

SUSTAINABILITY: THE MAIN

Shelton Fleming

RE-IMAGINING CONNECTED EXPERIENCES

07

EVENT

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GOOD FOR PEOPLE,
PLANET AND PROFITABILITY

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SUSTAIN_ABILITY

Editor’s note
Andrew Reid

Sustainability. It’s gathered a new sense of urgency these past months. Elevated in the public consciousness by the Extinction Rebellion Movement and venerable voices of the natural world – Attenborough and Backshall – and an army of U.N. climate experts.

We first published this paper a year ago. The insights and thinking shared haven’t changed. The urgency has. It is, now, the main event.

Our approach to ‘sustainability’ is holistic. Yes, there are clever ways to avoid waste, champion the circular economy, reduce carbon footprint and encourage use of eco-friendly materials. Sustainability also throws up critical issues focused on social justice and corporate responsibility.

For example, you stop for a crayfish and rocket salad-to-go and feel good because there’s a bamboo fork. No more plastic. No more injured sea turtles. Happy though the moment is, that salad’s journey towards true sustainability begs broader questions. Who put it all together? Were they paid a fair wage? Did they work in safe and healthy conditions? What about job security? At-work insurance? Sick pay? Healthcare?



So, as we go onto explore here, sustainability is about delivering the very best for people, planet and profitability.

“SUSTAINABILITY
IS A JOURNEY”

BUT WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY? IS IT A PROCESS, A SYSTEM, A PHILOSOPHY OR A CULTURE? HOW DOES SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT ON THE LIVE EVENTS BUSINESS?



INTRO_DUCTION

There's no escape from bad environmental news, whether it's about plastic pollution in our oceans, microbeads in our food, or the destruction of the rainforests. But sustainability is a more holistic and all-pervasive issue than simply being eco-friendly. It goes beyond the simple, but superb, efficacy of banning plastic cutlery.

We know that delivering a truly sustainable live event can seem a complex and weighty undertaking. At Shelton Fleming, we also know it's an undertaking that, with expert guidance, will deliver far reaching, positive effects on your business and brand.

Sustainability is certainly the compelling topic of the moment. Powerful brands and global companies, as well as your favourite café and local deli, will all have a position on sustainability and its powerful messages for people and planet.

For example, Sky News has championed Sky Ocean Rescue, which shines a spotlight on the problem of plastics in our oceans, while your local coffee stop will probably encourage you to bring and refill your own, personalised, reusable beaker.

On the one hand, sustainability is about 'reduce, reuse and recycle', where banning plastic cutlery and disposable cups certainly plays a part.

On the other, it's about fully embracing global standards, certifications and ISOs. Because while the little things count, for the long term, good intentions aren't enough.

But what is sustainability? Is it a process, a system, a philosophy or a culture? How does sustainability impact on the live events business? And is it really possible to identify simple, straightforward and cost-effective ways to deliver brand enhancing experiences that are truly sustainable?



**TO BE TRULY SUSTAINABLE,
WE NEED TO EMBRACE
COMPREHENSIVE BUSINESS
PRACTICES THAT PROMOTE
THE THREE PILLARS
OF SUSTAINABILITY:
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION,
SOCIAL JUSTICE AND
CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY.**

What is sustainability?

When we talk about 'sustainability', what we're really talking about is sustainable development. Sustainable development can be defined as "the organising principle for meeting human development goals, while at the same time sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend. It can be classified as development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations."

The everyday truths about sustainable development are very simple. Old models of consumption and industrialisation will not support the world's growing population. If we expect to have the water, materials and natural resources we need to thrive, we need to embrace a new approach to living. But sustainability is about protecting people, as well as about protecting the planet. Of course, it's always about stopping business practices that damage the environment,

IN SIMPLE TERMS, SUSTAINABILITY IS ABOUT DOING BUSINESS IN WAYS THAT GUARANTEE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY.



choosing eco-friendly materials and reducing our carbon footprint. But it's also about championing social justice issues. It's about challenging unfair and illegal inequalities in pay. Guaranteeing safe and healthy working conditions. Seeking out and eradicating modern slavery, wherever it exists. And it's about ensuring our businesses embrace the best economic and regulatory practices.

