BOARDROOM

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Why Do We Still Meet?

2026 VOLUME 1 | **VOLUME 2**



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Is There Still Neutral Ground?

Associations, whether professional societies or trade bodies representing an industry, like to see themselves as neutral ground: a place where researchers, practitioners, companies and policymakers meet around a shared interest, whatever divides their countries. The congress is where that idea becomes physical. A venue, a city, a week.

This year, the room has become harder to find.

After the escalation in the Gulf in February, UITP cancelled its Dubai summit, the Medical Image Computing and Computer Assisted Intervention Society moved from Abu Dhabi to Strasbourg and the International Federation of Exhibition and Event Services took its World Summit from Dubai to Munich.

In the United States, the International Association of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy cancelled its Nashville congress, citing visa uncertainty and policy concerns. In IAPCO's 2025 survey, about 60% of respondents said global conflicts affected their ability to plan international conferences, and a quarter had cancelled, postponed or relocated an event.

Most of these associations say they intend to return. But the episode points to something uncomfortable. Choosing a destination used to come down to access, cost and capacity. Those still matter, but the questions have multiplied. What will the congress leave behind? Does the city's expertise line up with the sectors and industries the association serves? And can everyone who matters to the community enter, and feel safe? Pick a city and you make a statement, whether the board wants to or not.

Some in our industry see European cities as the stable option, though experts caution it is too early to tell. A destination chosen only because others have become impossible has been chosen by default. It will be judged on whether it offers more than safety.

If a congress can move to another city in a matter of weeks, what does the destination really add?

That is where the Feature in this issue begins. Information is a click away, and an algorithm can summarise a congress before the closing keynote. Yet delegates still board planes. Why do we still meet? Our contributors, from convention centres to associations, each have an answer. As the right place in the world s harder to find, the question is no longer academic.



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Meet the moment



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IBTM World's Association Leaders Forum to Tackle Risk & Value

Designed with ESAE, this year's forum is built around two working sessions on risk mitigation and resilience.

Association leaders are invited to roll up their sleeves in Barcelona. The Association Leaders Forum returns to IBTM World, which runs from 17 to 19 November 2026 at Fira Barcelona Gran Via, and this year's edition takes place on the afternoon of Tuesday 17 November.

No Traditional Conference

Developed in collaboration with the European Society of Association Executives (ESAE), a long-standing partner of Boardroom, it carries the theme "Navigating Risks while Amplifying Value: Rethinking Association Strategies."

The programme starts from the questions that keep association leaders awake right now: financial resilience and revenue diversification, member engagement, rising costs and geopolitical uncertainty. And it is not a traditional conference with a row of presentations. Short expert insights and lightning presentations open each topic, then the room gets to work, in facilitated group discussions and workshops, with groups reporting back at the end. Delegates contribute, learn from one another and leave with solutions they can apply in their own organisations.



© Edward Hill Photography

They will be in good hands. The sessions are hosted by Strategic Event Host Magali Minet and Olivier Nussbaum, Managing Director of Brussels Booking Desk and Co-Chair of the Event Management Community within ESAE, who will guide the discussions and keep each one focused on practical outcomes.

What It Will Be About

Risk is on everyone's agenda, so it is only natural that a good part of the afternoon is dedicated to it. *Risk Mitigation in Practice* will look at the risks associations face in their operations, finances and events, from geopolitical uncertainty to rising costs. Participants identify the ones that matter most to their own organisations and compare the mitigation measures that have worked for others.

Strategies to Increase Value and Achieve Resilience then turns from defence to growth. It looks at new business models and sources of revenue, and at ways to raise the value delivered to members, as a way of making the organisation more resilient.

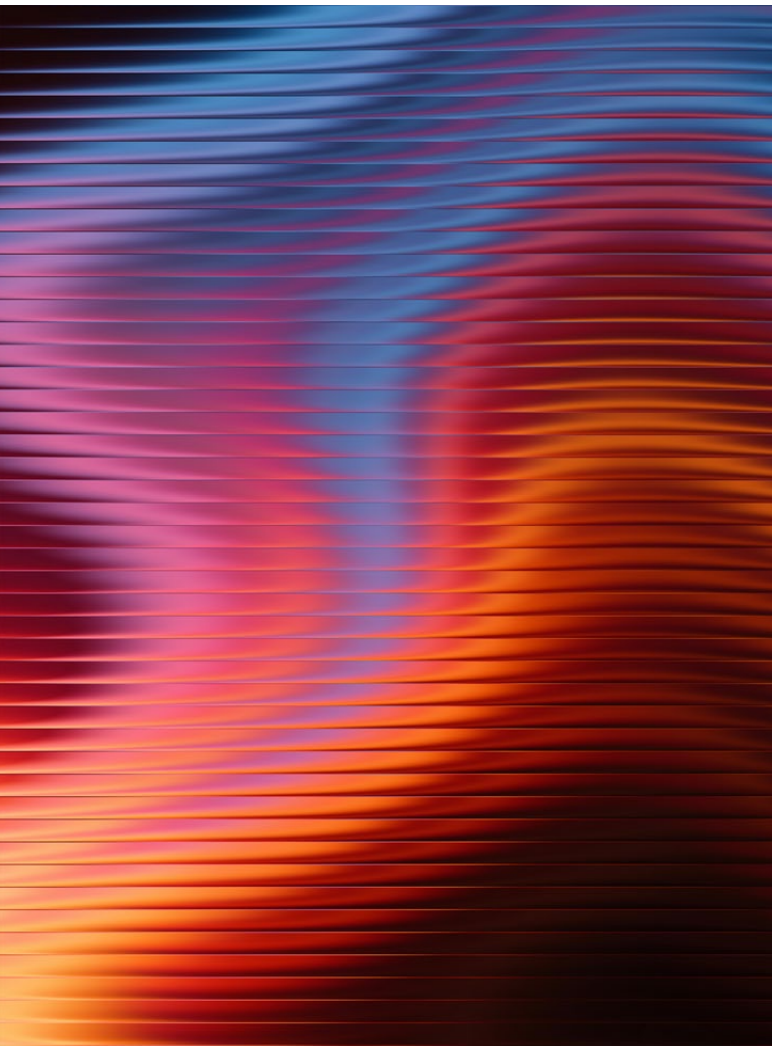
The afternoon closes with networking drinks, a chance to continue the conversation with senior association leaders from around the world.

The Association Leaders Forum is open to Hosted Buyers and Visitor Buyers. Interested? Scan this QR code:

By Dr Ole Petter Anfinsen, Special Contributor to Boardroom Magazine

Trust: The Secret Currency of Good Governance

Most boardroom crises aren't sprung by hidden information, but by a culture where no one felt safe enough to raise it in time.



Most failures in the boardroom aren't caused by a lack of information as much as by a lack of trust. When directors say they want "more transparency," what they often mean is: *"We don't trust what we are being told, so we need more evidence before we decide."* But when transparency becomes a demand rather than part of the intended design, the boardroom can slowly become theatrical, a place where everyone merely showcases their skills, no one admits to reluctance, and reality arrives too slowly to be of any use.

Trust determines what people will say, what they will admit, and what they will bring to the board early on. In short, when an issue can still be sorted rather than explained.

The real lived, day-to-day experience of governance is determined by something less obvious: whether people trust the board enough to speak openly. This means creating an environment where leaders can bring uncertainty to the board, employees can raise concerns or challenges without being seen as a problem, and the ED or CEO can openly share problems without being seen as weak, defensive, unprepared, or unfit for the role.

The Real Cost is That the Truth Arrives Late

Dashboards and control mechanisms can continue without noticing any immediate problems; risk registers become more of an administrative box-ticking exercise than a useful management tool; and closed sessions become more frequent.

Over time, employees may spend more energy worrying about how the board will react rather than dealing with the issue itself, while the ED or CEO learns that it is far safer to bring certainty to the board than complexity.

Boards are hardly ever surprised because nobody knew there was a problem; more often, it is because someone knew but was not comfortable or able to raise it early enough.

Consequently, boards sometimes defend a tougher, more interrogative approach justified by the idea that management must be held accountable.

But holding management accountable and treating every uncertainty as suspect are not the same thing. If every uncertainty is treated as evidence for poor management, people quickly learn to clean the story before bringing it to the board. If early warnings are welcomed and taken seriously, the opposite happens: people bring difficult issues forward sooner. The board should therefore not expect perfection, but create an energising environment where people can be open about problems and uncertainty without every difficult conversation becoming personal.

A simple way to put this into practice is to add a standing "Executive Dilemmas" item to the board agenda. This gives the ED or CEO a regular opportunity to bring the board an unresolved issue, one with no obvious or perfect answer, and work through it together: weighing the risks and trade-offs, testing assumptions, clarifying priorities and risk appetite, and agreeing what a good outcome would look like. Done this way, the board stays involved exactly where it should be: in direction, judgement, risk and priorities, not in the operational decision itself.

The Discipline of Asking Better Questions

Trust is also shaped by the questions the board asks and how they are asked. But if every discussion feels like an interrogation and performance review, leaders will naturally become more guarded and defensive. They become less willing to share early thinking, raise concerns before they have solutions, or simply admit that they do not yet know the answer.

Good boards make room for a different kind of conversation. They ask what might have been missed, where something could go wrong, what assumptions are being made and what could be done now to avoid problems later. They also create enough trust for management to say what they genuinely think, rather than what they believe the board wants to hear.

The conversation becomes less about demonstrating that everything is under control and more about understanding what is actually happening.

The same judgement is needed around closed sessions. But they should have a clear purpose rather than becoming routine. When too much happens behind closed doors, uncertainty and speculation can arise quickly. Transparency does not mean that everyone needs to know everything. It means being clear and consistent about what can be shared, what needs to remain confidential and why.

Associations do not need more reporting; they need governance that allows the truth to surface early. If people believe they will be punished for uncertainty, they will naturally become more careful about what they bring forward. When trust is deliberately built into how the board works, governance becomes far more effective at turning honest conversations into better judgement and decisions.

LESSONS FOR BOARDS

Embed trust into every aspect of the board work
Without trust, boards tend to receive carefully curated updates rather than the full picture.

Don't mistake more information for improved insights
Multiple reports, dashboards and data do not necessarily lead to better understanding or better decisions.

Encourage early warnings
How the board responds when concerns are first raised is critical. If people regret speaking up, they are less likely to do it again.

Ask constructive questions, instead of only challenging
Boards must hold management accountable, but the way questions are asked can either encourage openness or make people defensive.

Be disciplined about closed sessions
Some matters genuinely require confidentiality. But when closed sessions become routine, they can create uncertainty, suspicion and division.

Make space for unresolved issues
Boards should hear about difficult choices while they are still being worked through, not only once a decision has been made.

Stand together once the conversation is over
Healthy disagreement and challenge belong in the boardroom. Once a decision has been reached, confidentiality, respect and collective responsibility help maintain trust and stability across the organisation.

By Chris Vaughan, Ph.D.

Your Annual Meeting Is a Membership Product

When a registration discount is the primary member benefit, your annual meeting is doing event work, not membership work.



Ask most association executives how their annual meeting went, and they will tell you about attendance. Ask how it performed, and they will show you the P&L. Ask whether it was successful, and they will pull up the satisfaction scores.

These are reasonable answers. They are also the wrong ones.

Attendance, revenue, and satisfaction scores are the right metrics for an event business. But your annual meeting is not just an event. It is your largest investment, your most visible touchpoint, and your best opportunity to prove to members that their membership is worth keeping. Measured only as an event, it will perform like one. And quietly fail as something more important.

