

THE TIME IS **NOW**



Sustainability in Business Events Industry **Situational Analysis**





OVERVIEW

Sustainability has been a topic in the business events industry for decades, however past efforts have been slow and varied industry-wide. Today, more organisations are aligning with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), pursuing circular economy models for their businesses and products, and taking greater action toward net-zero carbon emissions. Yet the deadline of 2030¹ to take climate action and have even a reasonable chance of limiting global heating to 1.5°C is nearing and time is running out. Now, with the devastation caused to the industry due to Covid-19, there is greater business and consumer awareness of sustainability² and urgency for the event industry to act is further heightened.

The business events industry has worked collectively over the years to develop partnerships, principles, and standards. Some organisers and suppliers have also increased their individual commitments to sustainability. More work is still needed however to mobilise event organisers and get these resources and frameworks to them for real action.

This work, initiated and supported by the PCMA Foundation and the Singapore Tourism Board, aims to illustrate the next-level actions the business event industry must take collectively to scale progress. Developed through consultation with PCMA and its audiences, the Singapore Tourism Board and wider industry stakeholders, it was designed to:

- Outline areas of influence of event organisers and opportunities for maximum engagement
- Identify necessary initiatives, engagement, and resources that is required to raise awareness, build capacity among event planners, and give impetus to action
- Provide practical resources for organisers to use now

Note that while a true discussion of sustainability must encompass aspects that incorporate economic, social, and environmental impacts, the focus for this work is foremost on improving environmental sustainability within the events industry.

SITUATION ANALYSIS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

To align with global goals and avert environmental disaster caused by climate change, the business events industry needs to make a significant impact towards halving carbon dioxide emissions by 2030, tackling waste and using circularity principles to make far better use of energy and materials. To do this, five systemic challenges need to be addressed:



Sustainability not yet taken seriously at the top – Senior decision-makers still need to be convinced to take action at events. For commitment to spread across all business functions in the business, event organisers need to be empowered with the mandate and resources to act.



Limited knowledge - Event organisers need to be upskilled and build expertise in the elements of sustainability and how, what and where they get implemented in business events. Organisers need to be better positioned to use measurement tools and resources.



Overwhelmed by choice – The multitude of frameworks, standards, tools, initiatives, and case studies of event organisers who are much further advanced can be overwhelming for those event organisers who are getting started. The issues can be too complex resulting in event organisers being unsure of where or how to begin.



Control and supplier influence - Event organisers have varying degrees of control and influence over choosing more responsible suppliers and products. They need to be empowered as ringleaders, understanding where control and influence is best utilised.



Measuring, monitoring, and reporting data - The business events industry has struggled with the technical capabilities in current systems to accurately and/or regularly measure, share data and report the impact of an event.



The Environmental Impact of Events

In 2018, the event industry contributed US \$1.5 trillion in GDP, attracted more than 1.5 billion participants from over 180 countries, and supported 26 million jobs around the world³.

These numbers also translate into significant environmental impacts, in particular, carbon emissions and waste. While events vary in type, location and size, in terms of carbon emissions and waste, the main sources are:



Travel - this includes travel for delegates to get to an event from city of origin and within the destination, freight and logistics required to transport equipment, production of screens, stages, stands and booths, food and other goods to the venue, along with all the packaging involved.



Venues and accommodation – heating, cooling, ventilating, and lighting the buildings generate emissions. In addition, event equipment and servers for online streaming can be significant sources of emissions, and daily use of materials generates waste.

