



BOARDROOM  
THE BEST RESOURCE FOR ASSOCIATIONS

# The Evolving Landscape of Conference Design

2024 VOLUME 1 | VOLUME 2 | VOLUME 3 | VOLUME 4



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## LETTER TO OUR READERS

# Nurturing Well-Being in the Association Workplace

In today's fast-paced work environment, the concept of well-being is more than just a buzzword; it's a fundamental necessity for individuals and organisations alike. Nowhere is this more crucial than among associations, where the dedication of employees drive the mission forward. Yet, amidst the pursuit of lofty goals, the well-being of association professionals often takes a backseat.

It might be time to recognise that prioritising well-being is an essential investment in organisational success.

At the heart of any association are its people—the tireless advocates, innovators, and problem-solvers who fuel its mission. However, the very qualities that make association professionals so indispensable also make them vulnerable to burnout, stress, and diminished well-being. Long hours, tight budgets, and the pressure to deliver results can exact a heavy toll on mental, physical, and emotional health.

The true measure of an association's success isn't solely determined by its bottom line or the number of offerings or member services they put out there. It lies in the well-being of its workforce—their resilience, engagement, and satisfaction. A workplace culture that prioritises well-being is all about fostering an environment where employees feel valued, supported, and empowered to thrive.

This begins with leadership—the guiding force that sets the tone for organisational culture. Leaders must lead by example, demonstrating a genuine commitment to well-being and championing policies or practices that promote work-life balance, flexibility, and psychological safety. Flexible work arrangements, regular check-ins, and opportunities for professional development and growth are all integral components of a well-being-centric culture.

But well-being is also a collective effort that requires buy-in and participation from all levels of the organisation. Peers can serve as allies and sources of support, fostering a sense of camaraderie and solidarity in the face of challenges. By cultivating a culture of open communication and empathy, associations can create a workplace where well-being is an integral part of the organizational fabric.

Investing in well-being isn't just the right thing to do; it's also a strategic imperative. Studies constantly show that organisations with a strong emphasis on employee well-being experience higher levels of productivity, creativity, and employee retention. By nurturing the well-being of its workforce, an association can position itself for long-term success, attracting top talent and fostering a culture of innovation and resilience.



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# Building a Business Case for ESG Strategy

In the rapidly evolving landscape of association leadership, the integration of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) goals into strategic planning has become a central focus. Authored by **Colm Clarke**, Partner, Consultancy at Exempla Management & Consulting, this article navigates the challenges associations face in aligning ESG initiatives with their mission and member value proposition.

Incorporating ESG goals into strategy is one of today's hot topics for association leaders. But unless your association has a very specific ESG related purpose, such as renewable energy or the defense of minorities, it is unlikely that it will be easy and obvious to agree what your position should be on a host of ESG related topics. So what can you do about it?

## Who are we doing this for?

Simply put, you can start by asking yourself: who are/should we be doing this for?

A common stumbling block appears to be the gap between association staff teams' desire to "do more" on ESG topics but finding it difficult to relate those back to mission – and crucially – to the member value proposition.

Take an obvious event example around food selection at events – the sustainable option of local, primarily plant-based menus may be great for the organizing team seeking to reduce their event carbon footprint but will your members appreciate that? Or will (at least some) view it as a reduction of choice, or a diminished offering compared to what they usually get?

The same goes for educational programs and diversity objectives – promoting new faces is not always easy when the paying attendee expects to hear from "the top names" in the sector.

In times where costs are continuously increasing, associations must be seen to keep delivering value for money. The reality is that well-intentioned "it's the right thing to do" arguments alone will not convince Boards or Executive Committees to embrace ESG strategies, nor satisfying members scrutinising budgets.

## Building your business case for ESG

Creating compelling ESG strategies that resonate with Association Boards necessitates the development of a robust business case. In that area, research shows a few different things: younger generations prioritize environmental consciousness and diversity, as revealed by the Deloitte Millennial Survey 2020. Concurrently, corporations are actively engaging in efforts to demonstrate their commitment to ESG, as highlighted



“Let’s shift the narrative from the potential costs and efforts associated with ESG implementation to a more nuanced exploration of the risks inherent in not adopting such strategies

in the Harvard Business Review’s exploration of “The Comprehensive Business Case for Sustainability.” Furthermore, regulatory momentum is building, with entities such as the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) paving the way for formalized ESG reporting for large organizations.

Within this context, association leaders can shape ESG strategies to align with their business models. Anticipating the expectations of future members, these strategies must actively support ESG initiatives to foster a sense of belonging rather than transactional relationships. Moreover, attracting and retaining new and diverse talent is critical for the association’s evolution, challenging the conventional boardroom participant profile. Simultaneously, considering the perspective of emerging association staff is essential, as the recruitment and retention of this talent pool hinge on aligning organizational values with their aspirations.

As for events, often the public face of associations, they carry a substantial environmental footprint. As corporations increasingly scrutinise their participation, associations relying on corporate involvement in events may face inquiries into the event’s alignment with internal objectives and future reporting requirements. By framing ESG strategies within the association’s overall business model, a transformative opportunity emerges.

This approach allows leaders to shift the narrative from the potential costs and efforts associated with ESG implementation to a more nuanced exploration of the risks inherent in not adopting such strategies. It initiates a crucial dialogue that underscores the imperative of embracing ESG measures as an integral component of future-focused and sustainable (from both revenue generating and operational perspective) association practices.

### Using the UN SDGs as a conversation starter

Embarking on the journey of ESG integration presents a challenge as it permeates every facet of an association’s activities and organizational model, a potentially daunting prospect. Yet, reframing this challenge offers a positive perspective, providing numerous avenues to showcase how the association’s activities inherently align with and support broader ESG objectives.

The 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals provide a useful reference to start thinking about what your association does and how it may be (even inadvertently) supporting them.

Perhaps your environmental footprint is not best-in-class because you run large events – but maybe that makes you excellent at knowledge sharing, capacity building and creating partnerships. Maybe you have well developed programs to support gender equality or diverse representation

in governance structures, and that compensates for work that needs to be done on other areas.

Sometimes, associations take what they already do for granted so the first (and very motivating step) can be to look at what you’re already doing and build on that with a focus on member and external communications.

### The Long Journey Cliché

The saying that a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step may be an old one but it is very fitting to conclude on – the ESG journey is one where expectations will continuously be updated so it is unlikely to be “done” in our lifetimes.

There is no reason to delay taking small but tangible actions, starting with the business case assessment and how to relate your current activities to the broad SDG framework.

Colm Clarke is Partner at Exempla Management & Consulting, which helps international associations develop and implement strategies that increase member value, create unique content, boost revenues and drive engagement. Their work connects missions to stories, structures, events, and business models that generate sustainable success.

# Hybrid Working? That is the Question.

Special Boardroom contributor **Dr Ole Petter Anfinssen** explores the controversy and sustainability of hybrid and flexible working.

Quoting William Shakespeare: "*To be, or not to be, that is the question.*" The pandemic ushered in a sink-or-swim scenario, compelling society to don a technological "safety" vest for survival. Consequently, the first year proved to be a genuine struggle, with everyone simply attempting to stay afloat while providing support to those around them.

## **Loneliness & decreasing psychological wellbeing**

And now, what lies ahead? Despite the long-past disappearance of the danger, we find ourselves still wearing the safety vest. Rather than securely stowing it away, people persist in wearing it, having embraced it as the new norm. It appears that we are hesitant to part with it, justifying its continued use with the perceived necessity for flexibility and remote work.

However, this shift has led to increased loneliness and a notable decline in psychological well-being within society. Unhappiness is becoming a prevalent sentiment among us.

## **Stockholm Syndrome**

I have been pondering on this for quite a while, and I always seem to be circling back to the basic notion of human nature. If we do not have anything to complain about, we will find something, and we are never happy! It boils down to this: those with straight hair would love curls, those with curls would like straight hair... the list can go on and on.

Before the pandemic people voiced their dissatisfaction and complained about not being able to work from home or about the lack of flexibility. During the pandemic those same people complained about isolation, loneliness and not being able to meet up with colleagues. Now, post pandemic, they do not want to go back to the office.

What is wrong? Where did we go wrong? The best way to elucidate this is through the concept of Stockholm Syndrome, as I believe people might not fully grasp the consequences of this new work adaptation. Over the past five years, I have closely observed societal changes and how individuals react to different work transformations. It seems people are currently adrift, pursuing what they think they want rather than recognising what they truly need.

We cannot underestimate the social interactions, the informal conversations, the friendly behaviours and the smile or laughter from a colleague. We are social beings, in need of recognition. We learn from each other and from our surroundings, and we rely on support to move forward.

## **How do we change?**

Will we change? Given the ongoing dilemma and continuous debate surrounding the issue, I don't foresee an immediate solution. Nevertheless, as individuals, we can strive to cope and embrace new strategies for thriving, all the while developing new skill sets.

Looking back at my series of articles published in Boardroom last year, I would like to mention a short survival guide which encompasses the crucial skills of self-discipline, resilience, self-management, and adaptability.

Starting with self-discipline we could say it aligns with "*The Pain Paradox of Decision-Making*" (Vaden, 2012, p. 9), which "*is the idea that short-term easy leads to long-term difficulty, while the short-term difficulty leads to long-term easy*" (Vaden, 2012, p. 9). Resilience feeds into this as "*the capacity to cope with stress and avoid catastrophe*" (Jawad & Kakabadse, 2019), followed by self-management which consists of "*self-assessment, goal setting, time management, and self-regulation*"





(Gerhardt, 2007), with the fundamentals of “*time management, interpersonal communication, organizational skills, basic problem solving*” (Tulgan, 2017).

It all boils down to adaptability, defined as our ability to navigate new situations, environments, circumstances, and how we evolve to fulfill new purposes or address challenges. Considering the present challenges, mastering this skill becomes almost existential, serving as our survival kit in this intricate era of hybrid working.

