



## Your sustainable events guide to reducing the impact of CIOB events

### Introduction

The CIOB Environmental Sustainability Action Plan 2024-2028, made a commitment to ensure we are 'walking the talk' by embedding sustainability in our business operations as well as communicating the case for positive change in the industry through the promotion of environmental sustainability in construction.

This included an action to review sustainable event standards guidance and agree internal guidance for events. It was recommended that the guidance should be disseminated to regional managers and hub committees for hub events (where applicable).

This guidance should be applied as far as possible when organising large in-person events on behalf of CIOB, including major events such as Members' Forum, the CIOB Awards and in-person conferences. For smaller CPD and networking events, consideration should be given to applying the guidance in a proportionate way, as not all elements will be applicable.

### Why does this matter

Society faces some big challenges, like climate change, biodiversity loss, resource depletion, and environmental pollution. We can help protect the environment and natural resources by minimising the impact of our events.

Your audience cares about sustainability, so this is an opportunity to show them you've placed sustainable practices front and centre at your event, and it will get noticed, building CIOB's reputation, and proving that corporate responsibility is something we take seriously.

This is an opportunity for us to lead by example. We have made environmental sustainability a focused theme of our corporate plan and are working to influence the construction industry to embed more sustainable practices, so we must demonstrate that we are doing so too.

### Identify areas to target

Start by considering what the key environmental aspects of your event will be to identify the environmental issues you should aim to manage and your objectives for minimising the impact of the event.

For a large event with international participants, like Members' Forum for example, the key environmental aspects are likely to be the carbon impact of delegates travelling to the conference (especially by air); and provision of accommodation, catering, and materials; energy use at the venue; and waste generated.

For smaller events with a mainly local audience, it may be that accommodation or flights are not relevant, but sustainable travel could be encouraged; and consideration given to catering and materials to avoid unnecessary waste.

**According to research by sustainable event management agency MeetGreen, the average conference attendee produces over 170 kgs of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per day and a three-day conference for 1,000 people creates 5,670 kgs of waste, over half of which will go to landfill.**



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### Key considerations

#### 1. Venue choice

- Do you need a venue at all, or could this event be online, minimising the need to travel and making it accessible to a wider audience?
- Consider where the participants of the event are likely to be travelling from and ideally choose a venue that is conveniently located or central to the distribution of most participants.
- Consider whether the venue has good transport links.
- Is the venue able to facilitate a hybrid/virtual option such as live streaming panels so that participants who may be deterred by travel can still join in, boosting attendance but not the carbon impact of the event?
- Select a venue which is already supporting sustainability and will support you to reduce the impact of the event. For example, does the venue have a clearly stated environmental policy or environmental certifications and do they have measures in place such as:
  - Waste management including segregation and recycling of waste
  - Energy efficiency measures
  - Renewable / green energy contract
  - Water saving initiatives
  - Sustainable food sourcing such as local, organic, plant-based or Fairtrade products
  - Reusables prioritised over single use items
  - Availability of in-house services such as AV
  - Able to provide data to help quantify the carbon impact of the event.

**By asking about these measures, you can also help to encourage venues to improve their sustainability credentials.**

#### 2. Travel and Transportation

For in-person events, there will inevitably be some impact from travel, and we recognise the value of holding in-person events. However, this impact can be reduced by considering the following:

- Minimise the number of staff attending international events and consider which staff can add value remotely.
- When booking flights remember that direct flights tend to be more efficient than multi-leg flights so choose a location with a well-connected airport, and offer alternatives such as international rail or ferry (if available).
- Select a venue which is well serviced by public transport and sustainable modes of travel.
- Side events, dinners and networking should be planned to be easily accessible from the main venue.
- Ensure communications include messaging about sustainable travel options available.

**“The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it”.**  
**Robert Swan (Polar explorer)**



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### 3. Catering (Food and Drinks)

Food is often one of the most significant elements of waste from a conference or event, and this is not just bad for the environment but also a waste of budget. There are several potential considerations here in relation to event catering:

- Does the venue or catering provider have a clear strategy to reduce food waste? How are they managing their food waste?
- Will they help minimise food-related waste by providing reusable items, avoiding single use disposables, and only using biodegradable items if an appropriate disposal route is in place?
- Overordering is a common problem, as you don't want to run out before reaching the end of a queue of hungry participants! But it is important to work with the venue/caterer to avoid over-catering.
- Including vegetarian and vegan elements, and halal to meet delegate demand (based on dietary requirements information) can have the added benefit of reducing environmental impact in some cases.
- Request Fairtrade tea and coffee, avoid single-serving packaging for items like tea bags, milk and biscuits, and avoid disposable cups.
- Ask about their food sourcing policies to ensure they are aware of the sustainability impacts of their catering services.

