



Considerations and Benefits of Integration of Sustainability and Equity into Redevelopment and Operation of Convention Center and Public Events Facilities: Case Studies and Recommendations By Anna Jonckheer



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Table of Contents

١.	Executive Summary	3
	a. Context	3
	b. Term Definitions	3
	c. Project Questions and Objectives	4
	d. Report Objective	5
	e. Summary of Themes and Case Studies	5
II.	Summary of Recommendations	6
III.	Literature Review	7
IV.	Sustainability	11
	a. Sustainability: The Environment	11
	i. Current Sustainability Measures in AEC Renovation Planning	11
	ii. Recommendation 1: Develop a Waste Reduction and Diversion Polic	cy11
	iii. Recommendation 2: Clean Energy	17
	b. Sustainability: Inclusive Community Engagement	23
	i. Recommendation 3: Strengthen Community Engagement and	
	Accessibility	23
	c. Sustainability: Marketing and Mission	30
	i. Recommendation 4: Develop Effective Marketing that Includes	
	Implemented Sustainability Priorities and Measures	
	ii. Recommendation 5: Defining and Including Sustainability and Comn	nunity
	Engagement in the Mission and Measuring Achievement	44
V.	Conclusion	47
VI.	References	48

Executive Summary

Context

In January 2016, the Dane County Board of Supervisors began developing plans for a renovation of the Alliant Energy Center. The Board convened a diverse committee to spearhead the drafting of these plans. The Alliant Energy Center **Comprehensive Master Plan Oversight Committee comprises** the City of Madison, Dane County representatives, the Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Madison Convention and Visitors Bureau, elected officials from Dane County, and facility neighbors. The committee has devised a four-phase, multi-year renovation plan.¹ In fall 2023, Dane County partnered with the University of Wisconsin-Madison and UniverCity Alliance, a member of the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities Network (EPIC), to engage a student to conduct policy research in support of Phase 4 of the renovation: long-term implementation. The policy research focuses on informing recommendations for sustainability measures that can be included in the renovation to increase Alliant Energy Center' appeal to event planners.

Term Definitions

 Sustainability: The <u>Events Industry Council</u> defines Sustainability as "taking action towards preserving our natural environment; promoting a healthy, inclusive society; and supporting a thriving economy."²

- Waste Diversion/Reduction: The EPA defines waste diversion and reduction as the "minimizing of solid waste generation through source reduction, recycling, reuse or composting, reducing disposal costs and the burden on landfills."³
- **Clean Energy**: Clean energy is derived from renewable, non- fossil fuel, zero-emission sources that do not release pollutants into the atmosphere during utilization. The term also encompasses energy conserved through measures promoting energy efficiency.
- Community Engagement & Inclusion: The action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure. More than simply diversity and numerical representation, inclusion involves authentic and meaningful participation and a true sense of belonging. Initiatives that meaningfully engage with the neighborhoods and communities surrounding the AEC involving them in planning of the design, operation, and programming of the facility support inclusive engagement.⁴
- Equity: Dane County has defined equity as "fair and just inclusion into a society in which all, including all racial and ethnic groups, can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. Equity gives all people a just and fair shot in life despite historic patterns of racial and economic exclusion."⁵ Initiatives that increase workforce development and educational opportunities for underserved communities around the AEC specifically BIPOC communities—as well as increase

the representation of BIPOC people on AEC's staff, are aimed at advancing equity.

Project Objectives and Questions

Event facility sustainability has become increasingly important in the eyes of event planners. The events industry is historically one of the bigger polluters and waste generators in the United States.⁶ Today's vendors and event's organizers strive to change this history and set themselves apart by selecting venues dedicated to fostering healthy environments and equitable and inclusive communities.⁷ Sustainability is at the core of these efforts. Consequently, prioritizing sustainability in design, operation, and programming is imperative for the effective renovation and use of the Alliant Energy Center. This research project was designed to gather data on the sustainability practices adopted by the most environmentally-conscious convention and events facilities in the United States and North America, and examine how these practices are utilized for promotional purposes, and outline some of the benefits that derive from taking a more sustainable approach to designing and operating events facilities. The project presents various case studies with the goal of developing recommendations and providing additional resources for the Alliant Energy Center Comprehensive Master Plan Oversight Committee. Research questions addressed include:

• How do convention centers/large public event facilities effectively integrate sustainability principles in their design, operations, and programming?

- What are the most successful strategies for workforce development within convention centers/ large public event facilities, including on-site jobs and skills training?
- How do convention centers/large public event facilities implement waste reduction and elimination practices, and generate clean energy on site?
- In what ways do convention centers/large public event facilities effectively engage and integrate neighboring communities into their operations, promoting inclusivity, equity, and meaningful participation for the local population?
- What opportunities exist for convention centers/ large public event facilities to provide education and outreach for residents of local jurisdictions, and how does this contribute to sustainability and equity/inclusion goals?
- What funding structures and financial models are most effective in justifying the costs associated with sustainability and equity/inclusion efforts in convention centers/ large public event facilities, both for new construction and renovation projects, as well as for ongoing programming and operations?
- How do convention centers/large public event facilities market their sustainability and attract users because of these attributes? What are the strongest examples? What are challenges? What are strategies that work well?

Report Objective

The objective of this report is to present key research regarding sustainability measures in convention centers/ large public event facilities and propose recommendations for the renovation of the Alliant Energy Center.

Summary of Themes and Case Studies

Five case studies are included in this report:

- The Oregon Convention Center, located in Portland Oregon.
- The Fairplex Fair Grounds, located in Pomona, California.
- The Palais des Congrés de Montréal, located in Quebec, Canada.
- The Jacob Javits Convention Center, located in New York City, New York.
- The Orange County Convention Center, located in Orange County, Florida.

The themes that emerge from the case studies are organized into the following broad categories:

- The Importance of Prioritizing Sustainability: Defining sustainability, identifying motivations for sustainability implementation, and integrating sustainability into mission and values statements.
- Waste Reduction and Diversion: Development and implementation of strict waste reduction and diversion policies that identify materials prohibited from entering the space, set up clear processes of waste reduction and recycling, and engage in donation to meet needs of local communities.
- Clean Energy: Integration and use of a variety of technologies to reduce fossil fuel dependence in operations. Examples: Use of air ventilation fans that adjust to room occupancy; implementation of solar panels; implementation of LED lighting fixtures
- 4) Inclusive and Equitable_Community: Educational programs for young children focusing on sustainability, scholarship programs in partnership with public

schools and universities, centers for hospitality workforce development and internships, public art displays, and volunteering programs.

- 5) Funding: Integration of costs into general budget, or agreements with local trusts and local government to fund projects.
- Marketing: Use of social media to highlight sustainability achievements, sustainability as main focus on website, and sustainability included in facility tours/planning materials.

Summary of Recommendations

- Recommend that the Alliant Energy Center leadership draft and implement a thorough Waste Reduction and Diversion Policy that: (1) Is incorporated into vendor contracts, (2) offers incentives to vendors to reduce waste from events at AEC, (3) prohibits the use of foam-core signage and single-use plastics, (4) sets a method for the collection and processing of recyclables in appropriate containers, (5) establishes streams of donations to local nonprofits, and (6), is integrated into facility tours and other public educational activities..
- Recommend that the Alliant Energy Center consistently implement the following clean energy projects: Installation of solar panels, replacement of current light fixtures with LED lights, installation of demand-control HVACs, while also exploring additional ways to reduce energy consumption and source from clean energy.
- Recommend that the Alliant Energy center strengthen community engagement and accessibility. Devote resources to the facilitation of educational programs

- 4) for children in the community, partnering with local public schools and other organizations to offer these. The AEC should also allow for internships or shadowing programs for neighborhood and community high school or college students in South Madison studying hospitality and other fields related to convention and events facilities and operations. Additionally, AEC should look into inclusive infrastructure, such as a shuttle system.
- 5) Recommend that the Alliant Energy Center market its focus on sustainability by: (1) highlighting sustainability practices in event planning resources/tours/and onsite signage and other communications, (2) highlighting sustainability in its website design and content, (3) posting updates and accomplishments on sustainability on social media.
- 6) Recommend that the Alliant Energy Center leadership establish a clear definition of sustainability and equity, community engagement, and inclusion for the facility, indicate why it is important, and pinpoint goals for the center, incorporating these into the AEC mission statement, vision, and contracts, and develop a system of measurement for accountability.

Literature Review

A large body of research highlights the importance of prioritizing sustainability in convention center design, operation, and programming to attract vendors and attendees.

