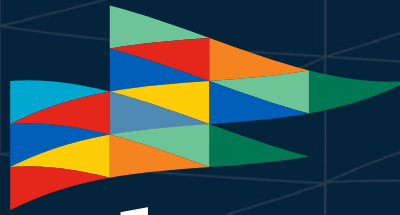


S U S T A I N A B I L I T Y



Sports ETA
SPORTS EVENTS & TOURISM ASSOCIATION

**Sustainability 101 for Sports Tourism:
Enhancing Destination Value
Through Responsible Event Management**



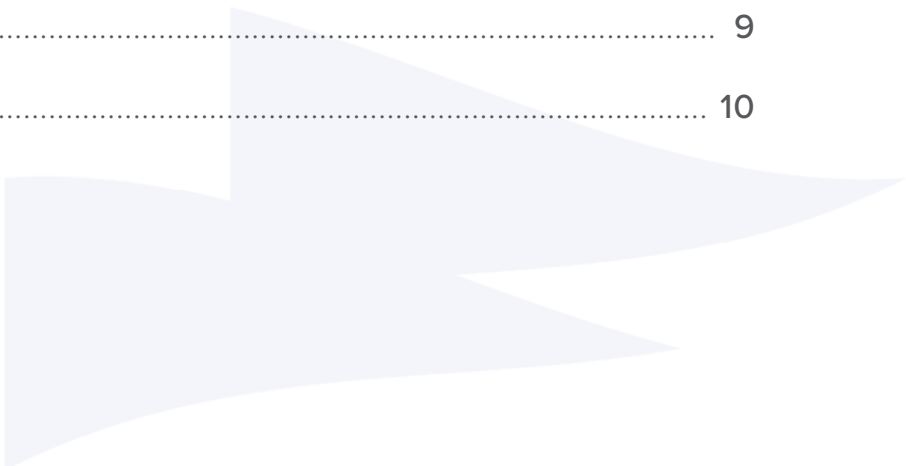
Sponsored By



RICO SOLUTIONS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Overview: The Triple Bottom Line in Sports Tourism	2
Environmental Sustainability: Preserving Ecosystems Through Sports	3
Social Sustainability: Building Stronger Communities Through Sport	5
Economic Sustainability: Creating Lasting Value Through Sports Events	7
Conclusion	9
Call to Action	10



1 | Introduction

Sports tourism has emerged as a powerful economic driver for destinations across the country. According to the Sports Events and Tourism Association's (Sports ETA) State of the Industry Report, the sector generated \$39.7 billion in direct spending in 2021, supporting over 635,000 jobs and creating \$12.9 billion in tax revenue. These figures underscore the significant impact sports events have on local economies and communities.



The Sports Events and Tourism sector generated \$39.7 billion in direct spending in 2021, supporting over 635,000 jobs and creating \$12.9 billion in tax revenue.

However, as the industry continues to grow, so does its responsibility to ensure this growth is sustainable. Sustainability in sports tourism goes beyond environmental concerns; it encompasses social responsibility and long-term economic viability. For those involved in destination marketing and event organization, embracing sustainability is not just an ethical choice—it's a strategic imperative that can enhance destination appeal, create lasting community benefits, and drive economic growth.

This white paper aims to provide a comprehensive introduction to sustainability in sports tourism, tailored specifically for professionals in destination marketing and sports event management. We will explore how sustainable practices can be integrated into sports events and tourism strategies, enhancing both the visitor experience and the long-term value of destinations.



2 | Overview: The Triple Bottom Line in Sports Tourism

Sustainability in sports tourism is built on the concept of the “Triple Bottom Line”—a framework that considers social and environmental impacts alongside financial performance. For organizations involved in sports tourism, this approach means:

- 1. Environmental Sustainability:** Minimizing the ecological footprint of sports events while showcasing and preserving local natural assets.
- 2. Social Sustainability:** Ensuring events contribute positively to host communities, promote inclusivity, and leave a lasting legacy.
- 3. Economic Sustainability:** Generating lasting economic benefits that support long-term growth and community development.

By adopting this holistic approach, sports tourism organizations can create events that drive immediate economic impact, enhance quality of life, promote environmental stewardship, and build a positive reputation for host destinations.

