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Vision & Intelligence

EVIDENCE BRIEF
NOVEMBER 2026

EVIDENCE BRIEF · SUSTAINABILITY

Green Wins Bids, Not Buyers

What drives event greening?

Sustainability ranks last among the short-term business issues of exhibition companies worldwide. Studies of business events, fairs and festivals show why greening happens anyway: business events go green because committed people push it, because it helps win bids and because corporate clients demand it, while fairs go green to save money.

By Eventamin · How we work 12 November 2026 Worldwide, Australia, U.S.

5 studies · 3 industry sources

event greening | sustainable business events | green meetings | sustainability drivers | corporate social responsibility | convention bureaus | green procurement | sustainable development goals | MICE sustainability | exhibition industry issues

Also in Destinations and impact

EDITION	Evidence brief · Published 12 November 2026
DOI	https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24378104
CITE AS	Eventamin. (2026). Green Wins Bids, Not Buyers: What Drives Event Greening? [Evidence brief]. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24378104
WEB EDITION	eventamin.com/evidence/sustainability/what-drives-event-greening, with interactive charts, chart data and the corrections log
LICENCE	Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) · © 2026 Eventamin

KEY FINDING

Greening at business events is pulled by bids and corporate clients' policies and pushed by committed individuals; at community fairs it follows cost savings. Customer demand and current regulation play little role so far.

Four studies, 2010–2024; industry data 2026

Key findings

- **Sustainability ranks last.** In June 2026, five percent of exhibition companies worldwide named sustainability as their most important short-term business issue, compared with 19 percent for the economy in their home market [1].
- **Bids and champions drive business events.** Senior Australian business events leaders named personal values, advantage in bids, image, clients' sustainability policies and anticipated regulation as the drivers of greening [2].
- **Green credentials become a requirement.** The same leaders expected green credentials to turn from a competitive edge into a condition for winning business [2].
- **Fairs go green to save money.** Two U.S. county fairs adopted digital tools to cut costs and sell more tickets, and lower paper use and waste followed as side effects [3].
- **Customers are not the push.** Customer demand for green products was lower than expected, and cost was the main barrier to greening [2].

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FOR THE MARKET

Market outcomes

What the studies mean for each part of the industry.

Organisers & associations	The strongest lever is the buyer's procurement policy. Sustainability criteria in bid documents and client contracts are where greening decides business.
Venues & destinations	Green investment is easier to fund when framed in operating savings as well as image; in leaner markets, savings are what pay for it. Simpler accreditation would remove a barrier the business events sector itself names.
Exhibitors & sponsors	Corporate clients' sustainability requirements travel down the supply chain to events. Measured results carry more weight than accreditation logos.

