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Low environmental impact event guide

Pre-waste

Improve the effectiveness of waste
Prevention policies in EU territories
06942R

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1. Introduction

This guide aims to be a useful tool to set up Pre-waste meetings/events by introducing best practices and recommendations to ensure their sustainability.

Firstly it is important to define what a green meeting is. The UNEP green meeting guide[1] defines a green event as one that is designed, organised and implemented in a way that minimises negative environmental impacts and leaves a positive legacy for the host community.

A green meeting is one where:

- The organisation, preparation, implementation of the meeting takes into account the minimisation of CO_2 emissions,

- The natural resources consumption, such as water and energy, are reduced and minimised,

- The waste generation is avoided as much as possible and the remaining waste is reused and recycled,

- The awareness of the staff, participants, organisers and local community in greening and sustainable measures is clearly established and communicated to all,

- These principles are implemented before, during, and after the entire event, including, in particular, accommodation, venue and parallel events.

However, the first question really needs to be: is it absolutely necessary to have the meeting or event in physical terms?

Nowadays video-conference technologies, worldwide communications and the internet (web streaming, etc.), are developed enough to allow virtual meetings with thousands of participants. For this reason, before organising an event, it is always important to consider if a virtual meeting is possible as the greenest and most sustainable option.

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[1] http://www.unep.fr/shared/publications/pdf/DTIx1141xPA-GreenMeetingGuide.pdf

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1. Virtual event recommendations

Assess the need of a physical meeting and whether the services cannot be provided by a virtual meeting (e.g. visiting a facility or specific place during the event). Consider how a virtual event could bring participants together more easily, nevertheless require a certain technology.

Choose a tool for a virtual event in accordance to the specific needs of the event (audio, video, document sharing platform, etc.). Though there are many tools available to organise a virtual meeting, here are some that have been assessed and are recommended:

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_web_conferencing_software
- http://www.webconferencing-test.com/en/webconference_home.html
- http://webconferencing.org/

Provide clear information about the tool to be used for the virtual event and, if possible, train the participants how to use the tool before the event.

On the day of the event, check that all the material is working before it actually starts..

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2. Venue

What are the standards to choose an appropriate venue for an event? Which considerations should we take into account? Mobility and energy efficiency are the first to come up when talking about locations for green events. If it is not possible to avoid the meeting/event, the venue should obey the following indications to minimise environmental impact.

2.1 Geographical location

An appropriate venue should be located in an area that is easy to access by the participants and staff; it can be done by selecting well-served cities or pavilions. It also has to be as easily-accessible as possible by public transportation.

The dimensions

Larger places require larger amounts of energy for cooling, heating, illuminating, etc. For this reason, to overestimate the dimension of the building requirements will considerably affect the use of resources. The size has to be in accordance with the number of attendants.

Environmental standards

Internal environmental management of the venue has to be taken into account to prioritise which one to use, among others. The implementation of standards involving sustainable practices such as ISO14001, or other relevant internal standards, is one of the best indicators to ensure the involvement of the venue in greening the event.
If no standard is implemented, a manager should be designated to be in charge of the sustainable management of the site during the event.

2.2 Managing Services

Energy /Water

The amount of energy /water could be reduced by choosing energy efficient buildings. In addition, to save energy cooling and heating recommendations should be applied, such as maintaining the temperature between 20-22 °C, using electrical efficient appliances or low-energy light bulbs, all of which will have a positive effect.

Waste

From small cloths and napkins to flyers, the amount of waste generated could be decreased by establishing and communicating the event's sustainability commitment from the earliest stage. Furthermore, providing recycling points at strategic locations and ensuring that garbage collectors will pick up and dispose of the separately collected waste in an appropriate and sustainable way should also be implemented.

