



# WHY INTENTIONALITY IS THE FUTURE OF MEETINGS

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VISIT  
**seattle**



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
A Message From Visit Seattle	5
1. Intentionality in Meeting Design	7
2. Intentionality in Driving Innovation and ROI	10
3. Intentionality About Blending Leisure Into Your Meeting	13
4. Intentionality in Showcasing Diverse Voices	20
5. Intentionality About the Footprint You Leave	23
The New Gold Standard: Intentional, Mindful Meetings	26
CMP Credits and Disclaimer	27

## ABOUT SKIFT MEETINGS

Skift Meetings is defining the future of events. As a Skift brand, Skift Meetings delivers insights into how business events, technology and travel play leading roles in creating and instilling organizational – and indeed industry – culture. We believe meetings and events are the catalyst for new ideas, cultivating values and building professional relationships.

Skift Meetings is defining the way forward, and helping our global audience of business event professionals to thrive by delivering up-to-date guidance, inspiration and news analysis through our multi-platform digital content, research, and live events.

## ABOUT VISIT SEATTLE

Seattle is a thriving and distinctive waterfront city whose resilient nature has fostered incredible innovation. Discover a compact and walkable downtown featuring world-class hotels and restaurants, vibrant arts and cultural institutions, and signature retail shops. The Visit Seattle team will ensure you have everything you need to make your meeting a success—from site selection and attendance promotion to convention planning and local resources. Learn more at [visitseattle.org/meetings](https://visitseattle.org/meetings).

# WHY INTENTIONALITY IS THE FUTURE OF MEETINGS

There are few industries that have witnessed more rapid change over the last three years than the world of business events and meetings. While this upheaval has put tremendous pressure on event professionals across the globe, it also presents an opportunity for reinvention. And there is one buzz word that has come to define this new mindset: intentionality.

What does it mean to design more intentional meetings? For many, it's a question of being more strategic about all of the elements that give face-to-face meetings an advantage over online channels of communication. In the midst of the era that brought us the "that meeting could have been an email" meme, it's no longer enough to fall back on the old playbooks. There must be a "why" behind every decision.

In some cases, that means being more structured with in-person interactions like networking. In others, it means making hard calls about which expenses truly deliver value. At a time when over 90 percent of S&P 500 companies produce ESG (environmental, sustainability, and governance) reports, being intentional also means being conscientious about our impact on the environment and the wider community.

In this report, we'll uncover the top trends in intentional meeting design by showcasing all the opportunities for innovation in one of America's top destinations: Seattle.

## A Message From Visit Seattle

As the world—and especially the tourism and meetings industry—continues to change, we need to be mindful about how we show up for those around us. In Seattle, we've built on our legacy of sustainability by creating greener meeting experiences. We've committed to uplifting diverse voices and supporting minority-owned businesses in our community. And we've ensured our city offers a vibrant setting for productive, intentional, and inspiring meetings.

Summit, Seattle Convention Center's new building, was designed with all of that in mind. Our state-of-the-art, vertical convention center sits in the heart of our walkable downtown—just one-and-a-half blocks from the original building, Arch. Summit's architecture and central location enable attendees to soak in the best parts of the city while they are in Seattle. The building was constructed largely using reclaimed wood and upcycled materials from Seattle's industrious past to minimize the environmental impact of building our future. \$150 million in work scopes

were allocated to women and minority-owned enterprises during the building's construction. And Indigenous art throughout Seattle Convention Center's buildings pays homage to the peoples who tended—and continue to care for—the land on which Seattle is built.

As a destination, intentionality goes beyond our convention center buildings. Through a partnership with the Intentionalist, a local non-profit that showcases diverse businesses throughout the city, Visit Seattle helps planners source from small businesses for their events. These are purposeful decisions designed to highlight diverse voices and talents, while leaving a positive impact on our community.

Every decision plays a role in a greater story. In Seattle, we're constantly working to make choices that better people's meetings experience, but more importantly, better the world around us. We hope you will join us in that mission.



**Tammy Canavan**  
President and CEO,  
*Visit Seattle*

TAKE MEETINGS  
TO NEW HEIGHTS



COURTESY OF CORY PARRIS

# Summit

IS OPEN IN SEATTLE

Opened in January 2023, Seattle Convention Center's Summit building has already welcomed thousands of attendees.

Summit pairs with the existing Arch building—just one and a half blocks away—to double the capacity of the entire campus.

