

Minimising the environmental impact of meetings and events

In a nutshell

SUMMARY

It is best practice to:

- introduce a sustainable event management system; the management system may be implemented by the public administration itself, and/or contractors/suppliers should be sought who have a management system in place; suppliers and hotels can also have an environmental management system (e.g. EMAS);
- communicate to all stakeholders (from suppliers, to delegates and the wider community) and engage with those involved with and/or attending an event on measures they can undertake to reduce the environmental impact of attending the event (e.g. using correct segregated bins, choosing tap water and reusable water bottles, choose sustainable means of transport);
- select the venue of the event or meeting considering environmental criteria (e.g. well-connected by public transport, building with reduced environmental impact, venue with an environmental management system in place);
- choose products and services needed for the organisation of meetings and events implementing green public procurement and limit gadgets and the content of conference packs (e.g. leaflets, pen drives, badges);
- procure catering services, or the food and beverages from catering services managed in-house, introducing sustainability requirements such as seasonal, organic food, ensuring availability of vegetarian/vegan options and avoiding (where possible) offering products in single use plastic packaging; choose service providers who can offer services without the use of single use plastic dishes, cups and cutlery, and make water fountains available instead of water bottles.

Target group

Public administrations having office-based operations

Applicability

This best practice is applicable across all types and scales of public administrations organising meetings and events.

Environmental performance indicators

- Share of suppliers with a recognised sustainable events management system (e.g. ISO20121) or environmental management system (e.g. EMAS) (%)
- Share of event-related tenders including in the criteria a reference to a recognised events management system (e.g. ISO20121) or environmental management system (e.g. EMAS) (%)

Benchmarks of excellence

N/A

Description

This section incorporates all business-related meetings or events, including both indoor and outdoor events which are organised or hosted by the public administration body. Meetings or events may take place on-site, or be hosted by the public administration body off-site. Events or meetings *attended by*, but not directly organised by, the public administration body are not included in the scope of this section.

Public administration bodies can influence external venue hosts or catering companies by choosing to only work with those who are already working to minimise their environmental impact. Similarly, while they do not have direct control over access and availability of wider sustainable travel networks, they can host events with good transport links, or provide sustainable options to attendees.

Venue choice is the most prominent method by influencing the environmental impact of meetings and events – venues with strong environmental performance (e.g. low energy, water efficient, sustainable facilities etc.) and venues locations which minimise transport should be preferred. Similarly, where meetings/events can be held via video and/or phone conference, this should be chosen as the premier option.

Venues with strong energy, water, and waste performance should be chosen; the general management and minimisation of on-site energy consumption, water consumption, and waste production (including that associated with meetings and events) is covered under previous sections of this report and may also be applicable to external event venues.

Key considerations when hosting an event are outlined below (suggestions adapted from the Brussels Sustainable Meetings & Events Guide (BELO & ICLEI, 2011)):

- Host a virtual meeting/event as an alternative
- If a physical event is held, ensure the venue and accommodation are accessible by public transport
- Events, venues and/or contractors should be covered by a relevant certification scheme (e.g. EMAS, ISO20121, ISO 14001, Green Key, etc.)
- Sustainable catering options should be provided (e.g. low meat, local, seasonal, fresh etc.)
- Sustainable transport options should be promoted to attendees (e.g. shuttle bus service, public transport travel passes)
- Conference materials/handouts/consumables/giveaways should be avoided; where items are given away they should have a dual purpose, be reusable after the conference, and ultimately be recyclable.
- Segregated waste streams should be provided and clearly signposted
- Sustainability information and engagement materials should be shared with attendees and stakeholders
- Best practice guides and sustainable procurement guides should be produced to disseminate best practice knowledge to other organisations in the jurisdiction

Best practice in minimising the environmental impact of meetings and event organisation may be most effectively administered through the introduction of a sustainable event management system (e.g. ISO20121) and/or through stakeholder engagement and dissemination of best practice learning.

