



# Large Conference

## Description

If you have the capacity, hosting a conference can connect your stakeholders and bring them together to discuss important topics and points of action related to sustainability. A large conference can have benefits to your mission, your school, the student community, companies, etc.. This will require plenty of preparation and a large team, so be sure to start planning around a year ahead of the event (depending on the scale). Once you host a successful conference, consider having it annually and exploring different topics each year. This guide includes information on logistics, inclusivity, preparation, speaker relations, tools to use and more.

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# Acknowledgements

This guide was created with the help of knowledge and experience obtained from:

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  - Director of Logistics, Desautels Sustainability Network (DSN)
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## About Re\_Generation

[Re\\_Generation](#) is a Canadian youth movement that seeks to build a regenerative, sustainable, and just economy. We aim to reimagine our schools, repurpose our careers, and remodel our companies to be aligned with regenerative principles. In particular, we provide resources for individuals to launch impact-driven careers and advocate for change within their companies and schools. We also aim to advance public policies that promote regenerative and sustainable business practices.

Our successful 'Our Future, Our Business' Manifesto campaign received the support of 65 youth organizations, 130 high-level executives, and 100 civil society organizations recognizing the need for reform in business education on sustainability. After three years of existence as the Canadian Business Youth Council for Sustainable Development, we have changed our name to Re\_Generation to become more inclusive of all youth, not just business youth.

We believe that the ideal society is a [regenerative](#) one. Regeneration to us means putting human and ecological [well-being](#) at the centre of every decision. It means restoring relationships, both within nature and within society, while helping all communities to thrive. Read more about our history and vision at our [About Us](#) page.

# Conference Team

You will need to dedicate a considerable amount of your club's resources to a large conference and have a large team working on the event before, during and after. Here are some suggestions for subteams that can be comprised of a few members each:

- Logistics: this team will cover everything that needs to be
- Speaker Relations
- Marketing
- Sponsorship

FOR MARKETING AND SPONSORSHIP, REFER TO THE OTHER GUIDES SPECIFICALLY DEDICATED TO THOSE TOPICS.

## Getting Started with Logistics

Before getting started with the implementation of your event, be sure to think of the following:

- The best platforms to use for your event
- Creating an eco-friendly event
- Creating a socially inclusive event
- What you need to do to prepare ahead of the event

## Platforms

### What online platforms have been successful?

Here are some suggestions, but this is not an exhaustive list of ideal platforms for a conference and they may be upgraded to include more features after the creation of this guide so be sure to do your research. Your choice of platforms also depends on the structure of your event and the features that would be very valuable to you.

- Discord
  - Pros: free, can create various channels for different purposes, voice and video channels to talk in groups, popular platform for youth
  - Cons: less professional than slack, has limits on number of users and channels
- Slack
  - Pros: professional business platform, allows creation of various channels for different purposes
  - Cons: no voice and video channels

- Teams
  - Pros: used by many business professionals, documents, chats and meetings organized in one place
  - Cons: used less by youth, costs money if you don't already have office 365
- Google Drive
  - Pros: free, easy for everyone to access important documents, used frequently by youth, great for your team to store documents and plans
  - Cons: may not be used as much by business professionals
- Zoom
  - Pros: free for participants very popular and easy to use, has many functions such as break out rooms, hand raises, chat, easily record sessions, supports large audiences
  - Cons: costs money for pro version for hosting an event, sometimes has a hard time supporting large amounts of people
- Hopin
  - Pros: a "stage" area, different rooms for separate sessions running at the same time, information and scheduling available for participants to view, separate chats for general event announcements and specific sessions
  - Cons: costs money, doesn't show participants' screens unless they ask to "come on stage" and share

## Eco-Friendly Event

### How to make the event eco-friendly?

Research if your school has a sustainability office/department. Do they have guides and fact sheets on hosting sustainable events? For example, the McGill Office of Sustainability offers [consultation and resources](#). Here is a [Sustainable Events Certification checklist](#). Another example is [JSEC's Sustainability Guide](#).

