



ISO 20121

Events Sustainability Management Systems

Guide to understanding the international standard

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Involvement in the Sustainable Event Management movement is fast becoming expected of all event production and delivery.

This guide, written by author of *Sustainable Event Management: A Practical Guide* Meegan Jones, offers a plain-language interpretation of the steps involved in implementing ISO 20121 and helps you to understand how this new international standard can be included in your event planning and delivery.

Best practice has moved away from ad-hoc issues management towards a systems approach. This new approach offers a strategic way to manage sustainability and embed continual improvement. It ensures the inclusion of strategies, policies, processes, systems and actions that intertwine to support and manage event sustainability issues more efficiently, effectively and professionally.

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So what is ISO 20121?

ISO 20121: Events Sustainability Management Systems is a document developed by participating 'standards bodies' from various countries around the world. The purpose of the standard is to provide a framework to implement a system to manage an event's sustainable development issues.

Rather than being a checklist, *ISO 20121* requires a systematic approach to addressing sustainable development issues in relation to event planning. It can be applied to an event organiser, a single event or a venue.

Successful implementation of an event sustainability management system will ensure continual performance improvement and systematic management of issues rather than an ad-hoc approach. It facilitates improved sustainability performance. Documentation of processes and disclosure of performance is key.

What is ISO?

ISO stands for the *International Organisation for Standardization*. It is comprised of a network of the national standards institutes of member countries. www.iso.org

What is Sustainable Development?

Sustainable Development is development that 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. It is the process of providing an enduring, balanced approach to economic activity, environmental responsibility and social progress. By ISO definition '**sustainability**' is the degree of sustainable development in the context of the organisation.

Why do we need ISO 20121?

There is increasing pressure to address sustainability in all sectors of society, industry and commerce.

As the level of understanding of sustainable development increases in society and in the events industry specifically, we will find an increasing need to formalize the processes in addressing sustainability impacts of our organisations.

The *ISO 20121* standard is not mandatory, however it's envisaged it will become minimum accepted practice in the event industry. By implementing the standard you will improve sustainability performance, have a framework to manage issues and be able to demonstrate responsible business practice to your stakeholders.

How can the standard help me?

Taking a systematic approach to problem solving is a natural next step as our industry gains understanding of sustainable development issues relating to event production.

The establishment of a management system and guidance provides a proven pathway to identifying and successfully managing sustainable development issues and importantly, to embed those learnings into the event organisation for continued improved success.

The benefits of implementing a management system around events for sustainability means you will not miss any important steps in identifying event sustainability issues, impacts, risks and opportunities.

It will facilitate or set up a higher likelihood of success in meeting sustainable development goals. It means you are not treating issues in an ad hoc way, rather you will track through the process in a systematic way, leaving no stone unturned...

Can I save money?

Yes. Being resource efficient invariably means saving money. There may be some trade off with higher labour demands or procurement choices, however it is very likely that a resource-efficient event will mean a cost-efficient event.

Can I become certified?

Yes. Your organisation can be audited for conformity with the standard. Conformity with the standard is through ensuring your systems are in place. **Read more about conformity assessment with GreenShoot Pacific and SEMS here.**

How do I use it?

ISO 20121 is a standard to comply with, rather than 'use'. A major part of the management system is to ensure the team implementing it has the skills, knowledge and competence to successfully implement it, and that processes are documented and performance measured and reported. **The following pages will help you understand the steps and move you towards compliance with the standard.**

1. Commitment and Resourcing

ISO SAYS: Leadership & Commitment; Provide resources.

GSP SAYS: Get the go ahead to get sustainable.

Getting commitment from top management and engagement by the team for the event's sustainability journey is essential.

Having the time, resources and knowledge needed to get going is the first step. The boss (or whomever gives the final nod – the board, sponsors, clients, local councillors, department head etc) must give the go ahead and offer the team the encouragement and support they need to ensure successful sustainability outcomes.

