot of Second Harvest.

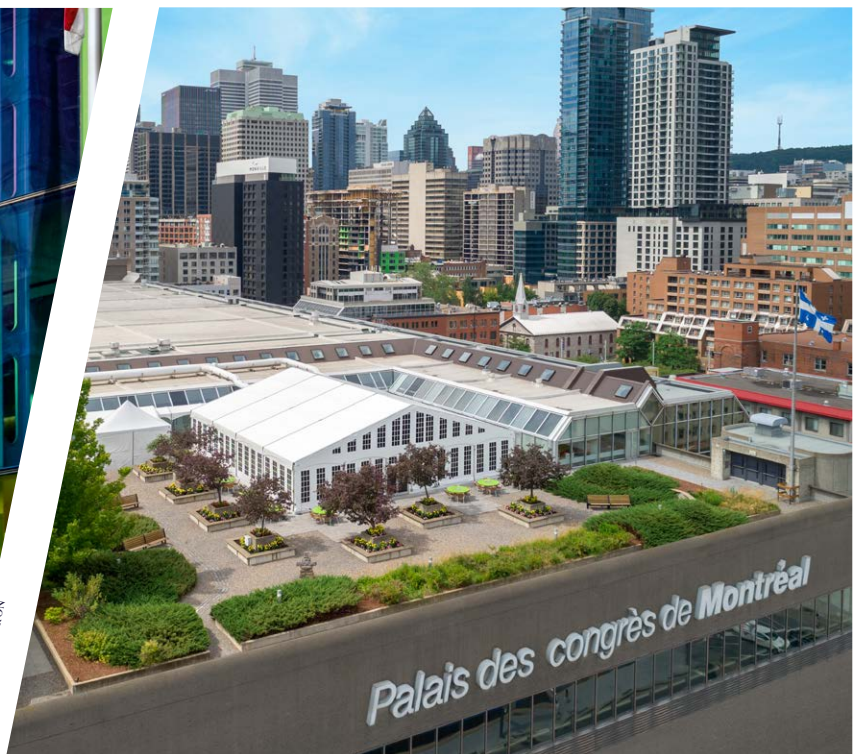
These partnerships aim to combat hunger and reduce food waste. Through lump-sum donations and surplus food contributions, they play a crucial role in providing sustenance to those in need.

Out on Vancouver Island, Tourism Victoria has achieved a remarkable milestone as the first major Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) in North America to receive a carbon-neutral designation. This accomplishment signifies a commitment to responsible tourism and a dedication to mitigating the impact of travel on the environment. Furthermore, the Victoria Convention Centre, the city's purpose-built meetings facility, also proudly holds a carbon-neutral title thanks to its offsets supporting the Great Bear Forest Carbon Project.

Canadian cities are leading the way in embracing sustainability initiatives, making them attractive destinations for environmentally conscious events and conferences. From coast to coast to coast, the country manifests a collective effort towards a greener, more responsible approach to hosting events and meetings, aligning with global sustainability goals and making a positive impact on their communities and the environment.



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10 Powerful Ways to Make Your Next Event More Sustainable

Sustainability is no longer a “nice-to-have” feature but rather has turned into “table stakes” — especially for the meetings industry. This means that planners are faced with a challenging balancing act that involves designing in-person events that are sustainable, inclusive and meaningful, while also keeping costs down and attendees satisfied. To help you, Destination Canada is sharing its own take on 10 simple, yet powerful ways to make your event more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.



1. SET SUSTAINABILITY GOALS

The first step is to put achievable and realistic goals in place. To do this, you can set five to ten measurable goals aligned with three to five UN SDGs. Once you have these goals, it's a great idea to create a dedicated team that can help track them and ensure you're making progress.



2. CHOOSE THE RIGHT PARTNERS

It's also important to align with partners that can help reduce your event's impact, whether that's venues and hotels with strong green initiatives or activities that minimize attendees' carbon footprint.



3. GO LOCAL

Today's business travellers don't want their trip to have a negative impact on the environment or local communities. One way to help give attendees a feel-good factor is through using local products and sourcing from local vendors whenever possible.



4. ELIMINATE FOOD WASTE

Planners should take the time to understand proper food management, including disposal and donation options for surpluses. They can also partner with charities, food banks and innovative companies that help sustainably process leftovers.



5. MAKE ATTENDEES ACCOUNTABLE

Provide attendees with insights on how they can reduce their own impact while attending your event. For instance, you can highlight the power of sustainable practices like using public transport, choosing vegetarian meal options, being mindful about water usage and opting out of daily hotel laundry services.



6. CALCULATE AND LOWER CARBON EMISSIONS

Carbon emissions calculators are excellent tools in helping to provide an accurate view of an event's environmental impact. With that information, you can then take steps to travel differently: use trains or public transport, take direct flights and travel light.



7. CHECK YOUR POTENTIAL SUPPLIERS

Sustainability requires buy-in from industry suppliers and partners. When planning, vet potential partners' commitments to sustainability and choose suppliers whose sustainability goals align with your event.



