beam ESG Toolkit

A guide to

Choosing a Sustainability Certification Partner

For events and hospitality organisations

Sustainability certification is now part of how business gets won and lost in our sector. Clients ask for it. Tenders score it. Regulators are tightening the rules on what you can claim. And the market is crowded — with certifications, disclosure platforms, target-setting frameworks and industry tools all competing for attention.

This guide is part of beam's ESG Toolkit. It is signposting, not endorsement — designed to help beam members across agencies, hotels, venues, serviced apartments and supplier businesses choose the right route for where they are now, with confidence and without spending a year reading the small print.

1. Why sustainability matters in events and hospitality

Sustainability is no longer a “nice to have” — it is built into how we are judged as businesses. Clients, stakeholders, regulators and our own teams now expect transparency and measurable action across environmental, social and governance impact.

Most UK businesses of any scale have an ESG strategy in place, and tender questions are getting sharper. They now routinely cover DEI, living-wage commitments across subcontractors and temporary staff, supply-chain transparency and verifiable carbon reporting — not just an environmental policy and a recycling pledge.

The right certification supports beam members to:

- Win new business from clients whose procurement teams require evidence, not statements
- Reduce operational costs through energy, waste and procurement efficiencies
- Lower carbon emissions across event delivery
- Attract and retain talent — particularly in a market where people choose who to work for
- Strengthen brand reputation and protect against greenwashing risk

A well-chosen certification doesn't just assess where you are. It gives you a structured pathway to improvement — supporting your transition to a more responsible business built around people, planet and profit.

2. Understanding the landscape

The first challenge is that not all “sustainability partners” do the same thing. Mistaking one type for another wastes time and money. There are four broad categories.

Certifications (formal accreditation)

Structured assessments that result in a recognised certification or badge. Usually involve auditing and ongoing compliance.

- ISO 20121 — event sustainability management systems
- B Corp — holistic, business-wide assessment
- ECOsmart — delivered by Greengage Solutions, designed for events and hospitality
- Green Tourism — widely recognised for venues

Disclosure platforms and ratings

These don't certify in the traditional sense. They score and benchmark your performance, often as part of corporate procurement.

- EcoVadis — widely used by large corporate buyers (including the Big Four consultancies and FTSE businesses) for supplier assessments. Demanding to complete; cost can run into five figures
- CDP — environmental disclosure (carbon, water, forests), aimed at larger reporters

Target-setting and validation bodies

Help you set credible climate targets aligned with global goals.

- Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) — validates that net-zero and emissions reduction targets are aligned with climate science. Increasingly required by large clients and suppliers

Industry tools and initiatives

Provide guidance, frameworks and best practice — but are not certification bodies.

- isla — practical frameworks and tools for sustainable event delivery

In practice, many beam members end up with a combination — typically one certification plus a reporting platform or a target-setting framework, depending on who's asking.

3. What makes a certification credible

The number of schemes is growing. The risk of greenwashing is growing with it. Credible certifications share these features.

Third-party verification

Is the certification independently audited, or self-assessed? External verification is becoming the baseline expectation — not the gold standard.

Transparency of methodology

Are the criteria and scoring clearly defined? You should be able to see how your performance is measured.

Evidence-based approach

Does the process require supporting data — energy, waste, supply chain — or does it rely on unverified claims?

Regular reassessment

Look for schemes that require ongoing review, not a one-off tick.

Alignment with recognised standards

Strong schemes align with the Greenhouse Gas Protocol (Scopes 1, 2 and 3) or relevant ISO standards.

Auditor quality

Are the auditors qualified and independent? Is the certification body itself accredited?

Market recognition

Will your clients recognise and value the certification? Commercial return depends on this.

4. Mapping certifications to events and hospitality

Which scheme you need is largely a function of who's asking for what. The table below gives an at-a-glance view.

Scheme	Best suited to	Typically asked for by
ISO 20121	Large-scale or complex event programmes; multi-event portfolios	Government, public-sector and destination contracts; large-scale event clients
B Corp	Whole-business commitment; organisations later in their sustainability journey with internal capacity for a detailed process	Values-aligned corporate clients; talent attraction; supply-chain partners
ECOsmart	Events and hospitality businesses looking for a sector-specific scheme	Corporate clients in events and hospitality
Green Tourism	Venues — particularly those serving leisure and inbound markets	Destination contracts; tourism-focused buyers
EcoVadis	Suppliers to large corporates needing benchmarked scoring	The Big Four consultancies and FTSE businesses, often as a tender requirement
SBTi (target-setting)	Organisations with the data maturity to set science-aligned reduction targets	Large corporate clients and suppliers requiring credible net-zero commitments
CDP	Larger reporters with detailed environmental data	Investors, regulators and large procurement teams

A note on B Corp

B Corp requires a change to your Articles of Association so that the business is legally committed to balancing profit with purpose. This can be a barrier for certain structures — charities, for example, cannot pursue B Corp for this reason. Worth checking early before investing in the process.

