

visit  greater
palm springs



The Four Cs of Sustainability

A Pioneering Model for
Sustainable Destinations,
Meetings and Events

By **Amy Blackman**

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Sustainability is not a Trend

See pg. 31 for citations

98%

of CEOs agree sustainability is their responsibility

37%

of the world's largest companies have a public net zero target. Nearly all are off track

18%

of companies are cutting emissions fast enough to reach net zero by 2050

70%

of consumers now value sustainability more than two years ago

81%

of consumers would switch from brands that neglect the environment

76%

of consumers expect brands to reduce carbon footprints

55%

of consumers rely on brands to raise awareness of environmental issues



Greater Palm Springs Knows Sustainability is Not a Trend: Attribution Stats in Action

See pg. 31- 32 for citations





PART 1



Definition & Big Whys: The Business Case for Sustainability

The term sustainability is widely used, but it is rarely defined or clarified. Fundamentally, **sustainability is about creating a balance between the needs of the present and the needs of the future**. But in what regard exactly? Sustainability may refer to environmental and resource conservation, or to the ethical responsibility of businesses to consider the social, cultural, and community impacts of their actions. Or perhaps all the above.

While the definition may be up for interpretation, there is enough environmental and societal evidence to conclude that sustainability initiatives are critical for businesses to prioritize and implement; to ensure long-term viability of environment, culture and community; as well for long-term organizational success.

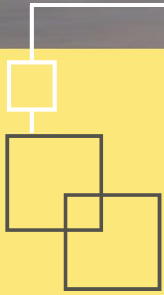
Unfortunately, business initiatives on sustainability often boil down to a green manifesto containing trendy and vague phrases like “*care for our planet, reducing emissions and lessening carbon footprint.*” They also contain a lot of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) buzz words, such as *responsibility, stewardship, and commitment.* But sustainability has long stopped being a “trend” and can no longer be a soft-shoe pledge on a website: it is an imperative. According to Bain and Company’s World Business Council on Sustainable Development, “a global cultural reset is well underway, driven by environmental evidence such as extreme weather, and by societal shifts in consumer preference and ethical commitment. Consumers are now upholding values-based choice making and values-aligned brand loyalty with higher standards than ever before”.

The Benefits of Sustainability Practices in Business Include:

- 1. Improved Efficiency and Reduced Costs in the Long Run** - *Due to the more efficient use of resources, lower waste and energy costs, and having more engaged and productive employees.*
- 2. Greater Market Share and Competitive Advantage** - *Many consumers are increasingly interested in buying products and services from companies that care about the environment and social justice.*
- 3. Enhanced Reputation and Branding** - *According to the 2024 Edelman Trust Barometer, consumers are more likely to trust and do business with companies that have a strong sustainability reputation. Sustainable businesses also can create unique and differentiated branding around their sustainability practices.*
- 4. Greater Opportunities for Innovation** - *Sustainable businesses are constantly innovating new ways to reduce their environmental and social impacts. This innovation can lead to new products and services, which can give businesses a competitive edge in the marketplace.*



PART 2



How Sustainability is Impacting the Meetings & Events Industry and Areas for Improvement

Within the meetings and events industry, the attitudinal transition toward sustainability is undeniable, echoing across the entire ecosystem and representing a crucial inflection point for the business stakeholders involved, and for the humans who attend.

Unfortunately, a data-driven reality demonstrates that even though attitudes are shifting, action is slower to progress. According to Knowland and Conference Direct's 2024 State of the Industry report, *"Sustainability is a hot topic. However, the meetings industry will need to up its game in the coming year. Although 35% of planners say groups have some protocols, almost 50% indicate their meetings do not have sustainability requirements. 13 percent said they have goals but aren't doing carbon-neutral events. Only 3 percent said they have sustainability goals and are doing carbon-neutral events."*

Despite challenges (**see below**), industry-wide progress is underway. It is widely recognized that during the pandemic years, the focus on sustainability was deprioritized, as health and safety, and industry recovery required our complete attention. Since global travel and events have returned to pre-pandemic levels, we are seeing a renewed commitment to more sustainable events and destinations. Meeting organizers are implementing measures to ensure their events run on the principles of ecological and social responsibility by adopting more sustainable practices (**see next page**). They are aware that sustainable strategies and practices improve brand image and attract a public that is increasingly aware of their impact on the planet.

