ISO 20121 Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is ISO 20121
ISO 20121 is a management system standard for the implementation of the consideration for sustainable development in events.

In other words, ISO 20121 is a way of working which helps you consider how to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, at every business decision point.

The social, economic and environmental goals of sustainable development are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

2. What is a management system?
A management system is a term used to describe the framework of policies, procedures and processes used to ensure that an organization can fulfill all tasks required to achieve its objectives. Most organizations will have a management system otherwise they would not be in business: it just might not be written down or thought of in these terms.

3. How has it been developed?
In 2009 the second version of BS8901 Specification for a sustainability management system for events was launched and very soon afterwards there was evidence that the standard was being used internationally.

Every country has a National Standard Body (NSB) and these NSBs were contacted through ISO (International Organization for Standardization) to ask if they would support the creation of an international standard.

32 countries are part of the development of ISO 20121 which began in January 2010 using BS8901 as a starting point. The fact that BS8901 was already being used internationally and had been through two revisions before starting at ISO process meant the starting document was robust and the international experts involved in ISO could move forward quickly.

4. Is ISO 20121 just BS8901?
ISO 20121 and BS8901 are not the same document.

BS8901 was the starting draft for ISO 20121. The ISO 20121 working group of international experts and liaison bodies have provided their input to improve, optimally amend and create an international standard.

5. How can I get involved- is it too late to make a difference?
There are a number of ways in which you can get involved and getting involved now means there is still time for you to provide your feedback:

1. Contact your NSB (if you don't know who is your NSB, email UK Secretariat Jose.Alcorta@bsigroup.com for their email details)
2. If you are a member of one of the liaison bodies you can contact them directly:

AIPC: International Association of Convention Centres www.aipc.org
EFAPCO: European Federation of the Association of Professional Congress Organisers www.efapco.eu
GMIC: Green Meeting Industry Council www.greenmeetings.info
HORTREC: Hotels, Restaurants and Cafes Europe www.hortrec.eu
MPI: Meeting Professionals International www.mpiweb.org
UFI: The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry www.ufi.org
GRI: The Global Reporting Initiative www.globalreporting.org- liaison status tbc.

3. Contribute to the public comment period (via your National Standards Body)

6. What do the mirror committees and liaisons do?
Each country operates their mirror committee slightly differently.

The general role of the mirror committee is to gather comments on the standard from their country's potential standard users and experts. These comments will be discussed within the national mirror committee and a national view will be created.

A maximum of three members of each country mirror committee attend the international working group meetings where the comments are discussed.

Liaison bodies have a similar role and although they are not able to vote on they draft, they can submit comments like ISO Members do.

7. How long has it taken to create this standard?
There are three time tracks for creating an ISO standard and the time track chosen depends on how the standard creation process starts.

In the case of ISO 20121 the starting point was a strong national standard (BS8901,) which had already had two revisions. Therefore the decision was made to follow the track one 2 year timeline.

The 2 year timeline has given the international working group the opportunity to give the standard an international focus.

The 2 year timeline also provides the opportunity for ISO 20121 to be used by the organizing committee for London 2012. This would give significant and unique exposure to the international standard, which could encourage more people to use the standard and therefore consider sustainability at their every decision point.

8. What are the future timelines for this standard?

- DIS ballot initiated (5 months) 2011-04-11
- Voting summary circulated 2011-09-11
- DIS comments resolution meeting (São Paulo, Brazil, tbc) 2011-11-07
- Full report circulated: decision for new DIS ballot Stage Description
- Full report circulated: DIS approved for registration as FDIS 2012-01-06
- FDIS registered for formal approval 2012-01-06
- FDIS ballot initiated: 2 months. Proof sent to Secretariat 2012-02-01
- FDIS approved for publication 2012-04-02
- International Standard published 2012-06-01

The Draft International Standard (DIS) is circulated to the whole of the ISO membership (i.e. 162 countries) for a 5 month commenting period and vote to move to final draft stage. This is a critical stage as all interested parties will have the opportunity to provide feedback.

The Final Draft International Standard (FDIS) is also circulated to the whole of ISO membership for a Yes/No vote to publication (i.e. no comments allowed at this stage).

9. Will this standard become a law?
ISO standards are voluntary standards and are not likely to ever be legally mandated.

