the co-operators®

A Better Place For You®

Guide to Sustainable Meetings

SUSTAINABILITY

Taking care of tomorrow — today

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INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), more than 80 million people around the world attend a meeting, conference or trade show every year.

The average meeting produces 20 pounds of garbage per person each day. That same person at home produces about five pounds of garbage daily.

The Co-operators Guide to Sustainable Meetings is designed to assist organizers and hosts of meetings and conferences who wish to reduce the negative – and enhance the positive – environmental and social impacts of their gatherings. From in-house staff meetings, to annual general meetings and Board meetings, to large conferences this is a guide to help you plan meetings that reflect your organization's sustainability values.

How to use this Guide

There are four sections to this Guide:

- Definition and benefits of sustainable meetings
- The phases of "green meeting" management
- An Appendix containing a toolkit of questionnaires and checklists
- A Glossary of sustainability related terms relevant to meeting planners

Acknowledgements and Resources
The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) "Green Meeting Guide 2009" was a key resource in preparation of this Sustainable Meeting Guide. A second resource was the Vancouver 2010 Olympics' June 2008 "Sustainable Meetings and Special Events Guidelines".

A) Definition and benefits of a sustainable meeting

What is a "*sustainable meeting*"?

A sustainable meeting, also referred to as a green meeting, is one that incorporates environmental considerations throughout all stages (from planning to dissolution) and aspects of the meeting (including location, food services, transportation and the provision of materials) to minimize the negative impact on the environment.

Every meeting has an environmental impact; each event uses energy and creates waste. Participants often travel to attend meetings, and planners purchase such items as gifts, food, whiteboards, flip charts, paper and signage. There are also social impacts of meeting planning that should be considered, including: accessibility for people with disabilities, safety and security, nutritional and health impacts for participants and the opportunity to source products from socially responsible and co-operative businesses. Each decision has a consequence and by holding more sustainable meetings we can reduce our collective environmental footprint. This guide will focus predominantly on the environmental impacts of meetings, but will also reference key social impact areas worth considering.

You may want to define your meeting as one that promotes sustainability principles, such as:

- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions
- Reducing consumption of natural resources (including water and energy)
- Reducing, reusing and recycling waste
- Protecting biodiversity, water, air and soil
- Integrating a sustainability ethic in purchasing of goods and services, venue arrangements, accommodation, transportation, and catering
- Raising awareness of sustainability issues with participants

It is important to remember that sustainable meetings are a process of continuous improvement. The most sustainable meeting is one held virtually by web or video-conference. All other meetings have impacts, which you can work to reduce over time.

The continuous improvement process is also a learning process. Often meeting organizers will be challenged to move out of their comfort zone, to try a new supplier or host a paperless meeting. Some efforts will be more successful than others and this is to be expected. The key is to learn from your experience and improve as you go.

And remember, simple things make a difference over time.

Why hold more sustainable meetings?

There are many benefits to greening your meetings, depending on the organization and nature of the event. Some benefits include:

Cost savings: By using fewer resources (e.g. paper), you can reduce the costs of your meeting.

Enhance your reputation: Your green meeting practices will be a visible demonstration of your sustainability commitment. By greening your meeting, you can avoid the reputational risks of being out of step with your participants' values.

Increase staff and participant engagement: Sustainable meetings can inspire and motivate staff and other participants who are often sources of good ideas and process improvements.

Foster innovation: A focus on reducing the negative impacts of your meetings can result in new ways of doing business for your organization.

Help achieve your sustainability goals: For those with a sustainability policy or strategy, you can further advance your progress by implementing a sustainable meeting program.

At The Co-operators, we have been focusing on holding more sustainable meetings. It has been our experience that regardless of the size of the meeting, there is always an opportunity to incorporate more sustainable practices into the planning of events. Please refer to **Appendix I** for a case study on how we made IMPACT! The Co-operators Youth Conference for Sustainability Leadership 2009 a sustainable event.