According to Meet Green, a Sustainability Advisory Firm for the Events Industry...

The following are a few of the most common challenges:

- 1. Lack of Resources** - This includes a lack of financial resources, human resources, and technical resources.
- 2. Lack of Awareness and Knowledge** - Many businesses lack awareness and knowledge about what sustainability is and how they can integrate it into their operations.
- 3. Resistance to Change** - Many businesses are resistant to change, particularly when it comes to their operations and procedures.
- 4. Lack of Leadership Support** - Without strong leadership support, it can be difficult to get employees on board with sustainability initiatives and make progress towards goals.

Practical Steps Toward Sustainability

- **Venue Energy Usage:** Focus on optimizing energy consumption and sourcing renewable energy to power event venues. This aims to reduce the carbon footprint associated with venue operations, implementing energy-efficient lighting, heating, cooling and other systems to ensure events are as green as possible.
- **Food and Food Waste Management:** Tackle the dual challenges of sustainable food sourcing and minimizing food waste. Strategies here involve selecting local and sustainable food suppliers, encouraging plant-based menu options, and implementing comprehensive food waste reduction and composting programs to divert waste from landfills.
- **Logistics:** Concentrate on streamlining event logistics to minimize environmental impacts. This involves optimizing transportation routes, encouraging the use of electric or low-emission vehicles for freight and personnel transport, and reducing materials sent to landfills through recycling and reuse practices.
- **Smart Production and Waste Management:** This initiative is dedicated to the innovative use of technology and materials in event production to reduce waste. It focuses on digital solutions to minimize the use of physical resources and employs strategies for recycling and reusing materials post-event.

Public demand for sustainable practice at events combined with event organizers' more strident requirements and commitments represents a unique opportunity for destinations in non-urban settings. Locations that sit in delicate natural ecosystems, on historical sites or indigenous land must now broaden their approach to beyond just environmental, to include cultural, historical, socio-economic sustainability.

On the destination side, **Abbi Whitaker** said it best:

“

The new interest in sustainability can now shift strategies away from destination promotion and towards destination protection. Changing from a growth paradigm to a sustainability paradigm redefines how success should be measured. Success can be defined not by visitor numbers alone, but by the positive impact those numbers can provide to local places and communities. The purpose of meetings and events can be to provide livelihoods, quality employment, and career progression while conserving and sharing natural and cultural heritage in a way that ensures that heritage remains strong for all future generations. Delivering a balance of positive benefit for community and place may become the optimal destination success metric.

”



PART 3



Greater Palm Springs *Steps Up*

In addition to implementing measures on-site and during events, consideration for the environmental impact of the event when selecting suppliers, vendors and destinations has become a high priority for organizers. Many are selecting destinations that feature sustainable policies and practices.

According to *Convene Magazine's* **Michelle Russel** on her Sustainability Pulse Check for Events:



The emphasis on sustainability as part of RFPs and contracts... suggests that organizers are counting heavily on their suppliers to help their events leave a smaller environmental footprint.



Greater Palm Springs has stepped up, not with mere green manifestos, but with a unique strategy based on the principals of sustainable development and backed up by concrete action steps. Their approach is comprehensive, holistic and realistic, taking into consideration the unique geo-historical, socio-cultural, economic and environmental attributes of their region. They are leading with “destination preservation” rather than “destination promotion,” putting into place investment, tool kits, innovation and support for meeting organizers to make a high impact sustainable destination choice, and to partner with sustainable suppliers in the region.





PART 4

The Four Cs

Because **Palm Springs** sits within a delicate environmental and cultural ecosystem, they have had to think more broadly and comprehensively about how they approach sustainability, applying a lens more in line with sustainable development than traditional tourism. Herein lies the crux of their unique approach: The **Four Cs** of **Sustainability**.

What are the 4Cs of sustainability?

Conservation



Community



Culture



Commerce



The Four Cs is a development philosophy originally created by the Zeitz Foundation — which runs Segera, a sustainable wilderness safari in Kenya. The Four Cs are a unique and high impact approach that considers all facets of sustainability concurrently: socio-economic, socio-cultural and environmental.