10. How do I know if this standard is relevant to me?
If the majority of your work focus is event industry related work then this standard is relevant for you.

This standard is suitable for:

-Any geographic location around the world
-Any event supplier
-Any size of company

This management system standard provides a framework for the consideration of sustainability, in relation to the user's own issues. This standard is relevant for any companies working within the event industry

11. I find the standard language confusing- what should I do?
ISO standards are written using ISO terminology so that all standard users across the world will have the same interpretation of the standard requirements.
If this is the first time that you have read an ISO or national standard the language could seem confusing.

However it may not be a case of suggesting different words for the standard because some of the words used have a specific meaning for the standard. Your national mirror committee or liaison body will be aware which standard terminology can not be changed.

The guidance section has been written with the aim of translating the standard requirements into easier to understand language.

12. What is the public comment period from April 2011 about?
The public comment period from April 2011 is an opportunity for event, sustainability and standard experts to read the draft of ISO 20121 and provide suggestions for improvement.

13. What is the ISO voting process
The DIS ballot is a 5-month process and the FDIS a 2-month one. Comments and votes (on both DIS and FDIS consultations) are submitted via the NSB to ISO.

14. How does ISO 20121 compare with the GRI guidelines
The Global Reporting Initiative Event Organiser Sector Supplement is due to be launched autumn 2011. This is a framework for reporting and includes quantitative and qualitative requirements.

It makes sense to use the GRI Event Organiser Sector Supplement as your framework for reporting on the work you have done to implement ISO 20121.

As of April 2011 GRI have applied for liaison status for the development of ISO 20121.

15. How does ISO 20121 compare with APEX/ASTM
ISO 20121 is a management system, which provides a framework for your way of working to support the implementation of sustainability. A management system provides you with a framework for 'how' you should work. The ASTM/APEX standard provides a more prescriptive outline and could be described as a checklist approach where you are given details on 'what' you should do.

It is worth remembering that ISO 20121 is relevant for all types, locations and sizes of events and the APEX/ASTM standard has been created for meetings.

These standards are not mutually exclusive and you could use ISO 20121 as your way of working and the APEX/ASTM standard as the specific actions that you implement.

16. Will this standard cost me more money?
Users will be able to purchase the standard from their national standard body. Users will need to allocate time for education and implementation of the standard but using the standard does not have to impact on your event budget.

Users are likely to find that through the implementation of the standard they monitor their negative environmental, social and economic impacts more and these results in positive economic results.

17. Will I be able to be certified to this standard?
All ISO standards have to provide the option of 1st, 2nd or 3rd party certification.
1st party is 'self determination and self declaration by the organization seeking compliance' in other words it is the standard user declaring they have done everything they need to in order to meet the standard requirements

2nd party is 'confirmation of conformance by parties having an interest in the organisation, such as clients or by other persons on their behalf' in other words someone with an existing relationship (e.g. client, supplier, association) checks that the standard user has done everything they need to in order to meet the standard requirements.

3rd party is when an independent 3rd party verifies that you have done everything you need to in order to meet the standard requirements. In the future 3rd party certifiers may be able to be accredited to this standard by national accreditation bodies.

18. Will this standard be good for the event industry?
An ISO standard is likely to raise the profile of the event industry, allow events across the world to use a recognized way of working and provide support for the consideration of sustainable development.

This standard should positively benefit the event industry.

19. Where should I start
Any step forward to consider sustainability is a good step forward. If you are interested in reading guidance and case studies on BS8901, e.g. BIP 7126 "Making Events More Sustainable: A Guide to BS 8901", contact the BSI shop on http://shop.bsigroup.com/ProductDetail/?pid=000000000030202077

If you are interested in reading the draft or ISO 20121 and providing feedback please contact your NSB to obtain a copy of DIS 20121.

If you are interested in being involved with your national mirror committee or liaison body see question 5 for their contact details.

Countries where BS8901 is being used may want to add the following questions:

20. What happens if I am using BS8901 already?
BSI will withdraw BS 8901 when the ISO 20121 is implemented in the UK.

21. Should I wait until ISO 20121 launches rather than implement BS8901 now?
BS8901 can be implemented and certified immediately and the sooner you can start considering sustainability within your way of working the better it will be for your business.