Some ideas to think about before planning the event:

- Make it clear to stakeholders that hosting an eco-friendly event is important to you. Support and encourage them to realise this vision together. For example:
  - Caterers: dealing with their waste at the event (utensils, food scraps, packagings), how to work on reducing that:
    - Partner with local food NGOs/farms/restaurants instead of traditional catering company
    - Buffet-style platters are better than individual lunch boxes
    - Leftover food gets donated to food banks
    - Compost bins for food scraps, specific packagings, compostable cups
    - Is packaging clearly labelled so people know whether it is recyclable or not?
    - Participants: how can they work with you to reduce waste?

- If you're serving food, make sure the participants know about it before coming, otherwise the forecast you gave caterers will be wrong and you will end up with leftovers
- If you provide refilling stations, encourage people to bring water bottles  
Speakers: avoid "flying" speakers in. Use Zoom.  
Venue: communicate accessibility like nearby bus routes/metro/bike stands
- Offset everyone's carbon emissions:
  - Integrate an uncircumventable station where each person will have to take 1 minute to offset their carbon emissions. It's very quick and sets the tone of the event too!
  - Use a carbon calculator - there are many out there.
  - A good website to offset is: <https://www.goldstandard.org/> The projects are always refreshing, you can even let participants choose which project they'd like their carbon offset to go towards (build a tally-based ratio for fund allocations)
- Avoid printing or buying supplies, think of what can be digitized
  - Make promotional materials all digital (no posters, brochures)
  - Have a well placed TV with a looped slide-deck can convey lots of information (schedule for the day, bathroom directions, instructions, etc.)
  - Get sponsorships from eco-friendly/sustainable companies, they will often donate sustainable items or gift cards. This also helps raise awareness for great brands within your community!
- Merch: goodie-bags and free stuff is cool but mostly unnecessary, we don't need more pens/notebooks
  - Good options: a free e-book, a nifty poster of the SDGs, SDG jacket pin, charity gift card
- Name tags: cut some paper into squares and let the participants write their name (and preferred pronoun)
  - This will save you so much time printing/organizing
  - Bonus points if you use seed paper - it's cute, can grow into a pretty flower, or is compostable

## Inclusive Event

- Start with a land acknowledgement
  - Tips on how to make them good: <https://www.mcgill.ca/equity/initiatives-education/indigenous-initiatives/land-acknowledgement>
- Venue:
  - Nearby bus routes/metro/bike?
  - Is there a wheelchair ramp? Elevators? Handicap bathrooms?
  - Gender neutral bathrooms (if there are multiple bathrooms at the venue, consider making one of them gender neutral) - communicate these accessibility features

- Ask participants their preferred pronouns during online registration
  - Print it with their name on their name-tag
  - If in an online platform, have everyone rename themselves with their preferred pronouns
- Consider accessibility when pricing tickets for events
- Consider diversity in speaker panels, workshops, etc
  - Representation matters!

## Preparation

What type of self-organization is required to be in control of everything and have no surprises on the day of the event?

- Keep in mind timing!
  - Have someone at each event to help wrap up and keep on schedule
  - Announce start/end times before each event so everyone is aware
- Rehearse transitions
  - For an event with multiple sessions, transitions are usually going to take longer than you first expected. People like to talk after, make a phone call, use the bathroom
  - Allow time for breaks in between sessions
- Put yourself in the shoes of each type of stakeholder and visualise the day unfolding from their perspective. For example:
  - Caterers/sponsors: *Where do we park our van? Where are the electricity plugs for our equipment?*
  - Participant: *Where can I put my coat? Where can I smoke? Where can I charge my laptop?*
  - Speaker: *Where can I be alone to gather my thoughts? What type of microphone will I be using (handheld vs. clip)? Can I get my parking ticket reimbursed?*
- Do a full run-through (or several) with your team prior to the event
- Outline contingency plans with your team, create mitigations for each and ensure everyone is familiar with them
- Have someone from the exec team on stand-by in each event in case there are technical difficulties, speakers need assistance, etc
- Delegate roles to the exec team for the day of the event:
  - Define clear expectations (verbally and written) to ensure clarity and no mis-communication
  - Don't micro-manage, try to be comfortable not being in control
  - Make sure everyone is prepared and has rehearsed their role before the event