Let's look at how the 4Cs work together, and then we will unpack how Greater Palm Springs putting the 4Cs into action.

Conservation

Thriving ecosystems and biodiversity are integral to the survival of people and our planet. It's safeguarding this biodiversity to support global needs.

Community

People matter; it is the right of every person to have their basic needs met, and enhancing the well-being of communities is a fundamental obligation of all.

Culture

Celebrating cultural diversity and commonality nurtures understanding and fosters connections. Respecting cultural difference is crucial to our future.

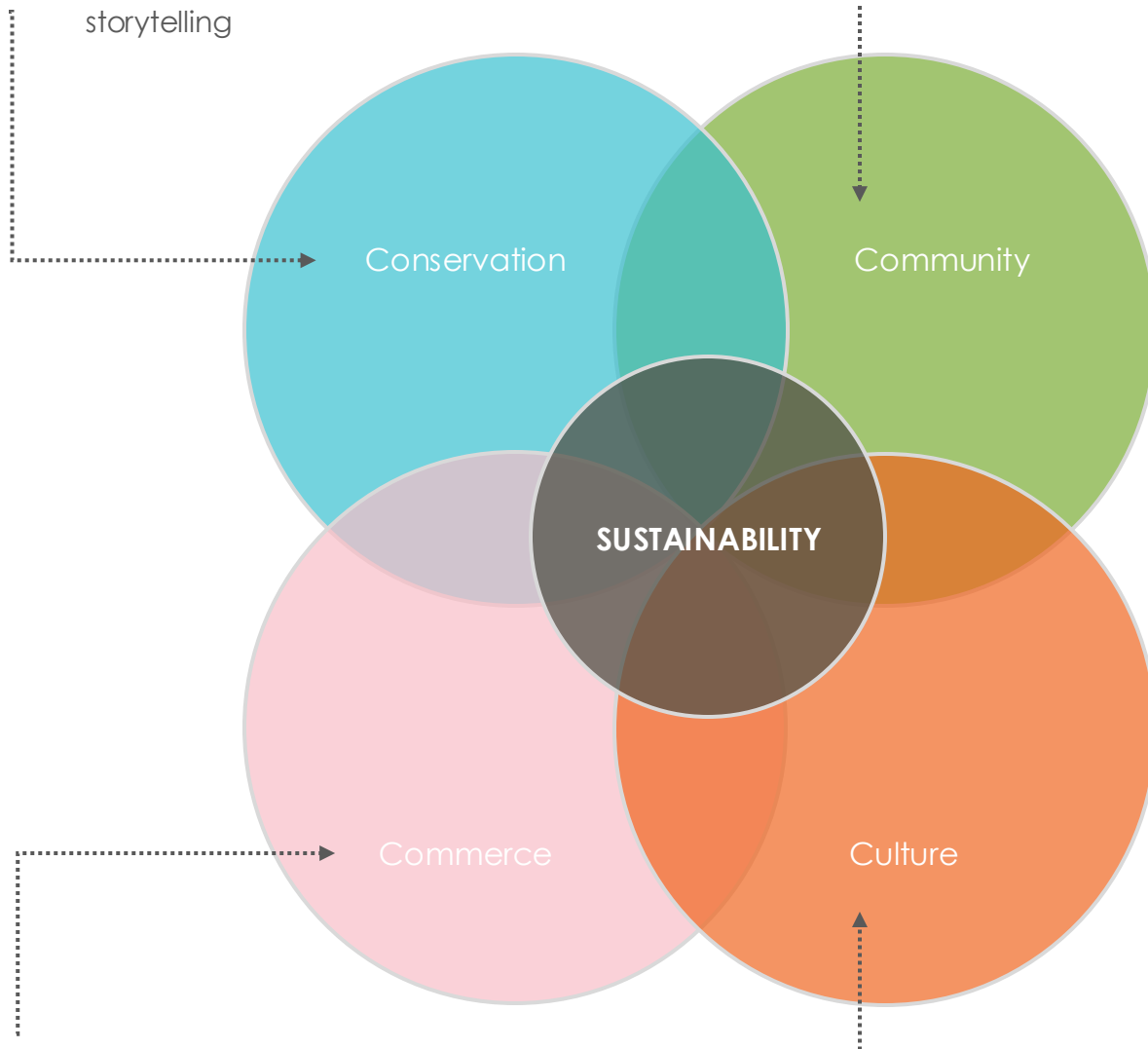
Commerce

Signifies the need to conduct business practices that are financially viable while also considering the environmental and social impacts, ensuring that economic activity contributes to a sustainable future by reinvesting profits back into community development and conservation efforts, not just focusing on pure profit alone; essentially, it's about balancing economic growth with environmental and social responsibility.