In 2013, Woojin Lee, Troy Barber, and Timothy Tyrrell from the School of Community Resources and Development at Arizona State University, completed a study examining the perceptions of attendees at "green" meetings. The study was entitled "Green attendees' evaluation of green attributes at the convention center: using importance–performance analysis." The study gathered data from events that took place at the Phoenix Convention Center (PCC), where researchers "explored the importance and performance of 20 green attributes relevant to the meetings and events industry." An online questionnaire was administered to 115 attendees after the events they attended, asking attendees to rate the importance of each sustainable attribute to them on a scale from 1-5. Of all 20 attributes, the mean rating was \geq 4.08. The 12 attributes that received the highest ratings of importance, listed below, each received an average rating \geq 4.28.⁸

- 1. Uses a comprehensive recycling program (glass, water, cardboard, metal, sod) -- 4.77
- 2. Offers alternative transportation that is near meeting facility (rail, trolley, train) -- 4.77
- 3. Has educational components about green efforts that are readily available (brochures, signs, monuments) -- 4.71
- 4. Has multiple clearly-marked recycle bins placed throughout facility -- 4.63
- 5. Uses water efficiency fixtures (low-flow lavatories, water faucet aerators) -- 4.61
- 6. Is within walking distance to hotels -- 4.60
- 7. Uses solar panels for renewable energy -- 4.55
- 8. Is a smoke-free facility -- 4.52
- 9. Has staff that is knowledgeable and motivated about reducing environmental impact -- 4.43
- 10. Is LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified -- 4.38
- 11. Has architectural designs centered around natural sunlight and air flow -- 4.29
- 12. Is near the airport -- 4.28

It is clear that attendees place significant value on sustainable practices at events facilities. As the study points out, "The results of this study...may be one of a few attempts to empirically measure the importance and the performance of the green attributes provided by an actual meeting facility. It can be concluded from this study that there are several attributes that were highly important to the attendees.... Thus, it is equally important for the meeting facilities to adopt environmentally sound policies and

practices as well as make attendees aware of these policies and practices."⁹ Attendees actively favor sustainability and consider it a vital attribute of attractive convention centers. It is therefore imperative that the Alliant Energy Center prioritize sustainable practices.

These findings are reinforced by additional evidence from other studies. In 2011, Jason Draper, Mary Dawson, Emma Casey, and Conrad N. Hilton of the College of Hotel and Restaurant Management at the University of Houston completed a study examining the importance of sustainable practices to event planners. The study is entitled "An Exploratory Study of the Importance of Sustainable Practices in the Meeting and Convention Site Selection Process." Similar to the Lee et al., this research involved sending a questionnaire to study participants to receive their rankings on various sustainability attributes. Seventy-five Certified Meeting Professionals (CMPs) received the questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 16 different sustainability practices, and event planners were asked to rank them by importance from 1-7. As seen in the table below, the mean ratings were between 3.76 and 5.02.¹⁰

	n	Mean ¹	Standard deviation
Energy Efficiency			
Management of water resources	267	4.42	1.82
Energy efficient lighting	268	4.29	1.75
Energy efficient room equipment	266	4.14	1.73
Energy efficient equipment HVAC	265	3.97	1.76
Energy efficient kitchen equipment	266	3.76	1.67
Recycling			
On-site recycling program to capture paper, newspaper, and cardboard	268	5.07	1.81
On-site recycling program to capture plastics	268	5.04	1.82
On-site recycling program to capture glass	268	4.88	1.81
On-site recycling program to capture metals, aluminum, and batteries	267	4.75	1.85
On-site recycling program to capture food waste for composting	267	4.29	1.80
On-site recycling program to capture separate organic for composting	267	3.87	1.71
Sustainable Policies			
Donating leftover food to a local shelter	266	4.69	1.88
Suppliers engaged in green products and services	268	4.67	1.67
Detailed environmental policy	268	4.39	1.78
Venue has applied for and is actively pursuing the Energy Star Certification	265	4.18	1.74
Venue has applied for and is actively pursuing the LEED certification	263	4.13	1.77

Description: A table displaying the mean ratings of importance on a scale of 1-7 of seventy-five CMPs for 16 different sustainability practices for the Draper et. al study.¹¹ While these ratings may seem low, when contextualized with industry trends at the time, it becomes clear that the results demonstrate a growing concern for sustainability in event facilitation. As the authors of the report describe, "the lower levels of importance could be a result of the Convention Industry Council's Green Meeting Report (2004) being relatively new compared to other sectors such as that of the hotel and lodging industry in 1994 (Houdre, 2008) and development of the Green Restaurant Association over 20 years ago."¹² In other words, the fact that these ratings were on the higher end of the spectrum is significant, and indicates that even at this time, before a pervasive focus on climate change and other sustainability issues, sustainability was valued by event planners. It is a strong assumption that these values have increased and that the scores would be higher today.

Michelle Millar and Sun-Young Park of the School of Management at the University of San Francisco completed a study in 2017 that supports this: "Industry professionals' perceptions of sustainability in meeting and event education." In this study, 12 MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Events/Exhibitions) industry professionals were interviewed about their perceptions of sustainability in the industry.¹³ They were asked variations of the following five questions:

- 1. How do MICE professionals define sustainability in the MICE industry?
- 2. How well do MICE professionals think the MICE industry is currently practicing sustainability?
- 3. How do MICE industry professionals evaluate the industry's performance of sustainability?
- 4. How do MICE industry professionals think the demand for sustainability has changed, if at all, over the years in the MICE industry?
- 5. What do MICE professionals think students should be learning about sustainability in meetings and events classes?

Their answers reveal that event planners see sustainability as an important attribute of event site selection. One interviewee, for instance, said, "Now we see a trend where business is starting to make the decisions based, not just on ROI, but the triple bottom line process where it is the right thing to do, making the right decisions and that's how sustainability, I think, is now becoming back in the forefront of our industry."¹⁴ Another interviewee mentioned "sustainability 'has become such a big factor in why companies and meeting planners select specific venues and vendors and how they plan their events." Finally, answering questions four and five, "others said that change is happening, and 'more and more folks are engaged in doing their best efforts' and 'sustainable practices are a large factor in how events are planned and executed.'" Finally, one of the professionals mentioned "Bigger companies and clients are demanding sustainable meetings and events, because it is part of their company policy and/or culture."¹⁵

It is evident, therefore, that event planners and professionals believe that sustainability is a major factor within their industry, and consider it as an important attribute when deciding where to hold events.

Sustainability

The following sections focus on various interconnected elements that can be addressed within a sustainability framework for development, operation, and management of public convention centers and events facilities.

Sustainability: The Environment

Current Sustainability Measures in AEC Renovation Planning

Alliant Energy Center Campus Master Plan and Destination District Vision and Strategy Plan (2018)

The Alliant Energy Center Campus Master Plan and the Destination District Vision and Strategy Plan lay out sustainability measures that have already been considered for the renovation. The Vision and Strategy Plan focuses its sustainability measures on: managing stormwater for lake quality by showcasing the area watersheds' model technologies and practices throughout the improved campus, facilitating alternative transportation improvements and services for district employees, residents and visitors, and integrating on-site renewable energy production. Notably, the Master Plan mentions "Green Linkages," which involve enhancing pedestrian amenities, upgrading lighting, optimizing pedestrian connectivity from parking lots, improving sidewalks and crossings, expanding ADA accessibility, and strengthening stormwater management. Sustainable transportation and accessibility initiatives, including walking paths, bike paths, and public transit, are also emphasized, with access points at Willow Island, Quann Park, and Lyckberg Park. Clean energy-related initiatives include LED lighting, solar panels, and green parking structures that meet Parksmart Gold certification standards. Additionally, there is a one-story green roof planned for the southeast Exhibition Hall expansion. This report will touch upon additional sustainability measures that were not emphasized in the earlier two AEC planning documents.¹⁶

Recommendation 1: Develop a Waste Reduction and Diversion Policy

Research indicates that convention spaces that attract events because of their prioritization of sustainability minimize waste production by employing effective waste diversion programs. A waste reduction and diversion policy should therefore be a priority in the renovation and future operation of the Alliant Energy Center. <u>The Oregon Convention Center (OCC)</u> and <u>Jacob Javits Center</u> (<u>JJC</u>) are exemplars.

Case Study: Oregon Convention Center (OCC)

The Oregon Convention Center's <u>Waste Diversion Policy</u> is included in its contract with each vendor. Key policy points are summarized below.

