



In partnership with



Sponsored by



Meetings With Meaning

An Introductory Guide to Harnessing the Positive Impacts of Meetings and Events



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
EXPERT ADVICE	4
WHY IMPACT MATTERS	36
START HERE	40
NEXT STEPS	43
IMPACT IN ACTION: CASE STUDIES	46
CONNECTING IMPACT AND PURPOSE	51
CMP CREDITS AND DISCLAIMER	53

INTRODUCTION

“Astronomy without conferences would mean a bunch of little people working on things without understanding what everyone else in the world was working on, so they are absolutely core to what we all do.” This quote from Nobel Prize-winning astrophysicist Brian Schmidt, featured in “The Power of Conferences: Stories of Serendipity, Innovation and Driving Social Change,” demonstrates that the importance of meetings and events goes beyond financial ROI. The book includes ten stories of impactful gatherings, such as how the serendipitous encounter of two researchers at a conference led to the development of an important vaccine. Others demonstrate how meetings have helped advance Indigenous rights or supported Schmidt in proving the universe was speeding up.

Meeting professionals recognize how important intentional impact creation is in the current global climate. This calls for the industry to become more deliberate in its design, moving beyond financial impact and a tick-box approach to a profound sense of purpose. This shift can translate to meetings that create measurable positive impact and legacy, redefining what it means to meet.

In this report, we explore the concept of impact and how to set attainable goals for meaningful outcomes that transform events into catalysts for change. With insights from industry experts, strategies, and relevant case studies, meeting professionals can play a crucial role in shaping the industry’s and broader society’s future. The guide presents a starting point for more impactful, purposeful meetings and events.



EXPERT ADVICE



Created in partnership with **BANFF & LAKE LOUISE TOURISM**



JODI BURKE

Managing Director, Sales,
Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity

With over 17 years of experience in the North American and International Business Events industry, Jodi Burke is currently the Managing Director, sales and conferences at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. Originally from Australia, Jodi brings a global perspective and a deep understanding of diverse markets to their role.

She holds a background in Tourism and Marketing education, which has provided a solid foundation in understanding business-to-business marketing and effective strategy development within the hospitality and events sectors.

Throughout her career, Jodi has been recognized as a highly motivated and energetic business development leader, known for strategic thinking and delivering exceptional results. She excels in strategic planning and implementation, and building high-performing teams. With a natural affinity for relationship building, her skills have been instrumental in forging successful partnerships and collaborations.

At Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Jodi is passionate about leveraging her expertise to enhance attendee experiences and drive measurable impact for conferences and meetings. Enjoying living in the mountains, Jodi finds inspiration in the natural beauty and outdoor opportunities that Banff offers, enriching both her professional and personal life.

Kira Lu is a seasoned marketing executive with 16 years of experience in business development and market expansion across tourism, travel tech, and luxury hotels in Europe, Asia, and North America. She excels in building and leading high-performing teams, driving strategic vision, and revitalizing projects through exceptional coaching and execution. Kira holds an Executive Master's degree from Ivey Business School, a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a Marketing specialization from Les Roches in Switzerland, and a Marketing Strategy Certificate from Cornell University. Her global experience fuels her passion for travel, meeting friends worldwide, enjoying wine and great food. In her free time, Kira enjoys cooking, yoga, outdoor activities, and spending time with her fur baby Maple, a redbone coonhound.



KIRA LU

Director, Market Strategy,
Banff & Lake Louise Tourism

Sustainability and impactful meetings are generating a lot of industry attention, but many event organizers may not know how to begin addressing such broad topics. What concrete steps do you advise planners and companies to start with when implementing new strategies?

Jodi Burke: Begin with the end in mind. Define the outcome and results your organization seeks to achieve from the event. With that clear understanding, you can align your team's and partners' efforts to achieve the right results.

The next step is to set clear goals for the event in relation to both sustainability and impact for the attendees, organization, sponsors/ partners, and destination. Specific and measurable goals provide both direction and a benchmark for success.

Next, we advise organizations to engage key event stakeholders, such as the destination, venue, suppliers, and transportation, in their sustainability strategy. Involving stakeholders early in the planning process encourages collaboration, innovation, and adopting sustainable practices across the event ecosystem.

Finally — and this can be difficult post-event — make sure you're taking time to measure and report on your results. Remember those measurable goals you set earlier? Tracking key metrics for impact and sustainability defined at the beginning of the planning cycle helps you refine and enhance your strategies moving forward. Post-event, evaluating your outcomes and unforeseen challenges is critical so you can reorient yourself for the future and, ultimately, meet your organization's goals for sustainability.

What are some key areas regarding sustainability and social responsibility to watch in the coming years to know meetings are living up to the push to leave the world a better place?

Burke: One key area is waste reduction and carbon management. Meetings often require extensive travel, so reducing an event's overall carbon impact will be crucial. This can be done through efficiency measures and countering unavoidable emissions with carbon offset projects. Waste reduction allows ample opportunity for attendees to compost, recycle, and employ reusable materials. You also want to look for a reduction in paper, cardboard, packaging, and non-reusable signage. Finally, watch for when a meeting is leveraging technology and digital tools for sustainable event management practices as often as possible.

Another key area is sustainable sourcing. Organizers need to ensure that products and supplies used for events are sustainably and ethically sourced and that venues and suppliers are aligned with their values on environmental needs and social responsibility. Having this alignment means the impact of an event will extend beyond logistics.

Similarly, organizers need to ensure that they're thinking of community engagement and legacy when developing their events. It's important to consider how they'll leave a lasting, positive impact in the area. Organizers can support one of the world's leaders in artistic education and training by hosting events at venues like Banff Center for Arts and Creativity and fund participants directly through scholarships. This social impact goes beyond the event itself, extending support to arts and culture globally. There's often a bonus to the event as well, as it enhances the overall experience of attendees when they're immersed in a vibrant, established community.

As with many elements of events, data collection is vital to building impactful meetings. What should planners consider measuring to understand the impact of their events?

Burke: These key areas underscore the importance of integrating sustainability and social responsibility into event planning strategies to ensure meetings contribute to a better world while aligning with organizational values and goals.

Areas for measurement include:

- Attendance and participation (and changing demographics year over year), engagement levels (such as session attendance or networking attendance to gauge activity interest)
- Feedback and satisfaction (influencing room for improvement, areas of interest, and future programming decisions)
- Sustainability impact (factors like waste generation and carbon emissions should be assessed), social media, and online presence (measure digital engagement and reach to see an event's online impact)
- Destination impact (spending on accommodations, dining, transportation, and any direct economic benefits generated for local businesses)
- Learning and education: Surveys can gauge how attendees gained new knowledge, skills, or ideas through workshops, presentations, or training sessions and whether an event achieved its education objectives
- Legacy: Measuring the long-term impact beyond the event on partnerships, ongoing projects, connections, destinations, etc.
- Last but certainly not least are diversity, equity, and inclusion measures (representation of diverse speakers, accessibility accommodations provided, and efforts to promote inclusiveness within the event)

By thoughtfully and purposefully collecting and analyzing the above metrics, event planners can gain valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of their events. This data not only helps assess success but also informs future planning and decision-making to continuously improve event experiences and outcomes while aligning with organizational goals.

Integrating local communities into meetings is gaining traction as a way to leave a positive, lasting impact on host destinations. What are some recommendations for finding partnerships that align with an organization's mission and integrating such groups into meeting agendas?

Kira Lu: The Community Impact Program (CIP) goes beyond the traditional approach to tourism, aiming to positively transform the environment, society, and economy of the region while driving sustainable economic growth. By incentivizing businesses to choose Banff and Lake Louise for their meetings and events, the program encourages investment in the local community and simultaneously enhances social and environmental outcomes.

A collaboration between Banff & Lake Louise Tourism (BLLT) and the nonprofit Banff Canmore Foundation (BCF), CIP provides delegates with a pre-paid credit card funded by the program itself, with additional funds from BLLT. The card gives users the freedom to experience the destination and take home a part of Banff and Lake Louise that is close to their heart. Moreover, when a group enrolls for the program, they have a valuable opportunity to align themselves with a local charity that reflects their values. BLLT makes an initial contribution to the chosen charity on their behalf, this enables the group to create a meaningful impact and leave a lasting legacy. Learn more [here](#).

Along with impactful meetings, creating immersive experiences is another trend in the meetings and events industry. How can meeting planners take a holistic approach to building equally meaningful, enriching, and entertaining programs for attendees?

