

Greening of Meetings

PMM5 Postscript[™] Number 40

Background Information: Amy Spatrisano and Nancy Wilson delve into Environmentally and Socially Responsible Meetings and Events in Chapter 30 of *Professional Meeting Management*[®], fifth edition. This chapter covers:

- Defining a green meeting
- Explaining how producing green meetings positively affects the environment
- Applying practices to make a meeting green

PMM5 Postscript[™] Use: Green meetings are environmentally responsible and also can shape the interaction that people have during the meeting. This PMM5 Postscript[™] provides information and resources for meeting managers to execute the logistical elements of a green meeting. In addition, PMM5 Postscript[™] affords planners additional incentives to green their meetings by focusing on the impact a green meeting has on the messaging, dynamics and participants. The PMM5 Postscript[™] also includes additional group discussion or research projects to supplement the PMM5 chapter.

Learner Outcomes: At the completion of this reading, you should be able to:

- List questions to ask various suppliers around green meetings.
- List additional resources and websites for more information.
- Discuss the impact a green meeting has on the actual meeting content.

Related PMM5 Chapter: Chapter 30, Environmentally and Socially Responsible Meetings and Events
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Who is Green?

In May 2005, General Electric Co. (GE) announced a new company-wide environmental initiative, pledging to decrease pollution from its products and to double research and development spending on cleaner technologies. Their plan calls for increased spending to develop new technologies such as wind-power generation, diesel-electric hybrid locomotives, more-efficient aircraft engines and appliances, and advanced water-treatment systems.

General Electric is the biggest addition to a growing list of corporations seeking to be seen as "green." GE joins BP, Exxon Mobil, General Motors, Ford Motor, Wal-Mart and other major companies with ecology initiatives. With these large companies display corporate-wide interest in sustainability, the green trend moves from a "trend" status to a ongoing movement.

Other organizations, including associations, are focused on the issue of sustainability. The American Institute of Architects recognizes a new branch of architecture called "sustainable design" or "green development." Although this new architecture is difficult to describe in a sentence or two, its overall goal is to produce buildings that take less from the earth and give more to people. In January, the National Association of Home Builders unveiled new voluntary guidelines to help home builders to incorporate environmental practices into every phase of the home building process while putting a priority on housing affordability.

Some organizations hosting green meetings include:

- National Recycling Coalition
- U. S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) Greenbuild International Conference & Expo
- 2004 Olympics
- World Summit on Sustainable Development
- 2004 US Democratic and Republican national conventions
- Worldwide Exhibition for Incentive Travel, Meetings and Events (IMEX)
- Ecological Society of America
- Aveda Corporation

Green Means Go

According to the Green Meeting Industry Council, a green meeting incorporates environmental considerations throughout all stages of the meeting in order to minimize the negative impact on the environment. What makes a meeting green?

Green Meetings can focus on:

- Reducing greenhouse gases (GHGs)
- Reducing landfill waste
- Recycling or reusing
- Refusing or reviewing what you do
- Using sustainable "ingredients" whether in food or other materials

The Green Meeting Industry Council explodes the following myths on their website:

Myth: Green meetings are a hassle

Myth: Green meetings are expensive

Myth: Green meetings reduce the quality of the meeting experience

Being green can very often mean:

- Holding down costs for meetings
- Savings money
- Creating or enhancing competitive advantage and reputation
- Supporting overall organizational objectives

Unearthing Green

Spatrisano and Wilson identify the fundamental questions for meeting managers to understand before undertaking a green meeting (Spatrisano & Wilson, 2006, p. 471). They suggest answering these questions before writing green goals and objectives for the meeting:

- Why does the organization want to incorporate green practices?
- How much is the organization willing to contribute?
- Is this a one-time effort or part of the organizations' core practices?
- What aspects of the conference are most important to green?

Once the meeting manager has established goals and objectives, they can incorporate information into their Request for Proposal (RFP). A meeting manager is more likely to secure the cooperation of vendors and suppliers if they communicate their priorities and policies up front. Key questions to ask of various vendors:

For any suppliers:

- Do you have an environmental program? If so, what does that program entail?
- Will you work with us to minimize packaging and waste? What have done in the past? What will you do for our meeting?