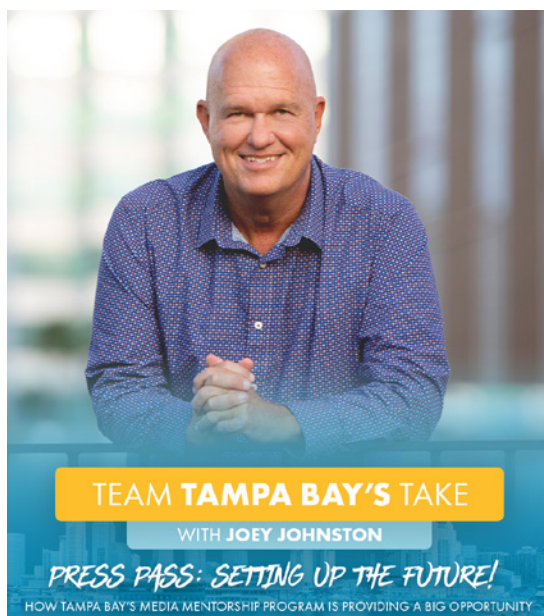
In the following sections, we'll explore each pillar of sustainability in-depth, providing practical insights and real-world examples from successful sports tourism initiatives. We'll demonstrate how sustainability can be a powerful tool for destination differentiation, community development, and long-term economic success in the competitive world of sports event hosting.

SPOTLIGHT

Tampa Bay's Press Pass Program

The Tampa Bay Sports Commission, in collaboration with the Girl Scouts of West Central Florida, implemented an innovative “Press Pass” program during the 2019 NCAA Women's Final Four. This 20-week initiative provided young girls in grades 6-12 with hands-on experience in sports media. Participants received exclusive access to the championship tournament, including behind-the-scenes views and opportunities to observe news conferences. The program culminated in a Junior Journalism Workshop where students were

credentialed and given the chance to tour various areas, including ESPN production trucks. This initiative not only enhanced event inclusivity but also opened doors to potential careers in sports media for local youth.



3 | Environmental Sustainability: Preserving Ecosystems Through Sports

Sports tourism presents a unique platform to demonstrate environmental leadership while hosting exciting events. As we bring visitors to our communities, we have the opportunity—and responsibility—to minimize our environmental impact and contribute positively to local ecosystems.



Key areas where sports events can make a significant environmental difference include:

1. Waste Management and Reduction

Effective waste management is crucial for large-scale sports events. The volume of waste generated during these events can be substantial, but with proper planning and execution, much of it can be diverted from landfills.

Implementing comprehensive recycling and composting programs can significantly reduce waste sent to landfills. This not only reduces environmental impact but can also lead to cost savings for event organizers. Adopting reusable or compostable serviceware can dramatically reduce single-use plastic waste, addressing a visible and problematic aspect of event waste.

2. Energy Efficiency and Climate Considerations

Energy use is a significant contributor to both the environmental footprint and carbon emissions of sports events. By focusing on energy efficiency and renewable sources, events can reduce their impact on climate change.

Strategies for improving energy efficiency include utilizing energy-efficient lighting and equipment in venues, incorporating renewable energy sources, and encouraging the use of public transportation or shuttles for attendees. These measures not only reduce environmental impact but can also result in significant cost savings over time.

SPOTLIGHT



Portland Trail Blazers' Reusable Cup Program

The Portland Trail Blazers, in collaboration with Bold Reuse and Levy, launched 'Rip City Reuse' in 2023, the first large-scale reusable cup program in U.S. professional sports. Building on a successful pilot that achieved an 88% return rate for reusable trays, the program expanded to arena-wide reusable cups for alcoholic beverages. This initiative makes reusable cups the default option for all events at no additional cost to guests. The program not only significantly reduces single-use plastic waste but also generates new revenue streams and enhances the fan experience. By implementing this system, the Trail Blazers demonstrate how sports venues can lead in sustainability while improving operations and engaging fans in environmental efforts.

3. Water Conservation

Water is a precious resource, and sports events often use significant amounts for everything from field maintenance to food service. Implementing water conservation measures can reduce this impact and set an example for responsible water use.

Permanent venues can install low-flow fixtures, drought-resistant landscaping, and water recycling systems, while events using temporary or leased facilities can implement mobile water stations with flow controls, temporary aerators, usage monitoring, and staff training on conservation practices. These practices are particularly important in regions facing water scarcity issues, where responsible water use can contribute to community resilience.

4. Sustainable Procurement

The choices made in purchasing goods and services for sports events can have far-reaching environmental impacts. By prioritizing sustainable procurement, events can reduce their ecological footprint and support the growth of sustainable industries.

Sustainable procurement practices include sourcing locally to reduce transportation emissions, selecting suppliers with strong environmental credentials, and using sustainable materials for event signage and merchandise. These choices can have ripple effects throughout the supply chain, encouraging broader adoption of sustainable practices.