Burke: To create immersive and meaningful experiences for attendees, meeting planners can take a holistic approach that authentically integrates the destination, venue, and local community. They can achieve this through several steps.

First, incorporate elements of the host destination's culture, history, and traditions into the event program. This could include reaching out to local indigenous communities for engagement, cultural workshops, or tours that highlight unique aspects of the location. Also, outdoor spaces

and natural surroundings should be part of the event experiences, highlighting the unique local environment. Next, work closely with the chosen venue to leverage its unique features and facilities. At Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, this could involve using artistic spaces for workshops or performances that inspire creativity among attendees. But no matter the location, you can engage local organizations to provide authentic experiences and support the local economy. Collaborate on interactive sessions, demonstrations, or cultural exchanges that showcase local talent.

Then, think about creative programming. Offer workshops, team building, or interactive sessions encouraging attendees to explore their creativity and learn new skills. For instance, the environment at Banff Centre fosters artistic growth and innovation, providing a conducive

setting for transformative experiences that connect attendees to each other and the spectacular environment in Banff National Park. Design programs that not only educate and entertain but also empower attendees to achieve tangible outcomes, leaving a lasting impact on their professional growth.

Meeting organizers can create holistic, enriching, and entertaining programs for attendees by integrating these elements into event planning. This approach not only enhances the overall event experience but also strengthens connections with the destination and community, fostering a deeper sense of engagement and satisfaction among participants. At Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, we combine our inspiring location, unique artistic facilities, and transformative programming to enable attendees to realize their creative potential and achieve results.

Elevate Your Meetings

Take your program to new heights in Banff and Lake Louise, where sustainability meets stunning venues. Enjoy mountaintop lodges, luxury resorts, and rustic cabins while supporting nature and community. Inspire attendees and leave a lasting, positive legacy by aligning with our mission for responsible tourism. Learn more at banfflakelouise.com



Created in partnership with **DESTINATION TORONTO**

ROMINA KWONG

Event Strategist & Founder,
Eco-Friendly Events

Romina Kwong (she/her) is an award-winning event strategist and educator passionate about sustainability. With a background in Environmental Studies and Special Event Management, she founded Eco-Friendly Events in 2019—a Toronto-based sustainable event planning and consulting agency for organizations on a mission to do good. She also now teaches Foundations of Sustainability in Event Management at Seneca College.

Sustainability and impactful meetings are generating a lot of industry attention, but many event organizers may not know how to begin addressing such broad topics. What concrete steps do you advise planners and companies to start with when implementing new strategies?

Romina Kwong: First, [identify and plan against your organization's eco-values](#). Does your organization or client already have sustainability policies or [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) in place? (The SDGs are 17 goals outlined by the United Nations that address our global challenges to a sustainable, equitable future.) Start there to begin developing event eco-values to prioritize.

Once you figure out your eco-values, they will become your North Star. They will support you in developing a

sustainability strategy and making decisions throughout the event planning process.

For example, let's say your organization has identified SDG Goal 12—Responsible Consumption and Production—as one of its priorities. While you plan the event, ensure you reuse or rent items to avoid and divert waste from landfills. When single-use is unavoidable, find compostable alternatives made locally.

If SDG Goal 15—Life on Land—is another identified goal, consider that the four major contributors to global deforestation are beef, soybeans, palm oil, and pulp. When talking to your caterer and selecting your menu, minimize or avoid these items altogether.

Identifying the eco-values first and planning against them is an excellent way to stay focused and not feel overwhelmed.

As with many elements of events, data collection is vital to building impactful meetings. What should planners consider measuring to understand the impact of their events?

Kwong: There are many event carbon footprint calculators on the market that can measure a wide range of event elements. And there are two areas in which planners can focus on measuring the impact of an event.

First, go back to your eco-values. If responsible consumption and production (SDG Goal 12) is a focus, you should track where all items for your event are coming from. Then, weigh how much waste went to landfills, recycling, and compost. Calculators such as Circular Unity will share specific questions and areas to input your data so you know exactly what to collect.

Second, look at transportation. Travel is the largest contributing factor to an event's carbon footprint. Track your attendees' method of travel (we recommend including this as a question in your registration plat-

form), coupled with their address (postal or zip code), and you'll be able to use this data in a tool such as Purpose Net Zero, which can calculate your event's travel footprint.

Integrating local communities into meetings is gaining traction as a way to leave a positive, lasting impact on host destinations. What are some recommendations for finding partnerships that align with an organization's mission and integrating such groups into meeting agendas?

Kwong: If you're planning an event in a new destination (or remotely), it can be difficult to know which communities to include. Asking Google or ChatGPT can be a good start, but here's where the opportunity to work with the Business Events team at destination marketing and management organizations such as [Destination Toronto](#) comes in. They'll have the network and resources to support your search for local businesses and communities to integrate into your meeting agenda.

You can also create an organizing committee with local community members such as municipal government leaders, nonprofit workers, and local Indigenous members. If there's a call for presentations, the diverse committee can share their viewpoints in the approval process. Or perhaps the local individuals in the organizing community can tap into their networks for speakers to be incorporated into the agenda. You can even get your organizing committee to support your agenda by being moderators for panel discussions.

Other companies like [WholeHearted](#) will curate unique programs that are developed to infuse purpose into organizational programming. They bring together social care, connection, and fun—making events memorable through meaningful connections.

Travel brings with it unavoidable carbon emissions. What are some compelling destination-specific ideas to consider to offset carbon emissions that cannot be avoided?

Kwong: It is important to remember that offsetting carbon emissions should be the last thing on the checklist when it comes to sustainable events.

Take a proactive approach by reducing carbon emissions from travel as much as possible. While nothing can replace an in-person event experience and networking, offer the option of a hybrid event so that those who live further away can still participate without flying or traveling at all.

When attendees do fly in, encourage direct flights, which helps to reduce air travel's carbon footprint. The more you land and take off, the more fuel is burned—the landing-takeoff cycle accounts for approximately 25 percent of airplane emissions. Select destinations with large international airports; these hubs are more likely to have direct flights from most destinations. Toronto, for example, has two international airports serving more than 180 global destinations in 55 countries, which means more chances at a direct flight.

Within the destination, select hotels and venues that are close together so that attendees can walk between places.

Transportation doesn't only include the attendees, but also the suppliers, vendors, shipping supplies, as well as catering ingredients. Limit all of these contributing factors to ground transportation—i.e. hire local suppliers who can drive to the venue.

Finally, ensure that the offsets you purchase for your event are from third-party certified offset projects. Sometimes, you can even select projects that are local or most important to the community/city where you're hosting your event. You can also opt to donate directly to local organizations with a strong eco ethos. For example, donating money you may have spent on swag to the [Turtle Protectors](#) program in Toronto.

How would you evaluate the current meetings industry's efforts to produce more purposeful and responsible events?

Kwong: Unfortunately, we were forced to take 10 steps backward during the pandemic when it came to single-use items for our health and safety, but we have since made progress when it comes to sustainability. Many planners are including questions about a venue's sustainability policies and practices in their RFPs.

I've also seen many hotels and venues implement changes like:

- Removing single-use items like shampoo, conditioner, and body wash
- Reducing housekeeping services for hotel rooms
- Partnering with food recovery organizations or local food banks

Other vendors are taking action too. They're conscious of their impact and have implemented the following strategies:

- Greater reliance on hybrid or electric vehicles
- Reducing transportation distances
- Reducing the use or eliminating single-use plastics
- Sourcing local ingredients

From the planners' side, I've seen questions about what they can do or for sustainable options such as:

- Utilizing digital signage
- Signing multiyear sponsored contracts to ensure multiple uses for signage
- Minimal printing
- Increased vegetarian and vegan options
- Engaging local businesses, vendors, and suppliers

And as much as there has been progress, it has been slow-moving. A few opportunities for improvement include educating clients about better environmental options from venues to catering to decor. It is also important to include a line item for sustainability to cover upfront costs of exhibitor builds or brand activations, for example. Finally, be more proactive about developing and incorporating sustainability strategies into the event planning process—thus engaging vendors earlier and demanding better practices from them throughout.



