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2018

# ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT



**Jeff Blosser**, President/  
CEO at Washington State  
Convention Center (left) &  
**Tom Norwalk**, President/  
CEO of Visit Seattle

## The Pacific Northwest

Lower Costs, Less Congestion and the  
Beautiful Wilderness Entice Planners to the Area

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Working With Volunteers  
Unpaid Staffers Can Achieve Great Results for Planners

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TABLET VERSION**

Credit: David Newman for Visit Seattle



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BIGGEST IDEAS.



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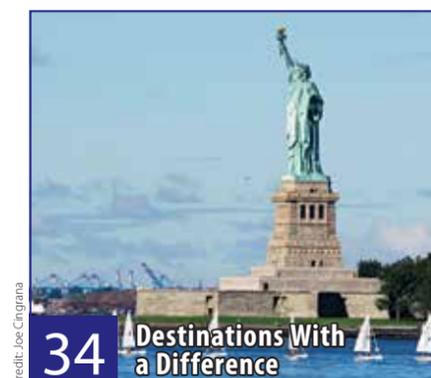
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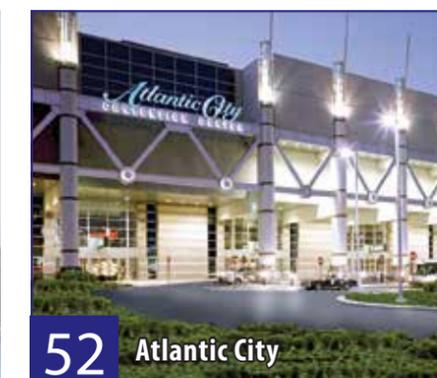
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## Going Places



Many different factors come into play when planning a meeting: At the top of the list is where to have it, while other important factors to consider include accessibility and costs. In "Destinations With a Difference" on Page 34, Resonance Consultancy ranked the 2018 Top 10 America's Best Cities, citing what lures planners to these destinations. "Dating back 30 years ago to myself as a younger event planner, I envisioned staging events with great venues in an exciting city, one that was easy to reach and featured a plethora of entertainment," says Bob Dorsa, co-founder and president, American Credit Union Mortgage Association. His choice: Las Vegas. Check out the list and see if any of these destinations lends itself to your next event.

One exciting destination currently luring planners is the Pacific Northwest (Page 58). Its beautiful scenery — from lakes to parks to mountains — and lower costs entice attendees to head West. Desiree Everett, CMP, CGMP, director of convention sales for Travel Portland, says her staff "makes it easy for planners to create authentic Portland experiences for their attendees. The Travel Portland team cultivates relationships with the city's top hotels, chefs and other businesses year-round," she says. In Seattle, the city recently broke ground on the new Washington State Convention Center, which will add 440,000 square feet of function space. And, when the Hyatt Regency Seattle opens in December, it will be the largest hotel in the Pacific Northwest with 1,260 guest rooms and 103,000 square feet of function space.

Once the destination is set, planners need staff to help with everything from A to Z. Often, these staffers are volunteers. Turn to Page 46 to find out how "Working With Volunteers" can be beneficial to a successful meeting. "Volunteers supplement our paid staff with their enthusiasm, by sharing the workload and by delivering a greater level of diversity in background and skills," says Rose Caple, visitor services coordinator for the Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau. And it works both ways: Volunteers also have the opportunity to learn valuable skills from the associations and staff they are working with.

Don't miss our 2018 list of Distinctive Achievement Award Winners on Page 20. These outstanding and deserving winners have met or exceeded the high standards that association meeting planners demand today.

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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## MGM RESORTS MEETINGS & CONVENTIONS SPACE

With convention center expansions designed to accommodate client growth and attract new business, collaborative, innovative meeting spaces to inspire the mind and the company's first all-inclusive, incentive group packages, MGM Resorts continues to lead the way in "meeting" expectations for groups of all sizes.

ARIA's major project began in May of 2016. In an effort to enhance its LEED Gold-certified convention center, they will deliver an additional 200,000 square feet of technologically advanced, flexible meeting space across four stories, for a total of over 500,000 square feet. Highlighted by stunning indoor/open-air verandas, dramatic views of The Park and T-Mobile® Arena, and the one-of-a-kind Cypress Executive Lounge with private suites, stocked pantry, conference room and library, the expanded space will put the "wow" in any event.

After breaking ground in June 2017 on an expansion of its award-winning conference center, MGM Grand is ready to top it off on January 30, 2018. The \$130 million project is adding 250,000 square feet for a total of more than 850,000 square feet when complete. Stay Well Meetings, the industry's first-ever wellness meetings experience (which launched at MGM Grand), also is expanding its footprint. Demonstrating the demand for a new way to conduct business, Stay Well Meetings feature amenities and programs that offer the kinds of healthy, productive and creative work environments that many clients are actively seeking. The expansion is scheduled for completion by the end of 2018.

Park MGM has introduced Phase I of its new 77,000-square-foot conference space and welcomed its

first major client during CES, the city's largest annual show. Combining innovative, non-traditional spaces and an outdoor terrace and flexible design, Park MGM will fill an unmet need in Las Vegas for small groups, while also offering the ability to host up to 5,000 attendees in the customizable Park Theater. In Phase II, opening later in 2018, Park MGM will introduce Las Vegas' first Executive Meeting Center (EMC) and Idea Studio — high-touch, high-tech meeting venues designed to maximize productivity for small groups. Additionally, Park MGM will include an installation of Stay Well Rooms and Meetings, the most comprehensive wellness room and meeting experiences.

Finally, set on 120 acres and home to three distinctive resort brands, this destination offers guests nearly anything their hearts desire at tropically indulgent Mandalay Bay. While listening to the waves, groups can relax and enjoy floor-to-ceiling views of Mandalay Bay Beach during their breakfast, lunch, dinner or reception. Available any time of day year-round, planners can book a seated dinner for 80, a reception for 150 or a prime viewing area for a summer concert on the beach within the 2,425-foot elevated and air-conditioned space. For an added wow factor, planners also can book The Beach and the exclusive Villas Soleil, atop the Beachside Ballroom, for a larger soiree.

Learn more about the capacities in each of our venues and contact us to help plan your next event.

**Book your Vegas convention today.**

For more information, please contact Michael Dominguez at [mdominguez@mgmresorts.com](mailto:mdominguez@mgmresorts.com).

## Construction to Begin on Las Vegas Convention Center Expansion

**LAS VEGAS** — The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) Board of Directors took the final step needed to begin construction on the Las Vegas Convention Center District's Phase Two expansion by approving the guaranteed maximum price (GMP) agreement. The approval allows the economic development project to break ground.

"This is an incredibly important and exciting time, not just for the LVCVA but for the entire destination," says Steve Hill, LVCVA chief executive officer. "We've been the No. 1 trade show destination in North America for 24 consecutive years, but we must continue to be innovative and upgrade our offerings if we're going to maintain that top spot."

The LVCCD Phase Two expansion project will feature stunning design, cutting-



edge technology and contemporary meeting and working spaces. It will add 1.4 million square feet to the current convention center facility, including at least 600,000 square feet of new, leaseable exhibit space. Late last year, the

LVCVA's Board of Directors finalized the selection of tvsdesign/Design Las Vegas to provide design services for the expansion. Construction of the Phase Two expansion is slated for completion in 2021.

[www.lvcva.com](http://www.lvcva.com)

## Hosts Global Announces New Leadership in New Orleans

**NEW ORLEANS** —

Hosts Global has appointed Holly Valenti as general manager for Hosts New Orleans, Holly Bethay, DMCP, as vice president of sales and has promoted Terry Epton, CIS, CITE, DMCP, from president of Hosts New Orleans to executive vice president, global brand ambassador. These strategic moves offer growth and new opportunities for Hosts New Orleans, as well as Hosts' global consortium of Destination Management Companies (DMCs).

Epton's new role includes supporting sales and marketing initiatives for Hosts' owned offices and global DMC consortium, as well as creating new partnerships with national and international entities to continue to strengthen Hosts' client experience.

Valenti has most recently served as director of operations for Hosts New Orleans. Her years of local hotel experience, including executive positions in sales, training and revenue management, will be beneficial for both growing the Hosts New Orleans business and fostering hotel partnerships.

Bethay has served as the director of sales and special events for Hosts New Orleans for the past seven years. She's developed numerous award-winning programs and is highly engaged in the New Orleans meetings and events industry. [www.hosts-global.com](http://www.hosts-global.com)



Bethay



Epton



Valenti

## The Palazzo at The Venetian Resort Debuts Reimagined Concepts

**LAS VEGAS** — The Palazzo at The Venetian Resort Las Vegas has unveiled the results of a design evolution, including a remodeled casino floor and renovations to all suites, as well as world-class dining concepts, unique incorporation of earth-friendly touches and unprecedented levels of access and personalized service through Prestige at The Palazzo, the hotel's elevated luxury experience.

