

Helsinki

Sustainable Meeting Guidelines





Introduction

The objective of this guide is to help you make more sustainable choices when organising conferences and meetings.

Helsinki aims to be the most functional city in the world and is committed to offering more sustainable lifestyles for every resident and visitor. The goal is to do everything a little better, more and more sustainably all the time.

Events, by essence have negative impacts on the environment (air pollution, waste creation, carbon emissions) but on the other side, they also generate many positive social impacts (education, networking, knowledge sharing). Embedding sustainable practices for events organised in Helsinki means we will improve our sustainability performance by minimising the environmental impacts

and optimising the social and financial impacts.

We will have to do things differently through our everyday choices, in our lives and how we conduct business. Integrating sustainability is a fantastic opportunity to do the right thing but most of all to be innovative and creative. Together we will create the new normal.

Helsinki has pledged to be carbon neutral by 2035. It means that Greenhouse Gas emissions need to drop by 80% compared to 1990 levels, and the remaining 20% will be compensated by implementing emission reductions outside the city or, for example, increasing the number of carbon sinks.

The City's emission calculations take emissions generated inside the city limits into account. The calculations do not include emissions generated outside Helsinki, such as those from air travel, food produced elsewhere or goods and services purchased outside the city.



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What to consider when organising a sustainable event?

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

The following aspects need to be considered, with the objective of reducing our negative impacts:

- Material use
- Water and energy consumption
- Air pollution
- Waste management

How to measure?

By measuring the carbon footprint, and reduced through a circular approach and optimisation of resources.

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The following aspects need to be considered, with the objective of leaving a positive legacy:

- Good governance by following international standards
- Diversity and inclusion, anti-harassment policies, etc.

- Participating in the local community you operate in
- Education and raising awareness (via communication, collaboration, content proposed at the event)

How to measure?

The impact of the above aspects is more difficult to measure than the environmental effects. However, a positive legacy can be achieved through active collaboration, education and communication.

ECONOMICAL CONSIDERATIONS, PROFIT VS COST?

- The financial aspects are key to take into consideration
- Businesses need to be profitable to carry out their purpose
- What medium to long-term benefits can a purpose driven approach generate?
- An event where you can engage and inspire your audience will

turn your attendees into ambassadors of your brand, attract talents, and inspire your suppliers to give out their best

- Good and positive PR is not included in your event's bottom line but will surely benefit your organisations' reputation, this in itself has value

How to measure?

The return on investment of an event can be measured through the Return On Investment (ROI), but it does not give an accurate view of the positive legacy generated by an event. The contribution to the brand reputation, the engagement of stakeholders (employees, suppliers, clients) and the positive impact left on the local communities, are valuable for the business yet not captured in the ROI of an event.

Quick guide: Where to start?

START HERE

- Set clear objectives for your event sustainability
- The location/venue sustainability and concept of the event are key aspects to consider
- Carefully select your suppliers and include sustainability criteria in your RFPs and sustainability requirements in the agreements
- Carefully choose the content and speakers, so that they reflect diversity (of people and views) and where the speakers come from

DURING THE PLANNING

- Think how your decisions serve your business strategy, the business' purpose to operate more sustainably and event objectives
- Keep asking your suppliers about their environmental and social initiatives and how they can support your agenda
- Communicate your actions to your stakeholders
- Create stories that are meaningful for your audiences

- Evaluate if the event can be back-to-back with another event so that resources can be shared and the need to travel reduced.
- Offer the option to participate in the event virtually

DELIVERY AND POST-EVENT

- Ensure your briefing to all teams include sustainability instructions (eg. recycling, health and safety).
- Communicate your achievements to your stakeholders, clients, partners and network

When making purchases consider always the lifecycle of every product

1. Where does it come from (local, regional, global provenance)?
2. What is it made of (recycled, renewable, raw material)?
3. By whom has it been made (in a country where human rights are respected, fair wages applied etc...)? Do you really need it? Is it meaningful, what is its purpose?
4. Where does it go once discarded (landfill/burnt, recycled, re-used)?