We can no longer rely on immediate motivation or support from our close work circle, as we find ourselves being separated by technological boundaries – where body language and context becomes secondary.

In many ways we find ourselves in conflict with human nature, attempting to compel an unnatural inclination that contradicts the instinctive behavior of us as humans. A parallel to what we see nowadays can be made with the use of social media and how psychological well-being has decreased with the increased use of social platforms. We are apart, but still so close – living through the screen of our phones or computers, trying to stay connected to our own constructed reality.

Undoubtedly, this is delusional, as we repeatedly encounter individuals who aren't authentically living their truth, especially in terms of what they choose to share. It's all a facade, where as humans, we only reveal what we want others to see. This evolves into a counterproductive

self-deception, permeating the real world and now infiltrating the workforce.

In conclusion, you will have guessed I am not a firm believer in hybrid working. I believe in flexibility, but as merely to have an option to work off site when needed. Not as a set of predetermined workdays from home, each week. If this trend continues, we will be in danger of losing the sharing of knowledge, learning and diversity of thoughts that inspire and motivate others to perform, privately and at work.

We are social beings who require social interactions. We end exactly where we began: “*To be, or not to be, that is the question*”.

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Associations professionals need to learn how to meet the high expectations of their board & members to deliver more accessible & diverse events, provide more interactive & immersive experiences, incorporate new technologies, & focus on sustainability & impact.



FEATURE

# FEATURE

## The Evolving Landscape of Conference Design

As the landscape of association conferences evolves, staying attuned to the latest design trends is paramount for creating impactful and engaging experiences. From innovative technology integrations to legacy measurements, these trends are reshaping the way conferences are conceived and executed. This Boardroom Special Feature explores some of the current conference design trends that are fostering meaningful connections and knowledge exchange.

The association conference sector is experiencing a swift metamorphosis propelled by several emerging trends. Following two years of disruptions stemming from the pandemic, the industry is now on the path to recovery. However, associations find themselves amidst challenges, from staffing shortages at hotels to tightened event budgets. The revival of in-person gatherings is a beacon of hope, but the path forward requires some strategic rethinking.

The digital pivot prompted over the last few years has led to significant investments in technology. Now, associations are evaluating the operational efficiencies of their expanded digital infrastructure. The integration of hybrid and virtual events has, in this regard, become an enduring fixture: according to a recent Cvent survey, 73% of event planners anticipate hosting a greater number of hybrid events in 2024 compared to the preceding year.

Hybrid events present a harmonious blend, encompassing the interpersonal dynamics of in-person gatherings alongside the practicality and inclusivity associated with virtual experiences. Conversely, virtual events emerge as a cost-efficient and sustainable alternative, especially advantageous for businesses seeking to engage a widespread audience.

This digital shift offers exciting possibilities for marketers and planners, providing more data points for actionable insights. Association organizers can leverage this to gauge the effectiveness of their events and enhance decision-making for subsequent occasions. Illustratively, data empowers event planners to monitor attendance, engagement levels, and ROI. Additionally, it serves as a tool for discerning trends and patterns in attendee behavior. Through the insights gleaned from this information, future events can be refined, ensuring they are not only more engaging but also more effective.

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) considerations also take center stage in event planning.

Sustainability is a priority, with organizations incorporating sustainable meeting programs. However, sustainability remains a challenge for event planners. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) initiatives become focal points, emphasizing the need for inclusive and accessible events. This involves selecting accessible venues, championing diversity in speakers, and incorporating inclusive language in communications.

Attracting the younger generations at conferences can also be a challenge. To counter this you can leverage innovative design strategies. Incorporate interactive elements, tech-driven features, and dynamic seating arrangements to break from traditional formats, embrace social media and event apps for real-time engagement, networking, and updates, diversify content with TED-style talks and workshops, appealing to diverse interests... the sky, really, is the limit.

Last but not least are the rising costs, increased demand, and inflation which necessitate a focus on cost savings and new revenue models. Associations are reevaluating their business models, experimenting with pricing, and creating flexible membership models. Creative sponsorships emerge as a win-win solution, offering additional revenue streams for associations and engaging opportunities for sponsors.

In the end, association conferences must be meticulously designed to provide maximum value to members, as they offer unparalleled opportunities for knowledge exchange, networking, and professional development. Ultimately, this comprehensive approach ensures that participants leave with a heightened sense of belonging within their professional community.

By Remi Deve

# Latest Trends in Conference Design

For ESAE, **Sharon Ashton** explores the enduring goals of associations to create value, generate revenues, and build community through events, and delves into the current challenges and opportunities facing the events community.

The fundamental purpose of why associations organise conferences have not changed, the way they are being designed and delivered is, however, evolving at an increasingly rapid rate.

The three main reasons why associations run events, regardless of the type or format thereof, are to:

- 1. Create value for members**
- 2. Generate revenues**
- 3. Build community**

By producing events, associations are directly contributing to building value, revenue and community for their organisation and thus impacting its core utility, relevance and even sustainability.

The global pandemic provoked a seismic change for the events community. Its an exciting time to work in events. Its also an extremely challenging time. Associations and event professionals alike need to learn how to meet the high expectations of their board and members to deliver more accessible and diverse events, provide more interactive and immersive experiences, incorporate new technologies, and focus on sustainability and impact. All this with limited human and financial resources.

Given these opportunities and constraints, what are the real trends in conference design we are seeing emerge?

As the Events Community Co-Chair at the ESAE, I have a unique vantage point to stay attuned to and gauge the pulse of the industry. Additionally, in my capacity as the Open Academy & Events Director at

EURORDIS-Rare Diseases Europe – an international NGO committed to improving the lives of all people living with rare diseases – I am deeply committed to implementing impactful conferences and events.

Here are some concrete examples of what EURORDIS-Rare Diseases Europe is currently experimenting with.

**SUSTAINABILITY:** despite seeing a hunger to return to fully in-person events, EURORDIS is increasingly conscious of the carbon footprint our flagship conference generates. To combat this, we have chosen to run our 2024 European Conference on Rare Diseases & Orphan Products in May as a synchronous hybrid event. We are limiting the capacity on-site and offering opportunities for those who cannot travel for health, financial or even convenience reasons to tune in remotely. Moreover, for the first time, we are using a carbon emissions tracking software ‘Trace by Isla’ to track the emissions of our speakers, staff, board and volunteers. All of this being new to us, we are starting slowly and will build up gradually.

**ACCESSIBILITY:** EURORDIS represents a vulnerable population. We are making more concerted efforts to allow everyone to fully participate in our conferences and meetings. This includes neurodiverse populations and those with disabilities that include vision and hearing impairment and reduced mobility. We are working with our members and specialised consultants in the field to put accessible measures in place for our conference. To name but a few, we will propose closed captioning in 12 languages for all sessions, add an accessibility page to our website, provide a quiet space on-site and instruct all speakers to describe themselves visually, while also describing the graphics on their slides.

By putting these – and many more – measures in place we will make the experience better for ALL participants.

**COMMUNITY:** we recognise that our conference is not a standalone initiative but rather a crucial element of a continuous, collaborative drive to bring about positive change in the field of rare diseases. It is for this reason that we are linking our next conference to our European Elections manifesto and giving the opportunity for our conference participants to co-create and co-sign an open letter to the EU Institutions and country leaders where expectations of the community will be clearly spelled out and conveyed to decision-makers in an unequivocal manner, leaving a solid legacy for the future EU leadership and for the conference.

As association professionals, we recognise that balancing opportunities with constraints is paramount to bringing about positive change. Fundamentally, we need to look inward before outward and return to our core mission and raison d'être. It is only by matching our outputs, including events, to the value we are creating for our members and community that will we be able to identify which trends are the most adapted to our needs. Ultimately, associations need to focus on the imprint vs footprint we are making.

In true association spirit, we go to each other for help. Sharing experiences helps us all advance without having to reinvent the wheel. One of the next key opportunities to do this will be at the European Association Summit, scheduled on 22 May in Brussels. We look forward to seeing you there!

For more information about ESAE, with which Boardroom has an exclusive partnership, visit [www.esae.eu](http://www.esae.eu).



## More Perspectives from the Community

### Sina Bunte, Founder of DigitalMind.events

In the evolving landscape of conference design, technology, such as AI, takes centre stage as a transformative force, capturing the attention of association planners.

At the PCMA Convening Leaders Tech Playground, held in January 2024 in San Diego, and which I supported on-site, innovative AI solutions were showcased.

For example, Spark, a generative AI platform, revolutionises backend operational tasks in event planning. Notably, its session summary tool swiftly distils key takeaways, streamlining post-session insights that can be shared with participants immediately.

Wordly, another standout, elevates participant experience through real-time AI translation to speech or text in multiple languages.

Event planners should also remain vigilant about the data they collect, leveraging its potential to personalise participant experiences and identify preferred content, thereby optimising engagement and fostering a more tailored and memorable event atmosphere.

Another technology solution showcased at the Tech Playground was Joi, an event planning and scheduling software which helps planners to move away from spreadsheets and streamline the programme development.

Associations must embrace the potential of new technology such as AI-driven innovations, as they not only enhance efficiency but also redefine the participant journey.

### **Silke Schlinnertz, Healthy Venues Ambassador, Creating Healthier Experiences**

By advocating positive change, the Healthy Venues initiative contributes to overall well-being and encourages a healthier and more conscious approach to events. It has three components – healthy catering, promoting activity and workplace health.

Healthy Venues takes a holistic view of the event experience, from healthy snacks in vending machines to encouraging people to take the stairs instead of lifts.

For instance, rearranging buffet orders from the healthiest to the least healthy can encourage unaware or reluctant guests to make healthier choices, as the first ones seen are the most chosen.

Promoting a less sedentary lifestyle by encouraging quick activities, such as asking the audience to stand when applauding, will keep them energised and active.

