

Greening Events: How a green event approach was undertaken in the ICLEI Oceania *Accelerating Now!* Conference, May 2007

1. Summary

Over 9000 international meetings are held globally each year and about 20 per cent of these are on a significant scale involving over 1000 participants. Staging events can result in positive economic benefits for the organisers, however, these benefits can also be accompanied by negative environmental and social impacts. When large numbers of people gather for an event the host city, country or region experiences an increased demand for natural resources (e.g. water and energy). This high level of consumption can lead to waste and pollution that impacts upon local communities.

Greening an event – by making environmentally, socially and economically responsible decisions when organising, managing or participating – has the potential to reduce local and global negative impacts.

A green event approach was applied in the planning and delivery of the ICLEI Oceania *Accelerating Now!* Conference in May 2007. This included consideration of waste reduction, resource conservation, carbon emissions reduction and offsetting, as well as communicating the approach to delegates and stakeholders.

2. Aims of a Green Event

It is important to note that the greening of an event is an ongoing and continuous process and not just an isolated once-off activity. Event greening involves the incorporation of sustainability principles into all levels of event organisation and implementation.

The overall aim of a green event is to:

- reduce the consumption of natural resources
- avoid damage to the local and global environment
- protect biodiversity and human health
- reduce waste to a minimum
- consider environmental, social and economic aspects.¹

Benefits of a green event:

- direct financial cost savings, mostly achieved by reducing energy and water costs (through reduction in use and employing efficient technology)
- waste separation and recycling (which contributes to reduced waste to landfill and support of local recycling businesses)
- stimulation of local/regional economies through the purchase of local products.

Opportunities of a green event:

- raise awareness on sustainable development issues
- encourage people to change their perceptions and behaviour
- make responsible decisions that can reduce negative impacts on the environment and society.



Wayne Wescott, ICLEI Oceania CEO, speaking at the *Accelerating Now!* Conference.

¹ As ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) is an international organisation that often holds conferences in

developing countries, considerable effort is made to ensure there are no negative impacts on local citizens and their lands.

3. Where to Start

There are a number of areas to consider in planning and delivering a low impact event.

ICLEI Oceania follows a hierarchy of action to reduce emissions from energy use and waste:

1. **Avoidance:** Avoid unnecessary use of energy and avoid waste.
2. **Energy Efficiency:** Use energy-efficient technology.
3. **Alternative and Renewable Energy:** Switch to energy sources that are less greenhouse gas intensive or emit no greenhouse gases (low emission technologies and renewables).
4. **Offsets:** Offset remaining emissions by investing in accredited abatement and/or biosequestration activities. In planning a green event, organisers need to consider the following areas and suggested approaches to minimise or avoid negative impacts.²

i. Consider event locations

The first consideration is choice of location for staging an event. In the case of *Accelerating Now!*, ICLEI Oceania was committed to a central location that was well serviced for mobility and accessibility. For these reasons the City of Melbourne was chosen.

ii. Choose your venue with greening in mind

Over the past decade there has been recognition by the hospitality sector of its environmental impact and the need to adopt sustainable practices across a range of operations. While an accredited green hotel approach does not yet exist, information about venues that were undertaking water, waste and energy conservation measures was sourced from the City of Melbourne's 'Savings in the City' program.³

Following an assessment of venues listed under the 'Savings in the City' program, we chose a hotel that offered a central location and was within walking distance to hotels and the gala dinner venue, with easy access to public transport.

Additionally, the venue was among 15 Melbourne hotels to achieve Waste Wise Certification in 2005. A recycling program deployed by the hotel resulted in a 15 per cent reduction in waste going to landfill and maintaining a standard of nine litres of waste per guest per night, considered industry best practice. At the time

² Attachment 1 outlines an approved approach undertaken by ICLEI internationally.

³ 'Savings in the City' is an innovative program to assist hotels in their municipality to reduce consumption. Visit <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/info.cfm?top=218&pg=2546> for an outline of the program.

of the conference, an efficient lighting and appliance conversion program at the hotel was also well underway.

The venue chosen for the gala dinner deploys significant water conservation measures including waterless urinals and use of recycled water for water features and watering gardens. Approximately 10 per cent of power used is GreenPower – accredited renewable energy.

The green event approach informed discussions with each venue and decision-making in the planning process. For example, ICLEI Oceania requested that the hotel not set out sweets on tables as it could only source individually packaged items due to Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) considerations; catering was sourced from local producers to minimise associated transport emissions; and, to avoid food waste, delegate numbers were determined as close as possible to the commencement of the conference.