Sustainable Meeting Checklist



Travel & Transportation

- ☐ Access to destination is within easy reach. Direct flight connections and public transportation from the airport to the event site
- ☐ Access to main event venues, accommodation and offsite venues are in walking distance or are easily accessible by public transportation
- ☐ Routes and provenance of event materials are optimised by suppliers
- ☐ Supplier's social initiatives, local staff and speakers are being considered

Accommodation & Venue

- ☐ Accommodation is close to event location venue
- ☐ Sustainability certifications and credentials like energy and waste policies and local community involvement are checked
- ☐ Accommodation and venue staff training and working policies are considered
- ☐ Accessibility for all is ensured
- ☐ Guests and staff are aware of any emergency plans

Food & Beverage

- ☐ Caterer selection is based on their sustainability credentials, both environmental and social
- ☐ Minimum sustainability requirements are clearly identified in RFP
- ☐ Menus are carefully considered; local, fair trade, preference for vegetarian food
- ☐ Processes like staff having been fully briefed and participants have been engaged to avoid food waste
- ☐ Use local staff and small businesses

AV & Material production

- ☐ Minimise the use of printed material
- ☐ Prefer digital applications for invitations, registration and event documents
- ☐ Usual options are challenged in order to minimise materials made of raw resources like paper, plastic, wood, etc.
- ☐ Re-use materials
- ☐ Rent furniture, decorations and energy efficient AV equipment
- ☐ Use local staff, providers, entertainers and speakers

Experience Design & Communication

- ☐ The event participant experience integrates sustainability education and engagement, pre and post event communication plan, as well as on-site communication
- ☐ Suppliers are pre-selected according to their sustainability credentials or willingness to improve sustainability performance
- ☐ Ensure diversity, inclusion, human rights protection and any corporate policy
- ☐ Consider carefully the social legacy of your event
- ☐ Communicate all the time about event sustainability to your audiences, both internally and externally

Performance documentation

- ☐ Clear and measurable sustainability objectives are set for each event activity
- ☐ Objectives include environmental, social and financial considerations
- ☐ Your performance is analysed post-event and actions are defined to improve the next event
- ☐ Performance is reported transparently
- ☐ It's ok if some of your objectives are not met, as long as the reasons are clearly identified and actions are put in place to avoid repeating the same mistakes

1. Travel & Transportation

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

To the destination

- Note that air travel is the main source of CO2 emissions created by international events, and can represent up to 70% of the carbon footprint of an event (source: Meetgreen, 2016).
- Select and recommend airlines with good sustainability credentials
- Prefer direct to connecting flights and travel light. The heavier the plane, the more kerosene is being burnt
- Speakers can also participate online

At the destination

- Eliminate in-event travel by planning for venues, including accommodation as well as any off-site activities and points of interest, to be within walking distance of each other.
- Encourage walking or cycling
- Make good use of all the public transportation networks. Inform your participants about public transport options (clear instructions, maps, timetables, apps)
- Prefer electric or hybrid to conventional vehicles

- Reduce individual car rides in favour of group transportation when necessary (including carpooling and car sharing)
- Encourage your suppliers to transport goods in vehicles that pollute less or favour truck-sharing
- Optimise truck loading and routes

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Arrange transport options through organisations that work with disadvantaged or socially excluded people

Checklist

- ☐ Access to destination is within easy reach. Direct flight connections and public transportation from the airport to the event site
- ☐ Access to main event venues, accommodation and offsite venues are in walking distance or are easily accessible by public transportation
- ☐ Routes and provenance of event materials are optimised by suppliers
- ☐ Supplier's social initiatives, local staff and speakers are being considered



2. Accommodation & Venue

Accommodation

Accommodation will have impacts on energy and water use, waste (water, materials and food) and social policies for the staff and local community. Accommodation affects greatly the amount of emissions created by an event. Certified hotels are likely to fulfil many sustainability principles.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Implements energy-efficiency measures, complies with green building standards and/or use renewable energy sources
- Implements water conservation practices (reduced consumption) and uses water-efficient appliances
- Reduces waste, has appropriate and controlled systems for waste collection and recycling, and purchase processes that favour sustainability
- Is energy-neutral (if available)
- Cleans with non-toxic and green-labelled cleaning products
- Serves locally grown and produced foods, as much as possible