For hotels:

- Can guests choose not to have towels or sheets changed daily?
- Are there waste containers for recyclable materials?
- Does the bathroom have low-flow shower heads and amenity dispensers with 100 percent natural soap and shampoo?
- Do you regularly purchase recycled products or products that can be recycled?
- Is there an in-house recycling program? If yes, what materials are included?
- Will you provide recycling bins and commit to seeing that the items are actually recycled?
- Can we avoid using disposables such as Styrofoam, plastic and individual creamer and sugar packets for F&B events?
- Do you purchase and serve beverages in returnable, refillable containers?
- Do you donate leftover food to a local organization?
- Do you employ solid waste minimization and/or energy reduction programs?
- Have you upgraded to energy-efficient lighting?
- Do you generate any energy from alternative sources?
- Are you doing anything to conserve water?

- Are the hotel dishwashers energy efficient (demonstrated by EnerGuide) or ENERGY STAR® qualified?
- Are you doing anything to reduce dry cleaning and laundry chemicals?
- How do you minimize chemical treatments and energy use in swimming pools and water features?
- Do you use pest management practices to minimize chemical use and! or water management practices to minimize irrigation?
- Do you use native plant species in landscaping?
- Do you use composting practices to enrich soils?
- Will you distribute leftover meeting materials to a local charity?
- Do you offer double-sided copying?
- Do you offer programs or proposals for attendees to leave a positive legacy of their stay in the local community?

Don't think of producing a green meeting as something else to do; rather, incorporate "greening" into existing site inspection process and checklist. In that way, "greening" a meeting becomes more of a mindset than another to do.

Green Tips

Tips abound on many of the websites listed in the References section. While it can seem overwhelming to start "greening" meetings, start by picking one thing and doing it well, then add to it each meeting. The reality is that changing just one thing can make a difference.

Additional suggestions for meeting mangers to consider:

Pre-Event/RFP Stage

- Establish an environmental statement or policy for the meeting, and get buy in for it from the meeting host organization's management. Share the policy with suppliers, delegates and speakers.
- Include a clause in the contract with the vendor/property that states their commitment to comply with the event organizer's environmental requests.
- Consider incorporating incentives into contracts, such as sharing profits from the sale of recyclables.
- Select sites with natural light.
- Select a site offering comprehensive recycling collection and mass transit services.

Transportation

- Encourage participants to use bus transportation in lieu of renting vehicles.
- Publicize mass transportation options.

- Provide shuttle service from mass transit stops or hotels to the event site.
- Have maps of walking trails and local parks available and be ready to suggest off-site events and tours that involve event attendees in the area's natural environment with minimal impact.

Meeting Materials

- Use new media and electronic technology to cut down on paper use.
- Encourage participants to register online and to review session materials online.
- Print all materials on recycled paper, using vegetable-based inks and on both sides of the page.
- Encourage attendees to recycle with visible signs, written announcements and opening remarks.
- Post the speakers' notes electronically along with conference proceedings.

Meal Times

- Create eco-friendly centerpieces; for example, create them from edible herbs or choose reusable centerpieces and decorations such as living plants or silk flowers.
- Minimize disposables by using china, glass, and cloth napkins where feasible.
- Conserve water and eliminate unnecessary dishwashing by making water available to dining room guests upon request only.
- Maximize use of fresh produce, which means less packaging waste.
- Give your participants reusable coffee mugs/water bottles at the start of the conference.
- Request fresh, locally grown, organic foods be served rather than pre-packaged foods at all meals. Offer vegetarian meal selections; vegetables consume less land base and energy to produce. If possible, compost all of the left over food waste.
- Ensure food and beverage packaging is recyclable, and that it will be recycled.
- Request reusable glasses, cups, dishware and cutlery. Use cloth napkins rather than paper ones.

Venues

- Request basic recycling (paper, plastic, glass, and cans) and visible bins at hotels and convention centers.
- Require a linen and towel reuse program at contracted hotels and encourage attendees to use it.

Why Green = Innovative

Green meetings can change the "character" of a meeting and improve the meeting. Here are five ways green meetings help the overall meeting message and objectives:

- **Pre-planning is important** — Being green encourages people to pre-plan. Downloading information from a website, reviewing a program on a CD ROM, self-selecting the materials that are important prior to arrival — all those activities encourage people to think about the meeting before they arrive.

If necessity dictates that participants review information prior to arrival, instead of arriving at a conference or meeting with little or no pre-thought to how they will spend my time, they are more likely to consider how to spend their time, consider what interests them and how they can maximize my investment in the meeting.

