

Guidance for more environmentally sustainable events



United for Humanity

Red Cross and Red Crescent
Statutory Meetings

Introduction



Bringing together humanitarian practitioners, governments, communities and partners to advance the humanitarian agenda and facilitate knowledge exchange is a core function of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement). At the same time, meetings, conferences and events (hereinafter collectively referred to as “events”) inevitably leave an environmental footprint, including carbon emissions, resource consumption and waste generation.

This Guidance aims to strengthen the environmental management of the Council of Delegates, the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and, by extension, the General Assembly of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). This is in line with commitments expressed in the [Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations](#). It may also serve as a resource for the broader Movement to guide event organization.¹

The Guidance has three sections:

-
- 1 An organizational roadmap to set, prioritize and achieve environmental goals and objectives related to events
 - 2 Practical guidance and key performance indicators (KPIs) for planning and executing more environmentally sustainable events
 - 3 A summary and brief checklist for event organizers to use as a reference before and during event planning. Further resources, templates and tools are provided in the endnotes.
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¹ The development of this Guidance was initiated by the ICRC/IFRC Joint Organizing Committee for the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and the Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, with a view to improving the environmental performance of the Council of Delegates and the International Conference. However, it is also intended to be shared as a resource for the broader Movement.

ROADMAP FOR SETTING YOUR ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

To assist you in setting environmental goals and objectives for your event, please follow the four simple steps outlined in this section.

Roadmap for setting your environmental goals and objectives

The following four steps will guide you in setting environmental goals and objectives for your event. Detailed information on how to implement and realize them is provided in Section 2 “Practical guidance and suggested key performance indicators (KPIs)” (pages 7–16).

Step 1.

Identify the environmental issues related to your events and determine your organizational boundaries and scope

A.

Start by identifying and writing down all environmental issues linked to your events:

- > carbon emissions, including:
 - emissions from international travel
 - emissions from local commuting and transportation
- > energy consumption, including:
 - energy used for venues and accommodation
 - energy used for transportation
- > water consumption, especially at venues and accommodation
- > waste generation, including:
 - waste from catering
 - waste from event operations and attendee activities
- > use of natural resources (non-PVC), such as:
 - catering-related items (e.g. food, drink, packaging)
 - materials for event setup, logistics and transport
 - production of promotional and informational materials (e.g. banners, backdrops, merchandise, programmes, signage)
 - QR codes to direct participants to information to reduce the printing of handouts.

B.

Assess which of these environmental issues your organization has control or influence over – this defines your organizational boundaries. Generally, if your organization is paying for something, you likely have some level of control or influence.

For instance, if you are covering the costs of catering, promotional materials, banners, etc., you can influence how they are produced and delivered.

C.

Define the organizational scope within which your organization will account for the emissions of your events. As per the Greenhouse Gas Protocol, emissions are classified as falling within Scope 1, 2 or 3.

Scope 1 includes all direct emissions under the organization’s control (e.g. fuel combustion in company-owned vehicles and equipment).

Scope 2 includes indirect emissions from purchased energy (e.g. electricity used in offices).

Scope 3 covers indirect emissions that occur in your value chain and are a result of your operations but are from sources you do not own or control (e.g. work-related travel, purchased goods and services, waste disposal). Emissions from air travel are reported under Scope 3. The bulk of the greenhouse gas emissions of most organizations fall under Scope 3.^{II}

^{II} Further guidance can be found at <<https://www.climate-charter.org/guidance/>> and in the [Greenhouse Gas Protocol \(WRI & WBCSD, 2015\)](#).

Step 2. Prioritize the issues

Once you've identified the environmental issues related to your event and determined your organizational boundaries and scope (Actions A–C), it's time to **assess which issues have the greatest impact and should be prioritized**. To determine which issues to focus on, consider the following questions:

1. How significant is the environmental impact?
2. What happens if action is or isn't taken?
3. Which issues matter most to participants, sponsors and the public?
4. Is the environmental benefit worth the effort?
5. How does current practice align with laws, standards and industry norms?