5. Carbon Footprint Reduction

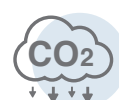
While not the only environmental consideration, addressing the carbon footprint of sports events is increasingly important. Travel-related emissions can be a significant part of a sports event's carbon footprint, highlighting the need to consider transportation in sustainability planning.

Strategies to reduce carbon footprint might include encouraging the use of public transportation or electric shuttles for attendees, offering carbon offset programs for participant travel, and implementing virtual or hybrid elements to reduce long-distance travel.

The impact of these initiatives can be substantial. For example, a study of youth hockey in Canada found that a group of 32 parents traveled a combined 78,000 km and emitted approximately 20 tons of CO₂ just attending away games in one season (Chard & Mallent, 2012). This highlights the potential for significant emissions reductions through thoughtful planning and sustainable transportation options.

By embracing these environmental sustainability practices, sports tourism can not only minimize its ecological footprint but also serve as a powerful force for environmental education and conservation. Importantly, these efforts can resonate with fans and participants. A 2021 study found that 69% of Gen Z sports fans (aged 16-24) support environmental action and want to see sport stakeholders do more on this agenda (Slippery Slopes, 2022). This suggests that sustainability efforts can enhance fan engagement and potentially attract a new generation of environmentally conscious sports tourists.

By prioritizing sustainable procurement, events can reduce their ecological footprint and support the growth of sustainable industries.



4

Social Sustainability: Building Stronger Communities Through Sport

While economic impact often takes center stage in discussions about sports tourism, the social benefits of hosting events can be equally profound and long-lasting. Social sustainability in sports tourism focuses on ensuring that events contribute positively to host communities, promote inclusivity, and leave a meaningful legacy.



Key aspects of social sustainability in sports tourism include:

1. Community Engagement and Legacy

Sports events have the power to unite communities and create lasting positive impacts. Effective community engagement involves including local residents in event planning and execution, creating volunteer opportunities, and developing infrastructure and programs that benefit the community long-term.

By fostering a sense of ownership and pride in the event, organizers can build strong community support. Research has shown that residents who are satisfied with event participation become strong supporters of the event (Park et al., 2022). This underscores the importance of meaningful community involvement in sports tourism initiatives.

2. Inclusivity and Accessibility

Ensuring that sports events are inclusive and accessible to all members of the community is crucial for social sustainability. This includes making events accessible to people with disabilities, promoting diversity in participation and attendance, and offering programs for underserved youth and communities.

By prioritizing inclusivity, sports events can serve as powerful tools for social integration and community building. This approach not only enhances the event experience but also contributes to broader social cohesion in the host community.

SPOTLIGHT



California International Marathon's Inclusivity Initiatives

The California International Marathon (CIM) has made significant strides in making their event more inclusive and accessible. They created and staffed a management position specifically to coordinate services and outreach for athletes with disabilities. This focused effort led to a dramatic increase in participation of athletes using traditional and non-traditional wheelchairs, growing from just three participants in 2017 to 25 in 2019. Additionally, CIM hosts the annual United States Association of Blind Athletes Marathon Championships, further broadening the event's appeal and accessibility. These initiatives demonstrate how race organizers can actively work to make their events more inclusive, providing opportunities for a diverse range of athletes to participate in major sporting events.

3. Health and Wellness Promotion

Sports events provide unique opportunities to promote health and wellness in host communities. Strategies include encouraging physical activity through participatory events, hosting health and wellness expos alongside sporting events, and partnering with local health organizations for community outreach.

These initiatives can have lasting impacts on community health, extending the benefits of sports events far beyond the event itself. By inspiring local residents to adopt more active lifestyles, sports tourism can contribute to improved public health outcomes.

4. Education and Skills Development

Sports tourism can be a catalyst for education and skills development in host communities. This might involve providing training opportunities for local staff and volunteers, offering workshops and clinics related to the sport, and creating internship programs for students interested in sports management.

These educational initiatives can help build local capacity and create pathways to careers in the sports industry. By investing in local talent, sports tourism can contribute to long-term economic development and community empowerment.

5. Cultural Celebration and Preservation

Sports events offer opportunities to showcase and celebrate local culture. This can include incorporating local cultural elements into event programming, partnering with local artists and performers, and respecting and highlighting the area's cultural heritage.

By integrating cultural elements, sports events can enhance the visitor experience while fostering pride in local traditions. This cultural exchange can lead to greater understanding between visitors and residents, enriching the experience for all involved.

By prioritizing social sustainability, sports tourism can become a powerful force for positive change in communities. It's not just about hosting a successful event; it's about leveraging the power of sport to create lasting social benefits that extend far beyond the field of play. In doing so, socially sustainable sports tourism doesn't just bring visitors to a destination—it helps build stronger, more vibrant communities that are better places to live, work, and play.