8. WEAVE SUSTAINABILITY INTO CONTRACTS

When negotiating contracts, think beyond rates and dates. Food donations, purchasing local, composting and post-event reporting are a few of the items on a list of negotiable items. After negotiating with suppliers about sustainability terms, make sure they are included in your contract as well.



9. MEASURE SUCCESS

Ask all suppliers to gather and provide post-event data on all the sustainable initiatives outlined in your contract. Then, meet with them to debrief, measure your results and talk through what worked and what needs improvement. After your event, consider producing a report to show how it was handled from a sustainability standpoint – and use those insights to elevate your next one.



10. BABY STEPS

It's important to recognize that progress won't happen overnight. Every small step you take today will gradually add up to significant changes.

The Voice of the Planner

For Boardroom, Alison Grinter, Events Director, Aviation Media looks back at the SMART Airports & Regions Conference & Exhibition which took place in Edmonton, with a strong sustainable component.

Aviation Media is an independent, business-to-business communications company. It specializes in the production of global aviation magazines, special publications, conferences, webinars, exhibitions and events, websites for the global aviation industry.

The SMART Airports & Regions Conference & Exhibition is the premier event covering how SMART airports and their adjacent regions are leveraging "connectivity" to stimulate "innovation and opportunity". It has been running for eight years in the US & Canada. In July 2023, the event took place in Edmonton as Edmonton International Airport were our airport host and were keen for Aviation Media to take the event to their city.

Explore Edmonton provided expert sustainable event planning support every step of the way to ensure sustainable decision-making during the planning process. For example, we opted to go paperless using an event app, and digital signage instead of throw-away signage. We also worked closely with Edmonton Convention Centre to prioritize local and sustainable menu options and food reclamation programs.

It was crucial to make sure that the facility's operations were in line with sustainability and low-carbon practices. This meant implementing waste reduction and recycling

procedures for managing event waste and reducing the use of energy resources during events by hosting them in a facility powered partially by clean, renewable energy sources.

We collected data from delegates on their travel to the event, combining the collection with the registration system so as to make the process as easy as possible. Data collection tools were customized with emissions factors specific to the host city and templates were provided to help make data collection easy; especially because we were working to measure our carbon footprint for the first time.

To give back to the local community - addressing the socio-cultural component of sustainability - we supported a local charity for those affected by poverty and homelessness, and we asked each delegate to bring a pair of socks with them to the event that we could donate to the charity.

Explore Edmonton was very supportive, enthusiastic & a pleasure to collaborate with. The process was easy to manage, and through all the work we did Smart Airports have set the bar in terms of how we will be able to deliver sustainable conferences in future locations.

We were delighted to learn recently that we achieved Carbon Neutrality for the event - we will definitely be looking at taking part in similar initiatives in the other cities that we take this event to. Canada is strongly committed to sustainability and has been proactive in assisting us in all areas where both small and significant actions can create a significant impact.



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Address

Avenue des Volontaires 19
1160 Brussels - Belgium
info@boardroom.global
www.boardroom.global
T. +32 2 743 47 20

Founder & Managing Partner

Cécile Koch \ cecile@boardroom.global
T. +33 6 72 78 27 37

Founder & Chief Editor

Rémi Dève \ editor@boardroom.global
T. + 33 7 71 89 43 99

Editors

Remi Deve & Vicky Koffa

Design

Paf! \ pafdesign.be
info@pafdesign.be
T. +32 2 743 47 28

Responsible Publisher

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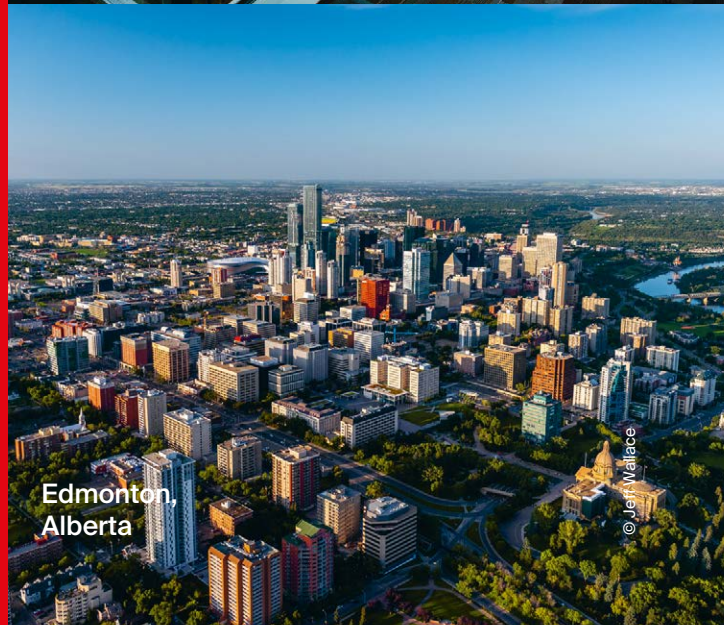
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