

Canada is Building Bridges to Sociocultural Sustainability



Photo courtesy of Indigenous Tourism Alberta.



Photo courtesy of Destination Canada.

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Across Canada, business events are leading the way in sociocultural sustainability by actively collaborating with Indigenous partners and communities, fostering meaningful partnerships, and contributing to reconciliation efforts.

In this insights paper, we are excited to share with ASAE members the strategy behind these efforts—and discuss initiatives across Canada that enable decision makers to integrate Indigenous voices and cultural heritage into events, creating more inclusive, respectful, and powerful experiences.

What Is Sociocultural Sustainability?

There are three pillars of sustainability—environmental, economic, and sociocultural. Sociocultural sustainability supports the social and cultural well-being of communities.

This can mean ensuring access to universal human rights and basic needs for all or supporting access for community members to enough resources to keep their families healthy and secure. In the context of business events, it can also mean that meetings hosted in communities help preserve and sustain local cultures, including beliefs, practices, and traditions.

Strategic Alignment

In Canada, we recognize the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations peoples who have called this place home for time immemorial—all with unique histories, languages, cultural practices, and beliefs.

Our dedication to Indigenous reconciliation is woven into our [2030 Corporate Strategy—A World of Opportunity](#), which focuses on a sustainable, regenerative approach to tourism.

Likewise, our [Business Events Sustainability Plan](#), launched in 2023, aims to improve the economic, sociocultural, and environmental sustainability of business events in Canada.

At Destination Canada, we strive to elevate these Indigenous perspectives and create a deeper understanding of the rich cultures and traditions from coast to coast to coast.

Combined with our work in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, we aim to ensure meetings and incentive experiences in Canada leave a lasting positive legacy for all.



A Uniting Framework

Canada is setting a global standard in sustainable business events by aligning its practices with the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). The goals offer an internationally recognized, shared framework for achieving a better and more sustainable future, with a common message that unites us all.

All the sociocultural sustainability initiatives described in this insights paper support at least one of the goals above. Indeed, many of the initiatives contribute to multiple goals, further compounding the impact of these sustainability activities.

Taking Action

Canadian destinations are acting as stewards of sociocultural sustainability in the business events industry, pushing the sustainability movement forward and contributing unique, imaginative, and practical ways to connect with Indigenous communities at events.

Here are just a few examples that include Indigenous cultural practices and history in event programs to create transformative partnerships with lasting cultural legacy.



Photo courtesy of Banff & Lake Louise Tourism/Bryan White.



EXAMPLE

For events in Montréal, the Palais des congrès de Montréal (Montréal Convention Centre) and Indigenous Tourism Québec have created Québec Autochtone (Indigenous Québec), a lively networking space where delegates can immerse themselves in the cultures of the 11 Indigenous Nations in Québec.

Offering a window on the living heritage of First Nations and Inuit, the space is encircled by a structure of wooden poles carved by Innu designer and artisan Serge Ashini Goupil. In the center, a 3D map illuminates the 55 Indigenous communities across Québec.

With a backdrop of striking Indigenous emblems and portraits of Kahnawà:ke traditional dancers, hundreds of Indigenous tourism experiences are showcased here, including art and culture, hunting and fishing, gastronomy, festivities, and nature and adventure.

Adorning the ceiling is a 12-meter wampum belt made of marine shell beads, representing peace and fraternity among peoples and welcoming event delegates from around the world.



EXAMPLE

The Indigenous Fashion Show supported by Banff & Lake Louise Tourism integrates Indigenous voices into event programming and celebrates their rich cultural traditions, fostering cultural appreciation, empowerment, and community engagement.

Created in collaboration with Indigenous designers, artisans, and community leaders, ensuring authenticity, this vibrant innovative fashion show leaves a lasting impact on event attendees.

Whether featured as an art installation at a cocktail reception or as the highlight of the conference agenda, these authentic designs exemplify the unique cultural heritage of Indigenous communities. They offer a striking way to support decent work, reduce inequalities, build partnerships, and illuminate events with a deeper cultural understanding.

“It was an honor to be included in the event held for SITE ISA (Society for Incentive Travel Excellence – Incentive Summit Americas) with Banff & Lake Louise Tourism and Destination Canada. This helps with truth and reconciliation by fostering understanding. It was meaningful to showcase my work on a local level.”

– Stephanie Crowchild, founder and owner, Stephanie Eagletail Designs.

Indigenous Participation and Representation

Programming such as an authentic Indigenous fashion show or an immersive Indigenous networking space can foster partnerships that work toward reducing inequalities by celebrating and empowering all voices. They enable decision makers to promote economic growth by providing opportunities for Indigenous designers, artisans, businesses, and communities to promote their work. These collaborative efforts create events with social, economic, and cultural dimensions, contributing to the UN SDGs while highlighting the wealth of Indigenous cultures.