### **Colm Clarke, Partner at Exempla / Programme Development for ASIS International European Bureau**

Don't neglect the educational programme when thinking about innovation. We've seen great success at ASIS Europe – an event for corporate security professionals – with scenario-based workshops which emphasise collaborative learning.

Small groups work on challenges such as the first 30 minutes after a ransomware attack or presenting risk intelligence to business leaders. A subject matter expert will facilitate and give guidance on best practices – or – if a real-life case is used, they compare what actually happened to the participants' responses. These are 90-minute sessions but the time flies by and the combination of learning and networking makes a great experience.

### **Victoria Matey, Event Psychology Advisor, Matey Events**

Applying behavioural science and psychology to event planning, aka 'event psychology', is a strategic approach that holds the key to more significant and lasting impacts for attendees, stakeholders, and organisers. As experiences inherently start and resonate in people's minds, they should be designed for how people think.

- Using behavioural archetypes rather than traditional marketing personas, for instance, leads to a deeper understanding of target groups.
- Understanding cognitive overload and applying research on optimal break times for both online and in-person results in a more balanced event programme.
- Integrating insights about sensory engagement – like the influence of colours on time perception, the impact of scents on memory, or factors contributing to sensory overload – can yield innovative solutions for better inclusivity and engagement.
- Recognising human biases such as scarcity or social proof, and learning about decision-making can help create more effective communication strategies with the event audience and extend the impact beyond immediate business objectives, fostering long-term behavioural changes like sustainable habits that persist well after the event ends.

Designing every aspect of an experience through a behavioural science lens is not just preferable but vital to achieve the most profound and sustained impact of our events.



# Five Meeting Design Hacks to Adopt in 2024?

Global Association Hubs International Advisor **Martin Sirk** pleads for some fresh design-thinking to extract additional value from association meetings.

Meeting design is too important to leave in the hands of event teams. Meeting design isn't simply psychologically-aware, objectives-oriented meeting planning. It's really an all-encompassing methodology for transforming an association's meeting into a powerful expression of its Mission and unique culture, into a platform for identifying and driving forward the most important priorities of the organisation and every member of its community. This is why Board, CEO, division heads, partners, members/delegates themselves, all have a role to play in the meeting design process. As do the destinations and venues that play host to those meetings.

Rather than listing some of the more obvious meeting design predictions for 2024 (AI-with-everything, impact-centricity, sustainability metrics, etc.), I'd like to highlight some more esoteric options, a wish-list to stimulate some of the more experimentally-minded and risk-embracing associations to include these concepts in their discussions about the future shape of their major events.

## 1. Active anti-passivity

This concept could also be expressed as “unrealised potential-minimisation” because that is the ultimate goal when using this perspective. It starts from the awareness that any gathering of industry professionals or discipline-experts represents an incredibly valuable aggregation of intellectual capital. But this value remains “potential” until it is unlocked, and all too often a large proportion stays uselessly unutilised inside delegates' heads.

Actions that support the goal of minimising unrealised potential start long before the event kicks off:

- Pre-qualification: Make sure only the right people attend who can contribute meaningfully to the topics and/or objectives. This can be done for either the whole event or for individual sessions.
- Personal objective-setting: Well in advance, prepare delegates to personally contribute by prompting them to define precisely what they aim to achieve from the event, and help them identify relevant activities and people. Once on site, remind them!
- Outsider-insider elimination: Every association congress attracts both “newbies” (who have no clue what's going on or how they're meant to act) and regulars (who believe everyone else automatically knows how things work!), but very few associations do anything to turn their newcomers into evangelists, via deep briefings on culture, behaviour and programme opportunities, mentorships and peer group support, goal-sharing and other such techniques.
- Wisdom of crowds: There are numerous ways to generate knowledge from large groups, using both technology and non-tech solutions. Active anti-passivity requires that these be used throughout the programme, constantly gathering and recycling information and insights, rather than as an ad-hoc experiment in one or two sessions. Every passive audience is a roomful of missed opportunities!
- Interactivity percentages: Set minimum percentages for the amount of time allocated to interactive components within every session, or on every day, or across the entire event. At least 60% is a good starting point!

## 2. Sounds of silence

Association conferences are typically packed full with education sessions, these sessions are crowded with content from start to finish, networking periods are boisterously busy. What's almost always missing are opportunities to think deeply about the validity of what one has heard, to reflect on the implications of new knowledge, to relate different ideas and perspectives to personal circumstances or your own projects.

This is one of the easiest meeting design hacks to implement, with the following:

- Five-minute rule: Require every session to include five minutes' eyes-closed silence for delegates to think about what they've heard.
- Five action-points rule: At each session, ask delegates to write down five actions they will take as a result of attending: changes they need to implement; people they need to brief; ideas they want to explore further; etc.
- Sound of silence room: Easy-to-find space where delegates can go to think about any aspect of the conference, or just to meditate. This concept is already a feature at many association meetings, but is more concerned with mental health and life-work balance issues than with the content and objectives of the event itself.

## 3. Excessive over-moderation

The worst imaginable cost-saving is to cut back on moderators and facilitators. In fact, this is an area where every association could benefit from increased investment, perhaps replacing one over-priced "inspirational" keynote speaker with three specialists who know how to extract new insights and ideas from a group of experts, and who will each be willing to handle three or four sessions!

So you can try:

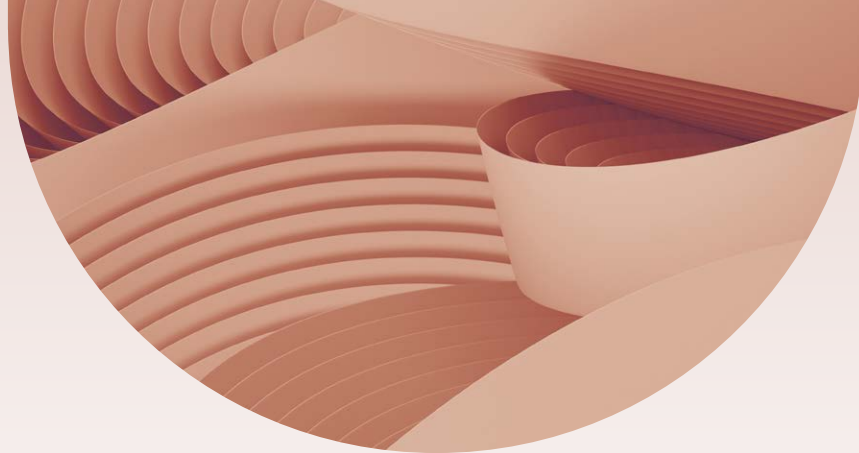
- Moderators as meeting designers: Make your moderators part of the design process from as early as possible, encouraging them to provide format ideas and novel solutions to session objectives, and input on connecting individual sessions with the overall event goals.
- DIY moderation: Some people are "naturals" at conducting an education session, irrespective of their age or professional status. Your association will certainly have a number of candidates, but beware of simply accepting all volunteers, some of whose enthusiasm may exceed their ability! The key step is to supplement the existing abilities of these individuals with training and support, and to consistently use them at your events so they gain experience and confidence.
- Double-up: Why not have two moderators in some sessions, one to manage the stage and one to manage the floor, or one to manage on-site and one to manage contributions from virtual delegates beaming in from around the world?

## 4. Magnificent messiness

Meeting planners crave nothing greater than order: they love checklists, line-by-line budgets, and predictable programmes. But large-scale association meetings are by their nature highly complex and dynamic, filled with unpredictable interactions and delegates with very different motivations. Smart meeting designers recognise this reality and take advantage of the inherent messiness.

Deconstructed networking:

"Networking" is a label that can obfuscate more than it illuminates: break it down into the real activities that are going on, and custom-design timeframes, formats and supporting tech to suit each. Are delegates aiming to do business or showcase their expertise, do they want to discuss in-depth projects or argue over current controversies, are they looking for new enthusiasts with a shared passion or searching for a new job or a candidate for a key position? Some networking activities are one-to-one, some requires small group space; some need



privacy whilst others work best in full view; some might require an hour or more, others need only one-minute interactions; some can be booked up well in advance of the event whilst others are entirely ad-hoc on the day. Avoid “standard” formats that assume everyone’s needs are the same!

- More unplanned time: Quite simply, give your event room to breathe, extend informal periods, allow your delegates adequate time to find one another and explore their common interests. Cutting back on the time allocated to information-sharing (use alternative distribution pathways for any top-down communication) is one easy way to achieve this.
- Experimental insiders: Don’t experiment on your delegates, experiment with them! Delegates will accept almost any kind of off-beat, novel session design or activity during an event if they feel part-owners of the process and outcomes, if they understand the goals, and are allowed to actively contribute.

## 5. Deep-diving with destinations

Whilst some destinations such as Global Association Hubs partners – Brussels, Dubai, Singapore and Washington DC – are committed to developing longer-term creative partnerships, the default thinking for most associations with regard to their conference hosts is primarily transactional. Associations could benefit enormously by turning destinations into meeting design partners from the earliest stages of event preparation.

**Share objectives:** If destination representatives don’t know what an association is aiming to achieve, nor the goals of the different categories of attendee, they can’t suggest potential solutions – unique venues, local experts or institutions or companies, ways to influence the mood of delegates through culture or inspiring surprises. Don’t wait for the destination reps to ask, tell them!

**Invite design input:** Draw from destinations’ experience of hundreds or thousands of past events: what were the most creative activities they’ve ever hosted; which innovations generated the best outcomes; how were venues

used in surprising and unconventional ways? Most design solutions come from existing sources, they aren’t invented from the ground up: take advantage of others’ development spend!

**City-as-venue:** Don’t just look at convention centres and meeting hotels, think about the whole cityscape as a canvas for the activities of your community. Ask local members of your association to recommend their favourite cafes, bars, bookshops and flea markets, museums, off-the-beaten-track local colour and eccentricities, don’t just rely on the local destination marketing organisation!