In simple terms, sustainability is about doing business in ways that guarantee ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, SOCIAL JUSTICE and CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY. The three pillars of sustainability are separate, but inextricably linked at the same time. You can't have one without the other two.

How can you optimise the sustainability of your live events?

SUSTAINABILITY

There can be little doubt that, in terms of ‘sustainability’, live events can generate significant impacts. Some of these are positive, in terms of generating income, creating positive PR, and raising awareness. Others are negative, such as inevitable energy use, waste generation, carbon emissions, and so on.

Of course, steps can be taken to reduce the negative impacts, confound the issues and maximise the positive impacts of the event. The first positive action is to identify the impacts that your event will have.

Then you’ll need to analyse your brand and its activities, identify its impacts and decide on measures to manage them. This will enable you to write a brief sustainability policy for your event, communicating your sustainability goals to all your stakeholders, including your suppliers.

The areas on which you’ll need to focus are Materials, Water, Energy, Waste, Procurement, Stakeholder Engagement, Accessibility, Community, Governance and Sustainability Performance.

In the section, Insight on Focus Areas, we explore each issue and offer a perspective on how you might tackle it. Of course, once we’ve completed a full analysis of your event’s explicit needs, we’ll be able to make specific recommendations.



International standards for truly sustainable results

When large groups of people get together, whatever the event, they inevitably put a strain on local resources such as water and energy and in the process, create significant waste. It is also possible that, despite your best intentions, you could face tensions with the local community or even cultural issues. Things get even more complicated when you have a variety of suppliers and partners involved. In all of these eventualities, international standards help us to work together to achieve the most sustainable results.

ISO is the International Organization for Standardization. ISO standards provide practical tools for all three dimensions of sustainable development: environmental, social and

Our work is underpinned by the accredited UKAS standards ISO 9001: Quality Management and ISO 14001: Environmental Management also underpin event industry activities. We work towards ISO 20121 and our policies and procedures are in compliance with that standard.

economic. In its own words, "An ISO International Standard represents a global consensus on the state of the art in the subject of that standard."

In response to this, the events industry has taken part in the development of a number of specific international industry standards. At Shelton Fleming, everything we do adheres to robust Environmental / Sustainability policies and procedures, to which we follow to on all projects. On an everyday basis, our work is underpinned by the accredited UKAS standards ISO 9001: Quality Management and ISO 14001: Environmental Management also underpin event industry activities. We work towards ISO 20121 and our policies and procedures are in compliance with that standard.



Enabling best business practice

International industry standards are critical to collaboration and consensus. It's clear that an organised, process-based approach to managing our environmental, social and economic impacts will optimise the true sustainability of our events. The monitoring and measuring that this approach demands will deliver opportunities to reduce the resources we use and significantly cut costs.

Of course, there is also a reputational advantage to using a recognised international framework. This will enable our experts, together with your events team, to demonstrate our collaborative actions in a credible and transparent way.

ISO20121 – Optimising the Sustainability of Live Events

Live events are, by their nature, high profile and transient. They have both positive and negative social, economic and environmental impacts. The International Standard ISO 20121 has been drafted to help organisations and individuals improve the sustainability of their event-related activities.