- **Interaction Promoted** — If paper handouts are not de rigueur, sessions may actually involve dialogue between the speaker and the participants. If nothing else, meeting managers can minimize the waste on session materials. Interested participants can visit a website or have handouts electronically provided to them. In doing so, meeting managers extend the reach of the meeting by giving people a reason to visit the website or connect after the meeting.
- **New Networking Opportunities** — A green meeting gives people something to talk about! It is a change of pace from the usual meeting. People can bond on mass transit options. People now have options to meet at the recycling bin and at the bar.
- **Halo Effect** — People generally respond well to green initiatives. People appreciate the opportunity to have small ways to be more environmentally sensitive. People can adapt measures they experience in the meeting. People will feel good. What a nice side effect from a meeting.
- **Partnerships** — Putting on a green meeting creates a great team between suppliers, the people executing the meeting, the people leading the meeting and the participants. And teamwork is what is necessary for great meeting. Just as everyone can contribute to the "greening" of a meeting, so can everyone contribute to the purpose of the meeting. It's everyone's responsibility to recycle, reuse and it's everyone's responsibility to get the "message," the purpose of the meeting.
- **Sustainability/Legacy** — Greening is just the beginning. While much is left to accomplish throughout meetings (and all of society) to be more green, a far more lofty goal is achieve sustainability. How can we insure that resources can sustain future generations? Amy Spatrisano puts it in perspective when she references the old camping adage about leaving your campsite better than when you arrived.

If meetings can leave a venue or a city better than before it arrived, then the industry is supporting sustainability.

Many organizations plan networking or teambuilding events or sessions to help build relationships, rapport and morale. These events can have an eco-bent to them. Giving back to the community, supporting cottage industries in developing areas or participating in an ecology-related project are all examples of teambuilding activities that will leave a legacy after the meeting concludes.

Green Resources

Meeting managers can use the following resources to learn more about green meetings:

- **BlueGreen Meetings** — This organization was created in 1996 as an environmental charitable organization with the mandate of conserving coastal environments through environmentally responsible tourism. It is the first charity in North America to focus on developing environmental 'best practices' for all sectors of the tourism industry. Found at <http://www.bluegreenmeetings.org>.

- Cleaner and Greener Event Certification — Register on this website for help to host a Cleaner and Greener Certified event. Organizations that register their event with Cleaner and Greener Event Certification make a commitment to reduce emissions. <http://www.cleanerandgreener.org/>
- EPA: Green Meetings — Access information that can assist in organizing conferences to be "greener" whether a person represents a meeting manager, supplier of meeting services, meeting host who contracts with meeting planners or attendee of meetings. <http://www.epa.gov/oppt/greenmeetings>
- Green Meeting Industry Council — Found at <http://www.greenmeetings.info>
- Green Meetings - Environment Canada — Found at <http://www.ns.ec.gc.ca/greenman/help.html>
- Recycling Advocates: Event Recycling — Found at <http://recyclingadvocates.org/pubs.htm#events>
- EPA: Energy Star for Hospitality — ENERGY STAR is a government-backed program helping businesses and individuals protect the environment through superior energy efficiency. Found at http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=hospitality.bus_hospitality

Objective, independent third-parties help assess whether hotels (and other suppliers) are being green. Some sources include:

- The Green Hotels Association also lists its member properties on its website at <http://www.greenhotels.com/members.htm>
- Green Seal is an independent, non-profit organization that strives to achieve a healthier and cleaner environment by identifying and promoting products and services that cause less toxic pollution and waste, conserve resources and habitats, and minimize global warming and ozone depletion. Green Seal lists the properties that have earned their green seal certification at <http://www.greenseal.org>
- GreenStop.net lists travel-related companies that are developing or employing environmentally and socially responsible policies. All hotels and travel companies are graded from one to three "greenstops", <http://www.greenstop.net>
- Green Leaf Eco Rating Program is managed jointly through TerraChoice Environmental Marketing and Audubon International. The site offers a program to enable hotels to succeed with their eco-efficiency savings and environmental commitment. The site also provides the professional and leisure traveler verified environmentally responsible options. <http://www.terrachoice.ca/hotelwebsite/indexcanada.htm>

The Green Afterglow

General Electric believes its green initiatives will lead to more products and revenue. Jeff Immelt, the company's CEO, said GE aims to double the revenue goal over that period for products that provide better environmental performance, to \$20 billion a year, and expects more than half of its product revenue to come from such products by 2015 (Khan, 2005).