5

Economic Sustainability: Creating Lasting Value Through Sports Events

Economic sustainability in sports tourism extends far beyond the immediate influx of visitor spending. It focuses on creating enduring economic benefits that support community growth and resilience. The sports tourism industry has demonstrated remarkable potential for economic impact. According to the Sports Events and Tourism Association's State of the Industry Report, the sector generated \$39.7 billion in direct spending in 2021, supporting over 635,000 jobs and creating \$12.9 billion in tax revenue. These figures underscore the significant role sports tourism can play in local and national economies.



Key aspects of economically sustainable sports tourism include:

1. Long-term Economic Planning

Successful sports tourism initiatives align events with broader economic development strategies. This involves more than just attracting one-off events; it's about creating a sustainable ecosystem that supports ongoing economic growth.

Investing in infrastructure that serves both event and community needs is a crucial element of this strategy. For instance, a multi-use sports complex built for a major tournament can later serve as a community recreation center or a venue for smaller local events. This approach ensures that the initial investment continues to pay dividends long after the headline event has concluded.

Developing a diverse portfolio of events is another key strategy for long-term economic sustainability. The State of the Industry Report notes that the average sports tourism organization managed 41 events in 2021, up from 33 in 2019. This diversity helps ensure year-round economic activity, smoothing out seasonal fluctuations and creating more stable employment opportunities.

SPOTLIGHT



NYRR's Team for Climate Fundraising Model

New York Road Runners (NYRR) has implemented an innovative funding model for sustainability efforts through their "NYRR Team for Climate" initiative. This new entry method for their marquee races—the TCS New York City Marathon, United Airlines NYC Half, and RBC Brooklyn Half—allows 200 runners to raise funds to offset NYRR's carbon emissions, including runner travel. For the 2024 TCS New York City Marathon, Team for Climate runners will be offered a sustainable start tent powered by solar generators, sustainable catering, and reusable branded singlets. This creative approach not only funds important sustainability initiatives but also engages participants directly in environmental efforts, creating a new avenue for runner involvement and environmental education in major sporting events.

2. Local Business Integration

Integrating local businesses into sports tourism initiatives can significantly amplify economic benefits. By prioritizing local vendors and suppliers for event services, destinations can ensure that event-related spending circulates within the local economy, creating a multiplier effect.

Creating opportunities for local businesses to showcase products to visitors not only boosts the local economy but also enhances the authenticity of the visitor experience. This could involve organizing local business fairs alongside sporting events or featuring local products in event merchandising.

3. Workforce Development

Sports events can serve as powerful catalysts for workforce development, creating both short-term jobs and long-term career opportunities. The State of the Industry Report highlights that the sports tourism industry supported over 635,000 jobs in 2021, demonstrating its significant employment potential.

Creating job training programs related to event management and hospitality can help build a skilled local workforce. These programs could range from short-term volunteer training to more comprehensive sports management courses developed in collaboration with local educational institutions.

4. Tourism Ecosystem Enhancement

Sustainable sports tourism strategies look beyond individual events to enhance the overall tourism ecosystem. This involves leveraging sports events to promote year-round tourism and developing sports-related attractions and experiences that can draw visitors even in the off-season.

Successful event hosting can significantly enhance destination branding. The State of the Industry Report notes that 91% of sports tourism organizations engage in some form of marketing activity, with an average annual marketing budget of \$286,466. This investment in marketing can help position the destination as a sports tourism hub, attracting both events and individual sports enthusiasts year-round.

5. Innovation and Technology Integration

Embracing innovation and technology can enhance the economic sustainability of sports tourism. This might include investing in technological infrastructure that benefits both events and the community, such as improved broadband access or smart city initiatives.

Using data analytics to inform economic impact strategies and improve decision-making is becoming increasingly important. The State of the Industry Report indicates that 84% of sports tourism organizations conduct economic impact studies, with an average of 16 studies per year. This data-driven approach can help organizations optimize their strategies and demonstrate their value to stakeholders.

It's important to note that economic sustainability in sports tourism is closely intertwined with environmental and social sustainability. For instance, a study by Greenhalgh and Drayer (2020) found that fans were willing to pay an average of US\$6.50 in the form of a sustainability fee to help an NFL organization implement environmental initiatives. This suggests that sustainability efforts can create new revenue streams while also addressing environmental concerns.

By focusing on economic sustainability, destinations can transform sports events from fleeting economic boosts into catalysts for lasting prosperity. This approach ensures that the economic benefits of sports tourism are felt long after the crowds have gone home, contributing to the overall health and resilience of the community.