The Metrics We Use Reveal the Model We're Running

Satisfaction scores tell you whether attendees liked the experience. They don't tell you whether membership got stronger. Revenue tells you whether you covered costs. It doesn't tell you whether you deepened the relationship. Attendance tells you who showed up, but not whether the members most at risk, most disengaged, or earliest in their careers were there and whether it mattered to them if they were.

One CEO put it plainly after reviewing her organization's post-conference report: "We had our best attendance in six years and lost 200 members in the following quarter. Those two facts were never connected in any conversation we had."

They should have been.

Here is the diagnostic question most associations have not asked directly: Does your annual meeting deliver member benefits beyond a discount?

If the honest answer is "not much," then your annual meeting is functioning as a revenue event with a price differential, not a membership product. The discount has become the message, and a discount is one of the weakest signals membership can send.

Benefits accessible to anyone—attendees, non-members, and sponsors alike—do not differentiate belonging. They commodify it. When the primary member value at your biggest event is a reduced rate, you're telling members the most important thing you think about them is that they deserve a deal.

What a Membership Product Actually Does

Consider what most annual meetings actually offer members beyond the discounted registration. The same sessions. The same keynotes. The same expo floor. A non-member who pays full price and a member who pays the reduced rate can have an identical experience from Sunday registration to Wednesday checkout.

A membership product does not require a separate entrance. It requires intentional design. Members arrive to an onboarding experience built for where they are in their career. They find programming shaped by what their peers told the association they needed this year. They leave with relationships that were engineered, not accidental. The non-member in the next seat may have attended the same conference. They did not have the same experience.

One national professional society restructured its annual meeting around three member segments, each with distinct programming built around what that cohort said it needed to navigate in the year ahead. A first-year attendee had a different schedule, different entry points, and different follow-up than a 15-year member. The chief membership officer's reflection was direct: *"We had been designing one meeting and wondering why it didn't work for everyone."*

The Metrics That Actually Matter

When you measure the annual meeting as a membership product, the dashboard looks different.

What is the renewal rate among attendees compared to those who did not come? What percentage of first-time attendees return and renew the following year? Are disengaged members recruited and re-engaged? Do early-career members find something designed for where they actually are? Do the connections formed at the meeting persist into year-round engagement?

None of these are difficult to track. Most associations simply are not tracking them. And what you do not measure, you do not design for.

A large healthcare association tracked event satisfaction for decades. They had never cross-referenced attendee data with renewal data. When they finally did, the pattern was striking: members who attended but did not participate in any structured networking renewed at nearly the same rate as members who had not attended at all. The event was not doing membership work. It was doing event work.

Design Follows Measurement

When the goal shifts from producing a great event to delivering a membership outcome, what you build changes.

Programming gets organized around member segments, not just topic tracks. Networking stops being ambient and starts being engineered, structured around what members said they needed when they registered. Onboarding for first-timers becomes intentional rather than incidental. And the meeting does not end when the last session does. Follow-up converts the energy of the experience into year-round engagement that actually drives retention.

One association restructured its post-meeting communication entirely around what individual members had done during the event: sessions attended, connections made, goals identified. Renewal conversations that used to start from scratch started from somewhere. *"We stopped treating the conference like a closed chapter,"* the executive director said, *"and started treating it like the beginning of the membership year."*

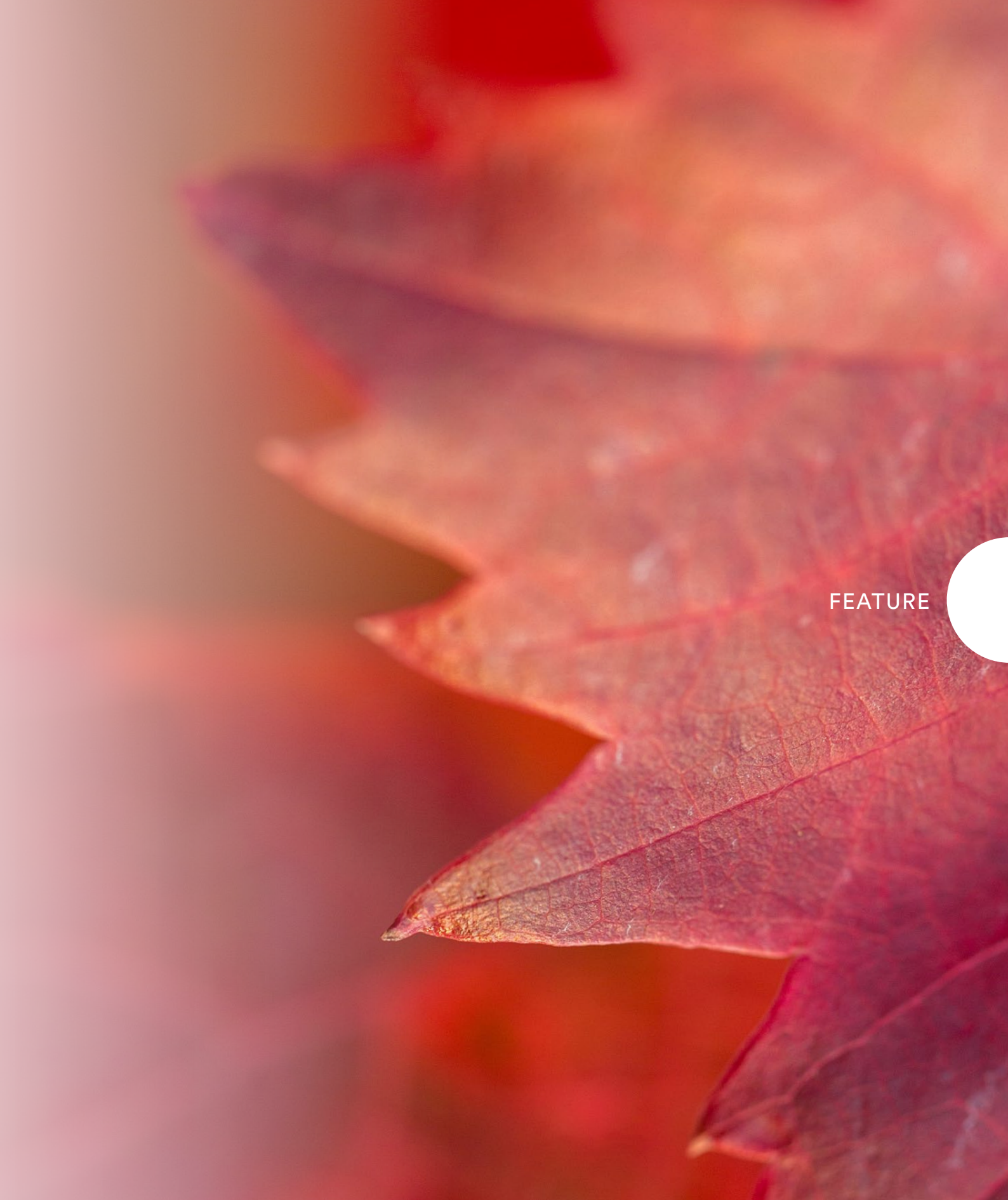
The Meeting Is the Message

Your annual meeting tells members what the association thinks of them: what it believes they need, how well it knows them, and whether it will be present after the closing reception ends. Manage it as an event, and it communicates transactionally. You came, you paid, you scored us, see you next year. Manage it as a membership product, and it communicates something the market cannot commodify: we built this for you, specifically, and we will still be here when you need us.

That is not a programming choice. It is a strategic one. And it starts with deciding who the meeting is actually for.

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Perhaps the first step towards the meeting of the future is therefore surprisingly basic: know our members better.


FEATURE

FEATURE

Why Do We Still Meet?

Information is a click away and an algorithm can summarise a congress before the closing keynote, yet delegates still board planes. So what are they travelling for? Leading voices from the industry, from convention centres to associations, answer from different angles: the place, the member, the data, the room after the room, and what remains once everyone has gone home. Together they suggest the meeting of the future is less about what we hear than about what we do next.

Before We Design the Meeting of the Future, Do We Know Who We Are Designing it For?

Everyone wants to talk about what AI can do for conferences; **Olivier Nussbaum**, Managing Director at Brussels Booking Desk & Events Management Community Co-chair at ESAE, argues the more urgent question is whether associations actually know who they're bringing together in the first place.

Recently, I moderated an ESAE webinar on "AI & Revenue Diversification Opportunities for Conferences & Events". I went into the conversation expecting to talk mainly about AI. I came out of it thinking much more about data.

Associations are sitting on an incredible amount of information: membership databases, event registrations, surveys, newsletters, webinar participation, website interactions and years of conversations with their communities. And yet, a simple question kept coming back to me: how well do we actually know our members?

Having data and understanding people are not the same thing. Sometimes databases are not sufficiently up to date. Sometimes information sits in different systems that don't speak to each other. And sometimes associations have spent years collecting data without being entirely sure what to do with it.

That matters far beyond membership management. It matters when we start designing meetings.

Before AI Changes the Event

There is understandably a lot of excitement about what AI can do during a congress: personalised programs, matchmaking, automated content, session summaries, translation and better hybrid experiences.I find all of that exciting too. But I wonder whether we are starting the conversation too late.

What if one of AI's most useful roles happens before the event even exists? Used intelligently, the data associations already have can help identify what members care about, which subjects generate engagement, how different groups behave and, importantly, who is no longer engaging at all.

That last point is particularly interesting.

We naturally hear from our most engaged members. They attend our events, answer surveys, open our newsletters and participate in committees. But what about everyone else? Why did someone stop attending? Why are younger members underrepresented? Why does one part of the membership rarely engage?

AI can help us identify patterns. But it cannot do everything. Data can tell us where to look. People still have to tell us why.

And there is another uncomfortable reality: AI cannot compensate for poor data. If we don't keep our information relevant, qualified and connected, the technology will simply give us more sophisticated ways of analysing an incomplete picture.

Perhaps the first step towards the meeting of the future is therefore surprisingly basic: know our members better.

Why Do We Still Meet?

Once we understand our members better, another question follows: why should they travel to a congress at all?

Information itself is no longer difficult to access. We can join a webinar, read research online or ask an AI tool to explain a complex subject in seconds. So offering more content cannot be the whole answer. What remains much harder to reproduce is what happens between people: challenging an



idea, comparing experiences, disagreeing during a workshop or meeting someone unexpectedly over coffee.

This is where association congresses have something very special. They can bring practitioners, researchers, businesses, institutions and policymakers together around a shared purpose. Knowledge is not simply delivered from a stage. It is discussed, challenged and sometimes created in the room.

That means we should perhaps design meetings less around *"What do we want delegates to hear?"* and more around *"What do we want them to contribute?"*

Making Knowledge Travel Further

This is where technology becomes particularly valuable.

A three-day congress generates an enormous amount of knowledge through presentations, workshops, questions and conversations. Yet traditionally, much of that collective intelligence has disappeared once the meeting ended.

AI gives us an opportunity to organise and extend it: making discussions searchable, summarising themes, connecting related ideas and helping participants continue exploring subjects afterwards. Hybrid formats can take this further by opening part of the experience to people who cannot physically attend.

And that brings us to inclusivity. If associations exist partly to exchange knowledge, we should constantly ask: whose knowledge are we missing?

Cost, geography, physical accessibility, language, family circumstances and many other factors can prevent people from participating. A truly inclusive congress is therefore not simply one that people can access. It is one where more of the community has a meaningful opportunity to contribute.

Technology can support that. It should never become a substitute for the human encounter itself.

From Destination Supplier to Destination Partner

My own perspective on meetings has also been shaped by having worked in business development for a convention bureau.

