Principal project founder and funder:

Finding the Future, Together

Results of a major new study into our industry

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Introductions

Background

Our industry is a huge force for good

An incredibly efficient way of meeting, connecting and doing business

$101bn direct spend in the U.S. in 2019

1million jobs directly supported*

Stimulates business sales for exhibitors

Millions of jobs

Generates $bns in taxes

Connected 45 million people in U.S. and Canada in 2019

Facilitates innovation, R&D, diversity, interaction

*Updated by CEIR recently

Awareness is growing of the cost of that

- >80% of our audiences care the event is run responsibly and sustainably

- 1/3 of exhibitors don't want to associate their brand with unsustainable events

- Our audiences are looking for content that helps with their own sustainability challenges

- Employees seek sustainable employers

- Our 'hidden impacts' are increasingly visible

- We're doing a good job behind the scenes
  - But we need to tell our story more
  - Need collaboration to accelerate

Tech conferences have a garbage plastic swag problem

by MATTHEW HUGHES — 10 weeks ago in OPINION

Nora Lindström @NoraLindstroem · May 10
Hoping the **conference** next year will think about minimising **plastic was**
#ICT4D2018

Rene Millman @ReneMillman · Jul 10
This is important - tech journalists should insist that companies play their part in reducing **plastic waste** and increase recycling! That means more recycling at tech **conferences** for starters!!!

Task Force's Collective Goals

About the task force

"*When it comes to sustainability, what can we achieve together that we can't achieve alone?*"

Project aims

- Demonstrate the industry is taking this agenda seriously

- Inform and prioritise actions

- Highlight where good practices are already happening

- Identify opportunities from collaboration

- Encourage others to proactively engage

- Place our industry in a positive, proactive and defendable stance

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Towards a more sustainable B2B trade show industry in the U.S. and Canada

Key Results

The stakeholder view

Concerns about environmental impacts and sustainability

Opportunities to do better

A challenge for all stakeholders across the value chain

The need to adapt to changing stakeholder demands

Connecting people in human ways

A valuable role as a travel consolidator

An industry with a significant positive economic impact

The key findings

- **Largest impact: Carbon**

  Participant transport, venue energy, and general service contractor depot-to-venue logistics

  2019: 6.1 million MT of greenhouse gases, annual footprint of 395,000 people in the U.S.
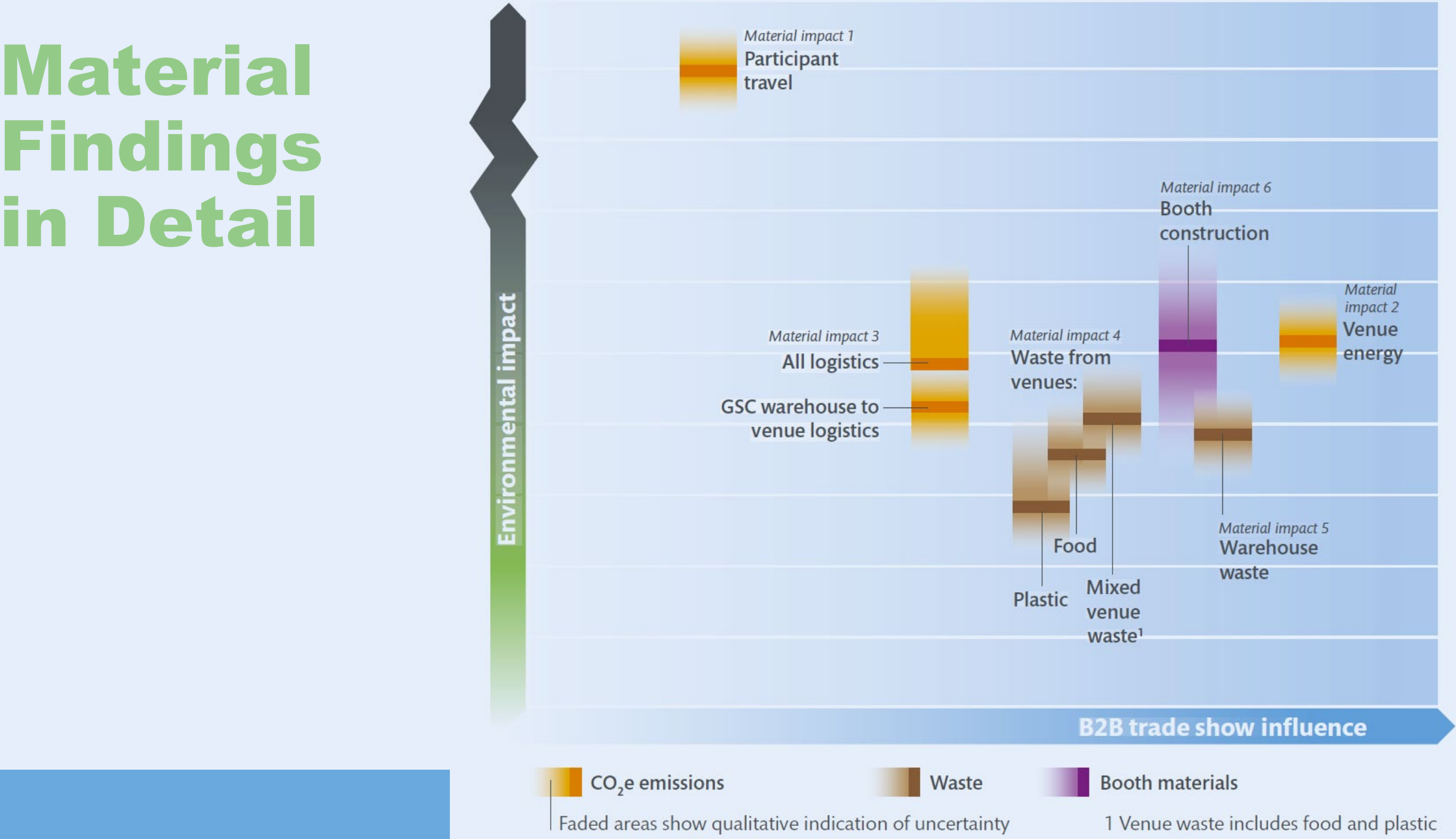
- **Second largest impact: Waste**