Sustainability among the industry's business issues

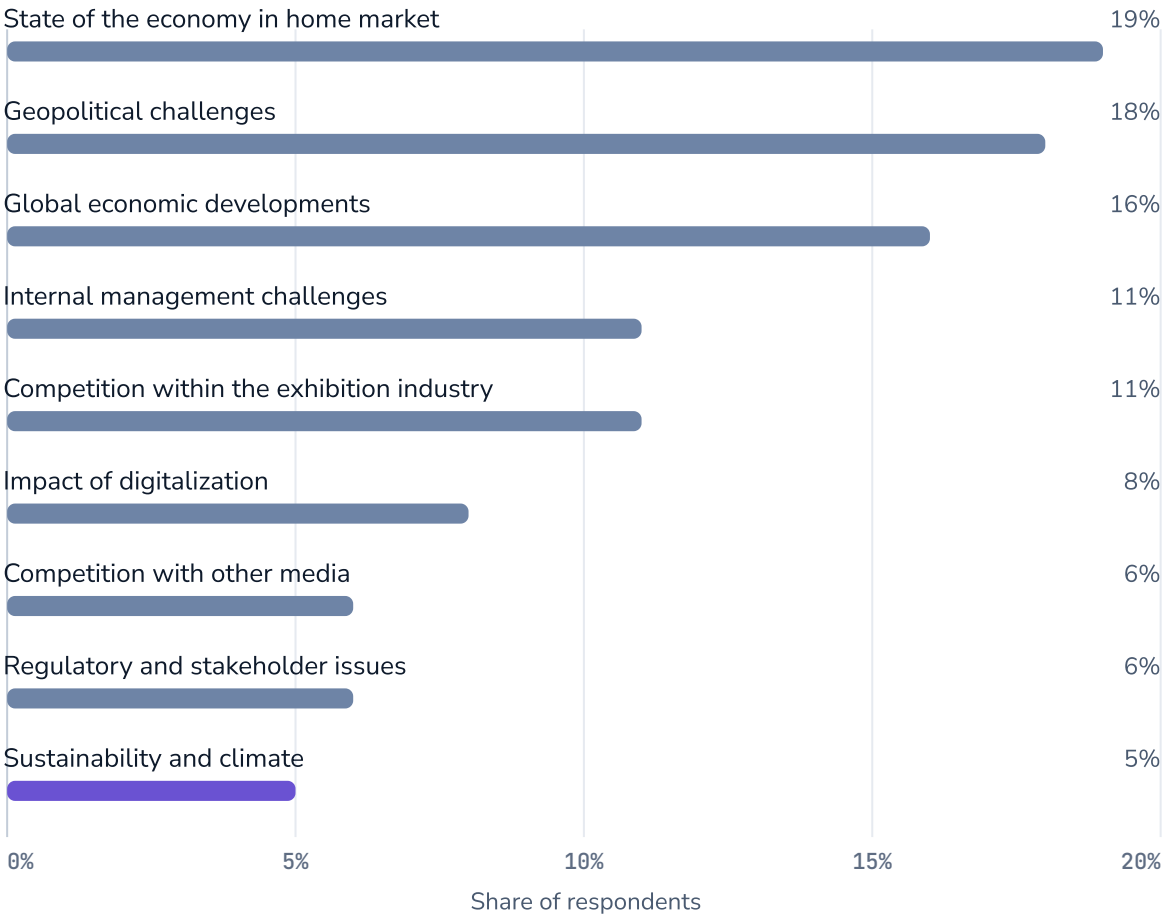
Sustainability ranks last among the exhibition industry's current business issues. In UFI's Global Exhibition Barometer, conducted in June 2026 among 466 companies in 59 countries, five percent of respondents named sustainability as their most important short-term issue, behind the economy in their home market (19 percent), geopolitical challenges (18 percent) and global economic developments (16 percent)[1]. In the medium term, sustainability rose to joint fifth place with 10 percent[1].

Commitments have run ahead of practice. The first reporting cycle of the Net Zero Carbon Events initiative in October 2025 showed a wide gap between pledges and published reduction plans[4]. Business events, with direct spending of around

1.29 trillion U.S. dollars in 2025, are the segment in which greening has been studied least[5,6].

Most important short-term business issues for exhibition companies worldwide as of June 2026

Share of respondents.



Source: UFI · Release date: July 2026 · Region: Worldwide · Survey period: June 2026 · Number of respondents: 466

Drivers of greening at business events

Business events go green for internal and commercial reasons. Interviews with ten senior leaders of Australian convention bureaus, convention centers, associations and professional conference organizers found a sector that felt a push toward sustainability, led by convention centers[2]. Committed individuals acted as environmental champions, and green credentials were included in bid documents

as a competitive advantage that interviewees expected to fade as all competitors claimed it[2].

Image mattered, including being seen to be green, and corporate clients' sustainability policies flowed down the supply chain[2]. The sector also greened to get ahead of future regulation and accreditation. Communities, suppliers, banks and most customers did not push for greening[2].

Cost was the main barrier, followed by time and the absence of sector regulation[2]. Confusing accreditation schemes held back uptake: around a third of Australian business events companies held green accreditation at the time[2].

Drivers of event greening, by event setting

Classification of each source's findings.

Driver · Weak driver · Not a driver · Not studied

	Business events, Australia	County fairs, U.S.	Review of 247 studies
Personal values and champions	✓	✗	·
Competitive advantage in bids	✓	·	·
Image and reputation	✓	✗	✓
Clients' sustainability policies	✓	·	·
Anticipated regulation	✓	·	·
Cost savings	✗	✓	✓
Customer demand	◐	✗	·
Current regulation	✗	·	·

Sources: Mair & Jago; Slocum & Lee; Cavallin Toscani et al. · Release dates: 2010; 2014; 2024 · Regions: Australia; United States; Worldwide · Classification: Eventamin

Drivers of greening at fairs and festivals

Community events go green to save money. One of two U.S. county fairs studied adopted online ticketing and digital communication because of financial pressure and the need for efficiency; the other held back for fear of added financial risk[3]. Paper use and waste fell, and one fair started an environmental education program, but sustainability arrived as a by-product of cost savings[3]. Neither fair marketed itself as green[3].

