



A Comprehensive Technical Guide

# The 10 Trends Shaping Sustainable and Responsible Corporate Events in 2026

By the Costa Rica Convention Center

Operated by **Grupo Heroica**

# With the support of:

## Industry



## Strategic Partners



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We recognize Costa Rica's National Sustainability Council for its support of initiatives that drive ever more sustainable events in the country, and the Costa Rica Tourism Board (ICT) for ensuring the development of a meetings industry aligned with Costa Rica's national convictions, values, and commitments.

Our gratitude goes to all these institutions for being key allies in building a meetings industry with positive impact and a forward-looking vision.

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**By Juliana López**

*CEO of Grupo Heroica*

## Editorial

### **Sustainability in the Conversation About Events**

Since its founding 16 years ago, for Grupo Heroica sustainability was never a trend or an external requirement — it was the very reason behind everything we set out to build. Every decision, every alliance, every space we have managed over these years has been guided by the deep conviction that it is possible — and necessary — to operate and grow responsibly, aware of the impact of our activities on the ecosystem we interact with.

We have always understood our convention centers as engines of economic and social development for the cities where we operate: living spaces, integrated with their surroundings, capable of generating shared value with the communities around them. Every congress, every trade show, every gathering we host is an opportunity to energize the local economy, strengthen the social fabric, and put our cities on the map of knowledge and innovation. That holistic vision is what gives meaning to every detail of our operation.

Our sustainability policy sums it up well: our operation of assets and services reflects continuous and responsible growth, in which environmental awareness and a positive impact on the city and region where we operate are a priority for nation-building. We are committed to generating the lowest possible environmental impact through the efficient management of resources required for our operation, and to fostering an environmental awareness grounded in prevention, mitigation, and offsetting of impacts on the ecosystems we interact with.

An important part of that learning comes from our operation of the Costa Rica Convention Center, where the conversation about sustainability is deeper and more consolidated than in other destinations in the region. This context has allowed us to bring new practices to bear and contribute to the competitiveness of our venues in Colombia — getting ahead of situations that are not yet regulatory requirements but that we know will become so.

Our operation in Costa Rica has achieved concrete, measurable progress in the neutralization and mitigation of the carbon footprint of our events — a path that today serves as a benchmark and that our operations in Colombia are following with equal determination. We know that deep change requires time, rigor, and willingness, and we are committed to all three.

As active members of AIPC, ICCA, and UFI, we follow with enthusiasm the work these organizations are leading around the ISO TC354 Technical Standards, the international technical committee dedicated to standardizing event and meeting management. This collective industry effort aims to raise global sustainability standards in our sector, and we applaud and firmly support every step forward.

Within that framework, one of our strategic objectives on the near horizon is to achieve ISO 20121 certification, the international standard for sustainable event management. This standard establishes a management system that enables organizations to identify, assess, and control their social, economic, and environmental impacts, continually improving their performance across these three dimensions. Earning this certification is not an end in itself: it is the formalization of a practice that is already part of our DNA, and a clear, verifiable, transparent signal to our clients and partners that their trust is well placed.

This e-book is the result of that accumulated experience and of our desire to keep contributing to our industry. The trends presented here aim to lay the groundwork for a challenging dialogue — one that demands genuine commitment and a willingness to rethink some of the ways we conceive events. With this guide, we want to offer a useful tool for those ready to begin or to deepen that dialogue.

At Grupo Heroica we are convinced that the sustainable transformation of the events and conventions industry is possible when there is willingness, knowledge, and, above all, the genuine commitment to contributing to a better world for everyone. We will continue walking this path alongside our various stakeholders, with the certainty that the planet is a shared environment we must all care for — not as an obligation, but as a conviction.



## Álvaro Rojas

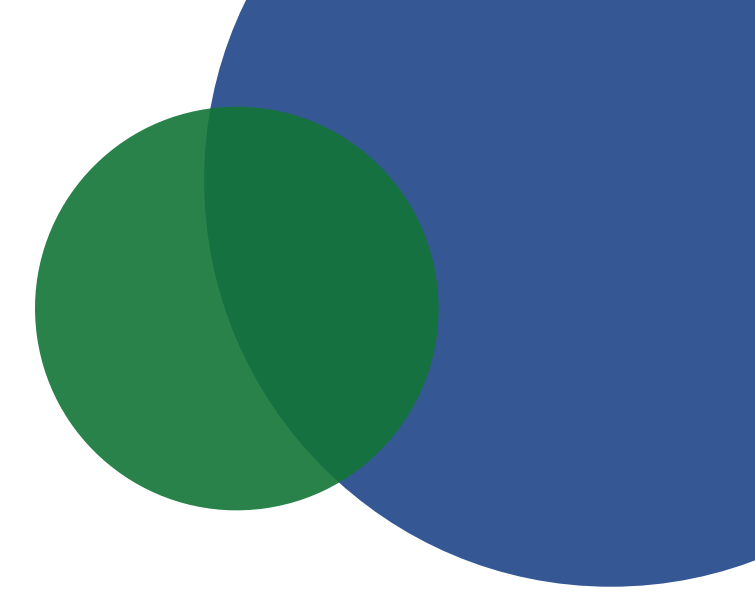
General Manager  
Costa Rica Convention Center  
Grupo Heroica

# A Special Note from the Author

From its very inception, the Costa Rica Convention Center, operated by Grupo Heroica, was designed to transcend the traditional role of a venue. It was conceived with the ambition of becoming a global benchmark in sustainable development, under one clear premise: true leadership is not defined solely by infrastructure or technology, but by the capacity to question and redesign the way we produce our events.

Our journey has taught us that the most meaningful innovation in the meetings industry does not always happen on the stage or in front of attendees. It happens behind the scenes, in decisions that are rarely communicated: how waste is managed, how the culinary experience is designed, how logistics are structured, how the carbon footprint is measured, and how an event relates to its social and environmental surroundings. **Today, we understand that an event can appear flawless while still generating significant environmental impacts behind the scenes. That gap between image and impact is becoming increasingly difficult to justify.**

**This eBook is based on a simple but important belief: Future events can no longer focus solely on reducing negative impact.** They are expected to generate measurable impact, to contribute actively to the regeneration of ecosystems, to the strengthening of communities, and to the construction of a legacy of shared value that extends beyond the duration of the event — connecting it to the company's broader sustainability philosophy.



# Why is this eBook relevant today?

We are at an inflection point for the meetings industry. Globally, events generate approximately 2.5 million tons of waste per year and contribute significantly to greenhouse-gas emissions, especially through transportation, energy, and the temporary build-out of infrastructure (Net Zero Carbon Events, 2022).

At the same time, attendee behavior is shifting rapidly: more than 80% of event participants now consider sustainability a relevant or decisive factor in their decision to attend (UFI, 2021; Deloitte, 2024).

This apparent paradox — high environmental impact alongside a growing demand for responsibility — is not only an operational challenge. It represents a strategic opportunity to redesign the event model, align it with global climate commitments, and turn every gathering into a platform of corporate coherence.

## Who is this for?

This document is aimed at professionals at corporate companies with sustainability strategies in place, those responsible for planning and executing events, sustainability directors, conference organizers, venue managers, and anyone committed to raising the environmental and social standards of the meetings industry.

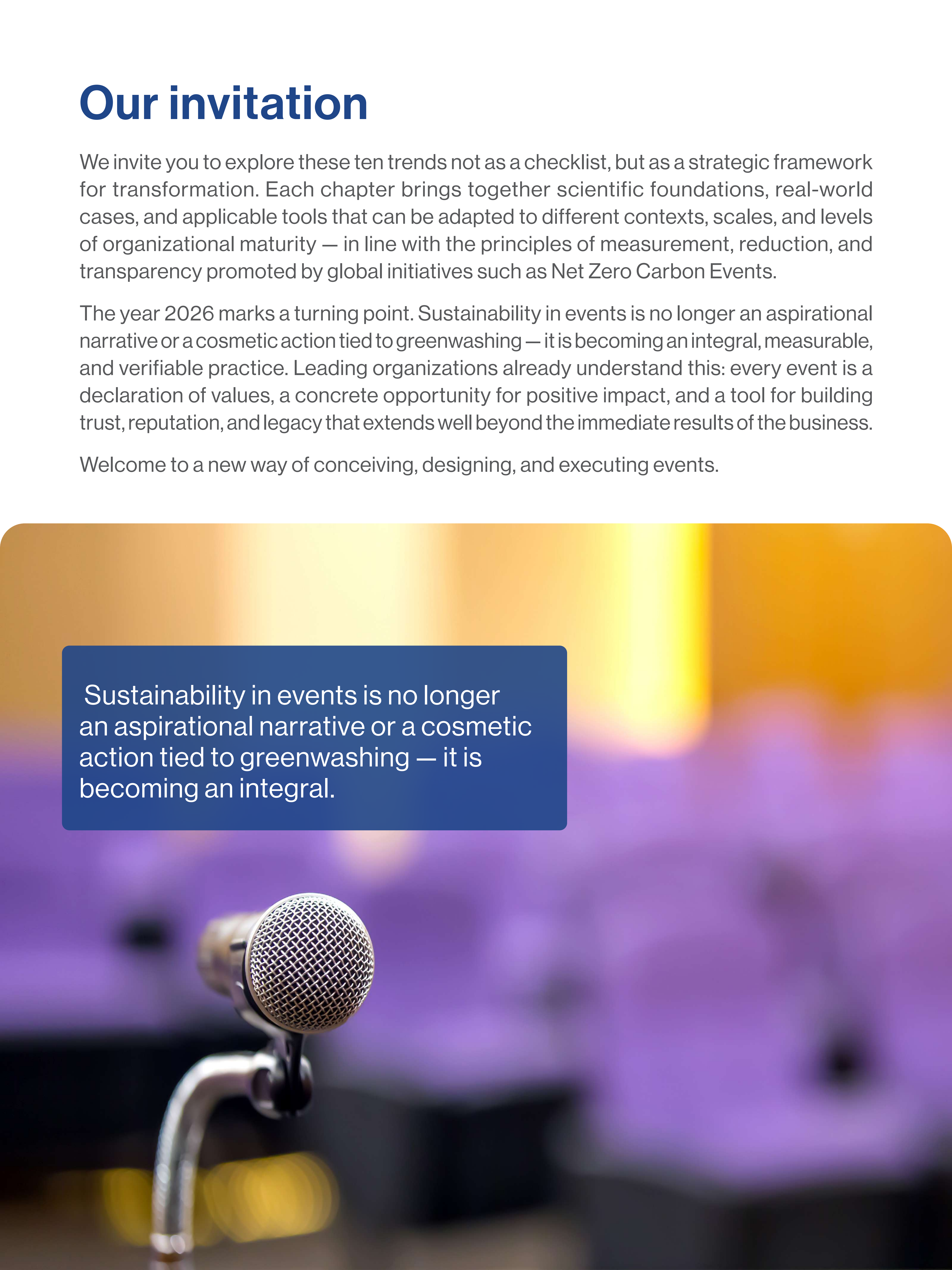
Both those just starting their journey toward more responsible practices and those seeking to deepen, systematize, and professionalize their approach will find strategic value and practical applicability on these pages.

# Our invitation

We invite you to explore these ten trends not as a checklist, but as a strategic framework for transformation. Each chapter brings together scientific foundations, real-world cases, and applicable tools that can be adapted to different contexts, scales, and levels of organizational maturity — in line with the principles of measurement, reduction, and transparency promoted by global initiatives such as Net Zero Carbon Events.

The year 2026 marks a turning point. Sustainability in events is no longer an aspirational narrative or a cosmetic action tied to greenwashing — it is becoming an integral, measurable, and verifiable practice. Leading organizations already understand this: every event is a declaration of values, a concrete opportunity for positive impact, and a tool for building trust, reputation, and legacy that extends well beyond the immediate results of the business.

Welcome to a new way of conceiving, designing, and executing events.



Sustainability in events is no longer an aspirational narrative or a cosmetic action tied to greenwashing — it is becoming an integral.

# Introduction

The Invisible Footprint of Bringing People Together

By **Andrés Escandón**

*Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean —  
International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA)*



For decades, events have been one of the most powerful engines of economic development, innovation, and global cooperation. Congresses, conventions, and corporate gatherings have allowed ideas to become businesses, industries to come together, and entire regions to establish themselves on the international stage. However, in a context defined by the climate crisis and a growing demand for corporate responsibility, it is increasingly evident that bringing people together is not a neutral act.



“Events generate a measurable environmental footprint.”

Attendee transportation can represent nearly the

**57%**

total carbon impact of an in-person event, becoming the main source of emissions.

“Sustainability in events can no longer be limited to peripheral actions.”

Recent scientific evidence is conclusive. Studies based on life-cycle assessment methodologies have shown that events generate a measurable, cumulative, and — in many cases — underestimated environmental footprint. In particular, comparative research on in-person and virtual conferences shows that the carbon footprint of an in-person event is not dominated by a single factor, but by the interaction of structural decisions that begin long before the first attendee registers and extend well beyond the event’s close (Mannheim & Losvasné Avató, 2025).

One of the most relevant findings is that attendee transportation can account for nearly 57% of the total carbon impact of an in-person event — making it the leading source of emissions. To this we add the venue together with food service (lunches, dinners, and catering) as the second-largest environmental contribution. Even when these two components are excluded, the event’s own organization continues to generate a significant footprint tied to energy use, materials, water, and waste.

**This evidence significantly reframes the conversation.** Sustainability in events can no longer be limited to peripheral actions like emissions offsetting or visible waste management. The real challenge is recognizing that the traditional design of events responds to a logic

never conceived for a world of climate emergency, regulatory pressure, and constant reputational scrutiny. **Much of the meetings industry still relies on legacy models** that prioritize intensive in-person attendance, unnecessary mobility, and consumption patterns that go largely unquestioned.

Here a paradox emerges that the industry can no longer ignore. **While many companies are advancing on decarbonization commitments, ESG reporting, and corporate sustainability strategies, they continue to organize or sponsor events that contradict those very objectives. This inconsistency is often less about negligence and more about outdated operational models.**

And it is precisely here that a historic opportunity emerges. Corporate companies that have integrated sustainability as a genuine strategic pillar — and not as rhetoric — possess today a unique capacity to reshape the direction of events. They are the ones who decide where, how, and for what purpose people come together. They are the ones who can demand rigorous measurement, traceability of impacts, and processes of continuous improvement. They are the ones who can turn every event into a coherent extension of their climate, social, and reputational strategy.

**The evidence also makes clear that the dilemma is not binary.** While virtual formats significantly reduce transportation-related emissions, in-person events remain irreplaceable in terms of human connection, trust-building, collaboration, and local economic spillover. **The priority is no longer choosing between in-person and virtual,** but designing intelligent events in which every decision is justified by its genuine contribution and its measured impact.

In this context, certain industry players have begun to take on a different role — not as mere providers of infrastructure or services, but as platforms of influence capable of translating science into operational decisions, accompanying companies through this transition. Their function is not to lead the change, but to enable it, demonstrate it, and scale it.