**Delegates as youth ambassadors:** Your delegates don’t just attend to receive value from your meetings, they want to give back and share their knowledge. Talk with your destination representatives about opportunities to give presentations at local schools or universities, about scientific advances, about societal challenges and possible solutions, about career paths and personal growth! Call for volunteers to speak to these young audiences: you’ll be amazed at the level of interest.

Global Association Hubs, a partnership between Brussels, Dubai, Singapore and Washington DC, is committed to promoting the societal value of international associations, and to stimulating the discussion of important issues through events and articles such as this, which appears as part of a collaborative partnership with Boardroom.

Brussels  
Dubai  
Singapore  
Washington DC

**GLOBAL  
ASSOCIATION  
HUBS**

By Chris Hamade

# Enhance Your Events With Experiential Design

Experiential design blends art and science to shape an individual's experience. Learn how this technique can enhance value for conference attendees and sponsors, boost an association's financial performance at events, and help improve member learning outcomes.

If you want someone to take a particular action, you can ask, incentivize, or possibly coerce them. But what if you could design conditions that naturally led to the desired behavior?

Crafting an experience that leads to a desired emotional or behavioral response extends beyond conventional linguistic or visual methods of communication. It can bridge the gap between your organization's core objectives and limitations, such as budget constraints, staffing issues, or resource scarcity.

Well-crafted experiences can influence culture, brand storytelling, and enhance the success of social impact initiatives. Let's delve into how experiential design can be effective and how associations can implement these ideas in their practices.

## Attendee & Sponsor Value

Several years ago, we organized a conference with three principal sponsors: a bank, a law firm, and an accounting firm. Instead of offering predefined sponsorship packages, we spoke with each sponsor about what they envisioned for a successful sponsorship post-event.

All three core sponsors agreed that the most crucial element was having abundant opportunities to engage with attendees. With this insight, we considered every facet of the conference experience, from the perspective of the attendees and the sponsors.

For the bank sponsor, we proposed creating a branded coffee bar and cabana experience for attendees. This encompassed an area designed as a central networking hub,

where attendees could enjoy coffee and pastries and relax in cabana-style seating arrangements.

The bank's branding was seamlessly integrated into the design, and they enjoyed exclusive rights to coffee distribution—attendees couldn't get coffee anywhere else in the conference.

Coffee is like gravity; even if you don't like it, chances are the people you want to connect with do. It brings people together in a defined space, providing the bank's account managers with opportunities to engage attendees and attendees with an innovative, relaxing space to network and engage with peers.

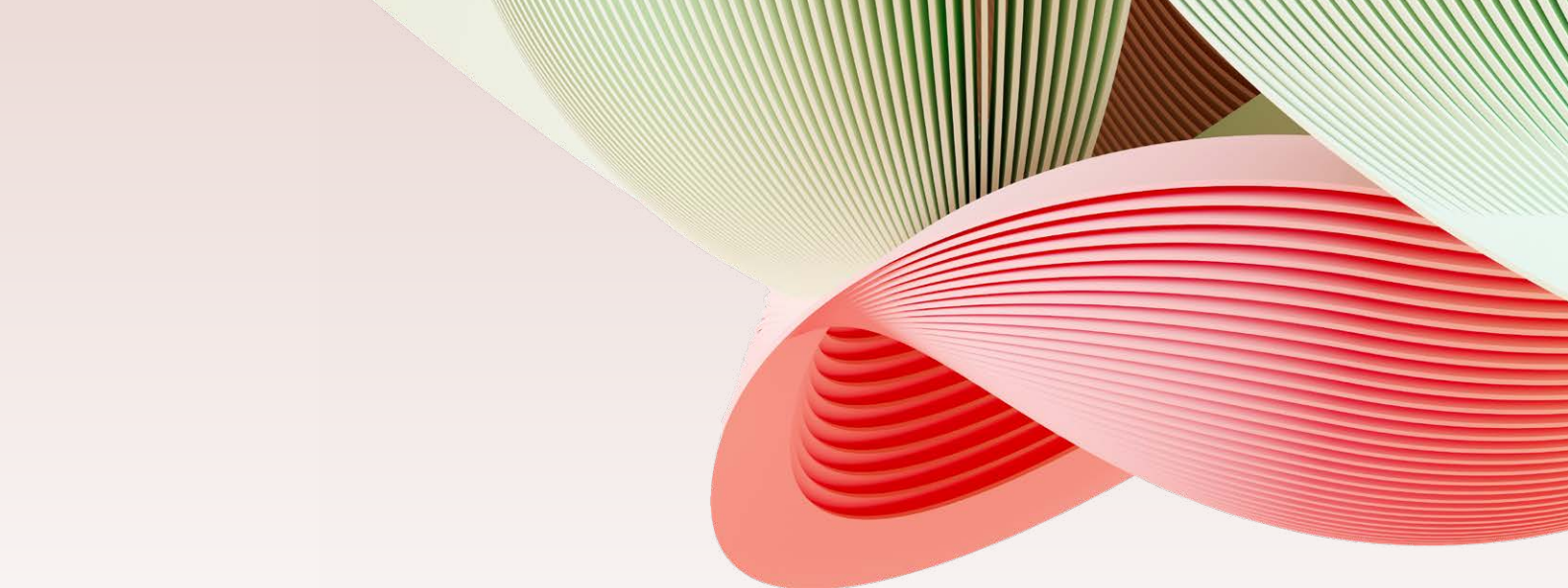
If we'd organized a basic coffee station with a sign that read "Sponsored by ABC Bank," it's doubtful the bank would have derived tangible value beyond brand awareness. By unlocking the inherent value of coffee in this manner, the sponsor gained value through enhanced branding and engagement opportunities.

## Financial Impact on Associations

Because we offered this sponsor exclusivity over coffee (and morning food offerings), the bank was willing to cover the expenses associated with their activation.

These food and beverage expenses were in addition to the sponsorship fee. Coffee was an expense we, as organizers, would have incurred regardless.

Following a similar strategy, we linked lunch to the accounting firm's sponsorship and canapes and wine to the law firm's sponsorship, effectively converting all our food and beverage expenses into valued sponsorship activations.



Consequently, all our food and beverage costs were covered by the sponsors, going beyond their sponsorship fees.

Shaping an experience through thoughtful design can help organizations achieve specific behavioral outcomes. The objective is to elevate value by communicating beyond the limitations of pure language, leveraging both emotional and tactile experiences.

### **Improve Member Learning**

Experiential design can be used as an effective teaching method. If your association is involved in education and knowledge sharing, consider moving beyond traditional textbooks and webinars by designing an immersive learning experience.

At the Real Estate Institute of British Columbia, we noticed publications comparing BC's real estate market to New Zealand's. We share market similarities, so observing their outcomes and methods could lend wisdom to our challenges, including Indigenous relations, climate-friendly approaches, and land-use policy.

We launched a webinar to gauge member interest. There were compelling conversations to unpack, but we didn't want to give members a 500-page white paper. To deliver a higher level of education, we needed a more immersive experience.

We contacted a New Zealand real estate institute and proposed an "exchange program." Our idea was to travel to New Zealand with members and enjoy a few days of shared knowledge and ideas.

The program will include tours of both industrial and downtown sectors. We'd also discuss politics, zoning bylaws, the expectations of the public and business communities, and observe how life works. Over lunch, members can ask questions to gain new insights, and vice versa. This trip is in the planning stages; we're aiming for fall 2024.

Reading about market similarities is one thing. Understanding the idiosyncrasies of culture and context when attempting to geo-clone a policy or action is another. Being immersed in an experience can help members distinguish between what sounds like a good idea and what practically makes sense.

Teaching through experience is more than an information exchange. The experience floods into the subconscious, provides richness that language can restrict, and brings our emotional and empathetic ears to a depth beyond what words alone could fathom.

Experiential design can unlock benefits, efficiencies, and powerful influence.

Chris Hamade is a serial entrepreneur and principal of Alchemy Agency and executive director of the Real Estate Institute of British Columbia.

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# Immersive Storytelling, Sustainability & Beyond

**Antonella Nalli**, Corporate Communications & Sustainability Manager at Triumph Group International, a new IAPCO member, anticipates a pivotal shift in the events landscape in 2024, emphasizing human-centric aspects such as anticipation, customisation, and environmental awareness.

The realm of events is reverting its focus to humanity. Although current technology presents ample opportunities for event revitalisation and innovation, we believe that the most noteworthy aspects in 2024 will be the anticipation of the event, the period leading up to it, and the corresponding excitement during that timeframe.

The commitment to customisation, immersion, and environmental awareness is poised to sway those who

are undecided, captivate the interest of the hesitant, and affirm the choices of the convinced. The objective is to craft an authentic and immersive experience that will allure participants, encouraging them to return for future events.

In July 2023, Triumph Group International organized the 25<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Dermatology, marking it as the largest medical congress ever hosted in Singapore. Through this endeavor, we have acquired valuable

insights and validated certain trends that are poised to influence the trajectory of the business events sector in the months and years to come.

Considering events as a tool for cultural integration leads to envisioning events as brands, each with its own identity tailored to the hosting environment, aligning with trends in customisation and inclusion. This approach prioritises crafting a unique and unforgettable experience that is deeply rooted in local culture.

In this regard – and based on our experience – conference design is nowadays based on four key trends:

**1. “4D” communication** – a term we use for storytelling that includes multisensory experiences involving flavours, aromas, colours, and sounds. It extends to the concept of cultural integration into planning truly immersive and experiential events, becoming an alternative tool for cultural education, as well as for comprehensive engagement, reinforcing its inclusive dimension.

**2. Sustainability**, increasingly intertwined with event production, with a particular focus on environmental and social aspects, is confirmed as an upcoming trend. This shows that the emphasis continues to be placed on organizing events, that not only achieve economic success but also generate mutual benefits for the organization as well as the host destination, encompassing positive outcomes for communities and the environment.

