

An overview of BS8901 – the sustainable event management system

About the standard

BS8901 was launched in November 2007 and is a new British Standard which specifies requirements for a sustainable event management system. The purpose of this new standard is to help the events industry conduct business operations in a more sustainable manner.

This standard describes itself as applicable to the full diversity of events and is designed to be capable of addressing sustainability management throughout the entire event lifecycle (i.e. from conception to final review) or restricted to certain phases.

The standard is also described as “proportional”, in other words, an organisation or individual’s role and position in the supply chain, its size, capacity to adopt the system and ability to implement it, will determine the requirements of the standard that apply. This means that the application of the standard in any situation is a matter of “informed” judgement.

Eventia activities

Over the recent months at Eventia we have been conducting reviews of the standard for the corporate events industry by consulting with different segments of the membership, including agencies, hoteliers and venues.

These reviews have led to the request for an overview on the standard to be produced to assist companies in knowing what the key elements within BS8901 are, plus potentially encourage them to order a copy from British Standards and work towards adoption in their respective businesses.

The various members came together in workshops to take a deep dive into BS8901 by reviewing each of the key steps within its three phases and provide feedback on whether it is appropriate and reasonable to adopt it in their segment of the market, and, if not, what is practical to adopt for each step to drive towards sustainability.

With BS8901 only being launched in the last quarter of 2007, British Standards is keen to receive feedback and have often had a representative in attendance at these workshops to hear first-hand any concerns. Specific feedback has been provided as a consequence. British Standards has committed to review all feedback in the last quarter of 2008 (from Eventia and other interested parties), they will then issue a revised document covering any areas they feel require a re-draft and offer this up for public comment, most likely in the first quarter of 2009.

BS8901 – an overview

This overview has been reviewed and approved by British Standards and is provided to assist Eventia members with an overall understanding of the key steps involved and, if appropriate, encourage members to purchase the standard. The standard is currently £45 to members of British Standard or £90 to non-members and can be found at <http://www.bsi-global.com/en/Shop/Publication-Detail/?pid=000000000030146791>

Phase	Step	Brief overview
1	Define policy for sustainability	This step is about drafting a corporate policy on sustainability (describing commitments to the principles of sustainable development, promoting those principles in events-related activities, defining the scope of commitment in application to events, including the supply chain and the event lifecycle). Having the policy approved by management.
1	Identify and engage stakeholders (including supply chain) as part of the planning process	This step looks at engaging with and identifying the issues and concerns of stakeholders; be they the client, supply chain, staff, delegates, partners, sponsors, trade bodies, local community, emergency services, etc. and showing that these have been given due consideration and a risk assessment has been undertaken where applicable. Engagement is an on-going requirement with this audience.
1	Finalise objectives, and set key performance indicators and targets	There is a requirement to set sustainability objectives and KPIs. In particular BS8901 is looking for high standards to be set for objectives that a company / event has the greatest capacity to address. The standard provides examples of sustainability issues/aspirations/policies and potential objectives, together with types of KPIs (for those purchasing the guide these can be found on pages 8-10). These should be continuously reviewed throughout the event planning process.
2	Implement: provide resources and competencies, manage the supply chain and maintain communications, document the system	<p>This step is about the allocation of roles – management to take overall responsibility and a competent representative to oversee implementation and maintain operating procedures for sustainability.</p> <p>It requires allocation of resources, based on scale and nature of activities, occurrence and duration, cost/benefit, and financial planning.</p> <p>It requires competence of resources in sustainable event solution implementation and training/development to ensure this competence.</p> <p>Objectives/KPIs to be looked at in relation to their relevance to supply chain and considered in the tendering process, as well as measured throughout delivery, utilising contract terms and performance reviews.</p>