This eBook starts from a clear premise: events are not the problem, but they can be part of the solution. In the hands of conscious, informed, and consistent corporate companies, every event can become a laboratory of applied sustainability, a tangible signal of leadership, and a tool for aligning business, reputation, and responsibility.

The future of events will not depend on how many are held, but on how — and for what purpose — they are designed. That future begins when evidence stops being ignored and finally starts guiding decisions.

## Trend #1

# The Waste Management Report — Toward Per-Event Waste Traceability

Traceability as the new standard of excellence in corporate events of sustainability-focused companies



# The real impact of the venue on an event's footprint

A one-day in-person event of 200 people generates — from venue operations alone — a carbon footprint that often goes unnoticed but can be significant in the event's overall balance. According to comparative analyses based on carbon-footprint methodologies applied to the meetings industry, this type of event can emit around 1.67 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> when held in a conventional venue, versus 0.83 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> in a venue designed and operated under advanced criteria of energy efficiency and environmental management.

This difference can represent a reduction of more than 50% in operational emissions attributable solely to the venue, depending on its specific conditions and the methodology used. To put it in perspective, 1.67 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> are equivalent, for example, to the energy consumption of an average household over several months, or to burning nearly 200 gallons of gasoline.

This suggests that venue selection is not merely a logistical decision, but a relevant factor within the event's environmental performance — one capable of contributing, to a greater or lesser extent, to the fulfillment of the organizing company's sustainability commitments (Mannheim & Losvasné Avató, 2025).

## Conventional venue



**1.67 t CO<sub>2</sub>**  
High carbon footprint



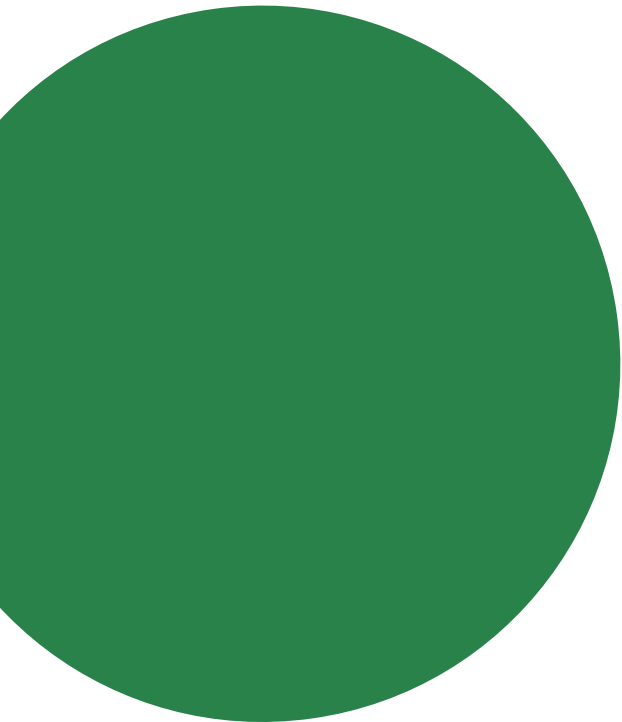
## Sustainable venue



**0.83 t CO<sub>2</sub>**  
Low carbon footprint



Nearly 200 gallons of gasoline



# The underlying challenge: invisible waste and measurable impact

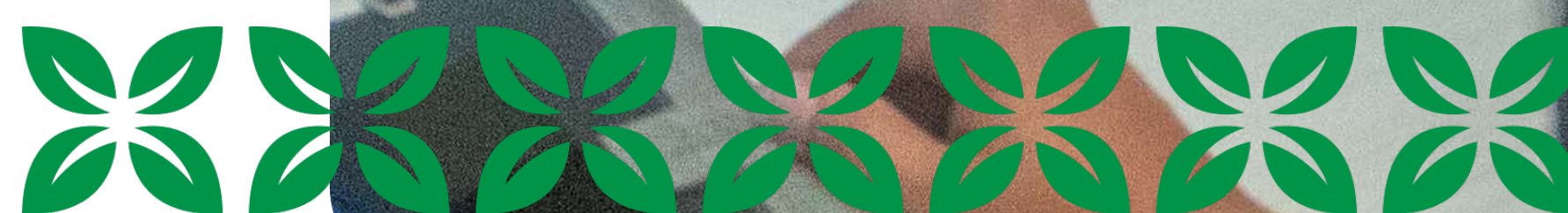
For years, waste management has remained a low-visibility operational function within corporate events. Once service ends, waste tends to disappear behind the scenes without leaving a clear data trail or clear accountability. For organizers, sponsors, and attendees, the destination of that waste has frequently remained an operational unknown.

**This lack of visibility has masked the true scale of the issue.** In-person events generate, on average, between 0.5 and 2 kilograms of waste per attendee per day — a figure that, scaled to large, multi-day corporate congresses, can translate into significant volumes of discarded materials. In many cases, only a small fraction of this waste is properly recycled or recovered, while the rest ends up in landfills or final-disposal processes with real environmental consequences.

For companies that have made sustainability commitments, this disconnect between what happens in front of the audience and what occurs behind the scenes has become a critical management issue. **Sustainability is increasingly becoming a discipline centered on measurement.**

0.5 kg  
& 2 kg

It's the amount of waste that in-person events generate, on average, per attendee per day



# The turning point: from operational handling to strategic reporting

In recent years, corporate events at sustainability-focused companies have been incorporating the post-event Waste Management Report as an increasingly relevant document – not merely operational. This report marks the transition from a primarily reactive approach to waste management toward a more structured tracking practice, one that helps demonstrate the coherence between sustainability commitments and the event’s operation, where every kilogram generated, separated, and recovered becomes part of the event’s accountability:

**Table 1: Minimum components of a Waste Management Report for a sustainable corporate event**

Report Component	Technical Description	Strategic Value for the Company
<b>Event identification</b>	Name, date, venue, number of attendees, and duration	Enables traceability and comparison across events
<b>Waste classification</b>	Separate categories (organic, recyclable by material, non-recoverable)	Enables circularity analysis and source reduction
<b>Measurement by weight</b>	Kilograms generated per category	Objective baseline for environmental KPIs
<b>Diversion rate</b>	% of waste recovered vs. sent to landfill	Key sustainable-performance indicator
<b>Final destination</b>	Composting, recycling, co-processing, landfill	Evidence against greenwashing
<b>Authorized handlers</b>	Handler name and type of recovery	Ensures legal compliance and reputational protection
<b>Emissions avoided</b>	CO <sub>2</sub> e avoided through recovery	Connects waste to the climate strategy
<b>Lessons and improvements</b>	Operational findings and opportunities	Input for continuous improvement

**Source:** Net Zero Carbon Events. (2023). Net Zero Carbon Events roadmap – Full report. <https://www.netzerocarbonevents.org>

Full traceability — from the point of generation through final disposal or recovery — makes it possible to turn waste into strategic information. This is not only about separating better, but about understanding patterns, costs, environmental impacts, and improvement opportunities based on measurable, verifiable data.

The experience of certain international venues with high sustainability standards, operating under integrated waste-management systems, shows that robust reports are achievable — ones that quantify volumes, destinations, emissions avoided, and operational lessons — without compromising client confidentiality or turning sustainability into a promotional exercise.

## Why traceability is transforming the standard

Measuring allows comparing, improving, and deciding. A well-designed Waste Management Report can fulfill multiple strategic functions for corporate events aligned with ESG criteria:

-  **1** Turns sustainability into a performance indicator, rather than a primarily narrative discourse.
-  **2** Allows results to be compared across events, venues, and editions.
-  **3** Can strengthen credibility with stakeholders by providing verifiable evidence of management and supporting sustainability communications.
-  **4** Identifies source-reduction opportunities and potential operational efficiencies in handling, storage, and material disposal.
-  **5** Connects waste management to corporate climate and circular-economy goals.



**Table 2: Waste-management hierarchy applied to corporate events**

Level	Action	Example in events
1. Prevention	Avoid generation	Elimination of single-use materials
2. Reduction	Minimize volume	Adjustment of portions and materials
3. Reuse	Use more than once	Modular signage and structures
4. Recycling / Composting	Recovery	Source separation with authorized handlers
5. Final disposal	Last resort	Sent to landfill

**Source:** (APA 7): European Commission. (2008). *Directive 2008/98/EC on waste*.

## The technical pillars of a world-class report

A Waste Management Report aligned with international best practices is built on four pillars:

### 1. Advanced source separation

The most developed systems go beyond the basic split between recyclable and non-recyclable. They classify waste by typology and recovery potential, directing each stream to its best destination and significantly reducing the non-recoverable fraction.

### 2. Differentiated and verifiable measurement

Weighing by category and by event zone (kitchens, public areas, and production) generates granular information that can reveal patterns not visible in traditional schemes. This practice allows critical generation points and potential operational improvement opportunities to be identified.

### 3. Partnerships with authorized handlers

Traceability is strengthened when waste is managed by certified operators. Documenting who receives each stream, under what permits, and with what outcome is just as important as source separation.

### 4. Evidence and transparent communication

Visual documentation, transport records, and recovery certificates strengthen the report and make it possible to translate technical data into information that is understandable to internal teams, sponsors, and decision-makers.

## Metrics that define excellence

- Landfill diversion rate — one of the leading indicators of circularity.
- Kilograms of waste per attendee — normalizes results across events of different scales.
- Percentage breakdown by waste type — reveals source-reduction opportunities.
- Final destination of each stream, with verifiable traceability.
- CO2 equivalent emissions avoided — connects waste management to corporate climate impact.

**Table 3: Key indicators (KPIs) used internationally in event waste reports**

KPI	Formula / Unit	Interpretation
<b>Total waste per attendee</b>	kg waste / attendee	Overall event efficiency
<b>Diversion rate</b>	$(\text{Recovered waste} / \text{Total waste}) \times 100$	Level of circularity
<b>Non-recoverable fraction</b>	% sent to landfill	Environmental and reputational risk
<b>Organics composted</b>	kg or %	Direct impact on methane reduction
<b>Emissions avoided</b>	kg CO2e avoided	Climate contribution of the event
<b>Waste by zone</b>	kg per zone (kitchen, halls, build-out)	Identification of critical generation points

**Source:** Net Zero Carbon Events. (2023). Net Zero Carbon Events roadmap – Full report.

# From operation to strategic value

There is a perception that advanced waste management necessarily increases costs, although that relationship is not always linear and does not present itself the same way in every context. By reducing volumes sent to landfill and optimizing routes, storage, and recovery, events achieve real operational efficiencies alongside clear strategic benefits:

- Can serve as a differentiating element in RFP processes where sustainability is an explicit evaluation criterion.
- Facilitates alignment with ESG policies and corporate sustainability reporting by providing verifiable event-management data.
- Can strengthen internal dialogue on performance, accountability, and continuous improvement, especially when data feeds into organizational learning.
- Can prove valuable in relationships with brands, clients, or partners that prioritize evidence of sustainable management in their decisions.

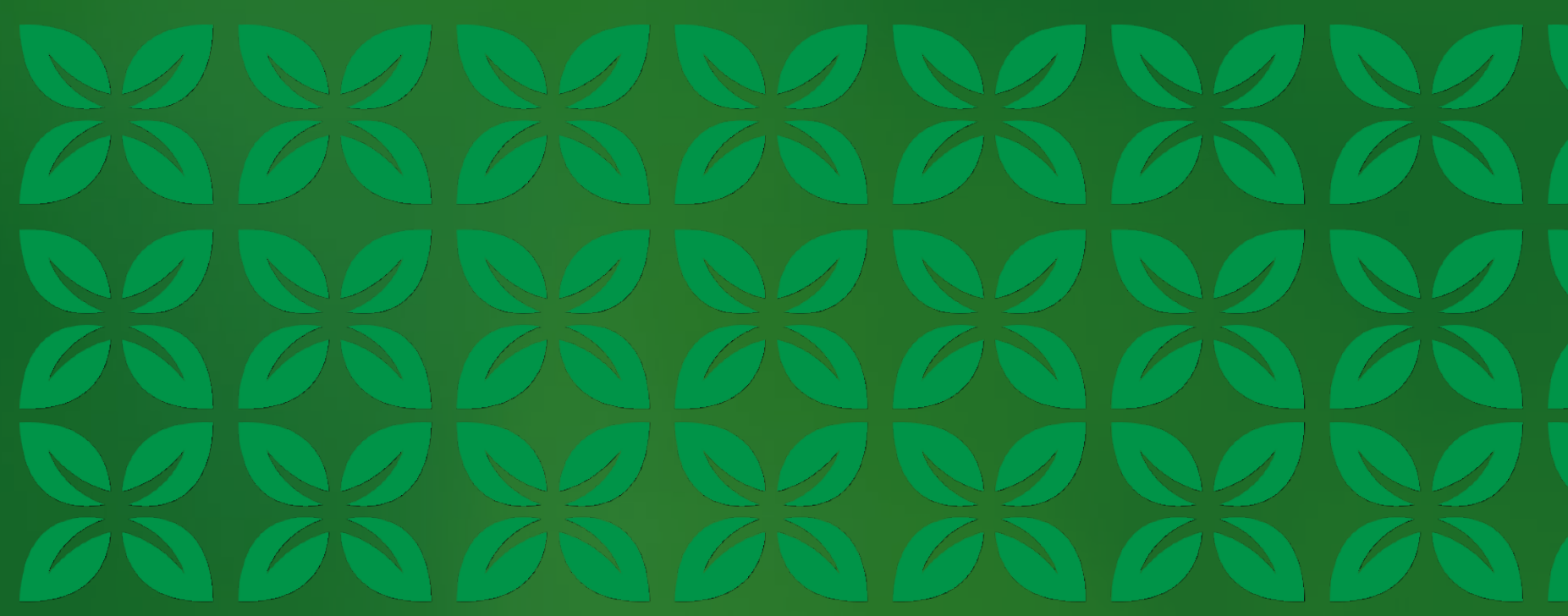
When integrated with criteria of efficiency, measurement, and continuous improvement, sustainability can generate operational and strategic value — and, in certain contexts, financial results as well.

## The horizon: events designed to generate no waste

The natural evolution of this trend points toward events conceived from the design stage to minimize, reuse, and recover. Source reduction, the elimination of problematic materials, circularity by design, and active communication with attendees are gaining relevance in corporate events at sustainability-focused companies.

The Waste Management Report can evolve from a technical annex into a strategic-alignment input. In organizations that declare sustainability leadership, failing to measure what is discarded represents a relevant management gap.

Traceability does more than make waste visible. It also makes it possible to evidence the level of consistency with which a company manages and communicates its commitments.



**Trend #2**

# **Menu Selection with Environmental Impact Awareness**

# From immediate pleasure to intelligent responsibility

For years, gastronomy at corporate events was understood primarily through the lens of immediate sensory experience. Eating well frequently meant eating more, prioritizing animal protein as a status symbol, and offering culinary experiences that impressed through volume rather than criteria. Menu success was measured by diner satisfaction, with little attention paid to what happened before — at the origin of ingredients — or after, in the form of waste.

