



UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST
ASSOCIATION OF
CONGREGATIONS

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The America's Center
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Worldwide**

GREEN MEETINGS CASE STUDY

In 2005 the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) initiated a commitment to integrate environmental responsibility goals into their annual General Assembly (GA). This commitment reflects the UUA's desire to align how their meetings are staged with their organizational value: *Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.* Efforts in Fort Worth, Texas, in 2005 laid the groundwork for green meetings work that was significantly expanded at the 2006 Assembly in St. Louis, Missouri.

The UUA's efforts to green the GA were able to expand significantly in 2006 primarily due to their ability to integrate environmentally responsible measures into event contracts. Another key ingredient in the success of the meeting was the identification of clear environmental goals and targets. Sufficient lead time to integrate greening clauses into contracts and tying final pay-

ment for services to receipt of environmental documentation is a primary reason the UUA was able to meet the environmental goals established.

With each year the organization has stepped up its effort and identified new opportunities for environmental responsibility. The approach to this process has been systematic, identifying environmental and economic cost savings opportunities associated with all aspects of the meeting and working to achieve them in a 'stepping stone' fashion from one GA to the next. This includes careful attention to the following areas of meeting management: destination selection, accommodations, event venue, transportation, food and beverage, exhibitions, communications and marketing and on-site office procedures. The specific achievements of the 2006 GA are outlined in detail below.

GREEN EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

- Provision of a voluntary carbon offset. 20% of the 4,000 plus delegates participated in the offset, pooling \$5078 for Carbonfund.org.
- Introduction of green language into the request for proposals process to identify GA host cities beyond 2009.
- Inclusion of an extensive and specific environmentally responsible meeting clause into the contract with the convention centre and caterer.
- Changing of hotel practices to adopt permanent linen and towel reuse, as well as communication to delegates of vendors unwilling to sign environmental clauses.

Engaging vendors

Building on the success of 2005 the UUA again worked with Meeting Strategies Worldwide (MSWW) to review environmental services available at facilities and from vendors. MSWW worked to negotiate and develop specific environmental requirements for each GA partner as follows prior to contracting with them:

THE AMERICA'S CENTER

- Provide documentation about air quality control and systems.
- Reduce the lights, power and HVAC during move-in and move-out times in the exhibit hall.
- Minimize energy use by turning off lights in meeting rooms when not in use.
- Offer large containers of drinking water rather than individual bottles.
- Have low-flow toilets and other water-saving devices in restrooms
- Sweep, not spray, parking lots, sidewalks and driveways.
- Implement a recycling program to recycle glass, aluminum, plastic, paper, grease and cardboard.
- Have a policy in place to reduce and reuse where possible and appropriate to include minimizing paper usage.
- Donate left-over food.
- Train staff to implement environmental policies.
- Use china service. (If not possible, use biodegradable disposable service ware.)
- Work with the organization at no cost to implement a composting system if available.
- Purchase locally grown and organic foods and products wherever possible and affordable (minimum 15% of meals).
- Purchase and serve condiments in bulk.
- Purchase and serve juice, iced tea, coffee and water in pitchers or bulk containers.
- Offer sustainable menus with comparable prices.
- Purchase bathroom supplies: minimum 20% 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.
- Establish a program with wholesalers to utilize reusable crates or cartons.
- Request vendors have environmental practices in place.

HOST HOTELS

- Be located within walking distance or easily accessible by public transportation.
- Implement the following:
 - a towel and linen reuse program
 - not replacing amenities unless empty
 - shutting off HVAC/lights when guests are not in their room
 - no polystyrene containers used in banquet or take-out service
 - recycling of paper, cans, bottles and plastic
- Have water conservation practices such as low-flow showerheads and toilets.
- Implement a recycling program to recycle: glass, aluminum, plastic, paper, grease and cardboard.
- Have a policy in place to reduce and reuse where possible and appropriate to include minimizing paper usage.
- Donate left-over food.
- Train staff to implement environmental policies.
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CATERER

- Implement water saving strategies. For example, not pre-filling water glasses or providing a saucer under the coffee cup. Offering large containers of drinking water rather than individual bottles.
- Reduce the use of ice in drinking water.
- Implement a recycling program to recycle glass, aluminum, plastic, paper, grease and cardboard.
- Have a policy in place to reduce and reuse where possible and appropriate to include minimizing paper usage.
- Donate left-over food.
- Train staff to implement environmental policies.
- Use china service. (If not possible, use biodegradable disposable service ware.)
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- Offer sustainable menus with comparable prices.