Small changes in behaviour can make a difference if large numbers of individual people make them.
Dr. David Suzuki

B) Green Meeting Management

There are three basic phases of hosting a "green meeting":

1) Planning
2) Communicating
3) Evaluating and reporting

These phases are reviewed in detail below.

1. Planning your green meeting

Do you need to hold your meeting in-person?

The first step in planning your meeting is to determine if you need to hold an in-person meeting at all: could you host your meeting by conference call or by video conference? There are many low and no-cost online meeting and information-transfer tools such as file sharing, screen sharing, webinars and video conferencing available to support your virtual meeting.

File sharing allows a number of people working on data or documents together to share the files within the network, typically for those with access privileges. Users are able to read, edit, copy or print the shared material. Screen sharing is the ability to transmit the contents of your computer screen to others, allowing you to show PowerPoint presentations, images and documents to others while users can see the contents of your screen in real-time. A webinar, or web conference, is a live meeting, training or a presentation conducted over the internet, enabled by the users' ability to log on to the meeting materials. A video conference allows people at two or more locations to hold a meeting, training or conversation, supported by simultaneous two-way video and audio transmissions.

Virtual meeting technology solutions can be found online via internet searches.

If you are able to hold your meeting virtually, you will reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with travel, reduce waste, and reduce the consumption of resources.

Of course, if the only option is a face-to-face meeting, the following next steps will guide you through a process of reducing your impacts.

Establish your sustainable meeting goals

The key to planning a sustainable meeting is to set your priorities early in the planning process and incorporate them into as many facets of the meeting as possible.

It is important to determine your sustainable meeting goals in advance. Some organizations or business units may wish to start small and only implement a few initiatives; others may wish to show their sustainability leadership with a more comprehensive approach or formally adopt a set of green or sustainable meeting guidelines which become standard practice throughout their organization.

Your goals could include a commitment to reduce the negative and enhance the positive environmental and social impacts of your meeting. They could, for example, specify priorities to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, reduce materials' consumption, reduce waste and water use, protect the environment, source environmentally and socially responsible products and services, and raise awareness of sustainability issues with participants and vendors. Organizations with a sustainability policy or purchasing program will want to reference these policy frameworks in their green meeting goals. **Appendix II** provides The Co-operators Group of Companies Sustainable Purchasing Policy as an example.

Designate a champion or lead person

It will be important to ensure someone on the planning team is designated as the lead to identify and follow up on putting your green commitment into action. This can be the responsibility of the whole planning group, but either way it is important to think through who leads on which item.

Develop your "to-do" list

Using the checklists in this Guide, and other ideas generated by your planning team (or participants should you be in a position to engage them in advance), put your task list together, ideally incorporated into your master meeting task list.

Appendix IV provides a sample framework for your overall sustainable meeting goals and plans to help you in the meeting planning phase.

Determine how you plan to assess and measure success

The planning stage is the optimal time to consider how you propose to measure your success. To establish your measurement framework you will want to review the goals you set for your green meeting to ensure you are able to measure your success. Key areas to measure include resources consumed (by weight); waste generation and disposal (the total quantity of waste generated divided by the type of waste and the percent reused, recycled, composted or landfilled); the total energy consumed; and travel (e.g. overview of the distance travelled and method used (air, rail, road) by participants). Basic information such as the number of participants and meeting duration in days should be provided for reference.

One way to measure your success would be to ask participants to rate your green measures in the event evaluation. Another way might be to measure the greenhouse gas emissions, paper consumed or waste produced as a result of the event. Some of your meeting goals may be more quantifiable than others; either way, take a few moments now to determine how you plan to assess your impacts.

2. Communicating your green meeting

Once you have established your green meeting goals and commitments, developed your task list and identified your green meeting lead, you may wish to communicate your green meeting initiative. Your target audiences could include participants, host venue, vendors and others. Finding the opportunity of communicating your sustainable meeting commitments signals your intent to others and can foster ideas and assistance in meeting your goals.