Research shows that the biggest contributors to the environmental impacts of events are, in descending order, air travel, venue and accommodation, catering and conference materials.^{III}

Whether or not international travel to and from events is included within your organizational boundaries, the emissions it generates should be reported on, as they make up such a big part of the overall environmental footprint. You can add an explanation if these emissions are not considered to be within your control or influence, stating that they are included for completeness. In your reporting, you can also include information on any measures taken to reduce and/or mitigate these emissions.

Step 3. Define “green conference”

If you want to “green your events”, you must **define what you mean by a “green conference, meeting or event”**. For instance:

A green conference, meeting or event is designed, organized and implemented in a way that minimizes the potential negative environmental impact and has a positive influence on all those involved and on the host community.^{IV}

Step 4. Set environmental goals and objectives

Next, **set your environmental goals and objectives in relation to your events**. These should align with your organization's environmental goals and objectives. Consider whether you need to develop a policy for your events and/or whether you have an organizational environmental policy or management framework that addresses meetings, conferences and events.

In alignment with the Climate and Environment Charter, the goal could be:

> “To maximize the environmental sustainability of our conferences, meetings and events and rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”^V

While this high-level goal sets a strategic direction, shorter-term objectives ensure measurable progress. These could include:

1. Reporting on major emissions from events (as described in Step 2)
2. Setting emissions, water and energy consumption and waste generation reduction targets (see KPIs in the next section)
3. Improving the environmental footprint of catering by promoting locally sourced, environmentally sustainable and/or vegetarian options
4. Eliminating single-use plastics and event-specific materials
5. Prioritizing sustainable procurement

^{III} Duane *et al.*, 2021; Neugebauer *et al.*, 2020; Stiel & Teuteberg, 2015.

^{IV} The definition draws on the terminology provided in European Commission, 2024; ISO, 2024; UNEP, 2009.

^V The suggested wording draws on the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations (ICRC & IFRC, 2021, Commitment 2).

Key elements to consider

To implement these objectives effectively, it is important to:

1. **Allocate resources.** For instance, if the objective is to reduce emissions, then your organization must have the capacity to collect data on current emissions to set a baseline.
2. **Assign responsibilities.**
3. **Establish monitoring systems** and ensure sufficient funds are budgeted. Progress should be regularly monitored, reported and adjusted as needed.
 - A good monitoring and reporting system tracks performance over time, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This may include carbon emissions calculations and reductions, participant feedback and other KPIs. The next section outlines tools that can be used for carbon accounting to track emissions from international travel, accommodation and the procurement of goods and services and suggests KPIs across various environmental aspects of events.

Potential challenges, such as limited capacity, financial constraints and stakeholder engagement, should be anticipated and addressed as early as possible to ensure successful implementation.

The above process will assist you in identifying and prioritizing environmental issues and establishing and achieving your environmental goals and objectives. To further guide this process, the next section provides practical guidance and suggested KPIs that apply to events, which your organization can use as relevant.

Important

Emissions offsetting is a complex topic, and reaching reduction targets should take priority.

Your organization may consider offsetting all or part of the emissions associated with your events. You may also want to encourage participants, at registration, to offset emissions from their travel to and from the event or all or part of their share of the emissions generated by the event itself. While the offsetting of unavoidable emissions through high-quality emissions reduction projects is an effective strategy, it should be considered as a complement to and not a substitute for emissions reduction efforts.

Further, not all offsetting schemes are reliable, which can pose reputational risks and “greenwashing” concerns. In the future, there may be opportunities for offsetting or “carbon taxing” emissions through schemes available within the Movement.^{VI}



As an option, you might explore aligning with international standards, such as the ISO 20121:2024 Event sustainability management systems or ISO 14001:2015 Environmental management systems, which covers the whole organization. These standards provide a framework for continual improvement over time and offer brand recognition; however, they require significant resources and investment and are not essential for improving environmental performance (ISO, 2015; ISO, 2024).

^{VI} Cette piste est étudiée par le Secrétariat de la Fédération internationale, en partenariat avec diverses Sociétés nationales.