At destination level, we naturally talk about connectivity, venues, hotel capacity and economic impact. All of these remain important. But associations increasingly need something more.

A destination is also an ecosystem of universities, researchers, companies, institutions, policymakers and communities.

I saw this clearly in Brussels. For an international association, access to European institutions, policymakers or relevant local expertise could sometimes contribute as much to the objectives of a congress as the infrastructure itself.

The same principle applies elsewhere. Perhaps the conversation should move from *"Can this destination host our congress?"* to *"How can this destination help us achieve our purpose?"*.

This is also where advocacy, sustainability and legacy start to connect. Destination accessibility, transport, accommodation, local suppliers and local partnerships are not separate conversations. They are choices about how a meeting interacts with the place hosting it.

Start With the Outcome

Which brings me back to where all of this started.

Before selecting technology, designing a programme or perhaps even choosing a destination, associations should ask themselves a very simple question: *"What do we want to be different after this meeting?"*

Maybe members understand an issue better. Maybe policymakers have listened. Maybe research reaches people who can use it. Maybe younger professionals feel they finally have a place in the community. Maybe a new partnership begins. Or perhaps someone who couldn't attend physically can still access and contribute to the knowledge created there.

Not every congress needs to change the world. But every congress should know why it exists.

The future of meetings will certainly involve AI, hybrid formats, sustainability, inclusivity and deeper destination partnerships. But none of these should be the starting point. The starting point should be understanding our communities.

Because before we can design better meetings, create meaningful knowledge exchange or talk seriously about legacy, we first need to know who we are bringing together and what they actually need from us.

This article is part of the exclusive partnership between ESAE and Boardroom. For more information about ESAE, visit **www.esae.eu.**

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By Dermot Ryan, ICCA Head of Association Engagement

The Future of Meetings Is About What Happens Next

What do we want to achieve by bringing people together? What will delegates do differently when they go home? Which conversations need to happen in the room? And what will remain after everyone has left? These are the questions associations should be asking themselves when designing a congress. And the good news is some are already doing it.

The Best Part of a Congress Might Not Be on the Agenda at All

Think about the moments you remember from a great event. I'll bet they're not necessarily the keynote or presentation. They are the conversation in the corridor, the unexpected introduction, or the idea that emerged because people happened to sit near each other.

We've typically treated these moments as happy accidents. I think we should be designing events around them.

That doesn't mean turning every part of a meeting into a networking exercise. Matchmaking can bring together people with shared interests, while smaller discussions can create space for peer-to-peer learning. Participants can also be grouped around challenges they're trying to solve, rather than simply by their job titles.

Put a researcher, policymaker, practitioner and young professional at the same table and you can spark a discussion that would never happen within their individual bubbles.

Attendance Doesn't Mean Participation

There is a giant gulf between attending a meeting and participating in one.

Most conferences still follow a tried-and-tested formula: people sit in rows, experts take the stage and the audience listens. There's nothing wrong with a strong keynote or presentation. But if knowledge only moves in one direction, we're leaving a lot of expertise on the table.

Members bring experience, research, case studies, successes, and failures from around the world. The question is whether we create enough space for those perspectives. That might mean fewer presentations and more conversation, replacing a panel with a facilitated discussion, or creating peer groups around a specific challenge.

ICCA's 2025 Congress in Porto put some of this thinking into practice through its multi-venue format, interactive and participatory design, and Sharing Hubs focused on peer learning and dialogue.

The Meeting Shouldn't End When Everyone Leaves

Some are still treating the congress as a self-contained event. But what if the meeting itself is just one stage of a longer process?

WONCA's 2022 World Rural Health Conference in Limerick is a powerful example. Its documented impact included advancing the "No Doctor No Village" campaign, producing the Limerick Declaration on Rural Healthcare, establishing Ireland's first ICGP National Standing Committee for Rural General Practice, and appointing the first Professor of Rural General Practice at the University of Limerick.

A Rural GP Fellowship Programme and Rural Ambassador Programme were also introduced, and the event hosted a WHO global meeting on developing a Rural Health Equity toolkit.

That is a different definition of event success. The meeting became part of a much bigger process of knowledge-sharing, advocacy, and change. The case study also identifies plans for a permanent Rural Practice Innovation

Network focused on knowledge-sharing, advocacy, and collaboration.

Edinburgh's International Papillomavirus Conference 2024 offers another good example. The International Papillomavirus Society has created a multi-year legacy programme using its congresses to drive HPV awareness, reduce health inequalities and empower communities. The programme includes targeted education for young people and plans for mobile screening in underserved areas.

Meetings Can Move More Than People

Association meetings have an enormous role beyond education and networking.

They bring together people with the knowledge, influence, and experience to move an issue forward. Researchers meet policymakers, practitioners can challenge established thinking, and business leaders can engage with experts.

But that does not happen simply because everyone is in the same city.

We should ask who needs to be in the room, which conversations need to happen and what we want to achieve before everyone leaves. That changes the meeting from a programme into a platform.

The same thinking applies to destinations. A host city is not only a place with hotels, convention space, and good flight connections. It's home to universities, businesses, institutions, and communities that can become part of the meeting itself.

The Society for Ecological Restoration's 2017 World Conference in Brazil illustrates this perspective. Delegates had the opportunity to volunteer at a restoration site near the venue, planting trees and collecting native seed, while the Society also donated to support local restorative activities in the area.

That is the kind of thinking that makes a meeting more than a temporary gathering.

It also changes how we think about sustainability. Yes, we need to consider carbon, travel, and resource use. But a more interesting question is: what can the meeting give back? Can it support local organisations? Transfer knowledge? Build skills? Leave something useful behind?

The Real Test Comes Afterwards

The biggest mindset shift is this: a congress does not really have a beginning and an end. The closing ceremony is not the finish line. It's the point at which we should ask whether anything changed because of the event.

Did conversations continue? Were new collaborations formed? Did research emerge? Did an advocacy initiative move forward? Did delegates apply what they learned? Did the relationship with the destination continue?

These questions tell us something different about the value of a meeting than delegate numbers or room nights alone.

The upcoming 2026 ICCA Congress in Panama City will explore this through its "CrossWorlds" theme, bringing participants across regions, sectors, and industries. Its programme also includes a strong focus on intentional networking, with 60% dedicated to connecting with the community.

Information is plentiful, but meaningful interaction is harder to find. Associations have something incredibly valuable to offer.

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By Sven Bossu, CEO of AIPC

It's Not About the Square Metres Anymore

The theme of this year's annual conference of Convention Centres of Canada (CCofC) was "From Space to Place", which is very fitting in the current market landscape. For convention centres, it is no longer about square metres, but about experiences and partnerships. And of course about technology.



St John's (NL) is one of those cities you never heard about and once there, you don't really feel like leaving. It is where AIPC is taking its annual conference this year, so I was very pleased to be able to discover the destination by attending the annual conference of CCofC.

A lot of the lectures and informal discussions touched upon the core theme of the conference: the shift from space to place. Organizers having to choose between Barcelona, Copenhagen and Singapore will indeed consider the full local ecosystem, rather than just the venue, hotels and airport (which all remain important factors). They will also look at all the different assets a destination can offer, from culture and attractions to access to local communities and policy makers.

And it goes beyond that. As information is easily available, it is no longer the core reason for people to attend conferences – which is something I have to admit reluctantly, as content is a key motivator for me personally. But the reality is there: technology allows us to access information faster and more efficiently than ever and the key reason to travel to a conference becomes connectivity. It is all about meeting someone you didn't expect to meet, building trust and feeling part of a professional community. And this is a very different "product".

This has a big impact on convention centres, which are built for moving big groups of people efficiently – from registration into keynote, from keynote into coffee break zone and from there into the exhibition. Going forward, it will be the "in between" spaces which will become more important. Little meeting corners, quiet zones, outdoor spaces, etc. which allow delegate to create connections the way they prefer and/or take a moment to take a step back and reflect. Great examples of this can be seen in the Palais des congrès de Montréal, the BMO Stampede Center or the Scottish Event Campus in Glasgow. And they don't require massive investment – very often, it is just about being creative with "lost spaces".

Technology allows us to access information more efficiently than ever and the key reason to travel to a conference becomes connectivity.

But is also means that convention centres might not be the first choice when it comes to holding meetings. If the need for large keynote rooms and ballrooms fades, organizers will start looking at other places. And here I see two big options: the venue which is unique and will provide a lasting impression or the technology driven spaces.

An example of a unique venue is the Tallinn Creative Hub, an former power plant transformed into convention centre. Composed of many different type of spaces and rooms and having a lot of industrial heritage elements kept in place, the venue both meets the needs for the "in between" space and the unique experience.

A completely different approach, this time technology driven, can be found in venues like the Sofia Event Center (SEC), which can transform its spaces into anything the organizer wants by using projection on both walls and floor.

An example I simply loved was the transformation of the black box (because that is what those spaces are) into an English garden. Convention centres worldwide are picking up on this and are transforming their ballrooms and other spaces into a sophisticated collective of flexible and interconnected spaces.

However, what the conference in St. John's demonstrated most, is that, at the end, it is about the destination you are in and the people around you. The organizing committee leveraged the local culture, the music (very important!), the food and the nature to create an ambiance which I have rarely seen before. It came to a point that a representative of next year's destination said: *"I take it back. We will simply come back here next year"*. And it was also the first time I saw a CEO of a conference centre closing the conference by ... singing a song (without any musical support).

So start booking your travel to the AIPC Annual Conference next year. It will be unforgettable.

Sven Bossu is CEO of AIPC, which represents a global network of over 200 leading centres in 55 countries with the active involvement of more than 1000 management-level professionals worldwide.
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By Juliano Lissoni, Managing Director, MCI Canada

The Room After the Room

As information becomes easier to produce, the value of a congress lies increasingly in what a community can do with it.

Predicting the future of conferences is a hazardous occupation. Technologies change faster than planning cycles, and what looks inevitable in a demonstration can prove surprisingly unimportant in practice. Existing evidence offers a more useful starting point: where meetings are moving, how people participate and what survives after they leave.

Then there are the things worth noticing without a spreadsheet.

Watch the end of a congress session. The presentation closes, applause follows, and most delegates move towards the coffee. A few remain. Someone challenges a conclusion. Someone else describes a situation in which it would not work. The speaker listens, qualifies an answer, asks a question.

The scheduled exchange of knowledge has ended. The unscheduled work of understanding it continues.

Much of the debate about the future of meetings overlooks that distinction. We ask how technology will deliver content when the more interesting question is what people need beyond its delivery.

One international healthcare meeting replaced a single global conference with regional gatherings, allowing local languages and priorities to shape the programme. In another model, international experts were livestreamed into smaller city gatherings, where local specialists helped participants interpret the material.

The knowledge could travel. Understanding required some local work.

Geography Still Matters

The same logic helps explain why geography still matters when knowledge can travel instantly. My analysis of 943 international agricultural conference editions, including confirmed future meetings, found a growing share hosted in Africa and Asia. The shift is worth considering alongside those regional healthcare gatherings: what changes when we bring the discussion closer to the conditions it must address?

In agriculture, those conditions are quite literal: soils, climates, crops, diseases and food systems. They also involve the ministries, research institutions and development agencies able to act on the findings. A paper can be read anywhere. An introduction to a funder, a conversation with a policymaker or the encounter that becomes a research partnership is harder to arrange from a distance. As with the regional healthcare meetings, the value lies in bringing knowledge into contact with the people who can interpret it, challenge it and put it to work.

Whether a meeting connects regional gatherings or moves across continents, it creates an opportunity to bring different experience into the discussion. Location becomes part of programme design.

