



Sustaining an Industry

*An MPI Foundation Canada
White Paper*

National Meetings Industry Day 2008
April 10, 2008

Vancouver • Edmonton • Calgary • Winnipeg
Toronto • Ottawa • Montreal • Halifax

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Background.....	2
Influence Awards for 2008.....	3
Corporate Social Responsibility.....	4
Why Be Environmentally Sustainable?	4
The Meetings Industry’s Significant Impact	5
The Ripple Effect.....	5
The Advantage of Being Proactive.....	6
A Sustainable Image.....	6
Taking It Beyond Perception	7
Clients Seek Environmentally Friendly Locations.....	8
Consumers Demand Environmental Initiatives	8
Building on a Foundation.....	9
Excluding Exclusion: The Importance of Pan-Organizational Support	9
Attitude Shifts	9
Labour Market Shortages	10
Partnerships are Critical.....	11
How to Become More Environmentally Sustainable	11
Using Internet Resources.....	11
Reducing the Carbon Footprint.....	12
Embracing Onsite Technology	13
Increasing the Number of Environmentally Sustainable Venues.....	14
Attracting Clients	15
Generating Client Relationships	15
Marketing Beyond Environmental Sustainability: Creating an Experience	16
Advertising Environmental Sustainability Initiatives	16
Sustaining an Industry.....	17

Introduction

On April 10, 2008, National Meetings Industry Day (NMID) events held at eight separate locations across Canada were united by their focus on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and environmentally sustainable meetings.

Participants in the various meetings heard that:

- Economic and environmental sustainability are intertwined, and the combination of the two will be a key preoccupation for meetings and events in years to come. The “triple bottom line” of people, planet, and profit transcends the still-lively debate about whether a sustainable meeting costs more to plan and execute, or whether savings achieved in some areas can be applied to other aspects of a more sustainable event. Increasingly, sustainable performance will become an expectation.
- Top-line data on the economic impact of meetings and events underscore the scope of the industry’s responsibility and of its potential contribution to sustainability. During NMID, MPI Foundation Canada announced that the industry had organized 670,000 meetings in 2006, with 70 million participants and more than \$23 billion in direct participant spending.
- By greening its own operations, the meetings industry can serve an important educational role, while exerting influence over a large, diverse supply chain. In Toronto, panelist Anthony Watanabe described conference attendees as “a captive audience, out of their daily routine and their comfort zone, and they’re more receptive. You have an opportunity to excite and educate them and to turn them on to sustainability.”
- The growing sense of urgency and obligation around sustainable meetings can still translate into significant competitive advantages for businesses and destinations that are quick to adapt and adopt. Panelists said facilities can boost their public image and retain employees more effectively by demonstrating a consistent sustainability commitment, as long as the change is genuine and, increasingly, open to third-party verification. In Halifax, panelist Mark Stoiber cited the “six sins of greenwashing” produced by the environmental marketing agency TerraChoice. The list included hidden trade-offs, lack of proof, vagueness, and “lesser-of-two-evil” products like organic cigarettes.
- Ultimately, the green transition will be driven by environmental imperatives, leading to heightened demand from clients and front-line attendees. “Green is the new black,” author Gill Deacon said in Toronto, and “a greener world is around the corner because of this shift.”

- The success of a sustainable meetings initiative depends on organizational support, from senior decision-makers to front-line staff. In Calgary and Montreal, participants heard that a commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR) means understanding how people fit into an organization and maximizing participation in decisions.
- From Toronto to Edmonton to Winnipeg, participants heard that partnerships and a sense of shared vision can drive the transition to sustainable meetings. "It's all about partnering and relationships," Sandra Wood, CMP told the Winnipeg meeting, adding that venues, suppliers, clients, and employers must share the perspective that "it's good for me, good for you, good for us, good for business."
- More broadly, greener meetings may challenge some of the industry's preconceived notions about hospitality and abundance. In Ottawa, panelist David Berman discussed an "illusion of comfort and high standards" that can lead to needlessly wasteful practices. Keynote speaker Thomas Homer-Dixon called for a fundamental shift in focus, from the inputs that support a meeting to the increased knowledge and enhanced networks that become the outputs of a well-orchestrated event.
- Increasingly, sustainable meetings will merely be "the price of entry" for a successful business, panelist Marty Avery told the Calgary meeting. "To build strategy that is green is not enough," she said. "You need to create a green experience within the meeting experience." At several of the meetings, speakers emphasized the need to give participants more value for their dollar, whether they attend primarily to gain knowledge or soak up the onsite experience. Much of the discussion centred on specific sustainability initiatives that had been demonstrated at NMID meetings and could be replicated at other events.