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Check that the accommodation has an environmental and/or corporate social responsibility policy in place, including appropriate communication with staff

and guests to encourage sustainable behaviour

- Special attention should also be given to the health, safety and rights of the accommodation staff
- Ask questions about the kinds of actions taken in a place

Venue

The sustainability performance of the venue will greatly affect your event and specific attention should be paid to the key partner for your event. The chosen venue should have sustainability policies or practices in place. These should be considered already during the RFP process.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Select venues that implement energy-efficiency initiatives, comply with green building standards and/or use renewable energy sources
- Select venues that implement water conservation practices and use water-efficient appliances
- Ensure that the venue has appropriate and controlled systems for the collection and recycling of waste in place
- Provide waste stations and signs to help attendees sort their waste
- Ensure that the venue can offer electronic signage for your use

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Employees are paid fair wages and are insured
- Employee health & safety is covered
- Employees are offered regular training, diversity and inclusion policies are in place
- Venue is engaged in local community initiatives
- Make sure the venue has a clear emergency plan, that the staff are aware of it and know how to proceed in case of an emergency or security threat
- Ensure adequate first aid arrangements
- Make sure your event feels inclusive and accessible for all participants, the screens and fonts are big enough and potential food allergens have been clearly labelled
- Ensure accessibility for special needs participants

If a sustainable venue is not available, work with the venue managers to make at least some smaller operational improvements, leaving a lasting sustainability legacy for them and future users. To get their commitment highlight the financial advantages, the improved image and competitive edge that may attract other event organisers, and include some initiatives in the contract.

Checklist

- ☐ Accommodation is close to event location venue
- ☐ Sustainability certifications and credentials like energy and waste policies and local community involvement are checked
- ☐ Accommodation and venue staff training and working policies are considered
- ☐ Accessibility for all is ensured
- ☐ Guests and staff are aware of any emergency plans

3. Food & Beverage

The impacts of catering activities are generated by the production methods (pesticides use, water intensity, animal welfare, nutritional values), transportation, packaging, employment conditions and waste management. As an event organiser, you have a great opportunity to educate and impress about your approach to the sustainability of the Food and Beverage on offer.

Smart catering options can significantly reduce the carbon footprint, the environmental and social impacts of the event and save money.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Prefer organic, locally grown, seasonal, fair trade and vegetarian options
- Avoid bottled water, use tap water whenever possible

- Minimise food waste! Use a compulsory registration form and remind people that no-show equals food waste. Estimate need for food as accurately as possible.
- Add separate tick boxes for every meal to the registration form in order to minimise food waste
- Reduce packaging needs to a minimum. Avoid individually packaged goods in favour of bulk dispensers
- Separate and recycle the waste
- Replace disposable plates and glasses with real glassware or recycled/recyclable products
- Avoid offering meat. By lowering the meat consumption of your event, you are considerably reducing the carbon footprint
- Offer culturally sensitive menus that respect the religious or cultural dietary requirements of

- your participants
- Use fish selected from sustainable fish supplies
- Avoid heavily processed foods
- Distribute edible leftovers from events – check for local programs that offer this service
- Minimise the need to transport food and other products
- Give preference to caterers who have an environmental policy or management system in place and have equipment that is water and energy efficient

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Use the local workforce and suppliers where possible. Try to ensure they have fair and equitable working conditions
- Use the local staff recruited through local social projects or support small businesses



Checklist

- ☐ Caterer selection is based on their sustainability credentials, both environmental and social
- ☐ Minimum sustainability requirements are clearly identified in RFP
- ☐ Menus are carefully considered; local, fair trade, preference for vegetarian food
- ☐ Processes like staff having been fully briefed and participants have been engaged to avoid food waste
- ☐ Use local staff and small businesses