MEET IN
TORONTO.
WHERE CULTURES *REMIX*

DISCOVER NOW 

ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO
AGO

Created in partnership with **HILTON**

GERILYN HORAN

Vice President, Group Sales & Strategic Accounts,
Hilton

Gerilyn Horan is the Vice President, Group Sales & Strategic Accounts at Hilton Worldwide Sales. She is responsible for driving the growth of the group segment for all Hilton brands and oversees a total account management approach to Hilton's largest customers.

Gerilyn has had a 30+ year career in leadership roles in global hotel sales & marketing, beginning with Hilton Hotels at the Waldorf-

Astoria in New York and including the Four Seasons New York, Meadowood Napa Valley, and Langham Hospitality Group where she helped launch this new global brand to the North America market. She is a purpose-driven leader who builds highly functioning sales teams and enjoys supporting team members to grow in their careers.

Prior to Hilton Worldwide Sales, Gerilyn was Vice President, North America at HelmsBriscoe, the leading global event procurement firm where she was responsible for leading the Associates in the region while supporting client acquisition and retention efforts.

Gerilyn served on the Global Board of Trustees for Meeting Professionals International (MPI) from 2020-2022 as well as the Board of Directors for the Strategic Account Management Association (SAMA) from 2021-2023 and is currently on the MPI International Board of Directors.

Sustainability and impactful meetings are generating a lot of industry attention, but many event organizers may not know how to begin addressing such broad topics. What concrete steps do you advise planners and companies to start with when implementing new strategies?

Gerilyn Horan: Now more than ever, guests are looking for brands that are embracing purpose and doing good for both people and planet in the destinations where they travel.

In addition to individual travelers, this is also an increasing conversation among Hilton's corporate customers, with many striving to meet their company's ESG goals. Corporate travel policies increasingly prefer booking with hotels that have proven sustainability credentials, which reduces the environmental impact within their company's supply chain. This trend is also driven by the need for companies to report the carbon footprint of their travel activities, including detailed emissions data from their hotel stays.

At Hilton, we aim to be a partner in this journey, working hand in hand with our corporate customers to deliver events and experiences that support their sustainability goals while also creating an engaging experience for event attendees.

[Hilton's Meet with Purpose](#) program, which was introduced in 2015, provides our customers with the tools they need to gather more sustainably, nourish mindfully, and positively impact the destination where they are convening. Hilton's signature [Meet with Purpose Checklist](#) outlines easy-to-implement opportunities to reduce your event's environmental impact while boosting its social impact.

As with many elements of events, data collection is vital to building impactful meetings. What should planners consider measuring to understand the impact of their events?

Horan: When hosting events with Hilton, customers don't have to gather their own data because we do it on behalf of our customers, which we know is a game changer. Our Meeting Impact Calculator within LightStay, Hilton's proprietary ESG measurement platform, allows for the calculation of an event's environmental footprint by using each property's unique consumption data to create a custom report detailing the predicted carbon, energy, water use, and waste generated during the meeting or event.

Additionally, once CO2 emissions are calculated, they can be offset with high-quality carbon offsets that can invest in carbon reduction projects. We began partnering with [ClimeCo](#) in 2022, a leading global environmental credit project developer, to offer these carbon offsetting opportunities.

Integrating local communities into meetings is gaining traction as a way to leave a positive, lasting impact on host destinations. What are some recommendations for finding partnerships that align with an organization's mission and integrating such groups into meeting agendas?

Horan: More than a century ago, Conrad Hilton greeted hotel guests with an inspiring welcome reflective of his philosophy, that it is "our responsibility to fill the Earth with the light and warmth of hospitality." Today, we have an incredible opportunity to make a difference in the communities where we live, work, and travel. According to our [2024 Trends Report](#), experiencing the destination and local culture is a top reason for travel, and our properties are an integral part of the communities in which we operate and are aligned to many different organizations.

Planners can work with our hotel teams and Destination Management Company (DMC) partners to help identify local organizations and activations that will help support their own sustainability and social impact goals, guiding principles, or values. Our hotel teams and DMC partners leverage a nuanced understanding of the region and surrounding communities and can help ensure meetings seamlessly integrate partners from the local community. Previous initiatives have included packing backpacks, writing notes to veterans, and creating flower bouquets for residents of women's shelters.

Along with impactful meetings, creating immersive experiences is another trend in the meetings and events industry. How can meeting planners take a holistic approach to building equally meaningful, enriching, and entertaining programs for attendees?

Horan: Our hotels are offering planners ways to give their attendees opportunities to explore and adventure more sustainability. Planners can partner with our hotels to activate experiences such as “Zero-waste Cooking Classes” at London Hilton on Park Lane, where our chefs educate on the importance of seasonality and sustainability while cooking a meal that will be donated to local food banks for distribution. At the Hilton Rotterdam, attendees can “fish for plastic” while enjoying a boat ride to some of the most beautiful and surprising places while collecting trash in nearby waterways. These are just a sampling of immersive experiences our hotels are offering planners today.

What are some key areas regarding sustainability and social responsibility to watch in the coming years to know meetings are living up to the push to leave the world a better place?

Horan: As the landscape of environmental and sustainability reporting and compliance continues to evolve, we see a shift away from a broad initiative approach at the enterprise-level to more of a spotlight on what each individual property is doing in the space.

We continue to see a focus on initiatives like waste reduction, including food waste specifically, where there is much potential to [partner and innovate](#). Interest in renewable energy sources is expected to continue. [Many of Hilton's properties](#) are working to embrace these efforts, paving the way for the sustainable travel experience of the future.

An aerial photograph of a curved swimming pool with a white building and palm trees. The pool is filled with clear blue water, and the building has several white umbrellas and lounge chairs. The scene is surrounded by lush greenery and palm trees. The Hilton logo is in the top left, and the text 'MEET WITH PURPOSE' is next to it. The location 'Conrad Tulum Riviera Maya, Mexico' is in the top right. The main headline 'Refresh the world and preserve these views.' is on the left, and two paragraphs of text are on the right.

Hilton

MEET WITH PURPOSE

Conrad Tulum Riviera Maya, Mexico

Refresh the world and preserve these views.

At Hilton, we help protect our communities and the planet by working to make sustainable travel a reality through Travel with Purpose. You can plan sustainable gatherings with resources like the Meeting Impact Calculator which gives a snapshot of the environmental impact of an event. This report is available at every hotel globally to help bring your sustainability goals to life when you host an event at Hilton.

To learn how you can make your meetings more sustainable and impactful, visit meetwithpurpose.com.



MYLÈNE GAGNON

Vice-President Sales and Convention Services,
Tourisme Montréal

With more than 30 years in the hotel industry, including 18 as director of sales and marketing at major hotel chains, Mylène possesses extensive experience in meeting development and services strategies and in hotel and revenue management. For nearly six years now, Mylène has held the position of Vice-President, Sales and Convention Services at Tourisme Montréal, overseeing a team of sales professionals responsible for the Canadian, American and international markets. With an educational background in tourism management and business administration in addition to her impressive track record of professional accomplishments spanning more than two decades, Mylène's strategic vision for the meetings and conventions market is recognized throughout the industry in Montréal and by her peers internationally.

Sustainability and impactful meetings are generating a lot of industry attention, but many event organizers may not know how to begin addressing such broad topics. What concrete steps do you advise planners and companies to start with when implementing new strategies?

Mylène Gagnon: It's important to recognize that there's no one-size-fits-all solution. It also needs to be said that our team at Business Events Montréal, which is a specialized arm of Tourisme Montréal, doesn't pretend to have all the answers because nobody does. What we're fortunate to have, however, is a wealth of accumulated expertise in the sustainable meetings space. This allows the Business Events Montréal team to provide meeting and event professionals with a comprehensive set of tools and useful, practical advice to help get them headed in the right direction.

Making meetings more sustainable and employing an effective and impactful meeting strategy doesn't have to be painful or pricey. There's a misconception that hosting a sustainable meeting is complicated and

expensive. In reality, planning more sustainable events is achievable for everyone if there's a willingness to learn and adapt.

Event planners should start with small steps and see where they lead. All those small steps will inevitably become bigger steps and eventually create a pathway. We accompany planners throughout the entire journey and are very transparent so that we all learn from one another as we build more sustainable meeting strategies.

One of the main things that sets us apart from other DMOs is that we've developed a highly effective [Sustainable Destination Strategy](#) to promote Montréal through a more eco-responsible approach to tourism that benefits both visitors and residents. This strategy was recently awarded the Mercure Prize at Québec's most prestigious business competition, Les Mercuriades. And last year, Montréal was ranked first in North America as a sustainable tourism destination by the GDS Index as a result of our efforts in implementing the strategy.