Pre-event communications, for example, could signal your intentions and encourage participant co-operation. Are there opportunities to provide participants advice on green behaviour in advance of the meeting? Suggestions could include: only print what you need; bring your own mug, paper and pen to the meeting; avoid travel in single occupancy vehicles; participate in linen reuse programs at the hotel; and shut off lights, air conditioners or heaters when leaving your room, etc.

By holding a sustainable meeting you can help raise awareness of sustainability issues and get participants to do their part. Communications opportunities include the event's website, agenda or program, press releases, signage and post-event publications. Think of ways to deliver the green message through your various points of contact with participants, suppliers and the general public.

Greening your Board meeting

Organizations that have adopted sustainability or corporate social responsibility commitments may have Boards of Directors interested in aligning their meeting practices with these commitments. One way to do this is for Boards of Directors to review their meeting practices for ways to reduce their environmental impacts. Opportunities to do this include ways to reduce air travel, transportation emissions and paper use. Food and beverage services provide another opportunity. See the relevant sections of this Guide for further ideas on ways you can green your Board meeting.

3. Evaluating and reporting on your green meeting

Once your meeting is over you will want to document and track what went right and what went wrong. In the planning phase you will have identified your success metrics, whether GHG emissions, waste, paper, etc. Once the meeting concludes, you will want to collect the data and evidence of your meeting impacts, preferably before too much time passes. Exit polls can be useful to ask participants to comment on the sustainability aspects of the meeting and provide suggestions for your next gathering. Where possible, incorporate your sustainable meeting questions into your meeting evaluation form. Don't forget to assess participant views on the hotel's green practices.

If available and you have the resources, pull together the sustainability impact information, along with the participant feedback and conduct a debrief session with the meeting planning team. Ask what worked, what didn't and what are some ideas for the future.

Use this information to assess the effectiveness of your efforts, and to communicate your achievements to others. Possibilities include news bulletins, staff updates, meeting performance reports and other communication channels. Case studies and inspiring stories can be very motivational for staff and other stakeholders and help to show your organization is taking its values seriously.

Did you know the average conference delegate…?

- Produces 61 pounds of solid waste during a three-day conference (the equivalent of two large garbage bags of trash);
- Uses 846 gallons of water (262 gallons/day) versus about 86 gallons/day at home; and
- Produces 1,418 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions – about the same as operating a car for one year.

Source: "Green Meeting Toolkit", Professional Convention Management Association, Canada East Chapter.

C) Sustainable Meeting Priorities

This section provides an overview of the main areas where you can influence the sustainability impacts of your meeting or event. A "checklist" you can use to guide your decision-making in many of these areas is included in the Appendix.

The main areas of impact are:

- Venue and accommodation
- Logistics
- Food and beverage
- Transportation
- Promotional items and gifts
- Participant education and action

VENUE AND ACCOMMODATIONS

The average hotel uses 218 gallons of water each day per occupied room unless it is equipped with low-flow toilets and water aerators on taps, which can reduce water use by as much as 31 per cent.
Fairmont Hotels and Resorts

The size of your meeting will influence venue selection and the nature of your meeting will influence whether accommodation is required or not. Small meetings will likely not require the use of specialized facilities.

Key venue and accommodation sustainability issues include:

Location: Venue location should be close to the accommodation and walking distance to amenities and on good public transit routes. This will help minimize travel and GHG emissions.

Energy: Energy efficient buildings and rooms that maximize use of daylight can reduce your energy use and GHG emissions. Having control over room temperature and air conditioning can also help you to reduce energy consumption and GHGs.

Waste: Meetings produce considerable waste. Venues and accommodation with effective waste management practices in place should be a priority consideration.

Water: Hotels consume significant amounts of water; water consumption can be a big environmental impact of your meeting. Hotels which practice water conservation, such as no second-day sheet and towel exchange and water efficient fixtures, should be given preference.

Cleaning: Cleaning services can have negative impacts on the environment and human health. Venues and accommodations with eco-friendly cleaning services should be preferred.

Buildings: Increasingly hotels and other facilities are following green building principles for renovations or new builds. Look for venues that are LEED or BOMA BESt certified, or have other environmental attributes.