Learn more about placing your meeting in Seattle at [visitseattle.org/meetings](https://visitseattle.org/meetings).



VISIT  
**seattle**



1 ■

# INTENTIONALITY IN MEETING DESIGN

It's no secret that one of the top benefits of onsite meetings is the opportunity to connect face to face. At the same time, it's no longer enough to default to the status quo of years gone by. Making the most of those in-person interactions is not simply a matter of cramming in as many back-to-back daytime meetings as possible and then tacking on a cocktail hour at the end of the day. Breaks need to be intentionally spaced throughout the day, and networking opportunities deliver the most value when they're thoughtfully structured.

According to recent *Microsoft research*, breaks between meetings are essential to lessen the stress that many attendees experience when transitioning between back-to-back meetings. The study found that even short breaks allow the brain to "reset" and improve the ability to focus and engage. These pauses in the schedule are more than just the "in between" time; they're an essential part of the day's rhythm, and they need to be designed with intention.

## Meeting Spaces and Surrounding Areas Set the Tone

To give attendees the best of all worlds in these moments of rest, look for event destinations that combine the versatility of urban appeal with the groundedness of natural beauty.

Some of Seattle's top venues are designed to maximize the restorative power of breaks by offering expansive views and seamless integration with the city's spectacular waterfront setting. This is especially true of Seattle Convention Center, where attendees can take in breathtaking views while simultaneously being within walking distance of major hotels, restaurants, shopping areas, and cultural attractions. The state-of-the-art facility has two buildings a block and a half apart: the original Arch building and the newly completed Summit building.

Seattle Convention Center's Summit building is an ideal backdrop for mindful meetings, featuring multiple design elements that incorporate



the outdoors. For instance, a cascading wooden stair climb allows attendees to sit and mingle while gazing out at Pike Place Market and Puget Sound. The main ballroom features a wall of windows that not only provides panoramic cityscape views, but also natural light — which [research shows](#) can boost well-being, creativity, and productivity. An expansive garden terrace means outdoor gatherings are another option.

## Meditation & Wellness Training Enhance the Intentionality of Breaks

To be truly intentional about offering attendees a restorative break between sessions and other agenda items, consider enlisting experts who can guide attendees toward mindful self-care.

Seattle-based facilitators offer a variety of meditation programs and other practices that enable attendees to reduce stress and achieve a sense of well-being. Among them are Nicole Virtue, whose energizing breathwork sessions help with regulating stress and anxiety, and Awan Johnson at Travelers Health and Wellness Inc., a specialist in corporate wellness training.

## Structured Networking Puts Connectivity First

Gaps in the schedule offer more than just the opportunity to look inward — they're also the ideal time to connect with colleagues and industry peers. And the industry is now calling for a more intentional approach to these interactions as well.

Opportunities for designing unique events and structured networking experiences abound in Seattle, according to Kelly Saling, senior vice president, chief sales officer, Visit Seattle. She believes they play an important role in intentional meetings, fueling points of connection among attendees.

“More structured activities provide opportunities to tie your event’s story to the destination as well,” she said. “At Visit Seattle, we love helping groups incorporate meaningful interactive moments, lending meetings a distinct sense of place. From city trivia with a tour guide on transportation between activities to a custom half-marathon, groups can leverage a destination’s attractions to bring attendees together.”

Saling explained that these types of interactive experiences with city attractions can double as team-building or networking exercises. “We have designed city bingo played from an Electric Boat Tour on Lake Union, and even created cooking competitions that highlight the local food scene while team building,” she said.

Sometimes the convention center itself can be transformed into a locus for group activities. For example, Visit Seattle turned a convention center tour into an “Emerald City Race,” an *Amazing Race*-style event with clues and challenges related to facts about the center and locations between the two buildings. In another instance, Seattle Center — the site of such iconic attractions as the Space Needle, Museum of Pop Culture, and Chihuly Garden and Glass — was the setting for a festival-style networking event with food trucks, art vendors, and entertainment.



# 2

## INTENTIONALITY IN DRIVING INNOVATION AND ROI

The disruptions of the pandemic reset expectations about the ROI of in-person events, and it's more necessary than ever to show that attendance delivers measurable value — whether that be through contacts made, deals closed, or knowledge gained. In turn, event organizers need to be more intentional about choosing destinations that are hubs of innovation and entrepreneurship.

“When meeting planners choose Seattle, they're also choosing a city with thought-leading approaches across industries,” said Saling.