  Venue (show floor waste and catering etc) and GSC warehouses

  2019: 114,000MT in total, equivalent to 140,000 people in the U.S.

- **Third largest impact: Booth construction**

  The most difficult to measure due to fragmentation of supply chain and pandemic disruptions.

  Although there is significant recycling, some materials have limited potential for re-use
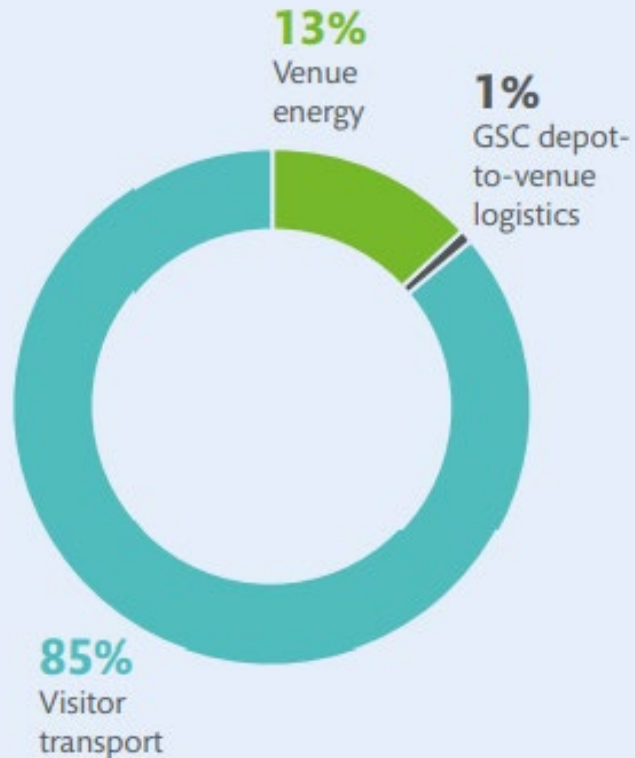
Material Findings in Detail

Environmental impact

Material impact 1
Participant travel

Material impact 6
Booth construction

Material impact 2
Venue energy

Material impact 3
All logistics

GSC warehouse to venue logistics

Material impact 4
Waste from venues:

Food

Plastic

Mixed venue waste[1]

Material impact 5
Warehouse waste

B2B trade show influence

CO_2e emissions
Waste
Booth materials

Faded areas show qualitative indication of uncertainty

1 Venue waste includes food and plastic

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Deep Dive Intro Results

Carbon - Participant transport

Figure 1: Breakdown of CO_2e emissions source

- **13%** Venue energy
- **1%** GSC depot-to-venue logistics
- **85%** Visitor transport

- 5.2 million MT CO_2e in 2019

- 120 kg CO_2e per participant

- Equivalent to the emissions for ~400,000 people per year

What can organizers do?

1. Consider and communicate our industry's role as a travel consolidator

2. Reduce travel emissions by considering proximity to key markets

3. Provide local shuttles and encourage less polluting travel

4. Offer carbon offsetting in registration, and measure

5. Work with airlines and other partners for the long term

Carbon - Venue energy

- 0.8 million MT CO2e in 2019

- 75% comes from events at hotel/resort venues

Arguably it's the easiest to address;

- Many venues working on energy efficiency

- MGM Mega 100MW Solar Array a great example

Carbon - Last mile logistics

- Measured from warehouses to venues - 85,600 MT CO2e in 2019

- The measurement of this needs to be expanded to the whole logistics chain

- US already does a good job of freight consolidation

- GES and others naturally seek to save fuel costs
  and reduce shipments

- Eg Freeman's lightweight reusable booth system

What can organizers do?

