

2024

SUSTAINABILITY **GUIDE**

**Global sustainability trends and best
practices for meetings and events**

“Sustainability isn’t
just a buzzword—
it is the future.”



MIKAEL EK

Managing Director EMEA

where we are

TODAY

When it comes to implementing sustainability practices into meetings and events, there is no time to waste. Individuals, corporations, and governments recognize the importance and opportunity a more sustainable future can bring. And with benchmarks and regulations already in place, the journey towards a greener industry is well underway.

At BCD Meetings & Events we're proud to lead the charge in this global movement. Our approach includes building a set of best practices and guidelines that serve our organization, clients, suppliers and the broader industry. Our sustainability toolkit, which includes things like a **venue scorecard**, and resources like this one can guide, empower and inspire responsible decisions - but we know there's still a lot of work to be done. The encouraging news is that planners, suppliers, vendors, and destinations are also on-board to moving things in the right direction, understanding it takes all of us. And while the scope of implementing sustainable practices can seem daunting, the opportunities it presents are vast and the power to connect people is inspiring.

"There is a lot of potential for positive change," says Patrick Ockendon, Client Development Director and member of the global sustainability committee. *"Our industry has made significant strides, and there is so much more we can achieve together."* Sustainability now extends beyond just environmental initiatives, encompassing social and economic change as well. The idea is to leave the world a better place.

"Sustainability represents an opportunity for event organizers, as well as corporations, to make an impact in local communities," states Ana Paula Hernández, Vice President & Managing Director LATAM.

*The first efforts to promote sustainability with venues start at the sourcing stage. We use our **'Venue Scorecard'** - part of our **Sustainability Toolkit** - to compare individual property responses against each individual client's key sustainability goals, prioritized from a menu of **40+** options.*

*These options focus on **six** specific areas:*

- **The Venue**
- **The Location**
- **F&B**
- **Sleeping Rooms**
- **Meeting Rooms**
- **CSR**

*Based on responses, a compliance **'percentage'** score is given.*

*For each of the **40+** line items on the scorecard we provide suggested contracting language that can be incorporated into a venue's contract to hold the selected venue accountable and supports the planner in determining how best to implement the identified goals into the program.*

Other areas included within sustainability discussions are:

- Health and wellness
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I)
- Social responsibility
- Career opportunities

The first step is the most important, says Ben Hoeksma, Senior Director, Global Program Lead and member of the global sustainability committee. *"You just need to start doing something,"* he says. *"Taking any action, no matter how small, is a positive step forward."*

Critical steps include:

- Tracking and data collection
- Education
- Goal setting
- Partner research

No individual or organization is in the battle to become more sustainable alone. Even companies who have made the environment a priority for years have a learning curve. BCD M&E recognizes sustainability is not a trend, but a priority. In the effort to be part of the solution, we work with clients to encourage best practices and develop guidelines that shape thousands of events every year. We are proud to share this guide to inspire action and encourage progress.





**social
responsibility**

environment

**health &
wellness**

DE&I

economy

sustainability

working towards more sustainable meetings and events

““

Everybody wants to talk about sustainability, but not everyone knows where to start.”



SHAUNA WHITEHEAD

*Vice President of
Customer Solutions*

top challenges to

SUSTAINABILITY

The following is compiled from industry organizations, expert interviews, and eco-minded vendors.

COST	Sustainable solutions tend to be expensive, putting it at odds with revenue and budget goals.
TRAVEL	Aviation accounts for between 2% and 3% of the world's greenhouse emissions and can account up to 75% of event emissions.
FOOD WASTE	Hotels and restaurants are tasked with managing excess food and beverage going to waste.
SHOW MATERIALS	Even trade show booths recycled for multiple events leave a carbon footprint with the necessary shipping.
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE	The event experience comes first. An unpleasant yet sustainable event can lead to the event message being overlooked.
COMMUNICATION	Any change from the norm should be explained to delegates so they understand reasons behind initiatives like meatless meals, venue selection, etc.
POLITICS	Views on inclusion and environmental policy vary from country to country and state to state. Organizations will have to decide whether to do business with only governments that align with their values.

environment

How far can you travel on one metric ton of carbon?*

3,922 km plane **18,868 km** electric vehicle

9,524 km bus **24,390 km** train

5,208 km gas car *Stats from [MeetGreen](#)

London to Paris Emissions, per passenger*

2.4 kg of CO2e car **66 kg of CO2e** plane **96% lower emissions** savings by train

*Information from [Eurostar](#)

During a typical five-day conference, **2,500 attendees will use 62,500 plates, 87,500 napkins, 75,000 cups or glasses and 90,000 cans or bottles.** Stats from [MeetGreen](#)

f&b

Beef has a **larger impact** on the environment because the land needed to raise cows is so vast and requires much more resources as a result. Additionally, cows emit a massive amount of methane, which has been rated as **10%** of the world's greenhouse gases.