Greater Palm Springs: The **Four Cs** of Sustainability

- Sharing sustainability narratives, best practices, and resources
- Inspiring change and pro-environmental behavior through storytelling

- Uplifting underserved communities
- Community outreach and engagement



- Workforce Development – sustainable pipeline of trained, engaged workforce
- Youth engagement
- Fostering regional collaboration and economic diversification

- DEI Initiatives
- Celebration of diversity – Cultural Tourism & Accessibility
- Protection of indigenous land and heritage

Putting the Four Cs into action in Greater Palm Springs

Starting with its region-wide positioning statements, Visit Greater Palm Springs has given itself its own call to action:

How can we contribute to making the Greater Palm Springs region a sustainable, inclusive, equitable destination for all to live, work and travel to?

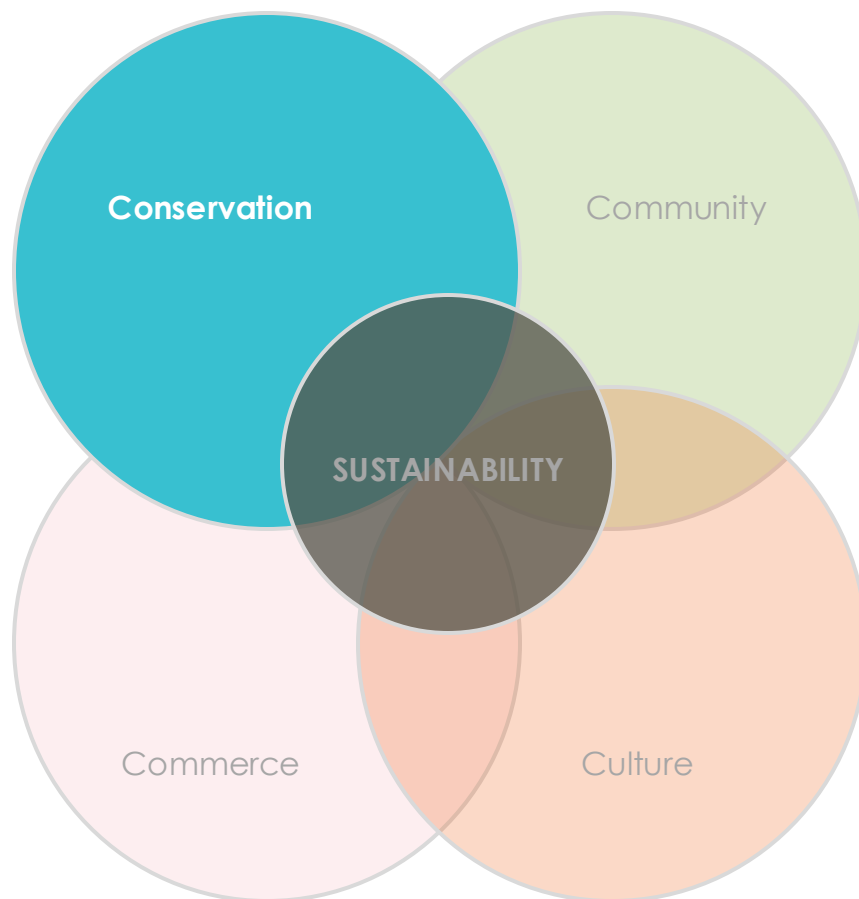
Its Commitment is Comprehensive:

VGPS is committed to ensuring that the values of sustainability, community, collaboration, and inclusion are embedded not only within the organization itself but also in the region's travel industry. At Visit Greater Palm Springs, we strive to center our community in our work and have a positive impact on our environment and the lives of our residents.



