

Corporate Social Responsibility: What You Should Know

A Meeting and Events Industry Primer



What is Corporate Social Responsibility?

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a set of practices that enables organizations to factor the “triple bottom line” of people, planet and profit into their decisions, and take responsibility for the impact on employees, customers, members, the community and the environment. This has been formalized in programs such as the United Nations Global Compact, where businesses voluntarily agree to support ten principles in the areas of human rights, labour, the environment, and anti-corruption.

For decades, the prevailing economic theory has been that companies’ primary role in society was to maximize profit and shareholders’ return. By doing so, they were ensuring the right allocation of resources, the efficiency of markets and the greater good. Today more and more companies are showing that they can contribute to society and build their own prosperity by making their business decisions and performance more sustainable - economically, environmentally, socially and ethically.

Meeting Beyond Green

CSR is about more than just “green meetings”. It means a broad strategy to reduce the environmental impact of meetings and events and increase their social impact, while remaining economically prosperous.

Corporate Social Responsibility does not mean simply giving money to good causes, either, although philanthropy can be an element in a well-rounded CSR program.

Why It Matters to the Meeting and Events Industry

With sustainability becoming a top issue for buying customers and the general public, meeting and event professionals may soon find that their future jobs depend on their ability to introduce sustainable practices onsite that reinforce a wider organizational mission, vision and CSR commitment.

At minimum, sustainable practices have already become a business imperative and, when they are implemented successfully, an important strategic advantage. For some organizations, being sustainable may be the key to business survival.

On an individual level, as these external factors influence the internal actions of organizations, they begin to influence us personally, since those professionals with well-defined and relevant sustainability strategies will be better positioned to survive than those that do not.

A number of factors make CSR and sustainability directly relevant to meetings and events:

- **Environment and Society:** The meetings industry is consistently searching for attractive destinations with excellent services. Meeting planners and participants place a premium on clean cities with safe streets, low crime rates, and beautiful beaches. A successful meeting also depends on local infrastructure - from clean drinking water to a reliable hospital system that will be available in an emergency. By reducing the environmental impact of an event, a CSR program helps a destination sustain the qualities that attracted a meeting in the first place. Community projects can help alleviate social issues in the locations where meeting professionals do business.
- **Social/Moral Obligation:** Meetings and events have the ability to touch our world

in a very direct way, through education and through the direct experience they provide. The convening power translates into a strong moral argument for the meetings industry to be environmentally and socially responsible.

- **Customer Demand:** Customers and clients are asking meeting suppliers to document and demonstrate the environmental and social sustainability of their programs, policies and actions.
- **Business Trend:** Environmental and social responsibility is a powerful business trend, with 86 of the Fortune 100 issuing sustainability reports in 2007, an increase of 48% from 2005.
- **Strategic Asset:** By recognizing the importance of the trend and incorporating it into meetings and events, meeting professionals position themselves as strategic assets within their organizations.

Definitions

BS 8901: British Standard specification for a sustainable event management system. Developed for the London 2012 Olympics, and launched in November 2007, this standard will likely become an international standard under the ISO (International Standards Organization) system.

Carbon Footprint: A measure of the impact of human activities on the environment based on units of carbon dioxide (CO₂), the most common of the greenhouse gases that cause climate change.

Carbon Offset: A financial tool to help organizations (or conferences) balance their carbon footprint by funding projects that reduce or eliminate carbon emissions elsewhere. The theory is that since climate change is a global problem, a reduction in emissions anywhere in the world will serve the purpose. A project is known as “carbon-neutral” if it reduces its carbon footprint to the greatest extent possible and offsets the rest. Offsets should be Gold Standard approved.

Carbon Philanthropy: A non-profit alternative to carbon offsetting, giving the consumer a choice of initiatives to address the causes of climate change. The conversion is not to units of carbon dioxide; instead it uses a simple monetary conversion. Therefore, it is easier for many buyers to evaluate the relative merits of their contributions.

Clean Development Mechanism (CDM): A carbon offset that funds an energy efficient or renewable energy project in the developing world to offset emissions in the developed world. Approved by the Kyoto Protocol, the CDM is designed to maximize the environmental benefit of an investment in carbon offsets.