That paradigm is beginning to shift in certain segments of the sector. Not because pleasure has stopped mattering, but because more and more organizations have understood that the value of an experience also lies in its coherence with environmental and operational criteria.

**In 2026, culinary quality and responsible sourcing are no longer seen as opposing priorities.** At events that incorporate these criteria, the high-end culinary experience is redefined: pleasure is accompanied by informed decisions, traceability, and purpose.

## Food as one of the highest-impact decisions of an event

The technical documents that guide sustainability in events today — including frameworks such as Net Zero Carbon Events and sector-specific guidelines — agree on a key point: food is one of the most relevant sources of environmental impact, in terms of carbon footprint, water footprint, land use, and waste generation. This makes the menu one of the most powerful — and most underestimated — levers for reducing an event's total impact.

The paradox is clear: for years, significant effort was invested in optimizing lighting, climate control, and transportation, while culinary decisions — which in certain scenarios can represent a meaningful share of total impact — were made out of habit, aesthetics, or tradition. The transition this trend marks consists precisely of bringing that same level of strategic analysis to food decisions within event design.





# Eating with intention

The shift does not mean giving up enjoyment. It means evolving from a logic centered solely on immediate satisfaction toward informed decision-making.

**Organizations with mature ESG strategies are no longer designing menus solely around guest satisfaction,** but to align with environmental, social, and operational criteria that are consistent with their values.

This transition occurs at three levels:

## 1. Ingredient traceability

The first shift occurs when the menu stops being a list of dishes and becomes a selection of raw materials with a story, a territory, and a production method. Costa Rica's National Plan for Sustainable and Healthy Gastronomy (PNGCSS) makes clear that food sustainability begins at the origin of ingredients, prioritizing local production, responsible practices, and short supply chains that reduce impact and strengthen local economies.

This framework is incorporated as an applied case within the operations of Grupo Heroica, operator of the Costa Rica Convention Center, which has integrated these guidelines into its culinary practices. While it is a country-specific framework, its underlying principles are transferable to other operations within the group – including the Cartagena de Indias Convention Center (Colombia) and the Valle del Pacífico Events Center – since they respond to common dynamics in the sustainable management of food at events.

## 2. Impact-conscious sourcing

The second level emerges when chefs, organizers, and companies understand that not all culinary decisions carry the same weight. Some proteins, production methods, and



supply chains generate greater impact than others. For this reason, the trend is not to radically eliminate categories, but to incorporate a plant-forward approach: menus where vegetables, legumes, and grains take the lead role, while animal proteins are integrated strategically, moderately, and with justification.

### 3. Waste-conscious planning

The third level — and one of the most critical — is recognizing that it is not enough to serve sustainable food if a significant portion ends up in the trash. The Net Zero Carbon Events guidelines emphasize that reducing food waste must be addressed from the planning stage, through realistic consumption estimates and through the service operation itself.

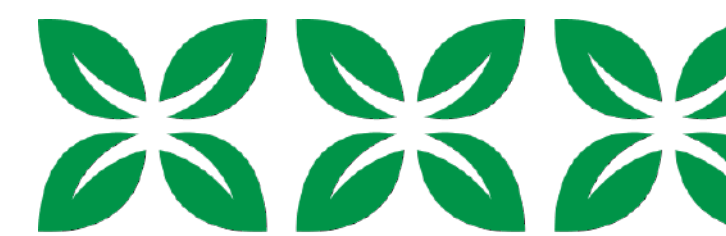
Menu selection at a corporate event is not an isolated or purely operational decision. Every ingredient, supplier, and preparation method triggers simultaneous impacts across the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainability. The following table illustrates how operational decisions — such as choosing local, seasonal, or family-farm products — generate systemic effects connected to the sustainability strategy of the event and the organization hosting it.

**Table 4: Relationship between menu selection and sustainability dimensions**

Menu Decision	Environmental Dimension	Social Dimension	Economic Dimension
<b>1. Local ingredients</b>	↓ Transportation emissions	Support for local producers	Energizes regional economies
<b>2. Seasonal products</b>	↓ Agrochemical use	Food education	Price stability
<b>3. Family farming</b>	Soil and water conservation	Rural income and equity	Productive linkages
<b>4. Responsible fishing</b>	Marine protection	Sustainability of coastal communities	Added product value
<b>5. Balanced menus</b>	↓ Waste	Consumer health	Cost optimization

**Source:** Vargas et al. (2014). *National Plan for Sustainable and Healthy Costa Rican Gastronomy*.

# The new logic of culinary design



In corporate events at sustainability-focused companies, the menu is increasingly designed as a system, not as a sum of dishes.

This means integrating criteria that go beyond flavor:



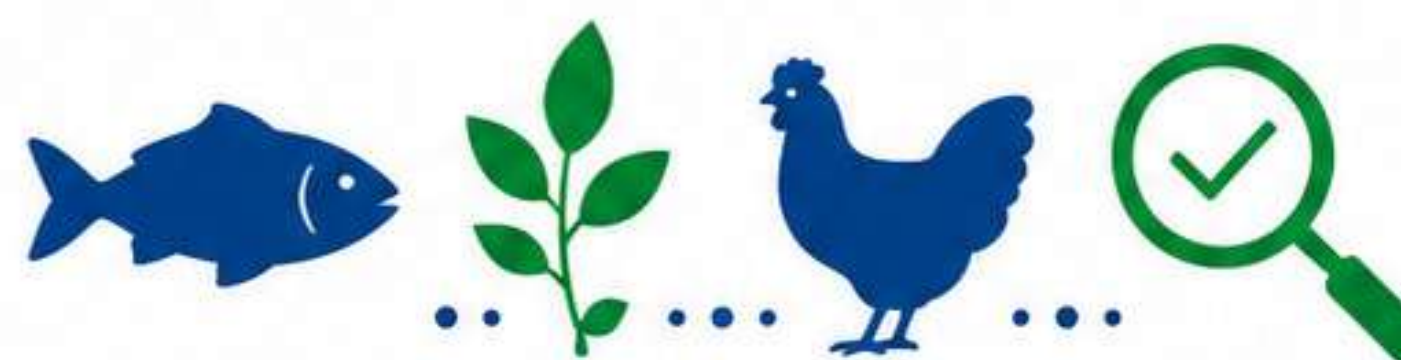
1. Seasonality and proximity, to reduce emissions from transportation and storage.



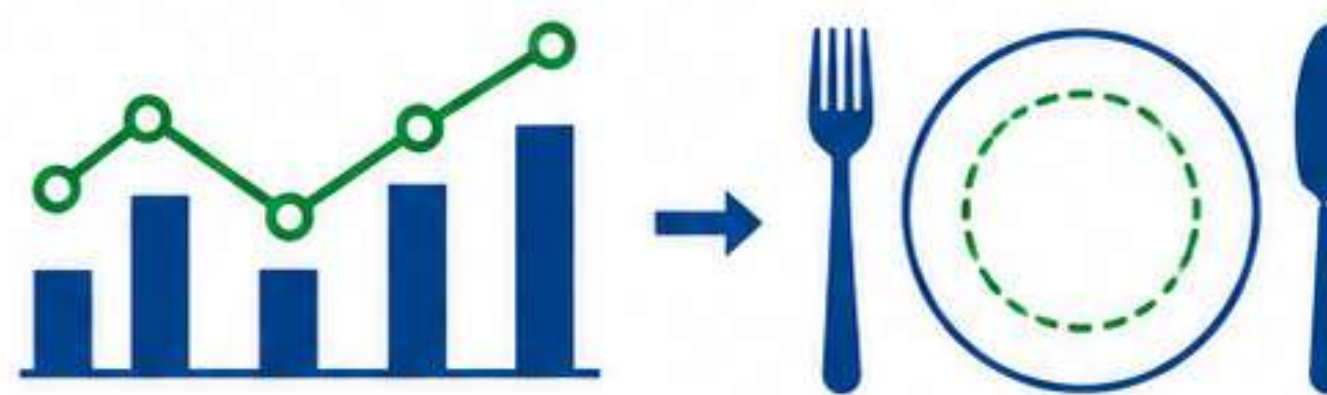
2. Plant diversity, which improves the nutritional profile and reduces pressure on natural resources.



3. Conscious protein selection, prioritizing lower-impact options with greater traceability.



4. Portion planning based on real consumption data, not overstated assumptions made out of operational caution.



5. Clear strategies for surplus food — including safe donation, repurposing, or recovery — avoiding the landfill as a final destination.



**Table 5: Prioritized vs. avoided ingredients in sustainability-focused events**

Prioritize	Rationale	Avoid	Associated risk
<b>Fresh local products</b>	Lower footprint and greater traceability	Ultra-processed foods	High footprint and low nutritional value
<b>Native species</b>	Biodiversity conservation	Unnecessarily imported ingredients	Higher carbon footprint
<b>Organic production</b>	Ecosystem protection	Conventional intensive production	Environmental degradation
<b>Simple preparations</b>	Less waste	Overly complex menus	More waste and food loss

**Source:** Vargas et al. (2014). *National Plan for Sustainable and Healthy Costa Rican Gastronomy*.

## The role of the venue and organizer: from executors to curators

his trend also redefines traditional roles. The venue’s culinary team is no longer just a creator of dishes – it becomes a curator of impact. The organizer moves beyond coordinating logistics to articulating decisions that connect sustainability, experience, and corporate narrative.

Professional kitchens adopt techniques historically associated with fine dining, but now with a broader purpose: whole-ingredient use, fermentation to extend shelf life, reinterpretation of secondary cuts, and use of stems, leaves, and peels. These practices stop being isolated gestures and become part of an operational standard oriented toward efficiency and culinary quality.





## When the experience integrates sustainability

One of the most important lessons of this trend is that **incorporating sustainability criteria into event gastronomy does not depend solely on guidelines, but on their integration into the experience.**

Events that achieve this successfully do not operate from restriction, but from design: the diner does not perceive a sacrifice, but a culinary proposal that expands flavors, textures, and stories.

Pleasure is still present, but now accompanied by an additional satisfaction: knowing that the experience being enjoyed is aligned with the company's values.

## The new standard: “From the ingredient to the impact”

In 2026, a sustainable menu is no longer a rarity or a symbolic gesture. It is an indicator of organizational maturity. The companies leading this change understand that every meal served at an event is an opportunity to align discourse and practice, impact and experience, pleasure and responsibility:



**Trend #3**

# Wellness-Focused Event Catering

# From feeding the body to enhancing performance

For decades, gastronomy at corporate events was conceived as a sensory and logistical experience. Eating well meant offering abundant, varied, well-presented food capable of pleasing diverse palates. Beyond ambiance, food rarely served a defined functional purpose: it was a complement to the program, not a strategic component of it.

That paradigm is changing. Sustainability-focused companies — particularly those that integrate well-being into their organizational culture — are beginning to understand that food at an event has a direct influence on attendees' physical, cognitive, and emotional states, and therefore on the effectiveness of the gathering itself.

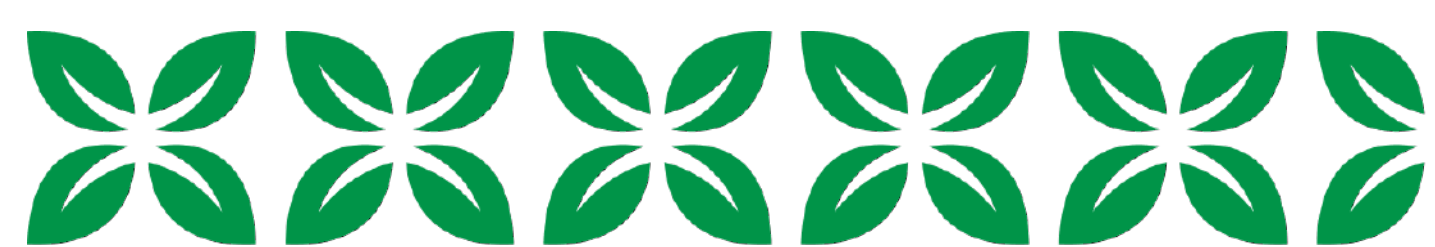
In 2026, eating well is no longer just about pleasing. It is also about preparing the body and mind to receive the value the event seeks to deliver.

## Food as a functional component of the event experience

Food is no longer just “what we serve”; it is also “how we prepare attendees for what comes next.”

This shift goes beyond aesthetics and culinary trends. It is grounded in evidence: certain nutritional patterns can favor sustained energy, focus, mood, and cognitive performance, while others can trigger drops in concentration, drowsiness, or digestive discomfort.

Within this trend, food is no longer treated as filler between sessions, but as part of the event's strategic design



“Within this trend, food is no longer treated as filler between sessions, but as part of the event's strategic design”



# The principles of wellness gastronomy



**1** Fresh, minimally processed ingredients.



**2** Balance between proteins, complex carbohydrates, and healthy fats.



**3** Inclusion of functional foods (probiotics, prebiotics, antioxidants, anti-inflammatories).



**4** Reduction of added sugars and ultra-processed foods.



**5** Conscious portion design tailored to each moment of the event.

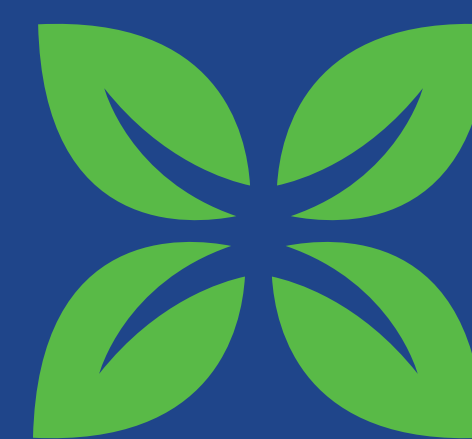


**6** Hydration as part of the experience: infused waters, herbal teas, functional infusions.



The goal is not for the diner to experience a “restricted” menu, but a **more refined, conscious culinary proposal** aligned with their well-being.