1. Work with GSCs and other contractors to consolidate freight

2. Explore light-weighted and low-volume solutions

3. Encourage exhibitors to only bring what they need

4. Coinvest in low carbon transport options

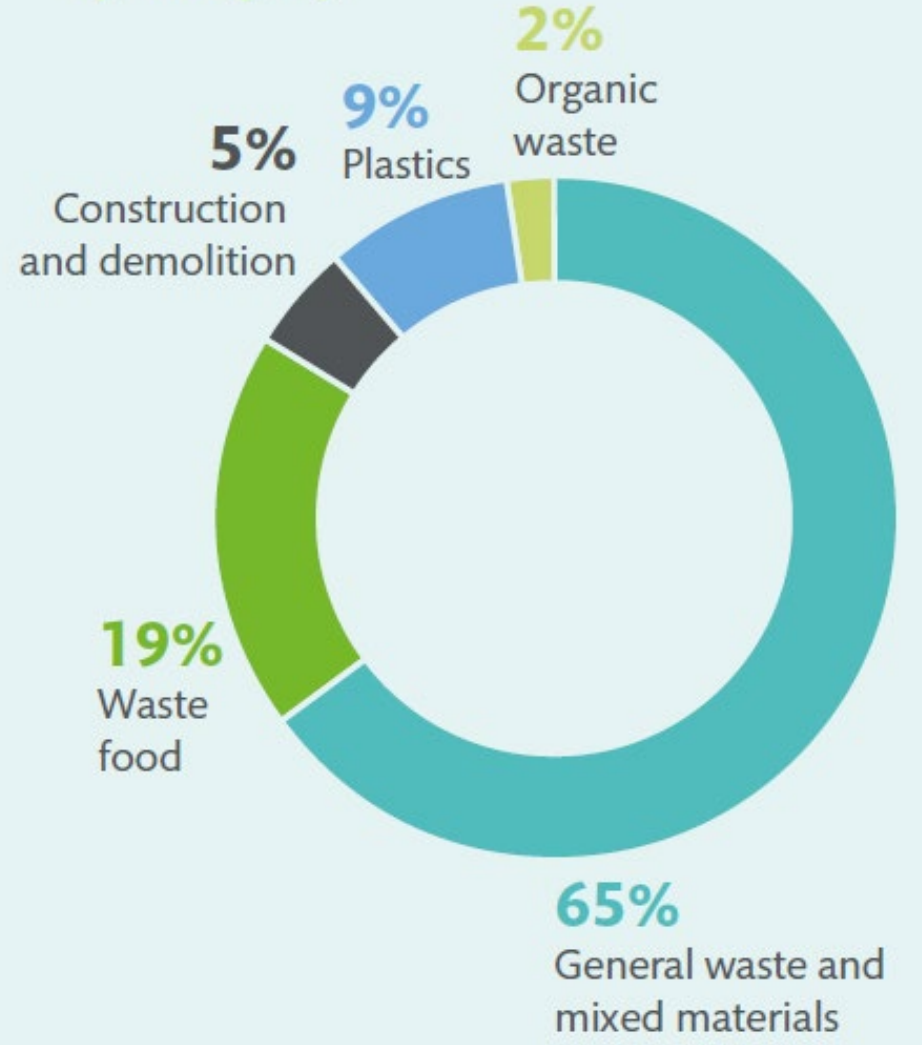5. Long term, look to move fewer materials in/out of venue

Waste from venues

- 74,500 MT of venue waste, averaging at 3.5 lb per participant- similar to annual waste from 91,800 US citizens

Figure 2: Breakdown of source of waste

35% Warehouse waste

65% Venue waste

Figure 4: Breakdown of total waste by category

5% Construction and demolition

9% Plastics

2% Organic waste

19% Waste food

65% General waste and mixed materials
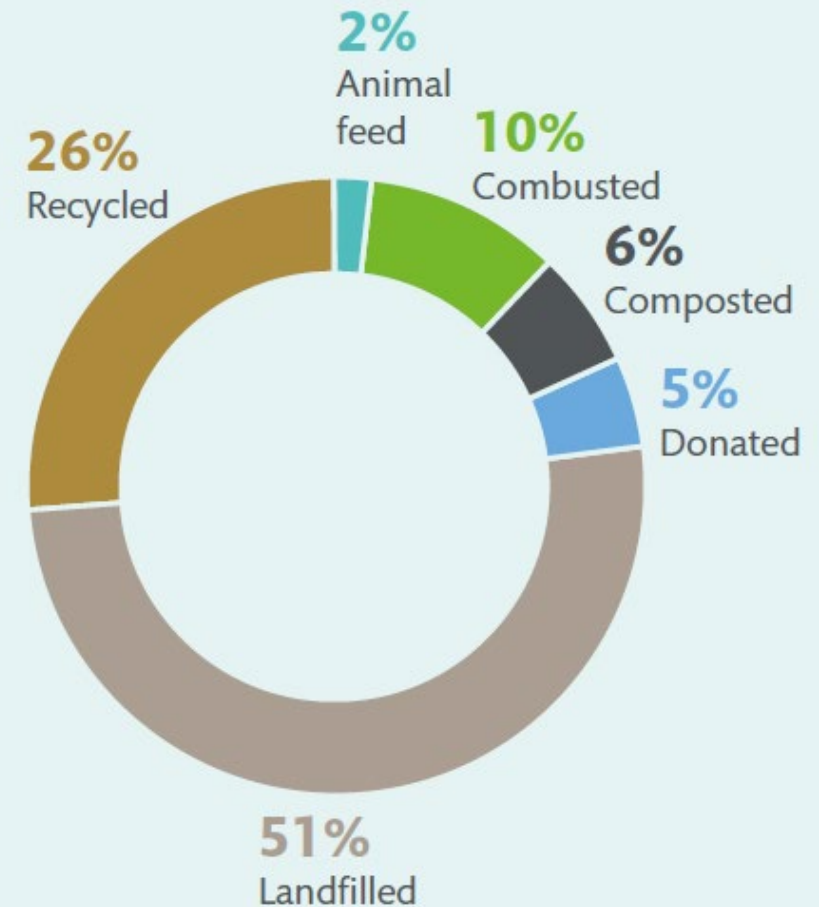
Waste from venues