Ecological Footprint: A measure of the amount of land and water it takes to create the goods and services needed for an event (or other activity) and to absorb the waste it generates

Event Miles/Kilometers: The total number of miles/kilometers traveled by delegates, staff, speakers, food, etc. to the event. Event miles/kilometers can then be converted into equivalent carbon emissions for measuring, reporting and offsetting

Gold Standard: The only independent standard for evaluating carbon offsets.

Green Meetings: Incorporation of environmental considerations within meetings and events to minimize their negative impact on the environment. (Definition provided by the Convention Industry Council)

Greenwashing: Misleading the consumer about the positive environmental benefits of a product or service

Locovore: Those who prefer to source food within a radius of 100 miles/160 kilometers

Sustainability: Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same.

Sustainable Meeting/Event: A sustainable meeting or event incorporates economic, environmental and societal considerations. It simultaneously supports the host organization’s prosperity, minimizes its environmental footprint, and has a positive and lasting human impact on its stakeholders and host community

Sustainable Event Strategy: A sustainable event strategy is global in nature and powerfully shaped by local factors including culture, infrastructure, and environment

The Triple Bottom Line: Referred to as People, Planet and Profit (or Prosperity), the Triple Bottom Line brings together the elements of social, environmental and economic sustainability that make up a corporate social responsibility program

Making a Start: Basic Responsibility Strategies for Meetings and Events

Here are some strategies to help you introduce a basic responsibility program for meetings and events.

Step 1: Get informed.

a. Research your organization/client’s existing policies and programs in this area. If you work for a small organization, you probably already know where to find them. In a larger organization, you may want to check with the corporate responsibility officer, public affairs, governance, or environmental governance for any existing programs that the meeting or event can and should support.



b. Determine how the meeting or event can support existing policy and programs. If your organization or client commonly supports a specific charity or community group, how can the event tie in? If the organization has set out to reduce waste by 20%, how can you meet or exceed that goal for your meeting?

Step 2: Use Available Tools.

Take a look at what other organizations have done. Attend a sustainability session at a conference, or log on to a webinar. Visit www.mpiweb.org/sustainability for case studies of MPI events and other resources.

Step 3: Activate.

Evaluate the potential impact of the event in each location and generate possible alternatives. Ensure that you include sustainability criteria in your request for proposal.

Destination and Event Selection

Destination	Location 1	Location 2	Location 3
Recycling facilities?			
Public transportation from airport?			
Close to majority of attendees?			
Transportation			
How many people travelling?			
Options (Rail/Air/Car)			
Public transport from airport to DT?			
Accommodation			
Environmental policies?			
Linen/towel re-use?			
Energy conservation?			
Water conservation?			
Recycling?			
Community support?			
Meeting Venue			
Environmental policy?			
Recycling?			
Environmental Procurement?			
Energy conservation?			
Water conservation?			
Community support?			

Event Logistics Evaluation

(This is not an exhaustive list, but is intended as a general guideline)

Contract	Yes / No
Does contract include sustainability performance measurements?	
Food and Beverage	
Percentage of local food:	
Percentage of organic food:	
Sugar/cream/condiments in bulk?	
Water in jugs/no bottled water?	
China service and cloth napkins?	
No pre-filled water glasses?	
If china can't be used, compostable/recyclable alternative?	
Vegetarian options?	
Communications	
Electronic communications?	
If printed, post-consumer recycled paper?	
Exhibitions	
On-line exhibitor kits?	
On-floor recycling?	
Encourage sustainable/consumable give-aways?	
Limit printed brochures?	
On-Site Operations	
Energy-efficient printers/computers?	
Post-consumer recycled paper for printers?	
Local Transportation	
Do you need shuttles?	
Are they hybrid or do they use low-sulphur or alternative fuels?	
Will destination donate free public transit passes to attendees?	
Are hybrid taxis available?	

Evaluate specific steps you can take in each logistical area and set goals for each. These steps should be specific to your program and your organization.

1. Environmental

i. Destination: Select a destination close to the majority of attendees. Ensure you ask infrastructure questions (Is there public transit from the airport to the hotel? Does the city have recycling facilities?) in the RFP.

Sample goal: We will locate the meeting no more than 500 miles from the majority of attendees.

Tool: www.bestplacestomeetgreen.com

ii. Transportation: Consider an offset for air travel. Try to eliminate shuttles as much as possible, and request low-sulphur fuels and hybrid vehicles.