**Tabla 6: Functional components and associated benefits in event gastronomy**

Functional Component	Common Ingredients	Associated Benefit
<b>Probiotics</b>	Live yogurt, kefir, kombucha	Digestive and immune health
<b>Prebiotics</b>	Oats, flaxseed, banana, root vegetables	Nourishes the microbiota
<b>Anti-inflammatories</b>	Turmeric, ginger, cacao	Reduces inflammation
<b>Clean energy</b>	Sweet potato, nuts, seeds	Sustained energy
<b>Stress regulators</b>	Herbal infusions, cacao, herbs	Calm and focus
<b>Antioxidants</b>	Tropical fruits, cacao, tea	Cellular protection

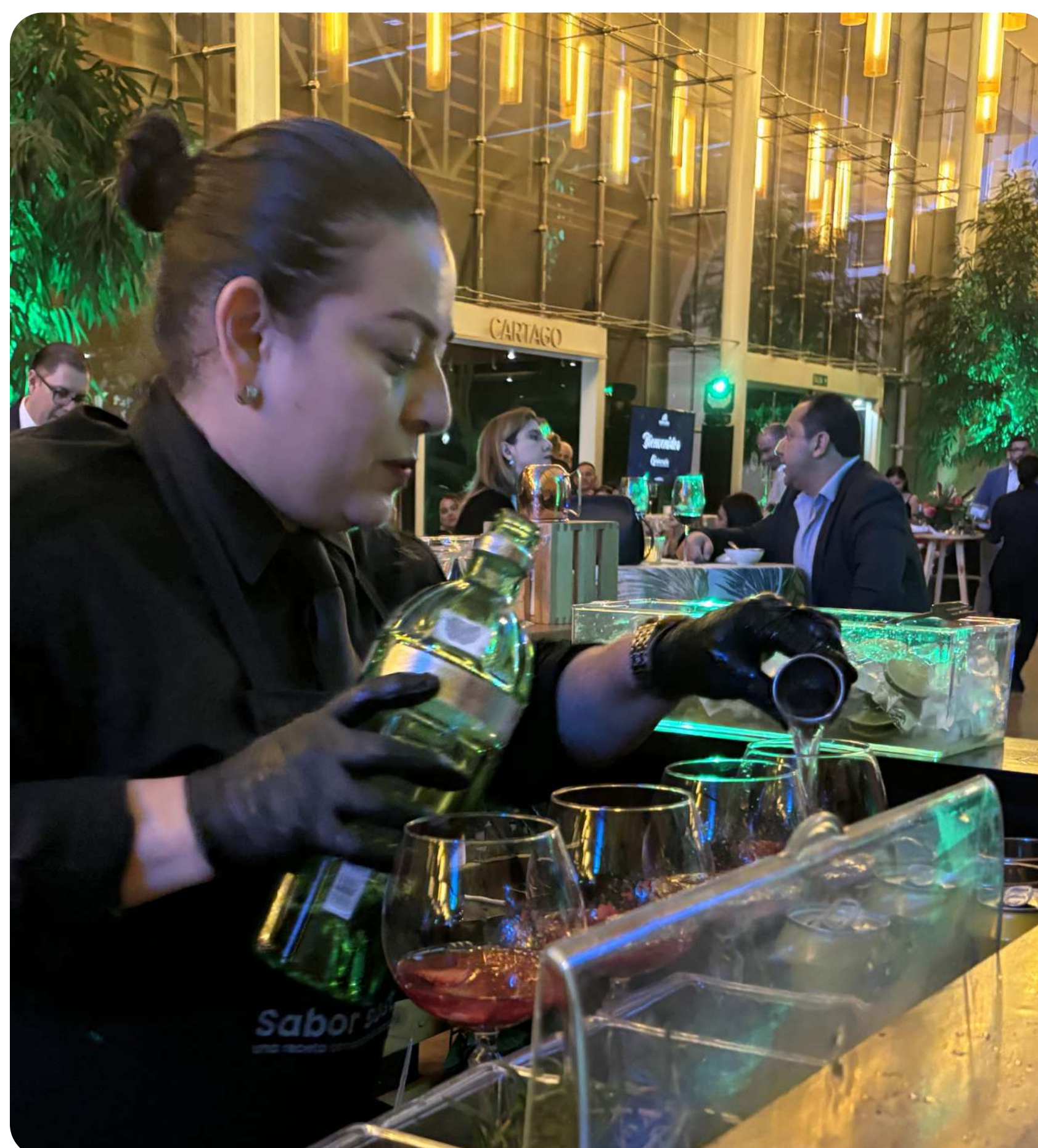
**Source:** Costa Rica Convention Center. (2025). *Mindful Bites* by Heroica. Grupo Heroica.

## The roles of the venue and organizer evolve

This approach redefines responsibilities. The venue's culinary team becomes a designer of functional experiences. The organizer moves beyond logistics and begins to integrate the attendee's state and experience into the event design itself.

The selection of raw materials, preparation technique, timing of service, and menu narrative are integrated into a single system. Nothing is incidental.

**Every decision responds to an intention.**





## Communicating without imposing

Wellness gastronomy does not require lengthy explanations or technical jargon. It communicates with subtlety: thoughtful names, brief descriptions, simple messages that help attendees understand why what is served is being served.

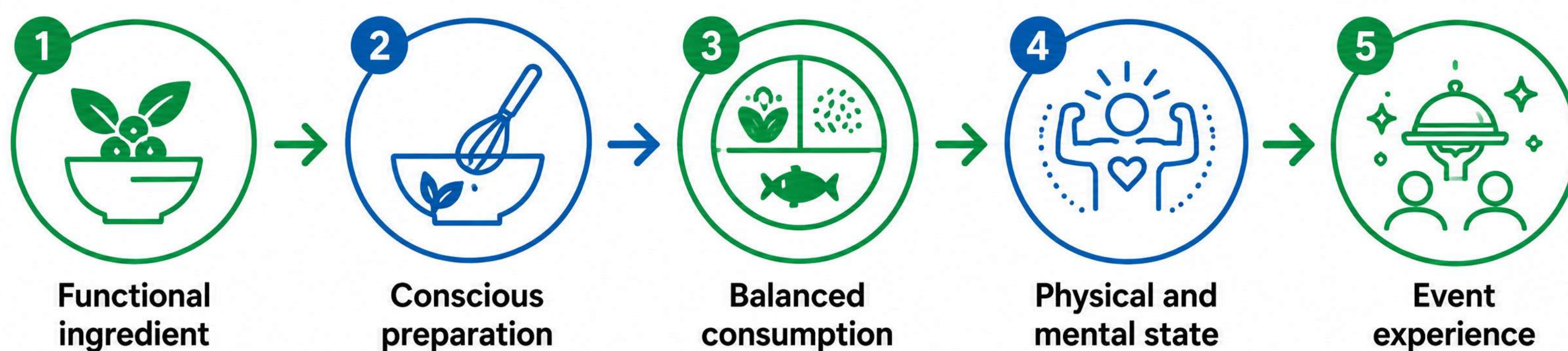
When people understand the intention behind the menu, they feel care, not restriction. And that sense of care can strengthen the emotional connection with the event and the organization.

A gathering where people are present and energized is a more effective gathering. In corporate contexts, food can contribute to better conditions for collective performance.

## Toward a new maturity in events: “From food to the attendee’s mental state”

Wellness gastronomy represents a natural evolution. **The goal is not restriction, but a more intentional culinary experience.**

It does not impose rules; it proposes criteria. **The focus has shifted toward food that actively supports attendee wellbeing and performance.**



Because today, at corporate events of sustainability-focused companies, food is no longer just a sensory experience. It is a strategic tool.

## Trend #4

# Selecting a Venue Aligned with Company Values

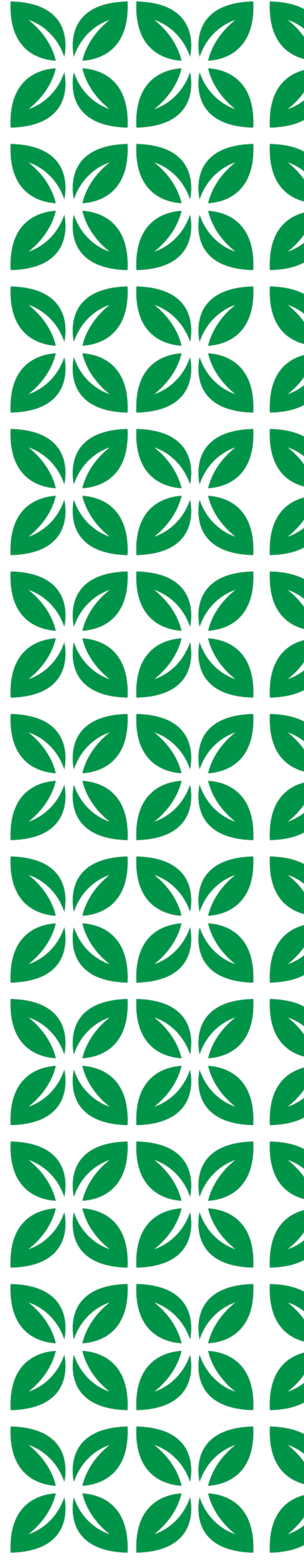
## The venue as a reflection of brand values

Choosing a venue is not just a logistical decision — it is, at times, a reputational one. In a context where sustainability has evolved from an aspirational attribute into an increasingly widespread expectation, the location where an event takes place becomes a tangible extension of the brand. What an organization communicates about its purpose, culture, and commitment to the future must be consistently reflected in the operation of the place where it convenes its stakeholders.

The venue alone represents one of the most relevant sources of environmental impact in an event, even before considering attendee transportation. The differences between operating in a conventional venue and one designed under criteria of energy efficiency and environmental management are measurable, comparable, and — above all — avoidable when the choice is made with strategic vision.

For this reason, selecting a venue is no longer about “where the people fit,” but **in what kind of environment the brand can most coherently project its commitments.**

An event that speaks of well-being, the future, and responsibility, but is executed in a space that cannot demonstrate verifiable environmental practices, **can create a visible disconnect among its stakeholders** — especially when sustainability occupies a visible place in corporate positioning. That dissonance can undermine credibility, erode trust, and widen the gap between corporate discourse and the experience people actually have.



# The new evolution of due diligence: from commercial checklist to operational verification

Historically, selection criteria concentrated on capacity, location, costs, and food-and-beverage quality. These still matter, but are no longer sufficient. In 2026, more and more strategically oriented organizations are elevating the process into a sustainability-driven due diligence exercise, in which the venue is evaluated not only by its promises, but by its ability to demonstrate performance and to collaborate with the organizer so the event genuinely reflects its sustainability commitments.

Here lies a key shift: it is not enough to “do it well” — it must be measurable, reportable, and actionable for improvement. This becomes tangible when the venue can deliver data once the event ends — waste managed, diversion rate achieved, traceability, supporting evidence — as part of a professional close-out. And when it understands that the organizer will need information to report performance and build legitimacy with stakeholders (Net Zero Carbon Events, 2023).



**Table 7: Strategic criteria for selecting a venue aligned with company values**

Criterion	Key question for the organizer	Strategic implication
Carbon footprint	Does the venue measure and reduce its emissions?	Climate coherence
Neutralization	Are operational emissions neutralized?	ESG compliance
Certified methodology	Is there technical backing and external audit?	Credibility
Waste management	Does it provide post-event reports?	Traceability
Energy and efficiency	Does it operate under energy-efficiency standards?	Impact reduction
Transparency	Does it deliver verifiable data to the client?	Prevents greenwashing

**Source:** Net Zero Carbon Events. (2023). Net Zero Carbon Events roadmap – Full report.

## Key criteria for evaluating a venue’s sustainable performances

### Real capacity for circular management and waste traceability

A venue aligned with sustainable values does not improvise waste management: it integrates it as a system. The coherence is usually visible in the invisible: service areas, operational corridors, kitchens, collection points, source separation, and partnerships with authorized handlers.

In practice, this means the venue can: implement source separation and operate a system with clear routing; maintain verifiable partnerships with authorized handlers; and quantify results and present them in a report useful to the client.



## **Integrating sustainability criteria into the RFP and contracting**

Sustainability should not merely be “asked for nicely” — it should be embedded into the selection process itself. A robust approach is to include environmental and social criteria in the RFP and use that information to compare venues (Net Zero Carbon Events, 2023).

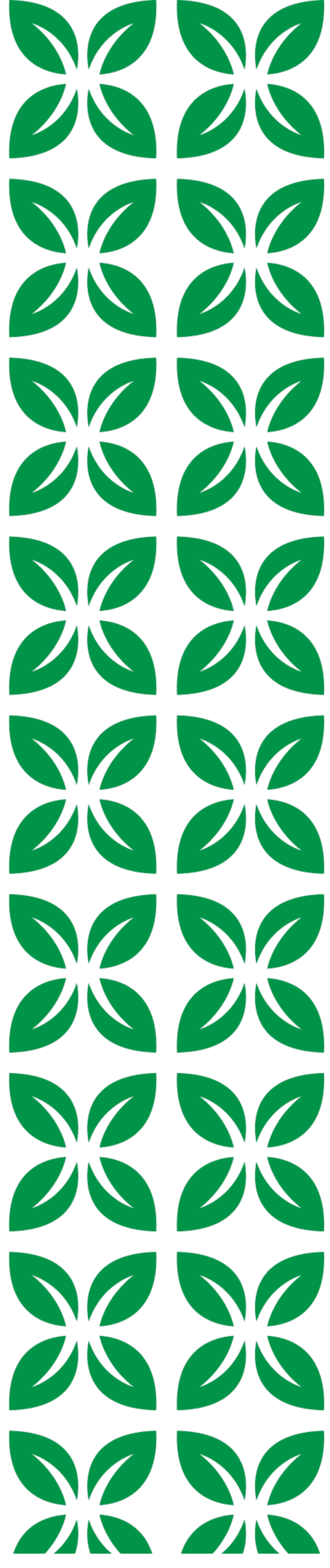
This becomes especially powerful in food service, where footprint, experience, and reputation all converge. From the RFP, the organizer can request local and seasonal sourcing, reduction of disposables, practices to reduce waste, and agreements to receive post-event data on food served and food waste managed.

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Values are expressed when the venue’s team can operate the standard without external supervision: correct separation, reduction of plastics, back-of-house order, and the ability to explain the “why” without resorting to greenwashing.

In addition, a values-aligned venue understands that communication is part of impact: educational labels, aesthetic signage, positive messages, and storytelling that elevates the experience without moralizing. Communication becomes a bridge between operations and perception.



**Table 8: Reputational and strategic impact of venue selection**

Dimension	ESG-aligned venue	Conventional or unverifiable venue
Brand coherence	Greater potential for coherence	Higher risk of misalignment
Reputational risk	Potentially lower	Potentially higher
Evidence for reporting	Greater availability of verifiable data	Limited or non-verifiable availability
Net Zero goal alignment	Can facilitate alignment	Can hinder it
Market message	Signal of greater consistency	May raise doubts about coherence

**Source:** *Net Zero Carbon Events. (2023).*

### **Accessibility: sustainability is also verifiable inclusion**

There is a dimension of sustainability that does not always appear in carbon reports or waste metrics but equally defines an event’s level of coherence: accessibility. A venue aligned with company values does not only measure emissions or manage waste with traceability — it also seeks to ensure that all people can participate on equal terms.

A truly sustainable event: verifies that ramps, accesses, restrooms, and evacuation routes meet current technical criteria; ensures that décor and setup do not obstruct corridors, exits, or support points for people with reduced mobility; incorporates signage that is clear, visible, and with adequate contrast; considers inclusive formats such as pictograms, braille, or accessible digital systems when applicable; and integrates sensory solutions for people with hearing disabilities when the event profile requires it.