5. The legislation lens — why third-party evidence matters more than ever

The regulatory environment is changing fast, and this should now factor into your choice.

EU — ECGT (Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive)

Coming into effect on 27 September 2026, ECGT cracks down on unsubstantiated green claims by businesses operating in or selling into the EU. Terms like "carbon neutral" and "eco-friendly" will be subject to far tighter rules, and claims will need to be backed by independent, third-party evidence.

UK — Green Claims Code

The UK equivalent, overseen by the Competition and Markets Authority. Less prescriptive than ECGT, but increasingly enforced and a useful benchmark for any beam member trading in the UK only.

The practical implication for beam members

Certifications that already include third-party audit are well-placed to support compliant claims. Self-assessed badges are not. When choosing a scheme, ask whether the certification body uses an external verifier — and check who that is.

Coming soon in the toolkit

A standalone briefing on ECGT and the Green Claims Code, including a practical checklist for member communications and tender responses. Watch the member portal for the launch.

6. Questions to ask before you commit

When evaluating any certification or platform:

- Does it apply to our business type — agency, venue, hotel group, supplier?
- Which areas does it cover — energy, waste, water, supply chain, social impact, governance?
- Is it suitable for our event formats — in-person, hybrid, virtual?
- Does it support measurement across Scopes 1, 2 and 3?
- Is it independently audited, and by whom?
- Is it recognised by our clients?
- What is the total cost — direct fees, internal time, ongoing renewal?
- What support is offered during the process, and after it?
- How does it accommodate growth — new venues, new event formats, new markets?

7. Measurement and reporting

Data collection

Understand how data is collected before you sign. Ask for a demonstration. Consider:

- Time required for input
- Support for estimating data gaps (e.g. attendee travel)
- Automation features — document scanning, supplier templates, invoice uploads

Reporting

The scheme should produce clear, flexible reports for the audiences you actually report to: clients, internal leadership, partners and — increasingly — regulators. Look for clear, visual outputs with actionable insights, not raw data dumps.

Benchmarking and progress tracking

Year-on-year tracking is more useful than a one-off snapshot. Some beam members combine certification reporting with additional benchmarking tools for deeper analysis.

8. Practical implementation

Fit with your operations

Think about how the process fits with existing workflows, and who owns it internally. A scheme requiring a dedicated sustainability lead is a different proposition to one that fits alongside an existing role.

Support on offer

Look for partners that offer training, ongoing consultancy, practical templates and a clear onboarding journey — not just an annual audit.

Time and resource

Be realistic about internal capacity. Identify quick wins and longer-term commitments separately so you can phase the work.

Scalability

Make sure the solution works as the business grows — across different event sizes, formats and locations.

9. Cost and return on investment

Costs vary widely. Rather than chasing the cheapest option, weigh the full picture:

- Certification or subscription fees (low four figures up to tens of thousands annually, depending on scheme and organisation size)
- Internal resource and time — often the larger hidden cost
- Operational changes needed
- Savings from energy, waste and procurement efficiencies
- Commercial upside — new business won, existing clients retained, talent attracted

Where possible, link the investment to a specific client requirement or commercial opportunity so the return is measurable, not theoretical.

10. Choosing for the long term

The sustainability landscape is evolving fast. Your chosen partner should be evolving with it.

Regulation

Anti-greenwashing rules are tightening. Third-party verification, evidence-based reporting and transparent methodologies will increasingly separate credible schemes from cosmetic ones.

Technology

Look for platforms using automation and AI to reduce manual workload. beam members are already experimenting with AI tools to manage the documentation load — see the AI in ESG resource in the toolkit.

Net zero and circularity

If you are heading towards net zero, ensure the scheme or partner supports baseline measurement, target setting and a credible reduction plan — ideally aligned with SBTi.

11. In summary

Choosing a sustainability certification is a significant decision — financially, operationally and reputationally. The right choice supports compliance, opens commercial doors and drives meaningful improvement. The wrong one burns time and money and leaves you exposed.

Take the time to understand the landscape. Ask the right questions. Prioritise credibility over recognition alone.

beam's *Code of Practice* and wider ESG resources are here to support members at every stage — from working out what you need to making the most of what you achieve. Innovation, ethics and quality sit at the heart of how we work; this guide is part of that.

Part of the beam ESG Toolkit

Related resources on the member portal include the beam ESG Jargon Buster, Social Value Toolkit, Legislation Briefings (ECGT and Green Claims Code), Legal Obligations summary (SECR, CSRD, TCFD), and Impact Report templates.

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