

GREEN MEETINGS

The Convention Industry Council's Green Meetings Task Force was charged with creating minimum best practices for event organizers and suppliers to use as guidelines for implementing policies of sustainability. The task force was composed of individuals from the EPA, the Ocean's Blue Foundation, the Society of Incentive Travel Executive's Green Meeting Group, the World Travel Organization, hotels, convention and visitors bureaus, convention centers, and meeting-planning organizations. For more information, visit the Convention Industry Council online at www.conventionindustry.org.

DESTINATION SELECTION

Minimum Best Practices

When choosing a destination requiring extensive attendee travel, consider using carbon offset programs. Strive to use venues and suppliers that have environmental practices in place.

*Environmental Practices**

Include a request for environmental "best practices" in your RFP, e.g.,

- ◆ A comprehensive sustainability plan;
- ◆ Programs to recycle and otherwise reduce solid waste;
- ◆ Programs for the conservation of energy and water;
- ◆ Environmentally responsible systems to handle to treatment of solid and liquid wastes; and
- ◆ Environmental initiatives above and beyond those listed herein.

**Source:*

www.bluegreenmeetings.org/HostsAndPlanners/Documents/Preference_Clause_Destinations.doc.

Their questionnaire is a helpful tool to use in gaining information about a destination's environmental practices.

ACCOMMODATIONS SELECTION

Minimum Best Practices

For a detailed checklist to assist in determining a site's environmental practices, download the Green Hotel Initiative's Best Practice Survey from the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economics (CERES) at <http://www.ceres.org/>. A sample is attached.

THE ORGANIZER'S ENVIRONMENTAL REQUESTS

- ◆ A recycling program that includes paper, metal, glass and plastic products.
- ◆ A request to staff to shut blinds, turn off lights, and turn down the heat/air conditioning when rooms are vacant.
- ◆ Guestrooms either have dispensers for soaps, shampoos and lotions, or the venue donates unused portions of amenities to charity.
- ◆ A linen and towel reuse program. Place cards in guest rooms offering guests the option to use linens/towels again. Housekeeping staffs are fully trained to follow guests' wishes.

EVENT VENUE SELECTION

Minimum Best Practices

If no literature is available from the property, ask for any current plan that will lead to such policies/practices be presented in writing. Or, have the venue complete a 'venue checklist' to detail their current environmental policies.

ORGANIZER'S ENVIRONMENTAL REQUESTS

Suggested requests to place in your contract:

- ◆ A recycling program that includes paper, metal, glass, and plastic products
- ◆ A request that staff shut blinds, turn off lights, and turn down the heat/air conditioning when rooms are vacant
- ◆ That leftover food be donated to a food bank

FOOD & BEVERAGE

Minimum Best Practices

ORGANIZER'S ENVIRONMENTAL REQUESTS

- ◆ Use reusable cutlery, dishware, linens and decorations. If disposables are unavoidable, make sure they can be composted and/or biodegradable products are used.
- ◆ Provide condiments, beverages, and other food items in bulk instead of individually packaged and that any packaging is recyclable and recycled.
- ◆ Use locally produced seasonal and/or organic food and beverages when possible (including fair trade shade grown coffee, tea, chocolate and cocoa)
- ◆ Serve only environmentally friendly seafood and offer vegetarian meal selections. (See www.mbayaq.org/cr/cr_seafoodwatch/download.asp for a comprehensive and well-researched list of environmentally friendly seafood)
- ◆ Donate left-over food to a local food bank or soup kitchen, and composts or donates table scraps to farms where possible

EXHIBITIONS

Minimum Best Practices

Request an agreement that states the site's commitment to comply with the event's environmental requests.

- ◆ Minimize the use of collateral materials, and, for any necessary materials, produce them on double-sided, post-consumer* recycled paper with vegetable-based inks.
- ◆ Minimize packaging and participate in recycling packaging when appropriate
- ◆ Use recycled or consumable products as giveaways when possible
- ◆ Do not use gift items made from endangered or threatened species
- ◆ Attempt to use locally grown/made products.
- ◆ Provide materials via downloads
- ◆ Bring only what is needed for the event, and take away what is not distributed

*Post-consumer material is an end product that has completed its life cycle as a consumer item and would otherwise have been disposed of as a solid waste.

Environmental Practices

- ◆ Provide recycling for cardboard, pallets, paper, cans, plastic, glass and other recyclable materials that are generated.
- ◆ Ensure clean-up crews are trained to keep recyclable and reusable items out of the garbage. Choose decorations and display materials that can be reused and/or are made out of recycled materials.

THE GREEN MEETINGS INDUSTRY COUNCIL

The Green Meeting Industry Council was formed on December 10, 2003 to improve meeting management practices by promoting environmentally responsible strategies through the collaborative efforts of the hospitality industry, corporations, government, and community organizations. The GMIC is committed to supporting economic, environmental, and community objectives as they relate to the meeting industry.