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE AND SUGGESTED KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

This section provides guidance and recommendations for reducing the environmental footprint of events across various aspects. These can be applied as relevant and include suggested KPIs to track progress over time.

Type of event (in person, hybrid or online)

Procurement

Transportation and travel

Accommodation

Venue

Catering

Promotional and
printed materials

Awareness-raising



TYPE OF EVENT (IN PERSON, HYBRID OR ONLINE)

Decide if the event should be in person, hybrid or online by considering the anticipated environmental impacts in relation to the objectives of the event, the time zones of participants and the costs. If the focus is on information-sharing, showcasing or preparatory activities, an online or hybrid meeting may be possible. In other cases, an in-person meeting may be the better choice, particularly for activities such as brainstorming, strategic planning, decision-making, relationship-building and negotiations. Online formats are more cost- and time-efficient and have a lower environmental impact. They also give those not able to join in person an opportunity to make their voices heard. However, meetings involving sensitive or complex interpersonal dynamics and requiring focus from participants usually work better in person.

- > Hosting a hybrid event is like organizing and facilitating two separate events, each requiring different resources, technologies and strategies. Make sure you plan and budget for both!
- > If hosting an in-person or hybrid event, reduce and target essential in-person participation and promote a more inclusive online participation.
- > Consider the pros and cons of having multiple local/regional events with virtual links between them. While it reduces air travel, it may also lead to less diverse interaction.
- > Prior to the event or as part of registration, inform participants of the format (in person/online/hybrid) and let them know if all or parts of the proceedings will be recorded and made available.

Possible KPIs:

Quantitative

- > Proportion of in-person and online participation over consecutive events/years (%).
- > Number/percentage of attendees opting for virtual participation instead of travelling over consecutive events/years.
- > Total estimated carbon emissions saved by hosting virtual or hybrid events instead of fully in-person meetings.

Qualitative

- > Measures taken to optimize participation, including limiting the number of in-person participants and strengthening online engagement capacity through better IT systems, training, etc.

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PROCUREMENT

- > **Integrate environmental criteria across all procurement of services and products**, including accommodation, venues, local transport, catering and materials, to evaluate suppliers and/or products and services purchased. Request suppliers to show proof that such criteria are met wherever feasible.^{VII}
- > Where possible, **prioritize providers who can show how they are managing and improving their environmental performance and the environmental impact of the product/service they provide.**
- > **Include environmental considerations in your tender and contractual documents** (e.g. clauses in your contracts, environmental stewardship in your code of conduct).^{VIII}

Possible KPIs:

Quantitative

- > Percentage of suppliers with sustainability criteria integrated into their contracts.

Qualitative

- > Examples of measures proposed by suppliers to reduce environmental impact.
- > Willingness of suppliers to engage in discussions about environmental sustainability measures.
- > Inclusion of environmental standards in the supplier code of conduct.

^{VII} To further assist in greening procurement practices, the IFRC [Green Logistics Guide](#) provides useful instructions. As part of the procurement process, suppliers can also be asked to fill out the ICRC [sustainability questionnaires](#) to provide a better understanding of their products, services and sustainability practices.

^{VIII} The ICRC [Supplier Code of Conduct](#) can be used as guidance.

Type of event
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Procurement

Transportation and travel

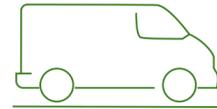
Accommodation

Venue

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TRANSPORTATION AND TRAVEL

- > **Report on air travel emissions.** Air travel represents between 96% and 98% of the total emissions of international events. While it may be considered that responsibility for these emissions should be shared between the host and the participating organizations, it is nonetheless important to report on them.^{IX} Air travel emissions can be estimated using home and destination locations and applying the [ICAO Carbon Emissions Calculator](#) or the [Humanitarian Carbon Calculator](#).
- > **Promote the use of more sustainable modes of transport** (e.g. rail), as appropriate, for all or part of travel to and from the event.
- > With regard to local travel, **organize shared transport between the airport, hotels and the venue. Promote the use of public transport if appropriate.**

Possible KPIs:

Quantitative

- > Total CO₂ emissions from participant air and other travel
 - > Reduction in travel-related emissions compared to previous years/events
 - > Distance travelled by participants and method of travel (e.g. air, rail, car).
-

Qualitative

- > Measures taken to reduce emissions related to transportation and travel, such as shared transport, promotion of sustainable transportation options and venue accessibility from the airport and promoted accommodations.
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^{IX} Duane *et al.*, 2021; Leochico *et al.*, 2021; Neugebauer *et al.*, 2020; Stiel & Teuteberg, 2015.