Top management's interest in the event's sustainability performance, with them actively seeking results and encouraging continual improvement, should be in place.

It's a confident and enthusiastic team embracing sustainability that will also contribute to success. Hopefully there are emeralds dotted throughout your team – those that are green-at-heart and ready to focus on your event's sustainability performance.

2. Stakeholder Engagement

ISO SAYS: Identify and engage interested parties.

GSP SAYS: Get everyone engaged with sustainability.

The production of most events relies on the coming together of many stakeholders external to the core event production organisation. These stakeholders can include contractors, venues, caterers, performers, talent, local government, attendees, community, associations, neighbouring businesses, etc.

Having these many stakeholder groups engaged in and committed to the event sustainability processes will be pivotal to the success of your plans.

By purposefully planning the recruitment of stakeholders into your event's sustainability plans, you will have a greater chance of success.

The communication and engagement process will also have the twin benefit of educating your event's stakeholders with the deeper issues around sustainability and (hopefully) ignite their active participation in developing solutions alongside you.

3. What are you talking about?

ISO SAYS: Determine scope of the management system.

GSP SAYS: Work out the boundaries of management.

Before you launch into setting up your management system you need to define what will be included and what will not. Does the management system cover a single event, a company and their year's worth of events, or an event organiser who will apply a management system to all their client's events?

Are you just concerned with what happens in the four walls of your venue, or are you scoping in all the activities in which attendees to your event will be involved? (e.g. delegates at a conference). By articulating this scope, boundary or frame of reference you can then establish parameters within which all your event sustainability concerns will fall.

Just because you can't control something completely, the issue or impact may still have a considerable significance and be deemed relevant by your stakeholders. Do they see it as your responsibility? If so, you must factor these potential sustainability impacts, issues, risks and opportunities into your plans. Remember, what is included in your management system needs managing! Don't be too whimpy though and scope everything out and then call yourself a brilliant performer!

4. What do you stand for?

ISO SAYS: Define governing principles of sustainable development.

GSP SAYS: Establish social and environmental standing.

The boss is on board, the team is into it, stakeholders are identified, but what is it you're trying to ultimately achieve? Establishing the higher principles to which the organisation subscribes, will make decision making easier down the track. So what are these principles?

Sustainable Development principles can include aspects such as **Inclusivity, Integrity, Stewardship, Transparency, and Legacy or Leadership.**

Embracing these at an organisational level is the first step, next comes embedding these principles into the operational, procurement (and possibly content) aspects of event production.



The **UN Global Compact** has identified the principles which businesses can use to guide them. These cover Human Rights, Labour Standards, Environment and Anti-Corruption. **Click for more details.**



5. Who knows what to do?

ISO SAYS: Ensure sufficient competencies and awareness.

GSP SAYS: Undergo professional development training.

The end game for sustainability in event management is to have it embedded into all operational and procurement decisions. But the pathway there is going to require people in the team to know what their doing and to drive the organisation toward sustainability.

If you're just starting out it is likely you'll need to gain new skills in and knowledge of sustainability to be able to know which issues are important and how to manage them.

Undertake professional development training, engage expert guidance or employ an in-house staff member to focus on sustainability and bring learnings back to the team.

You'll then know the right questions to ask, be able to effectively identify and manage issues, and roll out plans to achieve them.



GreenShoot Pacific runs events sustainability webinar and live training. **Enquire here.**



6. What's the issue?

ISO SAYS: Issue identification and evaluation.

GSP SAYS: Identify and plan for event sustainability issues.

So what's the issue and who's responsible? Who cares about it and how big an issue is it really? Working out what should be focused on, what is relevant, where the biggest gains will be and where the 'must-takes' are (regardless the size of the impact), is next.

Do a thorough analysis of your event's and organisation's 'business as usual' performance. You're looking for risks and opportunities, and don't forget that issues can be positive or negative. There may be barriers to improvement and that is of course an issue. Legalities and regulations may impact on plans. This process will also allow you to uncover what you're already doing well.