### 4. Conference Materials

The sustainability impact of conference materials cannot be overlooked and may give a negative impression. The unnecessary distribution of printed materials can contribute to deforestation, water use and carbon emissions, and results in waste as most conference materials end up getting thrown away at the end of the event.

- Go paperless if possible: Utilise digital platforms like QR codes, event apps, online registration, and digital programme guides to minimise paper usage.
- Print on demand: If printing is necessary, opt for on-demand printing to only produce the exact amount needed, reducing waste.
- Sustainable options: If printing is unavoidable choose recycled or sustainably sourced paper or card, use vegetable-based inks and use a local supplier.
- Reduce material usage: Design printed materials with minimal paper usage by optimising layouts and font sizes and print on both sides of the paper to reduce paper consumption.
- **Collateral, signage and display materials such as vinyls and pop ups are rarely recyclable, so:**
  - Make the content generic so that they can be reused at multiple events, avoiding date stamps and other time-specific imagery and language.
  - Be aware that special finishes can render items unsuitable for recycling.
  - Prioritise sustainable natural and renewable materials over synthetic fossil-fuel-based ones.
  - Checking existing way-finding signage at the venue, which may be adequate, could reduce the need for production of unnecessary single-use signage.
  - Use digital signing at the venue where possible.
  - Consider sponsorship branding and use of screens to promote sponsors.
  - Collect lanyards and plastic name badge holders for reuse.



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The sustainability impact of promotional giveaway items at events can be significant, often contributing to waste generation. This includes single-use items such as plastic promotional products, unless proactive steps are taken to choose reusable, recyclable, or ethically sourced materials. Many of the common reusable items (like canvas tote bags or reusable cups and bottles) have become so prevalent, people are inundated with them. So, giveaways are probably best avoided. But if promotional items are considered necessary:

- Choose reusable items
- Look for products made from recycled materials
- Consider plant-able items, such as seeds or small plants that can be grown at home (not suitable for international events)

- Consider locally sourced items
- Ensure minimal packaging

Beware that items marketed as sustainable may not be a truly sustainable option if they are being manufactured on the other side of the world and come with a large carbon footprint associated with transportation, or just aren't that desirable to attendees and end up getting dumped.

According to the 2019 Global Ad Impressions Study by the Advertising Specialty Institute and reported in Forbes, just 21% of branded and promotional items are kept for any length of time. More than half is given away, and 23% is thrown away. Think of that next time you order 1,000 of anything.

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### 5. Social value and your event

If you are organising a large event, you may wish to consider whether you can add any value to the event and support the local community through a social value activity. This could be as simple as inviting a relevant charity to present at your event or carrying out a charitable / volunteering activity as part of the programme (working with a local organisation).

For Members' Forum we have an Environmental Sustainability Action Plan action to identify a social value opportunity for members participating in Members' Forum annually (location dependent).

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### 6. Calculate the carbon footprint of your event

For Members' Forum we have made a commitment to quantify and offset the carbon footprint of the in-person event annually.

This can be done by completing the information on the following online form: [https://co2.myclimate.org/en/event\\_calculators/new](https://co2.myclimate.org/en/event_calculators/new)

A suitable offset scheme can be selected from the United Nations Carbon Offset Platform: <https://unfccc.int/climate-action/united-nations-carbon-offset-platform>

It is important that we only use a credible provider of carbon offsets that offers carbon offsets that are Certified Emission Reduction units (CERs) through Clean Development Mechanism projects.

Case Study: In 2024 we calculated and offset the carbon footprint associated with Members' Forum for the first time. You can read more here: <https://www.ciob.org/blog/ciob-offsetting-member%E2%80%99s-forum-emissions>

Although we have not made a commitment to quantify (or offset) the carbon footprint of other major events, you may still choose to do so, noting that it is necessary to include a small budget for the purchase of the carbon offset in the event budget.