Sustainability serves as a bridge to technological innovation, leading directly to the next trend.

**3. Sustainability-applied technological solutions.** It involves utilising digital platforms to categorize and manage all event activities. This approach enables real-time comprehension of the impact generated by an event, leading to more organized reporting. These tools contribute to constructing a more cohesive, respectful, and beneficial experience within the economic, social, and environmental context.

**4. Valuable partnerships.** This will become more prominent, irrespective of the event's size, actively contributing to the direct accomplishment of established objectives. Non-profit associations, charity organisations, or even corporations from the most varied sectors can become strategic partners in realizing shared values through the experience offered to participants, promoting a new collaborative paradigm.

The previous points pave the way for the last trend:

**5. Long-term Impact**, or the commitment to offset the environmental impact of the event and positively contribute to the growth or improvement of the host location. This is a genuine commitment from most PCOs at the moment to ensure that events have a positive and lasting impact over time. We expect this trend to continue way beyond 2024.

In our opinion, this clearly shows the shift of the meeting sector towards a focus on not only events but also the ongoing life and activities surrounding them.

IAPCO is a not-for-profit membership association, registered in Switzerland. IAPCO members are Professional Congress organisers (companies, not individuals) that have qualified for membership under the detailed application process by demonstrating that they consistently deliver PCO services to their clients and partners at high quality standards. They retain their membership through annual quality checks and reviews by the IAPCO Quality Committee.



# Bridging Chill Zones & Networking

**Adam Paulitsch**, Principal Architect at Populous, and **Sven Bossu**, CEO of AIPC, examine the challenges for event organisers and stress the importance of event design balancing community-building with personalised, self-serving options for evolving attendee expectations.

Event organisers face several challenges and the (very) last minute decision making by delegates is a prominent one. These delays not only impact the organiser but also the full underlying value chain – just imagine the headache with the catering department when volumes double or triple a couple of days before an event kicks off. Can event design help to address that indecisiveness by creating a sense of FOMO?

## **Tangible benefits**

The event industry is doing great, demonstrating that people want to travel, network and learn. However, the expectations are very different than they were three to four years ago. Nobody wants to travel to hear a professor on stage give a lecture for 60 minutes – we'll do that happily via Zoom, sitting on a comfortable couch at home. With the increasing integration of virtual meetings and learning into our everyday lives, the event industry must ensure there are tangible benefits to delegates attending in-person events.

Looking at the list of trends that organisers need to consider, it's interesting to see that delegates are looking for two seemingly incompatible elements. One the one hand, there are the elements linked to a community gathering: togetherness, diversity, inclusiveness and networking. At the same time, delegates are also looking for (hyper)personalised pathways, chill zones, wellbeing and the possibility to "self-serve." So, we want to come together AND we want to have options to be by ourselves when we want. This offers event designers a great opportunity to rethink the entire

lifecycle a delegate is going through and make sure the entire experience – from pre- to post-event – is seamless and exciting.

Music festivals, such as Tomorrowland, are extremely good at this. By offering a combination of togetherness and options to individualize the journey, these festivals are almost sold out on day one of ticket availability. Simultaneously, the differentiated pricing models and mining of data collected throughout the delegate event lifecycle allows them to continuously finetune their offerings and increase overall yield.

## **Can't copy/paste**

While conferences cannot "copy and paste" all the practices of music festivals, there are many elements that can be used. First, when thinking about event design, think beyond "on site." Make sure that every touchpoint – digital or physical – is consistent and reflects the values and ambitions of the event. Consistency, both in terms of design and in terms of flow, is of key importance. There are too many conferences that send you from a beautifully designed website to a clunky, difficult to navigate registration portal.

Secondly, use all the assets a venue can offer. Here, it is crucial to create a partnership with the venue staff early in the design process. They know their facility inside out and have seen many events pass through – so leverage their knowledge to create magic. This does not necessarily require massive budgets; rather, it hinges on the knowledge of all



parties involved with the venue to create a truly seamless experience, from back of house operations to security to designers and delegates.

Finally, think about how to create differentiated experiences. When people speak of the festivilisation of meetings or events, they often think there need to be flashy, over-the-top features that are often present at an actual music festival. The sentiment of festivilisation, however, is actually describing the behind-the-scenes work it takes to pull off curated spontaneity. We are able to use our vast research, experience and industry knowledge to design guardrails into an event that allow for specially curated moments – whether a delegate runs into each individual they were wanting to engage with or has a seamless, stress-free experience navigating the event – that feel completely unplanned.

Designing an event has never been more fun. The abundance of tools, examples, data and best practices allow us to address the challenges faced by many organisers. This wealth of knowledge, combined with creative, human-centric problem solving within event design, has the opportunity to drastically increase the value offered to your communities.

AIPC represents a global network of over 190 leading centres in 64 countries with the active involvement of more than 1000 management-level professionals worldwide. [www.aipc.org](http://www.aipc.org)



Associations serve as linchpins, encouraging collaboration, driving innovation, & honing the positive outlook that the industry aspires both to maintain & grow.



DESTINATIONS



By Vicky Koffa

# Brisbane's Evolution as a Business Events Hub: The BCEC Advantage

For nearly three decades, Brisbane has made a stand as a dynamic and sought-after destination for international conferences, positioning itself as a major hub for business events in the Asia Pacific region. The Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre (BCEC) hosts over 60% of conferences held in the city.



BCEC on Grey Street

As the third-largest city in Australia and the capital of Queensland, Brisbane, the country's fastest growing capital city, offers a unique blend of intellectual capital, cutting-edge research facilities, and an unparalleled commitment to sustainability, making it an ideal choice for hosting association conferences.

## Brisbane's Economic Landscape

Queensland, the second-largest state in Australia, boasts an economy constantly on the rise. The proximity to key Asian export markets has created the ideal backdrop for successful business opportunities and economic growth. The Brisbane Economic Development Agency (BEDA) has been set up to ensure investors find all the support necessary to keep the climb of economic growth.

BCEC is committed to boost this growth through targeted business events. *"As part of our roadmap to 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games we have embarked on a future growth strategy which recognizes the importance of opportunity and legacy, created by Brisbane's Olympic city status in attracting key international events, adding to Brisbane's reputation as a global leader in scientific research, technology development and innovation,"* says Kym Guesdon, General Manager at BCEC.

Diverse sectors such as agriculture, mineral resources, and tourism popular across the entire country are also the backbone of Brisbane's development. Queensland's Agriculture Strategy, for example, looks ahead and aims to double production in the region by 2040 by increasing market access and resource availability.

The tourism industry is also a significant contributor to Brisbane's economy, as the city enjoys a sub-tropical climate that encourages an active lifestyle, with a network of bridges and riverside dining precincts adding to the city's charm.



The government continuously invests in new infrastructure in order to offer the best visitor experience.

Queen's Wharf integrated resort development is due to open later this year with luxury hotels, and major public transport projects are on the way, including Green Bridges, metro and rail connections. In view of the 2032 Olympic Games, both leisure and business tourists will enjoy more connectivity as the award-winning Brisbane Airport's twin runway enables the highest aviation capacity in Australia, and Queensland's first dedicated cruise facility.

Brisbane's health sector has emerged as a key contributor to the city's robust growth economy. The city is a hub of medical research and innovation, with over 100 health and biotech facilities, including the Queensland Institute of Medical Research and the Translational Research Institute (TRI). TRI, along with other institutions including the University of Queensland, forms the Boggo Road Innovation Precinct, where scientists work collaboratively to address Australia's significant health and environmental challenges.

In this case too, BEDA provides support by establishing a MedTech Initiative that delivers a Global Accelerator program to fast-track investment in the field. Notably, Brisbane is where the world's first cancer vaccine was developed, highlighting its significance in pioneering medical breakthroughs.

Moreover, Brisbane has gained global recognition as an Advanced Manufacturing Hub, connecting the city to an ecosystem of advanced manufacturing companies. The city has also been acknowledged as one of the world's 50 most innovative cities, showcasing its commitment to technological advancement. The ARM (Advanced Robotics for Manufacturing) Hub, which works with industry and academia to develop commercial advanced manufacturing solutions, is based in the city while the Food Pilot Plant at Brisbane's

Health and Food Sciences Precinct helps researchers and industry experiment and trial new products and processes under industrial conditions.

### **Brisbane's Economic Landscape**

Parallel to the economic advancement, Brisbane's intellectual capital has flourished over the years, with the city now hosting internationally renowned universities and the largest medical research centre in Australia, the Queensland Institute of Medical Research (QIMR) Berghofer, with The University of Queensland, ranked among the top 100 globally. Brisbane was also named one of the top 30 best student cities in the world in the QS World University Rankings 2023, highlighting its attractiveness for higher education.

The QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, established in 1945, has become today Australia's most important medical research institute. With 55 laboratories, its research is focused on cancer, infectious diseases, mental health, and chronic disorders. TRI, as mentioned above, is another unique, Australian-first initiative of 'bench to bedside' medical research, solving health challenges faster.

This depth of intellectual capital and research expertise has been a driving force behind Brisbane's success in attracting international conferences across diverse sectors. Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre has leveraged this by establishing the BCEC Convention Advocates Partnership, creating a community of global research leaders passionate about the city. For over ten years, these ambassadors have been attracting major scientific conferences to Brisbane which generate not just economic growth but also life-changing research developments. This initiative has solidified Brisbane's position as a key Asia Pacific Business Events destination.

*“Strong collaboration is critical, and this is currently occurring with government, universities and industries, all united in a common goal. This combined focus of 2032 and beyond, will be a key accelerator in our future achievements. We have been leveraging the messaging of Brisbane as an Olympic host city with a stronger presence on the international stage and with our conference bids, presentations and conversations and there is sense of momentum and recognition of what we have to offer,”* comments Guesdon.

