

# SUSTAINABILITY IN EVENTS:

Seven Event Action Areas  
to Address Today

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### Focus on sustainability: Is there an eco in here?

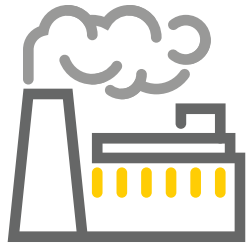
It's common knowledge that events use an outsized number of resources, often straining local infrastructure beyond capacity and generating significant waste, from food and swag to travel and accommodations. Improving sustainability is a huge focus in the events industry, with standardization guidance, certification programs, and even entire conferences dedicated to the concept.

At Impact XM, we firmly believe that sustainability is more than a buzz word and means more than just 'going green'. We anchor our sustainability initiatives in **4 pillars—human, economic, social, and environment**. In this spotlight, we will highlight the global environmental impact of events, talk about the power we have to inspire change across all aspects of sustainability, and discuss ways companies can start adding more sustainable practices into event programs.

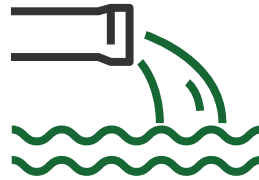


## ✕ THE GLOBAL IMPACT OF EVENTS: HARD TRUTHS

Up until recently, the idea of sustainable events took a back seat to attention-grabbing displays and the latest technology. However, this approach puts pressure on the planet in ways that are only now being recognized. For example, events as diverse as rock concerts, corporate meetings, and even the Olympics take an environmental and human toll that includes:



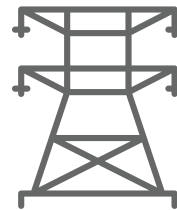
**10%** of  
the world's  
air pollution



**5%** of  
the world's  
water pollution



**5%** of  
the world's  
deforestation



**12%** of  
the world's  
deforestation

As you'd expect, the bigger the event, the bigger the impact. **The average event produces 1.9 tons of CO2e per person**—that's equivalent to **1 passenger car being driven for 5 months** or 4,792 miles per attendee. While mega-events cause exponentially more damage than regular events, the global negative impact on everything from emissions to waste management is a large and long-term community burden.

*(Source: The Meetings and Events Association & AT Kearney)*



## × ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF A 3-DAY, 1000 PERSON EVENT

**12,500 lbs**  
of discards =   
weight of four compact cars

**7,672 lbs**  
of landfill =   
weight of 2.6 compact cars

**584 tons**  
of CO<sub>2</sub>e =  1233 barrels  
of oil consumed

However, there is good news: if you are already implementing ways to be more sustainable, now is the time to ramp up your efforts and if you are just getting started that is ok too as there still much we can do.

Infographic: <https://meetgreen.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/eventfoot.pdf>