"Visitors returning to The Palazzo will find a noticeable difference in the energy level of the resort," says George Markantonis, president and COO of The Venetian, The Palazzo and Sands Expo. "A culmination of nearly two years of work, we have touched nearly every aspect of the guest experience at The Palazzo. Beginning with the casino, which has been reimagined from floor to ceiling, and continuing to the resort's refreshed suites, The Palazzo provides a fresh approach to Las Vegas luxury." [www.palazzo.com](http://www.palazzo.com)

## IAEE Chooses The Indoor Lab to Provide Indoor Foot Traffic Analytics at Annual Meeting & Exhibition

**NEW ORLEANS** — The Indoor Lab, the leading provider of indoor foot traffic analytics solutions for events and trade shows, has been chosen by the International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) to provide privacy compliant behavioral analytics (measuring foot traffic of attendees) during Expo! Expo! IAEE's Annual Meeting & Exhibition to be held in December at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans.

Using proprietary sensor technologies, The Indoor Lab will analyze foot traffic and attendee behavior during Expo! Expo! to provide IAEE staff, exhibitors and attendees with critical insights designed to help them derive

greater value from their strategies and investments. For example, a full suite of measurements for exhibitors, including privacy compliant passive leads, benchmarks and floor comparisons, will help them increase demand through empirical data and better customize future events. In addition, attendees will receive a summary of their activities after the event, including exhibitors and sessions attended, enabling them to provide greater input to team members and leadership regarding their learnings and show value.

"IAEE always looks to increase the value that our Expo! Expo! provides to exhibitors and attendees," says IAEE President & CEO David DuBois, CMP,

CAE, FASAE, CTA.

"We continually partner with technology innovators to provide the latest tools exhibitors and attendees can use to create new experiences. Our exhibitors and attendees will now have access to accurate information that will better quantify their event successes and help them plan for future trade show investments."

Representatives from The Indoor Labs will be available to provide demos and information to the nearly 300 exhibitors throughout the event. [www.iaee.com](http://www.iaee.com)



DuBois

## The Los Angeles Convention Center is the First in the U.S. With a Permanent 5G Network

**LOS ANGELES** — The Los Angeles Convention Center (LACC), owned by the City of Los Angeles and managed by AEG Facilities, is proud to be the first convention center in the United States to permanently install a 5G wireless network. This cutting-edge technology was deployed at the LACC in conjunction with the "GSMA Mobile World Congress Americas, in Partnership with CTIA."



"The establishment of 5G at the Los Angeles Convention Center will serve as a catalyst across all of Los Angeles," says Doane Liu, executive director of the City of Los Angeles Department of Convention and Tourism Development. "This is a significant development that will drive technological advancements in our city."

5G is the fifth generation of wireless internet and voice services, improving on 4G LTE that currently accounts for around three-quarters of total mobile connections in the U.S. (excluding licensed cellular IoT). 5G will move data faster and be more responsive, dramatically increasing wireless speeds and capacity to transform services such as AI, VR and video calling. It will facilitate additional technology uses including improved Internet of Things, autonomous vehicles, smart cities and more.

"The LACC is taking a visionary approach in deploying its new 5G network, providing next-generation capabilities for exhibitors and attendees at Mobile World Congress Americas, and many other events, well into the future," says Reed Peterson, head of Mobile World Congress Americas, GSMA. [www.lacclink.com](http://www.lacclink.com)

## Quad Cities CVB Names Dave Herrell President & CEO

**MOLINE, IL** — The Quad Cities Convention & Visitors Bureau (QCCVB) has named Dave Herrell, of Jacksonville,



HERRELL

Florida, as its new president and CEO. In his role, Herrell will oversee day-to-day operations, strategy and lead staff responsible for tourism marketing, brand development,

group and convention sales, visitor experience, membership and the recruitment and hosting of sporting events to the region.

Herrell comes to the Quad Cities after serving in management positions in Jacksonville, Phoenix and Nashville. He has a background in destination and brand marketing, administration, operations, strategic planning, business development, fundraising, communications and nonprofit management.

[www.visitquadcities.com](http://www.visitquadcities.com)



# 2018 ASAE Annual Meeting & Exposition

More than 6,000 association professionals and industry partners gathered in Chicago for the 2018 ASAE Annual Meeting & Exposition August 18–21. Attendees participated in more than 110 education sessions, experienced five game changers and explored a packed expo hall with 450 companies.

“Throughout the conference, our attendees heard from two fantastic keynotes, engaged in 115 learning labs and networked with industry partners in the expo hall. Participants found new ideas, strategies and solutions they could take back to their organization,” says ASAE President & CEO John H. Graham IV, FASAE, CAE.

Kickstarter co-founder Yancey Strickler was the opening keynote speaker. He gave insights on how he started Kickstarter and ensured it was designed to reflect trust, value and culture of the organization. For the closing keynote, World Champion triathlete Siri Lindley told her inspirational story about how she became a triathlete champion.

ASAE raised \$71,000 for two charities: The Greater Chicago Food Depository and Little Brothers: Friends of the Elderly. The total weight of the food donated to the Greater Chicago Food Depository Food Drive was 6,687 pounds, which translates to 8,693 meals.

AC&F



# Four AV Tips to Attract Attendees and Sponsors and Keep Them Engaged

By Steve Wildemann



## Audio-visual Tools Make Messages Stand Out

To make an association event memorable, attendees need to walk away feeling inspired.

Audio-visual (AV) is an effective tool to create a connection with your attendees and make your association's message stand out. AV technology can drive an entire event in exciting new ways to engage attendees and deliver results for sponsors.

You might think leveraging AV as an engagement tool is expensive, but it doesn't have to cost your association a fortune. There are ways to maximize what you're already paying for, and technology advances have allowed independent audio-visual companies to offer reasonable pricing. Ask your AV partner for their advice on how to deliver your association's message in an engaging and memorable way.

### USE WHAT YOU HAVE IN NEW WAYS

Every meeting room probably has a microphone, speakers and a screen. These elements are already in the room, so why not use them? Use the speakers to elevate your opening by playing upbeat music to excite attendees, grab their attention and engage them from the beginning. This is far more creative and memorable than tapping the microphone and asking if it's on. Music also naturally drives curiosity and attracts people into a session. Make sure you get a license for whatever music you choose.

Embracing social media is a way to attract younger members to an association event. Use the screens you already have in a room to show your association's social media feeds throughout the event. This will encourage attendees to engage with each other virtually. Who doesn't love seeing themselves on the big screen?

To create an exciting event wrap-up, utilize a variety of your digital assets to showcase pictures of attendees at the conference participating in all the great activities. This makes "See you next year!" a more personable and memorable send-off than a wave from the podium.

Using technology can also help save on hard costs and elevate the attendee experience. Developing an event app

can save on the costs of printing materials, as well as shipping. To encourage adoption, offer exclusive content on the app, such as revealing a private networking reception.

### LARGE-FORMAT LED PANELS

Think beyond the traditional projection of a pull-down screen or rear projection and, instead, look to large-format LED panels. The demand for these at events has been steadily increasing for many reasons, including:

- LED screen resolutions have increased, dramatically changing the quality of the presentation in the last five years.
- Panels can be put together to form larger, custom-looking screens for any space. Ultra-wide, curved screens offer a cinematic look helping to create an immersive, cinematic experience for attendees, similar to how a large movie screen captures an audience.
- When using larger panels, don't just think horizontal. Turning them vertical gives a whole new perspective to an image, especially with social media feeds.
- Leverage the larger screens as a platform to showcase your social media feeds, which will reinforce your relevancy and engage members, especially the younger ones, who prefer to connect virtually before they spend time in person.
- LED screens have a much smaller footprint than traditional screens and projectors. Space-hogging rear projection systems can take up a large footprint in a room, whereas an LED panel can be placed against a wall with minimal intrusion. In most cases, this means a meeting planner can gain back one-quarter to one-third of their event space for more attendees. The slim profiles also allow for additional screens to be used within a space, giving all attendees a perfect view of the presentation.
- Costs on this technology have come down so they can compete with traditional projection systems. Set-up costs can be less than traditional systems, especially since venues are capitalizing on exclusive rigging rights that sometimes increase traditional set-up costs. LED panels are so lightweight, they can be supported with ground-based stands instead of needing rigging.

### PROJECTION MAPPING AS EXHIBIT HALL ENGAGEMENT TOOL

Projection mapping is an opportunity to pump new, vibrant life into an exhibit hall, which can add value to sponsors who want to maximize their visibility to potential patrons.

Projection mapping enables light to be mapped and projected onto any surface — leaving the traditional pipe-and-drape exhibit booth in the dust. This tool allows three-dimensional objects of any size and shape to become canvases for images or video. Everyday objects come to life with color and the optical illusion of movement.

New technology is making projection mapping easier and

You can also elevate your sponsorship opportunities with this technology. Sponsors are attracted to ideas that are fresh and different so they stand out and are remembered. By bringing sessions together to a central space, sponsor signage and collateral can be showcased in the main area instead of being relegated to the breakout room, and the silent disco concept with its sponsor support can be showcased during pre-conference marketing.

Using what you already have — your expo hall — in a new, creative way can be a budget saver, as it eliminates the need to rent extra breakout spaces that may only be used once or twice throughout an event.

*Partner with your independent audio-visual provider to collaborate about ways to integrate the latest technology to attract additional sponsors and attendees for an association event.*

faster to execute at events. Instead of taking hours to render an image, computers may take minutes or even seconds to process and have it ready for use, cutting down on time and labor costs.