### **Brisbane's Economic Landscape**

Home to most of these important conferences (and all kinds of business events for that matter) is the Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre (BCEC). The venue has consistently secured a spot at the top of world rankings for convention centres. Named World's Best CC 2016 – 2018 by the international Association of Congress Centres (AIPC), for Excellence in Convention Centre Management, the venue is currently ranked Runner-Up, making it an attractive choice for international associations.

The strategic location of BCEC in the heart of the city, within the vibrant cultural and lifestyle area of South Bank, provides delegates with a unique experience. The proximity to green spaces, swimming lagoons, rainforest pockets, cafes, restaurants, art galleries, museums, and music venues offers delegates a chance to immerse themselves in the dynamic atmosphere of Brisbane. Featuring two major hotels located adjacent to the Centre and 60 more within two kilometers,

event attendees get a seamless conference experience in Brisbane.

With sustainable superior competitive performance at its heart, BCEC is renowned for its operational and service excellence. Its sustainability efforts are demonstrated through its EarthCheck Platinum accreditation, while it boasts partnerships that promote climate risk assessment and the promotion of local seasonal produce. The venue has also invested in energy and water management projects (solar panels, LED lighting, rainwater collection) as well as waste reduction efforts (food waste dehydrator, partnerships with recycling facilities). What's more, it is known for its fresh, local produce expertly curated, serving up sustainability, innovation and culture on a platter.

The venue can host any type of event in its numerous halls and meeting rooms, both indoors and outdoors. With a total capacity of 8,000 delegates, a Great Hall, 44 meeting rooms and a large tiered theatre with capacity of up to 3,500 delegates (to name but a few of the spaces available), the BCEC is the city's largest conference and events space.

To know more about what BCEC can offer you, contact [alisong@bcec.com.au](mailto:alisong@bcec.com.au)



# BRISBANE'S JOURNEY TO 2032: A GLOBAL CASE STUDY IN SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

The significant milestone of winning the bid to host the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games in July 2021 marks a turning point in Brisbane's journey. The International Olympic Committee's (IOC) new selection criteria, emphasizing sustainability (the 2032 Games must be the most sustainable ever held) and requiring 80% of venues to be in place, aligns with Brisbane's commitment to being a global leader in sustainability.

This sustainability remit extends beyond the games themselves, encompassing environmental, social, and industrial aspects. Brisbane is eager to meet this challenge, given its status as a hub for world-leading research and technology development in areas such as bioeconomy, sustainable plant fuels, biomedical manufacturing, critical minerals, energy transition, quantum applications, and artificial intelligence.

Brisbane's universities, with their pioneering research in these fields, position the city as a microcosm of global economic opportunities and challenges in the transition from traditional industries and energy resources. The journey to 2032 is a case study in city and state evolution, with a focus on creating new industry value chains and transitioning entire communities historically reliant on traditional farming and mining sectors for jobs.

*"Having a journey of over eight years, as a city, to that magic deadline of the Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games being held in mid-2032 is really like being a 'case study in action'! We know that industry, the knowledge community and their international peak bodies will be watching Brisbane over the coming years to see how we leverage our deep technology and innovation smarts in sectors that need global solutions,"* said Alison Gardiner, Director of Sales, Strategy & Partnership at BCEC.

The BCEC, in collaboration with government and city partners, is actively shaping Brisbane's future since the upcoming sports event is already creating legacy. The city's selection as the host for the 2032 Olympics has generated a sense of unity and purpose, with all levels of government, universities, and industry working in tandem to maximize the opportunities this global event brings. The heightened awareness of Brisbane on the world stage opens doors for international conferences to contribute to the city's technological, social, and environmental innovations.

## Looking Forward: Accelerating Global Solutions

Brisbane's current era is marked by excitement and anticipation, fueled by the belief that the city has a unique opportunity to contribute to global solutions. Hosting conferences that bring together industries from around the world is a key strategy to accelerate progress in various fields. The city, like a living case study in action, looks forward to sharing its developments, innovations, and progress on this transformative journey.

*"Conferences and business events that showcase and share innovations in those areas are key vehicles to show the world how we are progressing and how that translates to real world outcomes. It is truly a privilege for BCEC to work with all of our partners to attract these events that contribute to global solutions,"* concluded Gardiner.



By Lane Nieset

# Pioneering the Space Sector in Switzerland

The neutral nation of Switzerland is home to hundreds of international organizations drawn to the country's open climate, cosmopolitan atmosphere, and innovative outlook. A country that is already a champion in sustainability is now extending this sector to spearhead another frontier: space exploration.

Thanks to its 10 universities and two institutes of technology, Switzerland is already known as a research leader in several sectors. And while it may not be heavily publicised, the country's technology has played a role in 50 different American, European, Russian, and Chinese missions since the start of space exploration. A founding member of the European Space Agency (ESA), Switzerland has long been considered a competitive partner in the international realm and continues to contribute large-scale technological and industrial innovations in the space sector.

## Advancing aerospace

With a double Nobel prize, telescope designed to study exoplanets, and plans to charter the world's first space "garbage truck" – ClearSpace-1 – a world-first mission to clean up debris, Switzerland is proving that while the country may be small in size, it can still make a pretty big impact in such an important sector – and continue to drive growth and innovation with the help of associations and



conferences. Last summer, the Aerospace Europe Conference 2023, a joint event between the 10<sup>th</sup> European Conference for Aerospace Sciences (EUCASS) and the 9<sup>th</sup> conference of the Council of European Aerospace Societies (CEAS), was held at the Swiss Tech Convention Center in Lausanne, hosted by the EPFL Space Center at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (EPFL).

The Olympic Capital of the world and home to EPFL, which is ranked 16<sup>th</sup> in the QS World University Ranking, the sustainable city's energy policy made it the first to receive the European Energy Award Gold title.

The conference allowed the scientific community to present results and showcase proposals for the future of aeronautics in a neutral and encouraging environment with nearby facilities that could provoke other collaborations and projects.

Throughout the event, delegates had the opportunity to attend visits and tours of the Swiss Plasma Center; Swiss Aeropole – Airport and Business Park, home of aerospace



pioneers and innovators like SolarStratos and Destinus; and CSEM, where attendees could discover the latest developments in the fields of wireless sensor networks for aerospace applications and mechanisms for space like EU-funded project PULSAR (Prototype of an Ultra Large Structure Assembly Robot), designed to develop the technological bricks to assemble large structures in space.

### Path to progress

For more than half a century, Switzerland has provided game-changing research for aerospace exploration through technological and industrial innovations. From the moment when Buzz Aldrin became the second man to leave the Lunar Module in 1969 and stick a solar wind sail created by the University of Bern to the lunar surface, Switzerland has had plenty of milestones in the realm of space exploration.

Last year, the country adopted the Space Policy 2023, a strategy based on “*access and resiliency*’ (using Swiss membership in international bodies to push national interests and promote sustainability), ‘*competitiveness and relevance*’ (boosting the already strong standing of the Swiss space research and innovation sector), and ‘*partnership and reliability*’ (strengthening a rules-based multilateral governance of space),” according to Swiss Info.

Participating in the European Organisation for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites (EUMETSAT) and the European Space Agency (ESA), the government aims to have a role and say in the “*rapid developments in and increasing importance of outer space*.” Over the next three years, Switzerland plans to contribute \$667 million to the ESA’s budget, and the country’s very own Marco Sieber will be trained at the ESA’s European Astronaut Centre in Cologne.

Dr. Thomas Zurbuchen, former Associate Administrator for the Science Mission Directorate at NASA, also recently took over as director of ETH Zurich Space, a role that will help expand and strengthen Switzerland’s cooperation with the space industry. “*The space sector is dynamic and experiencing*

*rapid global growth. We want to ensure that Switzerland and Europe seize new opportunities, remain competitive, and increase their international visibility,”* explained Zurbuchen, a world leader in space science. “*Personally, I think ETH Zurich is the best place to advance these visions. I want to launch one of the world’s best interdisciplinary master’s degree programs in space science and technology to train the next generation of space leaders.*”

### Future missions

At the University of Zurich, the Innovation Cluster Space and Aviation (UZH Space Hub) brings together research in areas such as Earth Observation, Biotechnology and Medicine, Astrophysics and Supercomputing, Autonomous Flying and Navigation of UAVs, and Green Aviation, assisting in the development of applications for business and industry. Part of the Switzerland Innovation Park Zurich, the Swiss Aerospace Cluster (SAC) and the Universities Space Research Association (USRA), the UZH Space Hub has been rated one of the 28 globally significant hubs by the “Space Tech Industry Report.”

Starting this year, the UZH Space Hub will have a permanent home at Innovation Park Zurich in Hangar 4 to continue offering research flight missions and projects. Proving that institutions like UZH can act as incubators, Switzerland is looking to educators, students, researchers, and award-winning organisations as influential collaborators as it continues pioneering ahead with record-breaking achievements in the space sector — opening up room for international associations to join in and work together on industry world firsts.

More info on Switzerland as a convention destination:  
[myriam.winnepenninckx@switzerland.com](mailto:myriam.winnepenninckx@switzerland.com) / [www.MySwitzerland.com/meetings](http://www.MySwitzerland.com/meetings)

By Rochelle Long, with Remi Deve

# Seeds of Success in Christchurch

Hosting the 28<sup>th</sup> Asian Seed Congress at Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre from November 20 to 24, 2023, Christchurch, New Zealand emerged as the primary seed trading hub for the Asia Pacific region. Drawing 1,100 participants from over 45 countries, the event served as a platform for delegates to convene, exchange seeds, and engage in discussions regarding the prospective growth of the seed industry.

It was the first time New Zealand had held the Asia and Pacific Seed Association's (APSA) premier meeting, co-hosting with the New Zealand Grain and Seed Trade Association (NZGSTA) and with the support of New Zealand's Ministry of Primary Industries, ChristchurchNZ and Tourism New Zealand Business Events.

