

■ Recycling in Cyberspace



Taking the waste out of meetings

by Roger Guttentag

My use of the term “meeting” for this month’s column topic refers to any medium to large scale gathering of people for the purpose of conducting information exchanges or team-based project work. This definition covers a wide range of events such as seminars, workshops, retreats, symposia and conferences. However, meetings can be virtual or face-to-face (FTF). While it is undoubtedly true that a significant percentage of meetings have now migrated to virtual settings, an all-virtual meeting environment is as likely as the paperless office. We are a social species and, for that reason, we still feel a need for FTF interactions especially when it is combined with good old-fashioned tire kicking and off-the-clock partying. So, how can we do all those good things without the usual waste generated by these activities?

An introduction to green meetings

Green Hotels – Vermont

The Green Hotels in the Green Mountain State site has a nice fact-sheet available through its Topical Articles drop-down list, “Waste Prevention & Reduction Tips for a Green Conference or Event” that was published by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (VTANR). It provides a pretty useful check-list of action items to consider with respect to Waste Prevention, Recycling and Composting.

Green Meetings Council (GMC)

The GMC is a trade association that is focused on promoting professional best practices for sustainable meeting events. Their Web site, for this reason, can serve as an important basic reference on this subject. The recommended starting point would

be the Information and Resources section. The Links and Resources section has links to Web-based information organized into 13 categories such as Carbon Offsets, Green Meeting Guidelines and Sustainable Tourism. There are also links to green meeting Blogs and case studies.

Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LADEQ)

The LADEQ web site has a section “Running a ‘Green’ Conference or Meeting” that, like the VTANR fact sheet referenced above, offers a short summary of the key issues or actions that need to be considered in running a green meeting event. This includes mostly simple but effective recommendations such as making sure there is on-site recycling collections, maximize reliance on reusable products and encourage speakers to distribute their handouts in a digital rather than printed form.

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MeetingsNet – Green Meetings

This is another useful resource to consult for those who are unfamiliar with this topic that can be found on MeetingsNet, a portal site for the meetings industry. It consists of 11 links to short briefings on a variety of issues that have been addressed by the various newsletters that are part of this site. Examples are article links to a discussion of U.S. Environmental Protection Agency green meeting guidelines and green meeting mini-case studies such as a description of the Professional Convention Management Association's 2007 effort to hold a zero waste annual meeting.

Some additional resources

American Institute of Architects (AIA)

The AIA, as part of its sustainability initiatives, published in 2007 its Green Meeting Guidelines for its membership that is available as a downloadable PDF document. The guidelines have three principal sections that contain check-list type discussions focusing on meeting events, venue selection and travel planning. Waste prevention and recycling recommendations can be found mostly in the meeting section and in the sample contract language appendix. There is also an extensive information resource list that can be reviewed for further research.

Convention Industry Council (CIC)

You can download from the CIC site its 2004 "Green Meetings Report" that is a product of their Green Meetings Task Force. It is a compilation of best practices recommendations for Event Suppliers (e.g. hotels and conference centers) and Event Organizers (e.g. meeting planners). Each section is subdivided into a series of topics that are organized within an activity-based framework. Each topic has its own set of minimum and strong recommendations that are presented in a checklist format. Recycling and waste prevention suggestions are distributed throughout these recommendation listings.

David L. Lawrence Convention Center (DLCC)

The DLCC describes itself as the world's first green conference center. Their Web site is included in this survey since it provides a nice snap-shot of their operations as well as the type of cooperation they seek to obtain from event organizers and exhibitors in support of their core principles. Many

Web Address Directory

American Institute of Architects	http://tinyurl.com/aiagroup
Convention Industry Council – Green Meetings	http://tinyurl.com/cicgreen
David L. Lawrence Convention Center	http://www.greenfirst.us/
Green Hotels in the Mountain State – Tips for a Green Conference article*	http://tinyurl.com/VTgreen
Green Meetings Council	http://www.greenmeetings.info/
Green Seal Lodging Industry Program	http://tinyurl.com/Greenseallodging
Louisiana DEQ - Run a Green Conference	http://tinyurl.com/LouisianaDEQ
MeetingsNet – Green Meetings	http://meetingsnet.com/green_meetings/

*Select from the Topical Articles drop-down menu.

of their green practices revolve around waste prevention and purchasing environmentally preferable (e.g. recycled content) products and services. Reviewing the DLCC's operations can certainly provide ideas as to what other conference centers could be doing

Green Seal Lodging Industry Program

Green Seal, a U.S. environmental certification organization, publishes a GS-33 certification for lodging facilities that can be downloaded from its site. These certification guidelines explain how a lodging facility can qualify for a Bronze, Silver or Gold level Green Seal certification based on meeting a specific set of evaluation criteria. These criteria include five specific waste minimization goals that must be met for the Bronze certification (such as having a facility-wide recycling system). The additional waste minimization goals that need to be met for achieving the higher certification levels are also listed.

Final thoughts

Reducing the waste impact of your meeting events rests on two critical foundations. First, it is part of a larger "Green" framework for improving the environmental operating profile of the meeting facility that is being used. Waste reduction should be happening in concert with improving a facility's overall energy and materials efficiency and diminishing its carbon and toxics footprint. Second, the waste reduction objectives to be achieved rely on the same proven methods and procedures employed in other venues. There is no need to re-

invent the wheel; just appropriate adaption and implementation.

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