Management Systems: Overall venue and accommodation management is an important consideration. In addition to the green services your venue and accommodation provider offers for your meeting, you should consider the degree to which the operators are committed to an ongoing program of continuous improvement. Look for environmental or sustainability policies, programs and action plans as evidence of ongoing environmental management. The best indicator of quality environmental management is if the venue or accommodation facility has received third-party certification of its environmental practices.

Adapted from: “Green Meeting Guide 2009”, United Nations Environment Program, p. 23.

Implementation considerations include:

- Making your venue/accommodation/hotel contacts aware of your sustainability-related expectations. Many hotels now have sustainability managers who can promote their environmentally-friendly programs and communicate with you during the Request for Proposal (RFP) and planning phases.

- Many hotels and venues have sustainability programs in place or are rated for their environmental policies. For example, The Hotel Association of Canada uses a Green Key Eco-Rating system, which considers five rating levels covering corporate environmental operations, housekeeping, food and beverage, conference and meeting facilities, and engineering.

- The hotel or venue representative may also be able to link you to local green businesses for help with other green meeting requirements.

You'll want to appraise the venue / accommodation site and gauge the staff's willingness to work to meet your sustainability goals. You could, for example, request a "back-of-the-house" tour at potential sites to see their sustainability practices firsthand. While there ask if hotel staff job descriptions include environmental duties and if employees receive sustainability training.

Sometimes you have limited choice in venue and accommodation selection. If this is the case, by letting the operator know your preferences and offering to work with them, you may still be able to influence their practices and reduce the environmental footprint of your meeting.

As you research the venue and accommodation options, you may wish to incorporate your sustainability preferences into your Request for Proposal (RFP). Alternatively, or in addition, consider using the questionnaire provided in **Appendix V-A** as a component of your RFP. Make sure you provide prospects with a copy of your organization's sustainability policy or your general sustainability aims so they are aware of your commitments in this area.

Once you have confirmed your vendor, include a clause in the contract with the vendor that states their commitment to support your sustainability requests and that itemizes explicit sustainability commitments the vendor has made in advance.

See **Appendix V-B** for a sample checklist of items to include in your vendor contract. It is very similar to **Appendix V-A**, but tailored to the contracting phase, as distinct from the RFP phase.

LOGISTICS

Meeting Accessibility
Some meetings, particularly those open to members and the general public, will need to ensure the meeting is accessible for people with disabilities. A few key points to keep in mind include whether the facility or meeting location is accessible by public transportation; the availability of designated parking spaces for people with disabilities; an accessible route to the meeting room including designated walkways and ramps; hard, non-slip floors; sufficiently wide corridors and clearance in the meeting room for a wheelchair; and accessible restrooms.

Consider also the accessibility of your public or general meeting to parents with young children. For events outside of regular office hours, you may wish to arrange for child-care options.

Meeting logistics, which can include setting up the meeting, ordering supplies, communications, and registration, can generate substantial environmental impacts.

Key sustainability issues associated with logistics include:

Paper use: Work towards the overall goal of "paperless" meetings to reduce paper use and demonstrate you are walking your talk to participants. This can include pre-and post-meeting communications and electronic registration. If paper is necessary, use 100% post-consumer waste copy paper and Forest Stewardship Council certified paper when possible and always print double-sided.

Goods procurement: Work towards limiting purchases for the meeting. Any goods purchased should follow sustainable purchasing guidelines.

Waste management: Ensure that your waste management practices focus first on reducing waste through minimizing meeting materials and packaging, reusing items from other meetings, etc. The second priority is to consider opportunities for reuse through distributing leftover food or other items to community groups, and recovering and reusing delegate badges, for example. After every effort to reduce and reuse waste has been taken into account, ensure that the waste collection system allows for multi-material recycling, including visible bins, effective signage and announcements for participants.

Energy conservation and greenhouse gas emissions: During the meeting, ensure that lights and heating/cooling systems are turned off when not needed.

