



Three pillars of event sustainability

Sustainability, gosh... it's thrown out there a lot. I'm not sure how you feel whenever you hear it... but for me, I have a couple of reactions.

1. Confused
This one word can mean so much and something different to each person.
2. Daunted
The thought of how to not just talk the talk but walk the walk and demonstrate true sustainability is daunting. As with so much we do, those asking think it's easy but we know it's sometimes a little harder than you think.
3. Concerned
What is it going to cost? Will it impact my bottom line and push my event into non-viability?
4. Excited
Once I get through the initial reactions, I'm then so excited and enthused at the thought of bringing something into my events that could truly make a positive difference.

In this first of four articles, we're going to look at the three pillars of event sustainability.

What does sustainability actually mean?

According to the Oxford dictionary, sustainability means:

“the use of natural products and energy in a way that does not harm the environment”
“the ability to continue or be continued for a long time”

Personally, I love the definition that I read in [Auaha](#) - “sustainability considers how we can meet today's needs without compromising our children's tomorrow”.



Where did the concept of three pillars come from?

The United Nations outlines [17 Sustainability Goals](#) which are wide-ranging and far reaching. The three pillars for sustainable events are loosely drawn from these and adapted to be more specific for our industry.

What are the three pillars and what do they actually mean?

1. *Environmental sustainability in events*

Of the three pillars, this is probably the one that we've all done the most work on. Events can have a huge negative impact environmentally, particularly large trade shows. The [Exhibition & Event Association of Australasia](#) has been working to address this and you can read more about their 2030 pledge by following the link.

Ultimately, this pillar is about protecting our planet and minimising our footprint. There are many ways for you to action this pillar and members can jump in and have a read as this article is now live.

When considering the environmental footprint of your event, key items to consider are:

- Reducing your carbon footprint
 - Think offsetting speaker flights and talking to your venue about their carbon neutrality options
- Reducing food waste and working with food banks
- Sourcing sustainable materials
 - Think beyond branded merchandise and into theming green, assessing the products your exhibition supplier is using etc
 - The impact of your trade waste
- Is it reusable, recyclable, plantable or consumable?

2. *Socially sustainable events*

The Green Event Ninjas sum this one up beautifully:

"Social sustainability is realized by equitably meeting the needs of all people affected by the planning or activation of an event."

I love this definition as it's so simple yet so impactful. As you start to break-down 'all people' it becomes so apparent of the vital role each of us plays in our world and the truly phenomenal impact we can each have. Events reach far and wide and we are the makers of magic.



Another article available for members September 12 goes into a bit more detail but in simple terms, you want to look at:

- Equity and inclusion
- Cultural diversity
- Creating healthy work/event spaces (think program here, not just food) and don't forget about you and your team!
- Creating meaningful connections
- Leaving a positive legacy on the community where your meeting is being held
- Social well-being

3. *Financial sustainability events*

From an association perspective, this is front and centre every time we plan an event. For most associations, the financial impact of our large conferences and on-going events is what underpins the association's ability to perform activities that benefit members but don't generate revenue - advocacy being a prime function.

For events with a more corporate or leisure focus, the profitability of the event may not be a priority but other objectives are i.e. leads/sales generated, reward and recognition etc.

In broad terms, financial or economic sustainability is about being consciously aware of how you're using resources in a way that is responsible, good for business and considers the long-term impact.

This can include things like:

- using indigenous/fair trade suppliers
- Impacts to the local economy where the event is being held
- Member or shareholder value; and
- Return on investment... to name a few.

This article is going September 22 will delve further into this pillar and what it means for events in practical terms.



Where can I find out more?

There are some great easy read articles through the below links:

- [Green Event Ninjas](#)
- [Auaha](#)
- [Heritage Centre](#)
- [Event Brite](#)
- [United Nations](#)