

Carbon Offsets – The Basics

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What is a carbon offset? The “official” definition of a carbon offset (from Climate Trust) is, “carbon offsets are the process of reducing a ton of carbon dioxide emissions in another location for the emissions you cause in either your home, office, commute, travel or other activities that use energy and cause emissions.”

Carbon offsets enable anyone to reduce their climate footprint by supporting projects, typically energy efficiency, renewable energy, sequestration, biomass, etc. that reduce carbon dioxide emissions to offset one's own climate footprint.

What does a carbon offset have to do with meetings? Many companies and organizations have become concerned with climate change issues especially related to carbon emissions. Carbon offsets are a way to mitigate the carbon emissions that occur when attendees travel to meetings. Offsetting your event offers a value-added component for your attendees and can also offer some good PR. Attendees can feel good about participating in your event knowing their carbon emissions are offset.

What does it mean for an event to be carbon neutral? The term carbon neutral implies that if enough carbon offsets are collected to mitigate the meeting's carbon emissions, the event is considered carbon neutral. Caution: most carbon neutral claims do not include all the aspects of carbon emissions that are necessary to produce an event or conference. For example: the emissions necessary to provide the food and beverage served at the event are usually not considered. The emissions caused with exhibitor freight and products provided for a trade show are also not included. It would be better to use the phrase "working towards a carbon neutral event."

How do I go about arranging for carbon offsets for my events? There are a variety of carbon offset options. There are organizations that plant trees. There are ones that invest in renewable energy projects. There are others that accept offsets that are retired or donated from corporations. To learn more about carbon offset options, check out www.climateservices.com.

How do I calculate the amount of carbon offsets needed to offset my event? The carbon offset provider you select should be able to estimate the total carbon emissions expected by calculating the demographics of your attendees (in other words where the attendees will be coming from, are they within driving distance, are they flying, etc), the convention and/or hotel space you're using over what period of time, what forms of transportation you're using during the event, etc.

There are also calculators available for you to do your own calculations; however, if you're planning a large event and offsetting energy use as well, I highly recommend you use a provider that can calculate them for you.

Who pays for the carbon offsets? Four options:

1. Your organization pays for the offsets.
2. You offer the opportunity on the registration form for your attendees to pay for their own emissions (prices range from \$6-\$25 per attendee).
3. You get the offsets sponsored.
4. You use a combination of the above.

Carbon offsets are the newest, seemingly easiest way for organizations to mitigate some of their environmental footprint. Caution though: Not all carbon offsets are alike. For more information, check on the Resources section at www.meetingstrategiesworldwide.com.