79-101 CO2e

Range of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions from beef herd production, compared to 3-21 kilograms of CO2e from chickens.

[Bloomberg News](#)

At its core, sustainability's purpose is to leave the world a better place. As such, diversity, human rights, and health (physical and mental) are now incorporated into the discussion. A healthier environment results in a greater ecosystem for doing business and improving events.

social responsibility

Women account for nearly

42%

of the global workforce, yet the share of **women in senior leadership positions** (Director, Vice-President-VP, or C-Suite) is

32%

[World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report for 2023](#)

1 in 3

victims of **human trafficking** globally goes through airports, hotels, or other travel hubs

[Prevue Meetings](#) citing PACT (Partners in Protection Program)

health & wellness

About

16%

of adults aged 18 years and older worldwide were obese in 2022

[World Health Association](#)

One out of every two people in the world will develop a mental health disorder in their lifetime, according to a study from Harvard Medical School and the University of Queensland

[Harvard Medical School](#)

international

REGULATIONS

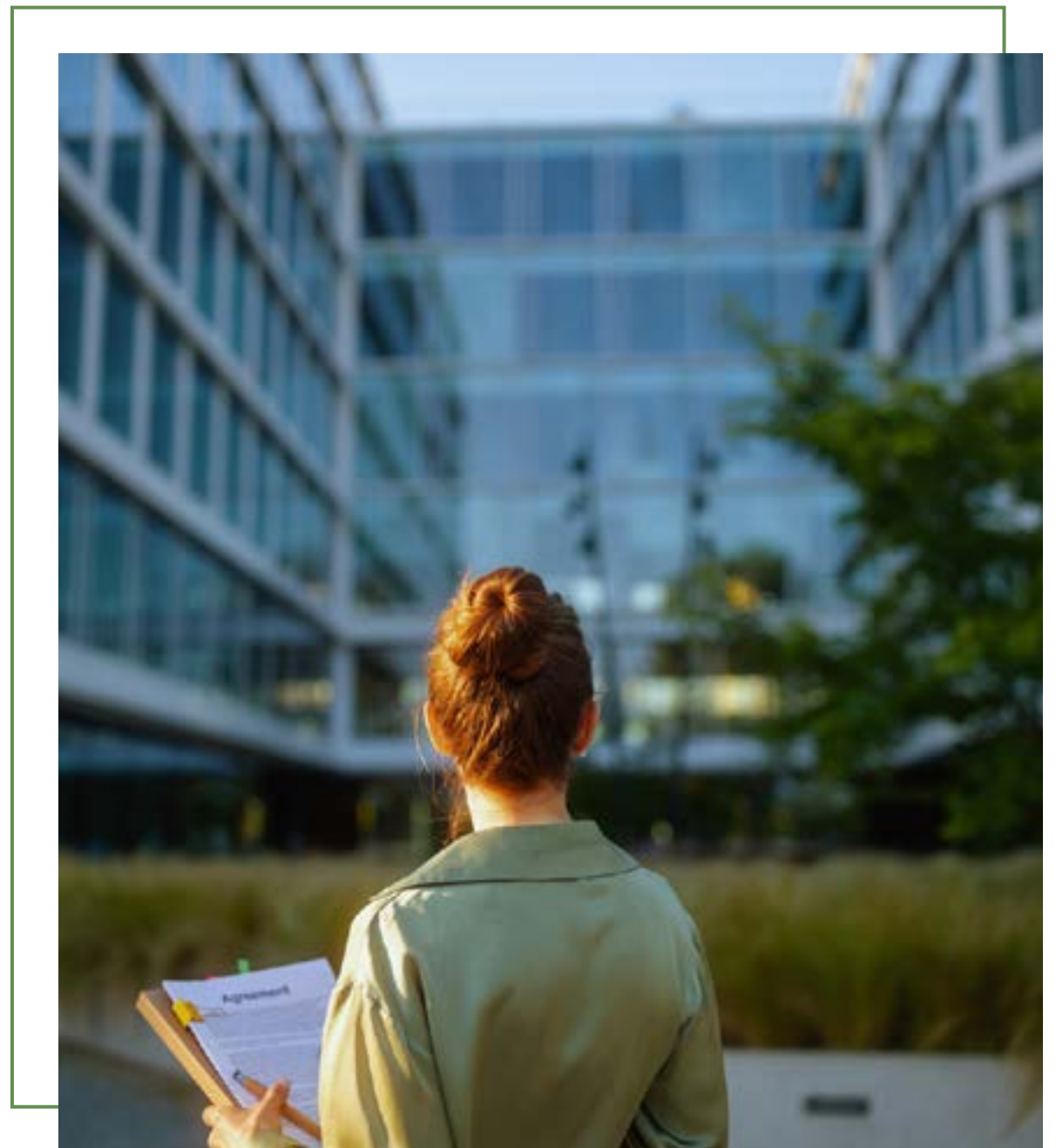
CSRD

The European Union is the first legislative body to take a substantive approach to sustainability.

The Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive is an EU directive which requires all large companies and listed SMEs in the EU, as well as many foreign companies to report on sustainability impact annually. All data will be audited.

About **50,000** companies will have to comply with CSRD's reporting requirements.

*BCD Travel will submit its first **CSRD report in 2026**. Today, you can read more about BCD's Sustainability standing in their annual **Sustainability Report**.*



Paris Climate Agreement

This **ambitious agreement** sets a target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions **43%** by 2030 and to become carbon neutral by 2050. Destinations like Washington, DC promote themselves as a host destination for meetings by touting the city's affirmation to reach the goals.

DID YOU KNOW?

For all the designations hotels, convention centers and other top meeting sites can receive (LEED-certific, GBAC Star), there is not an accepted universal definition for a sustainable venue?

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The UN has set **17 goals** aimed at achieving targets by 2030, ranging from combating hunger to promoting equal rights and implementing green policies.

EU Emissions Trading System

A **'cap and trade'** system to reduce emissions via a carbon market with the goal to make EU member states carbon neutral by 2050.



burning

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

How can companies start to measure and approach sustainable meetings and events?

BCD M&E has a portfolio of resources available, beginning with its Sustainability Toolkit. Key areas to examine are travel emissions and venues' green credentials. Using our toolkit as a guide, companies should pick the top 3-5 items that are most important to their own company goals and put a tracking mechanism in place to measure and monitor progress in the venue selection process. As there are no universal industry standards for venues, it's important for organizations to set their standards and create a baseline to measure and show impact.

How can we truly get to net zero as an industry?

The short answer is we can't if travel is factored in as a measurement. But rather than focus on unrealistic big goals, take it one step at a time and concentrate on positive steps your company can take immediately.

What are some smart decisions to make regarding event design?

It all begins with site selection. Try to pick a destination that is easily accessible for most of your attendees. Then aim to keep as much of an event in one venue as possible to reduce additional travel. Selecting local talent to assist as volunteers and in other capacities also saves environmental and economical resources.

What type of suppliers does BCD M&E recommend for making events more sustainable?

Start with vendors that have readily available data regarding their sustainability efforts (one example is how they help eliminate food waste). It is always a good idea to work with local organizations to support host economies and to eliminate long-distance travel for produce and goods. Engaging in conversations in these key topics with suppliers is a good starting place.

BCD M&E in Australia are increasingly focusing on partnering with Indigenous communities and organizations to provide goods and services and help share the country's history and culture with attendees. Examples include working with a merchandising company operated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and serving traditional Indigenous dishes as part of a day featuring traditional experiences.



FERNANDO LONERAN

Vice President, APAC Sales & Account Management and Australia

sustainable solutions

THINK BIG

Sustainability is not a one-time initiative but should be seen as a guiding principle for companies. In terms of events, this means starting with your portfolio of meetings and events to truly understand the overall impact.

1

Make a commitment

The most basic step is the most important: Commit to sustainability becoming a part of your organization's decision-making process.

2

Set a baseline

Measure your current event portfolio's carbon emissions to see where you stand. From there, you can set goals to improve.

3

Take it easy

Begin with manageable first steps that won't disrupt attendees' expectations. For example, remove single-use plastic, select a venue that limits waste, and use local vendors, but wait on taking meat off the menu.

4

Put it in writing

Create a checklist or one-pager that describes sustainability goals and principles. This adds accountability and provides partners with an understanding of your values.

5

Strike a balance

If hosting a 1,000-person event, consider converting smaller meetings into hybrid programs to offset the large footprint of the major event.

a balancing act

Sustainability will always be a top priority, but measures can't come at the expense of enjoyment. Make smart decisions that fit into your program.



Never lose sight of the fact that when people are attending an event, they want to come away with an experience.”



