

## NEWS

## Study Shows Greener Meetings Despite Economy

By Melissa Mercer

A recent AMC Institute study shows one-third of associations surveyed were willing to increase their expense budgets to ensure a greener meeting in 2009, despite the slumping economy.

This would continue the sustainability trend since the study also revealed that four out of five meetings in 2008 were more sustainable than in 2007.

"In the tightening economy, where for-profit and not-for-profit companies alike are cutting back on resources and programming, it's impressive that one-third of associations are

increasing meeting budgets in the name of sustainability," said John Francis, president of AMC Institute's Board of Directors. "As the survey results show, our AMC-managed associations are committed to social responsibility and are making the most of their meetings platform—increasingly greening materials and meeting activities, and sending an eco-friendly message to millions of attendees."

The survey revealed that associations—nearly 400 associations were represented by the 30 Association Management Companies (AMC) who responded—were implementing dozens of sustainability measures

to reduce the meeting's negative impact on the environment, some of which can be accompanied by a hefty price tag.

Among other trends, AMC's are increasingly investing in biodegradable products, locally-grown, organic food, and linen re-use program for their meetings.

"We're moving more toward electronic promotions and Web-based registration in order to cut paper and postage, converting from printed programs to CDs or Web-based materials, and using less Styrofoam and other paper goods such as plates, cups, utensils for food functions," said Miriam Yanders, a meeting plan-

ner at Drake & Company, an AMC Institute-accredited AMC based in St. Louis, Mo.

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But as the adage goes: what goes around, comes around. Even though associations are willing to increase their expense budgets, they may experience a high return on other cost-saving initiatives in the long haul. According to a Dec. 2008 white paper issued by Meeting Strategies Worldwide, companies committed to sustainable practices tend to operate more leanly by saving on energy costs and overall input costs.

For example, an association conducting a 1,300-attendee, 2-day conference will save about \$2,000 by reducing handouts—all while saving almost 500 pounds of wood. By eliminating water bottles at a 5-day conference with 1,200 attendees will save an association nearly \$48,000.

But according to Greg Schultz, vice president of The Sherwood Group, Inc., an Illinois-based, accredited AMC Institute-member AMC, the motivation does not lie solely in the economic savings that could result from implementing green initiatives.

"Everybody wants to be good stewards for the environment and therefore organizations are looking to be more environmentally responsible primarily because it's what their members want, at least in the short term," Schultz told USAE. "We're hoping to help all our clients move in that direction in a meaningful way and achieve savings at the same time, and it will make business sense in the end because they're members want it."

Both Schultz and Tracey Messina, executive director of the Convene Green Alliance, a grassroots organization dedicated to advancing sustainability, anticipate the sustainability trend to expand throughout 2009.

"Greening your meeting doesn't have to cost more and a greater number of attendees are expecting environmentally friendly events," Messina told USAE. "You can't put a price tag on the competitive advantage of going green...or the negative publicity that can result from not going green. The economy is going to recover eventually, and when it does, we will still be facing an environmental crisis."

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