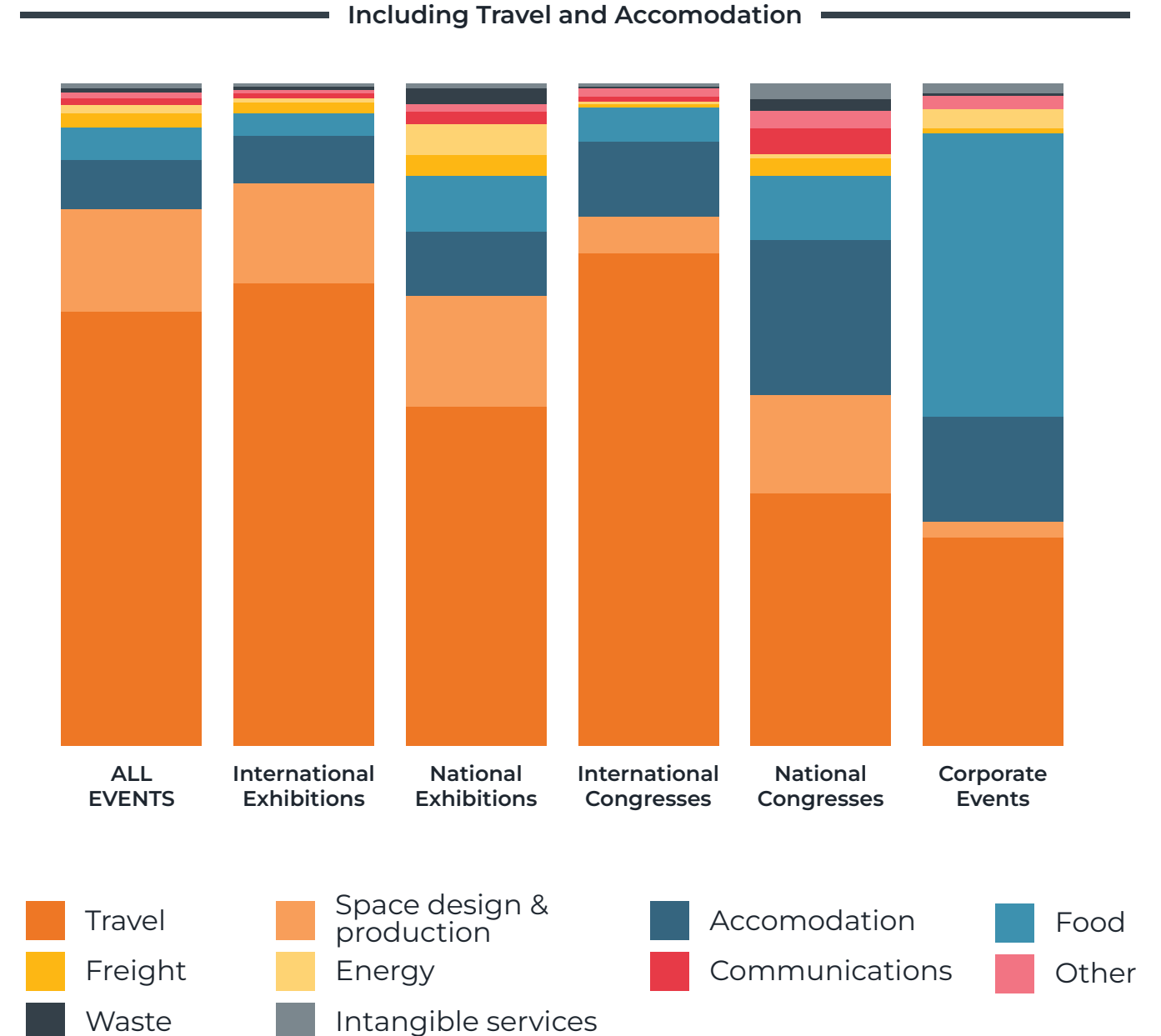


## ✕ ECO-LOGIC: HARNESSING THE POWER OF CHANGE

From recent research on the topic of sustainability, we have observed some promising data indicating a shift in the events industry. For example, **70% of event planners find sustainability to be important** and **60% are taking steps to make their events more sustainable**.

We also found that **40% of event planners are seeing the demand for sustainable events**, so it is exciting to hear that **20% have already achieved carbon neutrality**.

Speaking about carbon neutrality, you may be wondering how you can make a big difference to reduce your carbon footprint. It's been reported that **73% of event-related emissions come from travel & accommodations**. **65% from travel** and **8% from accommodations**.



The Carbon Emission of Events in France Source: Unimev

## ✕ ECO-LOGIC: HARNESSING THE POWER OF CHANGE

Finding ways to reduce these two factors would make an immediate difference, whether that be hosting an event local to your audience or offering virtual access, you can lower your emissions from travel and accommodations. Remember though, virtual options may be more sustainable, but they can't fully replace the value of in-person experiences. A recent global survey found that **7 in 10 respondents believe that virtual events will never be able to replace in-person interactions.** (Source: State of Events survey, 2024).

Though achieving zero emissions from travel and accommodations may not always be possible, you can further reduce your carbon footprint through careful consideration of things like space design and production, food selection, freight, and logistics. These further considerations can help you extend impact beyond only environmental action and target the human, social, and economic facets of sustainability.

*Source: State of Events survey, 2024*



## × CHANGE HAS ALREADY STARTED

Recent data shows that **46% of organizations are partnering with companies that meet specific sustainability criteria**, and **67% of businesses have started using more sustainable materials**. (Source: Deloitte). In fact, by 2025, it is predicted that the number of sustainable events will grow by 50%. (Source: The Meeting Industry Association). Therefore, organizations must adapt to the reality of the impact of events by balancing the need for event presence with proactive measures to reduce environmental impact and waste.

How, you say? Glad you asked.

To help event professionals understand the actions they can take to not only be more environmental but to be more sustainable, we created seven event actions areas that are derived from the UN's 17 sustainable development goals.



## ✕ SUSTAINING FOCUS: SEVEN EVENT ACTION AREAS



The following event action areas can serve as a blueprint for sustainability in the meeting and events industry. Each of these taken separately can help create a fundamental sea change in the way events are planned and executed across the world.