Understand which issues have greatest significance – just how big are the potential impacts, especially if you fail to act? Identifying and acknowledging issues is key. You may decide on a staged approach to managing issues over the course of several editions of your event. Just make sure you declare that you're aware!



Use the SEMS tool to track through detailed sections to identify issues for management. www.semstoolkit.com



7. How Formal Can You Get?

ISO SAYS: Establish and document policy.

GSP SAYS: Create an Event Sustainability Policy.

Developing a sustainability policy for your event and/or event organising company is an important step in formalising and articulating your commitment to sustainable event management. It is a good document to have to disseminate publicly, to give for student enquiries, and to new contractors and staff.

The policy can be a one-pager and visionary in scope, but we like to get some meat on the bones and suggest a more detailed approach.

The Sustainability Policy should indicate your commitment to sustainable development and describe your pathways to sustainability. It should include an overview on procurement, energy, transport, waste, water, venues, light and sound, ecology, heritage, community, destination, and any other aspects relevant to the organisation or event. It should include a statement of goals and a description of key sustainability indicators that performance will be measured against.



Use the **SEMS Sustainability Policy Wizard** to create your policy. **Click through.**



8. Reach for the Stars, Blast Off!

ISO SAYS: Set objectives and plans to achieve them.

GSP SAYS: Set objectives and make a plan.

Setting objectives and supporting targets provides not only an end goal, but can help gauge how you have improved and whether your undertakings are having a positive effect.

If you're in the first year of implementing sustainability at your event, you will be in base-lining mode. Your overarching objective will include gathering performance data in order to establish a baseline from which to assess future improvement.

Establishing Key Sustainability Performance Indicators is another aspect to setting objectives. The GRI has worked to create these:



**Global
Reporting
Initiative™**

The **Global Reporting Initiative Event Organizers Sector Supplement** has over 30 indicators of sustainability.

Choosing ones right for you will form the basis of not only how you will report on your successes, but what aspects you should focus on managing. For more information: www.gri.org



9. Keep on Talking

ISO SAYS: Maintain internal and external communications.

GSP SAYS: Make sure you keep talking to stakeholders.

You need to keep talking to the boss, keep talking to the team, and keep talking to your stakeholders, or as ISO calls them 'interested parties'. You'll go around in several loops when doing your 'communications' step of the management system.

At first you'll be trying to get everyone tuned into going on the sustainability journey. So just what are the benefits? **Reputation, cost savings, meeting industry best practice, stakeholder's expectation, and parent organisation's policies and CSR requirements.** You'll be talking to everyone when doing the diagnostic and again when discussing ideas and plans of action. You'll talk to folks about what should be in the policy and what's mandatory to uptake, then having more discussion when working out the objectives or targets, and of course when you roll out your plans and initiatives.

Talking's not your only tool of trade. Formalize requirements or expectations in contracts, encourage participation through newsletters, online, social media and onsite at the event through various communications mediums at your disposal.

10. Deliver the event

ISO SAYS: Establish and implement process for operational control and supply chain management.

GSP SAYS: Get cracking and roll out your initiatives.

The chunkiest and most rewarding part of implementing sustainability into event management is rolling out your initiatives to reduce impacts and enhance legacies. ISO calls the doing 'Operational Control'. We call it delivering your event.

So what to do? This is where a small pdf document is not going to be able to do-the-doing any justice. Assuming you've learnt what's what about sustainability or have someone to hold your hand on this journey, that you've undertaken a diagnostic of your situation to uncover issues, impacts and opportunities, and you have some great creative and logistical talent in the room, you'll be brimming with ideas! Look at www.greeneventbook.com for ideas too.

As many aspects of events are delivered through the supply chain, such as venues, caterers, signage and décor providers, exhibition infrastructure, sound and lighting suppliers, waste and sanitation companies, and generator suppliers, some of the action falls in the supply chain's hands. Here you'll need to influence them through contract stipulations, rewards, penalties or wholehearted engagement!