Key Policy Points*:

- 1. **Prohibited Items:** Licensees are prohibited from bringing certain items into OCC, including foam-core signage, signage that cannot be recycled or reused (with exceptions), helium balloons, plastic bags (except for certain types), and hazardous substances or items containing hazardous substances.
- 2. Allowed Items: While certain items are allowed within OCC during events, they must not be left behind upon the event's conclusion. These include vinyl banners, electronics, furniture, carpet-related items, items that cannot be donated, and pallets.
- Recycling Requirements: Licensees are mandated to properly dispose of specific recyclable items generated during events. This includes Styrofoam, cardboard, construction debris, food items, glass containers, and more. OCC provides recycling containers and expects Licensees to use designated recycling stations on the show floor.

- 4. **Exhibit Hall Clean-Up:** Licensees are required to leave the exhibit hall in a broom-swept condition when their event concludes.
- 5. **Items for Donation:** Items that cannot be recycled are donated to local non-profits. Licensees must seek pre-approval for any items intended for donation.
- 6. **Perishable Food Items:** Any perishable food items left by exhibitors will become OCC's property one hour after the show's closure.
- 7. **Enforcement**: All licensees are required to submit a waste diversion deposit. Failure to comply with the policy results in loss of the deposit.
- 8. **Incentive** Licensees that comply get 100% of the deposit back and are given a <u>Green Partner Seal</u> recognizing their compliance with the program.¹⁷

*Policy applies to contracted events 30,000 sq. ft. and above

94% compliance

522 tons of material diverted or recycled

Approx. 2 million attendees reached

Low cost, high effectivity The Oregon Convention Center has seen great success with this policy. Ninety-four percent of events comply with the policy and approximately 2 million people have attended events that adhere to the policy.¹⁸ Hundreds of pounds of donations equating to thousands of dollars have been made to local non-profits. In 2019, the program donated over 120,000 pounds of reusable goods and 46,600 meals to help solve food scarcity in Portland.¹⁹ The benefits of the policy are three-fold: The diversion of significant amounts of waste from landfills; the establishment of goodwill with the community; and the low cost and effectiveness in attracting vendors. The challenges include: How to incentivize vendors to adhere to the policy and how to market the policy. The Oregon Convention Center has developed strategies to overcome these challenges.

The Oregon Convention Center's Waste Diversion Policy (WDP) has diverted 122 tons of solid waste from Portland's landfill since its conception in 2018.²⁰ It is located in Multnomah County, which produces roughly 1000 tons of waste per year.²¹ That makes OCC's diversion 12% of the county's total waste that has now been diverted. While it may seem small, that is around 244,000 pounds, and the number is growing. Four hundred tons of material also have been recycled as a result of the policy. It therefore fulfills the Event Industry Council's definition of sustainability: "taking action towards preserving our natural environment."²² It also adheres to "promoting a healthy, inclusive society" through its donation to local nonprofits. Over 100,000 pounds of material have been donated, primarily to local organizations such as <u>The ReBuilding Center</u> and <u>Scrap</u>, helping to reduce hunger and revitalize communities in the greater Portland area.²³ This builds engagement with the community and demonstrates the OCC's intent to notice and work with the surrounding neighborhoods, particularly those in need.

The WDP is a clear indication to event planners of the Oregon Convention Center's serious commitment to sustainability. Major vendors looking to host large events have taken notice. As OCC Sustainability Coordinator Nancy Reimer stated in an October 2023 interview, "this past year we booked Specialty Coffee, which was a full building event, it was a huge boon for the city and had really high attendance, and sustainability was really important to them. We were able to pull all the trash and recycling after the event and give them an impact report."²⁴ In addition to the high compliance rate and 2 million attendees reached, major vendors see the WDP as important and engagement-worthy.

The policy is also very low cost. It requires no extensive funding, aside from purchasing extra bins for the diverted material. OCC Sustainability Coordinator Reimer stated, "It doesn't cost anything for us to implement. If anything, it makes things easier because

our setup team is not having to deal with as much trash. It is very much woven into our events."²⁵ The Alliant Energy Center could implement a policy similar to OCC's WDP policy relatively easily and at a low cost. In the "2023 Equipment/Services Price List" the Alliant Energy center lists "Large Black Trash Can" at \$21.00 each.²⁶ The price list includes "Unskilled - Regular Time" labor at \$43/hr.²⁷ Implementation could be achieved for under \$5,000 for additional bins and staff (assuming an 8-hour work day) based on the following assumptions: (1) The maximum number of bins needed is set at 5-7 per event (in accordance with the different categories of material listed in OCC's policy) and (2) The maximum number of extra staff members is set at 10 (to roll out bins, distribute waste, collecting, enforce policy, etc.).

Marketing and compliance are a bit more complex. The Oregon Convention Center ensures compliance through conditionality and incentivization. Prior to an event, vendors submit a waste diversion deposit. The deposit is not liquidated by the OCC, but serves as collateral. Vendors that successfully adhere to the policy receive the deposit back in full, as well as a Green Partner Seal recognizing their participation and compliance with the policy. This is valuable for vendors looking to differentiate and market themselves. It also ties into the marketing of the WDP and OCC's sustainability more broadly. As Sustainability Coordinator Nancy Reimer stated, "our sales team makes sure that vendors know on our tours and our website that because they are having their event here, their event is already sustainable. That is often something that their clients want to see. We provide that."²⁸ OCC pitches the policy as a service offered, which has proved effective. As former Sustainability Director Ryan Harvey explained, "Framing client expectations as 'collaboration' and presenting information [indicating] we are providing this as a service has been very successful."²⁹ The Alliant Energy Center can engage in this kind of incentivization and marketing at very little cost. Marketing practices will be discussed in depth later in the report.

Case Study: Jacob Javits Center (JJC)

The Jacob Javits Center crafted a similar <u>Waste Diversion Policy</u> that is effective and low in cost. Details are listed below.

Key Policy Points:

- 1. Sustainable Event Guide: The Javits Center has developed a Sustainable Event Guide to assist event managers, exhibitors, and attendees in incorporating sustainability into events hosted at the center. The guide provides step-by-step resources and impactful suggestions for developing a strategic plan for event sustainability.
- 2. **Sustainability Report Card:** The Javits Center offers a Sustainability Report Card that can be requested postevent, providing data on waste, energy, and donation metrics. This information can be used as a baseline for future events and to identify best practices and opportunities for improvement.
- 3. **Phase-out of Polystyrene Core Signage:** The center is working to phase out polystyrene core signage (foam core signage) due to its environmental impact. Event organizers can use reusable polystyrene core signage, but all foam core signage must be removed from the facility during move-out. This policy aligns with efforts by 14 other convention centers nationally to eliminate foam core signage.
- 4. Alternative Signage Options: General contractors like Freeman and GES are offering sustainable alternatives to foam core signage, such as corrugated cardboard core signage. These alternatives are often comparable

in price, and there are similar goals to phase out foam core production entirely.

- 5. **Exploration of Exhibitor Booth Phase-out:** The Javits Center is exploring the possibility of phasing out exhibitor booths made from foam core to further reduce environmental impact.
- 6. Event Waste Management Plan Requirement: The center requires event producers to submit an Event Waste Management Plan. This is crucial for identifying the types and estimated tonnage of waste generated, as well as how waste will be collected and removed.
- 7. **Donation**: Javits Center teams collaborate closely with event managers and exhibitors to identify, gather, and organize items donated or abandoned by exhibitors at the end of the move-out period. These items, including furniture, household products, and construction materials, are typically acquired for one-time use. Through the JavitsCares program, these items are repurposed and redirected to non-profit organizations across the New York region.
- 8. Waste Management Guide: The Javits Center has developed a guide with waste management strategies and a template for building the Event Waste Management Plan. The guide addresses waste streams during move-in, move-out, and open event periods, emphasizing zero waste strategies focused on reduction, reuse, and recycling.³⁰

The Javits Center's policy is similar to the Oregon Convention Center's policy. It prohibits the use of materials like foam core and polystyrene core signage. It also engages in recycling procedures and donations to local non-profits and charities. In 2019, more than 2,000 items were donated to local partners in New York City who distributed them to schools, hospitals, and cultural centers in the region.³¹ The policy ensures environmental improvement and builds goodwill with the community. With regard to compliance, of the over 150 events the center hosts per year, almost all comply with the WDP.³² It also runs at very little cost aside from the cost of providing extra waste bins. Thus, it is another example of the success that waste diversion policies have in being effective, attractive to events and vendors, and easily implemented.