EXHIBITORS

- Recycling participation – Exhibitors will participate in the facility's recycling efforts by ensuring they recycle cardboard, freight boxes, plastic wrappings during move in and move out.
- Minimize packing materials – Exhibitors will make a conscious effort to minimize packing materials.
- Environmentally responsible packing materials – Recyclable, biodegradable shipping and packing materials or environmentally responsible alternatives are to be used.
- Avoid large quantities of collateral – Bring samples or small amounts of materials and offer to send information upon request. Avoid dated material.
- Printed materials – Printed materials must be soy-/vegetable-based ink and post-consumer, recycled paper (minimum 30%).
- Environmentally responsible giveaways – Giveaways should be made of recycled, responsibly grown natural fiber, non-toxic, bio-degradable and that are useful, not merely promotional in nature. Any food (candy, etc) should be sustainably grown, processed and packaged.
- Gift items made from endangered or threatened species – These items are NOT allowed.
- Design and displays – Both should incorporate indoor air quality principals and be made with environmentally responsible materials include energy efficient lighting if applicable.
- Signage – Must be reusable, made of recycled materials or

donated.

- Transportation – Reduce the environmental impact resulting from transportation while supporting regional economy. Partner with local contractor, manage and use local labor. Minimize transportation to and from show site. Use bio-diesel fueled or alternative fuel trucks. Offset transportation emissions with carbon offset program.
- Donations – An area will be provided to collect any materials that are eligible for donation.

DECORATORS

- Minimize energy use - Reducing the lights, power and HVAC during move in and move out times in the exhibit hall.
- Exhibitor Kits/Service - Kits will be available electronically via the website. Any binders that are mailed to exhibitors will be made from 35% post-consumer recovered fiber and recycled paper. The contents of the binder are printed on post-consumer recycled paper.
- Tabletop Coverings - Use of pre-cut, to length, table top vinyl, wooden tables, bio-degradable trash can liners.
- Booth headers – Should be made from renewable forest by products with water-based ink.
- Aisle Signs/Show Signage /Double-sided signs, graphics and logos – Use products made of environmentally responsible components with applied and removable water base graphics.
- Booth and Aisle Carpet – Carpet should be made from and fully recyclable into more fiber and backing or at least recycled after use.
- Equipment - Use natural gas fork lifts and hand carts to move exhibitor freight in and out of the show to assist in the air quality.
- Shipping and packing materials - Make available to exhibitors and show management biodegradable shipping and packing materials.
- Transportation - Reduce the environmental impact resulting from transportation while supporting regional economy. Partner with local contractor, manage and use local labor. Minimize transportation to from show site.
- Staff Training - Staff will be trained to assist facility with properly disposing of recyclable materials and other waste. Personnel will be informed about the environmentally responsible practices to be implemented during this show.



Achievements

Pre-planning enabled the UUA to achieve significant environmental success at the 2006 GA.

ACCOMMODATION

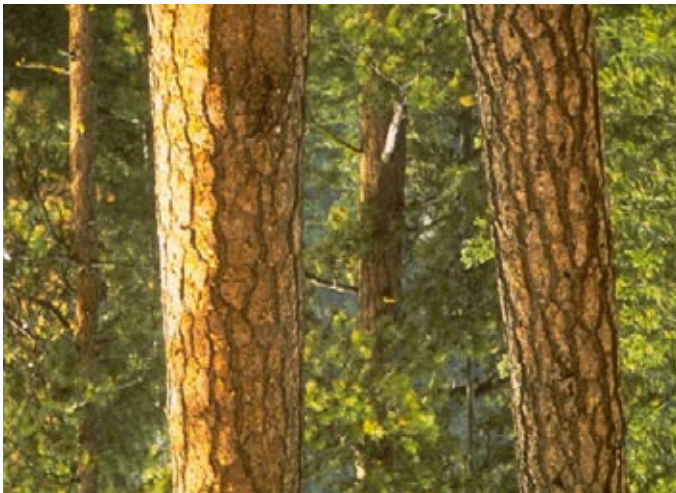
All originally contracted host hotels agreed to comply with the sustainability measures requested by the UUA.

