

Event planners can look to COP26 in setting the standard of conference planning in the post-pandemic world. Here we look at the organisers' successes.

What the Successes of **COP26** Can **Teach Event Planners**



AUTHOR: *SVEN BOSSU, AIPC CEO*

Event planners have made it through two years of uncertainty about the future of the convention industry. Many event organisers have invested in digitisation strategies to make virtual events not only possible but just as enriching as attending a conference in-person.

In particular, COP26 represented a significant turning point in the event industry's response to the global pandemic. As a hybrid in-person and virtual event that ran for two weeks from the Scottish Event Campus in Glasgow, COP26's positive impact rippled across to all corners of the globe.

Its leading cause – to further worldwide efforts to reduce CO₂ and build an environmentally sustainable future – captured the imagination of millions. Despite public health concerns at the time, COP26 was deemed too vital to be sidelined. Organisers moved heaven and earth to enable the conference to go ahead without a hitch.

For convention planners, COP26 sets a fantastic example of what conventions can look and function like in a post-pandemic world.

In a recent AIPC interview with **Kathleen Warden, director of conference sales at Scottish Event Campus** in Glasgow, they discussed the lessons events planners can learn from COP26. Here, we will run through a few top tips that event teams can use to bounce back after two years of economic setbacks.

1. Build strong relationships with stakeholders and event organisers

Rescheduling conferences poses many logistical challenges for event organisers. But for COP26, effective communication between key stakeholders, clients and teams ensured that everyone could come together to move ahead with the event scheduled for 31st October to 12th November 2021.

Belief in the purpose of COP26 was a critical driving force for getting everyone involved on the same page in overcoming the logistical challenges drawn from rescheduling an event of this scale. As Kathleen Warden notes: “In this industry, we do nothing in isolation – it is an industry of teamwork, and we were consistently met with a supportive and collaborative attitude from everyone involved.”

Trust, collective responsibility and clearly articulated common goals have always underpinned successful event delivery. This was more important than ever when hosting the largest event to take place anywhere in the world since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

2. Place visitors at the centre of your conference planning

Flexibility to meet attendees' needs was another area where COP26 triumphed in providing a high level of customer service for Summit visitors. With the possibility that some key people may not be able to join in person, the incentive to provide attendees with all the technological solutions they need to maximise their conference experience became more important than ever before.

In total, the organisers have created parallel

online resources for all 2,500 meetings held over the two-week COP26 timetable. The future of conference planning is about providing a great visitor experience – both online and offline.

3 Plan for the long-term sustainability of your event

COP26 planners looked beyond the scope of their two-week event and ensured that wherever possible, equipment and furniture used for the Summit was sustainably sourced and would have a use long after COP26 concluded.

For instance, grey was selected as the carpet colour of choice throughout the Scottish Event Campus (rather than the UN’s primary shade of blue). The organisers’ reasoning behind their choice of installing grey carpet rather than blue was purely made from a sustainability perspective. It seems such a small detail, but the implications of this decision were significant.

As COP26 organisers planned on donating the conference carpet tiles to Glasgow’s Social Housing Project after the Summit ended, they recognised that grey would work better in a residential setting than blue.

Thinking of the long-term sustainability goals of your event can help you plan charitable outreach schemes that really add value to people’s lives, and can also inspire wider audiences to become aware

About AIPC

AIPC is a global network of more than 190 convention centres across 64 countries. Their goal is to promote the best in convention centre management by providing education, research and networking opportunities to management-level events professionals worldwide. Visit aipc.org for more information.

of the positive impacts – adding greater purpose for your participants and stakeholders.

4 Expand your event beyond the scope of your exhibition plan

Additionally, local volunteers have signed up to provide a warm welcome for delegates arriving in the city from all corners of the world. Working with local councils and convention bureaux is another way organisers can promote their cause and gain support from the wider community.

Fundamentally, events and conferences bring together people that want to make a real difference to the world. Therefore, creating an environment where actions can match mission statements will help emphasise your event’s message and inspire attendees long after the last person has left the convention site.

In summary, COP26 set high standards for event planners in the years to come. While the industry as a whole may be catching up after two years of setbacks, digitisation, personalisation, and a keen eye for sustainability initiatives can help the sector thrive once more.