APSA President Dr Manish Patel said: *"Hosting this event in New Zealand was long overdue. New Zealand is a regional and global leader in the production and export of various vegetable and horticultural crop seeds. It is a model country in terms of its balance of science-based and business-friendly policy – and was also a popular choice*

*for the event, exceeding attendance expectations."*

## Delivering impact

The event opened with delegates receiving a traditional Māori Mihi Whakatau (welcome) from local iwi from Te Taumata o Ngāi Tūāhuriri and a rousing kapa haka (song and dance) performance, giving visitors an experience of New Zealand's unique Māori culture.

Then it was four days of business, networking, and knowledge sharing across a series of workshops, panel discussions, and technical sessions on issues from biodiversity and intellectual property rights to seed technology, trade, and quarantine.

A buzzing exhibition area hosted 37 seed-related businesses from around the world.

The 176 reserved trading tables at the congress sold out very quickly. Unreserved tables available on a first-come basis each day were also snapped up. In all, organisers believe close to 10,000 meetings were held during the event generating an estimated US\$150m to \$200m of new business directly.

Dr Patel added: *"Apart from trade deals, important collaborations were formed, including the signing of Memorandum of Understandings related to agricultural R&D and innovation, as well as the forming of public and private partnerships to develop sustainable technologies with a focus on seed quality*





ASC Haka



ASC Meetings

*aspects. These will contribute not only to the bottom line and thus sustainability of seed companies domestically and regionally, but to the food security and thus prosperity of all people and countries globally.”*

Hosting the event also delivered an estimated \$2.5m to Christchurch’s visitor economy, with many international delegates also taking the opportunity to explore other parts of New Zealand.

### Experiential learning

Four sold-out post-congress tours around the Canterbury region brought an experiential element to delegates’ learning and showcased the region’s specialism in the sector. This included visits to Plant & Food’s research centre, a visit to New Zealand’s 2022 Arable Farmer of the Year’s farm, and a new seed coating technology plant.

Those wanting to see New Zealand’s scenery enjoyed visiting a local dairy farm, sampling world-class wine in the Waipara Valley wine region; and a Canterbury High Country Station tour, complete with panoramic views of the Mount Hutt range.

New Zealand’s appeal as a destination also attracted a number

of delegates’ partners and families, with an accompanying person tour incorporating Christchurch’s must-do activities, including riding the city tram, punting along the Avon River, taking in the view from the Gondola, and boutique shopping at the Tannery.

Delegates also had the opportunity to take part in a 3km charity fun run at Christchurch’s Latimer Square, enabling them to get a feel for the city and to give back to the local community. Around 50 delegates took part, with a total donation of NZD\$4,050 given to Ronald McDonald House Canterbury Charities, which support New Zealand families when their children are in hospital.

The Asian Seed Congress also hosted its first ever Ladies Luncheon, an event aimed at cultivating equity and diversity in the seed industry. Attracting 120 women leaders in the sector, it was a huge success and will be an element APSA looks to continue in future.

Charlotte Connoley, the inaugural female President of NZGSTA, expressed that the Asian Seed Congress served as a remarkable exhibition, effectively spotlighting

both Christchurch and the seed industry in New Zealand.

*“Canterbury is the hub of the seed industry in New Zealand and was the perfect location for the Asian Seed Congress. The opportunity for delegates to meet in person to do business and to experience the New Zealand seed industry first-hand will have a positive and lasting impact on the New Zealand seed industry for years to come,” she said. “We are confident that business has been written that otherwise wouldn’t have had the location been elsewhere. By hosting such an event, New Zealand becomes a viable option for future seed industry events on a global scale creating opportunities for further tourism and trade.”*

Watch the video



For more information on hosting a conference in New Zealand visit [businessevents.newzealand.com](https://businessevents.newzealand.com)



By Remi Deve

# Barcelona: Unveiling the Impact of the Parkinson's Ready Program

In July 2023, Barcelona played host to the 6<sup>th</sup> World Parkinson's Congress (WPC), a significant event organized by the World Parkinson Coalition in collaboration with Associació Catalana per al Parkinson (ACAP). Sponsored by AbbVie and supported by Barcelona Convention Bureau (BCB), the congress witnessed the implementation of the "Make the City Parkinson's Ready" (Parkinson's Ready) program.

Founded in 2004, the World Parkinson Coalition seeks to share knowledge and stimulate research to enhance the diagnosis and treatment of Parkinson's disease. The 6<sup>th</sup> World Parkinson Congress in 2023 gathered over 2,600 delegates from 73 countries, reinforcing the global commitment to address the challenges faced by individuals with Parkinson's.

Introduced several years ago, but implemented on this scale for the first time in Barcelona, the Parkinson's Ready program aimed

to train public-facing and customer service groups to better understand Parkinson's disease and improve support for attendees of the WPC. The underlying commitment of the World Parkinson Coalition was to leave a lasting impact on Barcelona, ensuring that knowledge about Parkinson's disease persisted in the city post-congress, benefiting the over 29,000 people living with Parkinson's disease in Catalonia.

Barcelona, known for its commitment to sustainability and social impact, saw the

partnership with the World Parkinson Coalition as a natural fit. The Parkinson's Ready Program supplemented existing accessibility initiatives in the city, aiming to train customer-facing staff to recognize Parkinson's symptoms and adjust their interactions accordingly. The program aligned with Barcelona's vision and strategy of creating an open and accessible city for residents and visitors.

The impact of this legacy project became a focal point for assessment, with Barcelona Convention



Bureau partnering with #Meet4Impact, a non-profit organization specializing in evaluating societal impacts.

Embedded in a Theory of Change, the programme sought to achieve several goals, including enhancing the experience of Parkinson's patients at the WPC conference, raising public awareness, leaving a lasting legacy in Barcelona, and fostering collaboration between the local Parkinson's community and service industries, with a focus on six key areas.

**1. People with Parkinson's Increase in Confidence, Improving Their Ability to Travel:** The mid-term outcome aimed at enhancing the experience of those with Parkinson's (PWP) during WPC 2023. On-site feedback indicated a noticeable reduction in complaints compared to previous conferences. Attendees reported positive perceptions of ease of navigation in the city, satisfaction with travel experiences, and comfort in interactions with staff.

**2. Awareness of the Parkinson's Ready Program:** Communication efforts, including newsletters, social media, and press releases, aimed to inform delegates about the program. While some delegates were unaware, others found reassurance in knowing about the program, reducing anxiety about their experiences in the city.

**3. Inclusivity and Understanding from the General Population:** Media coverage played a crucial role, with over 30 outlets featuring the Parkinson's Ready program. The aim was to increase awareness

and understanding of Parkinson's, ultimately reducing stigma. Viewership estimates totaled over 97 million, showcasing the potential impact on public perception.

**4. Hospitality and Public Services Become More Inclusive:** Training sessions for public-facing roles, including hotel staff, transport professionals, and police, were conducted. Surveys immediately after training and three months later indicated a positive shift in understanding Parkinson's symptoms and how to respond. The program's broader impact extended to conversations among trainees and their commitment to sharing knowledge within Barcelona.

**5. Increased Demand from Congress Organizers for Legacy Projects in Barcelona:** The Parkinson's Ready program became a case study, presented at 11 conferences globally, garnering insights from over 1,000 event industry professionals. The program's success positioned Barcelona as a destination committed to social impact, potentially attracting future events with similar impact-oriented goals.

**6. Enhanced Support and Funding Allocation from Public Administration:** Collaboration with local and national government aimed to draw additional support for PWP. The initiative showcased practical adjustments that were feasible and important for managing Parkinson's in a comprehensive manner. Sponsorship from AbbVie and strengthened relationships with

local stakeholders demonstrated the potential for continued support.

Beyond the numerical assessments, the initiative sought to improve the perception of Barcelona as an inclusive city. Survey responses indicated positive strides, with 68% of delegates intending to return, signifying a favorable outlook for the city's future growth and its reputation as a welcoming destination.

Beatriz Ibáñez, Senior Social Impact Consultant at #Meet4Impact, points out: *"The study on the World Parkinson Congress and its findings underline the transformative potential of legacy projects in the events sector. Beyond immediate economic impacts, it highlights the need for deliberate legacy planning, aligning the promoter's mission with destination priorities and addressing gaps. Events are elevated when they are measured and communicated, not only as short-term economic drivers but also as long-term value creators to communities and destinations."*

In the end, the Parkinson's Ready program not only succeeded in preparing Barcelona for the World Parkinson Congress but also laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and understanding society. As the echoes of this initiative resonate globally, it serves as a testament to Barcelona's commitment to social impact and legacy in the realm of accessibility and inclusivity – and the longer impacts of it are of course yet to be measured.

Contact  
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# Did you know Boardroom is

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By Anna Stewart

# Watermicro Symposium Highlights Darwin's Assets

The 21<sup>st</sup> Symposium on Health-Related Water Microbiology (WaterMicro23) staged by the International Water Association (IWA) at the Darwin Convention Centre in June 2023 was the first time this conference had been held in Australia.



© Shaana McNaught & Darwin Waterfront Corporation

IWA members are located world-wide and the biennial symposium attracted 250 leading scientists, researchers, water suppliers, public authority regulators, business representatives and students to exchange the latest scientific findings, experience and know-how. Themed “Water Safety for All – reflections and emerging concerns”, with a focus on climate change, the event was hosted by Water Research Australia.

## Northern Territory expertise, accessibility & culture

A joint bid by Darwin Convention Centre and Northern Territory Business Events won the opportunity for the NT to be the host destination.

Darwin's close proximity and direct aviation links to Asia meant delegates, especially those from the Asia Pacific, would have access to the latest research, knowledge and practices in health-related water microbiology. It was also an opportunity for Australia and the NT to showcase expertise in this sector.

