



2005 Case Study
For the
Sierra Summit 2005
Sierra Club's National Environmental Convention and Expo

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Nearly 4,000 attendees and 148 exhibiting companies (200 booths) from across the nation participated in the inaugural Sierra Summit 2005 produced by the Sierra Club, America's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. The four-day meeting was held in the Club's birth place, San Francisco, on September 8-11, 2005. This event offered an outstanding program filled with renowned speakers including Robert Kennedy Jr, Al Gore, William McDonough, Adrianna Huffington, an evening with Bill Maher and so much more.

Sierra Club's interest in creating a "green" Summit is understandable and absolutely expected. By producing an environmentally responsible conference, the Sierra Club illustrated the important elements of their mission to: practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources, [and] educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment.

With any large gathering, the potential for reducing resource consumption is enormous. The Summit was no exception. All aspects of producing the Summit can impact the environment: from location of the Summit, to the convention center, to the accommodation operations, to the food and beverage offered and how it's served, to the transportation options, to the promotion of the event, to the exhibit hall.

To better understand the potential impact that the details of an event like the Summit can have, consider that a similarly sized, three-day event with 3,000 participants being served two meals a day could use approximately:

- 27,000 plates,
- 36,000 beverage holders,
- 18,000 napkins,
- 45,000 utensils, and
- 13,500 beverage cans or bottles.

HOW GREEN COULD IT BE

Ensuring the site selected for the Summit was an environmentally responsible one was crucial. Fortunately Sierra Club was founded in one of the most environmentally responsible convention cities. Other cities were initially considered, but San Francisco was able to out shine their competitors by having a convention center with solid, progressive environmental practices in place.

PARTNERS IN GREEN

Effectively greening a conference begins with respect for the venue and vendor personnel who will be asked to change their routines. Overcoming human resistance to change requires encouraging a sense of ownership and investment, inviting creativity, and nurturing the awareness that instituting environmentally responsible practices, in most cases, also proves to be cost-effective.

As the green consultant, Meeting Strategies Worldwide began by reviewing the environmental policies and systems of each of the participating facilities and vendors. The Moscone Center had solid recycling systems in place and we wanted to raise the bar. Moscone worked with us to ensure the conference would maximize use

of their current system structure to reduce landfill waste. (The system normally runs at 75% recycling, however, due to compostable service ware used, it was increased by 5%.)

Next, we met with and relayed to the vendors Sierra Club's environmental expectations, opening a dialogue for minimizing environmental impact. The following are the requests made for the hotels and convention center.

For Hotels

- Change the sheets and towels every other day, instead of daily, unless requested by the guest.
- Replace consumable amenities only when they are empty – not on a daily basis.
- Use cleaning products that do not introduce toxins into the air or water.
- Instruct hotel housekeeping staff to shut blinds and turn down the heat/air conditioning during the day in rooms while attendees are gone.

For the Convention Center and Caterers

- Use glass or china (non-disposable) catering plates, cups and glasses.
- Do not use polystyrene.
- Serve condiments in bulk containers, not individual servings, eliminating wasteful packaging. This includes sugar, creamer, butter, cream cheese, etc.
- Use shade-grown coffee.
- Use cloth napkins, whenever possible.
- Donate all leftover food to a local food bank.

HOW GREEN WAS IT?

Requesting environmental practices be implemented was the first step. The next step was to ensure the practices agreed on were included in the contracts. Measuring the environmental components was the third step in evaluating the success of greening the conference. As an example, the hotels and convention center had contractual agreements to honor the green initiatives. The following are excerpts from those contracts:

Hotel agreements included:

In connection with the Event, Hotel is currently practicing or will implement the following:

- ❑ Establish detailed environmental guidelines for Hotel and a strategy to implement them. Consistently communicate the policies in various ways to engage all venue employees, suppliers and client groups.
- ❑ Establish purchasing guidelines to obtain re-useable, recycled items and environmentally friendly products, including ENERGY STAR® equipment, low VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) paints, and cleaning supplies.
- ❑ Enhance Hotel's recycling program to capture paper, cardboard, metals, glass, plastics with a minimum recycling capacity of at least 50%.
- ❑ Offer a composting program (at no additional charge to Sierra Club) to capture all pre- and post-prepared food.
- ❑ Reduce the lights, power and HVAC during move in and move out times.
- ❑ Minimize the energy use by turning off lights in meeting rooms when not in use.
- ❑ Have a strategy in place to reduce and reuse where possible and appropriate to include minimizing paper usage.
- ❑ Train staff to implement environmental policies.
- ❑ Use china service. (If not possible, use biodegradable disposable service ware.)
- ❑ Purchase and serve condiments in bulk.

