

Driving sustainability forward in the events industry

The recent cross-association sustainability working group meeting provided a valuable opportunity for industry professionals to share insights and strategies on tackling sustainability challenges within the events industry.

Participants, including event managers and sustainability leads, discussed key topics such as carbon literacy, tracking scope 3 emissions, data collection issues, and the importance of collaboration in driving sustainable practices forward.

Below, we have categorised the key takeaways to help guide sustainability efforts across the sector.

1. Carbon literacy and training

A major focus of the discussion was the need to improve sustainability knowledge through carbon literacy training. Several organisations have committed to funding courses aimed at equipping participants with the skills necessary to understand and reduce carbon emissions.

- **Takeaway:** Carbon literacy training is essential for organisations looking to integrate sustainability into their operations. By educating teams, companies can ensure sustainable decision-making across all levels.
- **Next step:** Organisations should offer similar training to key members of staff to encourage more sustainable practices and share knowledge internally.

2. Scope 3 emissions: data collection challenges and solutions

Measuring scope 3 emissions, particularly those related to travel and supplier activities, remains a challenge. Some organisations shared their approaches, such as using post-event surveys to gather data or developing forms for suppliers to complete regarding their carbon footprint.

- **Takeaway:** Collecting accurate scope 3 emissions data can be difficult, especially across venues, suppliers, and organisers. Collaboration and technology are key to improving this process.
- **Next step:** Focus on improving data collection incrementally, starting with accessible information, and work closely with suppliers to fill in any gaps.

3. Offsetting versus carbon removals

The group discussed the merits of carbon removals over traditional offsetting schemes, which are often viewed as unreliable. Carbon removals, including direct air capture and reforestation, offer more permanent solutions, although they are often more expensive.

- **Takeaway:** Carbon removals provide a more sustainable solution to tackling emissions than offsets. While costly, they contribute to long-term environmental goals.

- **Next step:** Consider shifting resources from traditional offsets to carbon removals, and partner with reputable organisations to support sustainable technologies and initiatives.

4. Collaboration and the supply chain

Collaboration across the supply chain was emphasised as critical to improving sustainability. Many suppliers struggle with providing carbon data, and the group discussed how best to engage them, including making data collection a contractual obligation and providing tools to simplify the process.

- **Takeaway:** Engaging suppliers and offering support in carbon reporting is essential to achieving broader sustainability goals.
- **Next step:** Incorporate carbon data collection into supplier contracts and offer practical tools, such as carbon calculators, to help suppliers meet these requirements.

5. Combating sustainability fatigue

Sustainability fatigue was raised as a concern, where ongoing discussions around climate change and a lack of visible progress can cause disengagement. The group stressed the importance of celebrating successes, no matter how small, to maintain momentum.

- **Takeaway:** Regularly highlighting achievements, however minor, helps keep the team motivated and engaged in sustainability efforts.
- **Next step:** Celebrate even small wins and showcase sustainability successes to demonstrate progress and keep teams motivated.

6. Social value and community impact

There is a growing focus on social value within sustainability efforts, with an increasing number of organisations expanding their environmental goals to include community work and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

- **Takeaway:** Sustainability extends beyond environmental considerations, with social value now playing a more significant role in strategies across the industry. Organisations should aim to balance environmental goals with positive community impact.
- **Next step:** Incorporate social value projects into sustainability strategies to highlight a holistic approach that resonates with both stakeholders and the wider community.

Conclusion

The cross-association sustainability working group showcased the ongoing efforts and challenges in the industry's journey toward sustainability. From improving carbon literacy and tracking scope 3 emissions to shifting focus from offsets to carbon removals, collaboration remains essential. By engaging suppliers, celebrating small successes, and incorporating social value into sustainability strategies, organisations can maintain momentum and drive meaningful change.

The path to a sustainable future requires ongoing learning, adaptation, and shared commitment. By applying these lessons and working together, the industry can continue to push forward and make a significant impact on both environmental and social fronts.