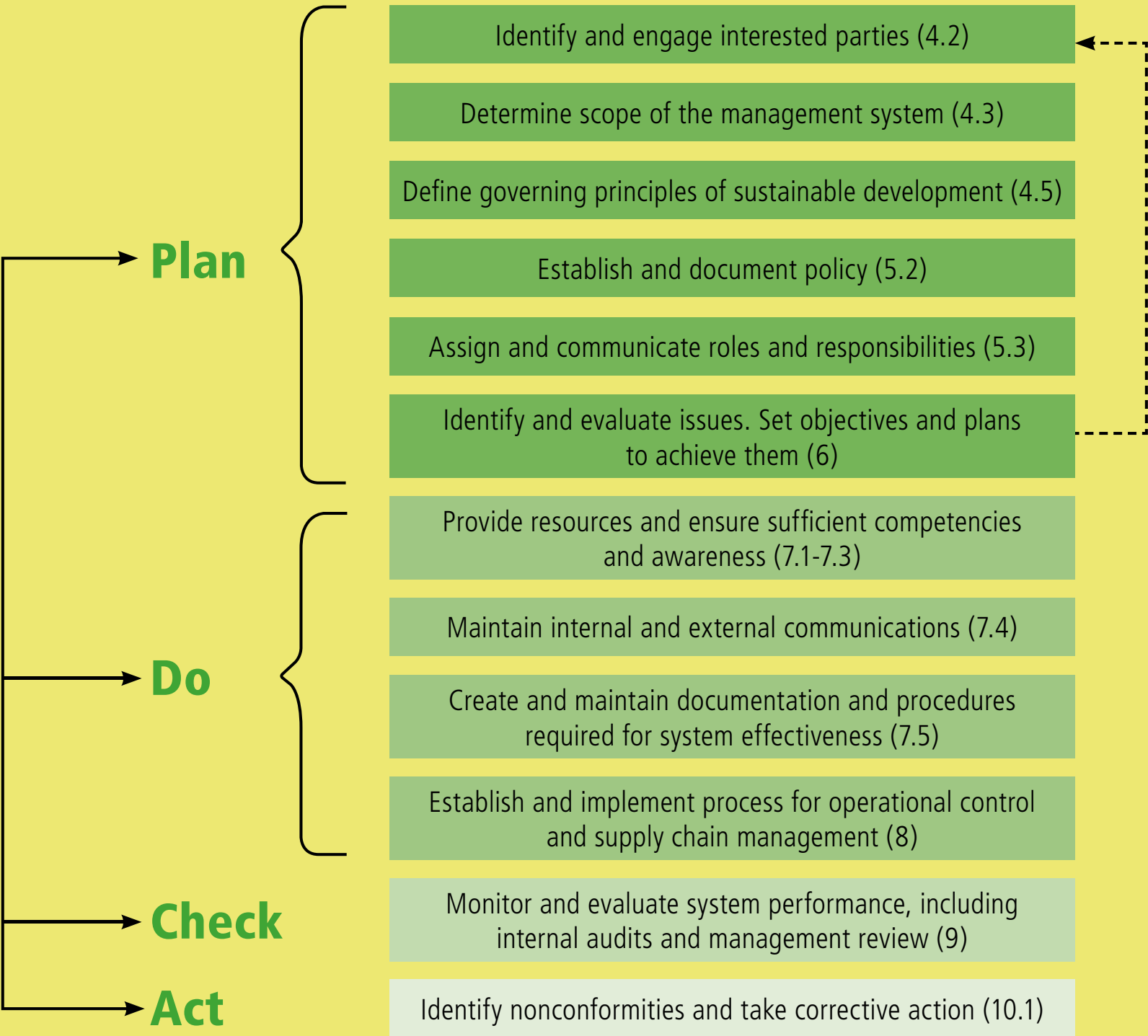
"This International Standard specifies the requirements of an event sustainability management system to improve the sustainability of events. It is applicable to all types and sizes of organisations involved in the design and delivery of events. And, it accommodates diverse geographical, cultural and social conditions. At the same time, it requires organisations to recognise their relationship with, and impact on, society and society's expectations of events."

[Click here to link to the ISO 20121 website](#)



ISO 20121's event sustainability management system model

figures in brackets refer to clauses and subclauses in the standard





DO SOMETHING GREAT

Making sense of sustainable events

The demands of delivering a truly sustainable event are considerable, and we understand that making the commitment represents a significant challenge. For us, the key is making the commitment to start a journey towards sustainability.

At Shelton Fleming, we have the experience and expertise to help you on your way. We can help ensure that delivering sustainable events is cost effective and profitable. We can help you achieve excellent ROI, allaying concerns that achieving sustainability is expensive. Because “buy better, buy less” applies as much to environmental design and the delivery of enriching experiences, as it does to any other purchasing decisions you make.

Together, we can help make the journey to sustainability simpler, more straightforward and friendly. Above all, we can help deliver sustainable events that resonate with key audiences and build your brand.

Insights

Earlier we asked some straightforward questions about sustainability in live events. They were, how does sustainability impact on the live events business? And, is it really possible to identify simple, straightforward and cost-effective ways to deliver brand enhancing experiences that are truly sustainable?