Accelerating Now! Conference delegates.

iii. Minimising emissions from travel

The very nature of events such as the *Accelerating Now!* Conference, which attracted delegates from across Australasia, requires careful consideration on how transport emissions can be reduced. Most of the greenhouse gas emissions generated by a large gathering of participants tend to be the result of transport to and from the conference.

It is necessary to strike a balance between the value that delegates gain by face-to-face networking with like-minded colleagues to learn and exchange information, and the quantity of carbon emissions created through their travel to the venue.

Accessing video conferencing to broadcast conference sessions is one way of avoiding or minimising carbon emissions from travel. Utilising web-based technology to initiate topic discussions prior and after the conference can help to reduce the event duration and delegate travel to and from the conference (see 'Online Collaboration').

For the *Accelerating Now!* Conference ICLEI Oceania assessed ways of reducing the need for travel, and where this could not be avoided, decided to offset the carbon emissions created by necessary travel. A \$20 offset fee was included in the registration cost for each delegate and allocated toward an approved emissions offset program that invested in direct mitigation through renewable energy.⁴

The offset fee was split equally among delegates based on the following rationale:

- To make attending accessible and prevent the offset fee being a barrier to those travelling a longer distance
- Each participant would benefit from the mix of attendees, near and far
- Each participant should share the cost of this common benefit
- Administration of a single fee is far simpler and arguably fairer.

iv. Determining the offset fee

The *Accelerating Now!* offset fee was set by estimating the number of delegates and their respective distances from Melbourne, then calculating the resulting transport emissions.

The aggregated total, divided evenly, was approximately one tonne per person. The actual fee was determined by the cost to offset a tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO_{2e}) with an accredited renewable energy project.⁵

Further assumptions were made regarding the mode of travel:

- All interstate and international delegates would use air travel to reach Melbourne.
- Victorian delegates were assigned an assumed mode of transport (car, public transport and walking) based on the distance (figures utilised from the Australian Transportation Taskforce 2001).

The total emissions were calculated to be 325.3 tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (CO_{2e}), based on travel as described in Table 1. At \$20 per tonne, the total cost of offsets was estimated as \$6506.

Table 1 Estimated Emissions

Mode	Total kilometres	Emissions per kilometre	Emissions ⁶
Air travel – domestic	577,243 km	0.35 kg CO _{2e}	202 t CO _{2e}
Air travel – international	404,000 km	0.30 kg CO _{2e}	121 t CO _{2e}
Surface travel	9800 km	0.235 kg CO _{2e}	2.3 t CO _{2e}
Totals	991,043 km		325.3 t CO_{2e}

As the number of international delegates who attended *Accelerating Now!* was less than originally expected, actual emissions were lower than first estimated as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2 Actual Emissions

Mode	Total kilometres	Emissions
Air travel – domestic	362,240 km	127 t CO _{2e}
Air travel – international	354,260 km	106 t CO _{2e}
Surface travel – car	20,600 km	7 t CO _{2e}
Surface travel – train	4730 km	8 t CO _{2e}
Surface travel – tram	260 km	0.5 t CO _{2e}
Totals	991,043 km	246 t CO_{2e}

v. Minimising Resource Use

Paper Consumption

Events are notoriously great consumers of resources and reams of paper are invariably used in event marketing, information satchels or folders filled with promotional brochures.

Paper used for conference promotion, management and satchels was minimised through a low impact marketing approach that included:

- targeting specific audiences via relevant publications and newsletters, thereby reducing the need for a large volume of printed promotional materials
- marketing via electronic modes (email and website) as much as possible, complemented by hard copy for the best coverage as not all potential delegate groups relied on email communication for their information
- printing necessary materials on 100 per cent post-consumer recycled paper.

⁴ ICLEI Oceania purchased offsets.

⁵ This was based on cost of carbon at the time of calculation (June 2006) provided by Climate Friendly and a comparison to NGACs (New South Wales Greenhouse Abatement Certificate). The cost of internal and domestic air travel, coupled with surface travel, was then averaged to \$20 per person.

⁶ Emission factor sources: Air travel – Climate Friendly calculator; Surface travel – Australian Transport Task 2001 & AGO Factors & Methods Workbook 2006.

An innovative approach to reduce paper usage for both the conference program and sponsor information was through the use of a reusable 'green stick'.⁷ The green stick – or data stick – aimed to reduce waste and promote resource conservation. It was a step toward making the event as paperless as possible by reducing the quantity of printed materials and replacing them with electronic copies.