Giving Destination Partnerships & AI a Purpose

This gives destination partnerships a purpose beyond securing venues and accommodation. Universities, hospitals, businesses, public institutions and community organizations can help an association identify questions it might otherwise overlook. A host city can contribute to the congress's thinking, not simply its logistics.

That contribution should begin before the programme is settled. Otherwise, "local engagement" risks becoming a ceremonial welcome attached to a conversation designed somewhere else.

Hybrid participation poses the same test. Can those outside the main venue influence the discussion, or only



receive it? A livestream may remove a travel barrier while preserving every barrier to professional recognition. Meaningful participation requires opportunities to question, contribute and build relationships, including across languages, time zones and bandwidth constraints.

AI can help with that work. Translation, captioning and searchable congress resources can make knowledge accessible well beyond the dates of the meeting. Programme recommendations can help delegates find relevant discussions they would otherwise miss.

But a perfectly summarized congress could still be a poorly understood one.

Consider a session in which participants examine a difficult professional decision. They reach an initial judgment, then compare it with an AI-generated interpretation. The useful moment is not when the machine supplies an answer. It is when the group discovers why its answers differ.

That is knowledge exchange with consequences. It requires expertise, disagreement and human oversight, especially when a fluent synthesis might conceal uncertainty.

Advocacy, Sustainability & Legacy

The same process can give a congress its advocacy value. Evidence presented across separate sessions rarely becomes a coherent policy argument by itself. Associations must bring the relevant people together, examine competing interests and decide which recommendations they can credibly support.

A policy brief needs an audience. A commitment needs an owner. A coalition needs a reason to reconvene. Without those connections, even an impressive declaration can become another document in the archive.

Sustainability belongs at the heart of that design. Bringing people together carries responsibilities: reducing travel emissions, using resources carefully and choosing suppliers thoughtfully. It also creates an opportunity to strengthen the people and communities involved.

Human sustainability asks us to consider what participants take home beyond information: new skills, supportive relationships, a stronger sense of belonging and the confidence to act. It means making participation affordable and accessible, allowing time to absorb and connect, and involving local professionals and communities in shaping the experience. The ambition is to gather responsibly and make that shared investment worthwhile, with benefits that continue after everyone leaves.

That ambition becomes practical when it shapes planning from the outset, alongside budgets and room capacities. A training partnership can extend learning to local professionals; a research group can carry a promising discussion forward; a public resource can make congress knowledge useful to the wider community. Each needs people responsible for it, resources to sustain it and a moment to assess its progress.

Legacy begins with those commitments, well before the first delegate arrives.

We should still count registrations and measure satisfaction. But six months later, someone should ask what participants actually used, which commitments progressed and what remained useful in the destination.

A Shared Undertaking

There is another reason to take this continuing community seriously.

As AI-generated material fills more of our information environment, convincing appearances become a weaker basis for confidence. A polished explanation tells us little about the care behind it. Associations have an opportunity here, provided they earn trust through scrutiny rather than claim it through status.

Their meetings can make the people behind the knowledge accessible: available for challenge, capable of acknowledging uncertainty, connected to colleagues who will still be there when a conclusion needs revising. That community can include people participating remotely. Its defining quality is accountability, not proximity alone.

Return to the small group after the session. What matters is not that everyone agrees. It is that the conversation has somewhere to go: a colleague to contact, a claim to investigate, a piece of work to undertake together.

No prediction about the next device or platform is necessary to see the value in that.

In a world where an account of almost anything can be AI-manufactured, the congress can offer something harder to produce: a shared undertaking. People who were there, people who contributed, people who will carry the work forward.

The room empties. The community has somewhere to begin.

This article is part of an exclusive partnership between IAPCO and Boardroom. IAPCO is a not-for-profit membership association, registered in Switzerland. IAPCO members are Professional Congress Organizers (companies, not individuals) who 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.

IAPCO MEETING QUALITY

By Remi Deve

Beyond the Ambassador: Italy's Knowledge Network

Convention Bureau Italia's Italian Knowledge Leaders programme treats academics as long-term partners in building a destination, not as names on an awards list.



Italy now ranks first in Europe and second in the world in the latest ICCA report. Behind the result is a deliberate choice by Convention Bureau Italia (CBI): to present the country not only as a place with good venues and good food (which of course it is!), but as a knowledge destination, where scientific communities find expertise, institutions and partners.

One of the vehicles is Italian Knowledge Leaders (IKL), a CBI project that links universities, research centres, destinations and meetings industry professionals around the country's leading academic figures. Its stated aim is to position Italy as the leading knowledge destination for international scientific association congresses, and to celebrate the people who make that possible. It's co-funded by the Ministry of Tourism, with the support of ENIT, the national public agency responsible for promoting Italy globally, and CRUI, the Conference of Italian University Rectors.

Not Another Ambassador Programme

Ambassador programmes are familiar to the industry, but IKL has quite its specific ways. As ICCA noted in a recent article on the model, it is not designed simply to reward ambassadors but to keep them engaged over time, with CBI aiming to cultivate *"this intellectual capital continuously"* so that new opportunities keep emerging.

In practice, that means giving Knowledge Leaders a role well beyond supporting a congress bid, and connecting them to one another across disciplines, with the meetings industry and with destinations. The programme's pieces reflect that: national awards for sustainable and inclusive congresses, a fully funded PhD at the University of International Studies of Rome (UNINT) researching the Italian meetings industry, a legacy project aimed at recognising and rewarding young students and researchers who have distinguished themselves in organising a congress, a new series of

interdisciplinary scientific events called IKL Dialogues, and a B2B event, The Exchange (see box).

Davide Petrillo, Managing Director of AIAA EMEA, the European office of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, knows the model from the inside. Before AIAA, he worked at the Space Generation Advisory Council and at Voyager, one of Italy's top space companies. He is both a Knowledge Leader and a partner of the programme. What drew him to it, he says, was above all the people.

"IKL connects me with Knowledge Leaders from medicine, engineering, economics, the humanities and many other fields, people who are at the top of their disciplines and whose paths might not otherwise cross with the aerospace community," he states. *"Many of the most interesting answers come from collaboration across disciplines, and IKL makes that possible here in Italy."*

Breadth, Not Only Depth

The clearest example so far is a Dialogue held in Turin in June, *"A Dialogue on Space and non space"*, co-created by CBI and AIAA and supported by Turismo Torino e Provincia. Turin is one of Italy's leading aerospace hubs and home to AIAA's first office outside the United States. Doctors, biologists, psychologists and economists sat in the same room as aerospace companies, working in small groups on concrete questions, from what happens to an astronaut's body and mind on a long mission to how to build resilience in extreme environments.

Petrillo is careful not to set the format against traditional congresses. *"Scientific congresses play an essential role, and they naturally focus on depth within a specific field," he says. "What Turin added was breadth."* The result, in his words, was people from very different worlds discovering how much they had in common: *"The companies brought the operational reality of space, the researchers brought perspectives from their own fields, and everyone came away with new questions and new ideas."*





For CBI, Dialogues exist to break down silos and turn scientific exchange into future congresses and collaborations.

What it Takes to Win a Bid

Petrillo has not yet backed a specific congress bid through IKL, and he is candid about what it would take. *"Supporting a bid is a meaningful commitment,"* he says. Three things matter most to him: *"an event that is the right fit for its community, a shared commitment from the agency, industry, academia and local institutions from the very beginning, and a lasting legacy in the form of new partnerships and opportunities for young professionals."*

This is where a network like IKL can make a difference. *"Bringing a major congress to a country takes time, relationships and careful preparation,"* he says. *"IKL can help identify the right opportunities and bring Knowledge Leaders, convention bureaus and local stakeholders together well ahead of any formal process."*

That is the real difference from a traditional ambassador scheme. It does not wait for a bid to appear. It builds the relationships first.

"Turin showed what is possible when the knowledge community and the meetings industry work side by side," Petrillo says. For associations looking for a destination that offers more than a venue, that is the offer.

For more information, contact : **maddalena@conventionbureauitalia.com**

WHERE THE EXCHANGE FITS

The Exchange is a B2B event organised every year by Convention Bureau Italia in one of its member destinations. It combines business meetings, educational sessions, a workshop and, of course, networking opportunities. The 2026 edition took place in Rimini, and the 2027 edition will be held in Trieste. According to CBI, the event has led to the winning of 6 congresses in 2023, 14 in 2024 and 12 in 2025, with others still to be confirmed. They have also launched a call to register. Interested? Get in touch with **maddalena@conventionbureauitalia.com**.

By Remi Deve

Barcelona's Legacy Playbook Widens Its Reach

This year, the Barcelona Convention Bureau has built dedicated community legacy projects around six of the congresses it hosted so far. Taken together, they show a city testing how far this kind of initiative can stretch across entirely different fields of science.

A year ago, Barcelona's approach to conference legacy centred on a single proof of concept: ECTRIMS 2025 showed that a congress could leave the city with more than delegate spend, provided the Barcelona Convention Bureau built impact from the start rather than bolting it on afterwards. In 2026, the same methodology has been run six times over so far, across a portfolio of congresses that share almost nothing in subject matter... which turns out to be the point!


Plaça Espanya

Liver disease, respiratory health, neuroscience and, for the first time, signal processing and artificial intelligence have each had their own legacy project this year, each shaped by the Bureau to fit the science on the agenda and the community around the venue. The throughline is the method: take what a congress already knows, and hand a version of it to the people who live in the city hosting it.

Two Health Congresses, Two Public Campaigns

EASL's Love Your Liver campaign ran a public health village alongside the congress itself, offering free liver scans to more than 500 members of the public and viral hepatitis C tests to a further 60-plus, many of whom, post-scan surveys found, had little to no prior awareness of their own liver health, and left motivated to change their diet or activity levels.

Sixteen volunteer hepatologists, including EASL's Dr Sabela Lens, also took the campaign into ten schools across Barcelona and Catalunya, reaching more than 700 students aged 10 to 15 with ultrasound demonstrations and a specially developed comic book, published in English, Spanish and Catalan, aimed at nine-to-eleven-year-olds.

Months later, the European Respiratory Society's Healthy Lungs for Life campaign took a similar approach to a different organ: a public event in the city centre offered 285 spirometry tests and 210 CheckAir assessments, run with local volunteers and the Lovexair Foundation, with a school programme following in October.

Neuroscience Goes Citywide

FENS Forum 2026, Europe's largest neuroscience meeting and a record-breaking edition for the Spanish Society of Neuroscience as host, took the widest public footprint of any of this year's projects.

Rather than concentrating activity around congress week, it spent months turning Barcelona into what organisers describe as a neuroscience hub: the city's annual Science Festival drew an estimated 22,000 attendees, 630 of whom took part directly at its dedicated Neurolab; the Escolab programme brought neuroscience to 60 schoolchildren during Brain Week; and more than 15 public talks, including one



© Turisme de Barcelona

Casa Batlló

delivered by 2014 Nobel laureate Edvard Moser, reached over 2,200 citizens in the months before the congress opened.

Why ICASSP Is the One to Watch

Of the six, ICASSP is the outlier, and Barcelona is treating it that way. As the world's leading conference on signal processing, speech, audio and applied AI, it had no obvious public-health hook to build a legacy project around, so the Bureau built one from the city's own urban challenges instead. Working with the CTTC (Centre Tecnològic de Telecomunicacions de Catalunya) and Barcelona-based PCO Grupo RIC, the project turned the conference's core expertise on air quality and noise pollution into a citizen-science initiative called Conscious Walks: predefined routes through the city, fitted with sensors to measure noise and air pollution, walked by both local residents and congress delegates, with the data feeding directly into the CTTC's public OpenData Dashboard.