Inclusion is not an “extra.” It is part of coherence. A company that declares social commitment but convenes in spaces with access barriers can project a message inconsistent with that commitment.

**Note:** *The operational guidelines described in point #4 incorporate technical contributions developed in collaboration with BAC Credomatic within the framework of its specialized practices in sustainability applied to events.*

# A recommended 4-phase process for organizers

## Phase 1: Initial Screening

- Questionnaire with evidence requested (policies, practices, available data).
- Eliminate venues unable to deliver basic post-event information (Net Zero Carbon Events, 2023).

## Phase 2: Technical Site Visit

- Walk-through of kitchen, loading areas, separation points, storage, and real operations.
- Validation of how they do it — not just what they say.

## Phase 3: Values Alignment

- Identify coherences and possible reputational exposures: is what the venue does consistent with what the brand wants to communicate?

## Phase 4: Scoring and Decision

- Multi-criteria matrix with weightings based on event priorities.
- Selection paired with an improvement plan: clear agreements on data, communication, and operational standards.

Choosing a venue also means defining a narrative. And in sustainability, that narrative gains credibility when the place where the event happens can demonstrate — through operations, data, and culture — that the company's values find backing in practice, not just in discourse.



**Trend #5**

# **Efficient Mobility Managementd**





# Decarbonizing the most decisive factor

One uncomfortable reality is clear: at an event, the greatest impact is not always where it is most visible. We can design an impeccable experience in waste, energy, and gastronomy — but if the movement of people is managed as a “logistical detail,” sustainability ends up misaligned with one of the most significant sources of impact.



Mobility goes far beyond transportation logistics. It is the sum of decisions that determine how much energy and how many emissions are triggered before the first person registers: from the chosen destination to the type of venue, proximity between hotels and venue, schedules, internal transfers, and the travel culture the event encourages or normalizes.

In decarbonization there is a guiding principle: first we avoid what does not need to happen, then we optimize the unavoidable. That is why sustainable mobility is managed as a hierarchy — aligned with the “Avoid–Shift–Improve” framework used in transport and decarbonization policy.



## Level 1. Scale the event without requiring travel

Before designing routes and buses, the format is decided: can the event be scaled without moving as many people? This approach does not replace in-person events — it makes them more intentional. We reserve face-to-face for what genuinely requires it — difficult conversations, negotiation, trust-building, deep networking — and avoid travel for what can be distributed digitally.



## Level 2. Choose destination and venue to minimize displacement

A sustainable event does not begin with the build-out: it begins with the choice of location. A well-located, well-connected venue reduces travel structurally. It also makes walking and public transit real options, not rhetoric.



## Level 3. Prioritize active mobility and public transit

When the event is designed to be walkable, everything improves: times, experience, logistics, and footprint. Public transit, when well integrated — clear information, passes, signage, on-site support — becomes a direct ally..



## Level 4. Optimize the unavoidable

Motorized travel will always exist. The key is to reduce empty trips, plan routes, adjust frequencies to match demand, and — when possible — shift to lower-impact fleets. condiciones para que el cambio ocurra en la práctica, no en el papel.



## From intention to engineering: designing event mobility

An event models its mobility footprint by asking two uncomfortable questions:

Where are my people coming from and how do they get here?

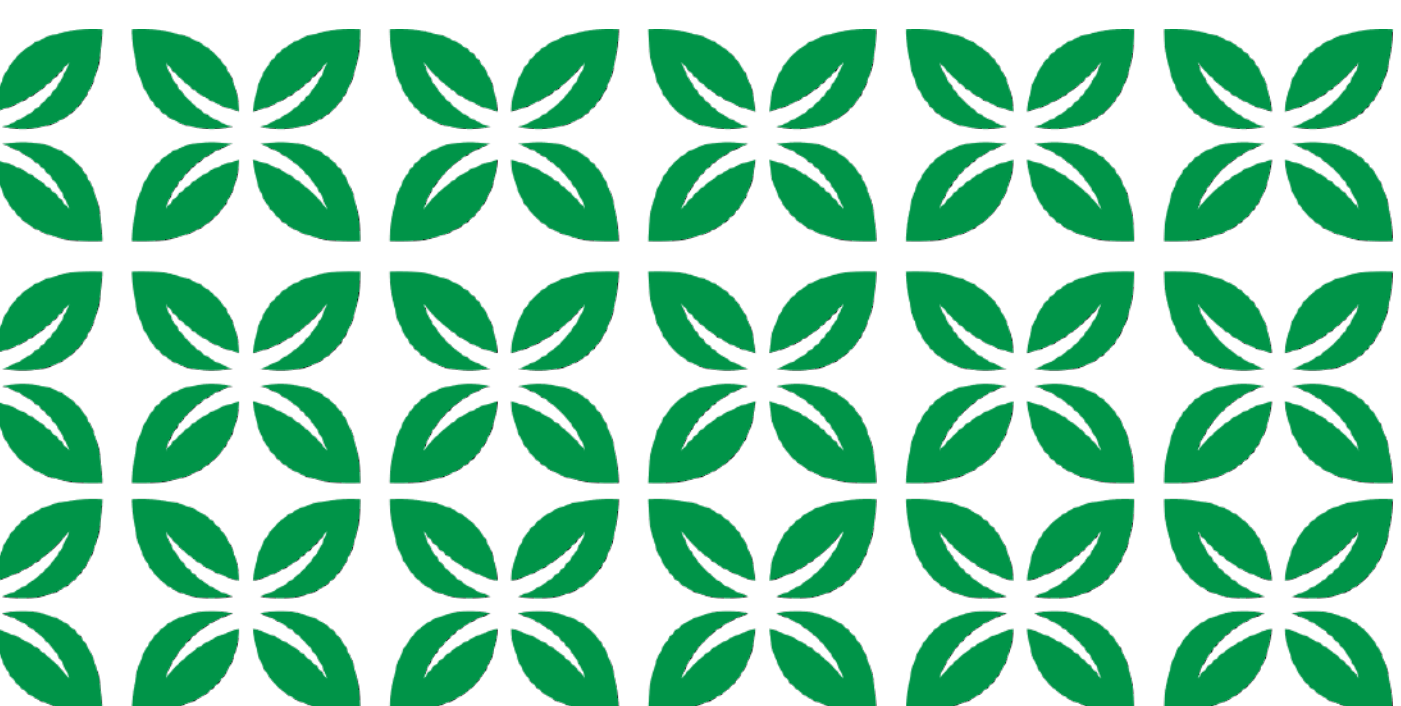
What am I incentivizing through my design and my decisions?:

### A. Pre-event diagnostic

- Origin profile (cities/countries, typical connections).
- Friction map of the journey: airport/terminal > hotel > venue > activities.
- Points where people default to driving due to lack of clear alternatives.

### B. Designing the movement system

- Hotels recommended by walkable or well-connected zone.
- Suggested pedestrian routes (safe, well lit, with real travel times).
- Public-transit integration (passes, simple instructions, on-site staff guidance).
- Shuttles only when they add genuine value: short routes, tight schedules, high occupancy.
- Positive incentives — not guilt: benefits for those who choose lower-impact options.



## C. Closing with data

A sustainable event does not just “do” — it also “tells.” Mobility should move toward the same traceability standard used in waste management: measure what can be measured (modal split, routes, shuttle occupancy, carpooling participation), and when possible, estimate emissions using transport-mode emission factors to build comparable, measurable baselines.

## Mobility as experience, not as “instructions”

Adoption of sustainable mobility practices depends largely on how easy and clear the experience is for the end user. Sustainable mobility works when it is communicated as part of the event’s value: simple, elegant, and useful.

- “This event was designed to be walked between key points.”
- “Your hotel is X minutes on foot from the venue.”
- “Here is the simplest public-transit option.”

The key is to remove friction and increase clarity.





## Brief application examples

### **Example 1 — National corporate convention (1 day, high attendance):**

- Venue and parking selection that encourages shared transportation.
- Differentiated arrival zones (carpool / public transit / walkers).
- Post-event report on carpooling participation and logistical efficiency.

### **Example 2 — Regional congress (2–3 days, attendees from nearby countries):**

- Prioritize recommended hotels within walkable or well-connected radii.
- Public-transit passes integrated into accreditation.
- Shuttles with closed routes and high occupancy.

### **Example 3 — Event with a wellness narrative:**

- Mobility is designed as part of well-being: walking, less commuting stress, clear orientation, shorter travel times.
- Connected with the concept of integrated well-being that seeks coherence between what the event says and what it does

**Trend #6**

# Activating Sustainability through Event Communications

## When sustainability exists... but nobody “uses” it”

An event may have a sustainability system in place — well-designed separation stations, responsible suppliers, conscious culinary decisions, defined recovery processes — and still fail to generate active participation. Sustainability is only activated when the attendee understands what to do, why to do it, and how their individual decision connects to a real, measurable impact.



For this to happen, communication must come from two primary, clearly coordinated sources. The first is the venue, responsible for communicating its sustainability management visibly, clearly, and consistently at key points along the attendee journey: entrances, halls, food areas, and waste stations.

This is practical information that translates the venue’s systems into concrete, understandable actions. Without attendee comprehension, even well-designed systems lose operational effectiveness.

The second source is the event organizer, who must amplify and give meaning to that communication — beginning before the event to prepare attendees and align expectations, continuing during to reinforce messages and facilitate participation, and closing afterward with results, lessons, and evidence of the impact achieved.

When managed strategically, this narrative becomes a shared experience that engages, educates, and leaves a mark well beyond the event.



## Four common communication failures

There are four mistakes that are repeated across all types of events:

### 1) Assuming people already know

Waste separation is not universal. Criteria vary by country, culture, and venue. Systems must not just have bins: separation must be defined at the source and traceability must be ensured. Without clear attendee instructions, contamination of waste streams is inevitable.

### 2) Communicating too late

When the message arrives at the venue, many decisions have already been made — what to bring, how to move, what to expect. Communication must begin before, accompany during, and close after.

### 3) Communicating in a punitive tone

Sustainability is not imposed: it is facilitated. The right tone does not blame; it invites, recognizes, celebrates, and guides.

### 4) Failing to return evidence of impact to the attendee

Motivation grows when people know their action led somewhere. A well-crafted phrase can do more than ten posters: “Every piece of waste has a destination.”

# A practical framework: modular, multi-moment, multi-channel communication

## 1 Before the event: prepare decisions, not just inform

- **Commitment message:** what the event is doing and what it needs from attendees.
- **Guide to concrete actions:** what to do / what not to do (especially on waste and consumption).
- **Logistical anticipation:** how the system works inside the venue (without overwhelming).

## 2 During the event: signage that guides decisions

- Simple visual instructions at waste stations, food areas, and high-traffic points.
- Short messages with immediate action, coherent with the actual system.
- Messages that connect sustainability with pride in the event.

## 3 After the event: closing the loop with traceability and legacy

- Summary of results and what happened with what was separated.
- Language that reinforces culture: circular economy, recovery, reduction to landfill.
- Clear explanations of what composting, recycling, and traceability mean.



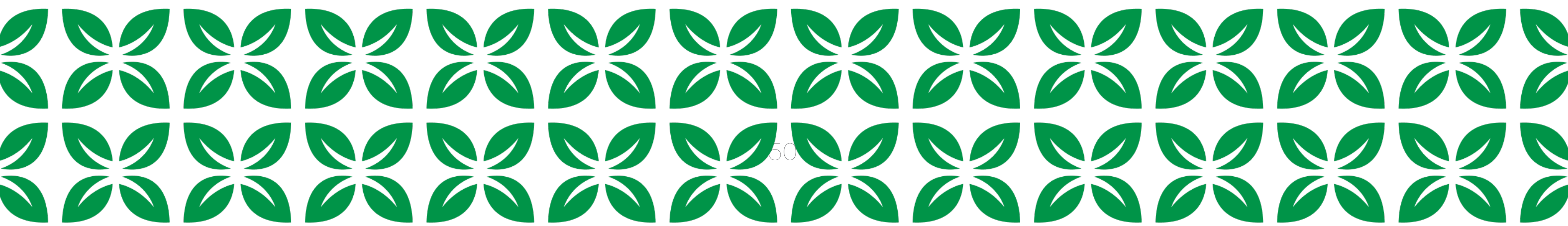
## Ambassadors: the system needs a face

Sustainability becomes credible when attendees can see, ask, and receive help without friction. Ambassadors fulfill three functions: reducing friction by resolving questions in the moment; preserving consistency by ensuring practice is executed as designed; and elevating meaning by reminding attendees that every action has a destination.

## Metrics: measuring communication without confusing it with “likes”

- Less confusion at separation stations (better source separation).
- Greater coherence between recoverable and non-recoverable waste.
- Greater understanding of traceability (“what happens next”).
- Greater adherence to the good practices promoted during the event.

The trend is not to communicate more. It is to communicate better: with intention, design, functional aesthetics, and narrative. Because in the end, the attendee does not remember how many signs they saw. They remember whether the event made them feel they were part of something serious, coherent, and human.



**Trend #7**

# **Per-Event Sustainability Certifications**



# When “saying” sustainable is no longer enough

Over the last decade, sustainability has evolved from a technical conviction into a market language as well. And when a concept becomes ubiquitous, an inevitable risk emerges: that it is used as decoration. The problem is not that organizations communicate their efforts; the problem is when communication replaces the effort itself.

In events, this phenomenon is especially delicate. An event is, by definition, visible, photographable, shareable. In a world where reputation is built in real time, **the temptation to appear sustainable can be stronger than the discipline of actually being committed to it.**

That imbalance erodes trust and penalizes those who do invest in rigor, measurement, traceability, and continuous improvement. Here, the strategic role of certifications emerges: **not as symbolic recognitions, but as verification tools.** If sustainability is a promise, certification is the contract.



# Certification as a business decision

Adopting a certification is not an operational decision — it is a strategic one. It implies resource allocation, priority-setting, and — in many cases — forgoing simpler solutions in favor of more structured processes. Its value lies not only in the recognition earned, but in the capacity to organize operations and reduce reputational risk over time.

- **Verifiable credibility:** reduces room for interpretation because progress is evidenced, not simply declared.
- **Framework for action:** defines a practical path, identifies priority impacts, and creates structure to manage complexity (Net Zero Carbon Events, 2023).
- **Benchmarking:** allows performance to be compared across editions, venues, or business units.
- **Continuous improvement with traceability:** requires producing evidence, records, accountabilities, and lessons learned.
- **Reputation with foundation:** when the event communicates a recognition, it is sharing proof, not opinion.



But in the capacity to organize operations and reduce reputational risk over time.





## Sustainable Events: the value of local recognition with verifiable logic

Costa Rica offers a particularly instructive example of how recognition systems can structure sustainability in events. Bandera Azul Ecológica – Sustainable Events represents one of the clearest mechanisms for legitimizing an event that implements good practices and actively manages its environmental impact.