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Venue Guidelines

2. Venue Recommendations
Preference should be given to venues that are certified with a recognised environmental management system possibly a recognised green building rating system and in line with the ISO14001 standards and other related standards.
The venue should have an environmental policy and action plan, ideally covering green procurement, energy, catering services, water, transportation and waste. These issues should be dealt in detail in specific management programmes with an accent put on energy saving, water conservation and waste reduction.
Staff should be acquainted with environmental duties, for instance through training courses.
The location should have good access (ideally within walking distance) to the main public transport connections and the city centre.
The neighbouring area of the venue should include hotels where participants and speakers can stay or the venue itself should provide accommodation.
If possible, all waste produced at the venue (e.g. paper, plastic, metal, organic) should be sorted at source and sufficient, well-marked bins should be provided in both participant and staff areas.
It should be possible to regulate the temperature within the building, in particular per meeting room. Meeting rooms should also be well insulated and not heated to above 20°C, or cooled to more than 6 degrees below the outside temperature.
Preference should be given to venues designed in taking into account green building standards, for instance buildings including high insulation and efficient heating and cooling systems, designed to maximise the use of daylight (meeting rooms, coffee areas, lunch areas and exhibition areas), supplied with green electricity and including energy efficient lighting as well as water-saving appliances in kitchens and toilets.
Offsetting of CO_2 emissions resulting from the building's lighting and heating/cooling should be included in the organiser's expenses.

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3. Accommodation

Participants who are not living close to the meeting will need to have accommodation. In some cases, organisers provide the place or make recommendations. When choosing or advising a place, similar standards as for the event place need to be taken into account.

Venues that follow an environmental planning or posses the ISO 14001 certification have to be favoured.

The accommodation has to be close to the event's location and/or well served by public transport. Other mobility initiatives, such as providing cycles or recommendations to use public transportation, are also a plus when choosing such a place.

The degree of sustainability in the accommodations services is also a point to scrutinize in the selection of one. An efficient energy system with, for example, auto switch-off lights in corridors and rooms, or cooling saving policies, is recommended. Water saving in toilet amenities, selective waste collection systems and policies to reduce having to clean furniture is advisable.

Places where "green management" is established as a priority in their actions and publicity is recommended to ensure a green accommodation. It also requires the involvement of the staff for proper management.

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3. Accommodation Recommendations
Preference should be given to accommodations certified with recognised environmental management system.
The accommodation should have an environmental policy and action plan, ideally covering sustainable procurement, energy saving, catering services, water, transportation, waste, and communication to guests. These issues should be dealt in detail in specific management programmes with an accent put on energy saving, water conservation and waste reduction.
Staff should be acquainted with their environmental duties, for instance through training courses.
The accommodation should be located close to public transportation and conference facilities (preferably within walking distance).
The accommodation should provide information on guest rooms about the green aspects of the accommodation to inform and encourage guests' participation. For instance, guests should have the option of no second-day sheet and towel change to save laundry energy and water. Guests and staff should be encouraged to reduce water use and turn off lights and other energy consuming devices with well-located signs.
Energy efficient light-bulbs and systems should be standard. Moreover, lighting levels should be set to provide the minimum necessary for comfort, safety and accessibility. The use of natural light and ventilation when possible should be promoted.
Hotel rooms should be well insulated and not heated to above 20°C, or cooled to more than 6 degrees below the outside temperature.
Facilities should be equipped with water-saving devices (e.g., tap and shower flow regulators; automatic shut-offs for faucets and showers; low-flush and dual-flush toilets).
Water-using fixtures and pipes should be properly insulated and have a regular maintenance programme to repair leaks.

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5. Catering

Ensuring sustainable catering/hotel services could substantially improve the event's sustainability. It is a basic and very direct way to promote the meeting as sustainable, and also a tasty way to convince and involve participants in the process.

5.1 Sustainable food

Sustainable food could be defined as: organic, seasonal, local, from fair trade origin and healthy. It is difficult to make sure that the nourishment will comply with all the criteria but the objective of sustainable meals will be satisfied by taking into account most of them. Sometimes, organic or seasonal choices are expensive; however concession solutions can help to green the catering, for example, by ensuring 20% of organic products.