BEN HOEKSM
*Senior Director.
Global Program Lead*

THINK **small**

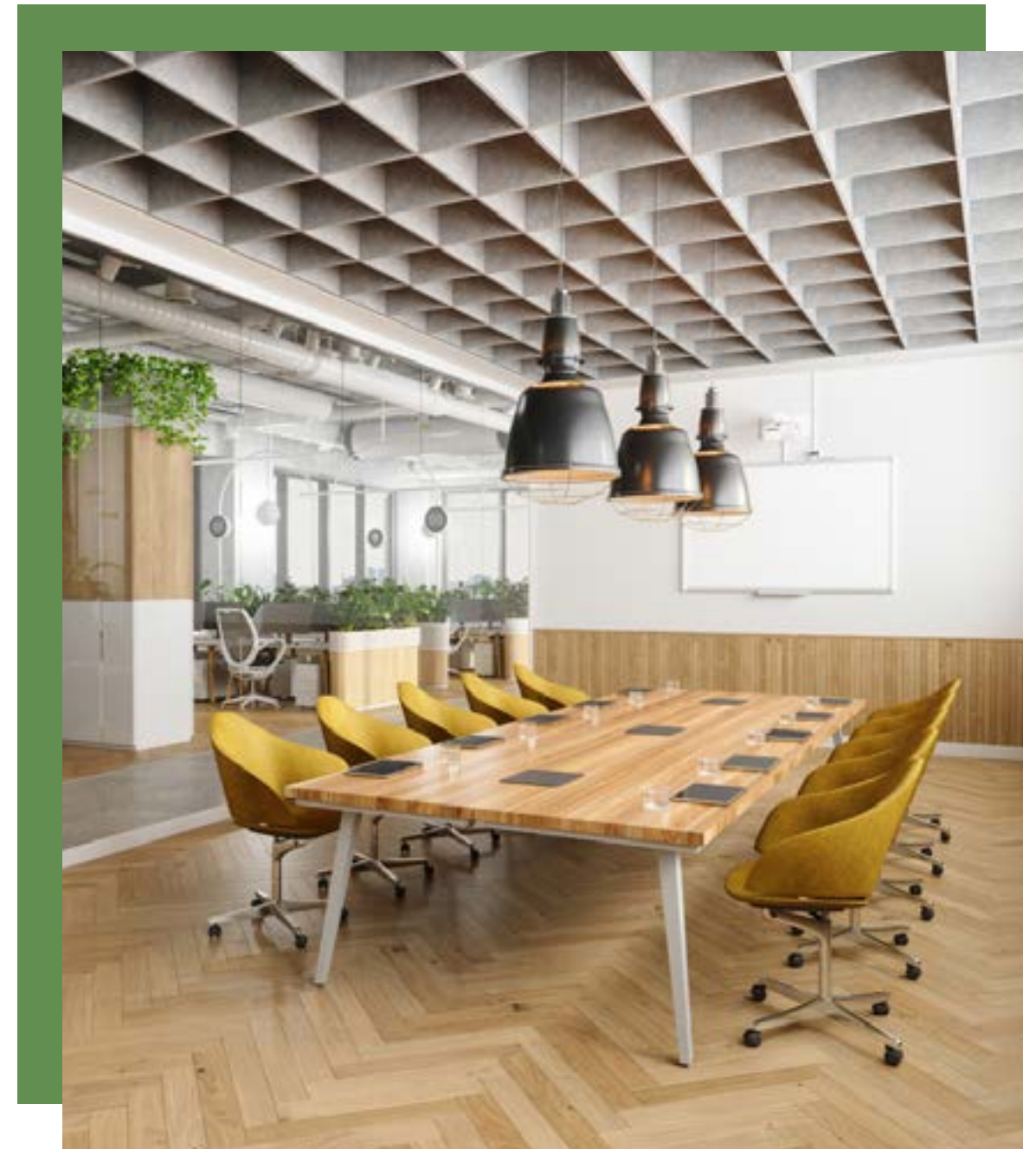
Approaches to sustainability for individual events.

Site Selection

- Rather than host one large event, create three or four regional events that are within driving distance of most attendees. Unite the group with technology - an event platform or app - that creates a hybrid experience.
- Select a venue in the central part of a city to add public transit as a viable option. Provide charter buses from the airport. Select a destination that most delegates can access via train.
- Keep as much of the agenda in one building. Ensure the selected venues have sustainability programs in place.

F&B

- Ban single-use straws and disposable silverware. Encourage attendees to bring reusable water bottles that can be filled at stations throughout your venue.
- Serve meals a la carte instead of offering a buffet, which can create more waste. Select a venue that donates excess food. Trade beef options for chicken, fish, or pork.
- Take meat off the menu entirely and offer creative vegetarian and vegan dishes. Source all ingredients from local farms and outlets.