Its true strategic value lies not only in the visible distinction, but in the external evaluation framework that organizes, validates, and makes event performance comparable. More than a symbol, Bandera Azul translates operational actions into verifiable evidence under nationally recognized criteria.

This principle extends to other recognition schemes that strengthen the event’s coherence within the national context. Events aligned with the country brand “Esencial Costa Rica” project a narrative of sustainability, innovation, and social commitment – built not through marketing, but through real experience.

Carbon-neutral events – those that measure, reduce, and offset emissions under recognized methodologies – reinforce the credibility of climate discourse in a country where decarbonization is State policy. Events with certified sustainable gastronomy connect the attendee experience to strategic national pillars such as family farming, biodiversity, health, and well-being.



Together, these recognitions in Costa Rica — Bandera Azul, Country Brand, carbon neutrality, sustainable gastronomy — share a key characteristic: they convert scattered initiatives into ordered systems of evidence.

For the organizer, this means being able to state with external backing: *“This is not only our vision; it is performance that has been evaluated and recognized.”*

For the venue and the destination, it means consolidating an event culture that is not only communicated, but measured, verified, and recognized — **contributing to the destination’s reputation and the industry’s standard.**

**This model is not exclusive to Costa Rica:** it is entirely replicable in other destinations with their own certification frameworks, territorial quality marks, or recognized environmental standards.

A destination in Europe can rely on ISO certifications or EU eco-labels; one in Latin America, on national sustainable-tourism seals or local gastronomy recognitions.

Where there is institutional willingness and rigorous measurement, there is also the possibility of replicating this standard.

## Venue certifications: when the venue enables event sustainability

A venue that operates under certified methodologies, auditable management systems, and recognized standards becomes a direct enabler of event certifications — reducing technical barriers, costs, and timelines for the organizer.

When the venue holds its own certifications — in environmental management, sustainable gastronomy, Good Manufacturing Practices, energy efficiency, or carbon neutrality — these can extend operationally to the event held there. This allows the organizer to leverage already-validated processes, existing metrics, and proven methodologies rather than building everything from scratch.

This model transforms the relationship between venue and organizer. Sustainability stops being an isolated event effort and becomes a shared commitment, with the venue contributing traceability, technical backing, and verifiable evidence. The venue does not merely host the event; it acts as a technical guarantor of its sustainable performance.





## Two levels of credibility: results and management systems

### 1. Verification by observable result

These validate that something occurred or was achieved with clear evidence: management reports, traceability, waste diversion, or neutralization of operational emissions within a defined framework.

### 2. Certifications based on management systems

These demonstrate that sustainability does not depend on an exceptional one-off event, but on a repeatable way of operating: policies, accountabilities, procedures, indicators, and review.

The underlying rule is clear: **without a system, sustainability will hardly be able to scale.**

# Carbon neutrality: method before offset

Few claims in sustainability are as sensitive as “carbon neutral.” Costa Rica has developed specific regulatory frameworks to ensure such declarations are made with technical rigor.

The National Carbon Neutrality Program integrates a national standard — INTE 12.01.06 — and promotes the correct sequence: measure, reduce, and offset only what cannot be reduced.

That order matters: it avoids the reputational shortcut of offsetting first and improving later.

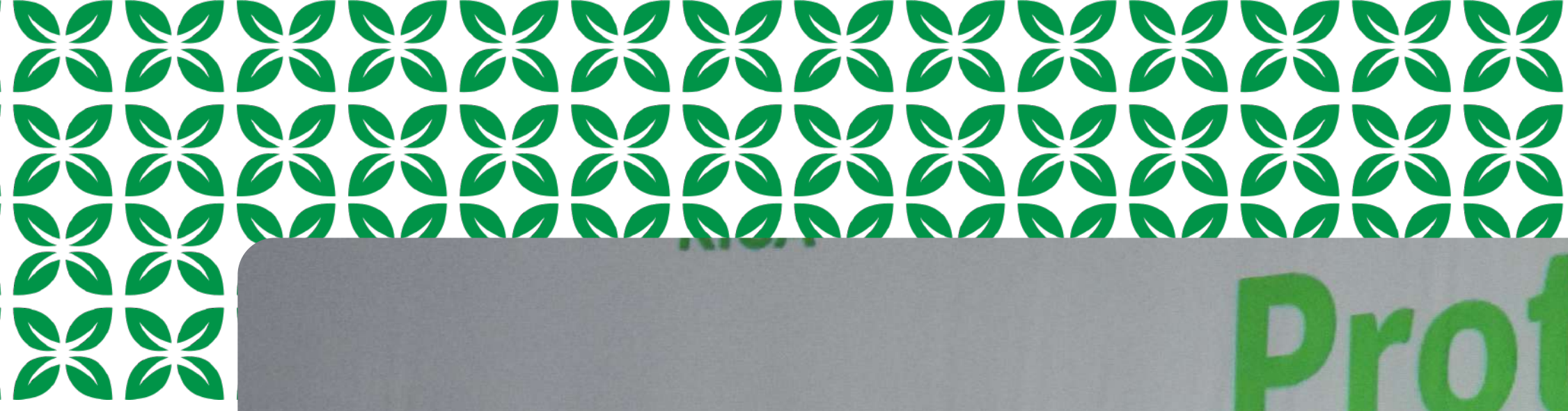
## Turning certification into a clause, not an optional criterion

A key practice is integrating environmental and social criteria into supplier solicitations, selection, and contracting, including expectations and requirements before the event. (Net Zero Carbon Events, 2023)

### Simple but powerful clauses can include:

- Supplier declares applicable certifications and provides verifiable supporting documentation.
- Supplier commits to maintaining those conditions during the event period and notifying the organizer of any changes.
- The organizer may request additional evidence when necessary.





## Beyond the seal: a culture that remains

- Measurement and reporting as a habit.
- Traceability as a standard.
- Aligned suppliers as an ecosystem.
- Continuous improvement as a discipline.

**Without measurable evidence, sustainability claims lose credibility.** Certifications exist to make that intention auditable, repeatable, and comparable: exactly what the meetings industry needs to grow with credibility.

A man wearing a dark cap, glasses, and a dark shirt is smiling and holding a large white document or folder. He is standing in what appears to be a clinical or office environment. The background is slightly blurred, showing some equipment and a chair. The entire image has a green tint.

## Trend #8

# Selecting Suppliers Aligned with Sustainable Practices

# The supply chain as a real extension of values

There is an uncomfortable truth in the sustainability of corporate events: an organization can have impeccable environmental policies, ambitious public commitments, and inspiring narratives — but if its supplier network operates with outdated standards, the real impact will be limited.



**The supply chain is central to the event’s overall impact. Suppliers** — audiovisual, build-out, catering, printing, transportation, furniture — can concentrate a significant share of the event’s total footprint through energy use, materials, waste, and logistics. Moreover, their practices are what attendees, sponsors, and stakeholders perceive directly.

An event that declares itself “sustainable” or “carbon neutral” but contracts suppliers who discard most of their materials, use inefficient equipment, or ignore basic ethical criteria not only generates inconsistency — it introduces a real reputational risk. In contexts where stakeholders have greater access to information and ESG criteria, that inconsistency is detected quickly.



# The paradigm shift in responsible procurement

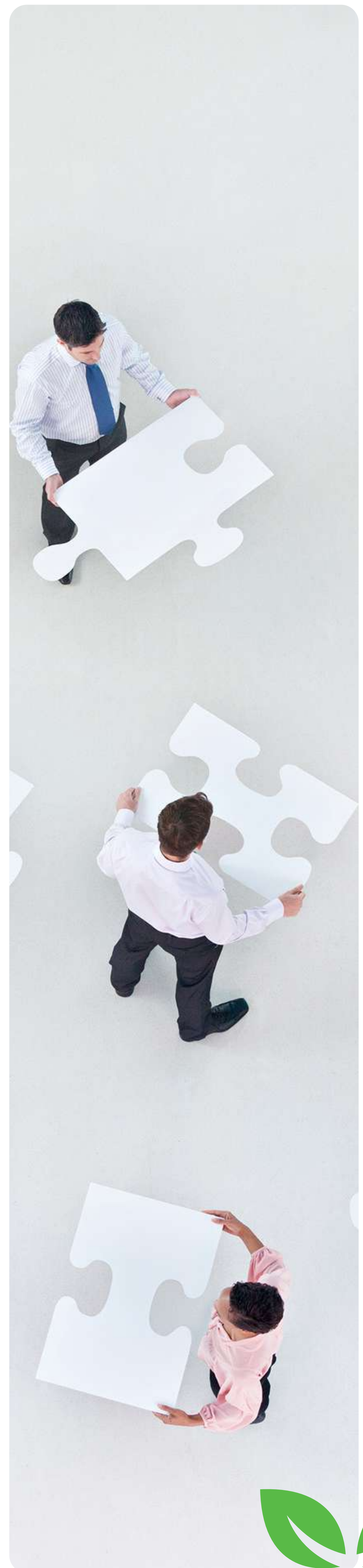
The question is no longer only whether a supplier can deliver the required service, but how they do it, with what impacts, and with what willingness to improve.

This requires rethinking the entire procurement process: from RFP design, through technical and financial evaluation, to management during the event and post-event review.

## Sustainable décor: from visual impact to real impact

- Prioritize modular, reusable structures.
- Use certified wood, reusable fabrics, and recycled furniture.
- Avoid single-use items or materials that are difficult to recover.
- Incorporate native potted plants — not invasive species — that can be replanted or donated.
- Design efficient lighting, preferably LED, and take advantage of natural light when possible.
- Plan from the start the final destination of each element: recovery, recycling, or donation.
- Do not obstruct ramps, corridors, or emergency exits.
- Consider art pieces made from recycled materials and work with local entrepreneurs and artisan groups.

**Note:** The operational guidelines in this section incorporate technical contributions developed in collaboration with BAC Credomatic within the framework of its specialized practices in sustainability applied to events.





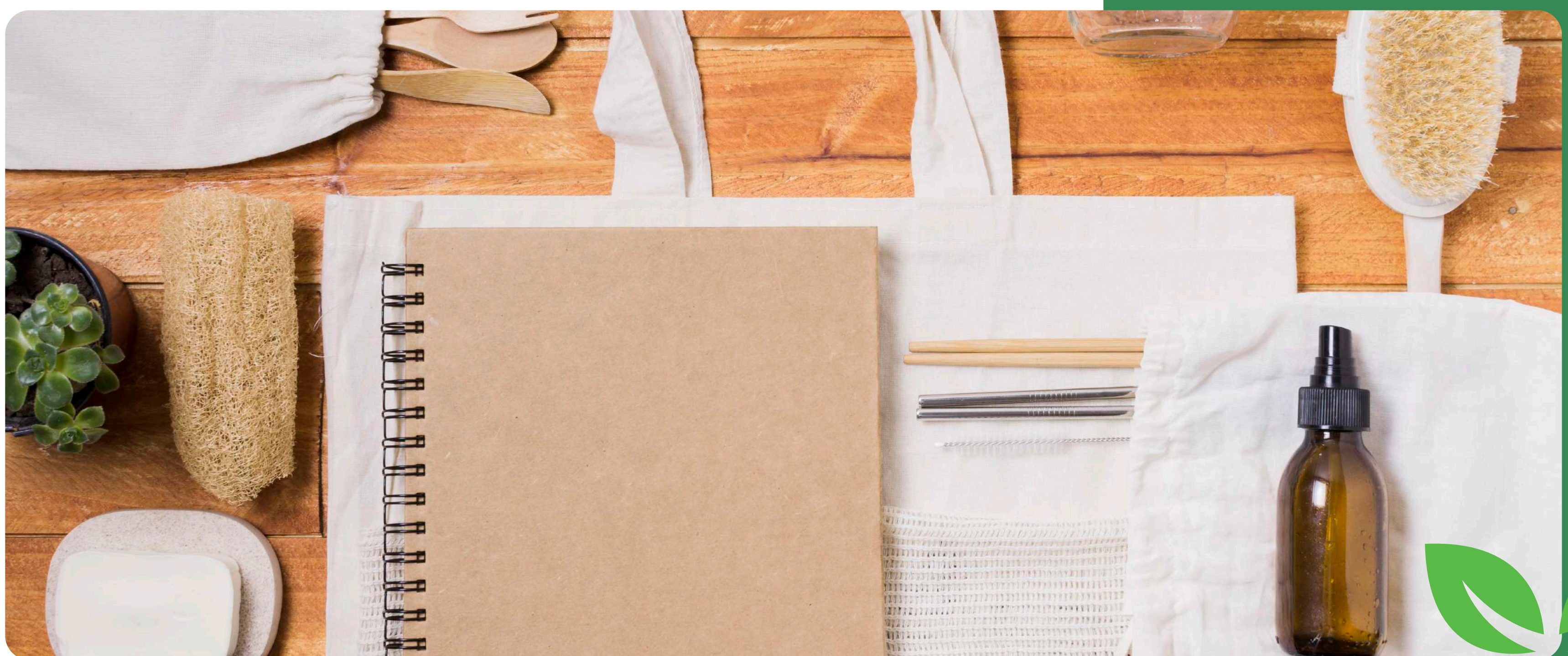
## Promotional items: from ephemeral souvenir to purposeful object

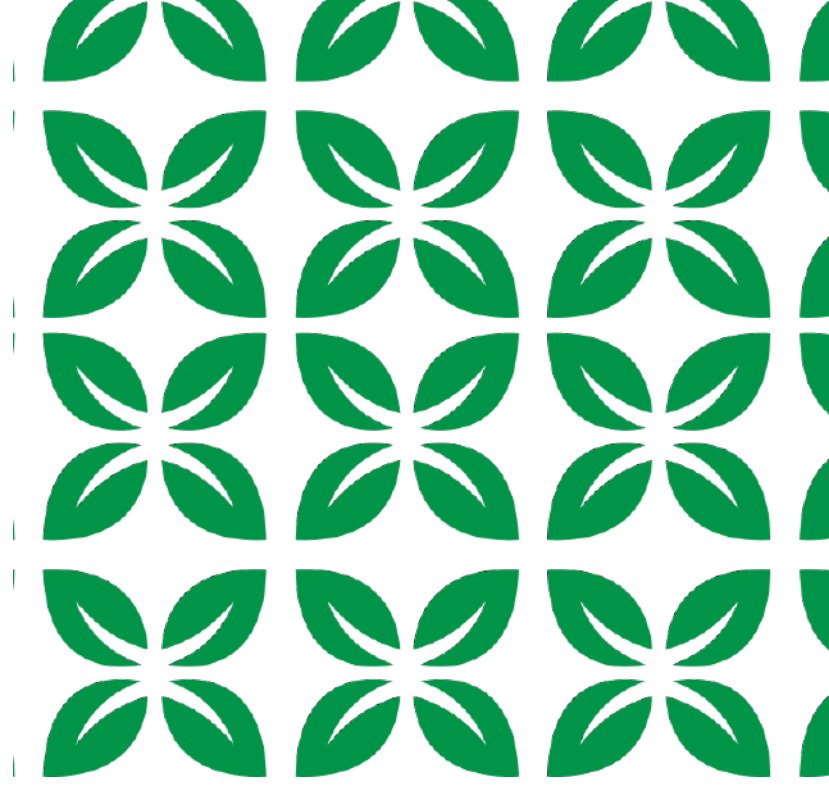
A promotional item is not neutral: it consumes resources, activates supply chains, and almost always generates waste. When the decision is made to give a gift, the question should not be “what can we give?” but “what meaning can we attach to it?”