Organic

Organic products are those that are manufactured/grown by avoiding the use of chemicals, fertilisers, pesticides, and medications, as established by a recognised certification. These products are healthier for consumers and, in addition, especially protect the environment.

Regional

These products are local, grown and manufactured in the neighbourhood of the event's location. They do not only reduce the carbon footprint inherent to imported manufactured products (due to transport) but help to develop the local economy.

Seasonal

Choosing seasonal fruits and vegetables improves the energy savings of the products' processing.

Fair Trade products

For products such as coffee, chocolate or sugar, that often come from developing countries where fair remuneration in farms is not ensured, choosing fair trade products will help to ensure ethical concerns and sustainable ideals in organising events.

Healthy

Healthy menus, equitable portions between nutrients and enough variety are essential in preparing catering and contribute to a positive image of an event.

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5.2 Waste reduction/management

In addition to providing food, managing this food is usually the responsibility of the catering service/company. To achieve a high sustainability standard in food management, particularly to avoid waste, the following elements have to be taken into account:

Waste reduction

Over-packing has to be avoided as much as possible, for example by not choosing individual packs, or providing reusablecups and spoons for coffees. Moreover, refillable bottles can be a good alternative to single use packaging. If reusable containers are not available, biodegradable or recycled plastics should be the preferred material.

The right amount of food per person has to be calculated, in order to avoid an overestimation of the food quantity required and consequently to prevent food waste.

Waste Collection

When choosing a catering company, the event's organiser has to make sure that waste collection obeys the standards for selective collection. Agreements with organisations that reuse or recycle food wastage must also be considered and favoured when choosing the catering.

Training/Raising Awareness with staff

Staff members working in catering should be aware of concerns and solutions regarding sustainable catering.

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5. Catering Recommendations

Seasonal products should be the main constituents of dishes in the menu, along with locally grown products and drinks.

When possible, food goods have to be certified with an ecological standard or label. Furthermore organically produced food should also represent a significant percentage of the supply.

Fair trade products, especially tea, chocolate and coffee, could also be an option when there is enough budget to accept higher prices.

Drinking water provided in bottles should be avoided; instead, tap water and coffees served in carafes/jugs/refillable bottles must be favoured.

The number of invitees attending the catering should be known so that providers can foresee the appropriate amount of food and food waste will be lower.

Some materials and disposable items should be avoided, such as aluminium foils. Furthermore, as a first and preferred option, plates, cutlery or glassware should be reusable.

When disposable items are the only solution, recyclable or biodegradable materials, such as plant based materials, should be the favoured option.

In general, non-reusable packaging has to be avoided and, when it is not possible, the use of biodegradable or recycled packing should be favoured.

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6. Material and furniture

The bulky material used during an event is mainly furniture at use for the exhibition (stands). In general, it is always better to use furniture made with local materials and by local producers, and to buy products from social economy distributors. To be supplied with sustainable products could be difficult at first, but it is always possible to find good sustainable products for almost every need. Many cleaning products are also used at events, so it is always best they be ecological.

Some general aspects are:

Only purchasing what's necessary. Again, when possible, the organiser should try to dematerialise its actions. If dematerialisation is not possible, the organiser should try to find furniture or goods that have already been used or can be reused in other events or meetings. It can also be a good idea to ask at the event place if the manager has some furniture available.

Promotional stands

Installations and stands are usually the responsibility of an external enterprise. Therefore, the organiser has to ensure that this company uses recyclable and sustainable material, as well as low energy consumption electronic equipment. The organiser also has to ensure that waste management is properly completed after the dissembling the event and that environmental standards will be abided.

For waste management of temporary stands, the organiser must ensure that products are recyclable or reusable, and it is better if the stands could be used for future meetings or events. When designing the stand, selective collection facilities should be considered. Furniture used for the visual aspect of the stand should also be forecasted as sustainable.