Background

NMID is an annual event that has expanded since its humble beginnings in 1997 and is now celebrated by all Canadian chapters of Meeting Professionals International (MPI). The event highlights the impact of the meetings industry on communities and businesses; it is about the power of meetings to engage and catalyze change socially, intellectually, environmentally, and economically. Meeting professionals cannot underestimate their influence in ensuring that their events achieve their strategic goals and help sustain the organizations that host them.

In a video shown at each meeting, Angie Pfeifer, chair of MPI's 2007–2008 board of directors, said NMID would "raise awareness of the power of meetings at work and in our community."

Pfeifer announced top-line results of the MPI Foundation's first Canadian impact study, which highlights the meetings industry's significant contribution to the Canadian economy. With

670,000 meetings in 2006, more than \$23 billion in direct participant spending, and 70 million participants, the Canadian meetings industry is “mature and vibrant.”

The focus on CSR, Pfeifer said, is “a recognition that we are intertwined with both society and Earth.” The meetings industry must take responsibility for its actions by embracing the “triple bottom line” concept of “people, planet, and profit.” Pfeifer encouraged every MPI member to be a leader in CSR. The theme of CSR underscored discussions in each chapter on topics ranging from creating and advertising an environmentally sustainable image, the foundation required to build a sustainable industry, the “nitty-gritty” of incorporating sustainability principles, and attracting clients.

Influence Awards for 2008

As part of the local NMID events individual chapters recognized members of their communities with the Influence Award, sponsored again this year by Tourism Toronto, which is designed to reach into the community and raise awareness of the meetings industry. The award acknowledges an individual or an organization who has contributed to the success of the industry.

The following businesses won this year’s Influence Awards:

- British Columbia: Vancouver Downtown Business Improvement Association’s Downtown Ambassadors Program
- Edmonton: Festival City in a Box
- Calgary: Calgary Airport Authority
- Manitoba: Heartland International Travel and Tours
- Toronto: Meetings & Incentive Travel
- Ottawa: His Worship Jim Durrell, a former mayor of Ottawa
- Montreal: Tourisme Montréal
- Atlantic Canada: Pier 21

Many of the recipients were responsible for furthering environmental and economic sustainability in their respective cities.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Why Be Environmentally Sustainable?

In Ottawa, Montreal, and Winnipeg, speakers offered compelling reasons for environmentally sustainable meetings.

A key reason to host sustainable meetings is that conserving energy and reducing waste save money, said Tom Price, director of sales and marketing for Ottawa Tourism. In Montreal, Mélanie McDonald said she agreed. A project coordinator for ecologically responsible events with the *Réseau québécois des femmes en environnement*, she said the belief that an ecologically responsible event is more expensive than a conventional event is a myth.

Speaking in Winnipeg, Sandra Wood, annual meeting manager with the Canadian Medical Association, had a slightly different message. She said it is not easy to determine if environmentally sustainable meetings are more or less expensive, but even if there are slightly increased costs, "it's worth it"; the cost of doing a sustainable event outweighs the cost of doing a non-sustainable one.

In Calgary, Marty Avery, founder of What If?, said CSR is a response to the all-consuming importance of profit. "The power of CSR is the power to harness the best ability of our city, our association, our company, and ourselves in service of something better and bigger than profit," she said.

Sustainable development is founded on the principle of ethical behaviour, said Jacques Blanchet, eco-advisor at the *Bureau de normalisation du Québec* (BNQ). Speaking in Montreal, he defined sustainable development as growth that responds to the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Paule Genest, president of the public relations organization PGPR, said she agreed. She stated that becoming ecologically responsible and adopting sustainable development practices is more than an economic rationale: it is a social responsibility.