4. AV & Material production

Generally, as a rule in events, most materials end up as waste. Recycling is an option but it is not good enough. Try to be smart about the way you decorate and communicate to event participants. Make use of existing systems and event elements.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Minimise printed materials (eg. invitations, programs, signage, booklets and brochures). If you need to print something, use recycled paper and sustainable ink. Ask your printer which sustainable solution they can offer
- Avoid printing the date of the event to be able to reuse it
- Prefer digital invitations and regis-

trations. Upload event documents to the event website for downloading. Use mobile apps, QR codes etc

- Minimise the use of give-aways or link the giving of donations towards a local social project. If traditional give-aways are preferred, choose ethically produced and sustainable materials and make sure the product serves a purpose
- Choose rental furniture, avoid manufacturing custom-made items
- Use natural and recycled elements for decoration
- Re-use signs from previous events – save as much as you can for further use
- Collect and re-use name badges
- Use products manufactured with or containing fewer harmful

substances, such as chlorine-free paper and non-toxic cleaning products

- Ask your suppliers about their sustainability credentials (social and environmental) and ask questions when the supply chain has many links
- If you need to add extra AV, select service providers that use modern, energy efficient AV equipment

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Use the local workforce, speakers and entertainers and promote local artefacts and craftspeople
- Ensure that the supply chains work in a sustainable manner with good working conditions and fair wages



Checklist

- ☐ Minimise the use of printed material
- ☐ Prefer digital applications for invitations, registration and event documents
- ☐ Usual options are challenged in order to minimise materials made of raw resources like paper, plastic, wood, etc.
- ☐ Re-use materials
- ☐ Rent furniture, decorations and energy efficient AV equipment
- ☐ Use local staff, providers, entertainers and speakers



5. Experience Design & Communication

EXPERIENCE DESIGN

Create an event ecosystem and memorable experiences inside it. An event ecosystem includes the supplier networks and all the stakeholders. It includes parties that have an interest in the event: from your internal team, internal wider audience, attendees, supplier network, media, NGOs, professional organisations etc.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Design and select event elements that are creative and inspiring
- Ensure the choices you make when designing the event have minimal environmental impact. For example, choose video mapping instead of a stage set requiring tailor-made elements, which are likely to not be re-used.
- Collaborate with your suppliers to come-up with creative sustainable options
- Prepare a communication plan at an early stage

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Organise field visits to outstanding social projects
- Organise a charity run or walk to raise funds for charity
- Think about the social legacy, for example open days and open

lectures for the public at the event, raise awareness and interest in the subject of the event; encourage exhibitors to showcase their activities to the public

- Take students along and foster the next generation of thought leaders
- Donate leftover materials to a local school, day care centre or rehabilitation work unit
- Ensure you have a clear process in place for health and safety and reporting abuse

COMMUNICATION

Ensure the initiatives you have put in place to enhance your audience's experience are well communicated and engaging. You need your entire stakeholder's participation to achieve your objectives.

Talk about event sustainability – communicate and educate your audiences, both internally and externally. Attitudes change slowly and people need to understand why things are done in a different way than in the past. Use every opportunity to raise awareness and to talk about your brand in a meaningful way. Sustainability offers opportunities to tell stories that create emotions and long lasting memories.

PRE-EVENT COMMUNICATION TO ATTENDEES

- Communicate about your choice of destination and venue e.g. Why was it chosen? What is special about their sustainability performance? Find elements that are inspiring to your target groups. Remember that these will add on to the overall experience your target groups will take from the event. These will also create meaningful connections to your brand and your company's values
- Highlight the relevant sustainability credentials (renewable energy, participation to a local charity, etc.) of the venue in your communication to the participants
- Tell your participants about the sustainability credentials of the accommodation you have selected. Remind them about the towel scheme, or make it fun with a shower song challenge (3 to 4 minutes shower to save water)
- Add public transportation or vehicle sharing app information to your invitation and explain why, as an organiser you are promoting less polluting transportation modes
- Offer practical and educative advice on lower impact travel
- Engage your audiences to participate in your environmental objectives. For example, in your