Thirty-eight people took part in the walks themselves, and on 6 May the conference opened its doors to 22 students from a technological baccalaureate programme for a masterclass from Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya professors and a demonstration of a collision-prevention application built on the same signal-processing principles discussed on the congress floor.

The numbers are modest next to the health campaigns' public reach, but the legacy is designed to outlast the week regardless: one running route and four walking routes, complete with audio explanations of the surrounding environment, are staying in place, and the sensors used during the project remain in the city for future use.

That distinction matters to how Barcelona frames its wider legacy ambitions, particularly around sustainability. A liver scan or a lung test delivers an immediate, personal result; a permanent sensor network and a set of public walking routes deliver something closer to civic infrastructure, the kind of outcome a destination can point to years after a congress has left town.

As Christoph Tessmar, Director of Barcelona Convention Bureau, concludes: *"What this year shows is that Barcelona Convention Bureau's Legacy Program has moved beyond proving that congresses can have a positive impact in the destination: it is now testing how far this model can adapt to the different nature of the events held in the city. We will continue taking the knowledge, talent and networks that congresses bring to Barcelona and turning them into initiatives that positively impact our community."*

For more information on how to organise an impactful congress in Barcelona, contact **legacybcb@barcelonaturisme.com.**

By Remi Deve

Estrel Berlin Adds a New Dimension to Congress Planning

For more than three decades, Estrel Berlin has been a known quantity to association planners: a single sprawling complex in Neukölln where a congress, a hotel stay and an evening reception could all happen without anyone getting into a car. From December 2026, that complex gains a fourth dimension. Literally.

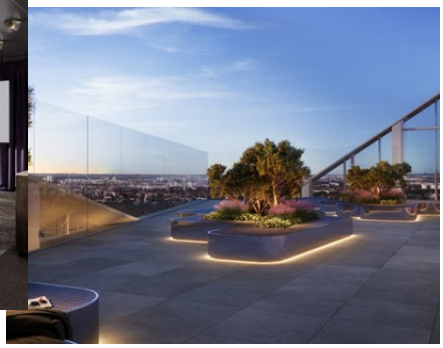


The Estrel Tower rises 176 metres and 45 floors above the existing site, and it will become both Germany's tallest hotel and Berlin's first skyscraper. But the headline height is arguably the least interesting thing about it for the people who actually plan international meetings. What is more interesting lies in what the building does to the maths of running a multi-format congress in one place, without splitting delegates, boards and speakers across a city.

An Old Problem, Solved Vertically

Anyone who has organised a large association event knows the puzzle: a plenary session needs one kind of space, a board meeting needs a completely different one, and somewhere in between there has to be room for informal networking that doesn't feel bolted onto the programme. Estrel Berlin's existing Congress Center already handles a lot of that within its 30,000 square metres and 85 event rooms, hosting different formats running simultaneously under one roof.





The Tower adds a new register to that same instrument, rather than a separate one. Its two dedicated meeting floors, on levels 41 and 42, are built for boardrooms and smaller executive formats: the kind of tight, high-level sessions that used to mean sending a delegation across town to a different building entirely. At ground level, the Grand Hall offers more than 1,000 square metres and theatre seating for roughly 1,250 guests, closer in scale to the Congress Center's larger halls than to a hotel function room.

The point, according to Opening Manager Gonca Dietrich, was never simply to build bigger. *"The Estrel Tower gives us the opportunity to expand what has always been at the heart of Estrel Berlin: bringing accommodation, meetings, events and hospitality together in one place,"* she says. *"For international organisers, the key benefit is not simply having more space. It is the flexibility to create very different experiences within one connected location."*

What Changes for Organisers

That flexibility shows up in fairly practical ways. A congress opening plenary could run in the existing Congress Center while a board convenes two floors up in the Tower the same afternoon, with delegates moving between the two without leaving the site. A multi-day association programme could pair large-scale conference sessions with smaller leadership retreats, product presentations or receptions, using the Tower's restaurants, bars and roughly 1,000 square metres of spa and fitness space to give delegates something to do once the formal programme ends for the day.

None of this is new in concept. Integrated congress campuses exist elsewhere in Europe. What's notable here is the direction of the expansion: up, rather than out, on a site Estrel has occupied for more than 30 years. The company describes itself as family-owned, and the Tower reads less like a new venture chasing a different market than like a long-term operator finally running out of room to grow sideways in a dense part of the city, and building upward instead.

That context matters for how the Tower fits into Berlin more broadly. Neukölln isn't the glass-and-steel district most delegates would associate with a skyscraper opening; it's a working neighbourhood Estrel has been part of for three decades. The Tower doesn't relocate the company's meetings business to a shinier postcode. It develops the address it already has.

What it Adds Up to for 2027 And Beyond

For international association planners weighing where to hold a congress that genuinely needs everything, plenary space, breakout rooms, board meetings, accommodation and hospitality, the calculation Estrel Berlin is betting on is straightforward: fewer venues to coordinate, fewer buses between sites, and more scope to run very different parts of the same programme without anyone leaving the building.

The soft opening begins on December 1st. Later next year, the Sky Restaurant and Sky Bar will open, adding another culinary highlight to the Estrel Tower and offering a unique dining experience high above Berlin. For events being planned from 2027 onwards, that gives organisers a genuinely new set of spaces to build around, not a separate destination to evaluate from scratch.

More information: **www.estrel.com / www.estreltower.com**

ESTREL BERLIN, BY THE NUMBERS

Existing complex: 1,125 rooms and suites - 30,000 m² of congress and event space - 85 event rooms - Capacity for events with up to 15,000 participants

Estrel Tower (soft opening December 2026): 176 metres, 45 floors - 522 additional rooms and suites, including long-stay accommodation - ~4,000 m² of new meeting and event space - Two dedicated meeting floors (levels 41–42) with boardrooms and breakout spaces - Grand Hall: 1,000+ m², up to ~1,250 guests in theatre seating - A Sky Restaurant & Bar

By Remi Deve

Why the World's Sustainability Leaders Keep Coming Back to Montreux

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) has been holding meetings in Montreux for close to twenty years. When its Annual Meeting returns to the newly renovated Montreux Music & Convention Center next April, it will be less a fresh booking than the continuation of a relationship the organisation has quietly built into its own operating model.


Irge Olga Aujouannet

WBCSD is a CEO-led organisation of more than 200 global companies working to accelerate sustainable business transformation across value chains, with the stated ambition of helping more than 9 billion people live within planetary boundaries by 2050. *"We bring together over 200 global companies from around the world, from different geographies, representing trillions in cumulative revenue,"* explains Irge Olga Aujouannet, WBCSD's Senior Director of Events and Operations. *"What makes us really unique is that we are cross value chain. We are not a sector organisation."*

One Meeting Instead of Two

For most of its history, WBCSD ran two separate flagship gatherings: a technical meeting bringing together sustainability specialists to co-create solutions, and a more senior CEO-level meeting focused on strategic alignment. From 2026 onward, the two have merged into a single Annual Meeting – a shift Aujouannet ties directly to how sustainability itself has moved inside member companies.

"Sustainability is increasingly becoming integrated in different functions within the company," she says. *"It's no longer only relevant for the Chief Sustainability Officer... it's about integrating sustainability in the decision-making process and operations of the company."* Increasing physical risks related to climate change, supply chain resilience, and tightening regulatory frameworks put sustainability on the agenda of the Boards, with the C-suite now becoming part of a conversation once reserved for specialists, which is why the new format runs executive, practitioner, and deep-dive tracks side by side.

There's a quieter logic behind the merger too. *"We wanted to combine our two large conferences to reduce our environmental impact while offering a platform that brought the right people together"* Aujouannet notes.

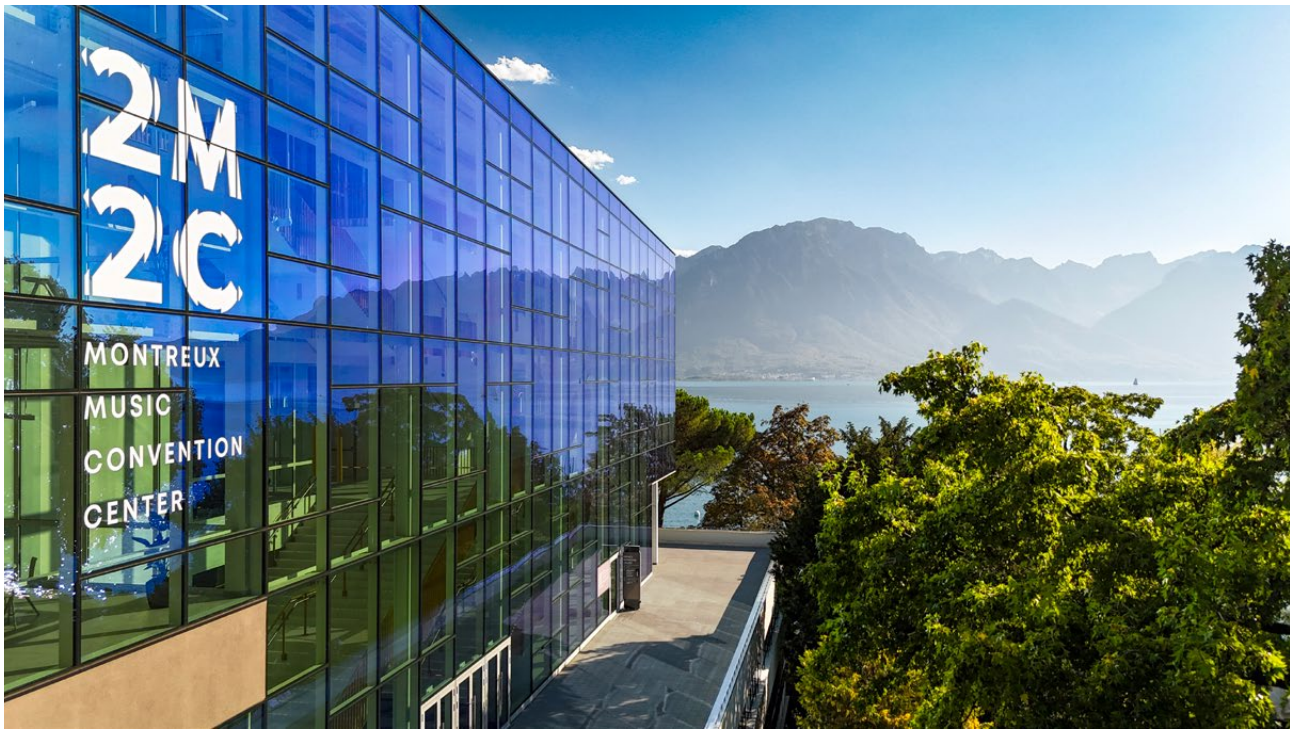
A Destination Delegates Actually Vote For

The obvious question is why Montreux, specifically, keeps winning that slot. Aujouannet points to data rather than sentiment: *"We actually ran a survey last year. More than 60% of our delegates who joined the meeting voted to come back to Montreux."*

Scale plays a role: WBCSD's gatherings run to 600-700 people on peak days, narrowing the realistic options to either sprawling international convention centres or something more intimate. *"Montreux offers all the benefits and infrastructure associated with a modern convention centre in a cozy atmosphere surrounded by vibrant nature. It's a better fit for the community spirit and proximity we are looking for"* and, as she puts it, *"with the lake on one side, and mountains on the other, it's a real immersion into nature that's hard to replicate elsewhere".*

Sustainability Credentials to Match the Mission

That immersion now comes with paperwork to back it up. The renovated 2M2C holds ISO 20121 certification, the



© Lou Barthelemy

international standard for sustainable event management, as well as the Vaud Ambassadeur label. It has also been awarded Swisstainable Level III, the top tier of Switzerland Tourism's three-level sustainability programme.