The JJC ensures compliance from its vendors by requiring deliverables. A draft of a specific waste diversion plan for the event is required from all vendors. Event planners have a total of 90 days before the event to complete this plan.³³ The plan cements compliance by creating a tailored course of action that is feasible for all involved. The JJC incentivizes compliance by generating sustainability report cards for organizations after their event. Like the Green Seal, the sustainability report acts as acknowledgement of the organization's sustainability efforts. The JJC's marketing strategies are similar to those of the OCC. Vice President of Guest Experience, Shane Beardsley, stated in a November 2023 phone interview, "we are able to promote our event spaces through our sustainable initiatives, with our ambassador-led Javits Tours being our primary marketing tool."³⁴ The Alliant Energy Center could promote its programs in this way, as well as offer sustainability reports to vendors.

<u>TAKEAWAY</u>: Waste diversion policies in convention centers and large event facilities are effective at benefitting the environment and the community, attracting vendors, and can be implemented at a relatively low cost.

<u>RECOMMENDATION</u>: We recommend that the Alliant Energy Center draft and implement a thorough Waste Reduction and Diversion Policy that: (1) is incorporated into vendor contracts, (2) offers incentives to vendors to reduce waste from events at AEC, (3) prohibits the use of foam-core signage and single-use plastics, (4) sets a method for the collection and processing of recyclables in appropriate containers, (5) establishes streams of donations to local nonprofits, and (6) is integrated into facility tours and other public educational activities

Recommendation 2: Clean Energy

Energy conservation and efficiency are crucial elements of sustainability. Expanding use of renewable, clean energy is increasingly essential to attracting events and vendors, as well as to reducing AEC's carbon footprint and associated costs. The <u>Oregon</u> <u>Convention Center</u> and <u>Jacob Javits Convention Center</u> have made impactful strides in this area.

Case Study: Jacob Javits Convention Center (JJC)

The Jacob Javits Center in New York is a prime example of effective energy conservation. In a <u>Sustainability Report</u> published in November of 2021, the Javits Center reported a total reduction from a baseline of 111kBtu (British thermal units)/ft2 (squared foot)/year to 95 kBtu/ft2/year.³⁵ Energy cost savings were increased by 12% as a result.³⁶ The Javits Center accomplished this reduction in two main ways: demand control ventilation and solar energy.

Demand control ventilation involves the use of air ventilators that can adjust to spatial conditions, including room occupancy and temperature. Based on conditions, demand control ventilators can modify engine speed using a Variable Frequency Drive to either reduce or increase ventilation accordingly. Demand control ventilation reduces energy usage by eliminating excess engine engagement. Small events, for instance, don't need 100% engine operation. Neither do events that take place during colder times of year. This technology, when used in aggregate, can make drastic improvements to reductions in energy usage.

As far as funding, Vice President of Guest Experiences Shane Beardsley shared in a November 2023 phone interview that: "As a NYC entity, the hardscapes and physical construction [is] supported by the original construction budget. However, the remaining items are not subsidized, and are simply budgeted as an expense to our overall operating budget."³⁷ In other words, for the Javits Center, there was no special funding structure for this renovation project. The Javits Center factored the project into its normal budget plans. The total cost of the project is not listed, but a <u>similar project completed at the Oregon Convention Center</u> cost around \$70,000 to install.³⁸ To offset some of the price of the renovation, the Javits Center enrolled in Demand Response Programs (DRPs). Demand Response Programs are programs created by energy companies that compensate participants for reducing energy usage during certain times of the day. Rates are generally set per kilowatt-hour. The Javits Center is enrolled in the <u>Con Edison Distribution</u> Load Relief Program and the <u>Con Edison Commercial Resource Systems Release</u> Program. These programs, according to the <u>Con</u> <u>Edison website</u>, allow users to earn "\$18,000 a year for every 100 kilowatts (kW) [they] reduce."³⁹ The Javits Center has seen tremendous energy reduction and savings from demand control ventilators and DRPs. Below is a table from the <u>Javits Center 2021</u> <u>Sustainability Report</u> listing these numbers.⁴⁰

JAVITS CENTER DEMAND RESPONSE RESULTS					
Year	kWh reduction	Cost Savings			
Summer 2019	1,086	\$517,762.02			
Winter 2019	216	\$130,227.12			
Summer 2020	4,371	\$631,762.74			
Winter 2020	4,198	\$131,817.51			

Description: Javits Center Demand Response Results from 2019 to 2020. Energy reduced per year is measured in kilowatt/hr. Cost savings per are measured in dollars.⁴¹

This is a viable option for the Alliant Energy Center in both existing and new spaces. Utilizing demand control HVAC systems will significantly reduce energy use and contribute to a smaller carbon footprint. Additionally, there are various <u>Demand Response</u> <u>Programs in Wisconsin</u>, one of which is run by Alliant Energy itself.⁴²

The Javits Center also has a robust system of 3,000 stationed on its 6.75-acre green roof. The solar farm provides 1.61 MW of solar energy to the facility, which has the capacity for 3.5 MW of battery storage. One MW can power about 1,000 homes, meaning that this system is extremely powerful. It was estimated in 2021 that the solar project would generate approximately 2,017,4000 kWh of on-site renewable electricity in the first year of operation, or 10% of total energy consumption. The Center also predicts an 85% Reduction in GHG emissions by 2050, 70% renewable energy by 2030, and 3,000 MW of energy storage by 2030.⁴³

The JJC's solar panels are funded via two Purchase Power Agreements: The first between Siemens, the solar panel/power provider, and the New York Power Authority (NYPA), and the second, between the NYPA and the Javits Center. The NYPA pays Siemens a monthly rate for the clean energy/solar panels, and then sells it to the Javits Center at a pre-determined monthly rate. This breaks up the cost monthly, rendering it more feasible.⁴⁴

A similar project at the AEC would likely be at a much smaller scale. The Javits Center is 3.3 million square feet, whereas AEC's New Holland Pavilions, Exhibition Hall, and Coliseum only equate to about 620,000 square feet. The AEC could potentially achieve a solar project without the need for PPAs, and instead, buy the panels directly. In fact, according to <u>EnergySage</u>, "As of November 2023, the average solar panel system costs \$3.26/W including installation in Wisconsin. For a 5-kW installation, this comes out to about \$16,325 before incentives, though prices range from \$13,876 to \$18,774."⁴⁵ Solar panels contribute immensely to on-site clean energy generation and are also an opportunity to signal the AEC's commitment to reducing its climate change impacts and advancing sustainability.

Case Study: Oregon Convention Center (OCC)

The Oregon Convention Center is another robust example of clean energy generation and conservation. Similar to the Javits Center, the OCC uses demand control HVAC systems and solar energy (photovoltaic panels) to achieve its reduction. It also replaced the majority of its incandescent and fluorescent lighting fixtures with LED lighting technology, which reduces energy consumption. The Center's transition from standard HVAC systems to demand-control ventilation and heating began a few years ago. It was centered on the original side of the building, where old, existing fan motors could only run at 100% speed. The objective of the project, as proposed by the OCC, was to exchange old fan motors with Variable Frequency Drive motors for five separate air handlers.⁴⁶ As mentioned, VFD motors are sensitive to room conditions. Room conditions generally require only 50% fan speed or less. The cost of the completed project came out to about \$70,000. The VFD motors themselves cost the OCC \$18,000. The OCC, however, stated, "The project will pay for the \$18,000 investment in a little over a year through energy savings."⁴⁷ It is evident again, thus, that demand-controlled HVACs are a cost-effective means of energy reduction.

The OCC funded the project using a grant from the <u>Energy Trust of Oregon</u> of \$41,000 and a grant from the Metro Sustainability Committee of about of \$11,000.⁴⁸ <u>Metro</u> is Portland's regional governmental body.⁴⁹ The <u>Energy Trust of Oregon</u> is an independent nonprofit that "works hand in hand with customers, utilities, community-based organizations and local governments to achieve shared goals through clean energy solutions."⁵⁰ Its funds are supplied through a utilities tariff mechanism that the Oregon State government passed in 2021. <u>Senate Bill 1149</u> and <u>House Bill 3141</u> established a system where "customers of Portland General Electric, Pacific Power, NW Natural, Cascade Natural Gas and Avista... pay a small percentage of their utility bills to support a variety of energy-efficiency and renewable energy services and programs in Oregon and Southwest Washington. This charge is referred to as a system benefit charge or public purpose charge on customer bills depending on the utility."⁵¹ Under the provision of the Oregon Public Utility Commission, the sum of public good and system benefit charges is transferred to organizations like the Energy Trust of Oregon, where it can be distributed to projects enhancing clean energy.