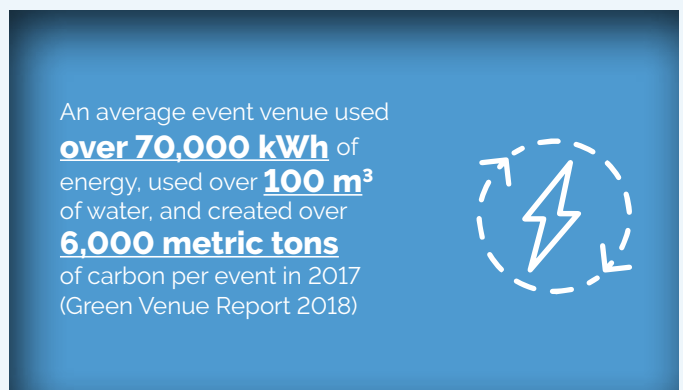
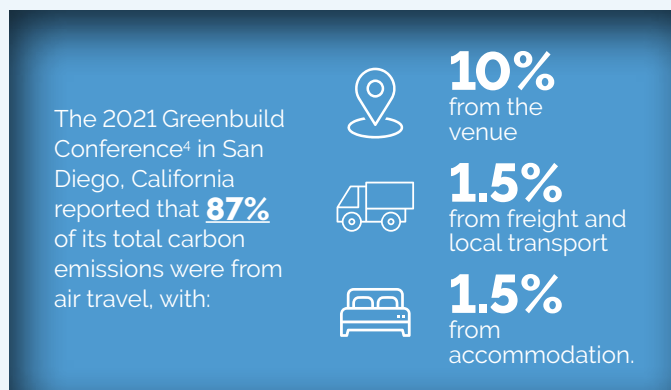


Food – Bringing in food items from far distances, menus with impactful types of food such as beef, and the management of food waste all have an immense carbon footprint.



Building and printed materials - printed programme agendas, flyers, posters, banners gifts as well as the construction and production of staging or booths have a carbon footprint each time they are made, transported and then additionally when processed as waste post-event.

Figure 1:
Examples of the scale of event waste



Emissions should be addressed through preventing or avoiding the consumption, using renewables energy sources, increasing recycling and energy recovery, and then finally offsetting the remainder. The way forward is **circular thinking**. A circular economy involves both using and reusing more of the same items, thereby reducing the need to produce products that ultimately create waste⁸. It is regenerative by design. In business events, circular economy opportunities are emerging, for example:



1 Move from owning to borrowing or experiencing

- use and reuse or rent booths instead of building and tearing down for each event
- offer a branded experience or content instead of branded physical giveaways



2 Rethink resources

- replace printed signage with digital (and power it by renewable energy)
- print better using renewable ink, and print on recycled or recyclable materials
- create reusable signage and materials that are not labelled for a specific event
- plan for ways to divert signage or materials from landfill, including donation



3 Design to remove waste

- create menus where fresh food left over in one meal production can be used as inputs in other meals, hors d'oeuvres or flavouring
- plan so that any leftover materials from an event built can be repurposed or remanufactured and used for another event



1 Investors

Investors such as BlackRock with its \$10 trillion of assets under management, are directing business change, requiring the companies it invests in to implement Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) programs and decarbonisation plans. This pressure hits the company's operations and in turn forces it to exert similar pressure on its suppliers.

Why the Time is Now

We are at a tipping point and in the events industry, pressures to act are coming from all sides:

2 Costs



Unprecedented inflation, a surge in demand driven by COVID recovery, climate change, labour shortages, and the war in Ukraine are all factors driving up costs. These in turn make the myriad costs of putting on an event increase. Rethinking event design with cost-cutting in mind ultimately converges with sustainability in using less and being more resource efficient.



3 Clients

Companies are seriously beginning to measure their impact and are setting environmental targets covering emissions, energy and waste. As they begin to estimate the costs of transitioning to a low carbon economy and identify cuts to business travel as an area of easier opportunity, event organisers will need to remain alert and competitive.



5 Delegates

Like all consumers, event delegates want proof of action beyond greenwashing, and to have experiences that generate an impact. Their reaction to event wastage can reflect poorly on companies hosting an event, and even sponsors.



7 Industry Initiatives

The business events industry is itself rallying around the need to cut emissions. The Net Zero Carbon Events initiative¹⁰ was launched at the 2021 climate talks in Glasgow. Over 230 organiser signatories and 120 supporters have committed to pledge net zero emissions by 2050. A Net Zero roadmap for the events industry will be published in November this year at the COP27 in Egypt. It will identify priority action areas and a common approach to measure and address emissions and decarbonisation.

4 Governments and Destinations



In the case of the US and others, legislation around decarbonisation, climate risk, and sustainability goals will further pressure businesses and their supply chains. In Singapore, for example, the country's [Singapore Green Plan 2030](#) (SGP2030) has very specific and time-bound energy and emissions targets to significantly increase the use of renewable energy, while also increasing local food production.