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ACCOMMODATION

- > **Promote accommodations that are close to the venue and that can demonstrate good environmental management and performance.** Service providers can be asked to present records of their environmental management systems and/or sustainability credentials (e.g. Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) or GSTC-Recognized [Standards](#), green building certifications, [Green Key](#), EarthCheck).
- > **Privilege longer-term partnerships with accommodations that are currently seeking or willing to improve their environmental performance over time.** This includes their capacity to account for and reduce emissions and waste and to optimize consumption, including energy, electricity and water. See also recommendations for procurement.
- > **Ask the promoted accommodations if they collect environmental data and if it can be shared** (could be included as a requirement in tender documents). Such data can include emissions, electricity use and mix, water use per room per night and waste generation and management.

Possible KPIs:

Quantitative

- > Percentage of participants in accommodation with sound environmental management systems and/or recognized environmental certification.
- > Average CO₂ emissions, energy consumption and mix, and water use per room per night.
- > Weight of waste generated (ideally disaggregated by type of waste, e.g. plastic, paper) and percentage reused, recycled, composted, landfilled and incinerated.
- > Over consecutive events/years, amount/percentage of waste avoided and recovered/recycled/reused.

Qualitative

- > Measures taken to promote pre-selected accommodations with environmental management systems and/or credentials.
- > Updates on partnerships with selected accommodations to enable environmental performance to be improved and data to be collected, shared and reported.

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VENUE

- > **Consider whether the event could be held on your own premises.**
- > **Prioritize venues close to or easily accessible from the promoted accommodations, airports, train stations and/or the city centre.**
- > **As with accommodation, prioritize venues that demonstrate good environmental management and performance, with preference** given to venues with internationally recognized environmental certification, such as ISO 20121:2024 or ISO 14001:2015.
- > **Request waste collection and recycling stations and no single-use items.**
- > **Request optimal heating/cooling and lighting options with energy-efficient provisions in place**, privileging the use of renewable energy sources.
- > As with accommodation, **privilege longer-term partnerships with venues that are willing to work to improve their environmental performance over time.** This includes their capacity to account for and reduce emissions and waste and to optimize consumption, including electricity and water. See also recommendations for procurement.
- > **Ask potential venues if they collect environmental performance data** and if it can be shared for reporting purposes (could be included as a requirement in tender documents).

Possible KPIs:

Quantitative

- > Percentage of events held at venues with a solid environmental management system and/or recognized environmental accreditation.
- > Total CO₂ emissions, energy consumption and mix, and water use for the whole event or per day.
- > Weight of waste generated (ideally disaggregated by type of waste, e.g. plastic, paper) and percentage reused, recycled, composted, landfilled and incinerated.
- > Over consecutive events/years, amount/percentage of waste avoided and recovered/recycled/reused.

Qualitative

- > Updates on partnerships with the selected venue(s) to enable environmental performance to be improved and data to be collected, shared and reported.
- > Measures taken to optimize resource use and reduce waste (e.g. lower air-conditioning/heating, recycling stations, digital banners).

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CATERING

- > **Promote plant-based alternatives and minimize waste by carefully planning quantities based on expected demand.**
- > **Request caterers to minimize packaging, avoiding single-use items and plastics**, and to implement appropriate waste management practices.
- > **Request caterers and/or venues (above) to provide water fountains or jugs with glasses** instead of single-use bottles, plastic cups or plastic-coated paper cups.
- > Where possible, **privilege caterers that have environmental management systems/certifications and/or use local, organic and seasonal ingredients and offer plant-based options.**
- > **Partner with organizations that redistribute surplus food and/or repurpose food waste** (e.g. composting, energy production).
- > **Ask potential caterers if they collect environmental performance data and if it can be shared for reporting purposes** (could be included as a requirement in tender documents).