Greater Palm Springs:

The Four Cs of Sustainability: Conservation



Conservation:

- Strategic partnerships with organizations focused on preservation, conservation, and renewable energy infrastructure: Friends of the Desert Mountains, CV Conservancy Commission, The Living Desert, Coachella Valley Association of Governments
- Sharing sustainability narratives, best practices, and resources
- Inspiring change and pro-environmental behavior through storytelling

Greater Palm Springs:

The **Four Cs** of Sustainability: Community



Community:



- Supporting underserved Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs with small businesses to connect to the wider hospitality industry
- Certified Autism Destination initiative to encourage hospitality businesses to become Certified Autism Centers, which enhances the experience of those on the spectrum, visitors and locals
- Partnership with FIND Food Bank to support their work and promote food waste reduction strategies for hospitality businesses

Greater Palm Springs:

The **Four Cs** of Sustainability: Culture



Culture:

Celebration of Diversity:

- Working with local tribes and diverse communities in the region to promote cultural heritage tourism
- Partnership with Wheel the World to map accessibility assets of our hospitality partners
- Robust internal diversity, equity and inclusion strategy to ensure these values are infused in our external programs and marketing

Greater Palm Springs:

The Four Cs of Sustainability: Commerce



Commerce:



Workforce Development Initiatives:

- Provide college scholarships to local students (up to \$45,000 per year)
- Convene a Workforce Readiness Committee with employers connecting them to education and nonprofits
- Partnership with COD PaCE program to provide professional development opportunities for our workforce
- Youth engagement – Summer Leadership Program for high school students
- Fostering regional collaboration and economic diversification



PART 5

People, Places, Properties, Programs & Planners

Let's dig into Greater Palm Spring's **People, Places, Properties & Programs** designed to put the sustainability walk in their talk.

People:

Visit Greater Palms Springs' commitment to sustainability was solidified with the hiring of Lauren Bruggemans as Director of Sustainability and Community Engagement. In this newly created role, she is leading Visit GPS' efforts to grow and enhance workforce development, sustainability, DEI, accessibility, and promotion of the benefits of tourism locally.

Greater Palm Springs offers many ways for visitors to enjoy the destination sustainably, and Lauren is leading the way in creating plug and play toolkits for visitors to lessen their footprint and support local businesses committed to sustainability—from checking into the nation's first carbon neutral resort and dining at farm-to-table eateries to visiting local attractions that care for the Earth and exploring protected natural spaces.

Here's a quote from **Lauren Bruggemans**



As the Director of Sustainability & Community Engagement at Visit Greater Palm Springs, I'm proud to highlight our organization's commitment to creating a more sustainable and equitable future. Through partnerships with non-profit organizations like Caravanserai Project to support underserved Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs and amplifying the preservation and conservation work of organizations like Friends of the Desert Mountains and The Living Desert, we're working to address the environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts of tourism.

Furthermore, by investing in our youth through scholarships and mentorship programs and providing our hospitality workforce with professional development opportunities to advance their careers, we're creating sustainable pipelines for future generations to thrive in our region. Our focus on uplifting the humans that live in our community is central to our mission, and by preserving the beauty and vibrancy of our destination, we're ensuring a sustainable future for everyone.



Places:

The Palm Springs Convention Center has many rigorous practices in place as an active participant in the stewardship and conservation of the region. **A few standouts are:**

GBAC STAR accreditation

2,574 solar panels with enough surplus generated to power 30 homes in the area

Reduce Energy Use

- Motion sensors installed in locations throughout the facility
- Energy-smart HVAC system that provides effective and efficient heating and cooling
- Timers on exterior and parking lot lighting
- The turning off of lights and air (or heat) in non-occupied areas
- Reflective fiber-tight membrane roof to reduce the heat load
- Added variable speed drives to mechanical HVAC related systems to improve efficiency

Recycling

- Use of 80 -100% recycled paper products throughout facility
- The recycling of paper products in restrooms
- Utilize biodegradable plates and flatware
- Green housekeeping and cleaning products
- 98% of food waste captured

According to **Rick Leson**, *Director of Sales and Marketing* for the **Convention Center**:



The Palm Springs Convention Center is focused on positively impacting our community in all we do, including how we interact with and affect our environment. We continually look for new opportunities to perfect our processes to become better residents of the Earth. One of our biggest focuses in the region is water conservation. Palm Springs is a desert, despite the visible greenery. The region sits on a natural aquifer.