# Common Challenges

## What are the challenges to anticipate and get prepared for in your position/in this type of initiative?

- Directors of logistics should have the most insight on the constraints and feasibility of certain suggestions from team members relative to the logistical mandate of your event
  - The challenge is to objectively welcome feedback and listen to ideas, reverse-engineer, re-evaluate, react, and explain your thought process
  - People will have good ideas and others will be bad. It's possible to find yourself even insulted by a team member's proposition to radically change a logistical parameter that you put effort into defining
- Understaffing constraints: consider getting volunteers for the actual day
  - Have a volunteer training/rehearsal a few days before: i.e. visit the venue, describe tasks, share the vision)
- For sponsorships (gifts, goodie bags, prizes):
  - Consider budget allocation if your predicted ticket sales are over or under anticipated
  - Leave room for flexibility within budget
- Promoting the event:
  - Consider promotional initiatives for day-of: social media plugs, photographers, photoboosts, etc.

# Getting Started with Speaker Relations

## Before getting started with the implementation of your event, be sure to think of the following:

- Best topic(s) to cover
- Ideal speakers for the event
- Expectations for the speakers and how to prepare them
- How your team will interact and develop relationships with the speakers
- How your team will interact with them during the event
- How your team will maintain good relationships with the speakers after the event

# Topics

## How to brainstorm topics with the speaker relations team and the broader team?

- Have input from as many people as possible
  - We will all have sustainability-related topics that we are more interested in
- Consider conducting a survey to your club members and/or club followers to see what people are interested in learning about/popular topics
- Discuss collaboratively with the team in brainstorm sessions
  - Idea: use Miro to brainstorm visually
- Speaker relations team should be researching hot topics in sustainability
  - This can be done by reading books and articles or reaching out to professors and other sustainability professionals you have relationships with
  - Look at attendance numbers for past events related to sustainability and see which topics/areas were the most popular
  - Check sustainability blogs/job postings/company thought leadership within the space to see what topics are emerging as valuable for students to know
- Try to stay away from topics that your organization has done in the past
  - Some of your attendees will be returning and will want to learn new things
- If possible, have a team with a variety of majors and interests
- Example: Montreal Youth Summit on Sustainable Business (MYSSB) Speaker Relations
  - A team of 5 with various majors and interests
  - The speaker relations team ranked the topics individually and whichever ones had the best average score were selected
  - [Link](#) to rankings of topics for the MYSSB

## Topic ideas:

- Managing without growth - slower by design, not disaster
- Climate change policy and competitiveness
- Sustainability consulting - integrated reporting & risk assessment
- Circular economy: sustainable supply chain in the food industry
- BCorps - believing in the impact of purpose
- Climate justice (environmental racism, intersectionality, just transition)
- Net-Zero (paris agreement, recent 2021 IPCC report)
- Social finance, green & impact investing
- Indigenous ways of living & conservation
- Ethical and sustainable consumption (garment industry)



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- Social finance, green & impact investing
- Indigenous ways of living & conservation
- Ethical and sustainable consumption (garment industry)
- Regenerative agriculture and farming (sustainable food production systems)

# Choosing Speakers

## How to ensure diverse backgrounds and perspectives?

- Ensure diversity among all its dimensions (gender, ethnicity, etc.), as well as balance of perspective (e.g., big corporations vs SMEs, private vs social/public sectors)
- Set targets for representation and cover topics that allow various perspectives to be involved in the conversation
- Don't settle for the easy speaker, get the best speaker!
- Example: If a woman from a company was your first choice but she cannot make it, and recommends a man (colleague), but you are afraid that it might affect too much the diversity of the event, don't hesitate to either ask them for a woman or turn down their offer (if you have a backup from another company who is a woman)