Possible KPIs:

Quantitative

- > Percentage of suppliers with sound environmental management systems and/or environmental certifications.
- > Percentage of locally sourced, organic and seasonal ingredients.
- > Percentage of plant-based meals served.
- > Total food waste generated (kg or % of total food served).
- > Percentage of food waste diverted from landfill (composted or donated).
- > Reduction of packaging and single-use plastics over consecutive events (%).

Qualitative

- > Measures taken that promote more environmentally sustainable catering.

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Catering

**Promotional and
printed materials**

Awareness-raising



PROMOTIONAL AND PRINTED MATERIALS

- > **Avoid or reduce printed materials**, including banners. Promote the use of video displays.
- > **Where printed or promotional materials are essential, avoid adding the event name and year to encourage reuse.**
- > **Avoid or reduce promotional materials and gifts, including carrier bags, notepads and pens.** If such materials are necessary, promote long-term reusable, recycled and/or organic items.
- > **Include sustainability criteria in procurement** (see the procurement section) and privilege printing services and products with environmental credentials (e.g. [EU Ecolabel](#), Certified B Corporation, ISO 14001:2015).

Possible KPIs:

While reducing printed and promotional materials is essential for promoting pro-environmental behaviour and organizational values, their overall environmental impact is relatively minimal. Consequently, it may not be necessary to gather extensive quantitative data. Focusing on qualitative data is likely more effective.

Qualitative

- > Ways that the event applied a “digital-first” approach (e.g. using apps, QR codes and digital signage instead of printed materials).
- > Measures taken to avoid or reduce printed and promotional materials.

Quantitative

- > Total weight of printed materials used per attendee (kg/person).
- > Reduction in printed materials compared to previous events (%).
- > Percentage of promotional items made from recycled, reusable or organic materials.

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AWARENESS-RAISING

Events are a good opportunity to promote organizational values, including environmental sustainability. Encourage leaders to acknowledge impacts, highlight steps taken to reduce them and promote more sustainable choices among participants.

> **Include communications that promote pro-environmental behaviour among participants, highlighting the personal benefits, ease and values of sustainable travel, accommodation and food options.**

> **Promote the environmental initiatives taken by your organization, including in relation to daily operations** (e.g. renewable energy for offices and warehouses, water fountains, less printing, the use of public transport) and programmes (e.g. climate change adaptation, nature-based solutions, restoration, carbon reduction activities), among others.

> **Include environmental sustainability questions in the post-event survey**, for instance:

- How aware were you of the measures taken to make the [event] more environmentally sustainable? (*Very aware – Not aware*).

Can you recall any such measures and explain what they were?

OR

How effective do you think the measures taken to reduce the environmental impact of the [event] were? (List your activities, being as specific as you can, e.g. online/hybrid event with reduced in-person participation, reducing or

eliminating single-use plastics and event-specific materials, catering, recycling stations) (*Very effective – Not effective – I didn't notice*).

- Will you change your own behaviour and personal choices based on measures taken for the [event]? (*Yes – No – Unsure*).

If yes, what measures will you take?

- Will you change any practices related to your organization's meetings, conferences and events based on measures taken for the [event]? (*Yes – No – Unsure*).

If yes, what measures will you take?

- Do you have any suggestions for improving the environmental aspects of future meetings, events and conferences? (*Open-ended response*).

Possible KPIs:

Qualitative

- > Description of awareness-raising and communication activities undertaken (e.g. leadership welcome speech, estimated travel emissions and total emissions for the event displayed or shared with participants).
- > Results from post-event survey.

SUMMARY AND CHECKLIST

The summary of the process and the checklist are designed to help you assess and improve the environmental sustainability of your events. By asking key questions before and during the planning process, you can make informed decisions that align with your environmental sustainability goals, increasing accountability and promoting sound choices.

Summary of the process for implementing environmental initiatives for your event

No matter where you are on your sustainability journey, small actions can add up to big change. Here is a simple chart to support your planning of a greener, more sustainable event.

