

Sustainable Conferencing: Shrink Your Footprint And Expand Your Impact

DR. AIDA WARAH & DHRUV
VALLATH



www.gentlewaysforourplanet.org



Introduction

Committed to organizing and operating sustainable conferences and meetings with minimal carbon footprint? We, at GentleWays for OurPlanet, have designed this booklet to help you do so! The suggested strategies are in line with the **three pillars of Sustainable Development; i) Social, ii) Economic and iii) Environmental** or simply put, the **3P's (People, Profit and The Planet)**.

“As reported by life cycle assessment studies, the carbon footprint per individual participant reaches up to around 3000 kgs of carbon dioxide. On top of that, the convention industry market size is expected to grow at a rate of about 11% over the next decade, which does not help matters either. Hence, amidst this ecological burnout, these suggested strategies could provide an effective and efficient pathway, without adding to the already impending environmental problems.”



Dr. Aïda Warah
Founder



Content

Economic Sustainability/ P
For Profit

Social Sustainability/
P For People

Environmental Sustainability/
P For Planet

Parting Note

Economic Sustainability/ P For Profit \$

Economic sustainability is the practice of conserving natural and financial resources to create long-term financial stability. A system that's sustainable can last far into the future with minimal negative impacts.

The main goal of economic sustainability is to create a balance between economic growth and the development of positive change for the environment and humanity.

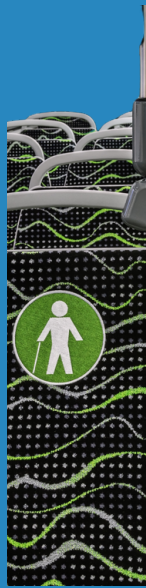


Reduced Travel Costs

Communicate the cost savings associated with reduced travel, including airfare, accommodation, and transportation. Provide a cost comparison for virtual attendance versus in-person participation.

Use visual aids and infographics in promotional materials, highlighting the financial benefits of attending virtually. Leverage social media and email campaigns to share testimonials from past virtual attendees who saved on travel costs.

In case of in-person conferences, encourage the usage of bike share programs like Montreal's [BIXI](#) or Toronto's [Bike Share](#). Provide shuttle services to the accommodation and event venue, preferably using electric coaches or minibuses. Create incentives for attendees to take public transport by providing travel cards, bus passes or vouchers for electric Ubers.



Selecting Green Certified Venues



Choose event venues that hold recognized environmental certifications such as LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), Green Key, BREEAM, ISO 2012. These certifications ensure that the venue meets stringent sustainability standards. Also, have they signed up for initiatives such as UNFCCC Race to Zero or have they taken the Net Zero Carbon Events Pledge?

During the venue selection process, prioritize those with demonstrated commitment to sustainability. Communicate the importance of this choice to participants, emphasizing the reduced environmental impact of the event.

Prioritizing Vegetarian/Vegan Foods

Offer predominantly vegetarian and vegan food options during the conference. Emphasize the environmental benefits of plant-based diets, including reduced greenhouse gas emissions and lower water usage.

Collaborate with and evaluate catering services using the **FLOSS** Method (**F**air, **L**ocal e.g., Localharvest.org, **O**rganic, **S**easonal e.g., FoodlandOntario.ca and **S**mart). Design a menu that caters to a variety of dietary preferences while minimizing the use of animal products. Encourage participants to choose sustainable food options during the registration process.



Sustainable Event Partnerships

Form partnerships with sustainable event technology providers. Seek out virtual event platforms that prioritize environmental and social responsibility, such as platforms with energy-efficient servers or those committed to carbon neutrality.

Research and select virtual event platforms with recognized environmental certifications or eco-friendly features. Work closely with platform representatives to negotiate cost-effective packages for hosting the virtual conference. E.g. [SCOCS](#), [Request Shed](#) etc.



Local Sourcing

Selecting vendors with commitment to environmentally friendly practices. Communicate the importance of supporting local businesses to attendees, highlighting the reduced environmental impact associated with shorter supply chains.