## Destinations as Connection Makers

Saling advises planners to work with a DMO such as Visit Seattle when tapping into a city's available resources.

“Depending on the event's needs, we may be able to leverage connections to local industry leaders or emerging voices who can bring some fresh perspective to various topics,” she said.

Visit Seattle can also help planners lean into their organizational mission with greater intentionality by facilitating connections to local initiatives, whether they be to tackle hunger, fund education, promote diversity, or any other worthy cause aligned with public health and well-being.

Here are some other resources and attributes to look for when determining how well-equipped a destination is for meetings that deliver ROI.

## Healthcare and Life Sciences

Planners for these segments should look for higher education institutions, charitable foundations, and research centers in the city for access to expertise and resources. In Seattle, organizations such as the University of Washington, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center, and Paul Allen Institute have helped procure subject matter experts for conventions, including:

- The American Academy of Neurology
- The Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology
- The American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
- The International Antiviral Society–USA
- American Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition

## Technology and Innovation

No matter what industry you work in, advances in technology will be relevant to future business, and it pays to host events in cities that are tapped into

this ever-evolving field. The Seattle region serves as the headquarters for Microsoft, Amazon, and Expedia, and is home to over 1,300 startups and dozens of the world's most inventive and established brands. Seattle has hosted meetings for:

- The Linux Foundation
- Amazon
- Redgate
- Smartsheet
- Solution Tree
- Moz
- Microsoft

## Gaming

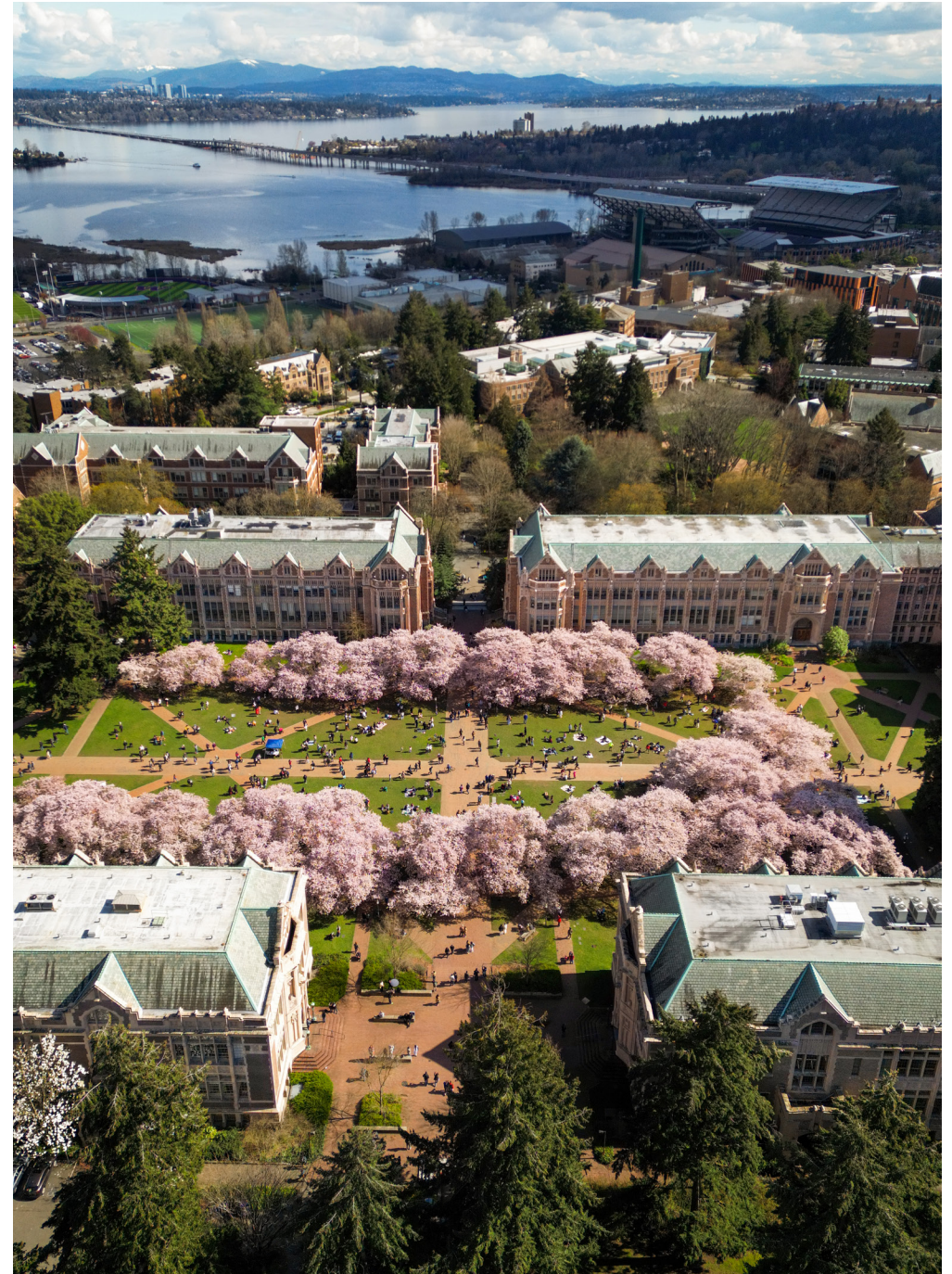
Gamification may be a growing trend within the event industry, but it's also an industry in itself. The birthplace of Super Mario Brothers and Zelda, Seattle is the number-one gaming city in North America, with over 150 video game companies such as Big Fish Games, Twitch, Wizards of the Coast, and Nintendo. The city's gaming events include:

- Pokemon Go Fest
- PAX West

## Education

Education is central to the mission of most business events, and educational resources at the host destination can be a boon in a variety of ways — from providing access to expert speakers to offering state-of-the-art research and lab facilities. In addition to boasting six local universities, Seattle is one of only two U.S cities to carry the designation of being a UNESCO City of Literature. Events attracted to the city's rich intellectual and educational capital include:

- The Higher Education User Group
- AVID
- American Booksellers Association
- SHAPE America





# 3.

# INTENTIONALITY ABOUT BLENDING LEISURE INTO YOUR MEETING

Attracting attendees is increasingly about recognizing blended travel demand. Planners need to be intentional in designing events for this growing audience, many of whom view the blending of business and leisure travel as a key element in work-life balance. The flexibility to work from anywhere, which is particularly common among senior-level white-collar jobs, has made it easier to extend travel before or after a conference. For this reason, the ideal meeting destination should be one that is both a business hub and a travel hotspot.

## Why Blended Travel Needs Consideration

Recent research on business travel behavior backs this up. According to [a recent GBTA report](#), 62 percent of travelers surveyed said they are blending business and personal travel more often than they did in 2019, while 42 percent are tacking on more leisure days to their business trips. [The Current State of Business Travel](#), a study jointly conducted by GBTA and Uber for Business, found that a whopping 93 percent of those surveyed were adding personal vacation time to corporate trips, with 52 percent of them citing the need for work-life balance as the motivator.

Visit Seattle's senior vice president and chief marketing officer, Ali Daniels, added that the blended travel trend — which she called “revenge travel” — has intensified.

“We’ve all been trying to make up for lost time, so every trip becomes an opportunity to fill the travel gap many of us felt through the onset of the pandemic,” she said. “If work requires travel, it also presents the opportunity for a blended trip.”

## Easy Access to the Destination

To ensure that the event is memorable for all the right reasons, it's key to choose a location that offers convenient domestic and international air accessibility. Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA Airport), which opened a new 450,000-square-foot international arrivals facility in 2022, sits directly halfway between London and Tokyo and was named Skytrax's best airport in North America for two consecutive years. SEA offers 93 domestic nonstop routes and 29 nonstop international routes ranging from Shanghai to Paris.

## Walkability and Ease of Navigation

Ideally, a blended travel destination should have a compact and walkable city center where it's easy for attendees to make the most of their free time. Some of Seattle's most iconic attractions, including Pike Place Market and the vibrant Seattle waterfront (which is currently undergoing a major renovation to make it even more enjoyable), are a short walk from the convention center and other downtown venues. Further, streetscape improvements will make it even easier for pedestrians to access the waterfront and the Capitol Hill neighborhood from the downtown core. Additionally, public transit such as the Link light rail from the airport makes getting around easy, as do the ride, bike, and scooter share programs that are accessible all over town.







## Selfie-Worthy Attractions

Scenic backdrops have always been a major draw for travelers, and this is even more true in the age of social sharing. Travel selfies are a way for attendees to prove that they've been there — that they've ventured beyond the airport and convention center to truly experience the local scene. Many hours can be spent exploring Seattle Center, where mid-century, space-age marvels created for the 1962 World's Fair live on with the Space Needle, Seattle Center Monorail, and Pacific Science Center. More recent additions are Chihuly Garden and Glass and the Museum of Pop Culture, both one-of-a-kind backdrops for social media posts and memorable photos.

