

MeetGreen® Article

The APEX Standards Are Coming! Sustainable Purchasing: Why It Matters

Amy Spatrisano, CMP

May 20, 2011 | Portland, Oregon



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When you hear about the APEX Standards do you think, “Are you kidding me, I’m focused on our next conference; I don’t have time or interest in developing and implementing a sustainable procurement policy! Give me one good reason why I should read any further?” I’ll do better than that – I’ll give you 5 good reasons.

Reason 1: A sustainable procurement policy is likely to be a requirement as part of the of the APEX/ASTM Environmentally Sustainable Event Standards for both planners and suppliers. Still don’t care? There’re 4 more, but first let’s agree about what a Sustainable Procurement Policy is.

Defining a “Sustainable Procurement Policy”

One of the best definitions for sustainable procurement can be found on the [Ottawa City website’s Sustainable Procurement page](http://www.ottawa.ca/residents/environment/workplace/procurement_en.html). (http://www.ottawa.ca/residents/environment/workplace/procurement_en.html) It explains that:

“Sustainable procurement means that you buy products and services according to three criteria:

- *Good for local economy*
- *Good for environment*
- *Good for social well-being of people who are connected to the product or service “*

Consider using those criteria as a filter to evaluate your supply chain when making product purchases.

Whether or not you plan to adopt the standards, consider four additional reasons to have a sustainable procurement plan:

Reason 2: Your Reputation Depends on It

Reputation is high on the list when considering the compelling reasons to employ sustainable procurement.



More and more organizations are making public statements about their environmental or sustainable commitments, from carbon reduction goals to product attributes and the public is watching. In the meetings industry, at least four large hotel chains over the past year have made announcements about their commitments to sustainable practices from the way their properties will be built and designed to new tools to measure their environmental impacts to contributions towards saving precious resources. For them to ensure their commitments are sound, making sure they have a sustainable product procurement plan will be essential. Certainly, no organization wants to damage their brand credibility by making bad choices about their use of natural or human resources through supply chain activities.

Reason 3: Cost Savings

Cost savings are often the initial motivator for organizations to consider or embark on any process. Cost saving in procurement efficiencies isn’t new for our industry. Many corporations run their meeting expenditures through their procurement departments, which provide cost savings through consolidation and collective buying power. These efficiencies also apply to sustainable procurement.

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Using a sustainable product procurement policy can help you realize cost savings by purchasing and/or sourcing products locally. Other potentials for cost savings include:

- Re-designing signage for an event to make it reusable for multiple years. If you're able to reuse the signage year after year, not only are you saving money, but you're also minimizing the environmental impact.
- Reducing your paper usage when printing your programs saves you money, time and the environment.
- Using products that will be recycled or donated can help reduce your landfill disposal costs as well.



Reason 4: Stakeholder Pressure



Another reason for sustainable procurement is stakeholder pressure. Your leadership or management may already be asking if you have any sustainable purchasing protocol or if you're aware of your supply chain practices. Having a sound sustainable procurement policy is critical if you're tracking or reporting on your environmental performance. For example, if your organization has committed to reducing your carbon emissions, and you're not ensuring you've reviewed your supply chain to make any reductions, you may be missing a key reduction source or worst yet, inadvertently risking your organization's reputation.

You may already have attendees questioning what something is made of, where it's produced or how the product is being disposed of. You'll want to be sure to you have a formal written policy you can refer to and share with them. Having a page on your event website or in the program talking about this policy is a great way to let your stakeholders know the steps you are taking in sustainability.

Reason 5: Risk Avoidance

Last but not least is risk avoidance. A sustainable product procurement policy will help avoid risks associated with selecting products that have negative environmental impacts. By following through with a defined procurement policy you'll be better equipped to assess the products you're purchasing and have a mechanism for accountability.

You'll want to be sure your suppliers haven't committed any illegal acts in obtaining the resources to make the product or in the production of it. For example, you wouldn't want to buy a product made from an endangered animal or support a factory that uses illegal labor or has violated local laws in any way.



Another aspect of risk avoidance is community backlash. You want to be sure products you've selected to use at your event are something that supports the commitments you or your organization has made. For example, if you're providing reusable beverage containers for your conference attendees instead of individual bottled water, you want to be sure the beverage container is also made of a suitably sustainable material. Otherwise, inevitably one or more of your attendees will notice, which could cause some embarrassing backlash.

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A Sustainable Procurement Policy Is Simply Smart Business

Meeting or adopting the APEX/ASTM Environmentally Sustainable Event Standards may not be important to you. However, establishing a sustainable procurement policy should be. Reputation, cost savings, stakeholder pressure and risk avoidance are all valid reasons to be sure you're establishing a sustainable procurement policy.

If you're already committed to environmental business practices, following through on them becomes smart business practices. Sustainable purchasing may start with "doing the right thing" and cost savings, but your organizations reputation and credibility may depend on it.

If you're convinced, even a little bit, that you need to create a sustainable purchasing policy, but are still unsure how to go about it, read our follow up article coming next month called, **The APEX Standards Are Coming! Sustainable Purchasing: Not an Oxymoron**. We'll give you tips and resources to help guide you through the process, so you can easily begin to create your own sustainable procurement policy.



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