- Combined recycling/composting is similar to US average – 51% goes to landfill

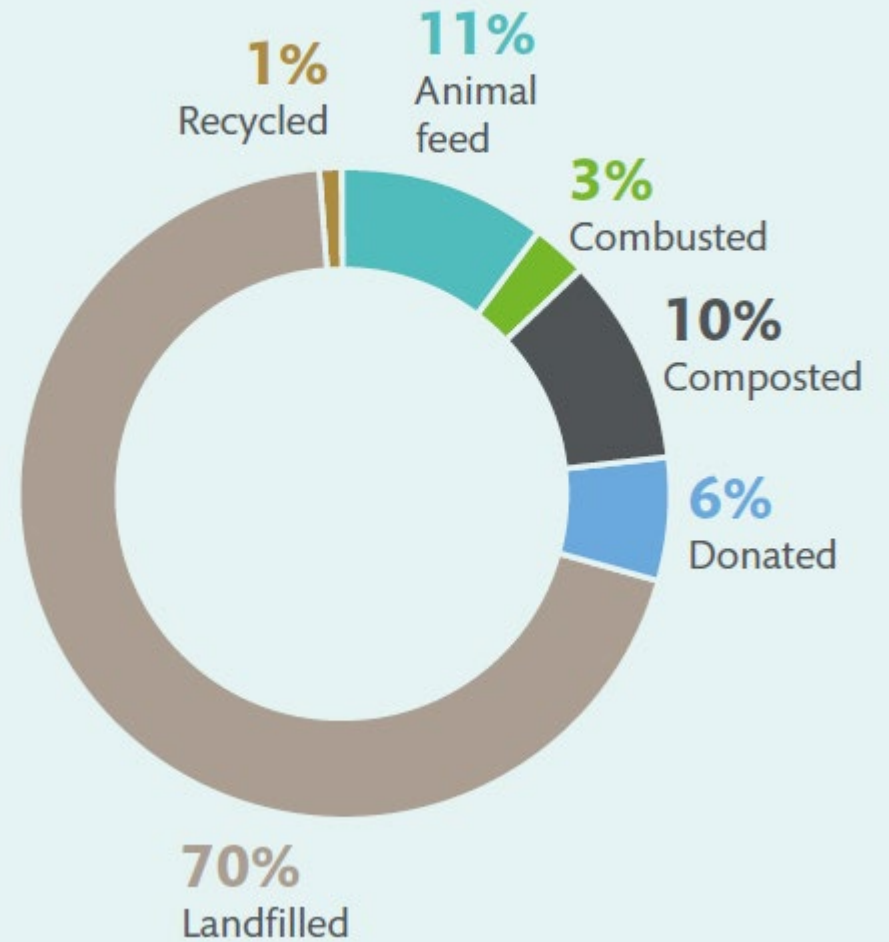Figure 5: Breakdown of total waste by end destination

- 26% Recycled
- 2% Animal feed
- 10% Combusted
- 6% Composted
- 5% Donated
- 51% Landfilled

Waste from venues

- Food waste: 14,250 MT, 19% of total venue waste

- An estimated 1,000 MT of excess food was donated, 238,000 meals

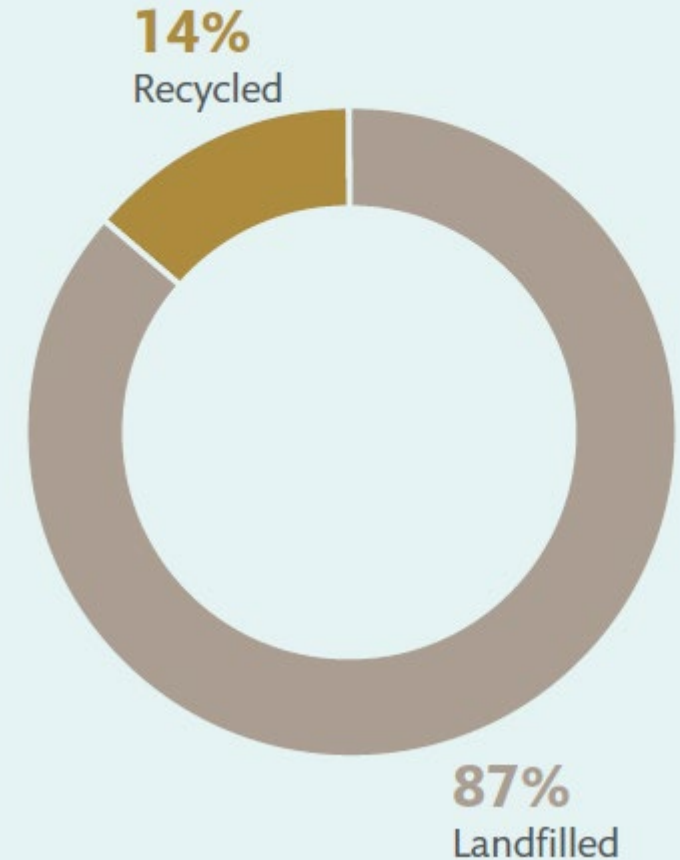- Most restaurants do much better at avoiding landfill