Sample Goal: We will recommend an offset provider to our attendees to help offset at least 20% of travel emissions.

iii. Accommodation: Ensure environmental performance measures are part of the contract. At a minimum, ensure that there are towel/linen re-use programs and recycling in place.

Sample Goals: We will insert environmental clauses in at least 80% of our hotel contracts. We will promote the towel/linen re-use program to our attendees and expect a 90% rate of participation.

iv. Meeting Venue: Insert environmental performance measures in the contract. At a minimum, ensure that recycling is in place. Energy and water efficiency programs are also beneficial; request that a certain percentage of energy during the event be provided from a renewable source.

Sample Goal: We will require that the meeting facility source 10% of the energy used during the event from a renewable source.

v. Food and Beverage: Insert performance measures into the contract. Eliminate bottled water; don't pre-pour water or iced tea; use bulk condiments (sugar, cream); buy local as possible.

Sample Goal: We will require our caterer to source at least 30% of meals served from ingredients found within 100 miles.

Tool: www.100milediet.org

vi. Communication: Use technology as much as

possible to reduce paper use. Provide the conference guide, exhibitor kits, and handouts online. When paper is needed, use post-consumer waste recycled paper and print double-sided.

Sample Goal: We will reduce our paper use by 50% and track the cost savings.

vii. Expositions: Request exhibitors to reduce or eliminate paper brochures on-site and to give consumable or sustainably sourced give-aways. Ensure the decorator has a recycling program.

Sample Goal: Through education and specific requests, we will encourage at least 50% of exhibitors to eliminate paper brochures at the trade show.

viii. Office: Reduce energy use and waste generation by using Energy Star printers, turning off lights and printers when not in use, reducing the amount of printing, and ensuring recycling is available. Reduce the cost of shipping by reducing the amount of paper being shipped.

Sample Goal: We will reduce the cost of shipping by 20% by reducing the amount of printed material shipped on-site.

2. Community

What are ways you can positively impact the community you are doing business in? What is important to the community? What plays to your organizational strengths? For example, a mortgage association or homebuilder might partner with Habitat for Humanity to build houses, or a food company might partner with the local food bank.

Sample Goal: With the assistance of the CVB, we will organize a community service event that helps meet a need in the host community, attracting 10% of our delegates to participate and donate 100 man-hours to the project.

Tool: Contact the Convention and Visitor's Bureau in the city you are holding the event in for their suggestions, or (for US-based events) go to www.volunteer-solutions.org.

Community	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Fit with organizational mission/vision?			
Needed by the community?			
Issues impacting community to be aware of?			
# of volunteers able to participate?			

Economic: What is your economic impact? For example, is the event large enough to create an economic impact in the community? Are their cost savings you expect to generate?

Item	Normal Process	Alternative	Cost savings
Pre-conference brochures	Print 5000 copies	PDF on-line	\$\$\$
Water	10,000 bottles	Water in pitchers	\$\$\$
Hand-outs	Registration +10%	Download on-line	\$\$\$

Step 4: Measure.

It is essential to set specific measurements that will help you determine how successful you have been, report results and ensure follow-through on your goals. Measurement is often seen as the most difficult step, so you may want to start small.

Performance measures may include:

- Dollars saved by reducing shipping volume, eliminating bottled water, reducing waste removal charges for exhibitions or printing less materials
- Energy use/savings
- Water use/savings
- Percentage of waste generated that is recycled
- Number of people participating in the towel/linen re-use program, and the savings in water/electricity use achieved as a result
- Pounds of waste generated per person
- Event miles/kilometers
- Percentage of food sourced within 100 miles/160 kilometers of the event (or another measure)
- Number of exhibitors using on-line kits/not bringing paper brochures
- Hours of community service
- Money raised for community service project
- Percentage of carbon emissions that are offset

Remember, measuring is easier if:

- Specific items are included in facility contracts (i.e. energy use, towel/linen re-use participation, volume of waste/recycling)
- Tracking is begun at the beginning of the process

Once you have tracked your CSR impact with one meeting, you can repeat the same measures each year to demonstrate progress over time.

Step 5: Report, Share and Celebrate!

Report on what your event has accomplished. Document your original goals, the process you went through, your successes, and your challenges.

It is tremendously important to share your results with your stakeholders - management, clients, participants, even the wider community. You can also share what you have learned and achieved with your professional community, using tools like the MPI CSR GroupSpace to post. And don't forget to celebrate your success!

Tools: www.mpiweb.org/sustainability