

The Eco Readiness

Your Road Map to
Creating & Implementing
Event Sustainability



Incorporating sustainability into your brand's events is crucial to meeting growing customer demands in today's marketplace.

Yet, many brands struggle to implement an effective, impactful event sustainability strategy. That includes outlining the right KPIs & measurement framework to identifying areas across the event value chain to focus key initiatives, to effectively tracking & reporting impact.

As event marketers, you have a tangible opportunity to play a crucial role in driving sustainability initiatives within your organization via your brand's experiences.

If you're just getting started, use this guide to develop the first steps in your sustainability journey. Already down the sustainability path? Use this as confirmation of the value of your actions.



Understand & Define Your Sustainability Program with the Right KPIs

The events & experiences industry is getting serious about making sustainability a priority. American Express Global Business Travel & Meetings Industry Association reported:

- **80% of meeting & event professionals** take sustainability into account during their planning processes.
- **76% have defined** sustainable meeting program strategies in place.
- **73% have a sustainability-focused** role in place.

However, many struggle to measure or implement impactful sustainability initiatives aligned to business KPIs:

- **Less than 45% of event professionals** are currently measuring their total carbon footprint.
- **Only 33% of event professionals** measure their events' carbon emissions.

A successful event sustainability strategy starts with outlining its purpose & scope. Research which environmental issues matter most to your audience, how they align with your brand values & what KPIs can best produce results to demonstrate change, so you can strategically implement individual sustainable initiatives for maximum impact.

Each KPI you set should have a corresponding process to effectively track its progress within your event results.

Some event sustainability KPIs are commonly used across industry verticals, such as tracking waste reduction, water usage & the amount of refuse recycled during your activation. Additional KPIs should support your brand's values & help you achieve your experiential goals & focus, keeping your audience firmly in mind.



For example:

Patagonia demonstrates how it lives its conservation brand values by emphasizing that 70% of its products are made from recycled materials & how it repairs more than 80,000 garments annually, cutting down on waste.

IKEA breaks down its climate footprint—and its sustainability progress—at each stage of its value chain, breaking down in tons the impact of its initiatives across materials, food ingredients, production, retail locations, and transport & logistics.

Ben & Jerry's, a brand consistently focused on activism, provides a detailed breakdown of its carbon footprint & transparently explains which sustainability goals are realistic for the company—and why.



Event Sustainability in Action

Salesforce's Dreamforce emphasized its commitment to sustainable practices by:

- Avoiding higher carbon footprint foods like pork & beef.
- Offsetting waste through compostable food containers & reusable water bottles.
- Offsetting its own & attendees' carbon emissions by partnering with nonprofit Cool Effect.

Heineken introduced its "Greener Bar" as a more sustainable festival activation, via:

- Bio generators, LED screens & a customized smart power plan to reduce fuel emissions.
- Reusable cups, reducing single-use plastic waste.
- Employing a circular design & construction approach.
- Supporting local musicians & artists, reducing travel emissions.
- Zero-waste uniforms.

The Green Sports Alliance's annual summit regularly provides:

- Impact reports on the progress of its sustainability commitments.
- Playbooks based on successful eco-conscious event initiatives.
- Recognition for sustainable venues via its "Play to Zero" Awards.



Image via The Green Sports Alliance Summit

Image via Heineken

Images via Dreamforce

Create & Implement an Effective Measurement Framework

Effective sustainability metrics should be tied to your brand's goals & audience behavior—and coupled with data analysis that identifies event patterns & results.

These are necessary for your event sustainability progress to be effectively quantified, improved upon, and powerfully communicated to your stakeholders. A measurement framework can also help you overcome common sustainability measurement challenges, including data collection difficulties & how to best integrate new technologies.

Once you create your event sustainability objectives, establish how you'll track your KPIs at each activation & across your event portfolio. This enables you to better understand which initiatives are working vs. which need to be retooled.

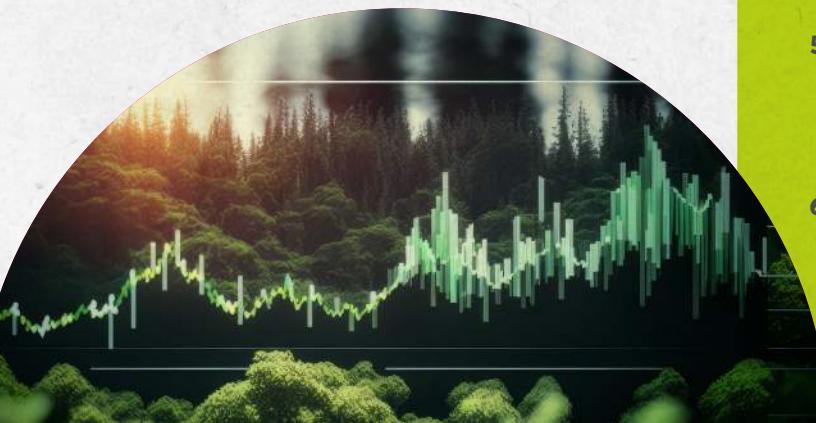
Integrate tools like cloud-hosted tracking software & dashboards to ensure your metrics are captured accurately. Use AI & other machine learning tools to efficiently process your emerging metrics & predict long-term impact.