All of that said, we don't claim to be the be-all and end-all and have every solution. But when it comes to building a winning sustainable meeting strategy, we're more than pleased to be able to provide planners with a useful set of tools, sound advice, a nudge in the right direction, and a supportive shoulder to lean on.

Integrating local communities into meetings is gaining traction as a way to leave a positive, lasting impact on host destinations. What are some recommendations for finding partnerships that align with an organization's mission and integrating such groups into meeting agendas?

Gagnon: It's almost impossible to overstate how strongly we believe that tourism and economic development shouldn't come at the expense of the local population. On the contrary, business events can and should be positive for host communities and vice versa. We've found that tapping into the expertise and creativity of the local community contributes significantly to the vitality of the destination, the lasting legacy of the event, and a positive experience for attendees. It's a win-win situation for everyone.

We've built great synergy with our local partners, casting our net wide into key economic sectors of Montréal. We do this to help meeting planners connect with local industry champions, subject matter experts, potential speakers, and more who can elevate their event. Without putting too fine a point on it, our team at Business Events Montréal has evolved into a de facto one-stop-shop adept at smoothing over

the pain points in the event planning process and making event organizers' lives much easier. The value of partnering with local communities is often vastly underestimated when it could, in fact, be an event's greatest asset.

For example, Business Events Montréal helped the International AIDS Society organize the AIDS 2022 conference, the largest worldwide gathering on any health issue. We acted as facilitators by helping create a local impact committee that aimed to amplify the benefits generated by the conference. In coordination with the impact committee, we connected conference organizers with community leaders and key stakeholders. Local Pride organizers Fierté Montréal took part by helping to curate the programming as well as scheduling events in collaboration with the International AIDS Society, an excellent example of partnership between local actors and a visiting association.

CSR projects have been a staple of meetings for years (if not decades). How would you advise planners to take socially responsible initiatives to the next level in a world that is more conscious of the impact meetings make on their host community?

Gagnon: Creating memorable, next-level CSR initiatives requires always keeping the end result in mind. That means striving to make a positive impact on the host community and delivering a meaningful experience for attendees.

When it comes to helping events up their CSR game, we're acutely aware that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions. That's why we go to great lengths to tailor CSR activities to the values, interests, and causes important to any organization. At Business Events Montréal, we're blessed with an abundance of tools, so offering activities that align perfectly with and exceed an event's ambitions is never an issue.

Teambuilding through sustainable activities is big in our book. Because sustainability can have so many meanings when it comes to events, we offer a slew of options for event professionals looking to inspire their teams while leaving a positive mark on their destination. In addition to having knowledgeable staff who can help facilitate activities, we also have comprehensive resources that provide detailed information about boosting community engagement through CSR activities.

We also have a new directory of volunteer activities for organizations wishing to make a difference during their event in Montréal. It offers information and opportunities for events to support important causes such as homelessness, food insecurity, protecting the environment, and reducing social inequalities. It also offers recycling and reuse options for limiting the event's footprint.

We're always more than happy to help event planners identify a cause, find an activity, and then jump right in to lend a helping hand. Again, everybody wins.

Montréal makes it more

**Don't just host
your event. Nail it.**



With its European roots and continual drive to innovate, Montréal is a vibrant city of contrasts that always has more to offer — and we at Business Events Montréal are your experts on the ground.

Contact us at
meet@mtl.org • meetings.mtl.org





NEW RESEARCH

Peer-to-Peer Event Marketing

2024 Benchmark Report



Add up to
30%
more
registrants.

Mobilize your audience and skyrocket your event's visibility by 51% and achieve conversion rates of 31.7%.

IS P2P MARKETING RIGHT FOR MY EVENT?

Discover which types of events benefit the most from referral marketing strategies.

WHO ARE MY TOP ADVOCATES?

Learn how to identify and incentivize your most valuable advocates to maximize event promotion.

WHICH SOCIAL CHANNEL PERFORMS BEST?

Find out the top strategies for expanding your event reach with minimal effort.



[I want my copy.](#)



ANITA PAIC

Director, **Vienna Convention Bureau**

Anita Paic is a seasoned expert in strategic marketing communication with extensive international experience in the global tourism industry, having held key management roles at FMTG Falkensteiner Michaeler Tourism Group, Sacher Hotels, and Marriott International. From 2009 to 2016, she led the sales strategy for Vereinigte Bühnen Wien, overseeing some of Vienna's most iconic cultural venues. Currently, she heads the department that includes the Vienna Convention Bureau, responsible for acquiring global congresses, conferences, and incentives, helping Vienna rank as one of the top conference destinations worldwide. Born in Croatia and raised in Vienna, Paic holds degrees in tourism management, advertising, an Executive MBA from the Vienna University of Economics and Business, and an MA in Business and Organizational Psychology from Danube University Krems.

Sustainability and impactful meetings are generating a lot of industry attention, but many event organizers may not know how to begin addressing such broad topics. What concrete steps do you advise planners and companies to start with when implementing new strategies?

Anita Paic: Implementing [sustainability strategies](#) takes time, but you don't need a finished plan to start. Begin with a sustainability assessment to understand your events' current environmental impact and existing measures. Use this as your baseline. Set clear goals and objectives for direction and accountability.

Next, get active by contacting your local convention and visitors bureau (CVB) to see if there are official ecolabels that offer certifications for sustainable events. These certifications provide criteria for sustainable venues, waste reduction, carbon-neutral travel, and regional catering, offering a solid foundation to build on. If you certify your event, it can also be a great marketing tool.

Engage all stakeholders — employees, suppliers, and attendees — in your sustainability efforts. Collaboration and buy-in are essential for success. Finally, measure and report the impact of your initiatives by collecting data on waste generation, transportation methods, and attendee feedback. Regular reporting helps track progress and identify areas for improvement. Remember, sustainability is an ongoing process!

Integrating local communities into meetings is gaining traction as a way to leave a positive, lasting impact on host destinations. What are some recommendations for finding partnerships that align with an organization's mission and integrating such groups into meeting agendas?

Paic: Leaving lasting benefits for the host community, attendees, and stakeholders is becoming a priority in the meeting industry.

Last year, the Vienna Convention Bureau partnered with the [European Association for the Study of the Liver](#) (EASL) on a pilot project to promote liver health in

Vienna. We organized a workshop to brainstorm ideas and initiated collaborations with the Board of Education for Vienna and the Vienna Healthcare Group.

The project included a free public event with expert speakers on liver health and opportunities for attendees to get liver check-ups and hepatitis C tests. EASL also hosted an interactive event for schoolchildren, who created liver-themed artwork displayed at the event venue Messe Wien Exhibition & Congress Center. This initiative not only raised awareness but also actively engaged the local community.

For your next event, consider how you can create a meaningful impact by partnering with local organizations and using the resources provided by your CVB.

Along with impactful meetings, creating immersive experiences is another trend in the meetings and events industry. How can meeting planners take a holistic approach to building equally meaningful, enriching, and entertaining programs for attendees?

Paic: First, knowing the goal of the event is crucial. Immersive experiences are great for involving participants, but they might not always be the perfect fit for an event. It is also important to understand the audience: who is attending the event, and what are they looking for?

Based on this knowledge, diverse content and experiences can be developed. Incorporating educational sessions, workshops, and hands-on activities caters to different learning styles and interests. Use technology like virtual reality (VR) and

augmented reality (AR) to create interactive and immersive experiences that engage attendees. Promoting well-being — easy sports sessions, healthy food options, or providing spaces for relaxation and recharging — can further enhance the experience. Make sure to balance education with entertainment. Learning a few waltzing steps while in Vienna is always a good idea — and can be easily implemented in any location, such as a baroque palace or modern venue.

CSR projects have been a staple of meetings for years (if not decades). How would you advise planners to take socially responsible initiatives to the next level in a world that is more conscious of the impact meetings make on their host community?

Paic: To elevate CSR initiatives in the meetings industry, planners should focus on creating meaningful, sustainable, and impactful projects that resonate with attendees and host communities. Instead of imposing external ideas, collaborate with local communities to identify their actual needs. This ensures CSR projects are relevant and beneficial. The local CVB can provide valuable information and inspiration, as they often know about ongoing local initiatives.