WBCSD's own practices reach beyond the environmental checklist, too. Alongside strict guidelines on single-use plastics, local and seasonal food, and vegetarian-first catering, Aujouannet is clear that the social dimension carries equal weight: working with local suppliers who pay fair wages and offer decent working conditions to their staff, wherever an event lands. *"Supporting local businesses and the communities to which they belong is a critical component of our event strategy."*

In Montreux, that translates into sourcing wine from neighbouring vineyards, working directly with local farmers, and running field trips that expose delegates to local agricultural practices. In short: deliberately using WBCSD's buying power to support the community hosting it, not just to lower its own footprint.

Writing the Next Chapter

Ahead of 2027, Lausanne Montreux Congress (LMC) proposed a set of Sustainable Experience and Legacy ideas, from local field visits to youth hackathons with regional academic institutions. Aujouannet confirms discussions are ongoing but nothing is locked in: *"We are very much still in the exploration phase,"* partly because WBCSD is mid-way through a broader strategy update that will influence the programming for its Annual Meeting.

What is locked in is the relationship itself: Aujouannet will formally join LMC's Ambassador programme this November. For her, a Swiss, it's less formality than natural extension. *"I'm very passionate about Switzerland. I love my country... we are extremely lucky to be living in a country where we have all the benefits of nature at proximity."*

She points to Montreux, Vevey, and Lausanne as places that *"set the example in the way they design and build their cities... in respect of nature and also the local communities,"* even while acknowledging the trade-off: *"things take a lot of time because we are a real democracy... but ultimately it's a great way of working, because it's really about people doing things for the people."*

More information on Montreux as a conference destination: **www.lausanne-montreux-congress.ch** / 2m2c.ch / fenot@lmcongress.ch

More information on Switzerland as a convention destination: myriam.winnepenninckx@switzerland.com / **www.MySwitzerland.com/meetings**

By Remi Deve

GL events & the Long Game in China

Eight years after signing in Guangzhou, GL events runs three major venues in China and is betting that the country's event industry is ready to look outward.

China is a market of numbers that resist comparison. The Canton Fair, held in Guangzhou for decades, draws tens of thousands of exhibitors. Cities of 25 or 30 million people run their own convention and tourism strategies. On the association side, GL events believes China is already the second-largest market after the United States, and that Beijing may soon host more association headquarters than any American city. It is a claim worth testing, but the direction is hard to argue with.

Yet the scale hides a paradox. For almost three years, China was closed to most of the world, and the entry rules were slow to follow. That has changed: Beijing now admits citizens of around 50 countries for up to 30 days without a visa, a policy currently running until the end of 2026. But the business that fills Chinese venues is still overwhelmingly domestic, and the country's event industry has barely begun to look outward.

The two cities at the centre of this story show why. Beijing is the political capital and, increasingly, the address where national and international associations want a presence. Guangzhou is the commercial heart of the Pearl River Delta, a trading city that has hosted the Canton Fair, twice a year, since 1957, and is now building an airport-centred economic zone around its events ambitions. Between them, they cover much of what an association looks for: institutions, industry and a way in.

That gap between size and international exposure is the opportunity, and it is the one GL events has been working on for the better part of two decades.





The famtrip organised by GL events, together with Beijing Capital Group Exhibitions & Events and Guangzhou City Construction Investment Group

Patience, Then Investment

The French group has been in China since the late 2000s. Its first showpiece was the Shanghai World Expo in 2010, and it now employs around 800 people there across three divisions: venues, live services and exhibitions. Its trade show portfolio in the country covers more than a million square metres.

The venue side is the newer and more deliberate chapter. GL events signed its first agreement in Guangzhou in 2018 with a local partner, took over the management of the Guangzhou Yuexiu International Congress Center (GYICC) in 2019, and saw it open in 2020, in the middle of the pandemic. The timing was not ideal, but the building was. Next to the historic Canton Fair site and surrounded by three city parks, GYICC is a business complex built as much for conferences as for exhibitions.

It has since become a corporate address. In good years GYICC handles around 650 events, many of them galas, product launches and the kind of gatherings China's big companies stage with enviable production values. The first event the team remembers is the launch of a Maybach, the premium range from Mercedes, where the client's staging and audiovisual work taught the team something. Tencent, Huawei, Alibaba, Procter & Gamble and Johnson & Johnson have since used the venue, and each satisfied client becomes a reference.

Two more sites have followed. The Guangzhou Aerotropolis Expo Center (GAEC) is a new-generation exhibition centre in the Aerotropolis district, two kilometres from Baiyun International Airport. And in Beijing, the Capital International Exhibition & Convention Center (CIECC) opened in February 2025 in the Shunyi district, again two kilometres from the capital's airport, with nine modular halls, a convention centre and a hotel on site. Both are run with strong local partners: Guangzhou City Construction Investment Group in the south, and Beijing Capital Group Exhibitions & Events, part of Beijing North Star Group, in the capital.

A Local Model

The operating model is deliberately Chinese. Venues managers and the almost entire staff (around 800 people) are Chinese. GL events took the same approach in Brazil, where it employs more than 600 people.

"When in Rome, do as the Romans do," says Eric Abramson, Director of Major Accounts and International Development in GL events' Venues Management Division. *"Sustainable partnerships begin with recognising that local stakeholders set the terms: they are on their own ground; our role is to build with them as long-term partners, rather than impose an outside model."*

That philosophy extends from staffing to strategy. A venue, GL events argues, is only the hardware of a destination. The software is everything around it: visas, air links, arrival, transfers, hotels, restaurants, and the universities, hospitals and research centres that produce the congresses of the future. *"The venue can be the most beautiful in the world,"* Abramson says, *"but if the other spokes of the wheel are missing, nobody will come except the locals."*



Guangzhou Yuexiu International Congress Center (GYICC)



Guangzhou Aerotropolis Expo Center (GAEC)

So the group's advice to its Chinese partners starts with mapping a city's strengths. Every destination has between four and eight clusters of expertise, and what matters is whether incoming requests match them. Each cluster needs ambassadors, and the destination needs a list of the major events that have never come, and a reason why. It is slow work, partly because relationships must be rebuilt as officials change posts, and partly because cities are only now looking at events as a source of tax revenue and visibility. But local authorities are listening more closely.

A Fam Trip With a Purpose

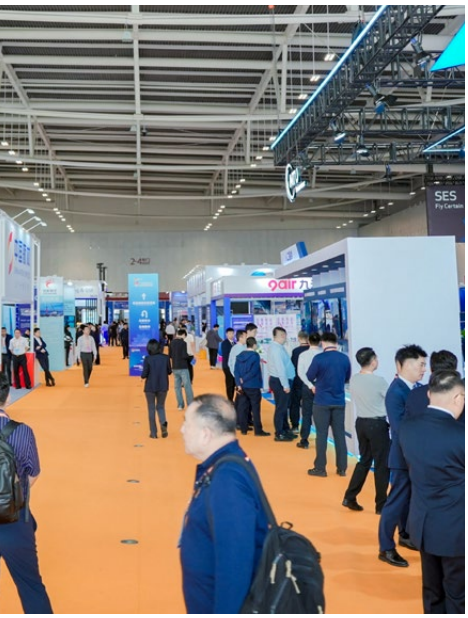
That is the thinking behind a familiarisation trip GL events organised this year, together with Beijing Capital Group Exhibitions & Events and Guangzhou City Construction Investment Group. The group was small and carefully chosen: representatives of the main professional bodies of the congress and exhibition industry, international organisers, and a few colleagues from GL events. It travelled from Beijing to Guangzhou, visiting CIECC, GYICC and GAEC.

The programme went beyond the venue tour. In both cities, local authorities presented their plans for the events industry, the support available to international organisers and the economic strengths of their regions. Beijing laid out its ambition to become a leading international destination for congresses and exhibitions, and Guangzhou its case as a future MICE hub for Asia, with the airport economic zone as a centrepiece. There were also business meetings with Chinese organisers, associations and companies, aimed at bringing new congresses and trade shows to China.

For one guest, Sven Bossu, CEO of AIPC, the international association of convention centres, the most striking lesson was not the size of the buildings but how they are run. At CIECC, he saw a building managed through data.

"The visit was an eye-opener, especially when it comes to making large infrastructures intelligent," Bossu says. *"This will be the next big trend, as it not only allows to monitor what happens in the building (how many events are going on, where the people are moving, what my energy usage is) but also to manage this with the use of AI. The Capital International Exhibition & Convention Center has put this in place and was very proud to show us how it works. Basically, one giant screen gives you the full status overview and the continuous data screening allows to automate interventions, from increasing the temperature in a room where it is too cold to sending a cleaning team in once the room is empty."*

For Clément Guerci, Deputy Managing Director of GL events Venues, the trip was meant to be more than a showcase. *"China is today one of the most dynamic and promising markets for the international events industry,"* he says. *"By bringing together event organisers, professional associations, institutional representatives and Chinese economic players on the ground, we wanted to go beyond simply discovering our infrastructure. Our aim was to create meetings, encourage exchanges and allow everyone to better understand the opportunities offered by these growing destinations."*





Capital International Exhibition & Convention Center (CIECC)

It is also how Guerci sees the role of the venues themselves: *"to be open platforms on their territory, serving the attractiveness of destinations and the creation of value for all stakeholders."*

Romain PEIFFERT, CEO of GL events Greater China, warmly welcomed representatives of the international MICE industry to China with the local teams. For him, the reception was more than a gesture of hospitality – it created a valuable platform for dialogue between the Chinese market and the global MICE community. *"We are very pleased to have played this role through our venues,"* he says. *"This would not have been possible without the long-standing trust we have built over the years, as well as the strong support and close cooperation of local institutions, leading industry clusters and service partners. Through this event, we wanted to express, together with our local partners, a clear openness to the international community and encourage organisers of global events to give greater consideration to our Chinese venues in the future."*

With more than 80 sites in its network, GL events is positioning itself as a connector between markets, and China is the one where the connecting has most to do. For associations, the practical message is simple. A market with this much domestic strength and so little international exposure will need partners who understand both sides. The first step is to see it, and for a growing number of them, that step has now been taken.

THREE VENUES AT A GLANCE

Guangzhou Yuexiu International Congress Center (GYICC) - Six-level business complex of 50,000 m², next to the historic Canton Fair site and surrounded by three city parks - 17,000 m² of event space, including a 3,024 m² pillar-free exhibition hall and a 2,400 m² pillar-free ballroom - 505-seat auditorium and 65 meeting rooms.

Guangzhou Aerotropolis Expo Center (GAEC) - Site of 350,000 m² with 120,000 m² of exhibition space in 11 pillar-free halls - A multifunctional hall with a ballroom, VIP lounges and meeting rooms - 2 km from Baiyun International Airport, with more than 3,500 hotel rooms nearby.

Capital International Exhibition & Convention Center (CIECC), Beijing - 210,000 m² of exhibition space in nine modular halls of 23,000 m² each, with 22 meeting rooms - 15,000 m² convention centre with 35 meeting rooms - 410-room hotel on site and about 4,000 rooms within 5 km - 2 km from Beijing Capital International Airport.