6 Employees



Amid **the great resignation**, higher numbers of people have been exiting hospitality and business event industries to find more secure and better paying employment elsewhere⁹. The industry will need to find ways to motivate and provide more purpose to its community.

The time is indeed now.

The Advent of Sustainability-themed Events

Just as The Time Is Now for collective and concerted global action on climate emissions and wider sustainability practices, the business events industry will see a growth in the number of events from industries or on topics related to sustainability. This translates into an immense opportunity in sustainability-related events that governments and organisations will seek to put on to drive mindset shifts and societal actions. Event organisers will need to be versed in sustainability to help these organising bodies walk the talk in their events. They will need to advise on how to directly relate speaker content to environmental and social issues and provide more experiential opportunities for delegates to further tie sustainability to the event itself.

See Appendix Singapore: A Home for Sustainability-themed Events for examples of how many of these types of events are calling Singapore home. Find out how Singapore is providing organisers with support and complementing it with delegate offerings.



Taking stock of where organisers are

In Spring 2022, event organisers from PCMA and beyond were engaged on their views and experience regarding sustainability in their events. Over 100 were also surveyed, with the following key findings:¹¹



Business events have improved sustainability over the years and targets are on the horizon.

Three quarters (74%) of event organisers agree that their events address sustainability more than they did five years ago. Two thirds are starting to measure, with 70% planning to set targets within three years. Most organisers encourage their suppliers to implement some sustainability practices.



Organisational leadership is an important gap to fill.

Only one quarter (26%) of PCMA event organisers agree to a great extent that sustainability is taken seriously by senior decision-makers in their organisations.



More awareness is needed on how to reduce carbon.

While cutting waste is a consideration where action is underway, there is a lack of awareness on low-carbon measures like having plant-based choices on the menu.



While sustainability has improved and organisers are aware, they see room to improve.

Only 15% said that the last event they held was 'very sustainable'. While many are starting, few have actually measured. Several have taken steps to cut materials and waste, but recognise more to do to reduce their footprint.



A perceived lack of resources still exists.

Despite a multitude of tools, standards, initiatives, and capacity building for sustainable events available, many event organisers do not seem to be finding them, or finding the resources that suits their needs. Those who said that their last event was either not very or not at all sustainable (27% and 4% respectively), reasoned that it was because they had few policies to guide them. While some event organisers do appear to be held back by cost in making sustainability efforts, more are looking for a suite of tools and resources to support them and their engagement with suppliers. "A guidebook for events that can be applied to different types of events", was requested.