Photo courtesy of Destination Canada.

Inclusive Event Design

Spotlighting Indigenous history and cultures in your host destination contributes to building sustainable cities and communities. Incorporating an Indigenous cultural experience into your event in this way also supports quality education by providing attendees with opportunities to learn about diverse cultures, peoples, practices, traditions, and histories, fostering cultural understanding and appreciation.

“This guide reflects our commitment to sustainable and culturally immersive business tourism. By offering attendees unique experiences that celebrate our heritage, we create memorable events and contribute to our community’s legacy.”

— Ann Cantin, director, communications,
Québec City Business Destination

EXAMPLE



“The Cultural Experience Guidebook” offered by Québec City can help decision makers incorporate the rich histories and vibrant cultures of the Indigenous Peoples in Québec into their events, through guided tours, visits to historic sites, and cultural activities.

Associations can partner with local organizations to host events at unique venues like museums, historic buildings, and Indigenous sites, creating memorable experiences that highlight cultural richness in the city and foster community connection.

These events could include a captivating journey to an Iroquoian longhouse of wood and bark or a storytelling session sharing the myths and legends that formed Huron-Wendat culture. Hands-on activities offer learning and growth opportunities—crafting talking sticks, canoeing, snowshoeing—or the chance to savor delicious Indigenous-inspired cuisine.



Photo courtesy of Destination Vancouver/Hubert Kang.

Partnerships for Reconciliation

Meetings and events are powerful economic drivers that present a unique opportunity to build profitable partnerships. Meanwhile, social procurement principles offer a chance for decision makers to make intentional positive contributions to both the local economy and the overall vibrancy of the community. By combining these opportunities and principles, decision makers can amplify their event's impact through intentional procurement decisions that consider positive social and community impact alongside price, quality, and environmental factors.



EXAMPLE

“The Guide to Social Procurement in Tourism, Hospitality and Events” was developed by Destination Vancouver in collaboration with Buy Social Canada. It aims to guide decision makers and associations in incorporating social value into their procurement processes, to create intentional and positive social impacts, recognizing the broad economic, sociocultural, and environmental implications of every purchase.

Acting as a starting point for the social procurement journey, the guide provides how-to information, outlining common opportunities for social purchasing in events, and offers ideas for potential actions. It helps decision makers put purpose into practice and provides tools to help create positive social and community impact through spending decisions.

The process begins by setting a community strategic goal, to determine what kind of impact an organization wants to achieve through the procurement process for its business event.

Setting a community strategic goal of Indigenous reconciliation could prompt social value objectives such as employment or apprenticeships for Indigenous Peoples, direct contracting or subcontracting with Indigenous businesses, and engagement with local First Nations.

In turn, these objectives may lead to partnerships with Indigenous organizations, such as Skwachàys Lodge, run by the BC Indigenous Housing Society. Each room in the hotel has been designed by an Indigenous artist, and the revenue generated by the hotel and gallery supports housing for Indigenous artists who live in the building next door.



Photo courtesy of Destination Canada.



To learn more about sociocultural sustainability at events in Canada, visit the [Destination Canada](https://www.destinationcanada.com) website or reach out to Virginie De Visscher, executive director, business events, Destination Canada at devisscher.virginie@destinationcanada.com or +1-204-802-0920.

Cultural Legacy Creation

The examples of sociocultural sustainability featured in this insights paper do more than give event attendees an unforgettable cultural experience—they offer a long-lasting positive legacy. By including initiatives like this, which foster understanding, respect, and collaboration, decision makers and associations can support long-term reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

Amplifying the voice of Indigenous Peoples in event programs enables everyone to listen and learn from Indigenous experiences and perspectives. Celebrating the cultures, traditions, and beliefs of Indigenous Peoples in the meeting agenda advances self-determination and prosperity.

Working with Indigenous partners to take delegates on a journey through the cultures and histories of the Indigenous Peoples supports strong and healthy communities. As we strive to renew our relationship with the Indigenous Peoples, incorporating these activities into business events can have a powerful impact far beyond the meeting room.

Final Note

As noted by [McGill University](https://www.mcgill.ca), sustainability is far from a new concept—Indigenous Peoples have practiced elements of sustainable living for generations.

As we learn from Indigenous Peoples in Canada, this deep knowledge of the relationship between people, planet, and place nurtures our work toward sustainability across the country.

Ultimately, building bridges through Indigenous inclusion in business events offers more than sociocultural sustainability—it shows true commitment to building a sustainable world for all.



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