Plan your Event

A useful 10 step-by-step checklist to organising a more sustainable event

Greening an event is a continuous process. It involves incorporating sustainable development principles into all stages of meeting organisation and implementation – from the start of planning the event, to well after the meeting has taken place.

Appropriate monitoring, reporting, benchmarking and evaluation procedures for greening activities should also be established to assess achievements, learn lessons and improve for the future, and also as a marketing and communication tool to promote the organisation.

The following checklist is designed to help you organise and evaluate your event. It is important to follow each of the main steps indicated below and tick YES/NO where appropriate. You may not be able to achieve all of the detailed actions suggested at the initial stage, so we suggest that you use this checklist as a working document to guide you throughout the organisation of your event.

TIPS

- Plan ahead: start early to plan your event

- Complete this checklist with other stakeholders involved in organising your event

- Write down comments in the observation box as questions arise

- Consider all phases "**Getting Started-Scope-Plan-Do-Review**" when organising your event

- Start with the actions that are easier for you to implement

Getting started
1. Get support from senior management

Scope
2. Define primary purpose and values
3. Define the scope of your Action Plan
4. Define a sustainability policy

Plan
5. Identify and engage with stakeholders
6. Evaluate issues, set objectives and targets

Do
7. Provide resources and competencies
8. Supply chain management
9. Implement a communication strategy

Check and review
10. Measuring, monitoring and reporting

This checklist has been developed based on a review of the existing guidelines and certification standards for sustainable events. For more details of event certification standards and other useful documentation please visit useful documentation.

How to use the checklist

Action	Description of the recommended action to be undertaken by the event organiser
Phase	Definition of when it would be ideal to implement this action
Yes	Tick here if the action has been carried out
No	Tick here if the action has not YET been carried out
N/A	Tick here if the action is N/A
Observations	If you are using this checklist online, write your queries or comments here for other users. If you are using a printed version, use this section to note down your comments and queries

Action	Yes	No	N/A
1 – Get support from senior management • Undertake an initial review of existing management practices and sustainability performance in the organisation • Assess the potential environmental and social impacts caused by the event in order to identify the main areas where sustainability action should be implemented. (link to table examples) • Communicate the business benefits of a sustainable event to senior management • Secure resources for an implementation team • Integrate your sustainability system into the overall event management process			
Observations:			

Before starting to organise the event you will need at least one person responsible for "greening" the event, and probably a team to implement the proposed measures. Effective greening will therefore require high-level support and good cooperation, both within your organisation and with the host partner. Early communication of your aims and proposed measures to management is vital.

Action	Yes	No	N/A
2 – Define primary purpose and values • Agree on a shared purpose and values for your event with your key stakeholders • Set up the sustainability objectives for your event type • Write a statement to include this information as part of your management system • As you create policies, objectives and targets, check these against your stated values • Communicate your values to your key stakeholders ** click here for an example: ICLEI World Congress 2006 in Cape Town (South Africa)*			
Observations:			

Once the assessment of the potential impacts of the event has been undertaken, it is important to define your sustainability objectives (e.g. reduce materials consumption and waste generation, compensate the CO_2 emissions of participants' transport, reduce water use) and the actions needed to achieve them. *See page 21 of **UNEP's Green Meeting Guide.** (pdf)*

Action	Yes	No	N/A
3 - Define the scope of your Action Plan Once the overall sustainability objectives have been set, define the areas that you will focus on in order to achieve your objectives. Make sure that the areas you choose are easy for you to implement the greening principles. Which of the following issues will you include in your Action Plan? Tick YES, for issues you have influence over.			
○ Location			
○ Venue			
○ Transport			
○ Accommodation			
○ Catering			
○ Communication & audiovisual			
○ Materials & exhibits			
Observations:			

The scoping phase is essential to start developing the Action Plan. As you may not have control over all aspects of the event, focus on the areas where you can make a difference to implement the greening principles.