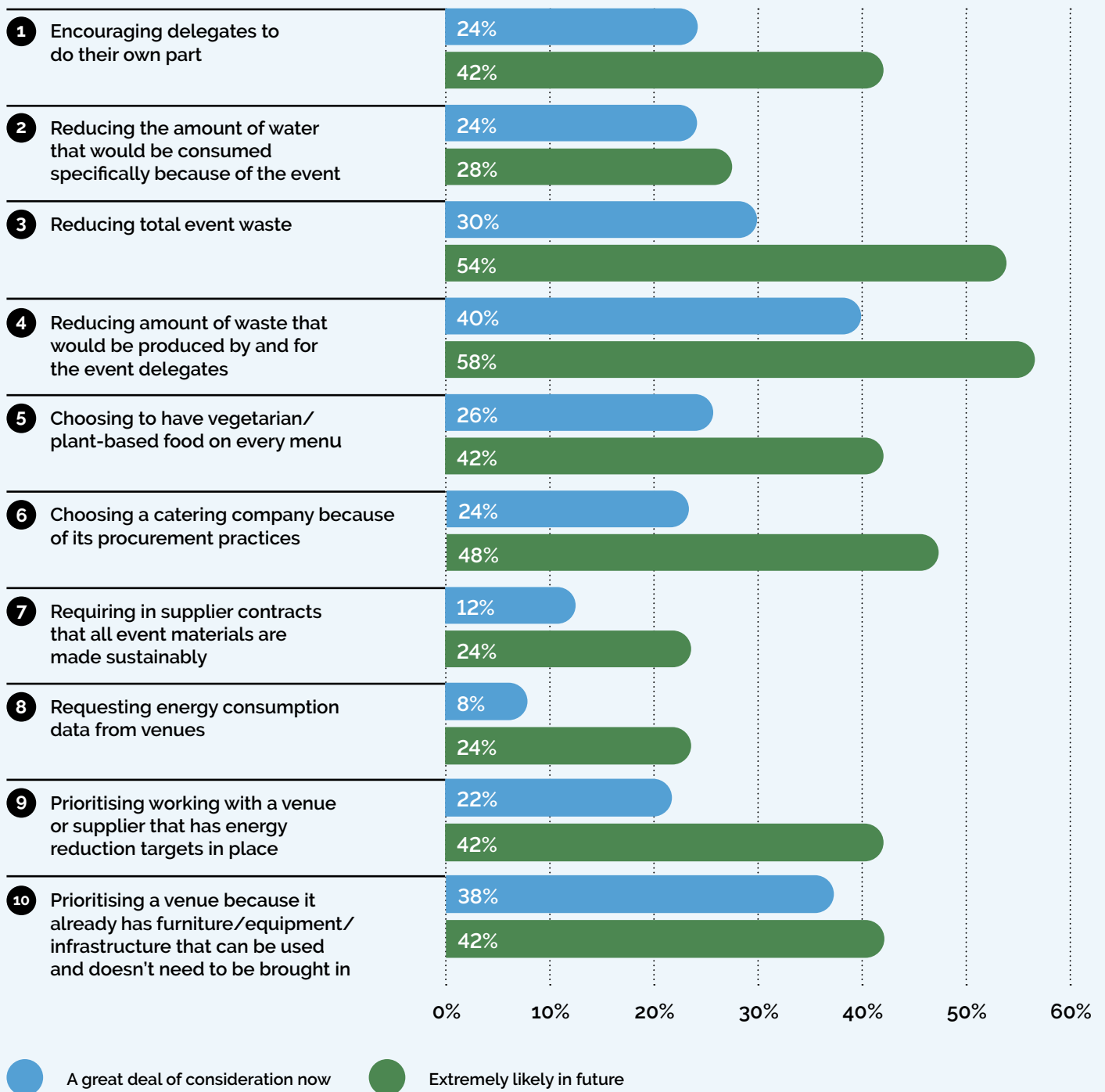


Event Organiser as Sustainability Ringleader

Research among event organisers identified areas where they currently consider sustainability and where they felt they could take action in future²². Reducing visible waste was the simplest area of action, while requiring event materials to be made sustainably or requesting energy data were least preferable. Much of the reasoning is based on perception of where organisers have control, as showing in Figure 2:






Figure 2: Event organisers' consideration of current and future sustainability actions



While suppliers generate most of the carbon footprint of an event, the organiser is able to see the full impact collectively, and is in the prime position to drive progress with suppliers as the sustainability "ringleader". These examples of control in decision-making process are seen in Figure 3. Even where the organiser only has indirect control, its suppliers may be looking at their own sustainability goals and targets that the organiser can support.

Finally, event delegates can be influenced or motivated to contribute and drive change. One event organiser recognised their 'ringleader' role: *"none of my clients ever ask about sustainability and it's not on the radar among delegates. We have a responsibility to educate up."* Another agreed, *"we need a huge shift in mindset, an epic education piece."*

Figure 3: Examples of control in decision-making process

| Supplier Category | Supplier control | Organiser control |
|---|--|--|
| Venue  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supply furniture and equipment without need to buy in from elsewhere Choose to get electricity from renewable sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritise a venue that offers furniture and equipment Prioritise a venue based on it having renewable energy |
| Catering company  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Venue has a contractual agreement with the caterers Catering company offers fixed menus | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contract the caterers directly based on sustainable procurement practices (sourcing and waste) Influence procurement practices through their RFP and contract negotiations Choose or influence menu based on local sourcing and carbon emissions of food and beverages |
| AV supplier  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Venue has a contractual agreement with the AV supplier | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contract the AV directly based on the efficiency of its equipment and resource use. |