Figure 6: Breakdown of wasted food by end destination

1% Recycled

11% Animal feed

3% Combusted

10% Composted

6% Donated

70% Landfilled

Waste from venues

- Less than 10% of identified venue waste was plastics

- But likely to be underestimated as little is segregated

- It's also high volume, light weight

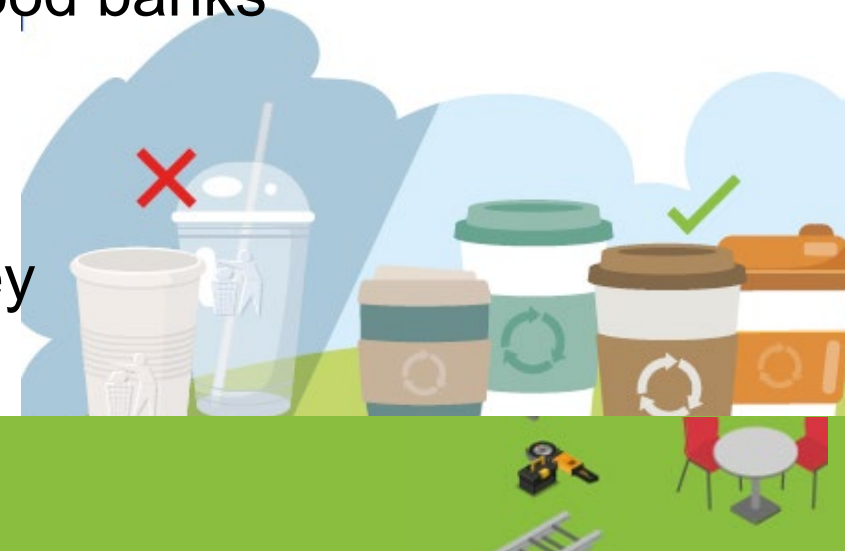- 14% of plastic waste was recycled (US average was 5% in 2022)

Figure 7: Breakdown of plastic waste by end destination

14% Recycled

87% Landfilled

What can organizers do?

Rethink – Refuse – Reduce – Rechoose – Repair – Reuse – Recycle

1. Avoiding waste, especially at move in/out - eg Emerald worked to phase out plastics at its Outdoor Retailer event

2. Many organizers are now considering how to cater for low waste food and working with caterers to partner with local food banks

3. Composting and recycling should be standard

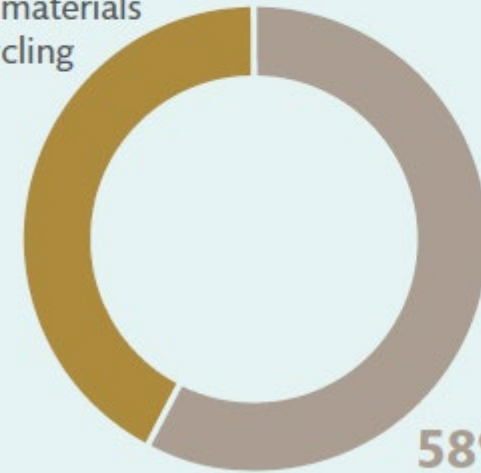4. Simplifying waste streams saves time and money

Waste from GSC warehouses

- 39,800 MT of waste

- 42% recycled, compared with a general recycling rate of 24% in the US

- Surprisingly venues seem to have more waste going to recycling

- GSCs are key to this but organizers can help by working with them to specify better materials such as carpet

Figure 8: Breakdown of warehouse waste to end destination
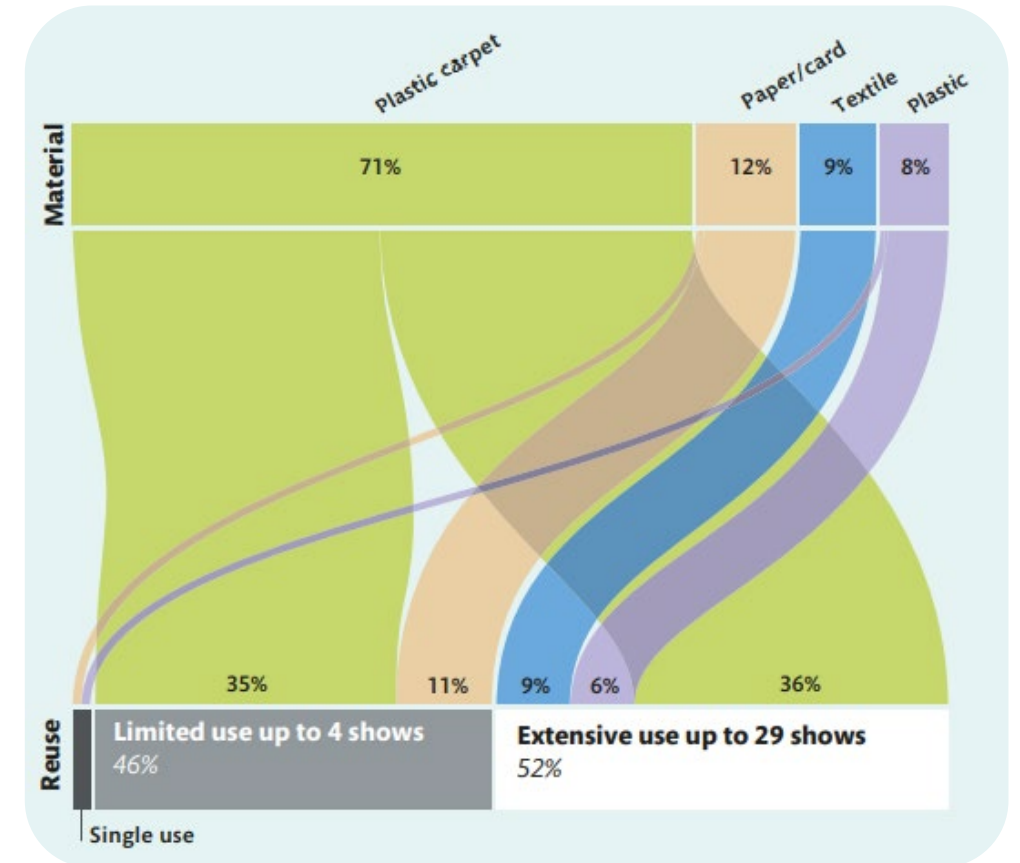
42% Mixed materials to recycling