In Toronto, Anthony Watanabe, president and chief executive officer (CEO) of The Innovolve Group, encouraged participants to think about the social dimensions of their environmental choices, such as fair trade and labour issues. "Think of the community you're involved in and how your choices affect it," he said.

Becoming environmentally sustainable can also be a matter of personal job satisfaction. In Halifax, Marc Stoiber, founder of Change Advertising, explained that he chose to market more

sustainable products not because he is “an environmentalist tree hugger,” but because sustainable products bring something truly innovative to the marketplace.

Wood summarized the many advantages of pursuing sustainability. Planners, venues, and their suppliers enjoy mutual benefits, including an improved green image. Strengthened and sustainable financial rewards are attained through improved efficiencies, streamlined processes, and reduced waste. And, finally, partnering for sustainability is the right thing to do; it leads to environmental benefits, which means everyone profits.

The Meetings Industry’s Significant Impact

Participants were pleased that the impact study results released by Pfeifer underscore the major contribution the meetings industry makes to the Canadian economy. The industry thus has a special role to play in embracing sustainability

MPI Ottawa Chapter President Darlene Kelly-Stewart said, “Meetings and events actually do have a measurable economic impact.” Mike Fitzpatrick, general manager of the Shaw Conference Centre, said the economic impact of the meetings industry in Edmonton is especially pronounced because of the current economic boom.

Robert Kawamoto, president of the Toronto Chapter of MPI, said, “Our industry has a big voice; we are a big business.” As a result, the meetings industry is capable of making a large impact when it works towards change. Watanabe cited the statistics introduced by Pfeifer, adding, “There is a responsibility for our industry to get outside.”

The Ripple Effect

By choosing sustainability practices and using the economic clout this brings with it, the meetings industry can produce a ripple effect. In Ottawa, Price said a sustainable meeting helps educate participants, organizers, and suppliers about the benefits of becoming more sustainable. Showcasing environmental technologies can provide companies with increased business opportunities and stimulate organizations to institute environmental protection measures more broadly.

“Seventy billion dollars in procurement spending” is “a lot of influence to help green the supply chain,” said Watanabe in Toronto. Conference participants are “a captive audience, out of their daily routine and their comfort zone, and they’re more receptive. You have an opportunity to excite and educate them and to turn them on to sustainability.”

In Winnipeg, Wood said long-standing relationships with suppliers might be affected if they are not considered green enough. "It helps to nudge [suppliers] along," she said.

The *Sustainable Development Act* in Quebec enforces this ripple effect. Speaking in Montreal, Blanchet said this regulation obligates organizations to develop partnerships with other organizations involved in sustainable development and to require that their suppliers adopt appropriate practices. This regulation also calls for sustainable principles to be included in calls for tender.

The Advantage of Being Proactive

Meeting planners who are ahead of the curve will be better prepared for "the greener world" described by sustainable living author Gill Deacon. In Toronto, she said, "There will come a time when it will be funny and perhaps alarming to look back at the way we've been living and operating."

In Ottawa, Thomas Homer-Dixon, the George Ignatieff Chair at the University of Toronto's Trudeau Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, said proactive meeting planners will have a comparative advantage within the industry. "Firms that succeed," he said, "will be adaptable and will offer a menu of alternatives other than conventional meetings." Graphic designer David Berman said he agreed. The world is facing an environmental crisis, he said, and to continue to exist, meeting professionals must know how to plan more eco-friendly events. Although electronic meetings are one solution, in-person meetings cannot be eliminated, and so planners must be able to reduce the carbon footprint of those meetings. Berman dared participants to change their professional world.

A Sustainable Image

Having an environmentally sustainable image can provide meeting planners with a number of benefits. In Ottawa, Price said sustainable and socially responsible organizations not only have a positive public image, but they can also better attract and retain employees.

Ken Fiske, vice-president of tourism, events, and motion pictures for the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation, said Edmonton is "on the radar worldwide," in part due to its remarkable economic growth. Because the city's high-profile expansion is linked directly to the oil industry, it is important for Edmonton to position its growth in a positive, environmentally responsible light. The city thus has a responsibility to encourage more sustainable initiatives, Fiske said.