To achieve a truly sustainable event, the areas on which you'll need to focus are Materials, Water, Energy, Waste, Procurement, Stakeholder Engagement, Accessibility, Community, Governance and Sustainability Performance.

Here we take a look at each area and give some initial thoughts on the response that's required.



Insight Materials

You'll need to invest an appropriate amount of time early on to guarantee the integrity of your supply chain. This will demand rigorous planning and the co-operation of third parties, to vet your supply chain from end-to-end.

When commissioning exhibition booths, conference sets, props and furniture, it's always more sustainable to re-use furniture, props and construction materials, as opposed to buying bespoke or new items. Re-use is not always easy in the live events business, but it's an issue we can offer advice on, according to your unique situation.

Make arrangements to donate the sets, furniture and props to a charity or local community group after the event, if they won't be used by you again. If you can't re-use, then consider the possibility of hiring, rather than buying. If you must buy, then buy responsibly. For example, any wood used should be sourced from sustainable resources and be FSC certified.

Materials

Sustainability demands that we respect the natural environment and the natural resources it provides. When you design and build events, you need to reduce your use of materials. This means using recycled and re-useable materials where possible, as well as using local materials and materials from renewable sources. There are other considerations. For example, when commissioning catering, you should consider greenhouse gas emissions, soil pollution and water pollution. Where appropriate, you'll also need to think about the welfare of flora and fauna, designing and delivering your projects, to avoid any possible loss of biodiversity.



Water

For your events to be truly sustainable, you need to reduce demand for non-potable / non-drinking water, through the sustainable management of rain and waste water to promote water efficiency. Where possible, you need to reduce the demand for potable / drinking water. This is especially critical in the fast-growth economies of Africa and Asia, where clean, drinkable water is often in high demand and low supply.



Insight Water

In the case of non-drinking water, ask your venue about the water savings measures currently undertaken by them and encourage them to take more measures, such as retrofitting flow controllers to existing taps, harvesting rainwater and recycling waste water. If possible - and we know it's a huge demand - drinking water should be from the tap or filtered and offered in jugs or recycled and re-usable bottles, depending on the quality of water. Avoid supplying water in disposable plastic bottles unless there is absolutely no alternative.

Insight Energy

When you're choosing a conference venue, look for one where the accommodation is in the same building or nearby, saving extra travel resources. Also, by using local contractors, you'll avoid travel time and resources, and reduce the need to truck elements across long distances, as well as cutting return journey times.

There are many other energy activities to monitor, but a good start is to find out if any energy sub meters are installed at the venue and whether the amount of energy used by your event can be measured. Ask your venue about the energy efficiency measures currently undertaken by them and encourage them to do things like replace conventional lights with LED lights and consider the appropriate use of daytime lighting for your event.

Energy

Before you start to commission an event environment, consider energy efficiency and ways to reduce energy use and demand at the event, thereby reducing carbon and greenhouse gas emissions. If you're providing accommodation, look at ways to reduce energy use and demand at the venues you choose.

It's also important to promote the use of renewable energy to reduce carbon emission. And, of course, we also recommend that your events take measures to offset the carbon and greenhouse gas emissions associated with energy use.