It takes seven years for storm water to reach the aquifer from the mountains. Therefore, we have multiple measures in place from metered water faucets, to low-flow toilets, to native plants on exterior landscaping, to reclaimed irrigation, and we are always seeking new innovations and ways to improve.



Properties:

The La Quinta Resort and Spa is leading the way in multi-tiered sustainability initiatives, spearheaded by its innovative and passionate Executive Chef Andrew Cooper. A standout is its food and beverage program - about as close to a closed-loop system as possible in a commercial setting. Initially, the kitchens source 100% of their produce from within a 100-mile radius with a focus on partnering with organic and regenerative farmers. Despite a just-in-time production system that allows for catering to be rapid-response made-to-order to minimize waste, and training staff on prep and next-generation repurposing techniques, of course food waste naturally will occur. To then address waste, Chef Andrew has implemented a cutting-edge waste disposal system called ORCA, which collects all organic food waste on site and converts it into environmentally safe water for irrigation.

What makes the ORCA different from traditional compost is it is more sanitary and hygienic, with light and easily transportable waste bins, no leakage, no smells and no heavy lifting, which improves the health and safety of employees.

The JW Marriott Desert Springs is also a standout example of sustainability in action, led by its Executive Chef Eric Theiss. His motto: “Treat every day like its Earth Day” is certainly apparent upon visiting the property. The grounds are a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary, featuring a biodiverse garden flourishing with olive trees, California-native plants, and edible herbs that provide fresh ingredients for the property’s culinary programs. Plus, the culinary team participates in ChefsEndHunger.org’s Food Donation Program. In addition, the F&B programs apply extreme rigor in minimizing food waste - they have kept 380 tons of food waste out of local landfills in 2023 alone and recycle 15 tons of cardboard per week.

Further, they have implemented both practical and leading-edge sustainability practices in their meetings and events offerings including:

- 100% recycled note pads
- Water coolers/filling stations with compostable cups
- Comprehensive recycling program
- Online event menus
- Energy Efficient LED lighting in function spaces
- Paperless billing
- Complimentary Cumulus App, which decreases the need for printed agendas

Programs:

Visit Greater Palm Springs has developed a resource kit for meeting organizers in order to provide detailed support and referrals to maximize their event's sustainability impact. It includes:

- Farm-to-Table restaurant referrals
- Group community service activities
- Local amenities referral list
- Sustainable experiences list

Planners:

According to **Anna Rembold**, CEO and Founder of **Metavent**, a Northern California based Corporate Events Agency:



Coming from San Francisco and having been president of the Society for Sustainable Events three times, I have probably a higher level of expectation than most people when it comes to choosing a sustainable destination and DMO partner.

We brought a FAM to Greater Palm Springs, and working with Visit Greater Palm Springs has been an incredible partnership for us, just across the board. It's been a really good collaboration, and we brought business there as a result.

There is always conscientiousness around the use of water and respecting the desert as the desert is. It's a real celebration of where you are, the natural beauty of the place. They understand the delicate nature of their surroundings and have put practices and support for event organizers in place to make it almost plug and play to implement sustainability initiatives. I have become a brand ambassador for Greater Palm Springs.





PART 6



How Meeting & Event Professionals Can Make a Difference

A sustainable meeting is defined as a “meeting that incorporates environmental considerations throughout all stages of the meeting in order to minimize the negative impact on the environment” and therefore encompasses all aspects of the planning process. By making choices at every planning level, from destination and site selection to partnering with sustainable-forward vendors and suppliers to donations after the event, the environmental impact can be significantly reduced. While it means taking steps to minimize waste through recycling, composting and avoiding disposable items it also includes decreasing energy consumption, using products with post-consumer recycled content and serving food that is organic, local or fair trade. Additionally, sustainable meetings incorporate

social aspects such as charitable donations and projects that give back to the community. All of these actions require being intentional about partnering with locations and suppliers that have established sustainability practices in place.