11. Systemize it, Document it

ISO SAYS: Create and maintain documentation and procedures required for system effectiveness.

GSP SAYS: Get it in order, document your systems.

Many of us fly by gut-feel and years of practical experience rather than procedure manuals and process descriptions. But having a central depository of all information and processes regarding events sustainability is helpful and a requirement of the standard. The system should exist without dependence on information held by any one person.

ISO 20121 requires that systems are established (it is a management system after all) and that you write everything down. Establishing an intranet portal is a great solution for this.

We would also like to introduce to you to a one-stop solution that not only enables you to document all that you do, but also provides a measurement system and a performance scorecard:



SEMS is a desktop sustainability tool that allows you to document your processes. It also helps you manage, monitor and measure performance
www.semstoolkit.com



12. Measure and Report it

ISO SAYS: Monitor and evaluate system performance, including internal audits and management review.

GSP SAYS: Determine how you went, tell others, set goals.

Monitor, measure and report your efforts. Conduct a management review, and identify areas for continual improvement, set new goals and objectives to achieve for the next event. Performance measurement can be in metric terms (volume, dollars, percentages or proportions) as well as in observational reporting (generally about participation and behaviour change or social impact).

Choosing how you will measure the event's performance is important to couple with plans to manage issues. Begin with the end in mind. Know what is important for report readers to understand and you'll have uncovered the issues needing management. Next make sure you have the systems in place to measure performance.

Again, **SEMS** takes the heavy lifting off the event organiser with in-built performance measurement and reporting features. It comes coupled with a transport impacts spreadsheet so you can to get down and dirty with your travel data! Also remember the **GRI Event Organizers Sector Supplement** to choose performance indicators.



GreenShoot Pacific assists productions to significantly increase their sustainability performance. We help identify potential environmental, societal and economic issues, balancing the demands of people, profit and planet.

As specialists in event, screen and touring we take pride in guiding our clients to reduce negative impacts and enhance positive legacies. Our principal goal is to share our knowledge and skills to make each client the best sustainability performers they can be.

GreenShoot Pacific specialize in the design of strategic services, systems, solutions and training across production management based industries to include; events, screen, sport, touring and facilities.

Our major focus is the identification of resource efficiencies so as to minimise negative impacts and facilitate sustainable growth.

Services

We provide performance measurement, analysis and reporting enabling our clients to credibly communicate their commitment to positive social and environmental outcomes.

As a means of ensuring our reports and services are consistent with the high level of excellence expected of us, we are guided by the indicators of sustainability performance set down by the **Global Reporting Initiative** and conform with International Standard **ISO 20121**. We also have a Quality Management System in place to ensure our processes and services are comprehensive, accurate and effective.

Planning	Diagnostic with recommendations
Policy	Event Sustainability Management Policy
Training	Sustainable Event Management Training Caterer Best Practice Seminar Venue Manager's Sustainable Training
Tools	Development of guidance resource Sustainability Measurement Tool
Solutions	Implementation of Solutions
Performance	Onside Audit Performance report & measurement Compliance auditing



GSP Offices

GreenShoot Pacific is based in NSW, Australia however we have offices and affiliates in several other territories including UK, Canada, USA, New Zealand, and India.

GSP Clients

NSW Office Environment and Heritage, ACT Government, NSW Local Government Shires Association, Sydney Festival, Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, Warner Bros. Pictures – *The Great Gatsby*, APRA AMCOS, Taste Festival, Garage Sale Trail 2011, Fuzzy - Parklife, La Dolce Italia Festival, Screen NSW, Panic on Rock Island (telemovie), Crave - Sydney Harbour Island Hopping, TAFE – Hunter Institute (Greenskills NSW RTO partner), Australian Centre Event Management, Sydney Entertainment Centre.

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The Sustainable Event Management System Tool

We suggest using the **SEMS Tool** as a system to get ISO 20121 'conformity ready' at a fraction of the price of a usual third party consultant-heavy audit.