This shows your organization is taking real steps to be more environmentally responsible – and it helps build momentum for future improvements. In addition, it will strengthen accountability and inspire others.

1.



SET A CLEAR GOAL

Decide what you want to achieve. It doesn't have to be complicated – something like “We want to make our conferences, meetings and events more environmentally sustainable and lower our greenhouse gas emissions” is a great place to start.

2.



TRACK AIR TRAVEL EMISSIONS

Air travel usually causes the most emissions – around 96%–98% for international events. Use tools such as the [ICAO Carbon Emissions Calculator](#) or the [Humanitarian Carbon Calculator](#) to measure the emissions from participants' flights.

This step helps you to:

- understand the environmental impact of air travel
- set a baseline that you can use to track progress over time/events
- set realistic reduction targets – such as limiting the number of in-person participants or encouraging alternative transport where possible.

3.



CHOOSE ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE HOTELS AND VENUES

Look for places that match your event needs and demonstrate a commitment to environmental sustainability. Ask hotels and venues if they have environmental certifications or policies. Where people stay and gather has the biggest environmental impact after air travel, so it's important to choose wisely.

4.



MAKE GREENER CHOICES FOR FOOD, PRINTING, EVENT MATERIALS AND TRANSPORT

Use the practical tips provided above to make better decisions about catering, printing and local travel. Keep a note of the choices you make – this will help later with your reporting.

5.



SHARE WHAT YOU DID

To complete the cycle, it is equally important to describe the environmental journey of your event in the post-event report, including the following points:

- list of identified environmental issues related to your event
- your environmental goals and objectives
- actions taken to reduce the event's environmental impact (even simple ones!) by using the KPIs indicated in the practical guidance section
- emissions from air travel
- challenges
- proposed improvements for future events.

This shows your organization is taking real steps to be more environmentally responsible – and it helps build momentum for future improvements. In addition, it will strengthen accountability and inspire others.

Tips

Consider involving an environmental expert – it may be helpful, but it's not essential. Make sure all event organizers and your leadership team are involved to build alignment and shared ownership across the organization.

Checklist

Before planning the event

- Have you defined your environmental sustainability goals in relation to your events?
 - Have you identified the scope and boundaries of the assessment of your events' environmental impact?
 - Have you established a pathway to reach your environmental sustainability goals (including inputs, outputs and intermediate and longer-term outcomes)?
 - Have you allocated sufficient resources (staff, budget, tools) to reach your goals and established a monitoring and evaluation framework?
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When planning the event

Format and travel

- Have you chosen the best format (in person, hybrid or online) for the event, considering both the environment and the objectives of the event?
 - Are you tracking and minimizing carbon emissions from participant travel?
 - Are you offering incentives for sustainable travel (e.g. public transport, carpooling, carbon offsets)?
-

Venue and accommodation

- Do the venue and accommodations have environmental management systems, recycling stations and water refill stations?
 - Do they collect data on environmental impact that can be shared with you?
 - Are the accommodations near the venue, reducing transportation needs?
-

Catering

- Can caterers prioritize plant-based menu options that are locally sourced and seasonal?
 - Have you planned food and beverages to match participant demand and minimize food waste?
 - Can you eliminate or minimize single-use plastics and packaging?
 - Are composting and recycling options available for food waste and packaging?
-

Materials and giveaways

- Can promotional and informational materials be shared digitally instead of being printed?
 - Are giveaways necessary? Are the items sustainable and/or sustainably sourced and produced?
 - Can the name and date of the event be avoided?
-

Communication and engagement

- Are there opportunities to promote environmental values and behaviour at the event? *Communication at leadership level is a great opportunity, as is sharing measures that reduce the environmental impact of the event.*
-

Suppliers and procurement

- Do your suppliers and service providers (including for the venue, accommodation, catering and materials) have sustainability criteria integrated into their contracts?
 - Does your supplier code of conduct include environmental standards?
-

After the event

- Have you included your environmental actions and lessons learnt in the post-event report?
-

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