Endnotes

- ¹ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate (IPCC) report released in August 2021 warned that the world is set to reach the 1.5°C level within the next two decades and only the most drastic cuts in carbon emissions from now would help prevent an environmental disaster <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-3/>
- ² <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/covid-19-lessons-for-sustainability>
- ³ Research from Oxford Economics and the Events Industry Council (EIC) and supported by the PCMA Foundation
- ⁴ https://images.go.informaconnect01.com/Web/UBMSCG/%7Ba31304fa-6652-45ab-b27e-2e54cb42026b%7D_GB21_Sustainability_Report_Final_02.10.22.pdf
- ⁵ <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/12/5001/pdf>
- ⁶ The authors of this research use this term widely to refer to the meetings and events themselves, party, tour program, administrative, venue usage, decoration and construction, equipment rental, shipping, printing, promotion and advertisement, extraordinary personnel, etc
- ⁷ <https://meetgreen.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/eventfoot.pdf>
- ⁸ See case study examples here: <https://www.circularglasgow.com/events-sector/>
- ⁹ See: <https://qz.com/2164722/no-one-wants-to-work-in-restaurants-anymore-2>
- ¹⁰ See: <https://netzerocarbonevents.org/initiative>
- ¹¹ The survey was sent to 6,336 event organisers, with a response rate of only 2.3%, indicative of the need to mobilise organisers in their sustainable event commitment
- ¹² Q18: Thinking specifically about the last live or hybrid event that you organised, for each of the elements below, how much consideration, if any, did you give to the following in your initial planning of the event?
Q19: To increase event sustainability, from those same elements listed above, which, if any, do you think that event organisers like yourself could likely consider as part of your future planning?

Appendix:

Singapore, Leading Destination for Sustainability-themed Events

Sustainability means business.

One manifestation of this mantra is the proliferation of events that have sustainability as their purpose, core content, or based on a specific industry that relates to its challenges and solutions. While some sustainability events may have been viewed as a fad in the past, the breadth and depth of topics, formats, company profiles, and attendee profiles is an indication of a clear trend.

Singapore has emerged as a leader in hosting sustainability-related events, not only through the impetus of the government and institutions, but from regional and international organisations seeking to put on events and finding Singapore a good fit.

For Climate Change, Environment and Sustainable MICE events, Singapore is an attractive destination due to the strong importance placed by the various government agencies such as the Centre for Liveable Cities (CLC), the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), and the National Environment Agency (NEA). The Government of Singapore also drives a national agenda on sustainable development with the launch of a whole-of-nation movement called the Singapore Green Plan 2030 (SGP2030), in 2021. This national sustainability movement aims to rally collective action from all industries

and households to tackle climate change issues, which acknowledges the emphasis of sustainability today in Singapore.

Beyond sustainability-related content, event organisers, suppliers and delegates themselves are increasingly focusing on how the event itself can be executed in a sustainable manner. The Singapore Exhibition and Conventions Bureau (SECB) provides a comprehensive suite of support and resources for organisers to host a sustainable event. Through assistance schemes such as Business Events in Singapore (BEIS), Singapore MICE Advantage Programme (SMAP), and In Singapore Incentives & Rewards Global (INSPIRE Global), organisers can realise sustainable event practices that minimises their carbon footprint and engage in eco-conscious experiences across dining, attractions, thematic tours, team-building and retail to enhance the itineraries of MICE groups to Singapore.