Taking It Beyond Perception

In Halifax, Stoiber said it is important for businesses and organizations to act in an environmentally conscious manner if they want to rebrand themselves as sustainable. In many cases, that means seeking third-party verification, such as organic certification; having an environmental agency audit the company; or partnering with a non-profit environmental agency toward a cause. “Greenwashing” refers to the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service. Stoiber listed the “six sins of greenwashing” as published by the environmental marketing agency TerraChoice. The list includes hidden trade-offs, lack of proof, vagueness, and “lesser-of-two-evil” products like organic cigarettes.

At the Ottawa meeting, Price suggested using Internet resources, including National Geographic’s Green Guide (www.thegreenguide.com) and *Green Living* magazine (www.greenlivingonline.com) to become better educated and help guard against greenwashing. He said planners might wish to establish a procurement policy that gives preference to third-party verified products and services.

“If you have a commitment to deliver your meeting in an environmentally sustainable way, be committed to it,” said Gavin McCaffery, director of catering and conferences at the Fairmont Winnipeg Hotel. “Don’t let it be a smokescreen.” Wood said she agreed and that regulations and standards are being introduced worldwide, but until they are in place in Canada, meeting planners need to voluntarily comply.

Speaking in Montreal, Blanchet said certification helps individuals and organizations to validate what they are doing and to communicate the effectiveness of their programs. He discussed several types of international standards and referred the audience to the BNQ website (www.bnq.qc.ca) for a list of other standards. Blanchet said over 400 people are working on a set of guidelines for social responsibility. In addition, an important part of practicing sustainable development is the process of reporting and communicating that information. Blanchet compared sustainable development reports to financial statements: work must be verified, and organizations must prove their claims. The Global Reporting Initiative provides guidelines for what should be included in a sustainable development report.

Also in Montreal, McDonald said the organization called Ecologically Responsible Events (www.evenementecoresponsable.com) can certify events as being environmentally responsible.

Clients Seek Environmentally Friendly Locations

Glenn Duncan, director of meetings, business travel, and events for Edmonton Tourism, said proposals to potential clients need to be pitched in increasingly creative ways, and sustainable meetings are one method of creatively attracting clients to the city. Sustainable meetings are an “extremely hot topic, and I’m proud to be a part of a city that is ahead of the game,” he said.

Pierre Bellerose, vice-president of public relations, product research, and development at Tourism Montreal, said that in 2007, Montreal became the first city in the world to sign the National Geographic Society’s *Geotourism Charter*. As a result of this accreditation, an increasing number of associations in the United States became interested in Montreal. Bellerose said he became aware that ethics are an important factor for clients when choosing destinations. As Blanchet said, sustainable development is founded on the principle of ethical behaviour.

In Vancouver, Matthew Coyne, executive director of Tourism Burnaby, said the 2010 Olympics will be “the greenest and most sustainable games ever,” which will “do a lot for our reputation.”

Consumers Demand Environmental Initiatives

In Halifax, Stoiber said 90% of Americans consider themselves environmentally conscious, which prompted some audience disbelief. Berman echoed this in Ottawa, saying that Americans now see climate change as affecting them in real life and are, therefore, reconsidering their priorities.

Speaking in Toronto, Deacon said she has noticed a marked shift in mainstream attitudes toward the environmental cause. “Green is the new black,” she said, and “a greener world is around the corner because of this shift.” Watanabe said he agreed, adding that an increasing number of celebrities are touting the environmental cause and bringing sustainability into the mainstream consciousness of Canadians.

At the Winnipeg meeting, Wood said the trend toward CSR is paralleled by a shift in broader social thought, consumers are aware of impacts on their communities, carbon offsetting is becoming popular, and people increasingly seek ethical investments.

Building on a Foundation

Excluding Exclusion: The Importance of Pan-Organizational Support

Although an environmentally sustainable meeting can save money, being “environmentally superior” can also be more costly than traditional meetings, said Price in Ottawa. Because of this financial uncertainty, when planning a sustainable meeting it is best to have organization wide support. Wood said much the same in Winnipeg, and noted that sustainable meetings’ success is based on a number of factors, including having a supportive relationship with one’s own staff. Alex Graham, president and CEO of Tourism Calgary, said everyone needs to be part of a discussion about environmental issues.

Bruce Graham, president and CEO of Calgary Economic Development, said “the first goal” of building a community around environmental principles “is focusing on people and community.”

