

Steps in the Journey to Sustainability

Many journeys need a roadmap or navigation system to direct you to your destination. The road to sustainability in event management can be a circuitous route and full of detours, roadblocks and the need to take a rest stop.



Trying to devise the best route towards sustainability in the hugely complex journey towards delivering a sustainably produced event can be sometimes overwhelming. The options are many, the road sometimes slippery and back seat drivers are noisy. Sometimes there's no straight right way, and no direct route. And cruise control's not the answer.

Put your foot down, fill up the tank, strap yourself in and let's get going!

In previous columns we've talked about the importance of knowing the subject matter – sustainability – so that you can make informed decisions. I urge you to take that to heart and learn all you can. Work out where you want to go, study the map, set out your check points, plot your route, decide who's coming on the journey with you, and what fun you're going to have along the way.

To make the process a little easier, and to continue with the analogy (sorry) the Sustainable Event Alliance (SEA) has developed the Sustainability Roadmap for events. It will help event organisers tackle sustainability in easy steps.

A DIY navigation route – The **Events Sustainability Roadmap** offers event planners a helping hand and leads you along the sustainability road, one step at a time. It's virtually pain free, and helps navigate your way. Before you know it you'll be heading directly towards improved sustainability performance across your event.

The Roadmap takes into account the imminent release of the new international standard in events sustainability ISO 20121, and helps event organisers to put together a framework to identifying issues and taking action to manage them.

When reading the ISO 20121 standard it may seem a little light on detail. It is not meant to be a step-by-step program.

It's not a checklist and it's not possible to be prescriptive due to the huge variety of events and circumstances possible in our sector. What it is, is a framework to get systemized, and there's a fair bit of document keeping so that the system can go on regardless of the event staff in place. But don't worry, the paperwork only needs to be as complex as your event – so a simple event? A simple system. A monster mega event? Things are going to get a little more complex.

The SEA's Event Sustainability Roadmap is a navigation system not only for improved sustainability performance but will also take you a long way towards being compliant with the upcoming international standard ISO 20121. Consider it like being on your Learner's Permit, getting the practice in before you go for the big test! The program comes coupled with checklist forms to report back your progress to the SEA and of course loads of how-to guidance and resources.

HERE IT IS IN SUMMARY:

1. COMMITMENT

The first step is to gain commitment from top management, plus interest and engagement by the event team and stakeholders. Getting the go-ahead to address sustainability must be achieved for your efforts to be supported and successful. The event team and other stakeholders also need to be engaged and committed, as they will be helping you implement your plans.

2. SKILLS

The event team will need skills and knowledge in sustainability to effectively identify issues, risks and opportunities and to devise plans of action to tackle them for improved sustainability performance. Skills can be gained through on the job learning, ongoing professional development training, engaging a consultant, or putting a dedicated staff member in place to focus on sustainability being embedded into event planning.

3. DIAGNOSTIC

Once commitment and engagement is achieved, and the skills are in place to tackle the sustainability agenda, the next step is to understand what the issues are that are unique to your event circumstances. The SEA Roadmap has a checklist and huge resources to help you identify the issues you will address.

4. POLICY

Now it's time to formalise your intent and write a Sustainability Policy for the event (or organisation if relevant). You may also write a separate Sustainable Procurement Policy. Your policy will include broad objectives or vision.

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5. OBJECTIVES

Now you get specific. Write objectives and targets for the event from which your performance can be measured. This includes identifying 'key sustainability indicators' which are barometers to how well your efforts are going. If it is the first year of looking at sustainability, you will be measuring performance in order to establish a baseline from which future objectives can be set for continual improvement.

6. ACTION

It's time get active, roll out your plans, initiatives, programs, projects, campaigns and courses of action to improve your event's sustainability performance and meet your objectives and targets. The SEA has included a menu of 'off the shelf' sustainability initiatives you can choose from and this will continue to grow as the SEA grows.

7. REPORTING

Let's see how you did. Here you will measure your performance against your set objectives and performance indicators. You will also produce a report which should include metrics as well as narrative or descriptive analysis on your approach to managing certain issues. If you're interested, you may include Global Reporting Initiative Event Organizer Sector Supplement performance indicators against which to report.

8. DISCLOSURE

Sustainability is all about transparency and so disclosing your performance to stakeholders or interested parties is an essential last step. You may also wish to be independently assessed for compliance with various standards or certifications. This of course includes the upcoming ISO 20121 standard. However other standards and certifications exist such as BS8901 (UK), BNQ 9700-353 (Quebec), Council for Responsible Sport certification (USA), CSA Z20120-10 (Canada), Eventi Sostenibili (Italy), Industry Green (UK), A Greener Festival Award (International), APEX/ASTM (USA), or SEMS (international).

If you're ready to take the first steps towards addressing sustainability, perhaps the SEA Roadmap route is for you. It is a gentle way to take the first steps towards improved sustainability performance. It is not a certification but instead a pledge by your event to becoming more sustainably managed.

For more information on the roadmap, visit the SEA's website: www.sustainable-event-alliance.org

Meegan Jones is President of Sustainable Event Alliance and author of *Sustainable Event Management: A Practical Guide*, is director of GreenShoot Pacific, and was on the working groups to develop the GRI Event Organizer Sector Supplement and ISO 20121.