Engage and empower attendees to participate in CSR activities, creating connections and lasting memories. Incorporate activities related to environmental and social commitment. For example, in Vienna, you can organize community cooking events or baking workshops with seniors or social city tours highlighting issues like poverty and homelessness that disadvantaged citizens guide.

Enhance [CSR initiatives](#) with educational components. Include sessions on local social issues, sustainability, and the impact of CSR projects, featuring local experts for valuable insights and inspiration.

If hands-on experiences aren't feasible and donations are preferred, invite a representative from the initiative to present their efforts. Always talk about your initiatives to raise awareness and inspire others.

What are some key areas regarding sustainability and social responsibility to watch in the coming years to know meetings are living up to the push to leave the world a better place?

Paic: Several areas are increasingly in the spotlight, driven in part by new legal requirements like the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) in the European Union. For the meetings industry, reducing carbon footprints is crucial. This includes minimizing travel emissions and choosing environmentally friendly venues. Effective food waste management, such as adopting zero-waste policies, is also becoming more important.

In addition to CSR and legacy projects, which aim to leave a lasting positive impact on the community, integrating DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) principles is essential. Ensuring that events are inclusive and accessible to all individuals, regardless of physical abilities or backgrounds, is vital. Embracing DEI not only makes events more equitable but also enhances their overall impact and sustainability.

Meet us in the extraordinary



MEETING
DESTINATION
VIENNA

NOW ♦ TOGETHER



Vienna stands for an impressive variety of meeting venues and outstanding cultural offerings. Located in the center of Europe, Vienna is easy to reach and renowned for its quality of life – an extraordinary meeting destination that inspires.

meeting.vienna.info

Created in partnership with **VISIT LAUDERDALE**

MICHAEL POUHEY

Vice President, Business Development & Sales Operations, **Visit Lauderdale**

Mike Pouey, Vice President of Group Sales at Visit Lauderdale, combines a global perspective with an impressive 20-year track record in the hospitality industry. Leading a dynamic, nationwide sales team, Mike drives substantial group and convention business to Greater Fort Lauderdale hotels and the Broward County Convention Center.

Mike's career is decorated with significant achievements, including his tenure at the 589-room Hilton Fort Lauderdale Marina, where he led the sales and event team to win Hilton's prestigious "Circle of Excellence" award in both 2015 and 2016. His extensive experience also spans sales leadership roles at LXR Resorts and Marriott, beginning his distinguished career at the Renaissance Orlando at SeaWorld.

Born in West Africa and raised across Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean, Mike brings a rich cultural tapestry to his role. He holds a bachelor's degree from Florida International University's School of Hospitality and an MBA from Nova Southeastern University. He is also fluent in French. Through his leadership and multifaceted background, Mike exemplifies Visit Lauderdale's commitment to inclusivity and excellence in hospitality.

Sustainability and impactful meetings are generating a lot of industry attention, but many event organizers may not know how to begin addressing such broad topics. What concrete steps do you advise planners and companies to start with when implementing new strategies?

Michael Pouey: Sustainability is not a one-size-fits-all approach. It varies significantly across communities and requires a deep level of community engagement to understand those unique needs. For meeting planners, balancing numerous options and opportunities can be challenging, but starting with the right venue can make all the difference. Start with a facility that leads by example — one that holds LEED certifications, integrates solar farms, implements energy-saving engineering plans, and prioritizes waste reduction.

Additionally, meeting planners should factor in local weather and seasonal trends when scheduling an event. Cooling a building is more energy-efficient than heating one, which makes Greater Fort Lauderdale an excellent choice for year-round meetings. Notably, the Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center stands out as Florida's first LEED-certified convention center, underscoring the region's commitment to sustainability.

Integrating local communities into meetings is gaining traction as a way to leave a positive, lasting impact on host destinations. What are some recommendations for finding partnerships that align with an organization’s mission and integrating such groups into meeting agendas?

Pouey: Art serves as a powerful medium to bridge the gap between residents and visitors, enriching the overall experience for meeting attendees.

We can use the Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center as an example of incorporating art and community to make an impactful meeting space. In April, Visit Lauderdale proudly unveiled the Hidden Disabilities Zen Room within the convention center. This sanctuary provides a calming space for meeting attendees with visible or invisible disabilities, offering 15-minute intervals to those feeling overwhelmed or overstimulated.

We collaborated with a local organization dedicated to supporting adults with developmental disabilities. More than 30 individuals contributed artwork to the project, transforming the Zen Room into a vibrant testament to our inclusive community. The artwork within the room is not only well-received but also underscores our commitment to valuing Everyone Under the Sun, which is Visit Lauderdale’s brand promise.

Meeting planners can look to this as an example of how a little art can go a long way. Another way meeting planners can connect with a host community is to ask conventions and visitor bureau staff for local vendors while they are still in the planning phase. At the Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center, 35 percent of our vendors are minority-owned businesses, which makes it easy for meeting planners who want to impact their local community to do so.

Travel brings with it unavoidable carbon emissions. What are some compelling destination-specific ideas meeting planners should consider to offset carbon emissions that cannot be avoided?

Pouey: Conscious travel begins with mindful choices about how you reach your destination. Many airlines arriving at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport provide options for purchasing carbon credits to reduce their carbon footprint. Every traveler’s decision significantly impacts our community, whether visiting Greater Fort Lauderdale for business or leisure. The county’s [“Plan-it Green”](#) initiative offers a voluntary carbon offset program designed to make events in Greater Fort Lauderdale carbon neutral. Contributions to the Plan-it Green Fund support local efforts to reduce carbon emissions, including tree-planting projects that combat soil erosion, mitigate climate change, and provide essential shade and habitats for native species.

At Visit Lauderdale, our partners choose sustainability as well, and we align with them when we can. Some restaurant partners organize beach clean-ups, source food locally, and eliminate plastic silverware to protect marine life. Also, once you land at the airport, our largest meeting facility at the Convention Center is conveniently located just four miles away, which reduces the need for extensive travel for many meeting professionals. Another added bonus is that you can get to our convention center and many of our attractions via our Water Taxi, which alleviates road traffic and the associated emissions.

What are some key areas regarding sustainability and social responsibility to watch in the coming years to know meetings are living up to the push to leave the world a better place?

Pouey: When choosing venues, prioritize those actively implementing sustainable changes, not just discussing them. Ideal buildings have clear goals for achieving carbon neutrality. Meeting planners should seek out facilities with comprehensive improvement plans, whether big or small. It could be they've chosen tile over carpet for a modern appeal or invested in advanced cooling and heating systems. Overall, meeting venues should focus on reducing energy consumption per attendee in these key areas: food and waste reduction, water use reduction, innovative landscape design, eco-friendly furniture, electric vehicles, and community-specific initiatives.

Also, Greater Fort Lauderdale exemplifies social responsibility through its commitment to diversity. Notably, 35 percent of the \$1.3 billion expansion and renovation of the Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center involves small and minority-owned businesses. As the Convention Center grows as a meeting destination, our diverse community also benefits. Choosing venues in destinations that reflect these principles will contribute to a greener, more socially responsible, and more sustainable future.

NEW EXPERIENCES BEGIN HERE

Give your group an unparalleled experience in Greater Fort Lauderdale.



Welcome to where business seamlessly blends with pleasure. With a newly expanded and reimagined Broward County Convention Center – including a \$1.3 billion expansion opening in 2025—as the center of a robust Convention Center District, you’ll find experiences that will surprise and delight your attendees. From 24 miles of golden beaches and enchanting waterside outdoor venues to a cosmopolitan dining and nightlife scene, give your attendees an experience they’ll be raving about for years to come.

DEFINING **IMPACTFUL MEETINGS**



According to Krzysztof Celuch, Ph.D., Events Experience Professor at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun, Poland, meetings can be defined as “[a] form of gathering, in one place at the same time, of a few or many persons for the purpose of discussing, exchanging ideas and experiences, presenting products, knowledge transfer, motivating.” By this definition, meetings encompass all types of business events, including conferences, conventions, trade shows, exhibitions, symposiums, and incentive travel, among others.

Impact is not as simple to define. Colin Habberton, Ph.D., co-founder and executive director of Relativ Impact, a global impact solution provider, explains that the word is used so loosely that one of the challenges is its definition. “Impact can take on different forms in different places, depending on what the goals of a particular organization are.” Habberton adds that the simplest definition of impact is the difference an organization makes in the context in which it operates, be it positive or negative.