Action	Yes	No	N/A
4 - Define a sustainability policy • Define the broad sustainability commitments based on your values and sum these up in a policy • Use clear language, define tangible objectives and keep the policy to one page • Designate a responsible person for the sustainability policy • Make the policy available to your stakeholders • Use the policy to evaluate your event *click **here**, **here** and **here** for examples of event sustainability policies*			
Observations:			

A Sustainability Policy is a written statement outlining your vision and commitment (objectives, targets and performance improvement) towards sustainability. It will help ensure formal commitment from senior management and used to communicate targets and objectives to all key stakeholders. The Action Plan you develop will be based on this policy.

Action	Yes	No	N/A
5 - Identify and engage with stakeholders • Identify your key stakeholders for the event management process and decide which have most influence • Involve stakeholders to identify sustainability issues relevant to them and within your control • Give stakeholders opportunities to give ongoing feedback on the issues being addressed • Organise a training session with the key stakeholders, communicating your commitment with sustainability, and the actions to be undertaken to green the event.			
Observations:			

Effective communication is key to the success of making your meeting more sustainable. Many measures will require co-operation from others, so identify everyone involved, from senior management to suppliers to the cleaning services. Furthermore, awareness raising can be one of the biggest impacts of greening events, so ensure all are aware of what you are doing and why.

Action	Yes	No	N/A
6 – Evaluate issues, set objectives and targets Once the sustainability objectives are set, it is important to set specific actions to achieve the sustainability targets set in the Action Plan. *See point 6.X for a more detailed template to help you develop your Action Plan.* • Decide on the key sustainability issues to be covered in your plan (issues which you can influence or control) • Identify applicable legal requirements for the event • Set objectives, measurable targets and indicators for each issue • Decide whether to use a management system, certification process or other endorsement process.			
Observations:			

Before organising a meeting the most important question to ask is: "Do we really need a meeting?" "Have all other options such as teleconferencing, videoconferencing and net-conferencing been addressed?" If the only option is a face-to-face gathering, then all efforts must be made to ensure that the impact is minimized and the following issues must be considered.

Action	Yes	No	N/A
6.1. Venue/Location **Level 1 – Doing the basics** • Venue within walking distance to public transport & accommodation • Location selected for its accessibility, direct flights and rail connections • Waste produced at the venue separated (e.g. paper, plastic, organic) at source and sufficient, well-marked bins should be provided in participant and staff areas. • Venue equipped with reusable dry-mark erasable boards or blackboards instead of paper flip charts. Ensure "non-toxic" markers are used **Level 2 – Going further** • Environmental policy and/or management system (e.g. EMAS, ISO 14001) in the venue. Ideally they should cover sustainable procurement, energy saving, catering services, transportation and waste • Self-regulation heating and cooling system equipment • Tele-conferencing and video-conferencing equipment available. • Daylight use maximization (rooms, coffee, lunch and exhibition areas)? • Size of meeting room adapted to real needs **Level 3 – Leading the change** • Water efficiency policy. Water-saving appliances in kitchens and toilets • Location designed with criteria of sustainable building. • Green electricity provided *click **here** for more details about sustainable buildings*			
Observations:			

Action	Yes	No	N/A
6.2. Transport **Level 1 – Doing the basics** • Online participation (e.g. video, skype, parallel meetings) that helps reduce travel • Location chosen close to participants' city of departure in order to minimize CO_2 emissions related to transport (encourage use of train or direct flights) • Venue and accommodation accessible by public transport • Instructions on how to get from the point of arrival to the venue via public transport. *TIP: Email participants clear instructions before the event, include a section on your website and display travel information at the event* **Level 2 – Going further** • Carbon emissions from travel to the event calculated and communicated. • Participants given **options** to **offset** their emissions locally • Member of staff or local volunteer provided to accompany participants from hotel/stations to the venue by foot or local transport **Level 3 – Leading the change** • Airport-greeting booth where attendees can obtain information on sustainable transportation from the airport provided • Electric and/or alternative fuel taxis provided • Electric and/or push bicycles offered for rental during the event and facilities provided for cyclists such as lockers and showers • Free pass to public transport for all the participants included. *TIP: You could propose to the city council or local public transport company to provide free passes for participants as a promotion of their services, and include this with participant's name badge.* *To estimate the carbon emissions of your event please click **here** or **here***			
Observations:			