Social Responsibility

- Make sure speakers come from a variety of backgrounds.
- Ensure venues meet regulations for attendees who use a mobility device. Have sign-language translators at education and general sessions for attendees with a hearing disability.
- Build a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) project into the event's agenda. Encourage sponsors to use their funds for CSR activities in place of swag, which often gets left behind.
- Work with Convention and Visitor Bureaus and Destination Management Companies to partner with local organizations. Promote local causes on event communications, websites, and apps.

Waste Management

- Reduce printed materials and use recycled products as much as possible.
- Work with vendors to ensure all materials are compostable, recyclable, or reusable.
- Make all name badges electronic; use digital signage. Go completely paperless.

“

A sustainable event allows a company to differentiate itself because it demonstrates criteria and values appreciated by key audiences and demonstrates a genuine commitment to social and environmental responsibility, which contributes to a reliable and positive brand image.”



**MARY CARMEN
RAMIREZ**

*Commercial
Director LATAM*

BCD M&E steps up

Our impact

- We've set a carbon reduction target to reduce our absolute Scope 1 & 2 emissions by **35%** by 2030 from a 2016 base year.
- In 2023, we received our **fourth consecutive** Platinum rating from EcoVadis.
- BCD M&E employs a **7-R's** program: **rethink, refuse, reduce, reuse, repurpose, recycle, report.**
- BCD M&E continues building its team with the incoming addition of a **new sustainability director**, who will guide initiatives and goals to set an industry standard.

Numbers add up

74%*

Reduction of Scope 1 and 2 emissions between 2016 and 2023

94%

Global BCD colleagues trained in Human Trafficking Awareness

50

We're supporting children in our local communities with **50** projects in **25** countries through our Making a Difference program in 2024

*NB this includes methodology changes



The United States Environmental Protection Agency defines Scope 1 emissions as direct greenhouse (GHG) emissions that occur from sources that are controlled or owned by an organization (emissions associated with fuel combustion in boilers, furnaces, vehicles, etc.). Scope 2 emissions are indirect GHG emissions associated with an organization's energy use, specifically tied to the purchase of electricity, steam, heat, or cooling.

DRIVING CHANGE: SEROTONIN Case Study

Named after the hormone that regulates happiness in the human body, SEROTONIN is an internal supplier event that showcases many sustainability principles. *“It provides an experience as well as education for BCD M&E’s staff to see how these initiatives are put into action,”* says Astrid Pfüller, Senior Manager, Client Solutions EMEA and member of the global sustainability committee, who was responsible for the sustainability concept and communications. *“It’s an event that is created to be as sustainable as possible,”* she explains.

Here's how the BCD M&E Sustainability Toolkit was put into action:

The Venue

Zurich, Switzerland was selected because more than **60%** of attendees could arrive by train.

Waste Management

Apps and websites were used to support a paperless initiative; vendors were vetted regarding recycling and waste policies, among other criteria.

F&B

Almost all of the food was vegetarian friendly, and it was all local and seasonal.

Wellness

Yoga, training and sports sessions were offered to reduce stress and promote physical and mental wellbeing. A wellness Q&A was included in the programming.

KEY RESULTS

- Train-accessible location cut down **58.3 tons** of CO2 emissions.
- **75%** vegetarian menu eliminated **1.5 tons** of CO2.
- Completed **41 out of 104** suggestions from the event checklist from the toolkit.
- Attendees reported a **9%** improvement in understanding the importance of hosting sustainable events.
- Sustainability measures earned well over **90%** support from internal and external attendees.

keep moving

FORWARD

Sustainability is not a fad or phenomenon. It is a mindset that all businesses must incorporate into decisions throughout their company. For meetings and events, the challenge is to continue to provide memories and experiences that attendees will cherish while maintaining a responsibility to the Earth and its citizens. **Factors to watch in the future include:**

Technology

Virtual events will never replace in-person gatherings, but the way in which we use technology is changing. Artificial Intelligence will play a role in shaping sustainability, even as its use within meetings and events continues to evolve.

Climate Change

As extreme weather impacts all regions of the world, meeting and event planners will be asked to continuously adapt to preserve host destinations.

Education

Because sustainability is an always-evolving topic, staying on top of new trends and best practices is vital to do our part.

BCD M&E uses the **power of our networks** to prioritize and drive sustainability initiatives throughout all our regions and lines of business. The commitment to **becoming a more sustainable company** is carried out by our people, partners, and clients across the industry. **We encourage you** to take the next steps on your sustainability path, and perhaps most importantly, **keep the conversation going.**



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