However, for professionals to know how to strive for impact, the industry must first define its parameters within the space.



Meetings Meet Impact

Within the context of meetings, Virginie De Visscher, executive director of business events for Destination Canada, defines impact as the planned and unplanned sociocultural, economic, intellectual, environmental, and other outcomes from hosting business events. This includes innovative ideas, research collaboration, new trade deals, and policy changes.

Other characteristics of event impact include its systemic nature — one area of action ultimately influencing another — and dynamic disposition. Quentin Remy, head of global procurement and strategic sourcing at MCI, stated that impact requires the ability to be effective in the long term: “[I]t needs to keep changing to stay relevant with what a meeting or event is doing.” In this context, **impact evolves with external global factors, affecting broader society.**

Geneviève Leclerc, CMP, co-founder and CEO of [Meet4Impact](#), defines impact as “an expression of the effects that are created where there is change resulting from something that’s being put in place and ideally lasting change.” She emphasizes that **true impact is not a fleeting change but a deeply rooted systemic change that endures over time and continues to generate benefits**. This, she notes, is a concept that the industry has not fully grasped.

Another crucial aspect of impact is its alignment with value. “If I have an impact on you because I’m teaching you something, I don’t define what that impact is. You are the only one who can tell me what the impact is. Impact is expressed and measured from the perspective of the groups benefiting from [it],” Leclerc said.

An impact can be about legacy, DEI, sustainability, or any other chosen focus area if it expresses a change resulting from something enacted around an event and creates benefits for a specific group.

Interconnected Terms

Understanding impact also means understanding the interconnectedness of other terms often used within the industry and external sectors. Impact and sustainability, for example, are not the same, although the concepts overlap.

The classic definition of sustainability is the practice of meeting today’s needs without compromising tomorrow’s needs, focusing on three primary pillars: people, planet, and

profit. “Sustainability describes a set of factors that are directly related to endurance and duration. The nature of the word means something can be sustained,” Habberton said.

Impact is the effects or changes that happen because of an organization or an event’s action, whereas sustainability ensures that these actions do not deplete resources. James Latham, founder of [The Iceberg](#), explains that in the case of sustainability, event impacts are the justification for a meeting, “They’re very much linked to the why [of an event], sustainability [would be] more about the how.” This means sustainability could be an outcome of an impact goal or an impact goal itself when setting and meeting objectives.

However, unlike sustainability, impact is broader, encompassing multiple areas of influence, depending on an organization or event’s needs, such as:

- **Economic:** Job creation, business growth
- **Environmental:** Biodiversity, conservation, carbon footprint, resource, water and waste management
- **Financial:** Return on investment, cost efficiency
- **Governance:** Legal and regulatory compliance, industry and global standards, transparency
- **Operational:** Innovation, internal productivity, health and safety
- **Reputational:** Brand perception, loyalty, and trust, corporate social responsibility
- **Social:** Knowledge sharing, community engagement, diversity, equity, inclusion, and health and well-being

Another term often used interchangeably with impact is legacy. “Impact is associated with immediate or short-term measurable results. Legacy refers to lasting change that extends well into the future,” De Visscher said when asked about the difference between the two.

“Essentially, legacy is what impact aims to achieve.”

- Virginie De Visscher, Executive Director of Business Events, Destination Canada

The industry is no stranger to legacy, with several major events like the Olympic Games focusing on the long tail of legacy throughout the years. However, it is even more necessary now. Today’s needs mean business event legacies must be something other than a nice-to-have or fly-in, fly-out approach. IMEX’s communication strategist Kit Watts said, “[Legacy] shouldn’t be taken lightly. If you can genuinely do something over time that’s meaningful, measurable — that’s true legacy.”



WHY **IMPACT MATTERS**



Meetings will have an impact, positive or negative, regardless of whether the industry intentionally considers it. Fiona Pelham, CEO of Positive Impact, describes this in a way many have come to understand over the last decade, “There will always be an impact when bringing people into [a] location or gathering online. Something will always happen, or there’ll be a mark left on the earth from it.”

However, until recently, meeting and event professionals have based event impacts solely on return on investment, such as attendee spending or increased economic revenue. In other words, the industry has focused on financial impacts only. Considering the broader definition of impact means focusing on widespread value creation that affects positive change over the long run.

“Generally speaking, an event is impactful if it achieves its goals,” Megan Henshall, Google’s strategic lead for global events, said, “For me, those [impact] goals often look very different from ROI and KPIs.” She further explains three critical attributes of impact: Making people feel something positive, giving people the opportunity to contribute and consume, and offering opportunities for authentic connection.

“Time is the most valuable and finite resource we have. It’s bad business and form to ask people for their time in service of something that isn’t impactful to, and for them.”

- Megan Henshall, Strategic Lead for Global Events, Google

Time has become a more valuable commodity, especially in a post-pandemic era. “We have less and less time in today’s world, and attending an in-person event is a commitment. It’s dedicated time,” Remy added. The fundamental questions for event professionals can then no longer center chiefly around financial returns, although they are still relevant; otherwise, the industry would not survive. However, the more fundamental questions planners should ask to justify event time and participation are:

- What is the meaning of this event?
- What is the reason for meeting?
- What impact will this gathering have?

An event with impact goals means if attendees feel they’re making a difference, they’re more likely to engage, translating to time well spent. One reason for this is due to the neuroscience of the brain and how it responds in social situations. Suppose a meeting minimizes threats and enhances rewards, such as the feeling of contributing to something greater than oneself, like a legacy project or learning something relevant. In that case, attendees are more likely to walk away feeling good. Dr. Evian Gordon, an expert in integrative neuroscience, backs this theory up, stating there is only one motivation of the brain: minimizing danger and maximizing rewards.

Younger generations, such as Millennials and Gen Zs, also prefer making an impact. As their presence in the workforce is set to dominate over the coming years, considering their preferences for positive impact is crucial.

In addition to placing a high value on attendee time and the subsequent post-event experiences, impact has other benefits, too:

GOOD FOR THE ORGANIZER

Despite being close-knit, competition exists within the industry. Retaining and finding new clients means organizers must demonstrate they have their finger on the pulse, considering relevant issues. Remy explains, “If you don’t want to become irrelevant, you have to get a hold of it by educating your staff and everyone in the company.” For example, MCI is training staff on artificial intelligence (AI) and sustainability, considering how best to use them to create a positive impact from an internal and external perspective. Impact, thus, keeps organizers and the organizations they represent relevant.

Financial impact is still essential for the industry to stay alive and help boost event ROI for organizers. Wellness is an example of this. David T. Stevens, co-founder and wellness architect at Olympian Meeting, shared that when “wellness portions” were introduced into a post-pandemic event, the net promoter score went from an 8.2 to a 9.4, and over 80% of attendees taking the survey reported positive feedback on the impact of wellness integration into the event.

Stevens includes four pillars of wellness in meetings: mindfulness, movement, meals, and meaning. While these areas may seem more minor compared to a large legacy project, by incorporating these aspects, larger goals can significantly impact attendees

due to the interconnectedness of effects. If an attendee is well rested and eating healthy food, they’re more able to engage. Some newfound habits may be continued post-meeting, increasing overall attendee satisfaction and the likelihood of returning to an event.

GOOD FOR THE DESTINATION

Destinations benefit from the impact of events through positive social value, knowledge sharing, and local community engagement — an often-forgotten element when hosting events. “Business events bring a host of benefits to a destination, but their impact can extend well beyond delegate spend,” De Visscher said, having first-hand experience through Destination Canada’s impact work. She further stresses how meetings can produce powerful ripple effects that continue long after an event has ended, including opportunities for transformative collaborations, tapping into investments, attracting talent, and spurring innovation.

Paul Black, head of business events for VisitBritain and VisitEngland, explained that international associations are starting to include impact or legacy objectives in their proposal requests. “Destinations are looking to leverage the opportunity of a business event to benefit their region, whether to grow a particular industry, support a medical or scientific initiative, develop skills, expedite behavioral change, or grow awareness of an issue. A mutual focus on impact and legacy enhances the benefits to all involved.”

GOOD FOR THE PLANET

Estimates suggest the meetings and events industry is responsible for as much as [10% of annual global carbon emissions](#). According to Watts, the time of avoiding the elephant in the room regarding event climate impacts has passed. IMEX is acknowledging its role and is taking steps to manage the long-term effects moving from a negative to a positive. "When you have a true 'license to operate,' you have to be crystal clear on the return on investment in carbon cost. Flying in 20, 10,000 or 20,000 people into an event...there's a carbon cost to that effort."