Sponsors are willing to pay top dollar to be the main attraction on a show floor, and projection mapping is a way to offer that benefit. The human eye is naturally attracted to light and movement, so projection mapping onto something within your exhibit space is an effective way to draw eyes to where you — and your sponsors — want them.

### 'SILENT DISCO' BRINGS THE PARTY TO THE EXPO HALL

Bring your presenters out of hiding from their breakout rooms by applying the idea of "silent disco" to your event. Wireless, multi-channel headphones allow attendees to hear the speaker of their choosing, regardless of their physical location. Breakout sessions once relegated to smaller separate rooms can now be incorporated in the main hall with everyone.

Using headphones allows attendees to focus their attention on the speaker, so they are not distracted by outside noises.

Partner with your independent audio-visual provider to collaborate about ways to integrate the latest technology to attract additional sponsors and attendees for an association event.

### ABOUT RENTAL AND STAGING NETWORK (RSN)

*The Rental and Staging Network (RSN) is a network of top-tier AV production companies throughout North America. Founded in 2007, RSN has members across the United States, Canada and Mexico providing state-of-the-art expertise in corporate meetings, conventions, live concerts and special events. RSN membership is by invitation-only and limited to the most qualified AV production companies. All members are vetted based on stringent criteria for quality equipment, breadth of knowledge in audio, video and lighting production and sound business practices. [www.rentalandstaging.net](http://www.rentalandstaging.net)*

*Steve Wildemann is president of Rental and Staging Network and president and owner of Advanced Staging Productions in Pennsylvania. With more than 30 years of experience in the event technology business, he leads RSN, a top-tier network of AV production companies throughout North America.*

# Promoting and Selling an Exhibition During Changing Times

By Kristofer Herlitz



## Innovative Ideas to Do It With Success

When organizing an exhibition, the logistics and design of an exhibition program and floor plan are essential.

Ask yourself: Why are you organizing this event? Why hold an exhibition?

Ultimately, you want to put attendees and exhibitors in the same room for an open dialogue. There are some basics to a good exhibition program, including:

- well-designed floor plan
  - attentive exhibit management before, during and after the meeting
  - clear and thorough exhibit prospectus sent out well in advance of the meeting
  - dedicated program breaks allowing attendees unopposed hours to visit the exhibits
- However, these days, you need more.

### THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF EXHIBITOR PARTICIPATION AND SPONSORSHIP EXPECTATIONS

Today's exhibitors need more than just an exhibit hall and strong attendance.

In fact, record attendance does not ensure any exhibitor will experience a better meeting than the previous one with lower attendance.

The ROI that exhibitors need to show to upper management to justify the expense of booth and sponsorship support is no longer the quantity of booth visits and leads but the quality.

Today's technology allows for much better tracking of the leads gathered on the exhibit floor — the cost per lead and the number of them that end in sales is extremely quantifiable.

So, three different meetings with respective attendances of 30,000, 3,000 and 300 are not necessarily ranked in that same order of importance. Fifty good, strong leads from the meeting of 300 outweigh 500 weak leads from the meeting of 30,000.

With that in mind, exhibitors and sponsors are looking for more from their support.

Here are some key questions you must consider if you want to increase the real added value offered to exhibitors and sponsors:

**How can they meet the key opinion leaders within your attendees?**

Try opening your exhibit hall a half-hour early and have your council or board members walk through the exhibit hall exclusively.

**What unique sponsorships do you offer (in addition to the traditional logos on the conference bag and lanyards)?**

Try a wellness lounge on the exhibit floor and let your sponsor be associated with this healthy (positive) addition.

**Is your leadership invested?**

Keep the executive leadership informed to what your top supporters/sponsors are asking for; not all marketing ideas may be common ground.

**Digital advertising opportunities are important, but what metrics do you offer?**

Click rates and page impressions are only part of the picture; provide the advertiser with more meaningful data, such as which sessions/speakers were clicked on the most and which times and days were most active.

Change is one thing that is consistent. Here are four things you should put into your project:

### SOMETHING OLD

Key relationships are as old as the industry itself and are still a key component. Are you maintaining yours?

You build relationships over time, but eventually your contacts change. A new generation is moving in, and what excited your previous contact may not speak to your new contact. Find out what they are thinking.

### SOMETHING NEW

The same exhibit floor year in and year out becomes stale. Try something new to draw the attendees in and engage with the exhibitors in a different manner.

Show floor meeting rooms can serve a variety of

purposes for the exhibitors. Whether it is just a quiet place to converse with attendees or space for on-site user groups and small presentations, this unique face-to-face time is what exhibitors are looking for to share their message.

### SOMETHING BORROWED

Educating your exhibitors is worth your time — lend them a hand by sharing what you know.

Hold a quick pow-wow with your primary booth contacts on the show floor on opening day to make sure your key messaging is not being lost along the way. Help them have a better show, and it will reflect on their future participation and level of support.

*A new generation is moving in and what excited your previous contact may not speak to your new contact. Find out what they are thinking.*

### SOMETHING BLUE

Using beacons and bluetooth technology paints a much fuller picture of the booth activity for your exhibitors.

This attendee tracking allows exhibitors to see not just the amount of traffic that came into the exhibit hall, but a heat map of where and when they congregated. Exhibitors are able to determine not only who visited their booth but the length of the visit, who was in the proximity but did not stop in and the demographics of both those groups.

*Kristofer Herlitz is managing director of the AIM Group's New York office. He is HMCC-certified with more than 25 years of experience in meetings and exhibitions management.*



# Don't Disregard SMERF Meetings

## Experts Weigh-in on How to be a Success With This Under-the-Radar Segment

By Keith Loria

It's no secret in the industry that SMERF (social, military, educational, religious and fraternal group) meeting planners are sometimes considered to be the red-headed stepchild of the meeting biz.

Katie Riggs, CMP, vice president, client and conference services for Indianapolis-based Raybourn Group International, has spent the last 10 years working with various types of associations and organizations to plan and execute meetings, conferences and trade shows, and understands the differences between a corporate event and its SMERF counterpart.

"Most of my organizations operate on a lean budget. Every decision is made carefully on what we spend money on," she says. "We always ask how will this benefit the member or

attendee. In the current climate, this can make negotiations a little difficult at times."

Other key trends she has seen lately include the focus on safety/security and transgender/inclusion topics.

As a "recovered" corporate planner, Riggs has worked with pretty much every type of client, but feels in the SMERF segment, it just seems more personal.

"People are there on their own dime or choosing your conference or event with very limited funds from their company provided to them for development," she says. "Therefore, they simply expect more, yet we typically have less resources to work with, so we get creative a lot."

For instance, Raybourn Group International works with a

government group that focuses on disability for its annual conference each year — an event that brings numerous unique challenges, but Riggs considers it some of the most rewarding work she has ever done.

"We were able to streamline processes, increase communications, bring in high-quality education and attract sought-after vendors for the expo," she says. "The general attendee surveys came back very high, and overall, the event ran very smoothly — all while connecting people with unique stories and bringing awareness to a sometimes forgotten segment of our population."

Matthew J. Wales, CMP, vice president, membership, events & special projects for the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), is responsible for contracting, negotiating, site selection and large-scale logistical development for all the meetings and conferences of the organization.

His team oversees one very large annual meeting in February, with approximately 2,300 members from the education community attending, and he also organizes a number of larger regional meetings in the summertime, a legislative

**"There needs to be more diversity and thought on how presentations are handled. There needs to be more opportunity for networking and engagement and activity."**

Matthew J. Wales

Vice President of Membership, Events & Special Projects  
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education  
Washington, DC

conference and a handful of committee board meetings that take place throughout the year.

"As the individualization of events continues, and we move from going from the traditional meetings of old with a speaker in a room and creating more of an experience for attendees, there needs to be more diversity and thought on how presentations are handled," Wales says. "There needs to be more opportunity for networking and engagement and activity."

Joan L. Eisenstodt, meetings and hospitality consultant, facilitator and trainer for Washington, D.C.-based Eisenstodt Associates, LLC, works with numerous groups that fall into the SMERF category.

"One thing I have found that's sad is that hotels and other supplier entities assign the newer people to the SMERF groups because I'm guessing they don't generate the same amount of income or revenue that other groups do," she says. "They are often dealing with volunteers who are planning events, and they don't know how. That is a dangerous combination."

As an example, Eisenstodt helped someone plan a military reunion earlier this year, and she sent a list of questions they should ask the hotel. They were flabbergasted because they didn't know to ask any of them.

"They were able to negotiate a better contract that was fair to them and the hotel," she says. "Because the hotel person was new, they weren't explaining any of the language, and the group would have had a very unfair deal."

Eisenstodt believes education meetings are a bit different than the other SMERF segments, but notes for the most part, people get together for the same reasons, whether a corporate meeting or association meeting — they want to spend time with colleagues, network and solve problems.

### THE MILITARY SET

Ray Casey, president of Military Reunion Planners, Grapevine, Texas, has been planning armed forces reunions for more than 30 years.

