



## Ten Steps to an Environmental Strategy

In the last twenty years, maintaining environmental quality has moved from a cause to an expectation. Communities in most parts of the world simply expect that a reasonable quality of environmental protection is required as part of any kind of business activity, and the meetings business is no exception.

As a major, high-visibility part of the community, Convention Centres can have a very high profile in environmental terms. At the same time, environment is usually also a factor in marketing; whether or not its specifically noted as an issue for clients, it's there at some level or other and there is a need to address it. The question becomes; what to do?

This isn't a question with a simple or even single answer. Just as there are a wide variety of environments, so are there a wide variety of actions to be taken. Every environmental organization has a list of actions that can contribute to making meetings more "environmentally friendly"; the real issue is how to select those activities which are most appropriate to your particular needs and circumstances.

So instead of simply repeating those lists of activities, AIPC is instead encouraging an approach you can use to organize yourself for making the key decisions about how to approach an environmental program that's right for your facility. There are ten key steps toward your own environmental plan:

### 1. Establish your objectives

This isn't as obvious as it looks, because there is no single purpose for an environmental program. Your expectations can range from simple compliance with local regulations all the way up to taking a leadership position in this area and making it the primary feature of your positioning. You need to decide who your primary audiences are (which may be the local community, meetings clients or some combination of both) and which areas are most important to them. At the same time, you need to weigh costs against benefits, bearing in mind that many measures like energy conservation are not only environmentally sensitive but cost-effective as well.

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## 2. Create an audit team:

Convention centres are complex operations. That means that no individual will be able to identify all of the opportunities available for effecting environmental improvements. The obvious answer is to create a team to identify and act on the appropriate measures.

The first job for that team is to carry out an audit of needs and opportunities. Having done that, they can then move on to the next steps of evaluating the potential of each area for meeting the objectives, the associated costs and the tactics to be employed. They'll also make a very logical group to involve in the evaluation of those activities when it comes time to analyse their success.

## 3. Look at codes, regulations and legislation before you go any further:

Many of the key environmental measures are already captured in local environmental regulations and building codes. An older facility may find, for example, that simply updating systems to newer codes will effect a big improvement. In any case, it doesn't make a lot of sense to launch a major new initiative without first finding out if you meet existing regulations.

## 4. Consult with community groups, site neighbours and local authorities;

Often, many of the activities you'll want to undertake rely on programs and resources that are already available through local groups. A successful re-use or recycling effort, for example, depends on there being complementary programs in the community to receive the recyclable materials. It's equally possible that other environmental programs exist that you can not only take advantage of but which in return can benefit from the extra volumes that a convention centre can generate.

## 5. Review activity lists from a variety of organizations to see how they apply:

Many groups provide lists of activities that convention centres and meeting organizers can employ to improve their environmental practices. These range from simple recycling hints to more elaborate energy management schemes, but all provide useful input to your decision process. Get the lists and ensure your staff give some consideration to them as they develop their plan. But at the same time, don't rely exclusively on such lists; they



aren't necessarily exhaustive nor do they reflect the fact that different kinds of facilities will have different kinds of needs and opportunities.

6. Consider your special circumstances; which areas are most sensitive:

Many convention centres have locations, clientele or operating conditions that make one environmental area more important than others. A centre in an area with climactic extremes, for example, will probably have energy management as a top priority. Similarly, a waterfront facility will need to be particularly sensitive to waste management and containment and one in an arid area should put the greatest attention to water use and conservation. These types of distinctions not only make good sense from an environmental perspective, but also in terms of cost-effectiveness since they are most likely to be the areas where operating efficiency is most important.

7. Look at a variety of areas; use a broad definition;

To many, environmental protection means waste management or pollution measures, with perhaps a recycling program thrown in. In reality, environment, as its name implies, takes in almost every aspect of a facility and its operations. As a result, you should use the broadest possible definition of the term as you explore opportunities. Along with waste management there are such areas as energy efficiency, transportation policies, community related programming and even the ways in which supplies are selected and used. Anything that uses resources more efficiently is good environmental practice – and, as mentioned before, it is usually a cost-saving measure as well.

8. Encourage and cooperate with facility users:

Very few events see all of the operational control in the hands of facility operators. Most often the program, which determines both the extent of environmental impact and the opportunities available for addressing them, is in the hands of the meeting planner. That means there is a critical role for the planner to play in determining the overall strategy for environmental management.



Working with clients and planners, a facility can both encourage activities which minimize environmental impacts and provide feedback as to the benefits that approach can create. Together, the planner and the facility control pretty much everything to do with the event – and by taking a cooperative approach, they can be much more effective than either working in isolation. For example, a planner’s knowledge of program activities combined with the facility’s knowledge of energy requirements can result in a space utilization scheme that can reduce energy consumption significantly.

#### 9. Review your program regularly as conditions change:

As with any program, environmental tactics need regular review and evaluation. But there is a particular need for regular scrutiny of environmental programs since they interface to such a degree with outside factors. Regulations may change that impact how programs operate; energy or water resources may come under particular pressure at different times; recycling programs may appear or fail in ways that have impacts on what can be handled from waste streams. Keeping in touch with such conditions will not only keep your programs on track but ensure you get the optimum benefit from them.

#### 10. Don’t forget your own staff!

Good environmental management is as much about attitude as practice, and the messages you send to staff in this regard say a lot about how seriously you take these issues. As a result, it’s important to consider how your own staff policies reflect good environmental practice. For example, it’s not a good message to be promoting energy conservation on the one hand while encouraging personal waste on the other. Such things as offering transit passes in place of private parking allowances create good continuity between corporate positions and the ways in which they’re reflected in personnel policies.

Yes, there are lots of “off the shelf” programs that can provide a simpler solution to developing an environmental stance for your facility. But the additional time spent to work through a process like the above will pay off many times over in terms of taking advantage of your own, unique circumstances and opportunities. Among those benefits will be financial savings, marketing opportunities and operating efficiencies. From AIPC’s point of view, the best return of all may well be the results of the process itself - and the staff and community involvement that it will generate!