City of Helsinki's Stara and Forum Virium Helsinki are now testing this with a new street sweeping robot in Jätkäsaari.



pre-event communication, ask participants to help you reduce waste by bringing their own water bottles to the event

- Chase for catering numbers and explain why you are doing it (to avoid food waste). Ensure your participants can cancel their attendance to meals if they plan not to attend. In your pre-event communication, make sure you address this topic to provide accurate numbers to your caterer

ON-SITE COMMUNICATION TO ATTENDEES

- Use your event app to communicate relevant sustainability info; number of plastic bottles saved, CO2 emissions saved thanks to veggie meals, etc. Put up a

display explaining the sustainability approach for the event

- Integrate a local charity challenge into your program to engage and educate your audience
- Inform participants about the recycling arrangements in place
- Create a story around the food experience, highlight the local provenance of products and dishes, get the chef to tell your audience about the menu and sustainable choices that makes it unique
- Display signage to tell your story and ask to be careful about food waste
- Use small print on badges and collateral to indicate “recycled paper, printed with non-polluting

vegetable ink, etc.

- Display appropriate signage and train staff to encourage as much recycling as possible, for example bins on event floor, badge collection boxes, pre-event selection for printed program

POST-EVENT

- Keep conversation going with delegates by sharing your sustainability report, or key figures that are important to you, for example CO2 emissions per person compared to average or contributions to local community



Checklist

- ☐ The event participant experience integrates sustainability education and engagement, a pre and post event communication plan and on-site communication
- ☐ Suppliers are pre-selected according to their sustainability credentials or willingness to improve sustainability performance
- ☐ Ensure diversity, inclusion, human rights protection and any corporate policy
- ☐ Consider carefully the social legacy of your event
- ☐ Communicate all the time about event sustainability to your audiences, both internally and externally

6. Performance Documentation

To show your engagement towards sustainable events we recommend that you follow the following process:

1. Set yourself simple and clear objectives

- Environmental objectives will be related to the four aspects: Material use, Water and Energy consumption, Air pollution, Waste management. For example, you can decide to only use recycled paper, or go paperless. Select a venue that can offer renewable energy, and has good recycling rates
- Social objectives can be measured through a post-event questionnaire by evaluating your audience's perception on the social aspects you have

addressed. Offer scholarships for students to attend the event, discounts for disadvantaged publics, participate in a hands on local project as an activity for your participants

- Financial objective: put in place a way to measure soft financial impacts (enhanced reputation, better performance of the teams, business opportunities, local projects financed through the event) and establish medium term goals as the benefits are not immediate

2. Measure the progress of your sustainability activities – list and quantify achievements, benchmark weaker areas and set targets and improvements for the future events. Be transparent

3. Start small. It does not have to be perfect or a full on sustainability program before you start, but still challenge yourself and your suppliers

Organising sustainable events is a continuous and long-term process: the targets you do not reach now will become the goals for your next event. Therefore, set clear targets, monitor their implementation and evaluate their success.

Documentation will give you a sound foundation for meaningful storytelling and inspiring your audiences. It will show in a concrete way that your organisation is committed to continuous development and a sustainable way of existing.



Checklist

- ☐ Clear and measurable sustainability objectives are set for each event activity
- ☐ Objectives include environmental, social and financial considerations
- ☐ Your performance is analysed post-event and actions are defined to improve the next event
- ☐ Performance is reported transparently
- ☐ It's ok if some of your objectives are not met, as long as the reasons are clearly identified and actions are put in place to avoid repeating the same mistakes



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Help needed?

With the sustainable events operational model, Helsinki Partners can support you with templates to define measurable objectives. We want to share our tools. Here you can find examples of

- The objectives ([link to KPI's](#)).
- Venue measurement template ([link to the excel](#)). Ask the venue to fill it in.
- Carbon calculator template ([link to the excel](#))
You can fill this after the venue measurement template.