A similar funding system does not currently exist in Wisconsin. However, it is worth exploring. Aside from that, however, there is also a consideration of cost differentials. The OCC is 1 million square feet, which is why the renovation required five HVAC generators. The Alliant Energy Center would not need to convert this same amount. If it were to implement a similar project, the project would be much less expansive. Additionally, as noted, these HVAC transitions also lead to substantial energy savings, which would likely lead to a quick return on investment.

The OCC also has a massive array of photovoltaic solar panels. It currently has more than 6,500 PV panels, which were installed in 2016. These solar panels account for 25.4% percent of the center's total energy production. In 2017, <u>it was reported</u> that the panels had altogether produced 1.8 million kWh of clean energy, keeping around 1,598 tons of CO2 out of the atmosphere.⁵² The panels are owned and operated by SolarCity, which collaborates with the OCC to maintain the PV systems. Funding for the project came from the Energy Trust of Oregon, which offered a grant of \$200,000, as well as from a \$500,000 grant from customers of <u>Pacific Power's</u> <u>Blue Sky</u> renewable energy program.⁵³

LED lighting is another source of OCCs clean energy. In 2016, the Center initiated a project to replace old lighting fixtures with new, more energy efficient LEDs. The Oregon Ballroom and Portland Ballroom, two of the OCC's biggest facilities, were the focus of replacements, as well as the loading dock area of the building. A summary of the lighting retrofits is can be seen below. AEC has already initiated lighting retrofits and should continue this policy and process.⁵⁴

Summary of the Oregon Convention Center's LED lighting retrofit projects:

In the Oregon Ballroom:

- The convention center substituted 400 watt quartz can lighting fixtures for 40 watt LED fixtures.
- Two 32 watt fluorescent lamps were replaced with a single 18 watt lamp.
- 15 watt incandescent bulbs were replaced with 3 watt LED bulbs.

In the Portland Ballroom:

- The convention center substituted 400 watt quartz can lighting fixtures with 40 watt LED fixtures.
- Two 32 watt fluorescent lamps were replaced with a single 18 watt lamp.
- 40 watt fluorescent lamps were replaced with 22 watt LED's in the ballroom chandeliers.

On the loading dock:

• The convention center replaced two 32 watt lamps for two 11 watt lamps in each fixture.

Overall, these fixtures contributed to an estimated 1,144,076 kWh in annual energy savings, and \$76,000 in annual energy expense savings. The project cost about \$230,000, which was partially funded by the Energy Trust of Oregon, while the remaining amount was estimated to be covered by savings within three years of the project completion.⁵⁵

LEDs also offer design benefits. As Scott Cruickshank, OCC Executive Director stated in a 2016 OCC <u>article</u>, "While the cost and energy savings are impressive, the new LED fixtures also provide more flexibility and significantly better lighting levels in all the areas, allowing us to set the perfect mood for any type of event." LEDs offer a more malleable decorative light option for events that desire that, which is an added benefit for vendors.⁵⁶

<u>TAKEAWAY</u>: The data demonstrates that renewables and clean energy measures are effective and essential components of convention center and event facilities sustainability, marketability, as well as critical to reducing facilities' carbon footprints.

<u>RECOMMENDATION</u>: Recommend that the Alliant Energy Center develop a plan to implement of the following the installation of solar panels, the replacement of current light fixtures with LED lights, the installation of demand-control HVACs.

Sustainability: Inclusive Community Engagement

Recommendation 3: Strengthen Community Engagement and Accessibility

At the October 12, 2023 Alliant Energy Center Community Leaders Forum, leaders from South Madison shared reforms they would like to see included in the renovation of the AEC. Vandewalle & Associates synthesized the community feedback as listed below⁵⁷:

- 1. Build connections with community-based organizations
 - o Urban League
 - Chambers of Commerce
 - MATC/UW special programs
 - o Churches and other community-based organizations
 - LGBTQ+
- 2. Work with disconnected youth through MMSD and other school districts
 - Work with 14+ youth and be socially innovative with schools and volunteers
- 3. Recruit from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's)
- 4. Use underutilized spaces for teen social events with volunteers (not parents)
- 5. Install new signage in multiple languages
- 6. Host community-relevant, health-focused, and other needed education events. Can the AEC function as the much-needed South Side Community Center?
- 7. Emphasize "Belonging"—not just "welcoming"
- 8. Improve access to walking, biking, and transit from neighborhoods

Convention centers and other public event facilities that do an excellent job of achieving the above-stated objectives are <u>Fairplex</u> Fairgrounds (CA), Jacob Javits Convention Center (NY), and Orange County Convention Center (FL).

Case Study: Fairplex Fairgrounds (FFG)

The Fairplex Fairgrounds has multiple programs focused on community engagement and accessibility. The Learning Centers at Fairplex are a group of programs that "provide a wide spectrum of innovative and enriching educational experiences that bring learning to life, benefit our diverse communities, and prepare our participants for success."⁵⁸ There are four designated learning

centers, the Child Development Center (CDC), the Career & Technical Education Center (CTEC), the Fairplex Field Trip program (FAIR), and the Millard Sheets Art Center (ART).

The Career and Technical Education Center (CTEC) is a model for inclusive and equitable community engagement that promotes workforce development. The Center engages local public high school students in hands-on workforce development training and vocational education. Industry professionals and experts from local communities teach classes, facilitate worksite field trips, and provide innovative learning experiences to help set students on a path for career success and long-term employment.⁵⁹ CTEC helps students stay on track to graduate and improve their job prospects. It is a robust and effective means of engaging with youth and promoting equity and opportunity. The center offers a variety of vocational programs: Arts, Media & Design, Automotive Arts, Welding and Fabrication, Agriculture & Urban Farming, Energy & Utilities, and Culinary and Hospitality.⁶⁰ It has seen great success with these programs. In the spring semester of 2020, 184 students were enrolled, representing 30 high schools within the region. A total of 902 credits were earned, and 13,767 hours of instruction took place.⁶¹ Fairplex has recruited many of the students who completed the Culinary and Hospitality program to join as Fairplex staff.

CTEC allows high school youth from the community to come together to socialize, learn, and gain applicable industry skills. The center acts as a site for workforce development and community cohesion. Similar programs at the AEC could be beneficial and satisfy the community leaders' desires outlined in points 2, 6, and 7 on the community concerns list above.

A similar center or program at AEC could provide disconnected youth in the community much-needed guidance and structure, transforming the AEC into a site of community gathering and bonding, which would engender a sense of belonging. Students would also gain real vocational skills that would aid them in future college careers and job searches. Although the AEC might not need to establish a large network of learning centers identical to those at Fairplex, having a regular slate of educational programs or volunteer opportunities that echo the work of CTEC would aid in making the AEC a model for equity, inclusion, engagement, and access in the community.

Fairplex's Child Development Center (CDC) is another example. The CDC runs a variety of programs designed to educate children of the community in literacy, writing, gardening, and so on. It serves children from 12 weeks to 6 years old, using individualized and group engagement activities to foster learning.⁶² The center admits children "regardless of income, religion, ethnicity, gender, culture, language, or developmental differences, based on enrollment space availability."⁶³ The center also offers on-site parenting education classes for new parents. Additionally, it has partnered with the University of La Verne (ULV), a local college, to give students pursuing degrees in child development hands-on training opportunities.⁶⁴ Thus, like the CTEC, the CDC cultivates youth

education, community cohesion, and practical workforce development skills. It is another example of community engagement programs that promote equity, inclusion, and belonging. Establishing similar programs at the AEC would cement it as a community center for the South Side. The AEC could partner with UW-Madison or MATC, much like Fairplex partners with ULV, to provide educational opportunities for college students.

The Fairplex Field Trip program (FAIR) also addresses some of the objectives expressed at the October Community Leaders Forum. As stated in <u>The Learning Centers at Fairplex Strategic Plan (2021)</u>, FAIR is a program that facilitates field trips to local organizations that participate in the LA County fair, as well as organizations that are located on Fairplex's campus.⁶⁵ These fieldtrips are integrated with courses from the CTEC or CDC. In alignment with Community Leader Forum objective 2 above, AEC could partner with South Side community-based organizations to take children on educational field trips. This would provide children with the chance to learn about the Urban League, LGBTQ+ organizations, governmental agencies such as the Chamber of Commerce, and other community partners. It would fulfill AEC's goal to connect with the community, while also satisfying the goal to have more partnerships with local organizations, and promoting AEC as a center for community, inclusivity, and equity.