Sustainable Event Management System

The introduction of a sustainable event management system represents best practice in minimising the environmental impact of meetings and/or events. Depending on individual organisational needs, the management system may be implemented by the public administration body themselves, or alternatively contractors/suppliers should be sought who have a management system in place (i.e. for a smaller organisation hosting a minimal number of events per year, it may be more efficient to source contractors implementing the system). ISO 20121 is the international event management standard and is suitable for organisations and events of all sizes. It is designed to help organisations in the events industry, such as caterers, security companies, stage builders, venues, and independent event organisers, to improve the sustainability of their event-related activities, products, and services. It should be used to support and structure sustainability initiatives, with third party certification for an organisation or individual event representing a benchmark of excellence.

Suppliers, hotels and venues may also be covered by EMAS or ISO14001, which are the leading international environmental management systems standards; or by other recognised international schemes such as the EU Ecolabel, Green Tourism Business Scheme or The Green Key.

Stakeholder engagement

In order to minimise the environmental impact of meetings and event organisation it is essential to engage with all interested stakeholders, from suppliers, to delegates and the wider community. Events are delivered by a collective of interested parties, from organisers, to venue owners, to caterers and the wider supply chain. It is therefore essential that each of these parties knows the role they play in the value chain of delivering a sustainable event. While a sustainable events management system can put a number of concrete measures and policies into place (e.g. recycling points, energy efficient equipment) much of the outcomes will also depend on user behaviour (e.g. using recycling points, efficient operation of equipment); it is therefore essential to clearly communicate and engage with those involved with and attending an event on simple measures they can undertake to reduce the environmental impact of attending the event (e.g. using correct segregated bins, choosing tap water and reusable water bottles, etc.). Stakeholders may also be engaged through pledge cards/online pledge boards, whereby stakeholders such as suppliers, delegates and local groups can 'pledge' to undertake a sustainable action. Organisations may also wish to promote sustainable modes of transport – this can be achieved through partnering with hotels within walking distance of the venue, arranging complementary shuttle bus services, or providing public transport travel passes.

This may be achieved through the provision of best practice guidelines and sustainable supplier lists; along with dialogue and surveying of interested parties to determine their needs/wants. Stakeholder engagement can significantly support the delivery of sustainable events and may be achieved through a near zero cost of scale following the initial production of a resource guide/information leaflet, particularly where these are hosted online. This is particularly appealing to Public Administration bodies that have a large outreach, but potentially limited funding for direct engagement.

Dissemination of best practice learning

Public administration bodies should use their unique position to disseminate best practice learning and encourage the development of a wider sustainable events industry and culture.

The purchasing power of public administration bodies also places them in a strong position to influence the local supply chain and to stimulate the market for sustainable goods and services.

They can also demonstrate leadership and commitment through sharing and communicating the benefits (both resource efficiency and cost savings) of delivering sustainable meetings and events. This can create a culture of change across their sphere of influence and multiply the effect of their own internal sustainability actions, making unconventional behaviours common place and habitual.

Environmental benefits

The chief environmental benefits of minimising the environmental impact of meetings and event organisation include:

- Reduced CO₂eq emissions
- Reduced energy and water consumption
- Minimal waste production and higher recycling rates
- Reduced materials/resource consumption

The unique position and influence of public administration organisations perfectly locates them to push wider standards and help mainstream sustainability through their everyday activities. Dissemination of best environmental practice to other councils, business and individuals can multiply the impact; each of the frontrunners presented in the Operational Data Section features a focus on sharing best practice and/or encouraging the development of a wider sustainable events industry and culture. Sustainable event organisation also provides an opportunity to engage directly with a number of stakeholders including delegates, suppliers and venues on sustainability issues.

Side effects

Promoting the use of public transport where large events are taking place, may place significant pressure on public transport systems and traffic control. In cases such as these, public transport network operatives should be consulted in advance of the event to ensure alteration of services where necessary. More information on logistics and multimodality is covered in the best practices for mobility.