6

Conclusion: The Interconnected Nature of Sustainability in Sports Tourism

As we've explored throughout this white paper, sustainability in sports tourism is a multifaceted concept that encompasses environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic viability. By adopting a holistic approach that addresses all three of these pillars, destinations can create sports events and tourism initiatives that not only drive short-term economic impact but also contribute to long-term community well-being and ecological health.



As the sports tourism industry continues to evolve, sustainability will increasingly become a key differentiator for destinations. Those that embrace comprehensive sustainability practices will not only attract more events and visitors but will also build stronger, more resilient communities.

The path to sustainability in sports tourism is an ongoing journey rather than a destination. It requires commitment, innovation, and adaptability. However, the potential rewards – for local economies, communities, and the environment – are substantial.

Destinations can create sports events and tourism initiatives that not only drive short-term economic impact but also contribute to long-term community well-being and ecological health.

SPOTLIGHT



NFL Green's Community Impact in Tucson

As part of the Super Bowl LVII sustainability initiatives, NFL Green partnered with Tucson Clean and Beautiful and the City of Tucson to plant 100 trees in the El Rio Acres neighborhood. This west Tucson area, with less than 7% tree canopy, was identified as a high priority action area in the city's Climate Action and Adaptation plan due to extreme heat vulnerability. The tree planting initiative aims to increase shade canopy coverage, helping to cool the area by reducing heat trapped in the built environment. This project demonstrates how major sporting events can leave lasting positive impacts on communities beyond the host city, addressing critical environmental and public health issues through targeted sustainability efforts.

7 | Call to Action

As industry leaders, it's our responsibility to seize this opportunity, ensuring that the events we host today contribute to a brighter, more sustainable future for the communities we serve. We encourage sports tourism professionals to:



- 1. Conduct** comprehensive sustainability assessments of current practices
- 2. Set clear, measurable goals** for environmental, social, and economic sustainability
- 3. Engage with** diverse stakeholders, including local communities, businesses, and environmental groups
- 4. Invest in** sustainable infrastructure and technologies
- 5. Measure and communicate** the impacts of sustainability initiatives
- 6. Continuously educate** staff and partners on sustainable practices

By making sustainability a core principle in all aspects of sports tourism, we can ensure that our industry not only thrives economically but also plays a pivotal role in building healthier communities and a more sustainable world.

SPOTLIGHT



Bank of America Chicago 13.1 Community Engagement

The Bank of America Chicago 13.1 exemplifies effective community engagement in sports event planning. Organizers hosted community meetings with West Side residents prior to race weekend, gathering direct feedback and ideas. This approach led to the introduction of a 1.31-mile Wellness Walk and youth events alongside the half marathon, broadening participation across ages and abilities. By actively involving the local community in the planning process, the event ensured it met real community needs and fostered a sense of ownership among residents.

About Us



Our Expert

With over 25 years in event production, Jen Marhenke brings extensive practical knowledge and hands-on experience to this course. Over the past decade, she has made sustainability a primary focus, leading teams to integrate sustainable practices into event operations. Through roles in event operations and as an Event Verifier for the Council for Responsible Sport, Jen has successfully led teams in reducing waste, conserving energy, and minimizing environmental impact, supporting events in achieving their sustainability goals. Now a Sustainability Program Manager for Rico Solutions, a consulting firm specializing in sports and event sustainability, Jen continues to drive environmental initiatives forward. Passionate about creating lasting change, Jen's approach to sustainability is grounded in real-world experience. Committed to continuous learning, she actively engages with the sustainability community through memberships and ongoing education, valuing the insights and collaboration that come from working with peers. This dedication to learning and sharing knowledge drives Jen to advance sustainability collaboratively, ensuring that environmental responsibility is not just a goal but a reality in the sports and events industries.



Sports ETA

As the only non-profit 501(c)3 trade association for the sports events and tourism industry in the United States, Sports ETA is the most essential resource for sports commissions, sports destinations, sports event owners, and industry partners. We believe sports tourism and the events that our members own and host have the power to transform society for the better. Our passion is to help sports events and tourism professionals achieve previously unimaginable levels of performance. We do this by nurturing a community of smart, creative, and interesting people: our members. Visit sportseta.org.



Our Sponsor

Trusted Sports Sustainability Expertise

At Rico Solutions, we specialize in unlocking your organization's full sustainability potential through innovative and tailored strategies designed to drive success. Our team of experts combines deep industry knowledge with technical skills to deliver impactful, actionable solutions that align with your unique needs and goals. From conducting thorough assessments and pinpointing areas for improvement to developing targeted solutions and connecting you with the right resources, we are dedicated to helping you achieve measurable progress in sustainability.