

# Headquarters

MAY 2023 #109 BUILDING BRIDGES IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY



THE ASSOCIATION  
MAGAZINE

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Multi-stakeholder Co-creation of  
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*SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT  
THROUGH CIRCULARITY*





# Go Green!

## Sustainable Practices & Trends

Sustainable practices in event planning have become the norm. Yet, while features such as on-site recycling, composting facilities, and “going paperless” are staples in every major conference or event, the urgency around sustainability remains very real. Consider this: According to **MeetGreen**, a 1,000-person, three-day event creates 5,670 kilograms of discards, which is the weight of four compact cars. The 2023 *Global Meetings and Events Forecast* reported that 80% of survey respondents said their organisations take sustainability into account when planning meetings and events, with three-fourths of this group already reporting sustainable programme strategies in place.

In November’s UN Climate Change Conference, the Net Zero Carbon Events Roadmap was presented, inviting organisations across the events industry to join the collaborative effort to drive the events sector towards net zero. Net Zero refers to a balance between man-made greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and their removal from the atmosphere. To achieve this balance, GHG emissions must be reduced and the non-avoided ones must be compensated or “neutralised” through the use of long-term carbon capture solutions.

So, how can event planners and destinations make sure that they are doing their best to uphold sustainable practices that protect the planet? The **World PCO Alliance** shares its thoughts on sustainability and where to go from here:

### Step 1: Start with the Basics

It may surprise readers to learn that there are still plenty of events not quite executing the basics of a sustainable conference. These basics include:

- On-site recycling and composting facilities
- Recycling/reusing attendee badges
- Providing refillable water bottles
- Less use of plastic wares, paper products, and give-aways that are not relevant
- Encouraging participants to go paperless. (even encouraging participants to take notes on their electronic devices.)

### Step 2: Partner with a Sustainable-minded Destination

More and more events are requesting destinations that have an explicit commitment to sustainability, and destinations are increasingly embracing sustainability programmes. For example, in 2021 the Madrid Convention Bureau launched “**PLUS**” (Platform for Legacy with us), a digital platform for social and environmental sustainability and legacy. Sustainability, legacy and positive impact are three key aspects of Madrid’s MICE tourism strategy that now may be fully implemented in the planning stage for professional conferences and events held in the city.

How does an association go about evaluating the strength of a destination’s commitment to sustainability? The Alliance recommends asking for a track record. A committed destination will be able to provide examples of initiatives and collaborations with other events similar in size and scope. Event organisers will also want to prioritise those destinations that minimise carbon emissions and plastic waste, and that opt for locally-sourced and produced food and drinks. But beware though: while much has been done and implemented by many cities, there is a long road ahead for many others. When it comes

to sustainability, destinations will have to walk the talk if they want to be recognised by clients as serious partners.

### Step 3: Select Environmentally Friendly Venues

Many cities are enacting environmental standards for their venues and buildings. One such example is **LEED**, a globally recognised sustainability certification. To obtain LEED certification, a project must meet pre-requisites regarding carbon, energy, water, waste, transportation, materials, health and indoor environmental quality.

There are plenty of country-specific certifications as well. The Thai partner of the World PCO Alliance, **CDM Thailand**, selects venues that meet the criteria of Thailand MICE Venue Standards, which are recommended by the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau in categories such as Physical, Technology, Service & Management, and Sustainability.

The Singapore Tourism Bureau has launched a MICE Sustainability Project, and the Japan Convention Bureau as well as Business Events Tokyo, part of the Tokyo Convention and Visitors Bureau, have enacted sustainability policies and initiatives.

Formal certifications aside, venues should at the least minimise the use of non-recyclable and non-essential materials and control temperature settings in meeting rooms, among other practices.

### Step 4: Make a Sustainability Pledge within Your Own Organisation

The World PCO Alliance points out the importance of leading by example, and the most effective way to do so is to weave sustainability into your own organisation's culture. This can be done in a more public or in-house manner.

For a more public pledge, in addition to the UN's Net Zero Carbon Events Roadmap mentioned earlier in this article, there are other formal organisations and pledges that your association may wish to adopt, including the **UN Global Compact**, which purports to be the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative.

Another example of a public pledge is from **Congrès Inc.**, which recently acquired the ISO 20121 (Event Sustainability Management System) certification. Under the process, an assessment was made on the company's existing ISO 14001 (Environmental Management System) and the new ISO 20121.

There are also "quieter" ways to express your organisation's commitment to sustainability, including:

- Having employees obtain certification. Certain Alliance partners such as CDM Thailand, have SEPC (Sustainable Event Professional Course) certified employees, for example;
- Creating a sustainability charter or commitment that guides the organisation. Alliance partner **JPdL International** has enacted such a charter, that requires the voluntary and active commitment of its employees and partners. The company has even published the charter on its website. Such a charter can include mandates such as improving the social and environmental benefits of an organisation's operations and cooperating with internal and external stakeholders in promoting sustainable tactics.
- Setting certain targets for proposing environmentally responsible measures to the organisers of the conferences that you have won.
- Operationalising the various initiatives in order to put them into action for your clients and teams: you want to ensure that the initiatives are integrated into day-to-day activities and offerings.
- Making sure that any outside partners share similar sustainability values.

Regularly assessing any internal sustainability commitments: While setting up a charter is admirable, it's the follow-through that really counts. Consistently evaluating and assessing results is critical. Create a committee, ideally one that is multi-generational and represents different sectors of the organisation (operational, administrative, etc.) that will be tasked with the assessment. Determine how often your initiatives are evaluated – once a year should be the minimum, but avoid being too ambitious and then falling short. Should an initiative not be living up to expectations, make the necessary adjustments to facilitate and enhance its implementation, and ensure alignment with your business strategy.

Ultimately, being sustainable is all about leaving a legacy with every event in every city in which that event is held, and legacy projects are gaining prominence for many associations. In this regard, a city that has a sustainability programme in place will be able to assist conference or corporate event organisers who wish to make sure that their event leaves a positive mark on the planet, yes, but also on the local infrastructure and community of that particular destination. This two-way contribution between a destination (and the people it serves) and the international conference/attendees is what creates a lasting legacy that, little by little, can change the world.



[WORLDPCO.ORG](http://WORLDPCO.ORG)



[WPCOALLIANCE@CONGRE.CO.JP](mailto:WPCOALLIANCE@CONGRE.CO.JP)



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