Create a vendor selection process that prioritizes local businesses with recognized environmental certifications like [ISO 20121](#). Develop a communication plan to inform attendees about the eco-friendly practices of selected vendors and how supporting local businesses contributes to environmental sustainability. E.g. Here are exhaustive list from [GreenEventBook](#) and [GoodGreen](#)



Social Sustainability/P For People

Social Sustainability is concerned with creating sustainable successful places that promote wellbeing, by understanding what people need from the places they live and work. Social sustainability combines design of the physical realm with design of the social world – infrastructure to support social and cultural life, social amenities, systems for citizen engagement, and space for people and places to evolve. As per the United Nations, socially sustainable communities are equitable, diverse, connected, democratic and provide a good quality of life.



Hybrid Events



When planning hybrid events, organizers should consider accessibility for virtual attendees. This involves providing clear instructions for virtual participation, testing technology in advance, and incorporating virtual networking opportunities. Prioritize inclusivity and ensure that remote participants feel fully integrated into the conference experience.

Utilize a hybrid event platform that facilitates seamless interaction between in-person and virtual participants. Conduct virtual rehearsals and tech checks for speakers to ensure a smooth experience. Implement virtual networking features that allow both in-person and virtual attendees to connect. E.g. [Hopin](#), [Bizzabo](#) and [EventMobi](#).



Diversity And Inclusion



Collaborating with organizations like [Women in Science \(WiS\)](#) or [Diversity in STEMM](#) involves actively seeking diverse speakers and panelists. This includes outreach efforts, establishing partnerships, and implementing a blind review process for abstract submissions to ensure a diverse representation.

Implement a comprehensive diversity and inclusion plan that includes targeted outreach to underrepresented groups, partnerships with diversity-focused organizations, and the establishment of diversity quotas in speaker selections.

Community Engagement

Partnering with nonprofits like [Social Venture Partners](#) or [Sustainable Seattle](#) can involve organizing community service projects or events. Engage with local communities through outreach programs and consider allocating a portion of conference proceeds to support community initiatives.

Establish partnerships with local nonprofits to organize community-focused events or service projects aligned with the conference theme. Allocate a percentage of conference proceeds to support these initiatives and communicate the impact of community engagement to attendees.



Digital Networking

Facilitating digital networking through platforms like LinkedIn or event-specific apps like [Brella](#), [Grip](#) or [Whova](#) involves creating virtual spaces for attendees to connect. Provide guidance on optimizing online profiles, setting up virtual meetings, and participating in discussion forums to enhance the digital networking experience.

Choose a digital networking platform that integrates seamlessly with the conference experience. Provide clear instructions on optimizing profiles, scheduling virtual meetings, and participating in discussion forums. Implement gamification elements to encourage active participation and networking.



Promote Eco-Friendly Swag

There are many green event ideas that can make a huge difference in reducing the carbon footprint of a conference. Some of these ideas include providing eco-friendly/recycled notebooks and journals, plants and seed packets, reusable tote bags, reusable coffee flasks, and eco-friendly USB and flash drives made from recycled materials. E.g Brands like [GoodTee](#) provide wholesale clothing, [pc/nametag](#) offers sustainable badges and lanyards etc.



Education & Awareness

- Integrating sustainability sessions into the conference program involves selecting knowledgeable speakers and creating engaging content. Examples include;

Featuring a speaker from an organization like the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) or the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to provide insights into global sustainability challenges, initiatives, and solutions

Inviting representatives from organizations like Greenpeace or B-Lab to share their experiences and engage in discussions on pressing sustainability issues.