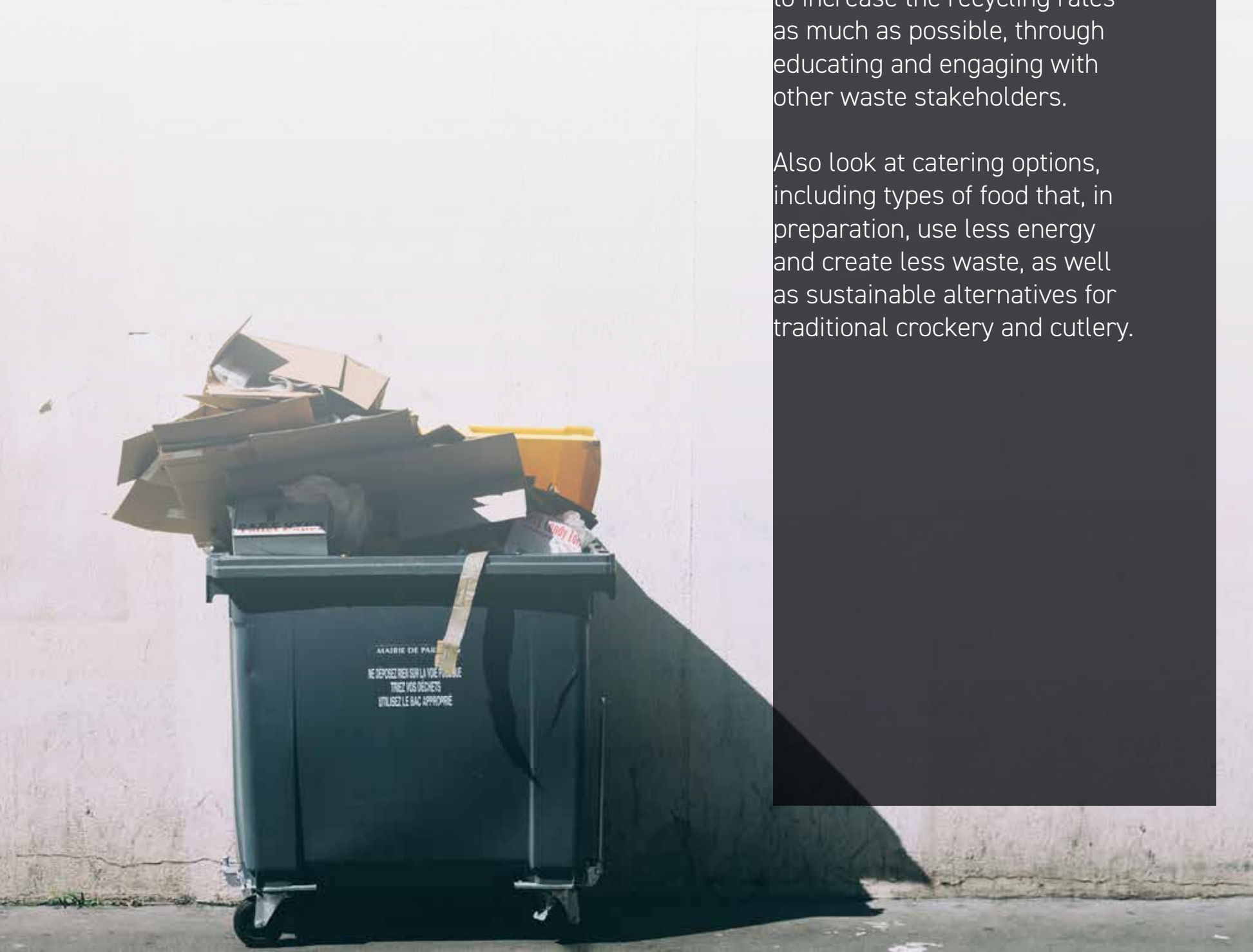
Waste

It's inevitable that any event will generate a tangible amount of waste, however hard you try to make your events waste free. Therefore, you need to put waste management plans in place. This means you need to work together with partners to reduce the negative impacts of the waste generated, before, during and after the event.

Insight Waste

To achieve this, find out how the venue manages its waste and how it's disposed of, looking at what percentage of the waste is recycled, composted, energy recovered or sent to landfill, ensuring that no waste is sent to landfill from our event. When planning events, always follow the waste hierarchy of reduce, reuse, recycle and undertake to increase the recycling rates as much as possible, through educating and engaging with other waste stakeholders.

Also look at catering options, including types of food that, in preparation, use less energy and create less waste, as well as sustainable alternatives for traditional crockery and cutlery.



Insight Procurement

Committing to the use of locally sourced products and services is a big undertaking, but it will be a massive contribution to the sustainability of your event. It's a relatively straightforward and easy way of making your procurement sustainable. Whether you're in Leeds or Laos, you'll be supporting the local economy, helping to maintain and increase employment and improve the lives of local people. With shorter distances to transport goods, you'll also reduce your environmental impact.