Currently, the Fairplex Learning Centers cost about \$280,000 per year to operate.⁶⁶ They acquire these funds through donations from board members and from local corporations and communities. It is important to note here that The Learning Centers at Fairplex operate as a nonprofit organization in collaboration with Fairplex Fairgrounds itself, which allows it to fundraise and draw in significant amounts of money to fund the programs. Though the cost for similar programs at the AEC cannot be accurately estimated, it is still worth looking into.

Case Study: Jacob Javits Center (JJC)

The Jacob Javits Center also runs two relevant community engagement and inclusion programs, JavitsCares and Javits Juniors.

JavitsCares is the Javits Center's volunteer program. Established in 2018, it is open to all members of the community, and works in tandem with Javits Center staff to help coordinate and carry out materials donations to local New York nonprofits as part of the Center's Waste Diversion Policy. Volunteer groups help arrange and coordinate pick up and distribution, and organize and categorize materials. Many volunteers come from local neighborhoods.⁶⁷ Additionally, every year, members of the Javits Center team engage in volunteer activities alongside donation partners, demonstrating their commitment to supporting the community. In 2019, the program expanded to include not just materials donations, but food donations, as well. JavitsCares both engages the surrounding community and gives back to those in need. Residents of the neighboring areas are able to come together, socialize, learn about

sustainability and the Javits Center's mission. It fosters an inclusive environment for the community, while also promoting equity through its donations. Members of the community walk away from the program more informed, more connected to one another, and having made a positive impact in the community.

The Javits Center has seen great success with the program. The <u>Javits Center 2021 Sustainability Report</u> describes "strong partnerships with local organizations like Materials for the Arts, Big Reuse, Housing Works and Hour Children..[made it so that] By the end of 2019, more than 2,000 items were donated to our partners who helped distribute them to schools, hospitals and cultural institutions. Similarly, our food and beverage provider, Cultivated, has helped us create a food rescue program, which has donated several metric tons of food to local organizations who work to tackle food insecurity in New York City."⁶⁸ JavitsCares is an effective program, advancing inclusive community engagement, community health and equity, and environmental health.

Similarly, Javits Juniors is a learning program for K-12 students that provides sustainability education through hands-on experiences. It bears resemblance to the Child Development Center (CDC) at the Fairplex Fairgrounds. Through Javits Juniors, local public-school children come together to "build a deeper connection with food and where it comes from and better understand the importance of environmental stewardship."⁶⁹ The center's green roof, called "The Farm," is the main classroom for these lessons. Throughout the year, Javits Juniors conducts educational tours for school classes, summer camps, and partners with local youth organizations. It reaches hundreds of kids and imparts important sustainability knowledge and is another vehicle through which the JJC deeply engages with the community, encourages community cohesion, leaves children better informed about sustainability, and promotes inclusion.

The Javits Juniors Scholarship Program, which is brand new, partners with the Fund for Public Schools and the New York Department of Education, using support from the Marian B. and Jacob K. Javits Foundation, to provide a handful of public-school students with college scholarships to encourage their pursuit of higher education.⁷⁰ Students apply for the program by competing in an essay contest, which is "designed to encourage community engagement and innovative thinking."⁷¹ The essay topic involves coming up with polices to improve the surrounding community of the JJC. So far, the Javits Juniors Scholarship Program has been successful. The first-ever scholarship recipients <u>Victoria and Ashleyn</u> both express their plans to go to college and fulfill their academic passions.⁷²

This scholarship program is a model for encouraging community engagement and learning, critical thinking, and equity. Students from local high schools, who are often disadvantaged or do not have the means to pay for college without loans, are provided

resources to pursue higher education. Along the way, they are challenged to think about how to better their communities. It is a prime example of inclusive community engagement that promotes sustainability and equity.

The Jacob Javits Center funds these two programs through support from the Marian B. and Jacob K. Javits Foundation, as well through other organizations and governmental departments such as the New York Department of Education, Materials for the Arts, Big Reuse, among others.⁷³ To implement similar programs, the Alliant Energy Center could explore partnering with Dane County government to pitch the idea of both volunteer programs and educational programs to community funders. Additionally, it could partner with local colleges, such as UW-Madison, MATC, or Edgewood College to collect funds or allocate scholarship spaces for South Side high school students. Implementation of these types of programs through AEC would fulfill many of the desires of community leaders, including points 1, 2, 6, and 7 listed above on page 23. A volunteer program similar to JavitsCares would help build connections with community-based organizations and an educational program like Javits Juniors would allow the AEC to work with disconnected or disadvantaged youth from South Madison. Both types of programs would foster a more informed and educated community surrounding environmental health and sustainability, while facilitating community cohesion and belonging.

Case Study: Orange County Convention Center, FL (OCCC)

The Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Florida also employs measures that nurture community inclusivity, equity, and sustainability. It does this mainly through the robust accessibility-centered infrastructure at the center. Physical accessibility for event-goers is a core aspect of inclusive community engagement and sustainability. It contributes to equity, combats discrimination, and leads to a greater sense of belonging and inclusivity for all. OCCC makes it a priority to ensure it meets these standards.

The OCCC has various pedestrian bridges that help attendees to access the campus and avoid oncoming traffic. These bridges include stairs, as well as ramps for disabled individuals in wheelchairs. The pedestrian bridges connect the center to the nearby OCCC Hilton and the Hyatt Regency hotels in order to ensure quick and easy movement to and from events. On the campus itself, the center offers alternative forms of transportation. For instance, the OCCC operates a bus, the CenterLine bus, which escorts event-goers to different buildings and halls. These buses have specialized mechanisms for those in wheelchairs. There is also a trolley line, the I-Ride Trolley, which can take attendees beyond the OCCC campus to neighboring restaurants, shopping destinations, and attractions.⁷⁴

Inside of the center's buildings, a wide variety of amenities are designed to ensure that everyone feels welcome. Wheelchairs and scooters are available for reservation through the OCCC's partnership with Scootaround, a Mobility Scooter & Wheelchair rental

service. All OCCC buildings are equipped with wheelchair ramps, automatic doors, passenger elevators, and accessible restrooms to make certain that all, regardless of physical ability, are able to easily navigate the campus.⁷⁵

The OCCC also takes mental health and maternal health into account. Service animals are permitted on the premises for people with physical, emotional, and mental disabilities. Massage therapy is available on certain levels, as well, intended for use by all guests. Located throughout the venue are Wellness Rooms, small spaces designed to offer an enclosed and private area for new and nursing mothers to pump or breast feed.⁷⁶

The OCCC covers a wide range of accessibility and inclusivity aspects that make its facility a strong example of intentional community engagement. The Orange County Board of Commissioners funds these measures through funneling <u>Tourist Development Tax</u> money to the OCCC for renovations and additions.⁷⁷

The AEC can take inspiration from the OCCC to increase its facility inclusivity and promote equity. Implementing signs in multiple languages, per the desire of community leaders, is a first step. The AEC could also establish an electric trolley or shuttle system that makes stops throughout South Side neighborhoods. One of the main concerns expressed at the October 12th meeting, as well as at prior meetings, is that the AEC feels cut off from the rest of the South Side area primarily due to the railroad that runs adjacent to it. Thus, getting to the AEC by walking or riding a bike is difficult. Driving is an option, however there are limited parking spaces. All of these qualities make the AEC feel isolated. A shuttle system would allow for dedicated transportation to and from the AEC, creating greater inclusivity and accessibility to and from the campus.

To fund this type of initiative, the AEC would need to work with the Dane County government or City of Madison to generate funds. Acquiring electric vehicles, establishing new routes, and hiring drivers would need to be considered. <u>City of Madison Metro Transit</u> lists the cost of electric busses at \$667,000 each. The "2023 Equipment/Services Price List" lists skilled labor at a cost of \$82/hr. Therefore, the potential capital and operation cost of a project such as this might be more significant. ⁷⁸ However, given that this is a primary community concern when it comes to inclusivity and equity at the AEC, it would benefit the AEC to explore possibilities for these as well as the other accommodations the OCCC exemplifies. TAKEAWAY: Many convention centers and public events facilities have prioritized local community engagement, accessibility, and inclusion in their design of facilities and onsite programs and operations.