Appendix VI consists of a checklist providing ideas for communications, purchasing, waste management, energy conservation

Planning an in-house meeting
Smaller, in-house meetings can also incorporate sustainable practices. Note, however, that depending on health concerns at the time of the meeting (e.g. related to H1N1 flu), some of these practices may not always be advisable.

Best practices:

- Avoid unnecessary disposable items (e.g. coffee stir sticks or straws);
- Use reusable linens, cutlery and dishes;
- Avoid pre-packaged foods, for example, provide sliced portions of cheese;
- Serve beverages in bulk (jugs of water, large bottles of juice), along with sugar in a bowl and cream/milk in a pitcher;
- Turn off lights when the room is empty;
- Ask participants to read documents online ahead of time, making notes of items of interest (instead of printing the material);
- Email presentations and related materials ahead of time;
- If you must print materials, print double-sided, do so in greyscale and use recycled paper;
- Use laptops and projectors for the agenda or the PowerPoint presentation; and
- Use non-toxic reusable markers on white boards for presentations or computerized Smart Boards that link what is printed directly to a laptop;
- Arrange for leftovers to be used by staff, donated to a local charitable group or composted.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE

A five-day event serving 2200 people breaks, breakfasts, lunches and receptions using china instead of plastic disposables, prevents 1,890 lbs. of plastic from going into a landfill; nearly one tonne.

Source: Meeting Strategies Worldwide

Most meetings offer participants food and drinks, whether simple snacks or formal dinners. Being selective when choosing food and beverage products and service providers can help you to reduce waste, provide healthy, low-impact refreshments, and even contribute positively to the community.

Key catering sustainability issues include:

Menu: The environmental and social impacts of the food and drink we consume can vary considerably depending on the product, where it was sourced and how it was produced. Consider the opportunity to include local and seasonal, healthy and nutritious (e.g. fruits, vegetables, grains, and low-sugar, low sodium, trans-fat-free and unprocessed), sustainable seafood, organic and fair trade products. Vegetarian meals should be incorporated as well, as meat and dairy products are highly resource intensive. A careful headcount will reduce preparation of unnecessary meals. Alternatively, have participants sign up for meals they plan to attend.

Waste: From discarded paper and plastics to packaging and food remains, food and drink consumption can generate a considerable amount of waste.

Community: In some locations, community groups and non-profit organizations operate catering services that hire and train people with employment barriers or that generate revenues to help run their community services. Look for local opportunities where it might be possible to have your snacks or refreshments provided by these social enterprises.

Appendix VII provides a checklist of food and beverage items for you to consider.

TRANSPORTATION

If just one passenger for every flight in the world packed one pound less luggage, the fuel savings would fly a Boeing 747 around the world 474 times.

Source: Delta-Sky Magazine, "Green Numbers", March 2007

Transportation contributes to the majority of a meeting's carbon footprint. While video and teleconference is preferable from an environmental standpoint, it is not always an option. It falls to the organizer to find how to minimize the meeting's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

If travel is unavoidable, the planner still has energy-saving options, including holding meetings in cities with efficient transportation hubs (airports or train stations) and easy-to-use public transit systems; arranging direct flights when possible; encouraging car-pooling or train travel for those living near the meeting; and arranging shuttle bus transportation to the hotel for groups arriving at similar times.

The key sustainable meeting transportation issues include:

Travel to and from the meeting: Providing information to participants regarding options on getting to and from the meeting can go a long way to reducing your meeting's carbon emissions. Clear instructions on public transport, cycling and walking arrangements from the point of arrival and departure to the venue and accommodations can be helpful, as can providing shuttle and car-sharing services. If it is not possible to organize shared transport, perhaps the hotels can arrange for joint pick-up of participants.

Transportation during the meeting: Some meeting schedules allow for or provide local trips within the region or city for tours or tourism purposes. Providing information on local transit and active transport (walking, cycling) options to participants can help them make sustainable transportation choices. Providing bus passes or city maps to participants on arrival can provide the incentive they need to reduce use of taxis or cars to get about locally.