For more information, visit **www.gl-events.com/en/venues** or contact **communication-venues@gl-events.com**

By Pamela Wilton

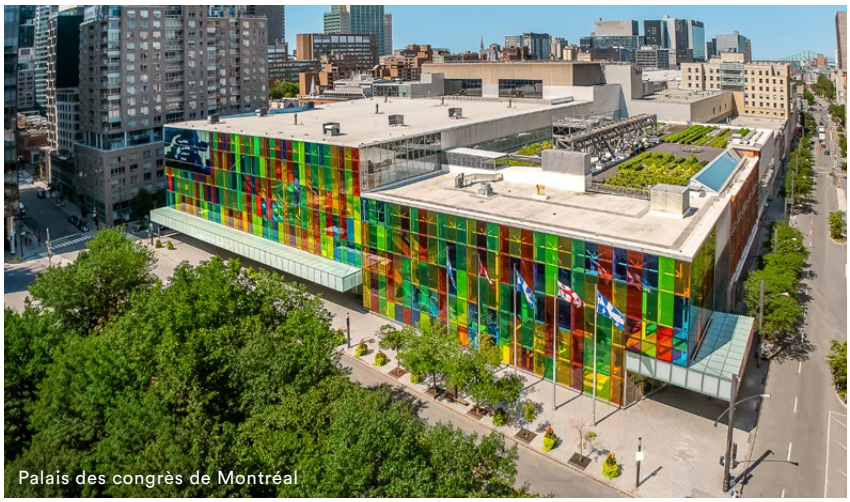
The Palais des congrès de Montréal: A Centre of Gravity for Business Events

Montréal has been North America's leading city for international association conventions for ten consecutive years. Behind that record is the Palais des congrès, where the city and expertise come together for a congress.

The World Tunnel Congress, the annual gathering of the International Tunnelling and Underground Space Association (ITA-AITES), reached Montréal from 15 to 21 May 2026. Some 2,700 underground infrastructure specialists filled the Palais des congrès de Montréal for a week of technical sessions and exhibitions. Yet the congress's most lasting legacy is above ground.

ITA-AITES and the Palais launched a tree-planting project in[AB1] downtown Montréal, above a tunnel of the Réseau express métropolitain (REM) and on a university campus. The planting is designed to reduce heat islands and add to the city's canopy.

"This initiative perfectly reflects ITA-AITES' commitment to sustainability and to building a more resilient, liveable future," said Helen Roth, Executive Director of ITA-AITES.



© Kotur - Michael Jesus

Palais des congrès de Montréal

A legacy like this starts with something more practical. Before associations decide what makes a destination memorable, they confirm it can deliver the basics.

The 2026 Evidénz Meeting Planner Study surveyed 422 planners responsible for choosing destinations for their organisations' largest meetings. It found that convention centre facilities and services are part of the baseline a destination must provide before any other factors come into play. The Palais provides that foundation, with 113 multipurpose spaces across seven floors, integrated audiovisual packages and teams experienced in large international congresses. For organisers, the essentials are confirmed early, leaving more time for the programme and the people.

The planting initiative shows how the Palais acts as an event's centre of gravity. The congress gathers in the building, then reaches out into the surrounding city.

The City Is Part of the Venue

The Palais sits in the heart of downtown Montréal.

Place-d'Armes métro station connects directly to the building, the airport is 20 minutes away, and thousands of hotel rooms are within walking distance. Delegates move between their hotels, sessions and the rest of the city on foot.

When the city is part of the venue, it also shares in the benefits. The World Tunnel Congress alone generated 5,600 hotel nights and an estimated CAD 1.6 million in economic spinoffs for Montréal and Québec.

Associations keep choosing Montréal. In its 2025 rankings, the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) showed the city first in North America for international association conventions for the tenth year running, with 83 qualifying meetings. The Union of International Associations (UIA) ranked it first in the Americas for the ninth consecutive year, with 89.

Connected to Montréal's Expertise

The 2026 Palais calendar reflects Montréal's strengths in life sciences, technology and artificial intelligence, aerospace and engineering.

The International Society for Stem Cell Research held its annual meeting at the Palais in July (2 548 delegates), followed in August by the International Pharmaceutical Federation's World Congress of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences (3 149 delegates). The IEEE Power and Energy Society met there the same summer (3 125 delegates). In February 2027, the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence brings its annual conference to the venue (3 500 delegates expected).

The Palais helps associations connect with the people in Montréal who work in their field. Luc Charbonneau, Vice-President of Business Development and Strategic Alliances at the Palais, said: *"What makes Montréal different is how naturally people come together around an opportunity. The Palais, Tourisme Montréal, universities, research centres, business organisations and local leaders each bring something different to the table. Rather than working in silos, we combine our strengths and expertise around a common goal."*



© Stéphan Poulin

Those connections can outlast the event. The STI & HIV 2025 World Congress, organised with IUSTI Canada, the national branch of the International Union against Sexually Transmitted Infections, brought 1,515 participants from 72 countries to Montréal in July. A year later, it shared its surplus of more than CAD 55,000 among six Montréal community organisations. The main talks were also made available online for free.

Dr Marc Steben, Co-President of the World Congress, said that placing community involvement at the core of its programme *"really switched up how things are done."*

A City Worth Exploring

The Evidénz study also identifies what sets a city apart once the basics are covered. It calls this destination appeal: culture, culinary experiences, identity and signature experiences.

Montréal's food scene, arts and neighbourhoods give delegates reasons to step outside the meeting rooms. Chinatown is steps from the Palais and Old Montréal is minutes away. The Quartier des spectacles, the city's festival district, and the Plateau Mont-Royal are within walking distance, many of them reachable through the underground city.

Charbonneau describes the Palais's role as *"bringing the city's ecosystem around the event."* Put a strong venue in a city like this, connect it to local expertise, and it becomes a centre of gravity for the whole event.

To explore how the Palais des congrès de Montréal can support your next event, scan this QR code

By Vicky Koffa

Thirty Years In, Québec City Convention Centre Still Looking Forward

Thirty years can tell you a great deal about a convention centre, but perhaps the most interesting question is what comes next. As the Québec City Convention Centre marks three decades in 2026, its anniversary offers international associations a reason to look back to its storyline. But this is also an opportunity to see how experience, continuous adaptation and a willingness to rethink the convention experience are shaping the Centre's next chapter.

Three Decades of Moving With the Times

When the Québec City Convention Centre officially opened on August 29, 1996, it was part of a wider ambition to establish Québec City as a leading North American destination for conventions and business events. Thirty years later, the numbers tell one part of that story: more than six million visitors have passed through its doors, attending over 4,300 events, while its activities have generated some $2.69 billion in regional economic impact.

But 30 years of history alone does not show how a venue has kept pace with a changing industry. What matters is how the Centre has adapted over time, responding to new expectations and, in some cases, anticipating them.

In 2006, it became the first Canadian convention centre to offer wireless Internet access throughout its facilities. A year later came another Canadian first, a programme offering turnkey solutions for sustainable events. In 2014, a 73,000-square-foot expansion increased capacity and gave organisers greater flexibility in how they could use the building.

At other times, adaptability has meant something more literal. For the 2018 G7 Summit, the Centre was transformed into an international media centre serving 1,400 journalists. The following year, it became an athletes' village for more than 3,700 people during the Québec Games. During the pandemic, its spaces took on yet another life, hosting immersive exhibitions including Imagine Van Gogh and Imagine Picasso.

For association organizers, these milestones point to something practical: a venue accustomed to changing requirements, unconventional formats and complex operational needs. That experience allows the Centre's team to approach each event with flexibility rather than relying on a standard formula.

"For 30 years, we have evolved alongside our clients and the changing needs of the association community. This anniversary allows us to recognize how far we have come while continuing to improve the experience we offer," says Caroline Lepage, President and CEO of the Québec City Convention Centre.

30 YEARS IN NUMBERS

6+ million visitors
4,300+ events
1,536 conventions
345 large-scale international conventions
$2.69 billion in regional economic impact
294,900 sq. ft. of usable event space
Capacity of up to 9,000 attendees



© Emmanuel Coveney -



Experience That Keeps Evolving

That same principle of adaptation is visible today. Flexible spaces allow different formats and simultaneous activities, while continued investment has brought updated event technology, digital signage, energy-efficient LED lighting, touch-free equipment and accessibility improvements.

Sustainability has similarly moved from an early initiative to a broader operating commitment spanning food and beverage, waste and energy management. In 2023, the Centre obtained Biosphere certification, an internationally recognised sustainability certification for tourism organisations.

Some innovations focus on parts of the delegate journey that can easily be overlooked. Opened in 2026 in collaboration with Québec City Jean Lesage International Airport, Salon YQB gives business travellers access to a quiet, airport-inspired lounge where they can work, meet or recharge before leaving the Convention Centre. The initiative was named a finalist for the 2026 AIPC Innovation Award, recognizing both its approach to the business traveller experience and its contribution to the Convention Centre's business model through a new revenue-generating service.

Yet three decades of technological and operational change have also reinforced the importance of the human side of events. The Centre's role now extends well beyond providing spaces. Its team works closely with clients to understand their objectives, respond to changing expectations and create events that bring people and ideas together.

The conversation with organisers has also changed over those three decades. Attendance and smooth logistics remain important, but they are no longer the only measures of a successful congress. Associations increasingly look at the connections an event leaves behind, the knowledge it advances and the value it can bring to a destination, a sector or the wider community.

The Next Chapter Takes Shape

That thinking sits at the heart of the Centre's Vision 2028. Its ambition is to become a model of excellence and innovation among convention centres in Québec, Canada and internationally, while attracting high-impact events and strengthening its role as an adviser to clients.

The emphasis is not simply on bringing more events to Québec City, but on helping those events do more once they arrive,that means maximising economic and tourism benefits while creating intellectual and social impact. Continued investment in sustainability, quality, infrastructure and technological solutions is intended to support that ambition.

"Thirty years of experience have taught us that innovation must serve a clear purpose: making events more effective, responsible and meaningful," Lepage adds. *"As we look ahead, we remain focused on helping associations generate lasting impact."*

Thirty years after opening its doors, the Québec City Convention Centre is therefore celebrating a milestone without treating it as a finish line. Its experience provides a foundation for what comes next: helping associations create events that respond to today's expectations and leave a meaningful impact long after delegates have returned home.

Be part of the next chapter. Consider Québec City - and the Québec City Convention Centre - for your association's next international congress.
More information on **www.convention.qc.ca**

When AGU Ocean Sciences came to Glasgow: creating space for ideas

When the American Geophysical Union's Ocean Sciences Meeting (OSM) came to Glasgow in February 2026, it marked a significant milestone: the first time the international congress had been held outside North America. AGU had three key objectives for bringing the meeting out of the USA; they wanted to expand their European reach, connect with local science, and maintain their focus on sustainability.

Hosted at the Scottish Event Campus (SEC), the meeting brought together the international ocean science community to share research, exchange ideas and address some of the most pressing challenges facing our oceans. Attracting a record attendance of 6000 delegates, with two thirds attending from outside the USA, its successful delivery was supported by strong partnerships across Scotland, the SEC's flexible and connected campus, and a collaborative approach to finding creative solutions to the organisers' requirements.

Taking Ocean Science Beyond North America

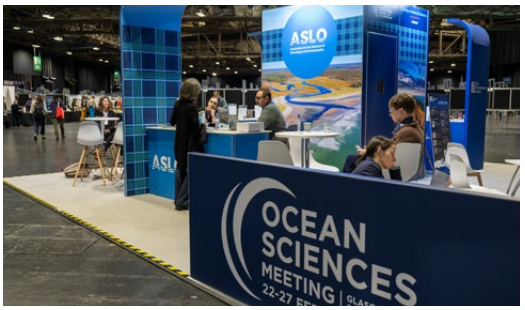
For the American Geophysical Union (AGU), moving an established international congress to a new continent presented both an opportunity and a challenge. The organisers needed a destination with the capacity, accessibility and scientific credentials to support such a prestigious meeting.