In addition to supporting hotels willing to comply with green practices, the UUA also advised delegates of those hotels which were unwilling to participate, including the following information for delegates on their web site: “Please be advised that the Hampton Inn was unwilling to work with us in our efforts to promote environmental sustainability and so is not one of our contracted hotels.”

All hotels, with the exception of the Holiday Inn which had an established program, introduced linen and towel reuse to comply with GA greening measures. The Renaissance said they are going to be implementing a permanent linen and towel reuse program by the end of 2006.

DESTINATION SELECTION

The UUA has now included request for proposal language encouraging prospective destinations of the Assemblies beyond 2009 to outline how hosting the meeting in their city would help meet sustainability goals.



EVENT VENUE

25-50% of convention center waste was recycled including: 250 lbs of cardboard, 900 lbs of paper, and 150 lbs of cans/plastic bottles.

Cans were donated to be recycled by a local charity group.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE

All of the following were provided: bulk condiments, vegan and vegetarian meals, and fair-trade, shade-grown coffee.

1 - 10% of food served was locally grown and/or organic.

Food concessions switched from Styrofoam and plastic containers to compostable paper. Since the GA meal functions are almost exclusively concession only, this is a significant factor.

The UUA's GA helped to establish a permanent partnership between the America's Center and Operation Food Search, the St. Louis regional food bank, to provide un-served food to the poor and hungry in the region.

EXHIBITIONS

Over 76% of vendors made use of online exhibitor kits.

Over 76% of products and services used by the exhibition company were sourced locally.

Left over materials were donated to a local charity.

TRANSPORTATION

The UUA introduced an optional \$6 carbon offset as part of the conference registration process. Voluntary donations were collected and forwarded to Carbonfund.org, a non-profit organization that educates the public about the issue of climate change and works with businesses and civic groups on CO2 reduction programs. 20% of GA registrants participated and \$5078 was collected for Carbonfund.org.

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION

Rather than mailing paper copies of the General Assembly agenda to congregations, Assembly organizers made it available on-line.

Registration packets, which require envelopes and pieces of paper, are not used. Registration confirmations were sent via e-mail.

Soy-based inks and the paper with the highest percentage of post-consumer recycled paper are used for all printed materials, including the program.

Signs were designed and purchased with re-use at future GA's in mind.

Lessons Learned

Put it in writing. Although the UUA had selected St. Louis as their host city prior to deciding to green the GA, they had not contracted with local vendors to provide meeting services. This enabled integration of specific environmental clauses into contracts with the convention center. This was the first time the UUA and the America's Center had developed and signed an environmental contract clause. Pre-planning and the ability to negotiate green practices as part of the contracting phase enabled a higher standard of environmental performance than might have been possible had contracts already been signed.

Providing greener concessions. Food and beverage service for the GA was provided largely as concessions. This presented challenges for waste minimization. Although concessionaires were unable to provide china and linen service, they were able to change their regular plastic and Styrofoam packaging to more environmentally-preferable and compostable paper alternatives.

Knowing your audience. Like many organizations, the UUA must reconcile its changing meeting practices with the attitudes and needs of its constituent attendees. In the past three years, many measures have been put in practice to reduce the amount of printed materials and mail produced by GA planners. In principle, these efforts are widely supported by the General Assembly community. Use of online registration has increased

from 28% of registrants in 2003 to 64% of registrants in 2006. However, the Association has felt pushback from the community when online communication is offered without alternative hard copy materials. Some attendees have limited comfort or ability to use electronic communication and many are unwilling to part with the comfort of receiving their printed program in the mail before traveling to the meeting. Future opportunities to reduce paper use and printing and mail out cost will rely on delegates becoming more comfortable with online communication.



The UUA's approach to greening the 2006 General Assembly in St. Louis has shown that pre-planning and contract language play a significant role in ensuring environmental measures requested are implemented by event facilities and vendors. The UUA has significant buying power that, when used to support environmental practices, can advance the capacity of the meeting industry to minimize waste and curb resource consumption, both of which significantly benefit the earth. The UUA has been able to improve significantly on groundwork laid at the 2005 General Assembly and has created a template for expanding efforts into the future.

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