<u>RECOMMENDATION</u>: Recommend that the Alliant Energy Center devote resources to the development and facilitation of educational programs for children in the community, partnering with local public schools and other organizations to offer these, and/or allow for internships or shadowing programs at the center for neighborhood and community high school or college students of South Madison. Additionally, the AEC should look into inclusive infrastructure, such as a shuttle system.

Sustainability: Marketing and Mission

Recommendation 4: Develop Effective Marketing that Includes Implemented Sustainability Priorities and Measures

To attract vendors and attendees, the Alliant Energy Center must also develop effective marketing strategies for its sustainability and inclusive community engagement measures.

Facility Tours & Planning Materials

To effectively market the sustainable aspects of their spaces, many of the convention centers and public events facilities discussed in this report use facility tours and event planning materials.

The Oregon Convention Center, as discussed under Recommendation 1: Waste Diversion Policy, uses its facility tours and informational planning materials as a key source of marketing. Sustainability Coordinator Reimer mentioned in her interview, "When we do tours of the facility, we really highlight our sustainability...our sales team makes sure that vendors know on our tours...that because they are having their event here, their event is already sustainable."⁷⁹ The OCC uses tours as an opportunity to point out sustainable features of the building, discuss sustainability initiatives, and overall convey the importance that is placed on sustainability at the facility and in the community. Event planning materials achieve this as well. In OCC event planning brochures, guides, and videos, the center is able to highlight its sustainability in greater depth. Pictures, statistics, and quotes from attendees help to show off OCCs sustainable aspects. On the OCC event planners page, for instance, there is a <u>video</u> discussing services provided by the Center.⁸⁰ It contains a segment dedicated to discussing the OCCs sustainability initiatives, such as the Waste Diversion Policy. The video underscores the OCC's prioritization of sustainability, and vendors are able to see that as they consider bringing their event to the OCC.

The Palais des Congrés de Montréal provides another example of using tours as an effective marketing technique. As Sustainability Coordinator Véronique Allard explained in a phone interview conducted in October 2023, "When the big clients make a visit at the Palais to tour, I am always invited to talk about sustainability. I am a part of the group that sells...I am there to talk about what sustainability looks like at the Palais, what we do, what we can do with our clients, and for them."⁸¹ Tours at the Palais are used as opportunities to communicate the importance of sustainability at the facility, as well as demonstrate that sustainability can benefit

the client or vendor. There is a sense of establishing partnership, which helps to market the sustainability measures of the facility as a service and allows the Palais to stand out for its commitment to green initiatives.

The Orange County Convention Center also uses its event planning materials as a marketing opportunity. The OCCC dedicates an entire section of its planning guide to sustainability, where it provides brief descriptions of all of its sustainability initiatives. It also lists the sustainability awards it has received, making sure that vendors understand the depth of its commitment to sustainable events and operations. Its <u>"Green Meetings & Events</u>" is a brief but informative description of all of the sustainability measures that make the OCCC a prime location for sustainable events.⁸²

The AEC can implement similar measures easily and at a low cost. Integrating the AEC's sustainability measures into grounds tours would be of little to no cost. Redesigning planning guides and materials to include an emphasis on the center's sustainability initiatives would also be of little cost and highly effective for communicating the AEC's dedication to being a destination for sustainable events.

Website Content & Design

Website content and design is another crucial aspect of marketing for these convention centers. These centers use their websites to market both their sustainability, and their community engagement initiatives. A website is the first impression that attendees and vendors get of a convention facility. If the Alliant Energy Center wants to ensure it is seen as a sustainable and community-oriented event space, it must convey this through its website design.

The Oregon Convention Center's website is green and bright aesthetically. Content-wise, it effectively highlights sustainability at the center. The first image that pops up on the website, for instance, is the OCC's LED towers, a leading feature of its sustainability renovations. In addition, a video overview of OCC features its commitment to moving forward and improving. Further down the page, the words "We Welcome Everyone" are highlighted.⁸³ Thus, the opening page of the website already emphasizes environmental sustainability and community engagement and inclusion, as well as the center's commitment to forward thinking.



Description: The opening page of the Oregon Convention Center's (OCC) website.⁸⁴

The center also has a specific section dedicated to sustainability under its "About" tab. This includes a video highlighting sustainability initiatives and sustainability awards, as well as various detailed descriptions of the OCC's green programs.⁸⁵ It is a concise and effective way of illustrating that sustainability is at the center of OCC's mission.



Description: The section of the OCC's website explaining its sustainability initiatives. On the right are textual descriptions of its programs. On the left are a list of statistics demonstrating OCC's achievements.⁸⁶ The Palais de Congrés de Montréal also uses its website as a marketing tool. On the opening page of its website, it contains a slide emphasizing its commitment to being environmentally conscious. The design portrays that sentiment through the inclusion of the globe, the bright colors, etc. By stating "At the Palais sustainable development goes beyond the environment, it seeks to meet the needs of all our visitors while reporting as much as possible the needs of generations to come," the broader community as well as the environment is included within the Palais' mission and drive for sustainability.⁸⁷



Like the OCC, the Palais also has a sustainability section on its website: "Sustainable development." This section highlights the commitment of the center to sustainable development and provides extensive information on each initiative through video and written description. Much like the OCC, it is a key method of conveying and marketing the green initiatives and services the center offers.⁸⁹



Our commitment

Though guided by government policies and action plans, the Palais was motivated by true convictions when committing to sustainable development initiatives. Working together with Montréal, an essential partner and leader in promoting sustainable events, the Palais takes pride in always going the extra mile to make a difference.

The Palais des congrès has a full-time employee in charge of sustainable development, Véronique Allard. Her role: to continuously improve and build on Palais sustainability initiatives. The organization's Sustainability Action Plan is a big part of her work, as she identifies and prioritizes the concrete steps required to achieve the Plan's objectives. Those responsibilities are supported by ongoing dialogue with stakeholders in every sphere of Palais activities.

Our key initiatives

2022-2023 Sustainable development report	~
Carbon-neutral building	~
Offsetting GHG emissions from our business travel	~
Our Urban Agriculture Lab and its innovative research projects	~
Palais Boréal, our carbon offset program for events	~
At the Palais, we recycle!	~
The Palais Non-Profits Program (POP)	~
Eco-conditionality policy	~

Description: The section of the Palais de Congrés' website detailing the center's commitment to sustainability, and listing the various sustainability programs it runs.⁹⁰

Similarly, the Javits Center's website contains a section specific to sustainability. This page is interactive, allowing visitors to choose the information they want to see in greater detail.⁹¹





Description: The

opening page to a section of the Javits Center's website dedicated to its sustainability programs (top). It offers interactive features where site-goers can choose the information they want to explore further.

(Bottom) <u>The</u> <u>"UNSDGs" segment</u> of the sustainability page.⁹²



Description: The "Timeline" segment (top) and "Partners" segment (bottom) of the JJC's sustainability page.



The Javits Center also uses its website to demonstrate its commitment to the community. For instance, on the website there is a separate section dedicated to the community entitled "Our Community." This section concisely describes the Javits Center's various community engagement programs, displaying its extensive efforts to connect with its surrounding neighborhoods. For instance, JavitsCares and Javits Juniors, its two leading community engagement initiatives, are displayed.⁹³



The Fairplex Fairgrounds also markets its inclusive community engagement aspects on its website. It has a specific page, for instance, dedicated The Learning Centers at Fairplex. This page not only offers a visual glimpse of The Learning Centers at Fairplex

implements, but it also provides informative descriptions of each center, demonstrating Fairplex's commitment to community engagement.⁹⁵



Description: <u>A</u> section the Fairplex's website detailing the mission of and programs offered at The Learning Centers.⁹⁶ These interactive pages, in all, are an informative and engaging way of demonstrating these facilities' dedication to sustainability and inclusive community engagement.

The AEC can take inspiration from these websites to implement sustainability and community-oriented aspects into its website design and content. For instance, it could add a section specifically dedicated to sustainability and community engagement and inclusion, or it could highlight some of its sustainability measures on its front page, with pictures or quotes from vendors/attendees who have factored the facility's sustainability features and services into their choice of the venue. All in all, website design and content can be a relatively low-cost and effective way of marketing.

Social Media

Social Media could also elevate marketing for the AEC. Social media allows individuals a snapshot glimpse into the sustainability measures of convention centers while being interactive and an easy method of engaging with younger attendees, and vendors. The Jacob Javits Center uses this strategy particularly well. Below are a few of the posts made by the Javits Center Instagram account. Through these carefully curated posts, the center provides transparent and informative descriptions of its sustainability initiatives. Each post acts as a storytelling opportunity, showcasing the steps taken toward priority sustainability practices. By utilizing hashtags related to sustainability and industry-specific trends, the center further enhances its visibility within the digital landscape. It is an effective and budget-friendly method for marketing sustainability.