A review of 247 studies on environmental sustainability in the event industry lists the same pattern: cost savings and image as drivers, and a lack of resources and knowledge as barriers[7]. The two findings fit together once the type of event is considered. Where clients are corporations with reporting duties, greening is pulled through contracts and bids; where budgets are small and audiences local, it is pushed by the finance line.

Beyond greener events

Greener events address only part of the sustainability question. Most event sustainability efforts are environmental and stop at the event's boundary, with less waste and lower emissions, while events could also contribute to sustainable development in their host communities and change attendees' behavior[8]. Evidence that events change behavior remains scarce[8].

The research has rarely looked at business events. Of 159 studies on sustainability in event tourism published between 2003 and 2022, 14, or 8.9 percent, covered business events such as meetings, conventions and exhibitions[6]. Festivals and cultural events accounted for 50 studies and sport events for 47[6]. Economic outcomes were coded more than twice as often as environmental ones[6].

Notes on the data

The figures are based on four studies published between 2010 and 2024: interviews with ten senior Australian business events leaders, case studies of two U.S. county fairs, a special issue of 16 papers and a review of 159 studies,

complemented by a review of 247 studies on event sustainability[2,3,6–8]. The business events evidence rests on a small number of interviews, and no study measures how much greening each driver produces or tests whether green credentials win bids. The classification of drivers is Eventamin's coding of the reported findings. The Net Zero Carbon Events result is taken from the publisher's summary.

Sources

● Study ○ Industry source

1 UFI. (2026, July). Global Exhibition Barometer, 37th edition [Survey report]. Retrieved November 7, 2026, from ufi.org — First-hand

2 Mair, J., & Jago, L. (2010). The development of a conceptual model of greening in the business events tourism sector [Journal article]. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 18(1), 77–94.* https://doi.org/10.1080/09669580903291007 — First-hand

3 Slocum, S. L., & Lee, S. (2014). Green ICT practices in event management: Case study approach to examine motivation, management and fiscal return on investment [Journal article]. *Information Technology & Tourism, 14, 347–362.* https://doi.org/10.1007/s40558-014-0019-3 — First-hand

4 Net Zero Carbon Events. (2025, October). Reporting results, executive summary [Report]. Retrieved November 7, 2026, from netzerocarbonevents.org — Reported

5 Events Industry Council and Oxford Economics. (2026, May). 2026 Global Economic Significance of Business Events [Report]. Retrieved November 9, 2026, from news.eventscouncil.org — First-hand

6 Jung, S., Draper, J., Malek, K., Padron, T. C., & Olson, E. (2024). Bridging theory and practice: An examination of how event-tourism research aligns with UN Sustainable Development Goals [Journal — First-hand

article]. *Journal of Travel Research, 63(7), 1583–1605*. https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875241231273

7 Cavallin Toscani, A., Vendraminelli, L., & Vinelli, A. (2024). Environmental sustainability in the event industry: A systematic review and a research agenda [Journal article]. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 32(12), 2663–2697*. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2024.2309544 First-hand

8 Mair, J., & Smith, A. (2021). Events and sustainability: Why making events more sustainable is not enough [Journal article]. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 29(11–12), 1739–1755*. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2021.1942480 First-hand

The evidence

5 studies · 3 industry sources

SAMPLE

Four studies: ten executive interviews, two fair case studies, a 16-paper special issue and a review of 159 studies; one industry survey

YEARS

2010–2024 (studies); 2026 (industry data)

METHOD

Interviews with Australian business events leaders, U.S. fair case studies and reviews of event sustainability research

About Eventamin

Eventamin reads the peer-reviewed research on events, exhibitions and hospitality, sets it against industry data and states what it means for the market. Every brief is published by Eventamin as an organisation: its sources, method and corrections are open.

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