# 1. CONSERVATION: POWER AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy, water, and sanitation is key. By reducing the use of resources or by using renewable sources of energy, you can help reduce your carbon footprint, minimize infrastructure impact on communities, and combat climate change. In the event space, companies can choose to:

Use energy-efficient lighting and appliances.

Choose venues that utilize renewable energy; choose a city and a season that allows you to take advantage of the outdoors or avoid heavy use of air conditioners or heaters.

Partner with composting, rainwater harvesting, and solar entities.

Educate attendees about sustainability and promote policies and practices that support clean energy and reduces use of water.



## 2. INNOVATION: INDUSTRY INFRASTRUCTURE, MATERIALS, AND LOGISTICS

Sustainable materials are only part of the equation. Everything from the materials your structure comprises to the cleaning supplies you use should be considered. Using local suppliers for goods and services can not only cut down on your carbon footprint, it supports the local economy and contributes to the community infrastructure. If a local provider is not available, you can also ensure you are working with sustainable production partners, who can support you in your sustainability objectives. Some action includes:



Cut down or eliminate single-use materials; focus on reused/recycled, such as rental assets.

Source locally to cut down on emissions/costs for transportation.

Consolidate shipments and packaging.

Align creative and design with sustainable materials and fabrication methods to streamline vision to execution.



### 3. WASTE REDUCTION: PRODUCTION TO CONSUMPTION

As seen earlier in our graph from Net Zero Events, food and food service are big contributors to event-associated waste and accounts for about 20% of CO2 emissions. There are several easily implemented solutions that can help you reduce your footprint, including:



Providing water or coffee stations that utilize dispensers instead of having individually pre-poured glasses.

Using locally sourced and seasonal ingredients for food.

Using recyclable, compostable, plant-based or reusable plates, utensils and cups.



## 4. SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES: TRANSPORTATION, CLIMATE, AND EMISSIONS

Travel and accommodations are responsible for nearly 75% of an event's total carbon footprint. Choosing sustainable cities with public transportation options and eco-friendly venues can limit the impact of transportation emissions. Other considerations could include:



Choosing [hotels and venues](#) with sustainable best practices or certifications in place.

Hosting events near a travel hub such as airports or train stations.

Selecting a team close to your regional audience or consider a virtual overlay.



## 5. HEALTH, WELLNESS, AND EQUALITY: ACCESSIBILITY AND DEI

Health and wellness are top of mind these days, as is accessibility and DEI. Be sure to prioritize these as well when planning an event. These actions will also touch on the other sustainability pillars Human and Social. Some things to think about:



Offer healthy, locally-sourced food options.

Focus on physical activities as well as mental exercises.

Confirm the venue is universally accessible, offers fair wages, employs a diverse staff, and supports gender equality.



## 6. PARTNERS AND PLATFORM: COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS FOR INNOVATION

Trying to consider and accommodate everything that goes into an event by yourself is a daunting task. Partnering with companies that strengthen your organization's commitment to sustainability can help you 'walk the walk' by encouraging connections, contributions, and communication so your sustainability plan comes to life smoothly. The following steps can help:



Align your purpose and plan with your stakeholders from Day 1.

Partner with vendors that use sustainable practices, and collaborate to track and optimize efforts.

Support local organizations dedicated to community sustainability (safety, resiliency, inclusion).



## 7. PURPOSE AND COMMITMENT: ADDRESS HUMAN, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

As Ghandi said, “*Be the change you wish to see in the world.*” A sustainable future requires proactivity and leadership. Companies that are focused on sustainability can further the movement by activating their audiences and community to also take action. Here are some ways you can share your passion with others:

Advocate for change in the events space and larger industry.

Use events as educational and awareness building opportunities to talk about sustainability and drive action.

Communicate your commitment to sustainability through words *and* action

Find ways to give back to the local community—everything from locally sourced materials, donations of extra food, and choosing sustainable venues helps mitigate environmental and social impact, while motivating local support.



## ✕ FIND YOUR ECO-LIBRIUM

Balancing the human, economic, social, and environmental impacts of meetings and events with business needs is a challenging, yet vital, part of the future of the in-person event experience. Impact XM is committed to partnering with you to reduce your carbon footprint and increase sustainability using innovative approaches that maximize presence while minimizing environmental impact. For more detailed examples of how we can help you improve your own event or exhibit program, reach out to our team at [[experience@impact-xm.com](mailto:experience@impact-xm.com)] and sign up for our newsletter to stay up to date with the latest insights, events, and more.





**IMPACT.**  
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To learn more or to see the full report email us:

[experience@impact-xm.com](mailto:experience@impact-xm.com)