As you gather event data, verify that your efforts align with audience expectations via post-event surveys & focus groups. Integrate sales data & revenue projections to further quantify the bottom-line benefits that your event sustainability initiatives offer.



Steps to Creating an Effective Measurement Framework

1. Clearly understand & list your organization's overall sustainability objectives.
2. Conduct market research, stakeholder interviews, surveys, event portfolio audits, etc. & clearly outline your event(s) & your target audience(s).
3. Translate your event/experiential objectives & key results (OKRs) to support your organization's overall sustainability objectives, integrating audience behavior.
4. Set a framework of sustainability KPIs that tie your OKRs to Science-Based Target initiatives (SBTIs) & use this across your entire event portfolio.
 - If you're setting KPI benchmarks for the first time, use historical or standard industry data.
 - Benchmark your performance against industry standards or top competitors to gain additional motivation & context for your sustainability efforts.
5. Identify measurement tactics to execute throughout your activation's duration, to collect comprehensive event sustainability data.
6. Set your post-event sustainability reporting process & cadence, focusing on holistic data analysis to determine trends, insights & results.



Avoiding Greenwashing

Sharing authentic, transparent sustainability messages can help your brand strengthen relationships with key customers & stakeholders, but take care to avoid greenwashing.

“What gets measured, gets done’, they say, but often forget that over-emphasizing measurement leads to bad behavior,” said Rajeev Peshawaria, CEO Stewardship Asia Centre and Founder & President of the Leadership Energy Consulting Company.

Prevent greenwashing by:

- Announcing a Net-Zero pledge with targets.
- Aligning your initiatives with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.
- Creating an implementation plan for your organization's sustainability commitments.
- Using Net Zero Carbon Events' (NZCE) resources to outline protocols, set baselines & adhere to industry best practices.
- Conducting external audits from established sustainability organizations & verification from internal sustainability officers.
- Transparently sharing progress reports & accurate, legally compliant language matching your organization's commitments.
- Completing certification for credible sustainability frameworks.



Examine Your Event's Value Chain & Identify Areas to Shore Up Sustainability Goals

Your event's carbon footprint will vary depending on the location, type of activation & size, but you can look at industry trends to identify areas where you can make the biggest impact.

For example, UFI reported that the largest single contributor to carbon emissions for the majority of B2B exhibitions is travel to & from the event, with that travel—whether national or international—**accounting for 85% of the event's carbon emissions.**

Prioritize green practices—including zero-waste initiatives, renewable energy use, eco-friendly construction practices & digital or hybrid experiences to reduce physical environmental impact. Seek out eco-advanced venues with a proven track record, underpinned by respected certifications such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards or the Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) framework.

Align with suppliers who not only share your sustainable vision but are willing to tailor their operations to meet your environmental goals. Look for partners who likewise follow sustainability frameworks & offer concrete certifications, but also provide full transparency over their practices, policies & sustainability metrics.



A Checklist to Identify Eco-Friendly Partners

In the U.S., San Francisco's Moscone Center & the Seattle Convention Center hold the highest level of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification. In the U.K., The Crystal in London, The Eden Project in Cornwall & Manchester's Central Convention Complex make the list of some of the region's most sustainable venues.

Yet, there's no comprehensive list of sustainable venues worldwide. Instead, **use this list of questions to help you research & choose the right venue for your next experience.** You can also use these to help you confirm sustainability alignment for suppliers, vendors & other event partners:

- ✓ What are your organization's current sustainability goals, initiatives & policies?
- ✓ Do you have a climate reduction plan?
- ✓ Do you have a waste management policy?
- ✓ Do you report Science-Based Target initiatives (SBTis)?
- ✓ What, if any, sustainability-related certifications, memberships, or accreditations does your organization hold?
- ✓ How has your organization responded to consumers' growing demand for eco-conscious practices?
- ✓ How do you communicate sustainability efforts to participants & attendees during experiential activations? What's your strategy for transparent sustainability messaging to stakeholders pre- and post-events?
- ✓ How do you measure the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives within experiential marketing campaigns? Are there any specific strategies or tools you use to evaluate your impact?
- ✓ What specific sustainability KPIs do you track & measure?
- ✓ How have you incorporated eco-friendly practices into your experiential activations? What examples can you share that demonstrate your initiatives' progress or impact?
- ✓ Do you have a sustainable material offering? If so, explain.
- ✓ Detail any equal opportunity and/or diversity, equity & inclusion (DE&I) policies your organization has.