A big trend in military reunions is a rise in Vietnam groups, but with that population declining, Casey says there will be a gap between that and the Gulf War groups, so reunions will possibly see a slowdown for a while.



Walking Dead reunion attendees pose at the U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial in Arlington, Virginia, in January.

Credit: Dey/Armed Forces Reunions, Inc.

Marriott Chicago Downtown/Magnificent Mile in Chicago, is responsible for securing all the SMERF business at the hotel, facilitating everything from government to spiritual leadership to fraternity formals.

“The trend that sticks out to me the most is that no one has a set budget, but they’re still trying to be as cost-conscious as possible,” she says. “Value is of huge importance because a lot of these organizations either don’t or can’t spend a lot of money, but once you show them the value of coming to your space, they realize they’ve made a good investment.”

The major difference between corporate and SMERF meetings comes down to money. Most planners admit that corporate events usually have more money to work with, whereas, sometimes SMERF meetings need to get a little more creative.

“At our property, we treat every meeting with care and consideration, so it’s no difference to us whether it’s SMERF or otherwise,” Donahue says. “We’re seeing these meetings evolve in that they are happening more frequently. That’s why it’s important to keep an open mind and be willing to work with your clients.”

### RUNNING A GREAT MEETING

In order to be successful with any segment of a SMERF meeting, Wales notes one has to be flexible and willing to acknowledge and admit that no event is going to be perfect, and that’s OK.

“As long as you’re putting your best foot forward, it will be successful,” he says. “We also try to be mindful of taking a deeper look at our events and go into strategic planning mode every five years to gauge where we could optimize improvement and develop a new three- to five-year plan to target the goals and develop tactics to get us where we need to be.”

Donahue says a secret for a proper meeting is to know upfront what the client is looking to achieve and digging in for as many details as possible.

“The government and association groups almost always know what they need and how they need it, whereas the religious and fraternal groups sometimes have zero idea of what it will take to have a successful event,” she says. “Use your experience to listen and execute the client’s needs to a T, but also be ready to take the wheel and drive if they need a little help.”

“A big trend is these social media groups where guys are getting together on these big Facebook groups, and eventually, someone will suggest getting together in person. That’s brought more people to these sort of events,” he says.

These reunions are also trending on the shorter side, with most typically two to three nights now, instead of the traditional four or more. There’s also been more individuals attending, rather than wives and kids tagging along.

“The younger, newer groups also don’t do as many offsite events and tours,” Casey says.

As co-owner and founder of Armed Forces Reunions, Inc., Norfolk, Virginia, Ted Dey has been organizing military events and reunions for 30 years.

“We’re seeing veterans from Operation Iraqi Freedom in Afghanistan and the war on freedom begin to form reunion groups and associations,” he says. “The key to success is to know what hotels are reunion-friendly. We can handle everything once there, but the hotel partners are a big part of the process. If you don’t book it right, it won’t be a successful event.”

Dey adds that things are a lot easier to plan today because so much is done online, and that has made planning everything more convenient.

### MONEY MATTERS

Due to some financial issues, many SMERF planners cannot have everything they would like for their meeting, which is why it takes a savvy and experienced planner to still create a memorable meeting that will provide the client with everything they are looking for.

The budget is definitely something that needs to be considered carefully for any education meeting, Wales shares. It all starts with finding new and creative ways to match the budget you are given.

Caitlin Donahue, senior sales manager for Courtyard by

### TECH TIME

A big trend that Karen Shackman, president of Shackman Associates New York, has seen penetrate the SMERF market is networking apps that are used before, during and after an event.

“Apps can now let you know that an attendee you were hoping to find for networking is down the street at a Starbucks,” she says. “Apps like Topi help attendees find people before the event. They also are great for networking after-hours, especially in cities like New York. If an attendee decides to go out for a walk or a drink in the evening, geofencing on these apps can provide locations on where other attendees might be having cocktails, as well.”

Shackman also believes SMERF hosts should consider private technology that increases presentations’ ROI.

“Meeting planners running an event for expansive, and often, diverse organizations, are looking for constructive feedback on organization business and should consider private technology that includes sophisticated tools to help moderators stay on pace and enhance feedback like attendee polling,” she says. “This also helps reduce noise from too many tweets and texts.”

That’s where activation stations should come in. She notes

“Value is of huge importance because a lot of these organizations either don’t or can’t spend a lot of money, but once you show them the value of coming to your space, they realize they’ve made a good investment.”



Caitlin Donahue  
Senior Sales Manager  
Courtyard by Marriott Chicago  
Downtown/Magnificent Mile  
Chicago, IL

that while millennials are highly social, and highly engaged, they are tech-dependent and expect amenities that make this a seamless process. However, they also love connecting face-to-face with others around common interests, products and causes. They want to learn from older generations, as well, which is a great formula for SMERF meetings.

“The key to balancing these two needs is activation stations and can include sponsored charging stations like Bubbles,” she says. “Others feature teambuilding games where the generations can interact and learn from each other. One of my favorite after-hours ideas that features ‘activation’ is the silent disco,

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**“The key to success is to know what hotels are reunion-friendly. We can handle everything once there, but the hotel partners are a big part of the process. If you don’t book it right, it won’t be a successful event.”**

where attendees can pick music they love, put on individual headphones and dance together. We have used activation stations at multiple events.”

### CHALLENGES AROUND

Just like any corporate meeting, those involved with SMERF meetings are faced with a litany of problems associated with the subject they deal with.

The AACTE’s upcoming 2019 annual meeting is scheduled for Louisville, in the Kentucky International Convention Center. However, since it was booked in 2015, the state was put on the travel ban list by the state of California. That means those member institutions represented from there need to find creative

## Consider the Venue

From 2009-2011, there were greater opportunities for SMERF meeting planners to find an ideal venue, but a rise in corporate meetings and conferences since the economic downturn has made it more difficult.

“The space is much more competitive now,” Wales says.

Shackman notes SMERF meetings are amazing opportunities for people to connect and make new friends, but the venue chosen is important in creating the perfect atmosphere.

“It helps to pick a destination that can accommodate either a major room block in a large legacy hotel, or an ability to intermingle attendees at multiple boutiques that can also host themed events throughout the meeting,” she says. “We recommend using either large hotels or multiple boutiques where attendees are intermingled.”

Casey says it’s getting harder to find venues for military reunions that will allow attendees to do the kinds of things they want to do.

“They largely enjoy hanging around the hotel, so we need to find a hospitality space that will accommodate more than just a typical suite will,” he says. “The magic bullet is to find a hotel willing to give us enough space to hold everyone at one time. And because they don’t have the budget a corporation does, they like to bring in their own beverages and snacks, and that’s getting harder to find, as well.” — KL

funding to attend, as they can’t get reimbursement from their institutions to attend due to the ban.

“That’s one of the challenges of having to plan so far in advance, which is something we have to do, whereby corporate meetings have a luxury of being able to plan much closer to a date,” Wales says.

One example Donahue cites is a college fraternal formal, where she made sure there was a security guard in the contract because she knew that would be an important feature, but things still didn’t go perfectly.

“I also knew that after a formal, those kids don’t just go home, they go upstairs into our hotel rooms and could potentially wreak havoc on the rest of our guests,” she says. “Together with my team, we built a ‘No Party Policy’ form that the group was held accountable to. Did it work? Sort of, but not really. Let’s just say that a ‘form’ doesn’t stop a group of angry college kids from trying to lift up and flip your front desk because their rooms aren’t ready. But, with the knowledge we gained from the experience, we’re better prepared for the next time.”

“The challenge these days is that the hotels are all so busy, and this business is not as attractive to them as it used to be,” Casey says. “We’ve been known to pull a rabbit out of the hat to get our guys great deals, but the hotels are now backing off on some of the goodies we used to get included, like breakfast or free ice.”

That makes it hard for many of the vets who are on fixed incomes, but look forward to getting together with their brothers in arms once a year.