Green Meetings - Good for Business

Let's be practical. Green meetings make good business sense. They:

- ◆ save money by conserving resources
- ◆ create and enhance competitive advantage and reputation
- ◆ open up new or niche markets
- ◆ present positive opportunities for marketing, improve public relations and demonstrate a commitment to corporate responsibility

Consider some of the following:

- ◆ **There is a market for green meetings.** Between May 2003 & December 2004 fourteen environmental or sustainable conferences met in Portland Oregon, representing an estimated income of \$10.5 million (Business Journal, 2004).
- ◆ **Local and regional governments are educating and compelling meeting facilities to reduce their waste stream or face steep disposal costs.** San Francisco's Moscone Center has cut hauling costs by \$500,000 per year since beginning a recycling and donations program (Meetings & Conventions, 2004).
- ◆ **Corporations and associations are feeling pressure from shareholders and members to demonstrate environmental responsiveness and corporate responsibility in their activities, including meetings.** According to a 2002 survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers 90% of the US's 140 largest companies indicate enhancing or protecting reputation was their primary reason for adopting environmentally responsible practices and 89% believe sustainability will grow in importance as a business issue over the next 5 years.
- ◆ **Organizations are being increasingly pressured to tighten meeting spending.** This is causing meeting professionals to consider all options to reduce waste and increase efficiency. Energy efficient lighting in Seattle's Washington State Convention & Trade Centre has saved almost \$200,000 in the last year (Meetings & Conventions, 2004).

Despite these proven business benefits, there remain a number of common myths regarding green meetings.

Myth: Green meetings are a hassle

Reality: For planners, green meetings involve looking at the decisions you already make in a green light. When inquiring about catering ask for local, organic and vegetarian options. When arranging for printing of collateral materials ask printers to use post-consumer recycled content paper, print on both sides and use vegetable-based inks. Suppliers may need to initially invest some time to set up recycling, energy efficiency or other environmental programs, however, the return on investment in these initiatives ultimately outweighs the initial equipment and human resource cost.

Myth: Green meetings are expensive

Reality: Green meetings are about increasing economic and environmental efficiency by minimizing the use of resources and reducing the amount of waste produced from meeting activities. Trimming waste curbs costs, whether it be through the introduction of energy efficiency programs in hotels and convention centers, by reducing the volume of printed conference materials, providing locally grown food, or designing re-usable signage.

- ◆ By providing water in pitchers Meeting Strategies Worldwide avoided an estimated \$12,187 to furnish bottled water to attendees (2002).
- ◆ Serving condiments in bulk is less expensive than individual serving packages - bulk cream is 62% cheaper and bulk sugar 50% cheaper than single serving sachets (Meeting Strategies Worldwide, 2002).
- ◆ Eliminating shuttle bus transportation and selecting hotels and meeting facilities within walking distance eliminated \$30,000 - \$40,000 for one three-day meeting (Meeting Strategies Worldwide, 2002).
- ◆ Day-lighting merchandise on the trade show floor increases sales by about 40% (Meetings South, 2004).

Myth: Green meetings reduce the quality of the meeting experience

Reality: Most green meeting activities go completely unnoticed by delegates. Attendees are not likely to notice your reuse of signage or preference for recycled paper. Many already sort their household waste for curbside pickup and are likely to make use of onsite recycling without a second thought. Furthermore, delegates who are becoming increasingly conscious of their diet respond positively to more healthy, organic food options that are authentic to the meeting destination. If traveling, attendees also might appreciate efforts to economize on handouts and provide resources in digital formats. Where they are informed of the outcomes of green meeting activities many delegates respond very positively to the contribution their efforts are making to the environment and host communities.

A 2003 survey by the Travel Industry Association of America indicated 83% of US business and leisure travelers are willing to spend 6.5% more for services and products that are provided by environmentally responsible companies.

Green Meetings Benefit Host Communities

Many meetings, events and conferences are moving beyond the significant economic contributions their activities make to destinations to consider additional legacies they might leave with host communities.

Contributions to host communities may include:

- ◆ Donation of un-served food to soup kitchens, homeless shelters or other community service organizations.
- ◆ Collection and distribution of leftover exhibit materials to charitable organizations.
- ◆ Delegate participation in a volunteer activity, such as a tree planting or construction of community housing.
- ◆ Providing un-used office supplies and equipment to local schools or charitable organizations.
- ◆ Setting aside free exhibit space for local non-profit organizations.

Coordination of and participation in such community service activities give delegates and exhibitors a 'feel-good' factor, but also present other benefits. By donating leftover re-useable materials exhibitors and organizers can avoid costs and waste associated with shipping materials to landfills or expensive return freight charges. In some situations charitable donations might also present tax deduction benefits.

Following are two examples of how green meetings benefit host communities:

1. In May 2004 over 50 exhibitors from the National Hardware Show in Las Vegas donated more that \$30,000 in demonstration goods to Opportunity Village, a local charity for disabled individuals (Successful Meetings, July 2004).
2. *Under One Roof*, a non-profit organization based in San Francisco, raises more than \$125,000 annually from goods recovered from exhibitions at the Moscone Convention Center (Association Meetings, 2004).