If you need personalised support to put in place specific initiatives and metrics for your event, we can help you to find the right partners to get started.

Contact

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Destination Helsinki

Helsinki aims to be the most functional city in the world and is committed to offering more sustainable lifestyles for every resident and visitor. The goal is to do everything a little better, more and more sustainably all the time.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- All main conference venues in Helsinki have third party sustainability certifications and will be willing to work with you on your event sustainability objectives. They are easy to access by walking or using efficient public transportation.
- By 2025, nearly 30% of Helsinki's bus fleet will be electric. And since the beginning of 2019, the electricity used for electric buses, trams, trains and metros has to be sustainably produced.
- 78% of available accommodation, according to GDS Index reporting, has third party sustainability certifications like Green Key or the Swann eco-label
- Avoid bottled water in Helsinki (ban plastic bottles!), use tap water, it's the best in the world!

- Helsinki Airport is strongly committed to sustainable practices and is offering green landing, which means reductions in fuel consumption, emissions and noise. Airport has the ISO 14001 standard
- 145 direct flights globally to Helsinki
- Helsinki has a 30 minute train connection to and from the airport
- Helsinki is one of the few capital cities in the world where the real nature is close to its inhabitants
- Helsinki has a digital service in place that shares information on event venues and services that operate sustainably:
myhelsinki.fi/thinksustainably

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Helsinki and Finland respects human rights
- Finland is one of the world's leading countries in fostering gender equality
- Helsinki has interesting social projects available that are linked to the legacy of the event destination (which can be beneficial to both the event organiser and the event destination)

- Finland has been ranked as the safest destination globally in The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017
- Helsinki was selected the European Capital of Smart Tourism 2019 considering the aspects of Accessibility, Digitalization, Sustainability and Cultural Heritage
- Students trained in event management and customer service are available for events in Helsinki

COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

- Consider communicating about why Helsinki was chosen and which sustainability considerations played a key role, for example: The city is very easy to navigate and the choice of sustainable options for accommodation and restaurants made the difference.
- Create meaningful stories for your audiences about why the event is taking place at the destination
- Highlight the local culture in your program and integrate it into the event experience



Continuous Development – challenge yourself

A good way to measure your environmental impact is by calculating the carbon footprint of your event (it is more relevant for big events or for a significant amount of smaller repeated events). It will be a good exercise for you to understand where your environmental impacts lie and hence manage your impacts. Measuring the carbon footprint of an event is useful if you are planning to offset your carbon emissions. You can then communicate about your commitment.

The first step is to reduce CO₂ emissions which can be done by integrating sustainability considerations and circular thinking. The second step is to offset emissions that could not be avoided.

It is difficult to find an event calculator on the market that is able to calculate the emissions accurately and values are based on averages. It is important to be very cautious and transparent when communicating about these values externally. The CO₂ MyClimate calculator is a good one to practice CO₂ emission calculations and will give you a sense of the type of data you need to collect: https://co2.myclimate.org/en/event_calculators/new?allow_cookies=true

Once you know the carbon footprint generated by your event, you can offset it to balance its negative environmental impacts. Offsetting schemes often have social benefits and you can choose projects that make sense with your business' activities.

Offsetting schemes should be certified by the recognised existing standards like Gold Standard, ISO 14064, etc. See for further info: <https://www.carbonfootprint.com/offsetstandards.html>

We bring your attention to carbon offsetting: if you choose to communicate about your engagement in carbon offsetting, we recommend you ensure all your claims are backed-up and communicated transparently as there is a potential PR risk. As sustainability is an actual topic, organisations' communication on these matters are scrutinised by a better-educated and demanding public. Your actions do not need to be perfect, but they need to be sincere.

Helsinki Partners

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The **Think Sustainably** service helps to choose more sustainable ways of enjoying the city. It filters content from the MyHelsinki.fi website to suggest sustainable services, such as restaurants, shops, sights, events, and accommodation. The service also includes a route planner feature that enables choosing emission-free transportation options to the wide variety of experiences on offer in the city.



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www.myhelsinki.fi/thinksustainably