## How to push the conversation further and be more challenging in the topics covered?

- When doing research on speakers try to find out if they have participated in the type of event you are organizing
  - Evaluate how well they did if they have past experience
  - Were they engaging and thought provoking?
  - Speakers with these characteristics will push the conversation further and challenge the topics being discussed
- Your research should also allow you to suggest speaking points for them to cover that will enhance the session
- Don't be afraid to be critical and ask hard questions, this is often where the best learning and conversation comes from
- Ensure speakers are told of questions ahead of time & moderators are prepped to ask questions accordingly

# Leading Up to the Event

## When and how to approach speakers and communicate with them until the event?

- Reach out as soon as possible
  - People are busy, so getting something in their calendar as early as possible is really helpful to them
- Whenever you can, get a person that has a relationship with the speaker to introduce you to them.
  - If a past speaker is their colleague, ask them to introduce you

- This introduction makes it less of a cold call or email and can also give you some legitimacy  
When you invite a speaker you should attach a package which has all the information of the event, as well as speaker responsibilities  
This gives the speaker an idea of the type of commitment they will have to make
- When a speaker confirms, send them a calendar invite to keep them organized and committed
- Once you have a moderator confirmed, have a call with them to discuss potential speaking points
  - Try to let them have control over discussion points as they are the experts, but make sure to emphasize to them what students would like to know and will find interesting
- After that call, organize a call with all the speakers of that session
  - In this full group call, the moderator should go over the major discussion points and who they will direct questions to
  - This group call will help speakers prepare for the session so they won't be caught off guard
- Throughout this process, you should be sending reminders of when the event is
  - Example: one month away, a week away
  - With these reminders you can also reconfirm the speakers availability for the event

## During the Event

### How do you facilitate discussions during events?

- Student organization members: have your members ask at least one question
- Smaller groups to allow individuals to speak more freely
  - Online: small breakout rooms
  - In-person: have people gather in small groups with those around them
- Q&A periods
  - Plan at least 15 minutes, more if possible, for attendees to ask the speaker questions
  - Have them raise their hand
  - Online: utilize the chat function
    - A lot of discussion occurs via chat
    - Do not save chat questions till the end
    - As soon as someone asks it, state the question to the speaker panel while it is still relevant
    - Have someone dedicated to monitoring the chat

# After the Event

## How to thank speakers or attendees?

- Speaker gifts.
  - Make sure it's sustainable
  - Gift idea: Charity Canada gift cards, can choose any registered charity to donate to and personalize it
- Digital thank you cards
  - Have team members write what they enjoyed about the speaker
    - I.e. "Joe wanted to thank you for this..."
- Follow-up email
  - Thank them through an email
  - Provide a survey for event feedback
- Raffles
  - Create a raffle for attendees

## How to maintain good relationships with speakers beyond the event?

- Send follow up notes to them
- Connect with them on LinkedIn
- Introduce them to the person taking over your position the next year

# Common Challenges

## What are the challenges to anticipate and get prepared for in your position/in this type of initiative?

- Speakers cancel (could be a week before, could be the morning of the event):
  - You need to be ready and willing to adapt
  - Remain calm and work with a team to figure out a solution
  - You can also ask the speaker that pulled out if they have any recommendations on who else to reach out to or if they can introduce you to a colleague that could also speak on the topic
  - There are many smart and interesting people out there, you will always have other options!
- Speakers want to reschedule:
  - Have meetings with the team immediately to see how you can move things around to still ensure a full schedule and good discussions

- If they still cannot make it, consider having them involved in another way such as sending a non-synchronous video or providing mentorship to team members or event participants

## Resources

Learn from the Montreal Youth Summit on Sustainable Business hosted by Desautels Sustainability Network (DSN), John Molson Sustainable Enterprise Committee (JSEC) and Groupe Humaniterre!

- Facebook Page
- Internal Planning Resources
- Speaker Package
- Speaker Tracker
- Conference Report

Another example conference: [Ivey Social Impact Conference](#) hosted by the Ivey Social Impact Club

Other resources:

- [Eco-Friendly Event](#)
- [Eco-Friendly Event Pt. 2](#)
- [Socially Inclusive](#)
- [Free Ticketing](#) for fundraising events