By tracking and showcasing the positive impacts of events, the industry can demonstrate its commitment to being part of the solution instead of the problem regarding environmental impacts. "If you're doing a massive global event and you're [emitting] a lot of carbon, is the financial impact going to make it worthwhile? We now know that [carbon] leads to rising temperatures and forest fires much quicker in our lifetime than we thought. Economic impact is becoming a weak argument if it's the only event impact. Money isn't the air we breathe," Pelham said.

START HERE



“Your starting point is your values,” Watts explains. “So if you haven’t done the work on your values — not your personal values, your corporate values — do the work first. Once you’ve got those, they guide all future decisions.” Watts further suggests that if an organization’s values align with inclusion and diversity, for example, that should drive the area of focus for creating impact goals.

Once values have been identified, professionals can define what impact to focus on but with the end in mind — in other words, create a strategy. This includes defining common goals and language for impact. For instance:

- What does impact mean to the organization?
- How will legacy be created?
- What gap or needs can be addressed?

Consider that the greater the gap or need, the greater the potential for making an impact. A theory of change is one such framework to support this process. It is a comprehensive roadmap to help communicate a vision for change, define desired impact objectives and outcomes, and strategize the necessary actions to achieve these.

Within this defining stage, planners should also identify relevant stakeholders. “In most organizations, it’s not just one set of stakeholders that sets those goals. It’s not just executive. There are owners, team members, partners, suppliers, and customers that need to be considered,” Habberton said.



An Example of A Theory of Change from Meet4Impact (Credit: Meet4Impact)

Stakeholders and partners are essential to creating real, long-term positive impact. Without collaboration, impact becomes an island. Sophia Hyder Hock, chief inclusion officer at Destinations International, recommends planners engage with local communities early in the process. “Talk to the local point of contact about the needs and priorities of the community and then align the meeting’s goals to address an agreed-upon number of priorities, ensuring the event resonates and leaves a meaningful legacy.”

One challenge with stakeholder engagement is different stakeholders have different needs and objectives. Because of this, a strong case for impact must be made. Leclerc explains this is why the planning phase is so important. It’s a chance to understand what’s at stake for each stakeholder and identify an area of intersection or overlapping goals. “If you skip that, it’s extremely difficult because everyone wants to get something in it for themselves or their organization,” Leclerc said.

Being mindful of leaving a positive impact is the best strategy to maximize the investment of meeting resources by creating goodwill for a broader set of stakeholders other than just attendees. However, if planners encounter initial resistance to impact from stakeholders, they should see it as an opportunity to return to the drawing board and find common ground. Henshall acknowledges that senior leaders are also people and that there are human feelings and fears behind resistance to new things and change, “If we can look beyond the ‘no’ or the objection to the possible root cause of it, we have a much better chance of overcoming it, building lasting trust, and avoiding the next no altogether.”

True impact needs to be planned. Impact is deliberate, thoughtful, and purposeful and requires commitment and resources.

“One of our challenges is to get people to understand that you’ve got to plan [impact]. You’ve got to understand what impact you want to have for whom, how much of it you want to create, and how much you are prepared to put in it to make sure that you are supporting and sustaining that impact,” said Leclerc.

Leclerc suggests that professionals feeling overwhelmed by impact should start by focusing on five areas:

- **Content Impact:** Producing targeted content with clear objectives and understanding what people want to do with it.
- **Event Design Impact:** Experimenting with learning formats, time spent in sessions versus networking, health and wellness, and other aspects of event design.
- **Planning Impact:** Creating proper implementation strategies, like an impact plan that includes a theory of change.
- **Legacy Impact:** Extending the positive effects of the meeting outside the event and into the community through long-lasting, tangible actions and projects.
- **Fringe Impacts:** Understanding the event may be used by external groups outside an event to create impact through actions like festivals or industrial theatre pieces for a cause.

NEXT STEPS



Measuring Impact

Measuring impact is essential. Accurate data can help obtain buy-in from stakeholders and give insights into the success of projects or whether something needs to change. Habberton highlights that this is another reason for defining impact.

Once impact is defined, it can be measured, and when it is measured, it can be managed.

Impact can be measured in various ways, including immediate observations, testimonials, surveys, or metrics such as waste diverted from landfills or jobs created from a meeting. And while there may be immediate evidence of impact, real insights only become visible months later. “Real impact measurement requires measurement over time, which is the hardest, most difficult thing to commit to in our industry,” Leclerc said. Black agrees. “Measuring the long-term impact of events requires commitment for a sustained period to track the changes which have taken place. There’s still a need to improve resourcing and to create long-term measurement models.”

However, impact measuring is more than time and data collection. It’s the understanding that data lies outside an organization when measuring impact performance. “You’re talking about measuring the effect on an external group. The information is not owned by the organization trying to measure that impact,” said Leclerc. Because of this, organizations may have to rely on a third party to get information, like an intermediary body such as the event organizer or a community group. “[This] is a very important but overlooked challenge around measuring impact, as the data is removed from the organization. So, it’s a lot more work and a lot more risk to try to get that information.”

Remy has a favorite saying regarding impact measurement: **“If you don’t have data to support what you’re claiming, you’re just someone else with an opinion.”**

Communicating Impact

The impact of meetings and events is amplified through good storytelling. Communicating these stories well enables everyone to better understand impact, and ensures those involved align with the objectives. “Stories that demonstrate impact and legacy are powerful because they are able to bring the human connection to light,” Hyder Hock said.

Solid data must be used as evidence to tell impactful stories within this space.

Otherwise, an impact story will remain only that — a story without substance to inspire further change. Communications must, therefore, be strategically aligned with goals and stakeholders.

Habberton sums up the importance of communication, illustrating that the first point will be to define the company’s impact. What are its impact goals? What goals does it set for itself, and what difference does it want to make regarding people, the planet, or their performance? What destination does the company want to reach? The second is determining the journey toward that destination and being transparent about measuring progress. Over time, the journey may have unforeseen shifts and changes to which organizations must adapt. So when it comes to communicating impact, it must be done with integrity.

“It’s doing what you say and saying what you do. And if you manage to get that right, the condition of being able to validate that will be the fact that you are collecting and can confirm the evidence of that progress,” said Habberton.

However, communicating impact is more than just a narrative and some qualitative anecdotal data points. It’s about measuring the journey and communicating all aspects, learnings, and results, supported by evidence from stakeholders.

For instance, Hyder Hock notes when sharing stories of inclusive impact, it’s essential to “center the voices of those directly affected, ensure authenticity, and highlight the measurable outcomes that demonstrate real change.”

Supporting Impact

Navigating and adhering to changing regulations, such as compliance with new environmental laws, can be challenging for event organizers. However, if meetings and events don’t adapt, these changes will be enforced by external sources, like government regulations. Some changes may even threaten the feasibility of all meetings and events. Therefore, commitment to these changes is not just about demonstrating care but about the industry’s survival. As Professor Greg Clark puts it, it’s about securing an unspoken “[license to operate](#).”

External support mechanisms such as service providers and impact consultants can help as they will be on top of recent and upcoming regulations. Global standards and frameworks can provide an organization with what is currently being identified as

the appropriate environmental, social, and governance factors to manage impacts. Some examples of these resources include [IRIS+](#), a system managed by the Global Impact Investing Network to measure, manage, and optimize impact and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, Habberton explains, “What a lot of people don’t realize is that SDGs were never meant for companies; they’re meant for countries, but they do provide a categorization of what various factors related to measuring the difference that you want to make.”

Standards such as [ISO20121:2024](#), the industry benchmark for sustainable event management or the [Race to Zero](#) campaign are good places to start. However, the industry faces a hurdle regarding regulations, and that is aligning itself with credible sources. In the past, meetings have created their own rules to some extent. That may not be possible in the future. “There are now regulation requirements, which mean we as a sector are not free to define this. We have to look at those rules and regulations and what that means for us,” Pelham said.

De Visscher added that positive impacts such as those created by sustainable events should not require buy-in — they are an obligation, not an option.

“If our industry is to meet net-zero targets by no later than 2050, the entire supply chain must work in partnership to implement impactful solutions.”