Additionally, Hotel agrees to work collaboratively with Sierra Club for the duration of this Contract and make reasonable effort to improve the overall environmental performance and efficiency of Hotel on the following:

- ❑ Purchase environmentally responsible cleaning products for:
 - carpets, floors, kitchens and bathrooms: minimum 50% of products used to be environmentally responsible.
- ❑ Donate leftover food in accordance to the San Francisco food donation laws, “All foods prepared in excess will be donated to the local food bank by the exclusive catering service of the Convention Facilities in compliance with the Good Samaritan laws.”

For the duration of this Contract, both Hotel and Sierra Club acknowledge that the process to further green Hotel will be a collaborative one. Sierra Club agrees to provide expertise and recommendations to Hotel on "greening" the facility over the duration of the Contract. Similarly, Hotel agrees to support this commitment internally by engaging and educating all departments of Hotel about this special commitment.

Convention center agreement included:

MOSCONE CENTER agrees that Sierra Club is committed to corporate environmental responsibility and continual improvement. Sierra Club requests MOSCONE CENTER adhere to the following:

MOSCONE CENTER recognizes Sierra Club's commitment and supports Sierra Club's efforts to provide a "green" meeting for its attendees. (Green is defined by the Green Meeting Industry Council as: A green meeting or event that incorporates environmental considerations to minimize its negative impact on the environment. See Convention Industry Council Green Meeting Report for recommended minimum guidelines at www.conventionindustry.org – special projects.) MOSCONE CENTER agrees to work collaboratively with Sierra Club for the duration of this contract to improve the overall environmental performance and efficiency of the MOSCONE CENTER with the following goals.

- ❑ Establish detailed environmental guidelines for the convention center and a strategy to implement them. Consistently communicate the policies in various ways to engage all venue employees, suppliers and client groups.
- ❑ Develop an energy management program to reduce consumption of electricity, including a plan to phase-in the program. Consider having a third-party energy audit to see where energy savings can be generated.
- ❑ Enhance the convention center recycling program to capture paper, cardboard, metals, glass, plastics with a minimum recycling capacity of at least 50%.
- ❑ Offer a composting program (at no additional charge to Sierra Club) to capture all pre- and post-prepared food.
- ❑ Reduce the lights, power and HVAC during move in and move out times in the exhibit hall.
- ❑ Minimize the energy use by turning off lights in meeting rooms when not in use.
- ❑ Offer large containers of drinking water rather than individual bottles in the public areas at no cost to Sierra Club. If additional water is required in the meeting rooms, Sierra Club will contract with the provider.
- ❑ Have a strategy in place to reduce and reuse where possible and appropriate to include minimizing paper usage.
- ❑ Train staff to implement environmental policies.

- ❑ Purchase bathroom supplies: minimum 100% recycled products for hand towels and toilet paper.
- ❑ Purchase environmentally responsible cleaning products for
 - carpets, floors, kitchens and bathrooms: minimum 50% of products used to be environmentally responsible.
- ❑ Request vendors utilize reusable crates/cartons and have environmental practices in place.

Onsite Caterer Must:

- ❑ Purchase and serve juice, iced tea, coffee and water in pitchers.
- ❑ Use china service. (If not possible, use biodegradable disposable service ware.)
- ❑ Donate leftover food in accordance to the San Francisco food donation program and the Good Samaritan guidelines which state, "All foods prepared in excess will be donated to the local food bank by the exclusive catering service of the Convention Facilities in compliance with the Good Samaritan laws.
- ❑ Work with Sierra Club at no cost to implement food composting.
- ❑ Purchase locally grown and organic foods and products wherever possible and affordable (minimum 30% of meals) at menu prices that reflect actual costs.
- ❑ Purchase and serve condiments in bulk.
- ❑ Offer sustainable menu choices with comparable non-sustainable menu prices.