Procurement

Procurement is at the heart of any viable sustainability policy, guided by vigilant product stewardship and careful monitoring of the supply chain. Product stewardship demands considering ethical and environmental issues when buying products and services. If you're going to clad the front of your exhibition stand, then use locally sourced, natural, bio-degradable materials from a replenished source. Not PVC. This might mean pine in Sweden or bamboo in South Korea (but never PVC!).

As discussed, social justice, along with environmental protection and corporate accountability, is one of the three pillars of sustainability. As part of the social justice focus of sustainability, fair employment practices are also central to sustainable procurement. This is about promoting fair terms of employment for people employed during the event and making sure that everyone involved is paid at least the legal minimum wage or above, as well as overtime.



Stakeholder Engagement

The support of your people is critical to the success of any event. But when it comes to a truly sustainable event, getting your people on board, engaged and proactively supporting your drive towards sustainability is absolutely critical.



Insight Stakeholder Engagement

The first step is to identify your stakeholders and prioritise them, making sure that key stakeholder groups, including employees, suppliers, consultants and, of course, clients are fully informed and engaged.

It's also important to share your sustainability initiatives in the agenda of the meetings with stakeholders, particularly suppliers, well before the event, to help them understand the risks and opportunities for them. Post-event communication, including a sustainability achievement report to include, where appropriate, details like the stakeholder group's travel carbon footprint, will keep the momentum going.

Insight Accessibility

Always ensure that your venue is accessible for mobility impaired, deaf and blind guests. Make sure it's easy for them to access the services they need. For example, if you have a double decker stand, but no lift, make sure you also have a meeting room on the ground floor, easily accessible to all. Consider ramping the edges of your booth and avoid steps altogether. Always brief stand staff on where to direct mobility impaired, deaf and blind guests to find toilets, lifts, cab ranks and other services.

Accessibility

By its simplest definition, sustainability includes the promotion of social justice, which is about equality in human rights terms and, in everyday terms, is about providing suitable access for all visitors.



Community

The community aspects of your event again reflect the importance of the social justice pillar to your sustainability policy. Your event should strengthen awareness of community and citizenship, contributing to the local community and encouraging investment in local skills and employment.

Governance

Appropriate frameworks should be in place to ensure governance issues are respected. This means operating an appropriate governance framework to manage sustainable delivery of an event.

Insight Community

Where possible, you should ensure diversity in your guest list, and also ensure event contractors and subcontractors demonstrate a clear policy for equality and diversity.

Insight Governance

It's crucial that you identify and appoint someone as 'sustainability champion' to be responsible for the sustainability management of your event. They should create and share your sustainability management framework and your reporting structure.



Insight Sustainability Performance

At Shelton Fleming, we can help you to monitor and measure the sustainability performance of your event. We'll work together to minimise potential nuisance, for example, resulting from noise or vibration. And we'll also liaise with surrounding venue users to ensure that there is no 'amenity conflict'. Most often in the form of unwanted noise.

Sustainability Performance

Sustainability is about sustainable development. A critical part of ensuring sustainable development is to measure and then increase the sustainability of your event. By measuring the success of your event in terms of sustainability, you'll build a legacy that will underpin the success of future events.



Shelton Fleming is a creative agency that connects B2B brands to expert audiences, through intelligent live engagements. We specialise in the application of technology and bold architecture for exhibition design and live events.



Download our other recent publications on live events and collaboration.

Virtual Conferences: Not what it says on the tin. This is a study of a complementary segment of the audience engagement sector: virtual conferences. We explore the triangulation of technologies, evolving digital supply chains and complex customer journeys and touch points.

Your unfair advantage in event management. This paper explores the market trends and technologies disrupting the world of audience engagement.



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Disclaimer: In this paper we introduce ideas that illustrate how you could start your journey towards sustainability in the live events sector. These are generic thoughts that are non-specific to any sector or business. Our views aim to stimulate discussion rather than provide specific recommendations. We'd encourage you to work with us, or an equally qualified partner, to analyse your activities, agree your desired outcomes and decide on a strategy to achieve them. This will enable you to find the solution that's best for your event and business. Every live or virtual event has unique requirements and, as such, the technologies, methods and concepts deployed should be evaluated against your brief. © Shelton Fleming Associates Limited.