The Darwin Convention Centre and the city's location on one of the largest harbours in Australia provided the

perfect backdrop, highlighting the significance of water microbiology in a region greatly shaped by its environment. The NT's relevance was also reflected in Symposium sub-themes such as “Indigenous Knowledge and Engagement”, with the NT home to a significant Aboriginal population and able to deliver meaningful cultural insights.

## Award-winning convention centre

The extensive facilities of the Darwin Convention Centre ensured indoor and outdoor spaces would accommodate the diverse program, which included concurrent workshops, an exhibition and plenary sessions. The Centre's alfresco Frangipani Plaza was the venue for the Opening Ceremony's cultural Welcome to Country and traditional Smoking Ceremony presented by the Larrakia People, Aboriginal custodians of the Darwin region.

WaterMicro23 organisers advised the Darwin Convention Centre was a world-class facility, offering the perfect location for an international symposium on health-related water microbiology.

The Centre's waterfront position with its views of Darwin Harbour was deemed to be one of its greatest assets and just a short walk from restaurants, hotels and the city centre.

## Delegates explore Darwin

A visit to Darwin's Mindil Beach Sunset Market, renowned for stunning sunsets as well as over 200 stalls, was a feature of the social program, with delegates hosted in an exclusive VIP area. Other activities included a networking and team building event staged at Browns Mart, home of NT performing arts, a cruise on Darwin Harbour and an evening at the waterfront Darwin Trailer Boat Club.

*"WaterMicro23 was a significant opportunity to showcase our country's expertise and connect with an international community of scientists, researchers, and practitioners and to share the latest research and insights on a wide range of topics, from water safety planning to the impacts of climate change on water quality. Darwin served as an ideal location for this conference, given its rich history of water management, vibrant culture, and stunning landscapes",* concluded Karen Rouse CEO, Water Research Australia.

For further information on business events in the NT, visit [www.ntbusinesssevents.com.au](http://www.ntbusinesssevents.com.au)

By Vicky Koffa

# Dubai's Economic Surge: The D33 Agenda

In the heart of the Middle East, Dubai has set a new course for the next decade with the launch of the Dubai Economic Agenda D33, driven by the city's visionary leadership. This ambitious agenda aims to double the size of Dubai's economy and secure its status among the top three global cities, reflecting the city's unwavering ambition to lead and innovate, and creating an even stronger platform for associations and meeting planners.

With six clear objectives, which include increase of foreign trade and direct investment as well as growth of digital transformation projects and government expenditure, the agenda aims at establishing Dubai's global presence across all economic sectors.

## Expanding Horizons & Innovation

At the heart of D33 is a commitment to significantly expand Dubai's foreign trade and enhance its global connectivity. His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum,

Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, emphasized the transformative nature of D33, stating: *"The Dubai Economic Agenda D33 includes 100 transformative projects, with economic targets of AED32 trillion dirhams over the next 10 years, doubling our foreign trade to reach AED25.6 trillion and adding 400 cities as key trading partners over the next decade"*. This expansion is not just a matter of numbers; it represents Dubai's broader strategy to become a pivotal hub in the global economy, bridging markets from Africa to Latin America and Southeast Asia.

The emphasis on green and sustainable manufacturing marks a pivotal shift in Dubai's economic strategy, reflecting a global movement towards environmental stewardship and sustainability. By doing so, Dubai is positioning itself at the forefront of the green economy.

Innovation and entrepreneurship are crucial to D33's vision, with the agenda setting ambitious goals to scale up 30 companies into global unicorns in new economic sectors. This initiative is a testament to Dubai's commitment to fostering an environment where





innovation thrives, and where companies are empowered to reach the global stage. The integration of 65,000 young Emiratis into the job market is a forward-looking approach to ensuring that the benefits of economic growth are widely shared. By focusing on the youth, Dubai is investing in its future, equipping a new generation with the skills and opportunities to lead and innovate in a rapidly changing world.

The launch of the Dubai Traders project is another strategic move to empower a new generation of traders in key sectors, highlighting Dubai's role as a vibrant trading hub. Furthermore, the introduction of Dubai's unified licence offers a unique commercial identity for all companies in Dubai, simplifying the business environment and attracting more investment. This move is part of a broader effort to create a seamless and investor-friendly ecosystem, enabling businesses to thrive and grow.

"Sandbox Dubai" represents a bold initiative to foster innovation by allowing the testing and commercialization of new technologies. This project is set to make Dubai a major innovation hub, providing a supportive environment for entrepreneurs and innovators to test and launch new ideas. Meanwhile, the ambition to attract the world's best universities to Dubai is a strategic investment in human capital, aiming to make Dubai a global hub for higher education and knowledge exchange. This focus on education is critical for building a skilled workforce and fostering a culture of lifelong learning and innovation.

Finally, the development of a scale-up program for SMEs by identifying 400 high-potential companies showcases Dubai's commitment to supporting

entrepreneurship and small business growth. By enhancing the capacity of SMEs and supporting their expansion on the global stage, the initiative contributes to economic diversification and innovation.

### **Economic Resilience & Social Development**

Already a year into the agenda, Dubai is already reaping the benefits. In the first few months of implementing the D33 agenda, the city reported an impressive 3.3% economic growth. From rise in tourism hubs and tech-powered communications networks to accommodation and transportation activities, the plan seems to prove Dubai's adaptability. This early success highlights the effective strategies under D33, showcasing Dubai's economic resilience and proactive approach to expansion.

The Dubai Social Agenda, launched alongside the D33, underscores Dubai's commitment to societal development, with healthcare being a primary focus. It aims to ensure that Dubai's healthcare system is equipped to meet future challenges, emphasizing innovation and sustainability in medical services and public health. This focus on healthcare is pivotal, as it aims to safeguard the well-being of the community, ensuring that Dubai remains a vibrant, healthy, and sustainable city for its residents and visitors alike.

*"Cities aiming to elevate their status on the global stage need to focus on four key areas: embracing a broader definition of economic prosperity that encompasses social welfare, happiness, and wellbeing; improving resilience and recovery capabilities in economic downturns; prioritising sustainability, happiness, and wellbeing of citizens; and*



*tackling demographic and environmental challenges. Dubai's aspirations are boundless when it comes to adopting technological and artificial intelligence advancements, cementing its standing as a global hub for innovation,"* said Mattar Al Tayer, Commissioner-General for Infrastructure, Urban Planning and Well-Being Pillar, Director-General, Chairman of the Board of Executive Directors of the Roads and Transport Authority (RTA).

As Dubai embarks on this journey, the D33 agenda sets a blueprint for the city's future development. It is a reflection of Dubai's resilience, vision, and tireless ambition to not only enhance its economic prosperity but also to contribute to shaping a sustainable and innovative future for the global community.

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in Dubai and visit  
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# THE VOICE OF ICCA

## Global Events

# Transforming the World

As 2024 begins, **Senthil Gopinath**, CEO of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), shares insights into the challenges facing the industry and underscores the pivotal role played by international associations in navigating these complex times. According to him, the transformative potential of global business events can indeed not just weather the storm but lead the way towards growth and resilience.



In 2024, we confront a multitude of uncertainties and complexities, ranging from global conflict, economic slowdown, and the looming prospect of recession to the triple threat of escalating travel and hosting costs, inflation, and interest rates. However, amidst these challenges, an optimistic perspective emerges—could there be a more adept group to confront and overcome these hurdles than the resilient international business events community?

The lifeblood of our industry is the essential role played by international associations. They serve as linchpins, encouraging collaboration, driving innovation, and honing the positive outlook that the industry aspires both to maintain and grow. With a unique global reach built on diversity and cross-border cultural exchange, associations can unify and lead by example. It is our job as events facilitators to help associations make all this happen. We must do this by maximizing the value proposition of what it is we offer, growing both scope and deliverables, going beyond anything one (as a delegate or contributor) may have experienced previously. By ramping up the experiential aspect of our events, we can meet 2024 with resilience and hope... and in doing so, raise our economic prospects.

In times of great uncertainty, the international role of associations becomes more pivotal. Associations provide neutral platforms where industry leaders, policy makers, and stakeholders can come together in ways that often transcend geopolitical tensions. In everything we do in our world, nothing matters more than people being able to speak with one another. Meeting, talking, listening can contribute to a more stable and positive global outlook for a more harmonized world. Everything starts with a small step, a conversation, a possibility, a realization that maybe we are all not so different after all.

Can 2024 be a year of growth despite all the evident challenges? Yes. And global business events can lead the way. International associations operate beyond personal ambition, often setting both the tone – and the agenda – for innovation and more sustainable best practice. By advocating for the interests of members, international associations actively shape the trajectory of our industry, creating a positive narrative even in the face of significant economic challenges.

The business of our business is a fast-paced, exhilarating one. The more doubt there is, the bolder we must be. As I said to my ICCA colleagues at the beginning of January, we did many great things in

2023. Now the pressure – and indeed the privilege – is to do even more for our members in 2024.

We are lucky that the international associations are the catalysts for so much change, so much possibility. From embracing cutting-edge technology and believing in innovation, to seeing every meeting as an opportunity to learn, to grow, to make a real and lasting difference. We can be the ones who create the safe space and the openings for dreams to fly.

Is this just sentiment based in wide-eyed naivety? No. We have been here before and we will doubtless be here again. I hope in many ways I do not have to cite the pandemic as a reference point in the coming twelve months but if I do, I will cite it as the time when everything changed and everything had to be re-imagined. It tested us to think and act differently and our industry responded.

We are the changemakers. We write our own story. We can all be the visionary leaders that sets the world back on track because we are connected, we are curious, and we are compassionate. And from these great and powerful things comes collaboration. Working together will bring us the future we all aspire to.

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Sheraton Frankfurt  
Airport Hotel and  
Conference Center  
**12pm to 5pm**

**Association Social**  
The Marriott  
**5:30pm to 7:30pm**

  
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