58% General waste to landfill

Booth materials

- 71% of booths are built from industry standard, basic pipe and drape

- Carpet contributed the most to materials with limited reuse

- Custom booths are hardest to measure the impacts from

What can organizers do?

1. US probably leads the world on this due to use of pipe and drape and booth reuse

2. But we ALL need to work to phase out single use 'build and burn' booths - e.g. Informa's Better Stands programme

3. And we can work to help educate exhibitors and create longer life booths or more modular booth systems

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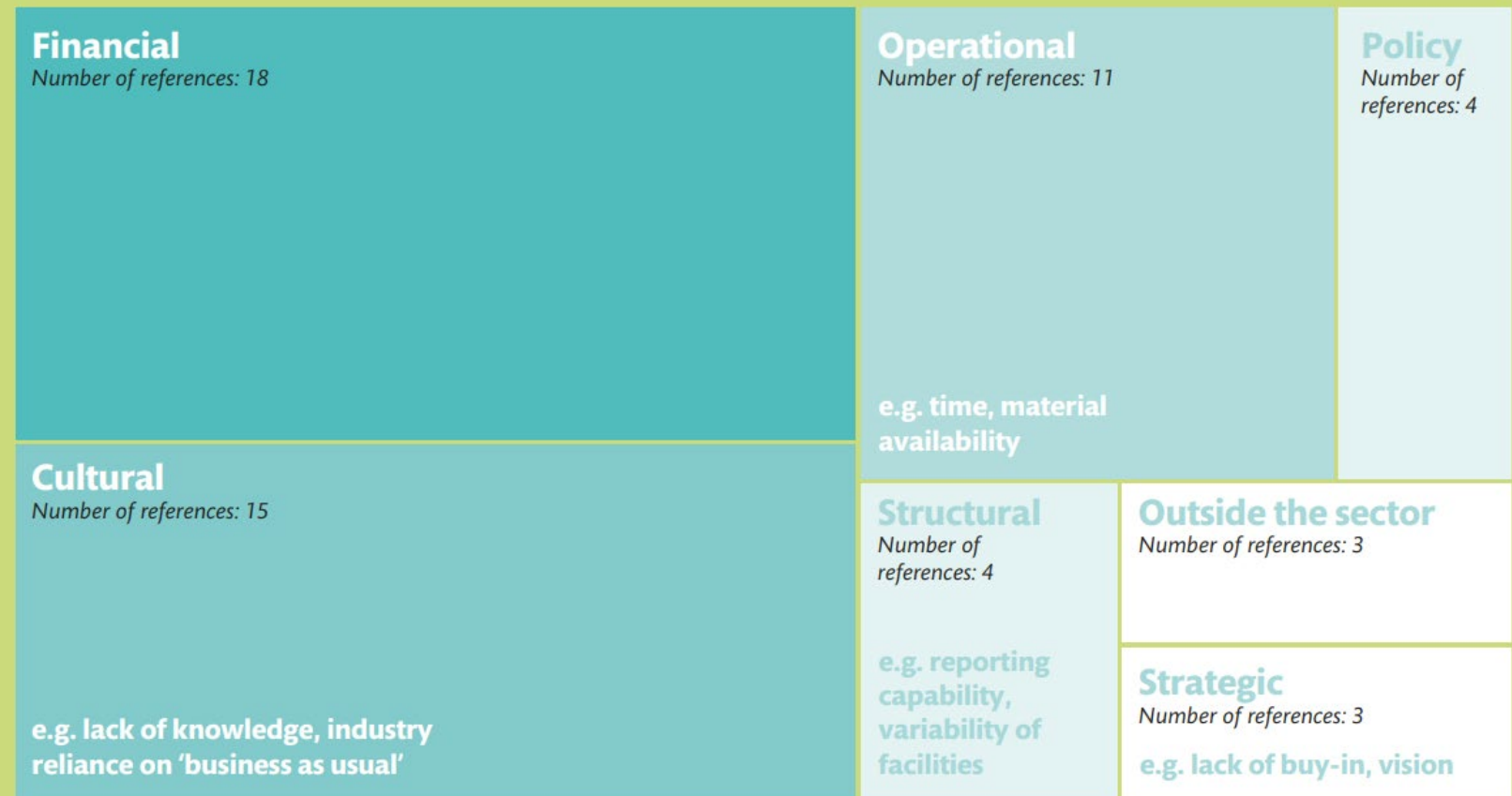
Recommendations from the Group