The Seattle waterfront is equally engrossing, especially the nine-acre Pike Place Market featuring stands heaped with piles of fresh produce and flowers set against local crafts. And for a truly buzzworthy backdrop, encourage attendees to visit the market's Gum Wall, where passersby have turned the classic treat into a mosaic of brightly-colored spots on the brick walls of Post Alley.

## Foodie Paradise: Coffee, Wine, and Fine Dining

F&B is an essential component of any event agenda, but the local options beyond the venue walls are equally important. According to the [2023 Global Travel Trends Report](#) by American Express, 81 percent of travelers say that trying local foods and cuisines is what they look forward to most from their trips. Seattle offers many opportunities to turn food and beverage delights into a full-blown experience. Groups can enjoy customized experiences at Pike Place Market interacting with farmers, fishmongers, and culinary experts through

such companies as Atrium Kitchen, Eat Seattle, and Savor Seattle Tours. Additionally, Seattle's Starbucks Reserve Roastery and Tasting Room is a place to learn the story behind the city's most famous beverage, browse through a library devoted to single-origin beans, enjoy a specialty coffee brew, or hold an event in an immersive atmosphere.

Coffee, not only from Starbucks but dozens of independent roasteries, is just one of the region's celebrated F&B standouts. With over 900 wineries, Washington state is the second largest producer of wine in the country. Wine-tasting experiences, many of which can be customized for groups, abound in and around the city, especially in nearby Woodinville, a town with over 100 wineries and tasting rooms.

Last but not least, Seattle's restaurants are lauded for their use of fresh Pacific Northwest ingredients, sometimes from the chefs' own gardens, and reflect a wide variety of cuisine styles — everything from Asian fusion to classic French.

## Outdoor Adventures and Wildlife Sightings

With a growing emphasis on wellness, close access to parks is another must-have for a blended travel destination.

In Seattle, opportunities for scenic hikes and nature walks are plentiful — and often a ten-minute drive away or less, making them ideal for an afternoon off. Among the most popular places is Discovery Park in Magnolia with its meadows, beaches, mountain views, and 12 miles of walking trails. Another is Mount Si, ideal for casual day hikes at a leisurely pace.





## Special Events and Offsite Venues

Saling also urges planners to consider how the meeting dates might align with other events happening in town. “In Seattle, we have annual events such as Museum Month and Cloudbreak Music Fest that offer hotel guests reduced or free admission into the city’s museums or small venue concerts respectively.”

Planners can also secure bulk tickets to popular sites such as local museums and the Space Needle, or combine a tour of the attraction with a gala event held on the premises.

Saling has seen multiple event organizers get creative with their itineraries. “In Seattle, rather than a standard welcome session or evening happy hour, you can take attendees on a boat tour reception that allows them to soak in the views of the city and explore its waterways,” she said. “Or host a wine tasting at one of our many wineries.”

Another option is to host an evening event at a music venue. For audiophiles, Seattle really has it all. Music venues run the gamut from Benaroya Hall, home to the renowned Seattle Symphony, to Climate Pledge Arena, which draws major headliners. For those seeking a more intimate space, consider venues with incredible histories like The Showbox and The Crocodile, which launched the careers of music legends including Pearl Jam, Sunny Day Real Estate, Sleater Kinney, and Nirvana.



# 4.

## INTENTIONALITY IN SHOWCASING DIVERSE VOICES

It's not just event organizers who are being more intentional. Business professionals are becoming conscientious consumers — not just in their private lives, but at work as well. While ROI is a major concern when deciding to attend a business event, another factor is increasingly entering the picture: values. And the destination choice comes front and center. How can planners be more intentional in catering to this new standard?

## A Safe and Welcoming Space

A safe and welcoming destination that is LGBTQIA+ friendly and strongly committed to DEI practices, Seattle is a natural fit for conscientious attendees and meeting professionals. It's partly about the local culture, but also about the resources on the ground that enable planners to leave a positive legacy.

With 80 percent of Seattleites believing that the city is welcoming to people of all backgrounds and cultures, it's no wonder that it's the fifth-fastest diversifying big city of the decade. A recent study also ranked Seattle the third most LGBTQIA+ friendly place in the country, and the Human Rights Campaign gave the city a perfect 100 percent score on its Municipal Equality Index.