- Set up virtual exhibitor booths for sustainability-focused organizations and initiatives. Allow participants to explore these booths, download resources, and engage in live chats with representatives. Organizations like 1% for the Planet, The Nature Conservancy and The Nature Conservancy Of Canada could showcase their work and provide educational materials.
- Create a dedicated "Sustainability Resource Hub" within the conference platform to share resources, such as whitepapers or articles, to further educate participants on sustainability topics. Collaborate with organizations like the Environmental Defense Fund and the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) to provide comprehensive and reliable resources.
- Create dedicated tracks or sessions focused on sustainability topics. Utilize a content management system within the conference platform to curate and share additional resources, including whitepapers, articles, and case studies, enhancing participants' education and awareness such as;

Collaborate with organizations like Sustainable Brands and the Rainforest Foundation to host workshops on sustainable practices in business and conservation

Highlight projects from companies like Patagonia or Unilever that have demonstrated significant positive impacts.



Environmental Sustainability/P For Planet

Environmental Sustainability is mainly concerned with the responsibility to conserve natural resources and protect global ecosystems to support health and wellbeing, now and in the future. In fact, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines it as “meeting today’s needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.”

Paperless Initiatives



Implement a comprehensive paperless strategy by choosing a conference platform that supports interactive presentations, Q&A sessions, and feedback tools. Educate presenters on the benefits of digital materials and provide guidelines for creating engaging and interactive presentations.

Utilizing interactive tools like Slido, Mentimeter or Glisser not only reduces paper usage but also enhances audience engagement. Encourage presenters to share slides and materials digitally, reducing the need for printed handouts.



Carbon Offsetting

Collaborating with organizations like [Carbonfund.org](#), [Gold Standard](#), [UN Carbon Offset Program](#) or [Terrapass](#) involves attendees calculating and offsetting their carbon footprint.

During the registration process, integrate a module that allows attendees to calculate and offset their carbon footprint directly on the conference platform. Collaborate with carbon offset organizations to provide information on specific projects supported by the conference's carbon offset initiatives.



Tracking Sustainability Quantitatively



Tracking and measuring sustainability goals often involve assessing environmental impacts, such as carbon emissions, energy consumption, water usage, and waste generation. By utilizing measurement tools, organizers can monitor the progress of their sustainability initiatives, identify areas for improvement, and demonstrate the environmental benefits of their efforts. E.g., Numerous carbon calculators aimed at event planners have been launched during the past year, including [SAM](#), a free event sustainability carbon measurement tool. Other available resources include the [TRACE](#) platform and [Proseed](#), both by Isla, a non-profit organisation.



Creating After-Event Waste Management Programs



This initiative focuses on managing and minimizing the environmental impact of waste generated during the event. A well-designed waste management program can include strategies for recycling, composting, and reducing overall waste, contributing to the event's commitment to environmental sustainability. E.g., To combat the "dirty dozen", tools like Too Food To Go for donating leftover foods, Terracycle for Disposable PPEs etc. can be used.

Virtual Conferences

Virtual conferences significantly reduce the environmental impact associated with travel. Organizers need to communicate the benefits of reduced carbon emissions and resource consumption to participants. Consider offering virtual backgrounds or digital badges to enhance the virtual experience.

Choose a virtual conference platform with features that emphasize environmental sustainability, such as tools for calculating carbon savings from reduced travel. Incorporate virtual backgrounds that showcase eco-friendly scenes or sponsor logos promoting sustainability.

Implementing a tiered pricing structure for virtual access. Offer basic access for free, with additional charges for premium content, exclusive workshops, and extended networking opportunities. Utilize a virtual event platform that supports tiered access and payment integration. Platforms like [Eventbrite](#) or [Cvent](#) allow organizers to create diverse ticket packages and manage payments seamlessly.



Parting Note

We hope that you have been inspired by our content, in making your gatherings greener. We also want to acknowledge the organisations that developed the tools and resources we have put together in this booklet. We encourage you to spread awareness about this booklet and use it whether you're organizing a small gathering or a very large conference.

You are welcome to use this work but please mention GentleWays for OurPlanet as a reference.

Thank You For Reading





GENTLEWAYS FOR OURPLANET

CONTACT INFORMATION

 +1 (613) 890-1860

 info@gentleways.org

 www.gentlewaysforourplanet.org