Going green also positions GE as progressive, environmentally sensitive and a (better) corporate citizen.

All organizations can benefit from the afterglow of going green. When executing a green meeting, like all meetings, meeting managers will monitor and evaluate the results. This will enable a meeting manager to:

- Document and track problems, successes and failures of event initiatives.
- Quantify results and measure the effectiveness of initiatives.
- Prepare press releases highlighting the environmental results of your event and promote the environmental achievements of the event.
- Plan for the next green meeting.

Summary

With recycling, reusing and reducing entering the consumer consciousness (especially in younger generations), it will not be too long before meeting participants are also clamoring for green meetings. Combined with interest from corporate America in creating greener policies, there is an opportunity for meeting managers to be at the forefront of their organizations. Spatrisano and Wilson note the many industries that the meeting industry influences:

- Energy
- Transportation
- Food
- Local community
- Accommodations

All of these industries could benefit from reduced consumption or a focus on sustainability (Spatrisano & Wilson, 2006, p. 468). Whether the actions of meeting managers are small or large, the most important step is to begin now.

Group Discussion or Projects

1. Evaluate the Meeting Planner's Questionnaire for "Green" Lodging Establishments. This questionnaire from www.greenhotels.com asks 43 pertinent questions which will reveal the greenness of a hotel, lodging establishment or convention center. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the questionnaire.
2. What might attract you to holding a meeting at either the David L. Lawrence Convention Center in Pittsburgh (<http://www.pittsburghcc.com/html/index.htm>) or Oregon Convention Center in Portland, Oregon (<http://www.oregoncc.org/>). What aspects of either venue are attractive to a meeting manager? What aspects of either venue are attractive to a meeting participant?
3. Do you think that a hotel would agree to the following contract language?
"Group expects Hotel will identify, recommend, and use as many environmentally responsible practices as possible and feasible for Group's meeting. These practices should include, but are not limited to, waste management, recycling, energy use, use of renewable resources, and conservation of nonrenewable resources. Hotel agrees to provide and/or implement the following at no additional charge to Group:

- *Recycling program (materials to be recycled: paper, plastic, glass, aluminum cans, cardboard, and grease);*
- *Recycling containers in hotel common areas, unless hotel sorts and recycles;*
- *Towel and sheet reuse program;*
- *Consumable amenities will not be replaced daily unless they are gone. Use of soap and shampoo dispensers would be optimal;*
- *Hotel housekeeping staff instructed to shut blinds and turn down heat/air conditioning during the day in rooms while attendees are gone;*
- *Use of glass or china (non-disposable) catering plates, cups, and glasses;*
- *No Styrofoam used;*
- *Condiments (including sugar, cream, butter, cream cheese, etc.) served in bulk containers, not individual servings;*
- *Shade-grown coffee served at conference functions;*
- *Cloth napkins used when possible; coasters used instead of cocktail napkins;*
- *All leftover food donated to a local food bank;*
- *All table scraps donated to a local farm or composted; and*
- *Use of cleaning products that do not introduce toxins into the air or water.*

If Hotel is unable to provide any of the above requested environmental practices during Group's meeting dates, Hotel will inform Group in writing at least thirty (30) days prior to meeting dates. Hotel warrants that any environmental programs in place at the time of contract signing will be in place at the time of the event, and Hotel agrees to cooperate with enhancing any such programs as needed to accommodate Group's environmental practice requests, above. Failure to adhere to the stated green policies may result in compensation concessions for Group."

Or review Tyra Hilliard's green contract clause for hotels which originally appear in *Corporate Meetings & Incentives*, December 2004: http://cmi.meetingsnet.com/ar/meetings_making_green_contract/index.htm.

How could a meeting manager approach a hotel to create a more green meeting? Define a potential goal for a meeting with such contract language. If you had to sacrifice one to three of the conditions, which would you be willing to negotiate away and why?

4. What stakeholder group might appreciate a meeting manager using hotels/venues on the Dow Jones Sustainability Indexes? Launched in 1999, the Dow Jones Sustainability Indexes are the first global indexes tracking the financial performance of the leading sustainability-driven companies worldwide.

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