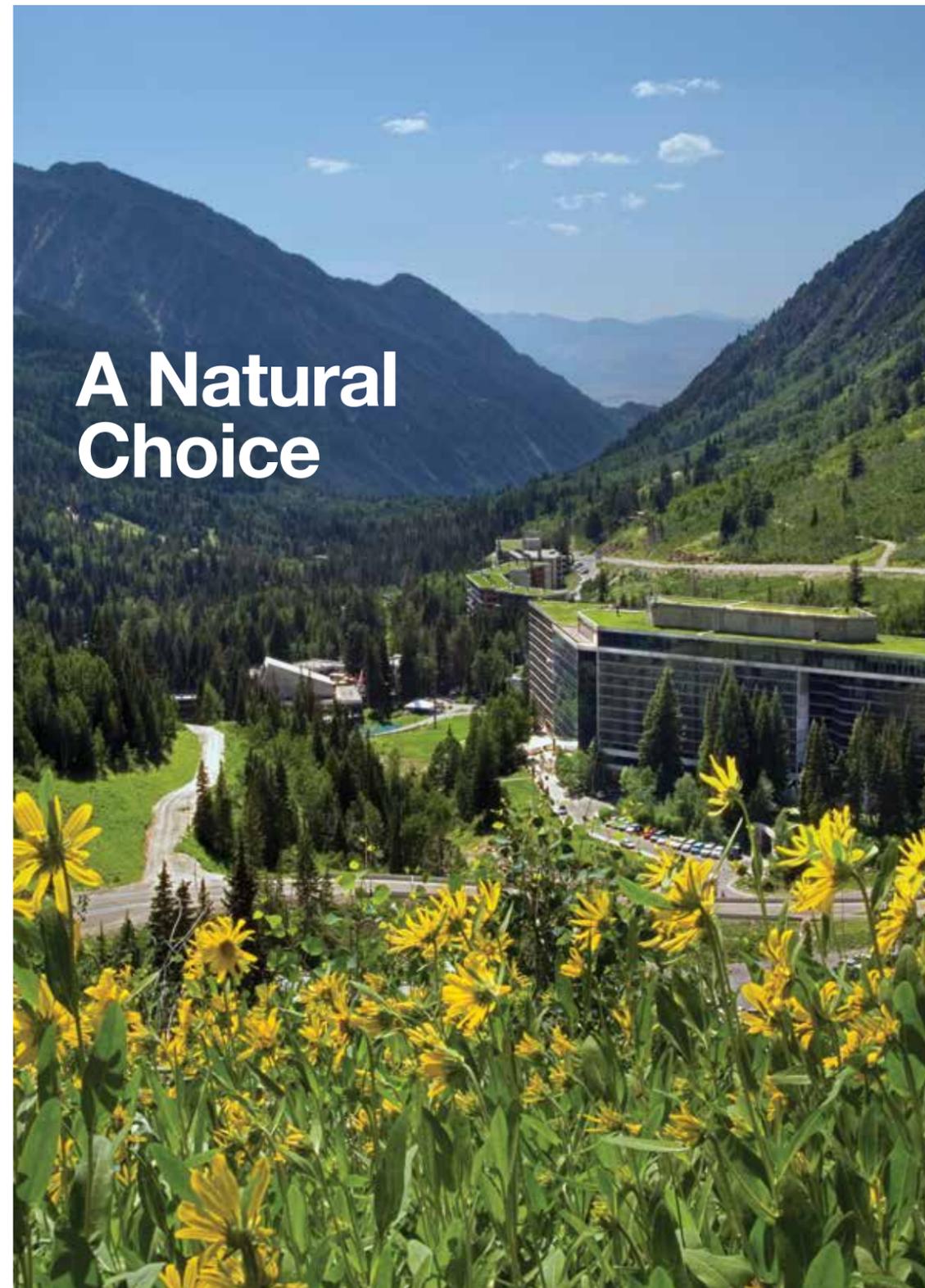
Dey notes the recent trend of hotels putting a cap on commissions is bad for his military groups and all SMERF events, because they are rate-sensitive, and it’s a challenge to find hotels that will offer an affordable rate.

“In most cases, a big challenge today is finding a hotel that will allow a hospitality room,” he says. “A reunion isn’t just 300 people in a hotel and they hang out in the lobby. They want to go to a central gathering room available to them 24/7. If a hotel is willing to give up a function room for them, it’s great, but you can’t go to every city in the country and find that — especially if they want to bring their own food and alcohol in.”

For all SMERF segments besides education, Eisenstadt says the biggest issue people face is the fact that volunteers are usually put in charge.

“That’s a hazard, and that’s what I’ve seen happen when people don’t understand what a contract really means and the implications of the language, they might sign something they shouldn’t,” she says. “Then, with something like the military reunions, often you have older people working with the younger salespeople, and they might not want to question anything because they don’t want to look like they don’t know what they are doing. As an industry, we need to do better to help and elevate what we do.”

AC&F



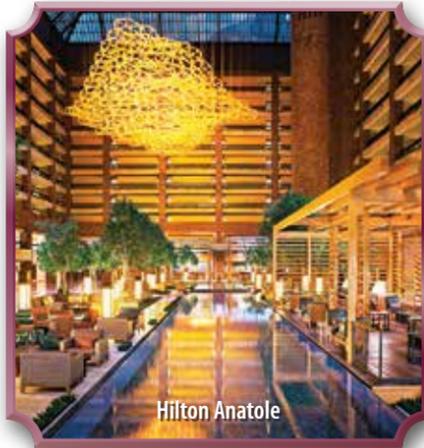
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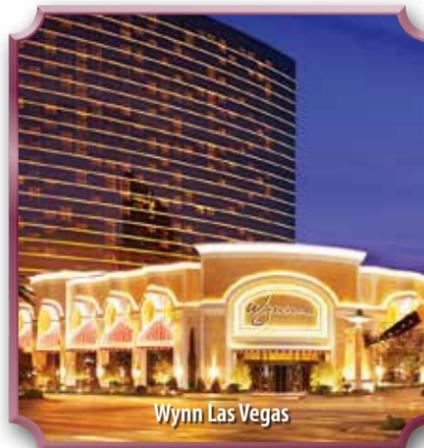
You will find profiles of several of the best of the best on the following pages.



New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center



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The space will feature a terrace where attendees can step out, mingle and soak up the city's signature sunshine and ocean breeze. The new Miami Beach Convention Center is also environmentally friendly and LEED Silver-certified.

### WHAT'S NEW

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- **Frost Science Museum**

The Phillip and Patricia Frost Museum of Science opened its doors to the public in May 2017, at its new home in downtown Miami's Museum Park. The 250,000-square-foot facility combines a planetarium, aquarium and science museum on one campus.

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### FACTS & FEATURES

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Anatole with the most amazing views of the Dallas skyline.

In the summer of 2016, the hotel unveiled JadeWaters, a \$20 million world-class resort pool facility, comprised of a leisure pool, family pool, lazy river, luxury cabanas and two 180-foot waterslides. JadeWaters offers a relaxed upscale atmosphere complete with art sculptures, and the sophisticated design also includes two event lawns, each with the ability to hold 400 people, complementing the hotel's existing park spaces for events up to 3,000 people.

### TECHNOLOGY

The Hilton Anatole delivers a wide array of technologies and services, with some of the most powerful internet capabilities in its meeting space (300 Mbps burstable to 1 Gbps, accommodating up to 15,000 devices) and the benefit of full-service, in-house audiovisual support from PSAV and a FedEx Office Business Center to ensure any needs are met seven days a week. Branding opportunities for groups and their vendor partners are immense throughout the hotel.

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# New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center

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Plans for the exciting transformation of Convention Center Boulevard in New Orleans, which will connect the bustling Warehouse/Arts District with the historic French Quarter and

dramatically transform the guest experience at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, are becoming a reality.

A new \$65 million linear park will update the urban environment with a tree-lined pedestrian plaza, bike lanes, covered porches, outdoor event spaces, water features, green walls, water walls, public art and shaded sitting areas for visitors.

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More than 1,400 restaurants in the city mean you never have to travel far for a good meal. With Centerplate, MCCNO's culinary partner, you don't even have to leave the show floor. Centerplate is committed to providing the essence of the New Orleans food experience through three onsite restaurants featuring live local music and menus of iconic Louisiana dishes by award-winning chef Donald Link.

After business ends, the Center is just a stone's throw from the newly renovated Outlet Collection at the Riverwalk, the historic Warehouse District, French Quarter and the National World War II Museum.

As a consistent Top 10 host of the largest number of conventions and trade shows annually, New Orleans' Ernest N. Morial Convention Center is an expert in hosting groups of all sizes and industries. The Crescent City, The Big Easy, a sportsman's paradise — whatever you call New Orleans, call it your next meeting destination.

AC&F



### FACTS & FEATURES

Guest Rooms: 40,000  
Hotels/Resorts: 283

### CONVENTION CENTER FYI

The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center features 1.1 million square feet of prime contiguous exhibit space, including a 60,300-square-foot divisible, column-free ballroom with 25,400 square feet multi-use pre-function space, rooftop terrace and hotel-like appointments.



Plans for a \$65 million transformation of Convention Center Boulevard, connecting the bustling Warehouse/Arts District with the historic French Quarter and dramatically transforming the guest experience at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, are becoming a reality.



NEW ORLEANS & COMPANY

## DESIGN ELEMENTS

- + Tree-lined pedestrian plaza
- + Covered porches
- + Outdoor event spaces
- + Water features
- + Transportation Center to move attendees more efficiently to and from the Convention Center
- + Improvements to roads and intersections on shuttle routes within the Warehouse District
- + Green walls
- + Shaded gathering areas
- + Public art



For more information, please visit [mccno.com](http://mccno.com), or call 504-582-3000. Like us on Facebook at [facebook.com/MCCNODevProject](https://www.facebook.com/MCCNODevProject) and follow us on Twitter at [@MCCNODevProject](https://twitter.com/MCCNODevProject).