Action	Yes	No	N/A
6.3. Accommodation **Level 1 – Doing the basics** • Hotel with an environmental management system recommended • Accommodation within walking distance of public transport and the event venue • Hotel fully accessible to those with special needs • Free Wi-Fi access and/or computers with internet access in the hotel **Level 2 – Going further** • Recommend the hotel to use local, organic or fair trade products during the celebration of your event • Accommodation with active social policy to employ disadvantaged groups • Water efficiency policy in the hotel **Level 3 – Leading the change** • Accommodation certified by a local or international eco tourism system • Accommodation with equipment to enable video links with other participants *click **here** for more details on sustainable accommodation*			
Observations:			

Action	Yes	No	N/A
6.4. Catering: Waste, packaging, waste collection and disposal **Level 1 – Doing the basics** • Exact numbers of participants calculated to avoid waste • Use reusable dishes, cutlery, glassware and linens and avoid aluminium foil (e.g. no paper, plastic or polystyrene cups, no paper napkins or table cover, no plastic cutlery) • Avoid single-serve containers for food and condiments (e.g. milk, cream, artificial sweeteners, butter, salt, pepper). Use bulk dispensers. • Drinking water served with onsite filter or jugs • Waste produced during catering collected and separated accordingly • Recycling instructions clear to participants **Level 2 – Going further** • Catering company with an environmental policy. If they don't have one, communicate your Sustainability Policy to the catering company to encourage more sustainable practices • Don't use individual menus: write them on blackboards (information about products' sustainability is welcome). If you print menus, do so on recycled, chlorine free paper • Staff involved in the catering informed and motivated about greening principles. *TIP Involving staff, service providers and participants with sustainability aspects in good time means that they will be prepared to act responsibly and more likely to be motivated* **Level 3 – Leading the change** • Onsite compost solution for organic waste • Zero-waste policy for your event • Waste generated from your event be usefully used for another purpose • Ask suppliers to communicate what efforts they have taken to minimise packaging • Donate surplus food to local non-profit organisations *click here for more **details** on sustainable event checklists*			
Observations:			

Action	Yes	No	N/A

6.5. Catering: Food & beverages

Level 1 – Doing the basics
- Locally produced food and beverage using seasonal regional produce
- Vegetarian and special dietary options offered
- Drinking water from the tap used.

*TIP Drinking water could be served in carafes/jugs instead of bottled; If are needed, use **glass** instead of plastic.*

Level 2 – Going further
- Organically certified food and beverages served
- Fair Trade products (e.g. coffee, tea, and sugar) provided
- Clear communication of the origin and type of product served
- Dietary choices considered

Level 3 – Leading the change
- Menus proposed by the caterers without threatened or overexploited species appearing in the IUCN **Red List** or listed in qualified international and national bodies
- All products produced within 100km radius
- Social integration policy for the chefs and waitresses

Observations:

Action	Yes	No	N/A

6.6. Communication & materials

Level 1 – Doing the basics
- Participants informed from the beginning about the event sustainability policy
- Minimal use of printing, using electronic means where possible (e.g. projections, slide share, USBs, online libraries, webs, social networks)
- Paper, posters, programme and other communication elements 100% recyclable, chlorine free paper and produced with recycled materials
- Electronic registration system allowing participants to submit forms and pictures, if needed, via email or through a web service.

*TIP Use a online registration system (**Regonline**, **Amiando** or **Fikket**)*

- Offer services to participants for the electronic copying of data, and make presentations available on the web
- Re use participant's badges
- Include only strictly necessary material in participants pack, email relevant documentation
- Turn off lights and equipment when not in use

Level 2 – Going further
- Printing the needed material at the venue/location of the event instead of shipping it from the headquarters.
- Stands, carpets and other event infrastructure made from recycled or recyclable material
- Systems in place to keep printing to a minimum (e.g. projectors, laptops, double-sided printing)
- Invite participants to bring their own pens and paper to the meeting
- Avoid material gifts, donate money to local sustainable initiatives or scholarships
- All materials produced for the meeting designed to enable reused for other meetings.