- Prioritize local products.
- Select items with real utility, not ornamental value.
- Work with social enterprises, cooperatives, or impact organizations.
- Minimize packaging and avoid plastics where possible.
- Consider reduced, premium-quality formats over mass distribution.

In some cases, the best decision is not to give an item, but to invest in an experience: a digital donation in the attendee’s name, a tree planted, a workshop sponsored.

The intangible can be far more memorable — and far more sustainable — than the tangible.





# Strategic categories with high impact

## 1 Catering and food service

- Suppliers with verifiable practices: local sourcing, organic or fair-trade products.
- Capacity to deliver post-event data on food served, waste generated, food donated.
- Conscious menus and adjusted portions. Compostable or reusable utensils.

## 2 Audiovisual and production

- Modern, energy-efficient equipment. Suppliers who reuse structures and minimize disposable production.
- Capacity to measure and report energy consumption. LED technology and intelligent control systems.

## 3 Transportation and logistics

- Optimized routes and lower-emission vehicles when available.
- Consolidation of cargo to reduce empty trips. Carpooling or shared-shuttle options.

## 4 Printing and graphic materials

- Drastic reduction of printed materials in favor of digital alternatives.
- Recycled or certified paper when printing is unavoidable. Vegetable-based inks.
- Reusable formats: signage, banners, structures.



## The evolved RFP: from request to filterble

- Sustainability criteria weighted equally alongside cost and quality.
- Specific questions about practices, certifications, and evidence.
- Requirements for delivery of measurable post-event data.
- Clauses for continuous improvement and supplier evaluation.
- Express ethical commitments: fair working conditions, supply-chain diversity, respect for human rights.



## Building a network of aligned suppliers

- Map suppliers by impact category and maturity level.
- Develop long-term relationships, not isolated transactions.
- Co-create standards and protocols with key suppliers.
- Share data and learnings to drive collective improvement.
- Recognize and reward suppliers who lead in sustainable practices.





## The future: suppliers as strategic partners

The most advanced trend is moving toward conceiving suppliers not as service providers, but as strategic partners in building responsible events: joint planning from the design stage, shared development of innovative lower-impact solutions, and long-term agreements that allow investment in sustainable improvements.

**When suppliers are treated as long-term strategic partners,** sustainability stops being a request and becomes a co-construction.

**Trend #9**

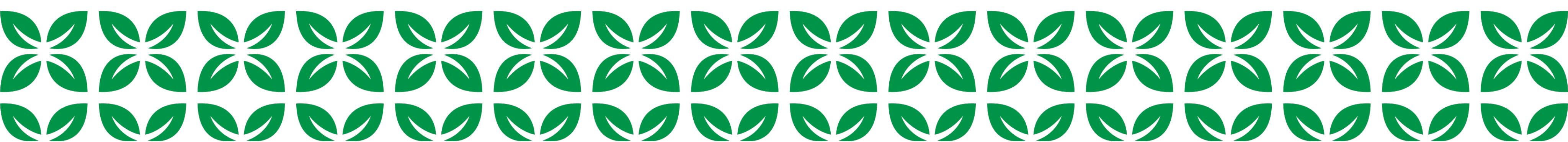
# **Social Impact in Action — Events as Bridges Between Brands and Communities**

## The social dimension as a strategic sustainability component

During the rise of sustainability in events, attention has focused primarily on the environmental dimension – carbon, waste, energy, water. This is understandable given the urgency of the climate crisis. However, this focus has often left a structural sustainability component in the background: social impact.

Corporate events have increasingly incorporated community-oriented actions: donations, volunteering, spaces for local organizations, alliances with social enterprises.

These are valuable initiatives, but they often share a common pattern: they are designed as complementary actions, not as part of the event's strategic core. When social actions are executed without understanding the context, without continuity, and without a logic of mutual benefit, they can end up superficial or disjointed.



# From charitable gesture to shared value

The most important shift is not operational — it is conceptual. The traditional logic of “giving something to the community” at the end of an event as a closing act of conscience is being replaced by an approach of shared value.

In the traditional paradigm, the event arrives, consumes the territory’s resources (infrastructure, services, public attention, mobility, urban pressure), delivers a symbolic contribution, and leaves. The community is a passive recipient.

In a more advanced approach, the event is conceived as a bridge between brands and communities, between global knowledge and local talent, between corporate investment and territorial development. **Communities should be positioned as active participants in the process, not passive beneficiaries. The event’s success is measured not only by its execution, but also by its capacity to generate positive effects in the environment where it takes place.**



## Knowledge as legacy: connecting company and territory

Every corporate event concentrates, for a few days, an exceptional density of talent, experience, and vision that is rarely shared beyond the immediate audience.

The key question is: how is that intellectual capital activated beyond the event? That knowledge — normally confined to closed rooms — can become a bridge between the organization and the educational environment, without requiring charity-style interventions.

Before or during the event, companies can articulate spaces to connect that knowledge with technical schools, high schools, or universities, aligning student profiles with topics already on the agenda.



Specialized talks, mentorships, career-inspiration sessions, or one-on-one meetings can build links between emerging talent and seasoned professionals — integrated operationally through parallel agendas or dedicated spaces without affecting the main program.

This approach also opens the door to programs like “Next Gen,” where company employees take on an active role as mentors, speakers, or guides during the event. Beyond the external benefit, this type of initiative strengthens the sense of pride and belonging among employees, who see how their experience transcends business and contributes directly to local talent development.

A concrete expression of this approach is Legacy Link by Heroica — an initiative designed to turn every event into a point of contact between corporate knowledge and the local academic community of the host destination.

Through alliances with universities and higher-education institutions in each city where Grupo Heroica operates, Legacy Link provides spots for students and faculty selected on merit, giving them access to high-level spaces that would otherwise be out of their reach.



# Five dimensions for building visible social impact

## 1. Educational capacity-building

- Structured internships and placements with clear objectives, an assigned mentor, and a final evaluation.
- Masterclasses open to local students or professionals, with proper curation to ensure genuine attendance.
- Intentional mentorship, connecting senior attendees with local young people and including follow-up afterward.
- Smart equipment donation, where technology or materials are coordinated in advance with institutions.
- Event-linked scholarship funds with real follow-up for young people facing access barriers.

## 2. Generating local economic opportunities

- Local purchasing with clear targets, defined and tracked, not just declared.
- Prioritizing MSMEs, cooperatives, women-led businesses, and impact organizations.
- Agile payment terms, because for small businesses, payment timing can be the difference between growth and closure.
- Showcases and marketplaces within the event for local entrepreneurs.
- Supplier-development programs, including training, mentorship, and accompaniment to build capacity.



### 3. Structured corporate volunteering

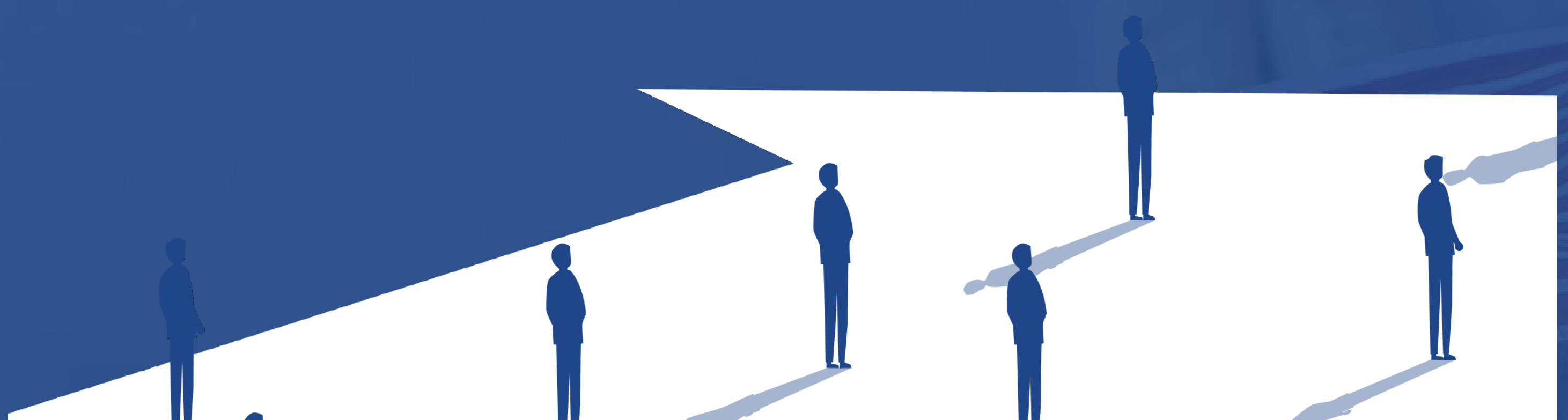
- Co-created with local organizations that define real community needs.
- Allocated as an official agenda block, not an optional extra.
- Focused on useful activities, such as infrastructure improvements, environmental days with follow-up, or food-bank logistics.
- Measured by hours, beneficiaries, concrete deliverables, and lessons learned.

### 4. Visibility for local causes and voices

- Spaces for local social organizations in high-traffic locations, with design support and networking preparation.
- Panels and shared stages where community leaders participate on equal terms, with fair compensation.
- Art installations that tell stories of the territory from a place of dignity.
- Intentional networking between the social sector, philanthropy, corporations, and decision-makers.

### 5. Legacy of community infrastructure

At large-scale events, there is the possibility of leaving useful infrastructure behind: spaces, connectivity, equipment, accessibility improvements, green areas, urban art, technical capabilities. The secret lies in planning the “second life” from the design stage, coordinating maintenance and post-event governance. Legacy is not what is inaugurated during the event; it is what continues to function once the event is gone.



# Measuring social impact with rigor: from stories to evidence

- Resources invested: money, time, expertise, and networks.
- Actions executed: internships, local purchasing, workshops, volunteering, and facilitated connections.
- Immediate deliverables: people trained, training hours, contracts generated, and infrastructure improved.
- Short- and medium-term changes: skills acquired, improved employability, and strengthened suppliers.
- Long-term transformations: social mobility, local business expansion, and more resilient ecosystems.

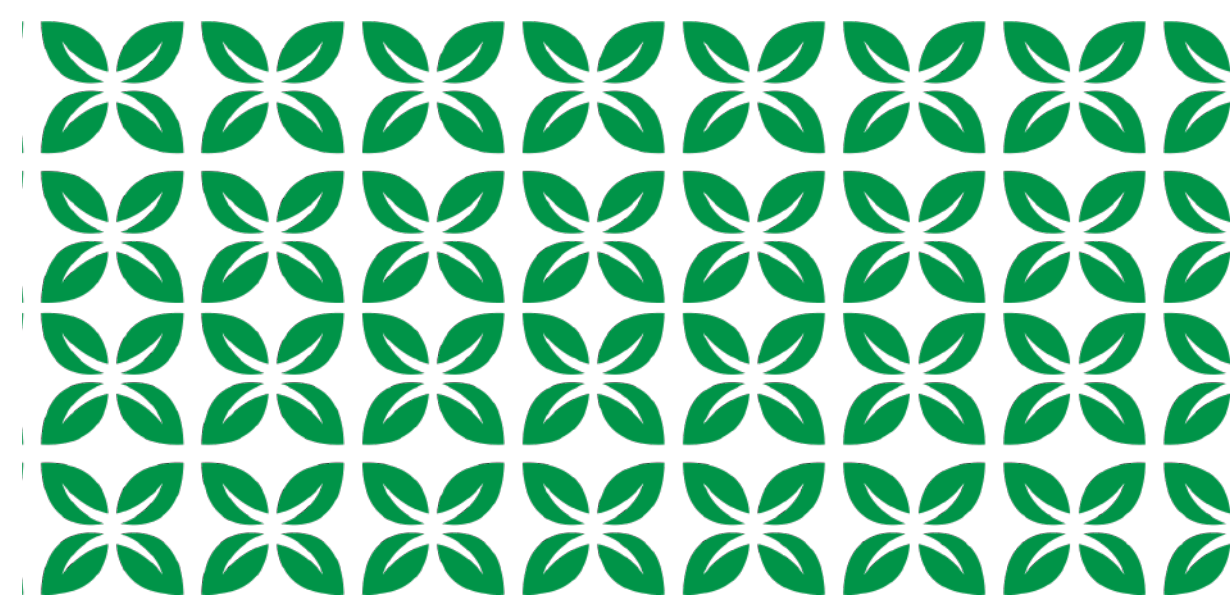
The process requires three moments: defining a baseline before the event, recording data during, and conducting follow-up afterward (at 3, 6, and 12 months).

Without follow-up, measurement is limited to outputs and cannot demonstrate sustainable outcomes.

## Communicating social impact with ethics and professionalism

- Tell real human stories without exploiting vulnerability.
- Avoid savior narratives: the community co-creates, it is not “rescued.”
- Ask for permission, protect privacy, and respect dignity.
- Report with transparency: achievements, limits, lessons, and items still pending.

The brand should not be the protagonist. The protagonist must be the change built in collaboration.



## The future: events as engines of local development

The most ambitious vision is to see events as a strategic tool for territorial development: activating investment, strengthening productive ecosystems, building capabilities, attracting international networks, and accelerating sector clusters.

When integrated consistently, a virtuous cycle emerges: high-quality events strengthen the local ecosystem, and that ecosystem improves the destination's capacity to attract higher-value events.

If environmental sustainability focuses on reducing negative impacts, the social dimension expands the scope toward generating value in the environment.

When both dimensions are integrated, the event stops being an operational moment and becomes a platform for transformation.