## South Point Hotel and Spa

9777 Las Vegas Blvd S., Las Vegas, NV 89183

702-797-8050 • Contact: Maureen Robinson, Director of Sales • [robinsonm@southpointcasino.com](mailto:robinsonm@southpointcasino.com)  
[www.southpointmeetings.com](http://www.southpointmeetings.com)

### WHAT'S NEW AT THE SOUTH POINT

South Point Hotel and Spa unveiled a \$40 million remodel plan to its guest rooms throughout the property's three towers, which includes 2,049 rooms and 84 suites featuring new furniture, luxury flooring, crown molding, mini refrigerators and bathroom upgrades. The remodel began in February and will be completed by September 2019. Some other improvements include:

- ◆ Tile flooring and new furniture in the renovated hotel lobby.
- ◆ New carpeting and new furniture in the Convention Conference Center.
- ◆ A quicker walk to the South Point Exhibit Hall with a new

moving walkway.  
◆ Costa del Sur Spa and Salon received more than \$500,000 upgrades.

### PERFECT FOR A CONFERENCE OR TRADE SHOW

The South Point's 75,000-square-foot conference center is equipped to handle everything from a 20-person board meeting to a 2,500-person general session.

The grand ballroom has 21,600 square feet of column-free, divisible space, as well as a permanent stage.

For breakouts, 22 meeting rooms come in various sizes, offering flexibility for any size meeting needed.

A permanent registration desk has two

offices, making the registration process seamless and simple.

For trade shows and exhibitions, South Point's 80,000-square-foot exhibit hall is column-free, carpeted and capable of breaking down into four separate exhibit halls.

The exhibit hall comes with its own registration desk, along with four breakout meeting rooms.

The six Bay rooms are conveniently located near the guest elevators and accommodate its small groups in a quiet atmosphere.

### AFTER THE MEETINGS

The South Point is the perfect location to please even the most demanding diners.

This four-star property is equipped with 11 dining areas, including the DiRoNA and Zagat award-winning Michael's Gourmet Room.

There is also enough entertainment on location to keep guests on property. The South Point offers a tropical pool complex, world-class spa, 64-lane bowling center, 16-screen movie theatre, 600-seat Bingo room and 400-seat showroom.

### EASY AND CONVENIENT

Whether flying in or driving in, groups will find transportation logistics at South Point Las Vegas a cinch.

All 5,000 parking spaces are free to guests, along with the hotel's shuttle to and from McCarran International Airport (LAS).

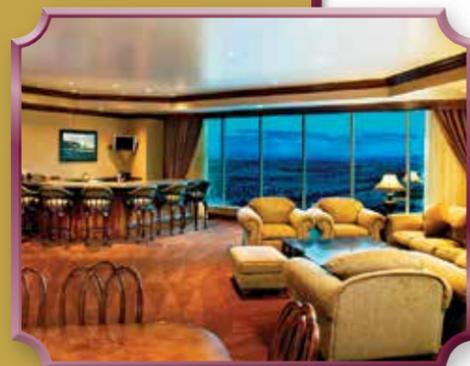
Visit [southpointmeetings.com](http://southpointmeetings.com) or contact the South Point Sales Department at 702-797-8050.

AC&F

# In Vegas, Don't Be a Small Fish in a Big Pond...

## We're Your Perfect Fit!

- 75,000 sq. ft. Conference Center with Ballroom and 22 Breakout Rooms
- 80,000 sq. ft. Column Free, Carpeted Exhibit Hall
- 2,100 Rooms and Suites
- 11 Restaurants on Property
- Movie Theaters
- 64-Lane Bowling Center
- And So Much More!



### FACTS & FEATURES

Guest Rooms: 2,049  
Conference Center:  
75,000 square feet

### SPECIAL SERVICES & AMENITIES

Whether flying in or driving in, groups will find transportation logistics at South Point Las Vegas a cinch. All 5,000 parking spaces are free to guests, along with the hotel's shuttle to and from McCarran International Airport (LAS). We are still one of the few hotels in Las Vegas offering complimentary parking.



South Point Hotel Unveils \$40 Million Dollar Guest Room Renovation to be Completed in the Third Quarter of 2019.

# SOUTH POINT

Hotel & Casino ♦ Las Vegas

To experience all the amenities South Point has to offer, book your next convention now by calling our Group Sales Department at 702-797-8050 or [robinsonm@southpointcasino.com](mailto:robinsonm@southpointcasino.com)

Visit our site [SouthPointMeetings.com](http://SouthPointMeetings.com)

# Teach Them Well



## Keep Your Attendees Focused With Innovative Education and Certification

By John Buchanan

**N**othing is more central to the continued success of associations today than the value of the educational content presented at their conferences and meetings. Unfortunately, however, too many associations still do things like they have for decades. And their failure to adapt to breakthroughs in brain science and learning has meant that non-association entities such as for-profit continuing education providers have stepped into the breach and gained market share.

In order to survive and prosper, experts say, associations must recognize their failures and deliver innovation that has practical, tangible value for members.

"The general way that education has been provided by associations has been pretty static for decades," says Tracy Petrillo, EdD, CAE, chief learning officer at the Phoenix-based Construction Specifications Institute, whose members include construction specifiers, architects and engineers. "It has been based on a traditional conference model."

Unfortunately, that time-honored model has been undermined and rendered outmoded in the internet age — and at a time when breakthroughs in brain science are redefining what education means and what it requires. Most associations have been caught flat-footed when it comes to successful adaptation to a changing world.

"The reason why so many associations struggle is that they say, 'We have to have a training for this and for that,' and 'We have to deliver something in every area that our members say they want,'" says Molly Marsh, CMP, director of education and engagement design at Lexington, Kentucky-based association management company AMR Management Services. "Or they say, 'If we focus on one subset of our membership, then the rest of our members are going to feel left out, so we have to offer something for everybody. What they fail to understand is that the need for broad, general education is becoming a thing of the past.'"

The kind of outdated mindset that strives to preserve it, Marsh says, is a formula for failure in today's educational marketplace, because it stretches resources too thin and ignores precise niche opportunities.

The good news, Marsh says, is that associations are starting to realize they must change course. "But making that realization actionable is another kind of challenge."

One of the biggest challenges her clients face now is "that they realize they have a 'general' audience, and they are having a hard time attracting new members or new attendees at their conferences because they do not offer the very specific kinds of educational resources and certifications that people are looking for. And at the same time, there are more and more private companies that are offering those kinds of very individualized resources. The number of for-profit companies that provide very targeted and highly specific educational resources has greatly expanded in the last few years."

### COMPETITION — THE GREAT MOTIVATOR

Unlike most associations, which operate based largely on how they have always done things, the growing universe of private education-for-profit competitors are, by definition, more focused on and attuned to innovation rather than habit.

"Because of that, the big trend I see now is that everything is very customized," Marsh says. "People seeking continuing education expect whatever they find available to be very customized to their needs and interests. What that means for associations is that if you don't offer exactly what your members are looking for, the exact continuing education credits someone needs to maintain their license or their accreditation in their industry, then they're going to go somewhere else to find it."

As a result, says Kismet Saglam, vice president of education services at Kellen Company, a major association management company based in Chicago, competition from non-association entities has accelerated within the association marketplace. Given that challenge, she says that associations must recognize and act on the need to improve their educational offerings in order to remain viable.

"In terms of the actual competition and the form it can take," Saglam says, "what I've seen with some clients, when their own educational activities really started to take off and grow, outside entities that started doing things like poaching our speakers and paying them more than we were and giving them longer-term deals and profit-sharing agreements."

However, she says, in one of the cases she observed up close, the association under competitive assault managed to survive and prosper by exercising their advantage as a non-profit organization. By analyzing the average cost per continuing education credit in their industry and then lowering their prices, they were able to undermine the profit motive of the competitor.

Even more important, Saglam says, is the elemental point that if an association truly delivers genuine thought leadership for its industry and embodies that in its educational programs, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for any outside entity to compete successfully.

Nevertheless, Marsh says, she expects the competition from non-association entities to continue to increase and intensify, which means that in order to remain competitive, associations must up their games considerably.

"More and more private companies will realize that these needs exist, and in many cases, are not being met," Marsh says. "So, that means there is an opportunity to make money, and they will take advantage of that opportunity. And, associations are often not as nimble as for-profit companies when it comes to identifying and taking advantage of opportunities."

The key factor that too frequently limits the ability of associations to recognize and exploit timely opportunities, Marsh says, is that associations tend to be more collaborative and slower-moving than private enterprises. "When associations consider these things, there are just more people at the

table when decisions are being made — and they tend to debate issues like what to offer, why to offer it, who to target and so on. And, when you do those things by committee, they are by definition, more challenging. That means private companies can move more quickly and be more successful.”

Saglam agrees with Marsh’s assessment. The appropriate response to that internal challenge, she says, is to focus discussions on specific learning objectives and decisions based on “a comprehensive needs assessment.” In addition, she says, “you have to look at cycling out old content and developing more specific content that is related to your industry going forward. The most important thing is to focus on providing education that people cannot get elsewhere. That is what creates real value.”

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

For associations that want to compete and thrive in the current and future educational arenas, the most important key is a laser-like focus, Marsh says. “The associations that are responding most successfully to the challenges they’re facing are the ones that do not try to be ‘everything to everyone.’ They set very clear strategic priorities, and they focus their attention and energy on those priorities. They’re not distracted by the latest shiny thing that pops up in front of them. They say, ‘This is our niche, this is what our members



Molly Marsh, CMP  
Director of Education and  
Engagement Design  
AMR Management Services  
Lexington, KY

**“You have to look at cycling out old content and developing more specific content that is related to your industry going forward. And the most important thing is to focus on providing education that people cannot get elsewhere.”**

say they need and want, and this is how we’re going to give that to them.’ They use hard data to make those decisions, and they focus on what is going to be most beneficial for their members.”