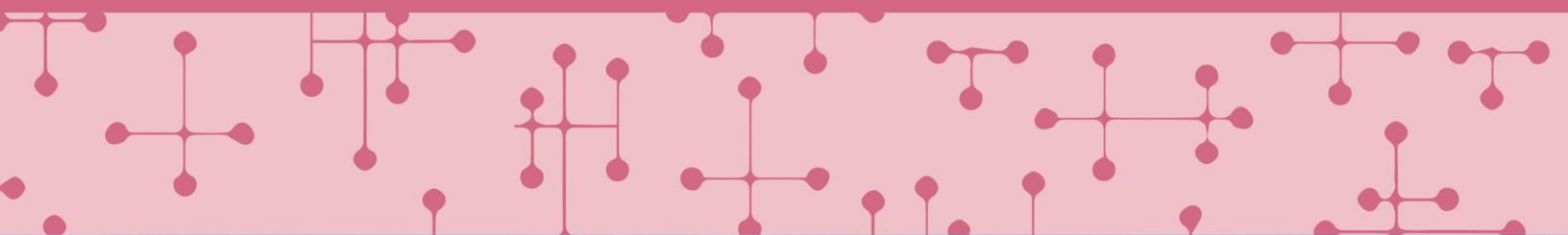
Creating a sustainable event can be more readily achieved by choosing destination and supply partners who have achieved sustainability infrastructure at scale. A destination with sustainability as its priority will more readily offer:

1. Sustainable Venues

Venues that have green certifications and are equipped with renewable energy sources, energy-efficient lighting, and sustainable waste management systems.

2. Eco-friendly Materials

The use of eco-friendly materials such as compostable or renewable plates, cups, and cutlery and decor made from recycled or upcycled materials.



3. Sustainable Food Choices

Locally sourced, organic and seasonal produce are favored to reduce the carbon footprint associated with transportation.

4. Community Engagement

Opportunities to engage with the local community to promote environmental awareness and positive change, such as site visits and educational workshops that empower attendees to take action beyond the event itself.

5. Ethical Sourcing

Event organizers are increasingly mindful of the products and services they source. They prioritize working with suppliers who share their commitment to sustainability, ensuring that products like promotional merchandise and event signage are produced in an eco-friendly and ethical manner.

6. Measurement and Reporting

Metrics like carbon emissions, waste diversion rates, and water conservation efforts can be requested from venues and supply partners, and shared with stakeholders to demonstrate progress



PART 7



Conclusion

The Greater Palm Springs region is known both for its rich cultural and natural heritage as well as its position as a cleantech and renewable energy hub, exemplifying the values of sustainability and conservation. As a representative of the tourism and hospitality industry and the largest driver of the Coachella Valley's local economy, Visit Greater Palm Springs is committed to being a responsible steward of our region by improving the quality of life for our residents and advancing regional collaboration while promoting our unique and diverse destination to the world.

Our organization embraces a holistic vision of sustainability by incorporating the Four C's- Conservation, Community, Culture and Commerce.

We recognize workforce development, youth engagement, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), cultural heritage tourism, and accessibility as subsets of our sustainability strategy. We strive to center our residents in our work and harness the power of the tourism and hospitality industry to widen the circle of opportunity to uplift underserved communities.

We look forward to partnering with you on your sustainable event.

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PART 8



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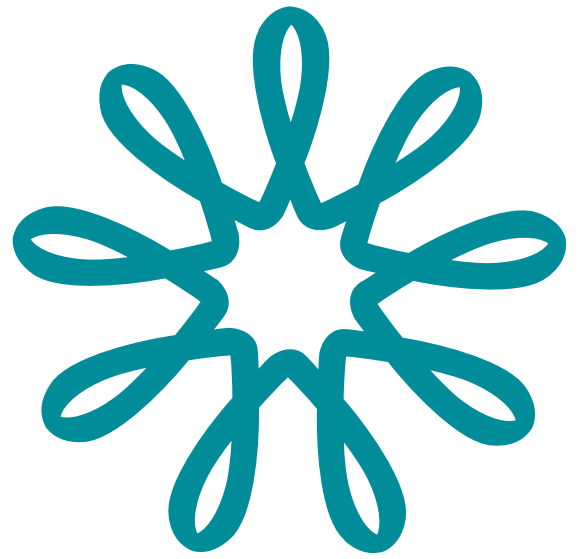
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Thank you.