Barriers to sustainable change
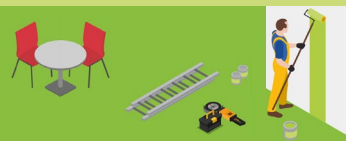
The barriers to overcome

When asked about the barriers to change, interviewees identified a number of factors:
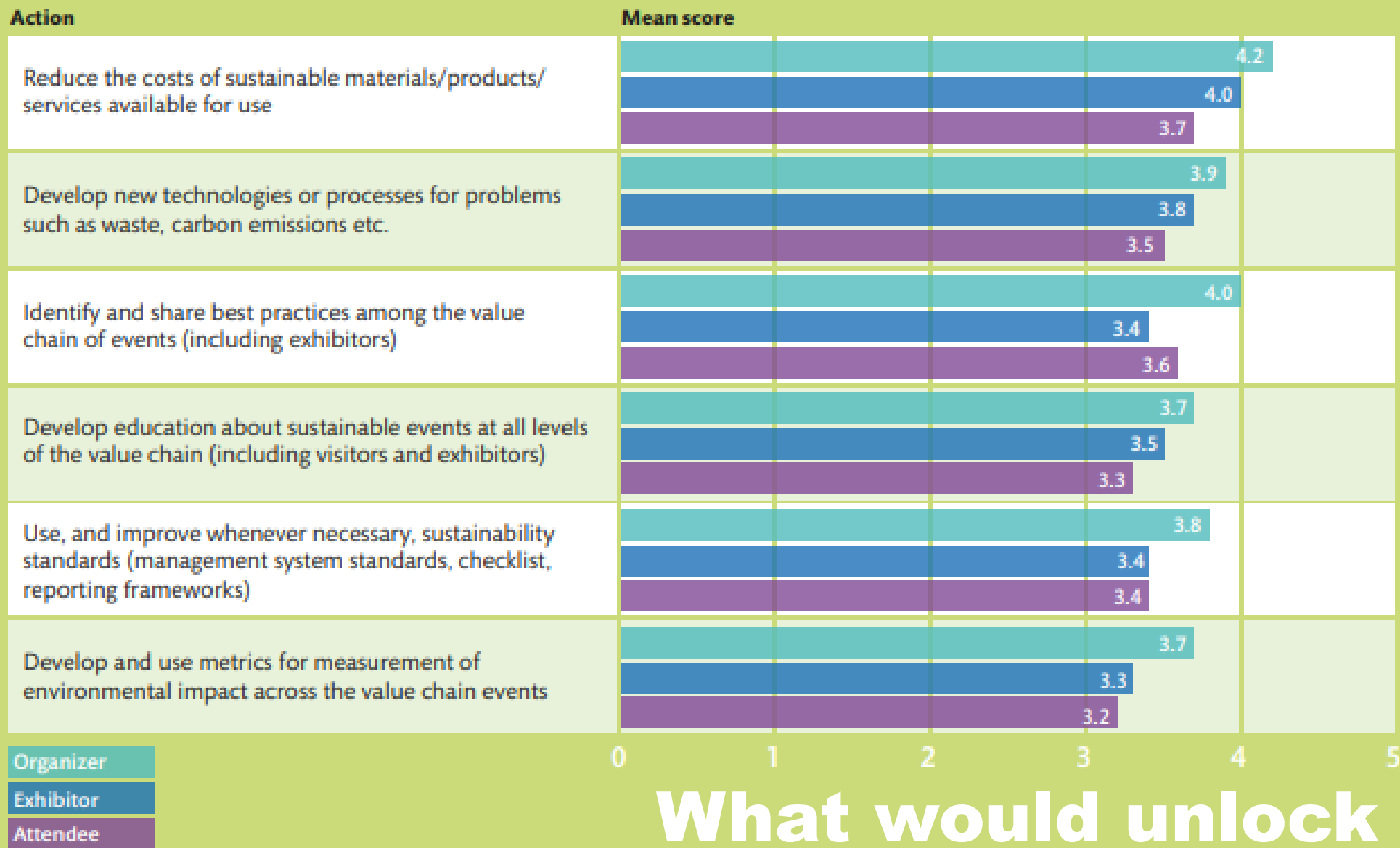
- **Financial** – the cost to value equation of particular actions
- **Structural** – the lack of the required infrastructure at venues/cities/ partners
- **Cultural** – the challenge of educating people and changing their behavior
- **Strategic** – the need for leaders to see sustainability as integral to their strategy
- **Operational** – the complexity of the challenge and the investment needed in time, technology, and support
- **Policy** – the lack of industry guidelines and sector-wide guidance
- **External** – the dependence of some actions on other sectors such as aviation

Figure 9: Barriers to sustainable change identified by interviewees

Financial
Number of references: 18

Operational
Number of references: 11

Policy
Number of references: 4

e.g. time, material availability

Cultural
Number of references: 15

Structural
Number of references: 4

Outside the sector
Number of references: 3

e.g. reporting capability, variability of facilities

Strategic
Number of references: 3

e.g. lack of knowledge, industry reliance on 'business as usual'

e.g. lack of buy-in, vision

Note: The mean score has been weighted to account for respondents that answered 'don't know' or didn't answer.