In order to help clients accomplish that, Marsh preaches that they focus on what she calls concept and strategy. “That means taking everything about your education programs and making that part of your larger organizational strategy. That is especially important to associations whose conferences are taken for granted. Your conferences usually should

be treated totally differently from other educational opportunities. Nothing should be taken for granted. Your conferences should be focused on the current and future needs of your attendees and how you can meet those needs. Making those kinds of decisions properly requires a lot of work, and that work needs to be driven by actual data. Then, you have to get all the right players in the organization on board to move forward.

“The other thing I talk about,” Marsh says, “is that innovative strategies for how you educate people are becoming more and more important. How you engage people is the most important consideration. The experience that people have as part of the educational program is very important. A focus on that experience is going to continue to become more and more important, as well.”

It all falls under the hot-topic banner of so-called “experiential meetings,” she says, citing examples such as shorter, more precisely focused TED-style talks and highly interactive sessions, as opposed to the traditional long general sessions and “talk at attendees rather than with them” one-way presentations.

### THE INNOVATION TOOL BOX

In order for associations to truly deliver a fresh kind of impact at their meetings, the ability for people to engage and interact with content is critical, Petrillo says. “That can start with the way the room is set up, with things like flexible furnishings that are very different from the typical furniture at meetings. Another trend is to minimize the requirements for audio-visual or Power Point presentations. The biggest thing I’ve talked about for a few years now is conferences that are what I call ‘speaker-free.’ What that means is you build content around a facilitator rather than a traditional speaker, and that person focuses on getting attendees engaged and interacting. It means stepping away from the idea that there is just one person in the room who is standing up there and making a Power Point presentation.”

Genuine innovation now requires that the speaker or facilitator “moves away from being the ‘leader’ of the session,” Petrillo says. “There should no longer be the traditional call for speakers or presentations. What there should be is the development of different learning objectives and activities that people do together. You have attendees in the room who want to talk about problems, talk about solutions to those problems, and learn together. That is based on real-life examples from people in the room, not from the traditional speaker or expert at the front of the room.”

Instead of a traditional presentation, she says, sessions should be based on a series of issues or challenges, or broad talking points, that are addressed as a group by attendees.

A further refinement of the concept, Petrillo says, is to at some point, have the attendees break down into smaller sub-groups who discuss among themselves an aspect of the broader topic. Those groups reconvene in a broader discussion that brings all the basic perspectives that have been highlighted in smaller groups.

“That’s how real learning happens — by thinking about and sharing experience and expertise,” Petrillo says. “That’s entirely different from having someone talk ‘at’ people and tell them what they should be doing. It’s attendees talking, from different perspectives, of what they actually are doing in their jobs and what the outcomes are.”

Petrillo does not yet see what she describes as a genuine trend. The reason why not, she says, is that traditional conferences and events remain “very focused on what room we’re in and what time we move around our educational sessions. As we move to competency-based education, we have to let the learners spend as much time learning as they need. And that means more flexible and open-ended scheduling. For example, you could have human resources people in a room for two hours talking about the employee performance review process. You find that half the people in the room want to continue that discussion [as opposed to going off to another session] and get into even more difficult issues as they perceive them. That means you have to be open to that kind of flexible scheduling and be able to accommodate those follow-up sessions. You have to be able to say to people, ‘You can stay right here for as long as you need, and really take a deep dive into your topic.’”

Petrillo practiced that approach for more than five years in previous jobs before she joined CSI.

She also knows of other planners and organizations that are implementing it successfully. Among them is the California Society of Association Executives.

In the future, she says, more and more associations will follow and adopt the early examples as a matter of necessity — and survival. As a result, the longstanding “Chinese menu” of scheduled breakout sessions with strict time limits will become a thing of the past.

One challenge: Introverted attendees can be uncomfortable with the “open forum” setting and perceived pressure to participate. “Doing sessions this way requires a different skill set from the traditional model,” Petrillo says. “It takes a facilitator who understands adult learning and personality types and the ways in which you motivate people to participate. It’s completely different from what most meeting planners and attendees are used to. That means facilitators have to be very well-trained. It also means you have to learn to be flexible with the timing and length of

sessions to try to determine what is enough time for people to be fully engaged around a particular topic.”

### DELIVERING “TAKEAWAY”

In order to survive, prosper and grow, Petrillo says, association meeting planners “need to start thinking about education based on clear learning objectives and their application back at work. It’s about planning sessions that have takeaways. You want attendees to walk out of your sessions saying, ‘I see how that applies to me, and how I do my job. And

**“There should no longer be the traditional call for speakers or presentations. What there should be is the development of different learning objectives and activities that people do together.”**



Tracy Petrillo, EdD, CAE  
Chief Learning Officer  
Construction Specifications  
Institute  
Phoenix, AZ

now, I’m going to go back to the office and use this information to actually do something.’ That’s what the focus should be. It’s not about, ‘Let’s just bring a speaker into a room and count it as an hour of continuing education credits. It’s not about the amount of time or who the speaker is. It’s about the content and how that content really makes people better at their jobs and more confident of career advancement.”

An important related best practice, Saglam says, is to “listen to your learners, understand their needs, and even if just incrementally at the beginning, start to address those needs. That’s because all of the experts in the association world have been telling us for the last five years that the association market is changing. Whereas, you used to be able to depend on a certain number of members attending your annual conference each year and renewing their memberships at the conference. There are now so many choices out there for where people get their information and knowledge that you have to realize you have to do a better job. If we want to continue to bring people to our meetings, we have to make sure we’re engaging them in the ways they want and need to be engaged. Then, you have to provide ways for people to share their educational experiences beyond the conference. There has to be a lot more thinking about how to build bridges that go beyond your conference and extend knowledge.”

Every destination is special, every destination is different, but not every destination has the basic component meeting experts might deem the “p” factor. Translation: perfect for planners.

So, in pursuit of this multifaceted quest, we scouted the nation’s top cities to guide planners to the right destination for their repertoire of needs. First stop: Resonance Consultancy’s “2018 Ranking of America’s Best Cities,” a comprehensive analysis of large cities’ key strengths and differentiating characteristics coupled with experiential data from such online channels as TripAdvisor, Yelp and Instagram.

Here are the study’s Top 10 cities, along with their leading lures:

1. **New York** (culture, nightlife)
2. **Chicago** (conventions, nightlife)
3. **Los Angeles** (promotion, diversity)
4. **San Francisco** (household income, educational attainment)
5. **Las Vegas** (attractions, culture)
6. **San Diego** (place, household income)
7. **Houston** (restaurants, Fortune 500 companies)
8. **Miami** (diversity, place)
9. **Seattle** (educational attainment, household income)
10. **Boston** (people, safety)

## NEW YORK: THE BIGGEST APPLE

Described by Resonance as a place “full of hustle and heart, dreamers and doers,” the nation’s largest city serves up everything to everybody, planners are no exception.

Of the greatest appeal to meetings’ decision-makers are the current \$1.5 billion expansion of the Javits Center; a \$16 billion investment in JFK, LaGuardia, Newark Liberty and New York Stewart International airports, in addition to the hotel scene — 117,300 hotel rooms as of May 2018, expected to reach 138,000 by end of 2020 (according to NYC & Company). In the hotel arena are the recently opened Mr. C Seaport, a Lower Manhattan luxury hotel by the Cipriani family, and AC Hotel New York Times Square. Slated for 2020 is the uber-luxurious Aman New York.

Recognizing its draw as an epicenter for nightlife, New York appointed a Nightlife Mayor for this destination whose new-on-the-scene additions include the Alley Cat Amateur Theatre, a restaurant/bar designed to recreate the ambience of a theater’s backstage, and The Woodstock, a ‘60s-themed bar in Manhattan’s Meatpacking District. Sweetening the deal are the city’s 72 restaurants boasting one or more Michelin stars.

Coming onboard are The Shed, a truly unique eight-story building structure unlike

any other arts venue in the city scheduled to open next year. The \$70 million Statue of Liberty Museum will also open next year, and SPYSCAPE, the world’s largest interactive spy museum, opened its doors in February.

Having picked New York for her 2020 and 2021 events, Tracy Orpin, CMP, conferences and meetings manager, International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP), details her selection process. “New York, like many first-tier cities, is typically out of the question due to hotel and food costs, but the city offers a lot, and the ease of traveling there is great. After speaking to Lisa Lopez from NYC & Company on many occasions regarding ‘how’ we can get IAAP to New York, she introduced me to Katrina Stewart at the New York Marriott Marquis Times Square, and we made it happen with affordable room rates and contract options that fit nicely into our budget.”

## CHICAGO’S TONY TOWN

For a city that strikingly sits on the shores of Lake Michigan and recently vaulted onto the culinary map, its biggest surprise is that it’s unexpectedly affordable. Named in 2017 the “Best Big City in the U.S.” by *Conde Nast Traveler* Readers’ Choice Awards and home to such organizations as the American Bar Association and American Medical Association, it is no stranger to the meetings market.