In Calgary, Avery said a commitment to CSR requires a better understanding of how people fit into an organization. To create workplaces where employees thrive, people need to know that they matter. In Montreal, Blanchet said sustainable development includes involving a greater number of individuals in the decision-making process; inclusion is an aspect of sustainable development itself and not only a means to ensure success. He said sustainable development requires change from within the organization, and he emphasized the importance of consulting with all of the parties involved. Sustainable development only excludes exclusion, he said.

Attitude Shifts

Becoming more environmentally sustainable does not merely involve adopting a checklist; it involves a shift in attitude. In Ottawa, Berman said attitude is one of the barriers hotels face in becoming environmentally friendly. The perception exists that to be hospitable and to create the illusion of comfort and high standards, everything must be plentiful. For example, if one asks for a refill of orange juice, the server will bring a new glass rather than fill the one already in use. It is essential to “choose a new attitude” to facilitate more sustainable approaches. A participant said the attitudes of both guests and hotel staff must change.

In Ottawa, Homer-Dixon said the meetings industry must change its measure of success from “what it procures to support its meetings” to the outcomes of meetings. Rather than gauging

achievement by the quantity of resources offered, planners should assess outcomes such as information dissemination and stronger professional networks.

To practice sustainable development, organizations must be prepared to do things differently, said Blanchet in Montreal. Because sustainable development is inclusive, the director of a company must accept the fact that she or he will lose control over the organization, and the leaders must demonstrate sincerity and prove their humility.

In Calgary, Avery said that as global consumers, it is important to “think about people in different ways.” She stressed the importance of being aware of humanity’s relationship with the planet in the business atmosphere where profit rules. The “boomer generation is now yearning for something more,” and the shift to CSR can satisfy those needs.

Labour Market Shortages

The labour force issues discussed at last year’s NMID panels were still a hot topic. In Calgary, Bruce Graham said the biggest change he has seen over the past few years is the challenge to attract and maintain the workforce. A commitment to CSR includes considering how staff and employees can be attracted and retained by companies, stated Avery. If companies become more sustainable in ways that demonstrate or reinforce the idea of good corporate citizenship, this can be attractive to employees.

A participant in Vancouver described the challenges of “attracting and retaining quality people.” David Gazley, vice-president of meeting and convention sales at Tourism Vancouver, suggested that companies worried about retention consider a compensation review to ensure that employees “don’t leave because they can get a higher salary as a tradesman.” Rose Ironside, managing director of Advance Group Conference Management, added that the generation currently entering the workplace has different demands. “To retain those employees,” she said, “it’s not just pay, it’s also a flexible work schedule, and the comfort to take a day off when they need it. When you meet them more than halfway, they’ll come the rest of the way with you.” Charles Gauthier, executive director of the Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association, said that to retain employees, modifications have been made to the required uniform, employees are recognized for accomplishments, and he is “not a ‘hard nose’ about arriving on time.”

Gazley said the colleges in Vancouver with strong hospitality programs are helping youth to consider the industry “as not a part-time job but a career.” Jocelyn Jenkins, general manager of the Victoria Conference Centre, said careers in conventions need to be “demystified,” and youth considering career options need to be educated about what a career in the meetings industry

involves. Coyne added that hospitality services “extend beyond the tourism industry” as far as the individuals encountered by meeting participants when they first arrive at the airport or at the border.

A participant in Vancouver said “human capital” is one of the pillars of the MPI Foundation, and this issue is being addressed at a global level.

Partnerships are Critical

Planning and attracting an environmentally sustainable meeting depends upon partnerships, with everyone involved, and a shared vision of sustainability. In Toronto, Watanabe said that “partnership and plurality of perspective” are necessary for success and that planning a more sustainable meeting can benefit from interdisciplinary partnerships. Speaking in Winnipeg, Wood said she agreed and that delivering a more sustainable event “is all about partnering and relationships.” Green success, she said, includes having a supportive partnership with the venue, suppliers, and one’s client or employer. It is important to establish an “it’s good for me, good for you, good for us, good for business” approach.