A comprehensive online sustainable event management system, the **SEMS Tool** will guide you through the process of implementing sustainable best practice into your events.

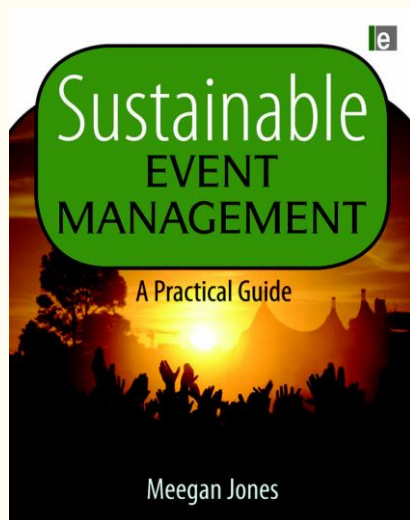
It includes guidance, in-built calculators, GHG reporting, and performance assessment report.

The **SEMS Tool** can be used to assess conformity with international standard *ISO 20121: Event Sustainability Management Systems*.

Upload your evidence, results, documentation and description of what issues you have and how you have managed them. Then submit for audit with an industry recognised event sustainability auditor for conformity assessment with ISO 20121.

[Read More Here](#)

Other Resources



Sustainable Event Management: A Practical Guide

GreenShoot Pacific's Meegan Jones has written a book on sustainable event management, published by Earthscan UK.

'I think it is a great practical guide to sustainable event management; Seriously, the standard set here is the highest I've seen in print.'

David Joblin, Independent Journalist

Buy the Book



Free Guide to Enduring Event Legacy

An important aspect of an event's sustainability performance is its enduring legacies such as demonstrating sustainability-in-action, encouraging changing behaviors, and leaving new skills and resources with the host community.

This guide gives you our top twelve legacies we encourage events consider leaving behind.

Access the Guide

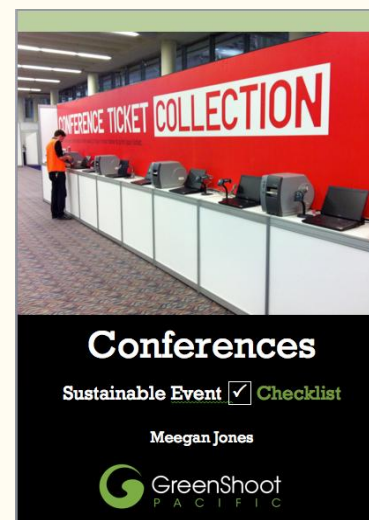


Outdoor Festival Sustainable Event Checklist

Focusing on outdoor festivals this checklist offers a comprehensive list of potential sustainability impacts to consider.

It includes detailed waste checklists, along with site considerations.

Buy the Checklist

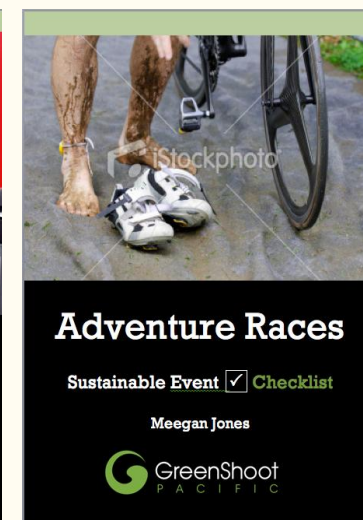


Conference/Convention Sustainable Event Checklist

Use our checklist document to help you track through your conference, convention or congress to ensure you've addressed sustainability impacts. Get ready for *ISO 20121* conformity.

This PDF document has check boxes you can tick off – the love of any event manager!

Buy the Checklist



Adventure Races Sustainable Event Checklist

Use our checklist document to help you navigate your outdoor adventure race towards sustainability. Get ready for *ISO 20121* conformity.

This PDF document has check boxes you can tick off – the love of any event manager!

Buy the Checklist



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Thank you, **Meegan Jones**