TIP For instance, avoid dates of the meeting in signs and banners so they can be used again

Level 3 – Leading change
- Organise a paperless meeting, giving participants a laptop and tips on how to minimize paper
- Use electronic equipment (printers, computers, photocopiers) that is **Energy Star** certified and use recycled printer cartridges

click here for an example of a sustainable **stand suppliers*

Observations:

Action	Yes	No	N/A
6.7. Exhibitions **Level 1 – Doing the basics** • Exhibitors encouraged to use decorations, carpets and display materials which are made of recycled materials and/or can be reused for future meetings • Use packaging which is minimal, and reusable and/or recyclable **Level 2 – Going further** • Different containers in the stands to separate the different types of waste • Exhibitors limited in the amount of publications and handouts. Instead, encourage collecting business cards or provide information electronically by enabling participants to copy the needed publication in a USB stick **Level 3 – Leading change** • Use of lighting and other energy requirements limited in the stands • Rent modular exhibition equipment that can be reused at other events			
Observations:			

Action	Yes	No	N/A
7 - Provide resources and competencies • Identify existing resources and identify external resource opportunities to meet objectives (sustainability may be of interest to new sponsors) • Define roles and responsibilities in the different actions of the action plan (link back to the action plan example – template) • Ensure employees are trained and competent in implementing the sustainability management system • Record activities and report to senior management			
Observations:			

Once the Action Plan has been established and the actions to achieve your targets have been defined, it is time to start implementing these actions in the DO phase. The following steps will guide you in the implementation of your sustainability actions.

Action	Yes	No	N/A
8 – Supply chain management • Communicate with your suppliers and service providers to find out if they can support your sustainability Action Plan • Include relevant sustainability criteria in your procurement process to contract suppliers and service providers when possible • Consider what to do if suppliers do not meet requirements. Speak to your suppliers and try to find a joint solution. • Use your sustainability Action Plan to evaluate your suppliers *click here for a list of sustainable suppliers*			
Observations:			

Action	Yes	No	N/A
9 – Implement a communication strategy • Integrate your sustainability ActionPlan into the overall event communication strategy (e.g. announcement, invitation, website, programme, agenda, welcoming speech, logistic indications, conference conclusions) • Provide relevant information from the beginning to the end to management, employees, suppliers and contractors (internal) • Avoid **green washing** using clear language, reasonable targets and verifiable certifications			
Observations:			

Communicating your commitment to sustainability, and your goals and plans to celebrate a sustainable event with all relevant actors effectively is key to the implementation of your Action Plan – especially as many of them will be involved in the specific actions to make your Sustainability Policy a reality.

Action	Yes	No	N/A

10 - Measuring, Monitoring and Reporting
 	
• Use the Action Plan to check your progress towards your objectives and goals
• Learn by doing: start with the easy activities and set more challenging objectives in your future events
• Measure and monitor your progress on sustainability performance (involving stakeholders where possible). *Examples on the data that could be collected to measure your impact are:*
    ○ *Waste generation and disposal [g waste/person *day]*
    ○ *Energy consumption during the meeting*
    ○ *Water consumption during the meeting*
    ○ *Participant's travel: overview of the distance travelled and method used (air, rail, road) by participants.*
• Undertake a management review after the event and identify areas for improvement
• You need to have a baseline against which to compare so keep a record of your own collected data in order to assess future activities
• Report your results: organise information electronically and make it available to key stakeholders
• Make sure to receive feedback from the actors involved in the organization of the event to assess the feasibility of the proposed actions
 	
Click **here for an example of a post event report template*			

Observations:			

Appropriate monitoring, reporting, benchmarking and evaluation is essential for ongoing improvement, and also serves as a useful communication tool to promote the organisation and its Sustainability Policy. Share the successes and lessons learned from greening the meeting to staff, participants, the public and organisers of future meetings.