In Edmonton, Duncan said partnerships with other local “champions” can lead to an increase in successful bids. Edmonton Tourism has partnered with the University of Alberta, the Shaw Conference Centre, and Northlands. With the Gateway Cities initiative, Edmonton Tourism “joins forces with Calgary to entice business to the province.”

How to Become More Environmentally Sustainable

Using Internet Resources

At the Ottawa meeting, Price hosted a session on using web-based tools and technological resources to help companies and events become more environmentally sustainable. Web collaboration, he said, facilitates planning and strategy development. Websites such as www.spaceshare.com and www.spacesaver.com help delegates coordinate and share transportation and accommodations. Web information on environmental standards and policies supports food services and other functions, and conference websites facilitate the provision of materials to delegates.

The Internet has changed from a “content collector” to a “content aggregator,” said Price. Tools are now available that gather information into one location, such as MeetingsEasy, which offers information on more than 300 Ottawa meeting and convention suppliers. This Ottawa initiative

is set to expand across the country. Electronic requests for proposals are an efficient, paperless way to address procurement. Finally, the social media model provides many ways to facilitate communication, such as email, Internet forums, instant messaging, blogs, wikis, podcasts, and message boards.

In Winnipeg, Wood identified a future trend in environmentally sustainable meetings: the use of “Web 2.0-rich” media, such as Facebook and Second Life, to deliver some meetings and events.

She highly recommended the Green Meeting Industry Council’s website. Its owners are meeting planners at the forefront of the sustainability movement in the industry. She also introduced a soon-to-be-launched online magazine, *The Green Meeting*, dedicated to the coverage of environmentally sustainable events. McCaffery said websites such as www.seachoice.org help the Fairmont Winnipeg identify fish products that are friendlier to the environment.

Participants in Toronto were already familiar with the advantages provided by the Internet. Using electronic voting devices, participants said they could easily find the Internet resources they needed to plan environmentally sustainable meetings.

Reducing the Carbon Footprint

Greening a meeting and a business is a complex endeavour, with an impressive number of options available. Speaking in Winnipeg, Wood asked, “How far do you go?” In Montreal, Bellerose recommended that every organization create a more sustainable office guide and a permanent environmental committee, because making an organization more sustainable is an ongoing process.

Many aspects of the event planning process allow ecologically responsible choices to be made. In Ottawa, Price outlined key areas of action: electronic sourcing and site selection, electronic communications and documentation dissemination, paper reduction, coordination with presenters and suppliers to “reduce and recycle,” facilities arrangements, food and beverage arrangements, transportation, and accommodations. McDonald gave a similar list in Montreal but added the management of residual materials.

In Ottawa, Homer-Dixon provided many specific examples of how the meetings industry can reduce its carbon footprint in these aspects of event planning. Examples included reducing material consumption by eliminating advance mailings; reducing onsite consumption of energy through more environmentally sustainable lighting, heating, and energy; and reducing the effects of travel through the use of public transportation, purchasing offsets, and travelling less.

The topic of increasing the number of electronic meetings was discussed frequently as a trend in greening the meetings industry. In Ottawa, a participant expressed concern that a reduction in the number of meetings would result in a loss of personal contact. Berman said that although he understood the growing emphasis on electronic meetings, he has travelled to conferences that have changed his life, and it is important to realize there is a place for both approaches. Homer-Dixon suggested that reduced travelling might actually benefit “social instinct”: structures would have to be created to deliver the same benefits as in-person meetings, and electronic meetings could serve to “reduce the frenetic dynamism in life.”

Berman recommended that planners use more sustainable meeting tactics that are both visible, such as recyclable name badges with the agenda printed on the reverse side, and invisible, such as recycled paper with vegetable ink. Participants supported the suggestion to eliminate conference bags, observing that they are usually “stuffed with stuff.” A participant said she had attended a conference in Quebec City where the delegates were given beautiful bags that could be donated to needy schoolchildren at the end.

Eliminating plastic water bottles is “Green Meeting 101,” said Watanabe in Toronto. He encouraged meeting planners to source foods locally and to avoid wasting excess food. The Metro Toronto Convention Centre donates 2,000 pounds of food every year to Second Harvest—food that would otherwise go to compost. This kind of sustainability measure is not only environmentally responsible but also provides a significant social benefit. As Genest said, being environmentally sustainable is a social responsibility.