Cleaning products

Cleaning products can be dangerous for our health and the environment as chemical components are often released into the air, soil and waste water when 'regular' products used. Sustainable and green products should thus be favoured.

Moreover, single-use cleaning products (wipes, etc.) must be avoided, in order to reduce the amount of waste produced during the event.

Cleaning staff also has to be trained in sustainable practices.

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6. Material Recommendations
Conference/event material when possible has to be reused from other meetings or events.
Choosing local providers will reduce the ecological footprint due to transport.
Social economy has to be present in mind when choosing general furniture and products.
It is preferable to buy sustainable products (recognised with eco-labelling), even when they seem hard to find, as they ensure to be produced according to low energy, efficiency, respectful standards.
When constructing or installing new furniture or stands, always ensure that the material is recyclable. The external enterprise should demonstrate environmental standard's accreditations and waste management should be ensured to use selective collection.
Cleaning products must have eco-friendly accreditations, or at least have low amounts of dangerous content (volatile organic compounds - VOC, phosphorus, corrosive or strongly irritating substances, etc.).
Choose reusable cleaning material rather than single-use material.
Cleaning staff should be trained in sustainable techniques.

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7. Communication

The objective of the following recommendations is to limit communications ecological impact, without compromising the communication process. A key aspect to keep in mind is the dematerialisation of the project's activities: when it is possible, hard copies should be avoided. If it is not possible, eco-friendly products and processes should be favoured.

Paper

The best way to save paper is to avoid its use by replacing it with electronic forms, leaflets and documents. When using paper is necessary, ecological and recyclable paper (not laminated or varnished) should be selected and recto-verso printing should be implemented. When printing documents, low energy printers should be the favoured option as well as avoiding large flat tints that use large amounts of colours.

Promotional Material

It is usual to offer to participants some promotional material such as bags, pens and notebooks. That said, material used for making them should be recyclable and environmental friendly. Organisers have to know which promotional material will be provided to assess their sustainability and also make sure that promotional material is useful and can be reused after the meeting.

Furthermore, organisers have to be aware of the transport cost and the environmental cost of the product and try to make it as low as possible. Priority should be given to products holding an ecological certification and, when possible, fair trade and regional products must be favoured.

Raising Awareness

It is important to notify sustainable standards to all the participants, organising partners and staff. The communication should be internal and external.

Internal

All the collaborators should be made aware of the sustainability commitment and obligations of the meeting; they have to be notified in advance and also the objective of a green event should be explained to them. It is almost impossible to run a 100% green meeting; however this requirement and explanation should improve the event's sustainability by involving together organisers, collaborators and participants.

External

Firstly, the event invitation has to mention that the event will be a green event. Furthermore, once the meeting has started, external visual announcements and verbal communication should also be considered in order to achieve this goal.

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7. Communications Recommendations
When possible printed material should be avoided with each point of contact related with speakers and meetings/communications in advance of the event. Electronic and virtual notifications should be the first option.
The event's registration process, materials and communications in advance of the event should be facilitated by setting up an electronic registration system.
The participants should be informed about the best sustainable practices to implement during the meeting, the so-called "green behaviour". Information about the intention to carry out a green meeting should also be communicated.
The material provided to participants should be strictly evaluated, in order to avoid providing them with unnecessary material.
Banners, posters, etc., should be designed in a way where they may be used again in other meetings. This means avoiding the inclusion of corporative images in the design. The organiser also has to make sure attendees and speakers are aware that any borrowed reusable material has to be given back after the meeting.
Paper used during the event must be recycled.
When printing or copying, always check that the both sides option is used by default. Using colours copies has to be minimised as well.
Regional and equitable products have to be the first option when considering the development of communications material.
Before the event, a choice between hard copies and electronic version of the communication package should be offered.
During the event, in the banners and the logistics speeches, the commitment to make the meeting as a green meeting should be forecasted. Moreover, communication should highlight, in particular, the event's CO_2 impact and the work done to reduce the event's ecological footprint.