Description: Posts made by the <u>Javits Center Instagram account</u> detailing sustainability initiatives and community engagement programs.⁹⁷

The Palais de Congrés de Montréal also adeptly utilizes this approach. Below are several posts shared by the venue's Instagram account. In these posts, the Palais de Congrés de Montréal openly and informatively displays its sustainability initiatives and commitment. Each post showcases the measures taken toward environmentally-conscious practices. This helps the venue significantly increase its visibility and market itself as a leading sustainable convention space.



These venues also use social media to make people aware of their community engagement programs. Fairplex, for instance, has multiple Instagram posts, as well as an entire Instagram page, dedicated The Learning Centers. These posts not only exemplify the positive effects of these programs, they give followers and the general public, including potential vendors, a chance to see it as well.





Mitchell (on the left) is also a senior in high school and is taking Welding wanacturing courses. "I decided to Description: Posts made by <u>The Learning</u> <u>Centers at</u> Fairplex Instagram account celebrating the achievements of students from different learning centers.⁹⁹ The Alliant Energy Center can enhance its image as a green and inclusive convention center by incorporating sustainability-focused and community-oriented posts into its existing social media accounts. Leveraging platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook to share updates on eco-friendly initiatives, energy-saving practices, community engagement, and environmentally conscious events can significantly bolster the center's reputation. Engaging content that highlights the steps taken towards sustainability, along with informative captions and visually appealing images, will not only resonate with the audience but also position the Alliant Energy Center as a leader in sustainable practices. This strategic use of social media provides a cost-effective and accessible avenue to showcase the center's commitment to a greener and more inclusive future and foster a positive narrative around its sustainability efforts.

<u>TAKEAWAY</u>: Convention centers and public events facilities that have prioritized sustainability and local community engagement, accessibility, and inclusion bring these priorities to the forefront through thoughtfully-layered and interactive marketing approaches.

<u>RECOMMENDATION</u>: Recommend that the Alliant Energy Center market its focus on sustainability and inclusive community engagement by: (1) highlighting sustainability practices in event planning resources/tours, (2) highlighting sustainability and community engagement in its website design and content, (3) posting updates and accomplishments on sustainability and community initiatives on social media.

Recommendation 5: Defining and Including Sustainability and Community Engagement in the Mission and Measuring Achievement

Lastly, the findings from these case studies reveals that convention centers and public event facilities that excel in sustainability and inclusive community engagement, attracting events because of such practices, actively prioritize both in their goals/mission statements, and highlight their importance in their work culture. Sustainability Coordinator Véronique Allard explained this in her interview: "It is important that in your mission, in your plan for your center, that you put priority on sustainability, and measure it

with mid-term and long-term goals. Then you will make an impact that people see. Employees have to know also. No director will have sustainability in their objective if they don't know about it. If workers see sustainability as important, if they see it is a priority, they will really work towards it and put money into it. It makes them accountable in their action, to measure it and follow through."¹⁰⁰ Including sustainability and community inclusivity as priorities in the mission statement acts as a method of accountability, while being an indication of the center's dedication to such efforts. Emphasizing its importance in a bold, public way allows attendees and vendors to see that a convention center incorporates the community and sustainability in everything they do, and that in collaboration with the center, their events can be sustainable too. Internally, it is a reminder of what the center and its staff has promised and what it must work toward achieving. Having sustainability and community engagement as part of the mission statement gives employees something to strive for and to which they can dedicate their time and energy. It is the difference between saying and doing. For this reason, it is essential that the AEC incorporate sustainability and community inclusivity into their current mission and vision statements:

"The Alliant Energy Center of Dane County will manage and operate first-rate venues for local, regional, national, and international events. The facilities will consistently deliver superior, user-friendly services to all its customers, clients, tenants, visitors, guests, and employees. The Alliant Energy Center will be properly maintained, and professionally and efficiently operated. The Alliant Energy Center will benefit the community and citizens of Dane County by providing the economic and quality of life benefits related to its success in the conventions, expositions, meeting, and trade show industry and hosting entertainment, sporting, livestock exhibition, consumer, and social events. The Alliant Energy Center shall achieve these objectives with no General Fund operating subsidy."¹⁰¹

"Alliant Energy Center is a key regional asset that serves as a dynamic convening campus providing an exceptional and authentic experience for the community and visitors alike. The integrated campus serves as a catalyst for a vibrant destination district driving tax base growth and increased access to economic opportunity." ¹⁰²

Below are three examples from the case studies reviewed in this report for guidance on how to incorporate sustainability and inclusive community engagement into mission statements, and offer templates as to how to effectively and truthfully integrate sustainability into mission statements and goals.

- Oregon Convention Center: "Inspired by our region and located in the heart of Portland, the OCC is a gathering place for our guests to share their ideas and shape the future of our world. We're passionate about advancing equity and prosperity, supporting our environment and cultivating meaningful relationships in our community."¹⁰³

- Jacob Javits Center: "The mission of the New York Convention Center Operating Corporation (NYCCOC) is to serve the citizens of the State and City of New York by generating new business and employment opportunities, serving as a catalyst for the continued redevelopment of the local community and operating in the public interest, consistent with the social, economic and environmental priorities of existing state policy. NYCCOC meets these objectives through maximizing the booking of trade shows, conventions, public shows, and special events that stimulate spending within the regional economy, create jobs at the Javits Center and in the surrounding community and generate a reliable source of revenue for the State and City of New York. NYCCOC strives to achieve these results by operating in accordance with the highest professional standards, generating sufficient operating revenue to be financially self-supporting, maintaining the convention center facility in accordance with our core values and ensuring our operations are consistent with contemporary sustainability objectives and a community friendly approach."¹⁰⁴
- Fairplex Fairgrounds: Fairplex is a nonprofit enterprise that serves as a place, a convener and a creator of memories to strengthen the community and economy through arts and entertainment, agriculture, education and commerce. "Guiding Principles: Public Benefit Committed to doing good in everything we do; Guest Experience Placing our guests at the center of what we do; Partnership We are at our best when we partner with others; Sustainability Committed to being financially healthy and environmentally friendly; Uniquely Southern California Celebrating the best of our community."¹⁰⁵

<u>TAKEAWAY</u>: Convention centers and public events facilities that have prioritized sustainability and local community engagement, accessibility, and inclusion define and highlight these priorities in their mission statements and metrics.

<u>RECOMMENDATION</u>: Recommend that the Alliant Energy Center leadership establish a clear definition of sustainability and equity, community engagement, and inclusion for the facility, indicate why it is important, and pinpoint goals for the center, incorporating these into the AEC mission statement, vision, and contracts, and develop a system of measurement for accountability.

Conclusion

This research project has explored the evolving landscape of sustainability and community engagement and inclusion within convention centers and public event facilities, with a particular focus on the imperative of transformation required in the events industry to remain attractive and competitive. The examination of leading convention centers and public event facilities across the United States and North America serves as a foundation for providing insightful recommendations that can be tailored to the specific needs and goals of the Alliant Energy Center Comprehensive Master Plan Oversight Committee.

The project's emphasis on sustainability as a core principle in design, operation, and programming aligns with the broader industry trend where event planners, vendors, and organizers seek and insist on venues dedicated to fostering healthy environments and inclusive communities. By delving into the practices of environmentally-conscious facilities, this research aims to distill key strategies and successful models that can be applied to enhance the Alliant Energy Center's sustainability and community engagement profile.

The research questions, ranging from effective integration of sustainability principles to workforce development, waste reduction, community engagement and inclusion, education, funding structures, and marketing strategies, comprehensively address and explore the multifaceted nature of sustainability within public event facilities. Through the analysis of case studies, themes such as the importance of prioritizing implementation of waste diversion policies, utilization of clean energy practices, creation of inclusive communities, strategic funding mechanisms, and effective marketing strategies emerge as crucial considerations for the Alliant Energy Center's renovation and future operations.

The recommendations this report proposes, when strategically incorporated into the mission, operations, and marketing of the Alliant Energy Center, are poised to elevate its standing as a socially responsible and environmentally conscious event facility. By fostering a commitment to sustainability, local community engagement, and inclusion, the Alliant Energy Center has the potential to serve as a model for sustainability and community-friendly service and programming that attracts new and greater numbers of events vendors and attendees, and fosters an enduring positive relationship with its neighbors.

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