In Toronto, Deacon encouraged meeting planners to look for “fairware”: meeting “swag” that involves items such as organic cotton T-shirts or non-polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pens.

Karel Mayrand, co-founder and director of research and consulting at Unisféra International Centre, told Montreal participants that 80% of the environmental impact of tourism is due to transportation. The reduction of transportation should be the first priority, after which compensation through the purchase of carbon offsets or credits is the best alternative.

The NMID meetings themselves were made eco-friendly with, in Montreal, pens manufactured from a biodegradable cornstarch product and, in Toronto, journals made of 100% recycled materials.

Embracing Onsite Technology

In Vancouver, Ironside said, “You have to embrace technology.” Not only can it help make the meeting more environmentally sustainable, but it is also “a time saver.” Registration can be conducted much more efficiently, and up-to-date status reports can be generated instantly. In

addition, clients can generate reports without the assistance of the meeting planner. Ironside said there is some resistance to the use of technology because clients are skeptical of its effectiveness.

Speaking in Ottawa, CheckinWiz President Eric Dormer described the company's two-part communication tool at www.checkinwiz.com. The tool allows travellers to book a hotel room and then use any web-connected device to update their arrival time to eliminate long wait times at the registration desk. It also provides an event calendar and a countdown timer to keep track of guest arrivals.

The expanded Vancouver Convention & Exhibition Centre, set to be completed in spring 2009, will have an onsite business centre and wireless Internet access, among other new technology. "Delegates are expecting this, not requesting it," a participant said. Because of the technology that will be installed for the Olympics, "we'll be leaders in terms of technology among convention centres in the world," she said.

Increasing the Number of Environmentally Sustainable Venues

Choosing an environmentally sustainable venue is an important element in planning a more sustainable meeting. Many venues across the country are already engaged in environmental initiatives, and many more are set to become involved. Participants in each chapter were proud to discuss the past accomplishments and future plans of venues in their city.

The Quebec City Convention Centre provides an internal waste management program, has a commitment to sustainable development, and is currently undergoing Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification for its existing buildings. In Ottawa, the Brookstreet Hotel has a number of strong sustainability initiatives. The planned Ottawa Congress Centre expansion includes many environmental initiatives, which 2008 Influence Award recipient Jim Durrell was instrumental in encouraging. In Winnipeg, McCaffery noted that the Fairmont was at the forefront of environmental stewardship in the hospitality industry. In 1990, Fairmont's Canadian hotels pioneered the Green Partnership Program, consisting of 26,000 "green ambassadors" in 40 resorts around the world who worked to minimize the impacts of meetings on the environment.

Martin Linlove, director of sales at Edmonton's Shaw Conference Centre, said the facility has recently become the first city-operated building to receive Go Green certification. Trish Macdonald, vice-president of business and community development at Northlands in Edmonton, said a number of sustainability strategies have been included in the current expansion, including motion sensor fixtures, upgraded heating and ventilation systems, and

reused or recycled concrete. Joseph Clohessy, general manager of the Calgary Marriott Hotel, said the facility is "looking at ways to initiate more green practices." The design for the Vancouver Convention & Exhibition Centre's expansion incorporates sustainable development principles, and in November 2007, the centre was audited for zero waste.

Attracting Clients

Generating Client Relationships

Every event hosted by a city presents an opportunity to forge relationships with clients and to attract meetings. In Vancouver, Gazley said he hopes the Olympics will present opportunities to establish "long-lasting relationships" with organizations that will be in the city for the Olympics. For example, relationships can be developed with corporate sponsors, and international sporting organizations can be approached to "bring world championships here." Facilitator Chris Olsen described this as a "multiplier effect; start with one event, and go out in many different directions."

This multiplier effect can be seen beyond the original host city. In Vancouver, Jenkins said that with the Vancouver Convention & Exhibition Centre expanding to accommodate larger meetings, Victoria has the opportunity to focus on keeping the small meetings in the province. This can include using the national meetings that are held in Vancouver to approach regional subgroups and encourage them to hold their smaller meetings in Victoria.

In Edmonton, Linlove described the Shaw Conference Centre's innovative Bring Them Home Campaign as a way to attract new clients. This program "makes it easy for people attending other conferences to bring these conferences to Edmonton."