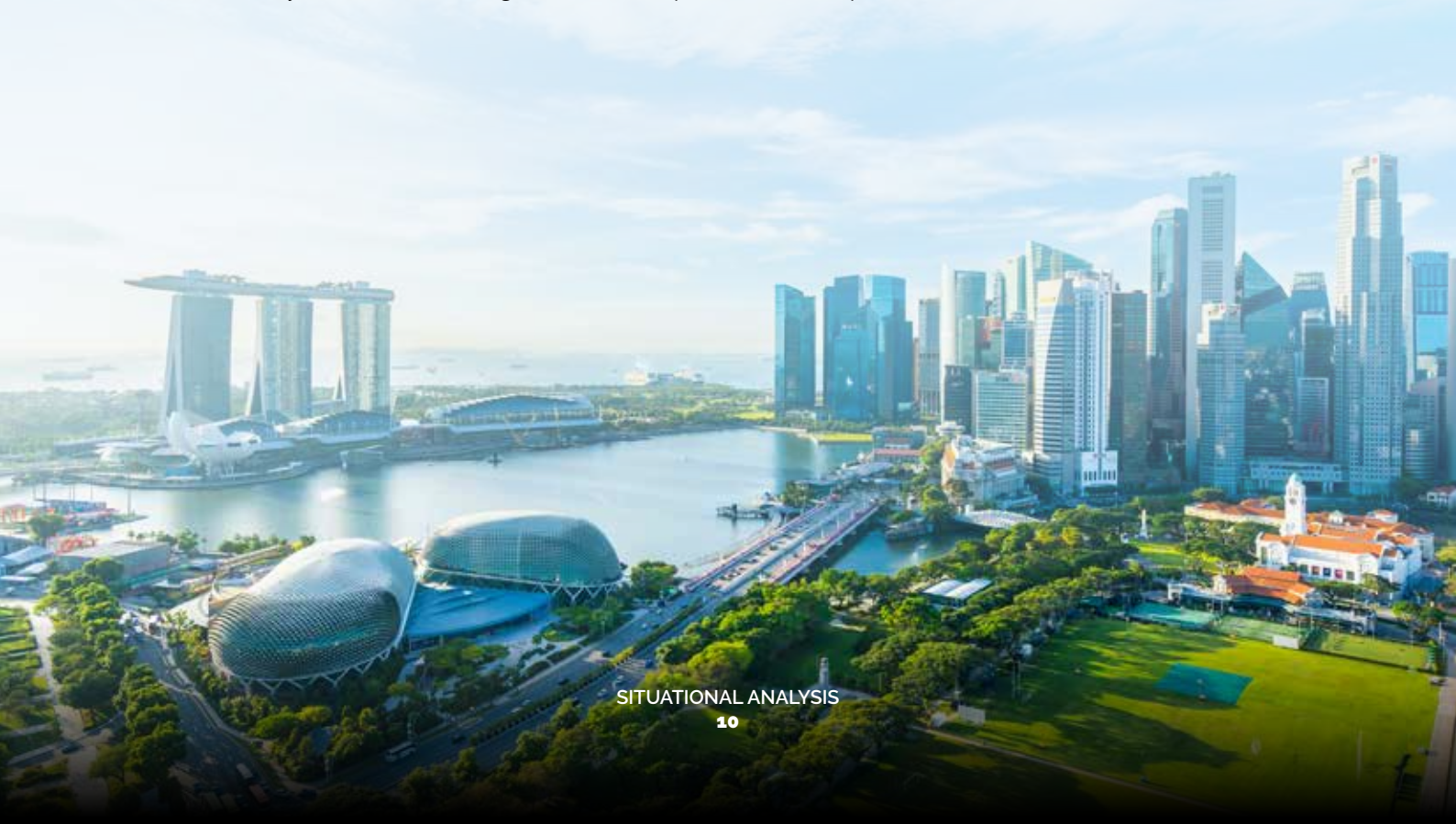
To complement efforts in organising a sustainable event, SECB also offers grant schemes to raise the competencies and capabilities of the MICE industry in delivering sustainable events. Through the Business Improvement Fund (BIF) and Training Industry Professionals in Tourism (TIP-iT) grant schemes, SECB facilitates sustainability capability development and growth for a robust MICE backbone.



Here are some examples of sustainability-themed events in Singapore, either recently held or upcoming:

Organised by Singapore Government and Affiliated

- **Ecosperity Week** - An annual confluence of events anchored by the Ecosperity Conference organised by Temasek, that brings together global business leaders, policy-makers, investors and other communities across the region to discuss pertinent trends in sustainability. In 2021, discussions are focused on decarbonisation and climate action, reimagining nature and resources, and sustainable investing and financing.
- **World Cities Summit** - Jointly organised by CLC and URA, WCS is an exclusive platform for government leaders and industry experts to address liveable and sustainable city challenges, share integrated urban solutions and forge new partnerships
- **Singapore International Water Week (SIWW)** - SIWW is a global premier platform to share and co-create innovative water solutions. The biennial event gathers stakeholders from the global water industry to share best practices, showcase the latest technologies, and tap business opportunities.
- **CleanEnviro Summit Singapore (CESG)** - Organised by NEA since 2012, the biennial CleanEnviroSummit Singapore serves as a global networking platform for thought leaders, senior government officials, regulators and policy makers, and industry captains. The 2022 edition will focus on the theme "towards sustainable and climate-resilient cities", deepdiving into waste management, cleaning, pest management, sustainable energy and pollution control.
- **Climate Action Week** - An annual campaign organised by the Ministry of Sustainability and Environment since 2018. It features ground-up initiatives which aims to raise awareness of climate adaptation and mitigation efforts by Public, Private and People sectors to support the Green Plan. It will have small scale events over a week, [2021's featured 63 partners and 130 activities, some of which webinars.](#)
- **SGBC Gala Dinner 2022** - Held in May 2022 by Singapore Green Building Council which presented leadership in Sustainability Awards.
- **International Conference on Additive Manufacturing for a Better World: Designing for healthcare innovation and sustainability**—Inaugural conference organised by SUTD which will take a hybrid format this year. Aims to highlight the advancements in additive manufacturing (AM) research in addressing the global challenges.
- **GIC insights 2021** - A hybrid event held in Nov 2021, organised by GIC. Topics of discussion included how sustainability and climate change will affect capital allocation, policies and investments.



International Organisations Holding Sustainable Events in Singapore

- **Sustainability Reporting Summit** - Asia's top regional conference organised by CSRWorks International. The summit is dedicated to discussing trends, techniques, challenges, solutions and success stories in sustainability reporting.
- **Singapore Energy Transition conference** - Virtual event organised by DNV, upcoming in June 2022. A panel of experts will breakdown the opportunities and challenges facing energy companies and industry stakeholders in adapting to the energy transition
- **Asia Green Packaging Innovation Summit 2022** - In-person event upcoming in September 2022 organised by ECV international. This summit will discuss regulations and market trends of packaging sustainability in Asia, explore future technology related to packaging to drive the zero-carbon reform of packaging industry.
- **Future of energy week 2022** - Hybrid event upcoming in September 2022 organised by Economist Impact. Target audience of policymakers, business leaders, scientific experts and representatives of multilateral institutions to discuss the status and effects of the energy transition in the Asia-Pacific, along with the region's role in defining the pace and scale of this global transformation.
- **AWS Sustainability Summit 2022** - A virtual event organised by Amazon from their Singapore office, in conjunction with Eco-business. Discussions with experts will centre on key trends concerning sustainability of the cloud.
- **Reuters Events: Responsible Business Asia 2022** - A virtual event happening in June 2022 where discussions will prove the business case for responsible business practices and the importance of achieving internal alignment on your ESG goals, to help deliver a resilient supply chain, while navigating the regulatory landscape and ensuring strong stakeholder engagement.
- **BEX Asia 2022** - In-person event at Sands convention centre in September 2022 organised by BEX Asia for the built environment industry to connect with solution providers, distributors and sellers with decision makers, developers, architects, interior designers, landscape architects, consultants and buyers to generate successful business connections and leads across Asia.
- **Decarbonising cooling: achieving Singapore's Climate ambition** - a virtual event organised by WWF Singapore in June 2022. A report titled, "Decarbonising Singapore's Energy System in the Context of Cooling" delivered by the Carbon Trust will be launched at the event. WWF-Singapore has worked with the National Climate Change Secretariat to shape the study and we will be sharing key findings at the event.
- **Global Web3 Eco Innovation (GWEI) Summit 2022** - A hybrid event in July 2022 jointly organised by Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) and 8BTC which will bring together founders and executives from leading crypto and financial enterprises, academic institutions, policy-makers, and enthusiasts to discuss fintech trends.
- **Greentech Festival 2022** - An in-person event in November 2022 which will comprise an awards ceremony, exhibition and conference that highlights the latest technologies and pressing needs in business.

Supporting the execution of sustainable events are exhibition and convention centres which have achieved 3rd party sustainability certifications for the operation of the facility. These include:

- 1 Sands Expo and Convention Centre**
 - a. ISO 20121 Sustainable Events Management System
 - b. Events Industry Council Sustainable Event Standards Platinum Certification
- 2 Resorts World Convention Centre**
 - a. Certified according to Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Destination Criteria
- 3 Singapore EXPO Convention & Exhibition Centre and MAX Atria**
 - a. ISO 14001:2015 Environmental Management System Certification