Recycling

The measurement of the environmental impacts was easy to do in the area of recycling because of the Moscone Center’s ability to track waste. Subsequently, one of the most noteworthy examples of the power of partnership was the convention center’s recycling. According to figures from Moscone, the following materials were recycled:

An estimated one bale of cardboard (bag stuffing, kitchen and exhibits)	2000 lbs
Mixed paper (actual weight)	4200 lbs
Can & bottles (estimated 1/4 of total)	490 lbs
Exhibitor wood chips and leftover wood	500 lbs
Exhibitor food donation (actual weight)	562 lbs
Compost two 4-yard bins (estimated)	6000 lbs
Pallets for reuse	500 pallets

Results: an estimated 80% of waste was diverted, not including food donation from SMG's Catering Department. Only 2,780 pounds of garbage went to the landfill. The efforts and ability to compost all disposable items increased the Moscone average recycling numbers by 5%. This is a legacy that the Summit should be proud of building.

The success of the recycling was due to participation by:

- Convention center and union staff ensuring extra attention was made to support the existing recycling efforts.
- Attendees who were also key to the success of the captured recycling material by their disposal of trash in the appropriate bins.

Food and Beverage

Food and beverage presented another area to capture environmental data. Catering by SMG, the facility's caterer, put together a menu healthier than its usual offerings. In addition, the company didn't use polystyrene and black plastic to-go containers. Instead they purchased disposable products made of material that can be composted. Subsequently, all of the service ware for the meals was able to be added in with the food compost resulting in a decrease of landfill waste.

- The caterer arranged for 200 lbs of consumable, leftover food to be donated.
- Served 300 vegetarian/vegan meals.
- Served Sierra Club fair trade/shade grown coffee.
- Approximately 31-50% of the food served was local and/or organic.
- All condiments were served in bulk containers. Saving approximately 51-75% of the cost over serving individually packaged products. The only product not recyclable or able to be composted was the chip bags sold at the concessions.

Marketing, Communication and Registration

Generally, marketing and communicating to attendees of the greening efforts of a conference is essential. In the case of the Sierra Summit, the expectations of attendees for the conference to be green was a given. Some of the highlights for communication were:

- Soy-based inks and the paper with the highest percentage of post-consumer recycled paper were used for all printed materials, including the program.
- Signage used was donated post event.
- Recycled name badge holders were turned in to be recycled.

PARTICIPANT EDUCATION

Educated Vendors

Green meetings are becoming more popular, but not every city, convention center, hotel or caterer knows what to expect when greening an event. While the Moscone Center has a wonderful reputation for their green practices, the requests made by the Summit raised the bar.

The Summit created opportunities to raise awareness and provide information to venues and vendors about green meeting practices and why their request would have a positive environmental and economic impact.

LESSONS LEARNED

As with every project there are opportunities to learn from the experience. The lessons learned reflected here center around the environmental impact of the Summit. The following lessons are shared with the intention to educate and motivate others to take on greening their events.

1. Know your community and its infrastructure. Contact local EPA regarding rules and resources. Make sure waste management is in place; otherwise you'll be asking for things that can't be achieved. Research local laws.
2. Even with solid environmental practices in place new ideas and products should be considered to continue to improve practices.
3. Start the greening process with site selection. This allows you to minimize travel required and to choose a facility that has environmental management systems already in place. Facilities should be interviewed regarding their environmental policies and practices as criteria in decision-making. It also influences the

market long-term by raising awareness that clients are increasingly basing their site selections on the environmental policies of hotels and conference venues.

4. Stay the course, and don't be dissuaded by expense. Most greening efforts save money. Though some may presently cost more, environmental consciousness is permeating buying practices and driving costs down.
5. The original hotel package was changed late in the process to support unions, selecting union preferred properties. As a result, implementing the original environmental practices with the new hotels was limited.
6. The trend toward greening the meeting and hospitality industry is strengthening, which means consumers like Sierra Club members have more options.
7. The challenge is to connect green products and services with real world practices. Meeting planners, businesses, and individual consumers have an opportunity to bridge the process.

CONCLUSION

The greening of the Summit in San Francisco was successful in a number of ways. In the short-term, the conference minimized its impact on the local ecosystem. Long term, it raised awareness and educated venues, vendors and attendees.

The environmental practices in place for the Summit proved to honor and exemplify two key elements of the Sierra Club's mission. "Practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources... Educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment." Unquestionably, greening the Summit demonstrated, through deeds, Sierra Club's commitment to the planet.

But there are more than global benefits to the greening of Summit. Because every event that identifies environmental stewardship as a priority is a step in the right direction, Sierra Club is now part of the growing number of organizations illustrating how all gatherings, regardless of whether they involve industry, nonprofits or religious organizations can be more environmentally responsible.