Vancouver's Be a Host program encourages influential people in the city to bring the organization they are affiliated with to Vancouver for a meeting. "It's something of local pride for them," Gazley said, "to show off this facility we're building and to showcase B.C. technology and ability." A participant described it as "looking at the business in your own backyard and expanding it."

New cross-border travel regulations were discussed as an important point to clarify with US clients. In Vancouver, Gazley suggested organizing a session with the Canada Border Services Agency to ensure meeting planners are aware of all the pertinent regulations. Ironside said that as meeting planners, "it's our responsibility to inform clients of all they need to know."

Marketing Beyond Environmental Sustainability: Creating an Experience

In Calgary, Avery said a move from a “knowledge economy” to an “experience economy” has occurred. Making meetings more environmentally sustainable is merely the “the price of entry” for a successful business. “To build strategy that is green is not enough,” she said. “You need to create a green experience within the meeting experience.”

Macdonald said Edmonton’s Northlands uses multimedia marketing techniques to publicize the “experience” offered by the venue.

At the Vancouver meeting, Ironside said delegates are seeking “more value for their dollar” and attending fewer meetings. As a result, “creative marketing is needed to attract delegates.” Advertising the location of a conference is important, as some clients might want to combine a business trip with a vacation. Gauthier said the experience in the public realm of a city is an important attraction for clients. “‘Wayfinding’ is critical,” he said, as is the cleanness and safety of the city.

Advertising Environmental Sustainability Initiatives

Environmental marketing is a “Wild West,” Stoiber said in Halifax. There are no precedents, and companies must be courageous and creative. He pointed to Earth Hour as one example of a lost marketing opportunity: no companies stepped in and used it to their advantage. “We have an hour when we turn off the lights and sit in the dark and do something. Where was Trojan Condoms? Where were the telescope companies?” he asked. In contrast to this, Stoiber cited the partnership between the environmentally conscious Fairmont hotels and the World Wildlife Fund as an example of successful environmentally sustainable branding.

In Winnipeg, Wood said she had communicated sustainability initiatives in a number of ways to her delegates at the last conference she had planned. Menu cards for meals were projected on a screen with a note that 70% of the cuisine was sourced locally, and it was announced in plenary that only one bag of garbage was generated by 600 people attending a dinner and a show.

Event organizers could provide a way for the participants to calculate their greenhouse gas emissions and announce it at the event, suggested McDonald in Montreal. Frédéric Saint-Mleux, an environmental consultant with RCI Environnement, emphasized the importance of visibility and suggested sensitizing participants to sustainability initiatives through measures like large,

brightly coloured recycling containers. In addition, he said, everyone involved in the event must communicate a clear, uniform message about the sustainability initiatives.

In Vancouver, Gazley called green marketing a “double-edged sword.” He said it is fortunate that Vancouver has “a reputation as a green destination.” He said he is hesitant to advertise that, however, because “we don’t want to be seen as another city hopping on the green bandwagon.” Vancouver’s green image “has filtered [through] without us having to do any advertising,” Gazley said.

Sustaining an Industry

Across the country, the message was clear: economic and environmental sustainability are inextricably intertwined, and will remain a primary focus of meetings and events for the foreseeable future. Whether sustainable events cost more to plan and execute, or whether they bring their own cost savings, planners will embrace environmental sustainability and make it an integral part of the planning process. Partnerships and a sense of shared vision can drive the transition to environmentally sustainable meetings.

With the growing recognition of the phenomenal economic impact of meetings and events comes increasing responsibility, and the opportunity to influence and educate at every level of a diverse supply chain. Businesses can seize this opportunity to create competitive advantages, while they serve the “triple bottom line” of people, planet, and profit. Organizations and facilities that demonstrate consistent commitment to sustainability stand to grow and thrive—as long as the change is genuine and open to third-party verification.

Ultimately, environmental imperatives will dictate the need for change, as clients and participants demand a shift in corporate and organizational priorities, from senior management to front-line staff. Current definitions of hospitality, abundance, comfort, and “high standards” will evolve to reflect the fundamental change in focus: clients still demand value for their dollar, but that value is rapidly being redefined to accommodate public awareness of the need to preserve the environment for generations yet to come.