Action	Mean score
Reduce the costs of sustainable materials/products/services available for use	Organizer 4.2; Exhibitor 4.0; Attendee 3.7
Develop new technologies or processes for problems such as waste, carbon emissions etc.	Organizer 3.9; Exhibitor 3.8; Attendee 3.5
Identify and share best practices among the value chain of events (including exhibitors)	Organizer 4.0; Exhibitor 3.4; Attendee 3.6
Develop education about sustainable events at all levels of the value chain (including visitors and exhibitors)	Organizer 3.7; Exhibitor 3.5; Attendee 3.3
Use, and improve whenever necessary, sustainability standards (management system standards, checklist, reporting frameworks)	Organizer 3.8; Exhibitor 3.4; Attendee 3.4
Develop and use metrics for measurement of environmental impact across the value chain events	Organizer 3.7; Exhibitor 3.3; Attendee 3.2

Organizer
Exhibitor
Attendee

What would unlock progress fastest?

What we can do as an industry

- Committing to deadlines on net zero carbon and sustainable materials

- Moving to renewable electricity

- Phase out single use materials – serviceware, signage, booths

- Optimising logistics to save fuel, time and money

- Collaborating with host cities and key partners such as airlines

- Optimising industry standards for sustainable design, data and metrics

Creating a plan for change

Collective strategic action is the key to a more sustainable sector, so we have developed 32 recommended quick wins and longer-term actions for industry-wide adoption

	Quick wins in the next 1-2 years	Proposals for action in the next 2-5 years
Participant transportation	1. Work with local communities to promote and incentivize the use of public and other low-carbon transport in host cities 2. Campaigns to encourage event participants to adopt environmentally friendly travel practices to/from host cities, including offering carbon offsetting to attendees at registration or elsewhere when flights are the best choice 3. Campaigns and collaboration to help customers understand how best to consolidate travel through attending events 4. Weaving digital events into the product offering, where appropriate and where it maintains the quality of the customer experience	19. Support policies that enable the transition to low-carbon travel 20. Partner with transport providers to support and influence the development of low-carbon travel 21. Develop and expand best practice that helps events be more effective as travel consolidators, including exploring the co-location of related events
Venue energy	5. Collaborate on the consistent measurement of venue and hotel carbon emissions 6. Venues to explore collaborative ways to reduce emissions, such as industry buying programs	22. Set a goal to halve carbon footprints by 2030 in line with the Science Based Targets initiative 23. Commit as an industry to a net zero carbon goal such as the Net Zero Carbon Events Initiative and set a time bound goal for shifting to renewable energy
Logistics transport	7. GSCs, organizers and venues to work together to find ways to use common or shared materials, such as carpet, AV, staging, pipe, and drape, across shows 8. Encourage local sourcing by all parties	24. Organizers to work with exhibitors to reduce the volume and weight of materials freighted to and from events

Creating a plan for change

	Quick wins in the next 1-2 years	Proposals for action in the next 2-5 years
Venue waste	9. Educate exhibitors about shifting to low-impact materials for booths and materials 10. Invest in consistent and expanded waste handling infrastructure and training for venues and contractors 11. Expand efforts to phase out plastic from venues, caterers, exhibitors etc., including concessions 12. Invest in water refill stations and support a culture of reusable water bottles 13. Partner with others to find new ways to repurpose waste	25. An industry-wide agreement to simplify materials at shows to increase recycling 26. Work together on timelines to phase out hard-to-recycle materials 27. Invest in more reusable serviceware or ban disposable food service materials 28. Work with cities and waste handlers to improve waste handling infrastructure, particularly around composting and off-site materials recovery
Food waste	14. Work with caterers and specifiers to improve food sourcing, specify appropriate quantities, recipes and serving styles, and reduce waste 15. Work with local communities, government, and NGOs to maximize the donation of edible food, and find uses for the rest	29. Commit as an industry to reduce food waste, with phased targets 30. Consider investing in shared community infrastructure to handle food waste better
Depot waste	16. Work together to reduce the amount of carpet specified and improve reuse and recycling rates	31. Explore alternatives to carpet such as permanent or bare flooring
Booth materials	17. Promote the value of reusable, sustainable booth systems 18. Support R&D into new sustainable materials and booth systems	32. Invest in a greater supply of reusable booth systems 33. Invest in new reprintable materials such as booth signage and fabrics

Quick wins for organizers

Carbon	1. Move your offices to renewable electricity, and ask venues to do the same 2. Look for opportunities to save energy, materials and money onsite 3. Encourage attendees to travel efficiently and offer offsets in registration 4. Offer shuttles and encourage public transport or even walking from hotels 5. Join initiatives like the Net Zero Carbon Events Initiatives 6. Use industry standard methods to collect and share data
Waste	1. Work with venues and suppliers to improve recycling and donations 2. Work with caterers to reduce food waste and seek sustainable food options 3. Work with suppliers, exhibitors and others to phase out hard to use materials
Booth materials	1. Work with exhibitors and contractors to phase out all disposable booths 2. Look to reuse, recycle, replace or remove carpet, or at least don't specify edge to edge – use what you need and no more

Questions?

For more information:

siso.org/finding-future-together

www.netzerocarbonevents.org

www.eventscouncil.org/sustainability

www.ufi.org/susdev