## Trend #10

# Post-Event Stakeholder Reporting — From Lived Experience to Demonstrated Value

## The most common blind spot of sustainable events

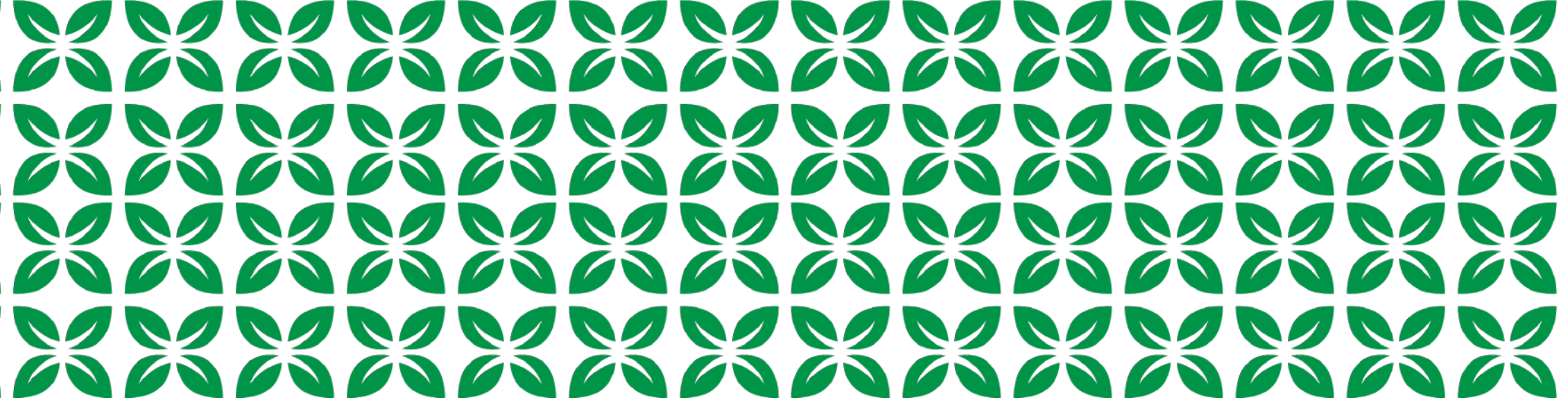
Many corporate events advance decisively toward more sustainable and responsible practices. They incorporate environmental and social criteria into their design, measure key indicators, communicate during execution, and celebrate visible achievements.

However, when the event ends and operations are dismantled, a critical value gap appears: if the impact is not documented, analyzed, and communicated strategically, it dissipates.

**Without post-event reporting, sustainability efforts often remain anecdotal rather than measurable.** With a well-structured report, it becomes a strategic asset, organizational learning, and verifiable evidence for stakeholders.

**A post-event report should function as more than a closing document** — it is the bridge between what the event did and what the organization can demonstrate, improve, and scale.





## From informing to accounting for results

The real paradigm shift is not about telling what was done, but about telling what was achieved. A high-level post-event report fulfills at least four fundamental functions:

- **Transparency** — presenting real, measurable results, not just intentions.
- **Learning** — clearly identifying what worked, what did not, and why.
- **Credibility** — reducing the risk of greenwashing through verifiable data.
- **Decision-making** — feeding continuous improvement and the planning of future events.

# Understanding stakeholders

One of the most frequent mistakes is producing a single, generic report for “everyone.” A strategic approach starts from understanding specific expectations:

## Senior leadership and board of directors

Clear, comparable indicators aligned with risk, reputation, operational efficiency, and strategic opportunities — generally in more executive formats.

## Clients, sponsors, and partners

Coherence between discourse and practice, evidence of real impact, and reputational return from association with the event, with emphasis on verifiable results.

## Attendees

Confirmation that their individual and collective effort made sense, and what concrete impact it generated.

## Suppliers

Feedback, recognition where appropriate, and clarity on future standards.

## Local communities and social actors

Understanding of what was left after the event and how value was created for the territory.

## Internal teams

Operational lessons that allow processes and results to be improved in upcoming editions.





## The five pillars of a post-event report

### 1 Context and commitment

- Purpose of the event.
- Principles that guided decision-making.
- Commitments publicly assumed before the event.
- Scope of the report: what is measured and what is not.

### 2 Measured environmental impact

- **Waste management:** total volume generated, percentage recovered, and comparison with similar events.
- **Energy:** total consumption, efficiency measures, and use of renewable sources.
- **Water:** consumption and conservation actions.
- **Mobility:** modal distribution of attendees and associated emissions.
- **Carbon footprint:** total emissions, avoided emissions, and — where applicable — offsets..

### **3 Visible social impact**

- People directly benefited: students, local suppliers, social organizations.
- Hours of training, mentorship, or volunteering.
- Economic value generated in the local environment.
- Capabilities or infrastructure that remain after the event.
- Brief stories that illustrate aggregate impact — as evidence, not promotional content.

### **4 Attendee participation and behavior**

- Use of sustainable transportation.
- Choice of lower-impact culinary options.
- Use of water stations versus disposable bottles.
- Participation in social or environmental activities.
- Results from perception and satisfaction surveys.

### **5 Lessons learned and next steps**

- What worked particularly well.
- What did not go as expected, and why.
- What would be done differently in a future edition.
- Concrete improvement commitments.



## COP29 as a reference for demonstrating value

Reports from events like the UN climate conferences — including COP29 — show how it is possible to translate operations, decisions, and results into a clear, structured, publicly accessible document for multiple stakeholders. These reports are typically available on official event channels, reinforcing a key lesson: when sustainability is real, it is not hidden — it is documented and shared..

[See the COP29 Sustainability Report](#)

Beyond its global scale, the value of the COP29 Sustainability Report lies in its logical, accessible structure. It does not limit itself to listing actions — it explains context, defines objectives, describes strategies, and presents results in an orderly manner. It covers waste, energy, mobility, food, social impact, and governance, allowing any reader to understand what was done, how it was done, and what was achieved, without needing deep technical knowledge.

# From a single document to a reporting ecosystem

- A complete report as a reference document.
- An executive summary for senior leadership.
- Visual infographics for external communication.
- Internal dashboards with comparable indicators.
- Customized communications for sponsors and partners.
- A closing message to attendees highlighting collective impact.

## Mistakes that weaken the report

- Presenting only percentages without absolute values.
- Comparing without explaining the context.
- Omitting limitations or challenges.
- Using overly promotional language.
- Failing to link results to concrete decisions.
- Publishing the report after interest has already faded.

The rule is simple: clarity, timeliness, and honesty. When done well, the post-event report reinforces corporate reputation, supports certification processes, facilitates future sales and bids, aligns internal teams, and feeds broader corporate sustainability reporting. It stops being an operational cost and becomes a strategic investment.

In the new era of corporate events at sustainability-focused companies, impact does not end when the event closes. It begins when it is analyzed, documented, and shared. The post-event report is the moment when intention becomes evidence, experience becomes learning, and sustainability becomes strategy. Today, credibility depends not only on action, but on the ability to demonstrate results.



# Bonus: The CST — Modernizing Tourism Sustainability for Event Venues

In Costa Rica, tourism sustainability is not just an ideal: it is a concrete tool of competitiveness and responsible management. Since 1997, the Certificate for Sustainable Tourism (CST), promoted by the Costa Rica Tourism Board (ICT), has consolidated itself as one of the country's primary mechanisms for evaluating and recognizing how sustainability criteria are incorporated into the operations of tourism organizations. Its approach turns sustainability into a practical element of management and competitive differentiation, evaluating business-management criteria, social, economic, and environmental impact, as well as category-specific aspects.

The CST standard carries international backing, including from the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, which recognizes it as equivalent to international sustainability criteria — strengthening its technical credibility. It uses multimodal criteria covering business management; social, economic, and cultural impact; and environmental impact. It has structured levels grouped into categories such as basic and elite, evaluating compliance with mandatory and additional criteria.

In 2025, the ICT took a significant step in modernizing the CST by announcing a new standard and a refreshed brand — marking a more agile, inclusive stage aligned with international criteria. This update simplified the certification process, strengthened the indicators, and expanded thematic coverage to address the diverse realities of the country's tourism sector, reinforcing the seal as a competitive advantage for companies seeking to stand out in an increasingly demanding global market.

One of the most relevant transformations of this update was the inclusion of the venues category, incorporating for the first time spaces oriented to meetings, congresses, and conventions. This expansion recognizes that venues play a fundamental role in the sustainability of tourism and that their operations — from waste management to social impact and energy efficiency — must be evaluated under rigorous sustainability criteria.

The Costa Rica Convention Center, operated by Grupo Heroica, was the first venue in the country to obtain this new CST category — a historic milestone that reflects the maturity and commitment of these types of spaces to integrated sustainable practices. Beyond a recognition, this achievement represents a clear signal that public standards also evolve, aligning policies,

incentives, and technical criteria with global demands for environmental, social, and economic responsibility.

The modernization of the CST and its extension to event spaces is an example of how Costa Rica continues consolidating its sustainable-tourism model through the articulation of public policy, technical instruments, and business management.

For events professionals, this evolution represents an opportunity to integrate sustainability into operations, communicate it with credibility, and transform venues and experiences into engines of positive impact.

By adopting these standards, venues not only contribute to the competitiveness of Costa Rican tourism — they also align themselves with global practices that are redefining the value of events in the 21st century.



# When Events Stop Being Mere Gatherings and Become Decisions

The ten trends developed throughout this eBook are technical, strategic, and operational practices already being implemented by organizations that understand sustainability as an integral part of business excellence. Thousands of events across continents apply them with measurable, auditable, and communicable results.

**Sustainability in corporate events is rapidly becoming a baseline expectation rather than a differentiator. Every event reflects a series of operational and strategic decisions** — about the venue, gastronomy, suppliers, mobility, communication, social impact, and reporting — and each one produces concrete effects.

**These ten trends are deeply interconnected.** They function as an interconnected system, where coherence is built or lost in the execution. A sustainable event is not defined by a badge, a one-off action, or a well-crafted narrative, but by the capacity to align strategy, operations, and experience under measurable, verifiable criteria. When this happens, sustainability stops being a cost or an operational burden and becomes a tool for management, reputation, and long-term value.

Costa Rica, for example, offers a favorable context for this approach. Its national culture, its frameworks of local recognition, its commitment to decarbonization, and its leadership in sustainability allow events to be much more than platforms of economic exchange. They can become living showcases of what the country represents — connecting brands, talent, knowledge, and communities with a shared vision of the future.

Looking toward 2026, the real challenge for the meetings industry is not to make events “greener,” but to make better decisions — in design, operations, and measurement. Events conscious of their impact, their responsibility, and their potential as agents of change. Events remembered not only for how well executed they were, but for the coherence they demonstrated, the legacy they left, and the value they proved beyond the last round of applause.

Every event is a statement. The question is no longer whether it can be sustainable, but what it is really saying about the organization that convenes it.





## About the Author

### Álvaro Rojas

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Costa Rica Convention Center / Grupo Heroica*

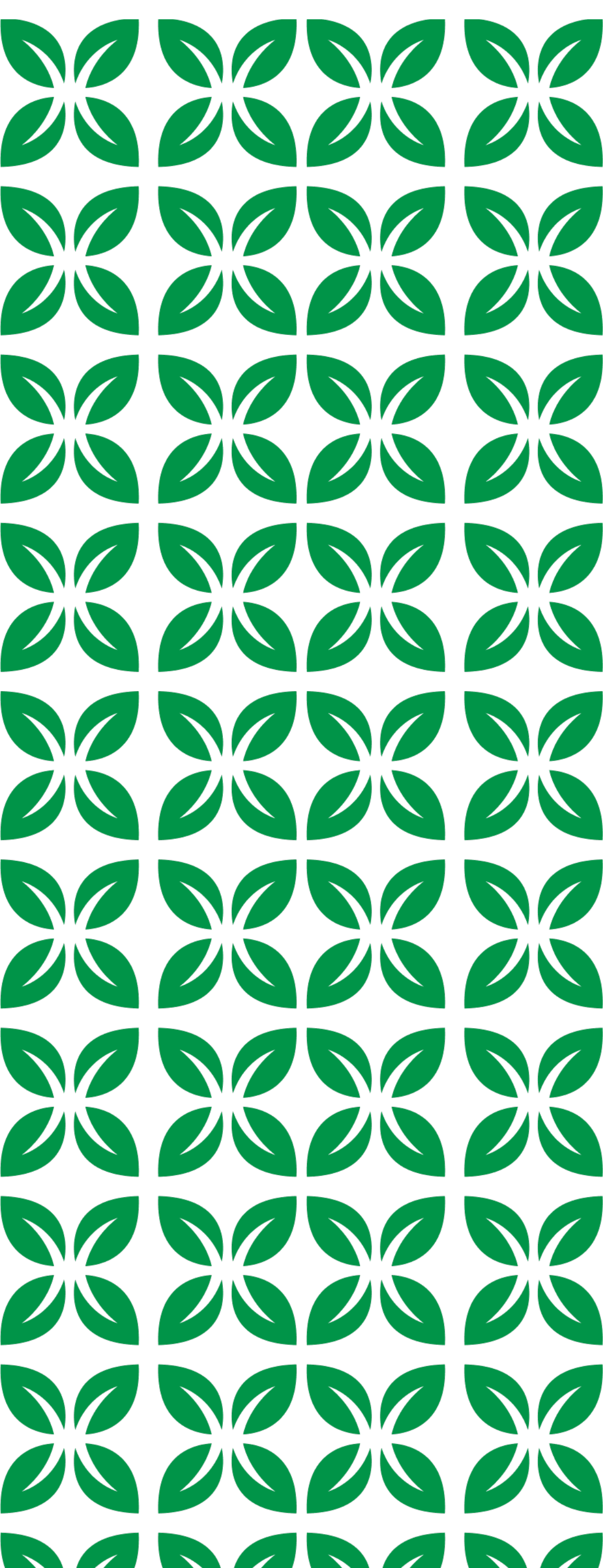
[www.grupoheroica.com](http://www.grupoheroica.com)

Álvaro Rojas currently serves as General Manager of the Costa Rica Convention Center, operated by Grupo Heroica, where he has been one of the most active voices in the region in transforming the meetings industry toward more sustainable, responsible, and globally aligned models. From this platform, the emphasis has been on demonstrating that events are not merely spaces for economic exchange and knowledge-sharing, but arenas with significant potential to generate positive environmental and social impact when managed with strategic vision.

In his role, he has driven comprehensive management that connects operations, sustainability, innovation, and legacy. As Grupo Heroica, they have positioned the Costa Rica Convention Center as a regional reference in responsible practices within the meetings industry. His work focuses on turning every event into an opportunity to reduce impacts, strengthen local value chains, promote the circular economy, and leave tangible benefits that extend well beyond the event itself.

His career has been grounded in operational, commercial, and strategic management, with particular emphasis on organizational transformation, leadership development, and adapting business models to the challenges of Industry 4.0. Throughout his career, he has championed data-driven, context-aware, and purpose-oriented decision-making, integrating sustainability as a cross-cutting axis rather than an accessory element.

Álvaro is the author of several books, including *Y ahora... ¿quién podrá defendernos?*, *El eslabón perdido del liderazgo 4.0*, and *Centros de Convenciones inteligentes*, in which he reflects on the role of leadership in complex environments, the impact of technology, and the need to build more conscious, human-centered organizations prepared for the future.



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# Costa Rica Convention Center

## Operated by Grupo Heroica

Leading the transformation of the meetings industry toward a sustainable and regenerative future.

*“Every event is an opportunity. Every decision is a vote for the future we want to build. Let’s choose wisely.”*

## Contact

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A Comprehensive Technical Guide

# The 10 Trends Shaping Sustainable and Responsible Corporate Events in 2026

By the Costa Rica Convention Center

Operated by **Grupo Heroica**