As important as these factors are, Saling encourages meeting planners to be intentional about their choices beyond destination selection. “Creating a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment also means looking for opportunities to celebrate diversity. Consider highlighting minority and women-owned suppliers when planning your event.”

To encourage this, Visit Seattle partners with the Intentionalist, an online guide to intentional spending that highlights local small businesses. Visit Seattle’s team often leverages this network of diverse businesses to help planners augment meeting experiences — from food and beverage options to giveaways — while positively impacting the community.

Volunteer activities are another way for attendees to leave a legacy in the city. There’s no shortage of opportunities for groups to get involved with some of Seattle’s foremost initiatives to protect and give back. Options include serving meals at Compass Housing Alliance, maintaining gardens alongside Volunteer Park Trust, cleaning up beaches with Puget Soundkeeper Alliance, collecting items for shelters, and working with animal rescue agencies. Visit Seattle can help planners find volunteer opportunities that align with their groups’ specific organizational values or missions.

Seattle is also working to extend these values beyond the city itself. Visit Seattle is a founding partner of [Social Offset](#), a nonprofit organization that helps event attendees offset spending in destinations whose laws do not align with their core values by making it easy to donate to local charities that do.





5.

**INTENTIONALITY ABOUT  
THE FOOTPRINT YOU LEAVE**

With growing pressure to report on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) goals, it's no longer enough to treat sustainability as an afterthought. It needs to be an intentional element right from the RFP stage.

In Seattle, sustainability practices are front and center, particularly when it comes to infrastructure related to meetings and tourism.

## Venues

Your venue choice will have one of the biggest impacts on your event footprint. A shining example is Seattle Convention Center's new Summit building with its 14,000-square-foot garden terrace and use of sustainably sourced and recycled materials throughout, including reclaimed wood used for railings. The innovative structure captures rainwater for irrigation and other uses and has radiant heat flooring, which circulates cool water during warmer months and hot water during cooler months rather than running the AC or heat longer. Combined with the original Arch building, the LEED-certified convention center helps organizers reduce the environmental footprint of their meetings every step of the way.

## Airport

The destination's airport is an often overlooked but important factor. SEA Airport is the first in North America to earn certification for reducing carbon emissions. It has installed 300 charging stations for electric ground support and provides pre-conditioned air to airplanes at the gates. Further, the electric-powered Link light rail connects SEA Airport to downtown Seattle.



## Hotels

Your venue is important, but what about overnight accommodation? Numerous Seattle hotels have launched industry-leading sustainability initiatives, including “Sleep Green” at the Sheraton Grand Seattle. The city has a 100 percent score on the Green Key Eco-Rating Program, with multiple [\*LEED-certified hotel options\*](#).

## Citywide

It’s also key to consider citywide sustainability initiatives. Plastic utensils have been banned in Seattle bars and restaurants since 2018, with many restaurants offering easy access to compostable alternatives and composting stations. Further, Seattle’s electric utility company was the first in the U.S. to reach 100 percent carbon neutrality, with over 90 percent of the city’s electricity coming from hydropower. Seattle also diverts over 60 percent of its waste, almost double the national average.

## Volunteer Opportunities

For an event that’s truly intentional with its sustainability efforts, consider incorporating eco-conscious volunteer opportunities. In Seattle, local environmental programs include Puget Soundkeeper Alliance, a grassroots organization focused on protecting the marine environment with opportunities for volunteers to remove debris from beaches, waterways, and shorelines.





## The New Gold Standard: Intentional, Mindful Meetings

The last few years have brought with them a period of unprecedented disruption for meetings and events, but as so often happens during times of rapid change, the industry has been given an opportunity to reevaluate the status quo with fresh eyes. Now is the time to think carefully into the “why” behind each of our decisions.

Ensuring that meetings reflect the principles of intentionality is a top priority for Seattle, according to Kelly Saling, senior vice president, chief sales officer, Visit Seattle.

“Intentionality is about making thoughtful choices that support a goal or purpose,” said Saling. “We help groups make decisions when planning their meetings that make a positive impact on both attendees and our community.”

Ultimately, this kind of guided intentionality will result in better meetings — for organizers, stakeholders, attendees, the environment, and all of society.

## CMP CREDITS

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This report is worth **1 CMP** Credit under the Strategic Planner category.

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