Implement Your Goals & Measurement Framework for Rapid Adjustment

Create memorable experiences that demonstrate directly to your customers & stakeholders how your brand puts sustainability into action, so you can foster trust while boosting brand enthusiasm & reputation.

Tie your implementation to your objectives & KPIs through a clear data collection process, so you can determine results along the way. Use multiple methodologies to implement & report on your sustainability goals. Employ a certified environmental management system (EMS), seek reporting certification from established sustainability frameworks like the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) or Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Integrate robust technology such as an event dashboard platform & a carbon footprint calculator to ensure & streamline accurate data collection. Track the progress of long-term goals while identifying areas where you can change tactics or pivot to improve results.

Regularly update your measurement framework to adapt to new technologies, changing environmental standards & targets, or shifts in your audience's needs & expectations.



Sephora stands out as a sustainability leader for using 100% renewable energy across its U.S. stores, distribution centers & corporate offices. But the retailer also weaves its eco-conscious impact into its brand narratives & experiential efforts:

- Partnering with ChemForward & implementing a new public chemicals policy & goal to reduce the number of products containing these ingredients by 50%.
- Transparently sharing its progress toward partnering with brands that meet Sephora's product formulation standards via its platform, Clean at Sephora.
- Installing recycling drop-offs for empty containers—collecting nearly 11,000 pounds of materials in just over a year.
- Sharing its sustainability vision, goals & efforts with its customers & advocates at its annual hybrid event SEPHORiA.



Image via Sephora

Industry Resources for Implementing Sustainability KPIs

Use tried-and-tested industry resources such as **World Economic Forum's (WEF) Stakeholder Metrics & Net Zero Carbon Events' (NZCE) Measurement Methodology** to more clearly action, track & report upon your sustainability metrics.

WEF organized its metrics—prepared in collaboration with Deloitte, EY, KPMG & PwC—into four pillars:



NZCE outlined **nine key categories** of emission activities directly applicable for the event lifecycle:

1. Production & Materials
2. Freight & Logistics
3. Food & Beverage
4. Travel to & from the Destination
5. Local Transportation
6. Accommodation
7. Energy
8. Waste
9. Digital Content & Communication

NZCE further mapped these categories into **five Priority Action Areas**, outlining the suggested focus for collaborative action that you & your partners can take across your event's value chain:

Action Area 1:

Power events efficiently with clean, renewable energy.

Action Area 2:

Redesign events to utilize sustainable materials & be waste-free.

Action Area 3:

Source food sustainably & eliminate food waste.

Action Area 4:

Move goods & equipment efficiently, transitioning to zero-emissions logistics.

Action Area 5:

Work with/influence travel sector partners to reduce & mitigate the emissions from travel to events.



As your brand continues to navigate the complexities of a rapidly evolving market, **sustainable event initiatives will remain a cornerstone for your success.** Your brand's commitment to the environment is not just a message—it's a measure of your brand's relevance & responsiveness to consumer expectations.

Understanding & defining your event sustainability program, setting up an effective measurement framework, identifying key focus areas throughout your event's value chain for implementation & actioning your initiatives with processes for rapid adjustment & reporting will help you meet your customers' & stakeholders' needs. It will also help you drive positive change—across the industry & toward a more sustainable future for us all.

Ready to get started on your sustainability journey? Discover how a strategic roadmap can benefit your brand.



CITATIONS:

- American Express Global Business Travel:** 2024 Global Meetings & Events Forecast
- EventsForce:** Embracing Sustainability: Unveiling the UK's Top Ten Most Sustainable Event Venues
- EY:** How Sustainable Supply Chains Are Driving Business Transformation
- Meetings Industry Association:** Vision 2025 Event Industry Green Survey 2022 Results Reveals Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainability in Live Events
- Net Zero Carbon Events:** A Net Zero Roadmap for the Events Industry
- Net Zero Carbon Events:** Measurement Methodology
- Skift Meetings:** How Top U.S. Convention Centers Stack Up on Sustainability
- Sustainability Magazine:** How to Measure and Report Social Impact for Business Success
- UFI:** Finding the Future, Together—Towards a More Sustainable B2B Trade Show Industry in the U.S. and Canada
- World Economic Forum:** Measuring Stakeholder Capitalism Towards Common Metrics and Consistent Reporting of Sustainable Value Creation