If the meeting and accommodations are at different venues, organizers will want to ensure that sustainable transportation modes are available to participants, including fuel-efficient shuttles or vans.

Offsetting greenhouse gas emissions: Unlike other environmental impacts of meetings, organizers have the opportunity to offset the GHG emissions generated by event-related travel by purchasing carbon offsets. Carbon offsets are usually purchased through brokers who facilitate the transaction between reductions in GHG emissions created by one party to balance the initiatives of the other party. The David Suzuki Foundation has a guide on carbon offsetting, including a survey of 20 Canadian offset providers, found at: http://www.davidsuzuki.org/publications/reports/2009/purchasing-carbon-offsets/index.php. The Foundation also provides links to various carbon calculators that can be used to calculate the GHG emissions of your event: http://www.davidsuzuki.org/what-you-can-do/reduce-your-carbon-footprint/go-carbon-neutral/.

Appendix VIII provides a checklist of transportation items for you to consider.

PROMOTIONAL ITEMS AND GIFTS

Sixty-seven per cent of meeting and incentive professionals have taken environmental considerations into account when planning a conference or incentive program.

Source: Green Lodging News, April 2007

Promotional items and gifts – swag – provide high profile opportunities to communicate your sustainability commitments. Your efforts to green your meeting could be greatly undermined by not carrying forward your social and environmental responsibility into your give-aways.

Key sustainability issues to consider include:

Minimizing consumption: You may wish to consider whether the purchase is really necessary, or whether the gift could be a donation to a community group or replaced with a service instead of a product that generates waste. Giveaways which are edible, such as maple syrup or a local specialty product, or reusable, such as a metal drinking bottle are ideal.

Local sourcing: Products sourced locally both communicate the regional attributes of the host city, while also limiting the distance the product needs to travel to the venue destination. Sourcing locally also helps support the local economy.

Ethical production practices: Products sourced from factories which are not in compliance with international norms for human rights and labour practices can undermine your social responsibility ethic. You may want to ensure your gifts satisfy ethical sourcing standards.

The Co-operators Corporate Supplier Code of Conduct, found in **Appendix III**, outlines its ethical sourcing commitments and may be a useful reference.

Community and environmental benefits: It is often possible to procure promotional items which have visible sustainability attributes; hemp or bamboo clothing, items made by local artisans or produced by social enterprises or co-operatives and minimally packaged items are some examples.

Appendix IX provides a checklist of things to take into account when looking for sustainable gift ideas.

PARTICIPANT EDUCATION AND ACTION

Event Safety
To ensure a safe meeting, follow these guidelines:

- Prior to your meeting, regularly check for news/events in the area you are visiting that might affect your stay (e.g. labour unrest/scheduled protests/forest fires).
- Discuss fire drill/evacuation procedures, emergency communication and parking restrictions with participants.
- Keep a list of local police, fire, emergency and medical staff contact information.
- If something goes wrong, stay calm and take charge. Ensure that your attendees have up-to-date information.
- Ensure that meeting rooms and any other rooms associated with the event are locked at night.

Achieving your sustainable meeting goals will require active engagement of your participants. Meeting organizers can set the stage for a sustainable meeting, but you will need to engage and motivate participants to fulfill its true potential.

Some of the opportunities to engage your participants in taking sustainable action at your meeting include:

Reducing paper: Provide electric outlets for laptops and challenge participants to “go paperless”.

Reducing materials: Think of the materials participants use during meetings and identify alternatives, such as using refillable travel mugs, banning bottled water, etc.

Reducing travel related GHG emissions: Encourage participants to rideshare, cycle, take transit, or to offset the emissions of their travel. Consider including the cost of offsetting into the registration fee, or providing links to carbon offsetting services from the meeting website. For participants whose distance requires they travel by air, consider video-conferencing or other virtual options to air travel.

Other sustainable behaviours: Encourage participants to think through other steps they can take to adopt more sustainable lifestyles. This can include using the onsite recycling bins, shutting off lights, turning down thermostats and opting not to have daily linen service.

Each of these actions, one by one, will move us toward the sustainable society we envision