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8. Evaluation

At the end of the event, the success of the conference has to be evaluated in terms of sustainability. Using indicators is an objective way to extract conclusions that could be provided to organisations, collaborators and attendants. It is also a way to monitor progress over time.

Some of the indicators could be:

Use of resources

For paper, plastic, water, etc. a comparison between the amount of sustainable resources and the amount of traditional resources could be highlighted (for example tap water litres vs. bottled water litres or ton of recyclable paper vs. non recyclable paper…).

Waste

It is also useful to know the quantity of waste produced, and also the type of waste flows. To this end, the waste management enterprise should undertake a survey.

Distance

Evaluate the average travel distance of attendants, collaborators, and also the transportation used. These indicators will help assess if the sustainable measures implemented for the event had a positive effect in the event's development.

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8. Indicators suggested		
Type of indicator	Applicable Yes/No	*Results*
Number of participants.	☐ ☐	

CO2 emissions (kg): - generated
                  - avoided (please develop)
                  - compensated
	☐ ☐
	☐ ☐
	☐ ☐	

Tonnes of waste generated per participants.	☐ ☐	
Tonnes of recycled waste per participant.	☐ ☐	
Litres of tap water in comparison with bottles of water distributed.	☐ ☐	
Weight (kg) of consumed food.	☐ ☐	

% of: - local and seasonal food
     - ethical food
     - organic food
	☐ ☐
	☐ ☐
	☐ ☐	

Km travelled per participants per transport mode.	☐ ☐	
Energy (kWh) for light, heating and cooling of the venue.	☐ ☐	
Number of participants from outside the events city and staying for 1 or several nights.	☐ ☐	
Number of public transport stops/stations in a distance of 250m.	☐ ☐	
Number of hard copies of communication package distributed.	☐ ☐	
Number of electronic copies of communication package preferred to hard copies.	☐ ☐	

9. Going further

This guide provides essential recommendations and advice to ensure sustainability of your events, but you can go further by having a look at other guides that include more information about the reduction of environmental impacts with events. Moreover, additional information regarding greenhouse gas (GHG) offsetting will help you to reach carbon neutrality. These lists are non-exhaustive.

Other guides

The following links allow you to find out more information to make your event even greener.

- UNEP's "Green Meeting Guide":
http://www.unep.fr/shared/publications/pdf/DTIx1141xPA-GreenMeetingGuide.pdf

- Guide from Bruxelles Environnement on "Improving access to big events" (in French or Dutch):
http://documentation.bruxellesenvironnement.be/documents/Guide_Prof_Mobilite_evenement_FR.PDF

- BlueGreen Meetings:
http://www.bluegreenmeetings.org

- UC Santa Barbara's Green Event Planning Guide:
http://sustainability.ucsb.edu/purchasing/docs/pubs/Bridging-the-Gap-Green-Event-Manual.pdf

Compensating carbon emission

It is not always easy to understand how GHG offsetting works and to find a trustable carbon off setter. The following links aim to help you better understand what carbon compensation is and how it works. There is also a link to a catalogue of carbon off setters in Europe (without guarantee of their efficiency) and some CO2 off setters that have already worked with EU events. However, please remember that it is better to reduce GHG (by finding greener solutions) than to compensate them.

- Kick The Habit - A UN guide to climate neutrality:
http://www.unep.org/publications/ebooks/kick-the-habit/Default.aspx?bid=ID0E35BG

- The Greenhouse Gas Protocol:
http://www.ghgprotocol.org

- Carbon providers in Europe:
http://www.carboncatalog.org/providers/europe

- Action Carbone:
http://www.actioncarbone.org

- CO2logic:
http://www.co2logic.com

- Climact:

http://www.climact.com

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