		<p>This step also requires initial and on-going communication of the sustainability objectives & KPIs and progress.</p> <p>Finally it requires a documentation management system covering policy, stakeholders, issues, engagement, monitoring and measurement activities and non-compliance. The guide also provides list a of additional documents requirements where applicable, (for those purchasing the guide these can be found on pages 13).</p>
2	Check: monitor and evaluate against KPIs	<p>This is about monitoring and measurement to deliver both against the KPIs and continually improve procedures. It covers compliance and responding to non-conformity.</p> <p>There is a requirement to establish, implement and maintain procedures for auditing, that covers all of the key aspects within the above steps. This step only suggests it is 'where appropriate' for suppliers. This will be dependent on the scope set by the company.</p>
3	Review and feed forward	<p>Requirement in the standard for management reviews at regular intervals, assessing performance against a number of listed issues, such as stakeholder engagement, meeting contractual conditions, achieving objectives/targets, attention to non-conformance, etc.</p> <p>Lessons learned should be captured, reviewed and implemented in the future.</p>
Appendix	Maturity Matrix	<p>Requirement to create and use a maturity matrix on sustainable development. The appendix has an example matrix, but British Standards stress this is an example only and appropriate characteristics for your own organisation are required, considering the principles and practices it outlines. The matrix example covers inclusively, integrity, stewardship and transparency as the principles and notes specific practises, such as 'stakeholder engagement and issue identification'. It then has examples of 'minimum involvement', 'improved commitment', and 'full engagement'. The concept being that once a company has identified the appropriate characteristics for their business they then consider where they are on the matrix today and sets about developing objectives to move towards 'full engagement' over a period of time. Progress against these objectives require regular review.</p>

Hotelier observations:

- It was felt that hoteliers who operate franchisee agreements would require the franchisee to have their own scope as they could not be entirely governed by the corporate and consequently would not come under any corporate claims of sustainability. However the corporate could give guidelines for sustainable goals and encourage engagement.
- Hoteliers also felt that whilst there needs to be a corporate owner of the standard and all this entails, a representative/champion needs to be identified for each property, who is empowered to drive and measure action locally.
- Stakeholder engagement referred to in the standard would vary hugely by property and there would need to be local ownership of this and possibly a statement of intent from the corporate with feedback city by city for the larger hotel groups. On-going communication to stakeholders would require different levels of detail according to the audience.
- It was agreed that to a degree a number of the sustainability objectives that could be set are ones that are already reported on to the city for the publicly traded companies, so management and measurement of these should not be too hard. This is very different for privately owned hotels, unless they have already identified sustainability objectives as a corporate aim and are working towards them.
- Concerns were raised about older properties but it was highlighted that it is about the scope and types of objectives that are set which are reasonable at the different locations, for example the objective may be less around heat retention and more around waste recycling. It was also noted that often the objectives can deliver financial benefits for the business.
- The document management system covering policy, stakeholders, issues, engagement, monitoring and measurement activities and non-compliance was seen as potentially alien on-property but within the standard would be a requirement and therefore a step change was needed even if perceived as burdensome to begin with.

Agency observations:

- The feeling was that compliance to the standard should be about demonstrating best efforts to comply rather than 100% compliance, as conformity to the standard for a company can somewhat depend upon an individual client's buy-in to this being important. If this was not the case, then whilst best efforts behind the scenes could be achieved one event may lose a company's accreditation status. BSi said this was not the spirit of how the standard accreditation should be applied and this concern would form part of their formal feedback to review when they look at re-drafting the standard later in the year.
- Concerns were expressed about how claims of compliance, through self-accreditation, would be managed. The feeling was that many companies would place the standard at the heart of their business practises, investing in people, training, supplier communication/management, etc. but others would do 'window dressing', and with no mandatory external audit, how could a true compliance be reflected in the accreditation.
- In the detail of the standard it suggests that a 'sustainability performance criteria' should be reflected in supplier's conditions of contract, with sufficient detail to determine instances of non-compliance. The feeling was that the inclusion within contractual terms was not appropriate and a more partner-orientated approach was required. A number of the agencies' suppliers are either long-term and have terms already in place or are just one-off, based on event location and more standard terms would be applied. To have individual contractual terms around sustainability would be a great deal of administrative burden. BSi expressed it was important to pick this up in the scope for a business, but were open to this feedback and that when the standard was being reviewed later in the year comments of this nature would form part of the review.

Venue observations:

- Venue feedback to date has been highly positive. The feeling was that embracing the standard could create a competitive advantage.

- One venue felt a good way to engage identified staff, local community and on-site suppliers was through a series of workshops and that the key was to find advocates who are passionate enough to generate bottom up initiatives.
- Venues felt setting achievable targets was highly important, for example, reduce something by 10% rather than reduce to 0.
- Some venues saw merit in external auditing, as they were keen to demonstrate compliance.
- There was a recommendation to charge 'sustainability advocates' with generating new initiatives to maintain momentum.