Engagement materials which generate waste (i.e. flyers, handouts, consumables) should be avoided to prevent having a negative impact on waste production.

While video conferencing facilities may reduce the number of physical events to be hosted, such facilities will increase energy consumption at the administration office hosting events virtually.

Applicability

This best practice is potentially applicable across all typology and scale of Public Administration offices across Europe.

Economics

The employment of a sustainable events management system can produce substantial economic savings through the reduction of waste production and resource use (including energy, water, food, consumables etc.). For example, the EU2012 Danish Presidency delivered the event at a €40million reduction compared to previous presidencies which they attribute to the use of the ISO20121 management system (Danish Sustainable Events Initiative, 2013). Savings may also be achieved where a meeting or event is attended/hosted remotely, thus reducing travel and business expenses.

Driving forces for implementation

The chief driving forces for implementation of sustainable events and meetings are to reduce costs, resource use and CO₂ eq emissions. A sustainable events policy and/or events management system can also influence stakeholders, enhance reputation, and drive innovation (for example see Brighton & Hove, Danish EU Presidency and Scandinavian Sustainable Meetings Accord case studies). Competitive advantage is an additional driving force, for instance the city signatories to the Scandinavian Sustainable Meetings Accord use their sustainability credentials to promote their region as leading international events destinations.

Reference organisations

[Barcelona City Council \(Spain\)](#)

In 2006, Barcelona City Council released 'Sustainable City Council', an educational guide to reduce the environmental impact caused by public activity, including events organisation.

[Belfast City Council \(UK\)](#)

Belfast City Council was part of the EURO CITIES' Clean Cities Working Group which published the 'Greening of Major Events' booklet in 2009; which provides best practice guidelines for major outdoors sporting events in European cities.

[Brighton & Hove City Council \(UK\)](#)

Brighton & Hove City Council has developed a Sustainable Events Programme; covering two internationally recognised standards for Environmental Management and Sustainable Events - ISO14001 and ISO20121.

[Brussels-Europe Liaison Office \(Belgium\)](#)

The Brussels-Europe Liaison Office and International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) developed a practical guide on how to manage events in Brussels more sustainably.

[City of Copenhagen \(Denmark\)](#)

The City of Copenhagen is a signatory to the Scandinavian Sustainable Meetings Accord; committing to ten actions to advance sustainable practices within the events industry, with a benchmark of performance published annually by the International Congress and Conventions Association.

[City of Göteborg \(Sweden\)](#)

The City of Göteborg is a signatory to the Scandinavian Sustainable Meetings Accord; committing to ten actions to advance sustainable practices within the events industry, with a benchmark of performance published annually by the International Congress and Conventions Association.

[City of Helsinki \(Finland\)](#)

The City of Helsinki is a signatory to the Scandinavian Sustainable Meetings Accord; committing to ten actions to advance sustainable practices within the events industry, with a benchmark of performance published annually by the International Congress and Conventions Association.

[City of Reykjavik \(Iceland\)](#)

The City of Reykjavik is a signatory to the Scandinavian Sustainable Meetings Accord; committing to ten actions to advance sustainable practices within the events industry, with a benchmark of performance published annually by the International Congress and Conventions Association.

[City of Trondheim \(Norway\)](#)

The City of Trondheim is a signatory to the Scandinavian Sustainable Meetings Accord; committing to ten actions to advance sustainable practices within the events industry, with a benchmark of performance published annually by the International Congress and Conventions Association.

[Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(Denmark\)](#)

In 2012 the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs became the first organisation in the world to achieve externally verified certification to ISO20121 sustainability standard for the Danish EU Presidency.

[Madrid City Council \(Spain\)](#)

Madrid City Council was part of the EUROCITIES' Clean Cities Working Group which published the 'Greening of Major Events' booklet in 2009, which provides best practice guidelines for major outdoors sporting events in European cities.

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