- Virginie De Visscher, Executive Director of Business Events, Destination Canada

IMPACT IN ACTION: CASE STUDIES



Boosting Local Communities: Destination Canada



[Destination Canada](#) commissioned a [Legacy & Impact Study](#) to investigate the impact of the meetings and events industry. Specific focus areas include the economic, social, and environmental benefits of hosting business events. The aim is that the findings will inform a longer-term strategy for developing models that use business events to create impact.

The study has evaluated 16 conferences held in the region between 2018 and 2024 across six economic sectors: life sciences, natural resources, finance and insurance, advanced manufacturing, agribusiness, and digital industries. “During the first year, we studied seven events and found that the most prominent impacts fell into three categories: policy impact, financial impact, and intellectual impact,” De Visscher said.

She further explains that the goal is to uncover insights and guidance on the type, scale, and scope of business events most likely to support medium-to-long-term benefits in local communities.

“As a national tourism organization, we aren’t necessarily working at the level of individual events but instead are trying to understand the bigger picture when it comes to impact within the meetings industry.” De Visscher stated the research process required long-term stakeholder collaboration, including local host committees, host destination marketing organizations (DMOs), conference organizers, and professional conference organizers (PCOs).

While the project is still in the early phases, initial research has revealed four key focus factors: pre-event activities, government participation, destination marketing organization (DMO) involvement, and external collaboration. Destination Canada is looking to leveraging findings from these real-world examples to sway decision-makers who consider the importance of legacy and impact.

Reframing Health: EASL



Credit: EASL

The European Association for the Study of the Liver ([EASL](#)) collaborated with Meet4Impact to develop the “[Love Your Liver](#)” project which addressed critical gaps in hepatology care and public awareness of liver health. The initiative, launched at the 2022 International Liver Congress in London, is seen as a successful early example of an intentional impact project being delivered by an association.

The project aims to increase awareness of liver disease through public awareness, early detection, and school engagement in the host destination of EASL’s annual conferences. The social impact measurement plan took a two-pronged approach:

- “Be nice to your liver” — public awareness campaign in a local school.
- “Love your liver” — a fibro scan track to assess and refer patients with potential liver damage.

Measured impacts included:

- 60 primary school students learned about liver health, and 88% agreed that taking care of the liver is essential after the session.

- 93% of students could correctly explain the liver’s function, and 75% mentioned that exercise benefits liver health.
- 5 million people were reached worldwide through news articles and television programs as part of a public awareness campaign.
- 159 people had their liver scanned on-site, with 96% having a healthy liver function and the remaining 4% being referred for further testing.
- Engagement with the Deputy Mayor, who was impressed with the impact program and supported amplification at the conference and beyond.

EASL has continued and expanded on this legacy work in subsequent conferences. The 2024 edition saw project outreach spread nationally to cities across Italy and secure external funding to help scale the initiative.

The EASL impact project has prompted other associations to explore including impact projects in future meetings.

Driving Social Change: Business Events Sydney



Credit: Maja Baska

The [Sydney WorldPride Human Rights Conference](#) brought together community leaders, activists, politicians, NGOs, and human rights experts from 20 countries, to focus on human rights issues impacting LGBTQIA+ people. The conference aimed to leave a lasting impact on delegates so that they could help make a difference in the lives of LGBTQIA+ people regardless of culture or geography.

The conference put producing a socially impactful event at the forefront of its design in line with its overall strategy of inclusion and accessibility. This meant that factors influencing the WorldPride Human Rights Conference design included:

- Being inclusive of those with a disability or additional needs.
- Involving local communities in the event.
- Showcasing elements of local culture.
- Being inclusive of those with diverse genders and sexualities.
- Creating a culturally inclusive space.

Some practical applications to achieve this plan comprised quiet and prayer rooms, access for assis-

tance dogs, Auslan and international sign language (ISL) interpreters, and yarning rooms for First Nation mobs to connect.

The educational program was created by and for the LGBTQIA+ community with Equality Australia. Topics were relevant to attendees, including content about ending conversion practices, protecting LGBTQIA+ people seeking safety and asylum, and First Nations justice.

The conference led to significant government support, with the Australian Federal Government committing AU\$ 3.5 million to the Global Equality Fund to aid LGBTIQ+ civil society organizations and regional human rights defenders. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs also consulted the LGBTQIA+ community on a human rights engagement strategy that helped establish an LGBTIQ+ national health action plan and raise funds for dedicated health and medical research. Local government also introduced a bill protecting the rights of all intersex people in medical settings.

Building Capacity: VisitBritain



[VisitBritain](#) is working with destination partners to spread awareness and support clients in embedding broader impact strategies to meet their and the destinations' objectives. One of the project's outcomes was an impactful legacy toolkit for DMOs across the UK. It also involved delivering a masterclass series in collaboration with [GDS-Movement](#) to train professionals in legacy and impact measurement and management. Utilizing the [BE Impactful](#) research created by Meet4Impact, the course identifies eight capitals to define objectives and measure an event's overall impact: natural, built, social, human, intellectual, cultural, financial, and political.

"Business events are one of the best communication tools or activations to accelerate these missions by facilitating high engagement with shared objectives and experiences," Black said.

Measurement is also fundamental to this process, presenting the ultimate means to demonstrate change, according to Black: "How do we measure job creation from events over a sustained period, how do we calculate enhanced medical access, how do we authentically

demonstrate actions to minimize the footprint of the event, and how do we support and grow accessibility, equity, and inclusion?"

The Impactful Framework provides a pathway to do this but must align with the client's mission and the event's purpose. "Effective planning for positive impact takes time, smart resourcing, and clear collaboration among the organizing teams."

On the supplier side, the project has been about establishing resources or working groups to support clients in delivering their missions. Examples of this include:

- [Glasgow Convention Bureau](#) has launched a new positive impact and legacy team to support conference organizers in creating a measurable effect on the broader public when hosting meetings in the city.
- [ACC Liverpool](#), working with the [Liverpool Convention Bureau](#), has released its own toolkit to facilitate knowledge building around legacy and drive more robust engagement between organizers, venues, local communities, and partners.

CONNECTING **IMPACT AND PURPOSE**



Implementing relatively new concepts like impact can overwhelm meeting and event planners. However, professionals must remember that the industry is renowned for its creativity and innovation — **when in doubt, the best place to start is with a single action designed to lead to a positive effect.** “A simple way to talk about impact is about having intention, the intention to do better...[Impact] is a verb, [and] we’ve acknowledged that the word act is inside the word impact,” Watts said.

As Latham retells from a recent industry interview recorded for The Iceberg, industry professionals are change agents, not travel agents, “We describe the consumption economy, the visitor economy associated with business events, as the tip of the iceberg.” Latham acknowledges that meetings are significant contributors to the visitor economy. However, many confuse meetings with leisure tourism. Business events deliver legacies that improve healthcare in the community, drive the economy, build new industries, create new jobs, and ensure a sustainable society and economy. “We’re a force for good. We talk about the consumption economy as our priority. [But] that is not why our industry exists. It exists for a purpose.”

Beyond the standard meeting metrics, events can be used as a platform to achieve something memorable and create a legacy when impact is considered.

“Long-term impact equates to purpose by creating a sustained legacy that aligns with the organization’s values, driving ongoing positive change, and deepening the connection between the event and the community it serves,”

- Sophia Hyder Hock, Chief Inclusion Officer, Destinations International

Impact then becomes why meeting and event professionals do something, leading to legacy and purpose within this process.

The case for impact is thus threefold: Events in themselves as tools for impact, the effects of impact on event organizers and companies, and, finally, a better world for all, as meetings have the power to move mountains and change lives.

Henshall concludes, “Impact is a lens through which we can understand our purpose, but I believe purpose comes first. Without a personal understanding of values and purpose, ‘impact’ will almost always be reduced to metrics and data points on paper. When impact is a result of purpose, it becomes a rich humanistic story that is much easier to tell and far more delightful to hear.”

CMP CREDITS

Skift Meetings is a CMP Preferred Provider accredited by the Events Industry Council and provides Continuing Education credits for learning activities.

REDEEM YOUR CREDIT

This report is worth 1 CMP-IS credit under the Strategic Planning domain.

For more information about the CMP credential , please visit <http://www.eventscouncil.org/>.

DISCLAIMER

This report's content was created by the Skift Meetings.

If you wish to sponsor our future publications or receive sponsorship opportunity notifications, email meetings@skift.com.