Scotland offered a compelling solution. Its internationally recognised marine science community, policy expertise and commitment to ocean sustainability provided a natural connection to the event's subject matter.

Securing the event was a collaborative effort involving the SEC, Glasgow Convention Bureau, VisitScotland, the Scottish Government and academic partners. Scotland's Blue Economy Vision, which links the health of its marine environment with economic and social wellbeing, provided a particularly relevant backdrop. Engagement with the Scottish Government's Marine Directorate helped connect the meeting's international agenda with local researchers and policy specialists.

Scotland's concentration of expertise combined with Glasgow's strong destination credentials and the SEC's scale and facilities helped answer the organisers' brief to accommodate the extensive scientific programme.







Janice Lachance, Executive Director, American Geophysical Union, said: *"Bringing Ocean Sciences Meeting outside North America for the first time was a big step for us, but Glasgow delivered on every level. The strength of the local scientific community, the support from partners, and the ease of delivering the event within a connected campus made it an incredibly positive experience for our delegates."*

One Hall, Eight Theatres

The organisers wanted to expand their programme in Glasgow and chose to work with the SEC team on an innovative solution using a single 5000m2 flat floor space for 8 parallel sessions.

Working closely with AGU, the SEC's in-house Technical & Production team devised an open-plan environment built around eight silent presentation theatres. Wireless headphone technology allowed the eight concurrent sessions to operate within a shared space without audio interference, while delegates could move freely between presentations and other activities.

The approach maximised the available footprint and brought efficiencies in installation, resource use and cost while enhancing the open, connected delegate experience.

Keeping a Global Community Connected

For a meeting of more than 6,000 delegates, the challenge extended beyond providing sufficient space. With a packed scientific programme, exhibition activity and numerous opportunities for collaboration, organisers needed an environment that would be easy to navigate and encourage delegates to connect throughout the event.

The SEC's compact, integrated campus provided the answer, accommodating conference, exhibition and networking activity within a single connected location, with accommodation nearby.

For delegates, the result was an environment designed to make moving between sessions and networking opportunities straightforward, with more time to exchange ideas, meet colleagues and make the most of the international gathering.

Delivering Responsibly

For a scientific community focused on the health of the world's oceans, sustainability was an important consideration in choosing a destination and planning the event. Glasgow is one of the world's leading cities for sustainable tourism and events; 97% of the city's energy comes from renewable sources, and 100% of the city's venue hold a third-party sustainability accreditation. The city is currently ranked 5th globally and 1st in the UK in the Global Destination Sustainability (GDS) Index.

The connected campus and nearby accommodation also helped reduce the need for transfers between venues. Catering plans incorporated locally sourced produce, plant-forward options and measures to reduce waste.

The organisers, city partners and venue worked together to develop the social programme and maximise the event's longer-term impact, creating meaningful opportunities for Glasgow's next generation of students and researchers to connect with leading experts in their field.

Beyond the Closing Session

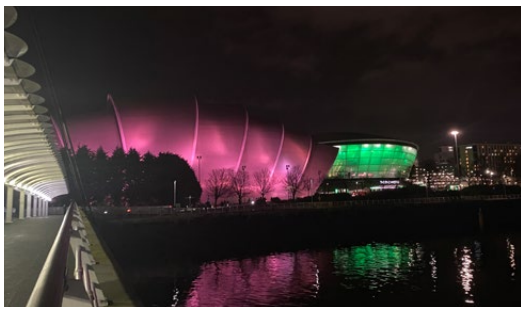
Hosting at the SEC fulfilled AGU's ambition to expand its European reach, connect with local science, keep the spotlight on sustainability. The outcome demonstrated the potential of that ambition, with delegates from more than 60 countries attending the Glasgow meeting. It also created opportunities for knowledge exchange across borders and disciplines, connecting the global ocean science community with Scotland's researchers, policymakers and institutions, and opening up new avenues for collaboration.

For other association organisers considering a move beyond familiar destinations, OSM provides an encouraging example of the opportunities that can come from embracing change. With the right partners, a clear understanding of shared objectives and a collaborative approach to delivery, a new destination can bring fresh perspectives and experiences to an established event.

More information about SEC Glasgow: **www.sec.co.uk**







By Remi Deve

How Sarawak Built Itself Into a Legacy Destination

Sarawak doesn't announce itself the way some convention capitals do. There's no skyline of glass towers competing for attention, no manufactured congress district, just Kuching, a quietly compelling city on the island of Borneo, that has spent two decades building something less flashy but more durable: a track record built on legacy.

Since the Borneo Convention Centre Kuching (BCCK) opened its doors in 2009, Sarawak has drawn international associations from fields as varied as aerosol science, energy, and maternal health, climbing the rankings to become one of the region's more surprising convention success stories.

But the real shift in Sarawak's story came because of a vision. In 2006, when the Sarawak Convention Bureau opened its doors, its job was straightforward: bring conferences to Sarawak and let the tourism economy benefit. Two decades on, the organisation now known as Business Events Sarawak (BESarawak) has been chasing a very different ambition, becoming, as it puts it, the *"Legacy Capital of Business Events in Malaysia and Borneo."*

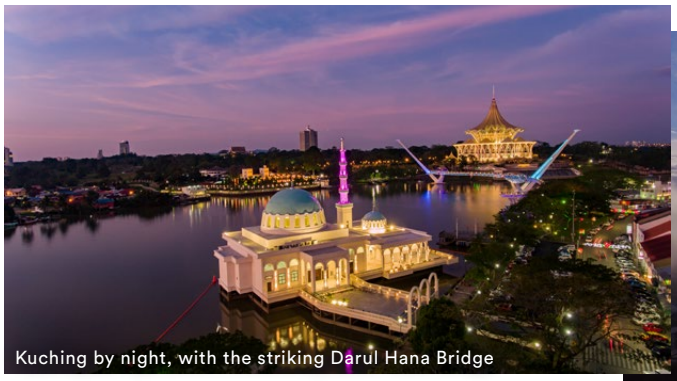
The shift in name, in 2018, actually signalled a change in what counted as success. A packed conference calendar and strong delegate numbers were no longer the finish line; they became the starting point for a harder question: what does an event leave behind once the delegates go home?

That question now sits at the centre of Sarawak's business events strategy. It was formalised through the Legacy Impact Master Action Plan (Legacy MAP) 2023–2025, built on four pillars: Advocacy, Education, Advancement and Recognition. Together, they gave Sarawak a structure: which events to pursue, how to align them with the state's Post-COVID-19 Development Strategy 2030 (PCDS 2030), and how to build what BESarawak calls its "legacy PR."

That last piece now has a face: LEGACY360 and the LEAP Summit drive policy dialogue, the Borneo Inspires Legacy Awards (BILA) recognise changemakers, the Business Events Sarawak Alliance (BESA) bridges industry and government, and AI.LEGACY tracks outcomes with a rigour no delegate count ever could.



Kingwood Hotel Sibu



Kuching by night, with the striking Darul Hana Bridge



One of the clearest validations of this approach came when business events were formally written into PCDS 2030, as an official recognition, from the state government, that the industry is a growth sector in its own right, one expected to contribute to Sarawak's social, economic and environmental progress alongside more traditional pillars of the economy.

The case studies are where that system is tested against reality. BESarawak's newly released Sarawak Legacy Report examines ten conferences held in 2024 and 2025, tracing each one's outcomes through to the legacies they're generating, part of a wider AI.Legacy dataset that now monitors 60 legacy-driven events, with these ten independently validated in partnership with Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS).

The three of them below illustrate just how differently "legacy" can show up, depending on the room.

When Science Meets Policy

The 13th Asian Aerosol Conference (AAC 2024), held in Kuching in November, drew 613 delegates from 36 countries – 34.7% above its original target – for what might have looked, on paper, like a routine scientific gathering. It wasn't. Sessions led by figures including WHO advisor Professor Lidia Morawska fed directly into Malaysia's National Clean Air Action Plan 2025-2040, giving federal policymakers the modelling data they needed to regulate urban particulate matter and chart a path toward the country's 2050 net-zero target.

LEGACIES IN SARAWAK BY THE NUMBERS

- 20 years: from Sarawak Convention Bureau (2006) to BESarawak's legacy-driven present
- 60 events currently tracked through the AI.Legacy system
- 10 case studies independently validated with UNIMAS
- 74.07%: the highest Legacy Impact Score recorded, achieved by AAC 2024
- 7 MoUs signed in two days at EICCEB 2025
- 265 submissions to the 2025 Borneo Inspires Legacy Awards, the first year open to international entrants

Along the way, the conference upgraded the technical skills of 144 local Sarawakian researchers, linking them into international research networks that will outlast the conference itself by years.

As organising chairman Ts. Noor Zaitun Binti Yahya puts it, her guiding principle is to *"connect people, knowledge and solutions for a cleaner future"*, which is more or less exactly what AAC 2024 did, scoring a Legacy Impact rating of 74.07%, the highest of the ten case studies reviewed.

When a Conference Becomes a Deal Room

EIC Connect Energy Borneo 2025 (EICCEB 2025) offers a different kind of proof point. Held in February 2025, it brought more than 1,000 energy leaders, policymakers, investors and innovators from Sarawak, Sabah, Brunei and Indonesia to Kuching to debate one question: what does Borneo's energy future actually look like?

The answer arrived in the form of seven Memorandums of Understanding, signed across hydrogen development, carbon capture, engineering solutions and future energy technologies – agreements organisers describe not as ceremonial gestures but as the seeds of new investment and cross-border partnership.

The conference also built the case for Borneo as a future "battery of Asia" through discussions on the ASEAN Power Grid, while local SMEs gained a stage to showcase their innovations to an international audience. Organising committee chairman Ts. Syed Saggaf bin Syed Ahmad sums up his approach to leadership simply: *"the ability to adapt and adopt – not necessarily what worked before will work in moving forward."*

EICCEB 2025 scored 68.52% overall, with its strongest showing (75%!) in t he environmental pillar.

When Legacy Looks Like Lives Saved

Not every legacy shows up in MoUs or emissions targets. The International Midwives' Day Conference (IMDC 2024), held in Bintulu, brought together 300 rural midwives, urban nursing units and health policymakers for two days of hands-on Neonatal Resuscitation training, clinical research sharing, and a video-storytelling track documenting the "untold journey" of midwifery in Sarawak.

The conference scored an 88.89% social-pillar rating – the highest recorded across the entire report – for work that strengthened emergency readiness among frontline midwives serving Sarawak's most remote communities, several of whom now sit inside a stronger regional peer-support network as a direct result.

Organising chairman Madam Sa'adiah Binti Abdul Rahman describes her own leadership lesson plainly: *"Listening is more important than speaking"*, a philosophy that shaped a conference built, quite literally, around listening to the practitioners doing the hardest work in the room.

Taken together, the ten case studies form something closer to an institutional memory than a highlight reel: it's clear proof, event by event, that Sarawak's legacy framework isn't aspirational language but a system the state is prepared to measure itself against.

Twenty years after opening a convention bureau to chase tourism dollars, Sarawak is now building a different kind of pitch to the international association world: choose Sarawak, and the outcomes outlast the itinerary.

For more information on Sarawak as a conference destination, visit **businesseventssarawak.com**

Download the full Sarawak Legacy Report, including all ten case studies, now



Kuching at sunset: where historic temples, colourful rooftops and Sarawak's distinctive architecture come together in one spectacular cityscape

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