Rather than providing a satchel containing detailed program and sponsor materials, the delegate welcome packs consisted of a reusable nametag, a pocket-sized program, a welcome letter from the conference convenor and the green stick, which contained detailed program information and sponsor materials. The green stick proved to be very popular among delegates and sponsors.

Post-conference additional resources, including reading materials, presentations and photos from the event, were made available online only. All paper used to record the delegate recommendations in the workshops was collected, recorded and recycled.

Energy Consumption

It has become standard practice that ICLEI Oceania events use accredited GreenPower for venues. 100 per cent GreenPower was provided during the conference at the hotel and 90 per cent GreenPower for the gala dinner.⁸



The Accelerating Now! 'Green Stick'.

In order to estimate the amount of power required during the conference and gala dinner, conference organisers considered the venue type, the size and number of rooms used and the number of attendees. Based on this information, 8 megawatts of accredited GreenPower was generated from 100 per cent wind energy.

⁷ It should be noted that a full life-cycle analysis of the data stick was not undertaken and thus one can assume that there are energy and resource implications of their use.

⁸ To complement the 10 per cent GreenPower already purchased by the venue.

Sustainable Transport

To reduce transport emissions ICLEI Oceania provided sustainable transport information in the marketing materials. The conference website and emails to delegates included information on travelling to the venue. Walking distances between venues and public transport options were provided and walking was strongly encouraged.

Online Collaboration

Another initiative to make the most of the face-to-face time at the conference, and reduce the need for printed conference materials, was the pre-conference engagement process.

The online collaboration was established as a discussion forum on the ICLEI Oceania website, supported by topic resources for scheduled sessions.

4. Leaving a positive legacy

Sustainability and leaving a positive legacy are important features of a green event approach. Greening an event is a process, and as such requires continuous assessment in the lead up to, during and after the event.

It is essential that monitoring and evaluation be used to appraise the effectiveness of the decisions made and the activities performed. Evaluation urges people to be accountable for their actions but, most importantly, encourages continuous learning and behaviour change. Crucially, evaluation provides information on achievements and successes that can be disseminated and incorporated into future events.

ICLEI Oceania wishes to acknowledge the mentoring provided through participation in past ICLEI World Congresses, in particular Cape Town, South Africa 2006, where knowledge on the practicalities of greening events was gained.

5. Useful References

Savings in the City, City of Melbourne 2006

"How to plan a sustainable event", Sustainable Communities Network Brochure available at www.sustainable.org

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability

A range of resources are available from ICLEI's International Training Centre website at www.iclei-europe.org/index.php?id=766

Attachment 1

Greening an Event

Tips for greening venues and managing green events courtesy of ICLEI Global

Waste Avoidance and Minimisation

- Adopt the 'reduce, reuse and recycle' ethos.
- Provide waste specific bins (e.g. organic, recyclable and land fill) at the event venue to ensure separation of waste at source.
- Print conference papers on post-consumer recycled paper or FSC-certified (Forest Stewardship Council) paper.
- Involve recyclers in all events.
- Ensure that any temporary buildings, kiosks, banners used for the event can be reused for other purposes.
- Minimise food offerings that are packaged, and use washable crockery and cutlery.
- Ensure accurate processes are in place for finalising attendee numbers to reduce wastage from overcatering and oversupply of conference material.

Energy Efficiency and Water Conservation

- Retrofit and use energy efficient appliances and equipment.
- Do not use electrical signage.
- Provide cost-benefit information for energy savings to venue of hotel managers, and customers where applicable.
- Ensure air conditioning at the venues is sensory or controlled.
- Turn off appliances when not in use (computers, projectors, hot water urns).
- Check water conservation measures are in place at venue and hotels, for example, low flow taps and dual flush toilets.

Transport

- Establish transport standards for contracting official vehicles, e.g. preference low emission vehicles.
- Identify accommodation close to the venue or easily accessible to public transport.
- Source high-density accommodation to avoid the need for individual travel and encourage car pooling.
- Encourage use of public transport and walking.
- Source food and materials locally where possible through consultation with the hotel staff.

Renewable Energy Use

- Promote purchase of Green Power.
- Upgrade hot water system to solar hot water heating.
- Install photovoltaic panels where possible.

Climate Change

- Confirm that whenever CO₂e emissions cannot be avoided, they are offset through an accredited organisation.
- Consider a carbon-offset payment in the conference fee to compensate for the CO₂e emissions caused as a result of event-related air travel.

Training and Awareness Raising

- Communicate opportunities on event greening to staff and conference participants.
- Increase public awareness and application of "Greening Principles".
- Consolidate the lessons learnt and disseminate to other cities hosting global and regional events.

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