“Chicago is constantly abuzz with new developments,” says Marc Anderson, executive vice president, Choose Chicago. He cites the new Chicago Architecture Center along the river with 10,000 square feet of gallery space and the indoor meeting place of Gallagher Way, a park/plaza just outside Wrigley Field. “Chicago has also had quite a hotel boom in recent years,” continues Anderson, mentioning Hotel Zachary, St. Jane Chicago in downtown’s historic Carbide and Carbon building, Moxy Chicago and Hilton’s first triple-brand hotel near McCormick Place.

Beyond McCormick Place’s 2.6 million square feet of exhibit space and 173 meeting rooms are the city’s award-winning



The Chicago Architecture Center (ground floor, center left), located above the Chicago Riverwalk, has 10,000 square feet of gallery space.

“New York ... is typically out of the question due to hotel and food costs, but the city offers a lot, and the ease of traveling there is great. We made it happen with affordable room rates and contract options that fit nicely into our budget.”



Tracy Orpin, CMP  
Conference and Meetings  
Manager, International  
Association of Administrative  
Professionals  
Kansas City, MO

dining landscape comprised of more than 7,300 restaurants. According to Anderson, “Chicago has delivered James Beard Foundation winners 23 out of 24 years. In fact, after 25 years in New York, the foundation selected Chicago in 2015 as the new host city for its elite awards ceremony for which the Windy City is slated to host the Beard Awards until at least 2021.”

The future home of the National Museum of Gospel Music (2020) and longtime home to the Field Museum (celebrating its 125th anniversary this year), Chicago’s nightlife is equally impressive from Second City and live theater to the Lyric Opera Chicago and the Joffrey Ballet, in addition to 200-plus music venues, such as Andy’s Jazz Club and Rosa’s Blues Lounge.

## LOS ANGELES IS A STAR

If you’re in “the business” in L.A., you’re in entertainment, Hollywood-style. Known for such iconic landmarks as the Hollywood Sign, the Hollywood Walk of Fame and the Walt Disney Concert Hall, what better place to impressively reward attendees than in the city whose role is to entertain the world?

To Ellen Shortill, director, convention and meetings, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), L.A. spelled success for the association’s 2017 annual convention, attracting more than 14,000 attendees over three days.

“For me, the key takeaway was that to meeting planners who are essentially producers (and directors, editors, scriptwriters and more), it was refreshing to be in a destination where production is truly understood. Los Angeles is the entertainment capital of the world, and what meeting producer doesn’t love going to the land of producers, where the entire team understands the need to work together to create the next greatest hit. It made my team feel like stars.”

Created around the theme, “Focus on the Big Picture,” a highlight of this only-in-L.A. event was the President’s Reception, to which record-shaped invitations were sent for an evening on the rooftop of the GRAMMY Museum.

Additional options include the Hollywood Bowl and the Greek Theatre, and activities associated with the region’s sports

# Destinations With a Difference

## Making Meetings Memorable Can Be as Easy as Booking the Venue

By Cynthia Dial

teams — the Los Angeles Dodgers (MLB), Lakers and Clippers (NBA), Kings (NHL), Rams and Chargers (NFL). Along the traditional route (though traditional only by L.A.'s standards), the city has more theaters and museums than any other in the nation, such as the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' six-story Academy Museum, slated to open next year.

As the nation's sixth-largest hotel market with 1,022 hotels offering more than 102,000 hotel rooms, many are new to the scene or newly renovated. Among them are Hotel Figueroa, which reopened last January following a \$30 million renovation transforming its longtime Moroccan décor to a contemporary look (steps from the Los Angeles Convention Center and STAPLES Center); The West Hollywood EDITION, the first West Coast property under Marriott International (Ian Schrage's EDITION lifestyle brand) opening on the Sunset Strip later this year and The Surfrider Malibu, the 2017 redesign of a 1950s-era motel into a modern California beach house.

### SAN FRANCISCO'S HEART

Forever known for its lavish landscape across seven hills, the always-present silhouette of the Golden Gate Bridge and proximity to such prestigious institutions as Stanford and the University of California, Berkeley, fresh enhancements include downtown's towering 1,070-square-foot Salesforce Tower and the \$550 million, 305,000-square-foot expansion of the Moscone Center (scheduled for completion in January). In addition, the San Francisco Travel Association promises meeting planners more than 360 out-of-the-box thinking facilities and venues, nearly one for every day of the year.



Las Vegas' over-the-top attractions, along with the 1.4 million-square-foot expansion of the convention center, ensures its spot with planners.

### LAS VEGAS DOES SLEEP ... A LITTLE

Named the World's Leading Meetings & Conference Destination in 2017 (the fifth consecutive year) by the World Travel Awards and the No. 1 Trade Show Destination by Trade Show News Network for 24 consecutive years, its recovery from the tragedy on the Las Vegas Strip a year ago has been steady and impressive. Expected to continue in visitor appeal, its over-the-top attractions, along with the multiphase renovation and 1.4 million-square-foot expansion of the convention center, ensures its spot with meeting planners. In addition to nearly 150,000 hotel rooms and more than 11 million square feet of meeting space, reinvestment for 2018 through 2020 and beyond is estimated at \$16.9 billion.

One repeated visitor is the Service Industry Association

(SIA), the industry's only C-Level directed association. Explaining SIA and Vegas' history, executive director Claudia J. Betzner says that when she began coordinating the association's events three decades ago, she would alternate east and west destinations. However, after noticing that when SIA was in Las Vegas, the attendance increased 15 to 20 percent, a decision was made in 2000 to only hold the annual summit in Vegas. Having used TAO Nightclub at the Venetian and Chateau Nightclub & Rooftop at Paris Las Vegas, her conclusion is definitive: "Better dining options, great shows, pretty much anything you want is in Las Vegas."

Her advice to planners when picking a hotel is to not just look at price and location but to get referrals for hotels with whom it is easy and pleasant to work. "I have used Paris Las Vegas for my major summit the last three years and just resigned a new contract. I love the people there. It's a pleasure to work with them — from sales to convention services, front desk, reservations and more."

Bob Dorsa, co-founder and president, American Credit Union Mortgage Association (ACUMA), details his evolution to the destination of Vegas. "Dating back 30 years ago to myself as a younger event planner, I envisioned staging events with great venues in an exciting city, one that was easy to reach and featured a plethora of entertainment." His choice: Las Vegas.

"Our association is somewhat unique; everyone is in the same business. This makes networking first and foremost. In past years, we organized groups to see performances such as Elton John, Celine Dion and Bette Midler. We now observe suppliers treating guests to Top Golf and dinner cruises on Lake Meade. And the list goes on and on."

In conclusion, Dorsa urges planners not to procrastinate if specific dates are required. If flexible, however, there may be bargains should a hotel need to fill vacant space when they near capacity.

### SAN DIEGO IS "AMERICA'S FINEST"

San Diego: 263 days of sun, 23 beaches and a convention center ensconced beside an urban waterfront. It's this visual that beckons planners repeatedly. Sweetening the deal are the promise of almost 3,000 rooms under construction and a convention center expansion proposed on November's ballot.

Known for the world-famous San Diego Zoo, the 1,200-acre Balboa Park (North America's largest urban cultural park), farm-to-table dinners and an impressive craft beer scene, additional embellishments are in the works. Under construction is a massive waterfront project: a \$1.3 billion, eight-block, 12-acre Navy Broadway Complex that will house a 17-story headquarters for the U.S. Navy and the Manchester Pacific

"Dating back 30 years ago to myself as a younger event planner, I envisioned staging events with great venues in an exciting city, one that was easy to reach and featured a plethora of entertainment."



Bob Dorsa  
Co-founder and President  
American Credit Union Mortgage  
Association, Las Vegas, NV

Gateway — four office buildings, two hotels, a museum, a retail promenade and an almost two-acre park.

### HOUSTON IS TEXAS' BIGGEST AND BEST

At 655 square miles, the area of Houston could contain the cities of New York, San Francisco, Miami, Seattle, Boston, Minneapolis and Washington. The surprise, however, is that Houston's most delicious appeal is its collection of 10,000 restaurants, many inspired by its rich ethnic diversity — more than 145 different languages are spoken by its residents (a greater number than New York). Home to NASA's Lyndon B. Johnson Space Cen-



The 2018 Craft Brewers Conference drew 15,000 attendees to Nashville, where the vibe of the city fit its demographic well.

ter and the world's largest medical center, it's also the base of the nation's second-largest concentration of Fortune 500 companies.

Of the Texas city's leading teambuilding activities, Judi Quesonova, CMP, CTA, vice president of client services with Visit Houston, gives details. "The all-time favorite team activity involves sports." At Avenida Houston, meeting attendees have access to three Houston sporting venues and four professional sports teams within a few blocks of one another, creating endless possibilities. For the more active are night biking with HTX Nite Bike and the opportunity to channel your inner 'stuntman' instincts at Avenida Houston's Discovery Green, where certified coaches teach participants to run, jump, climb, crawl, balance and vault like stunt professionals.

## Nashville: Music to a Planner's Ears

It may not be one of Resonance's Top 10 cities, but the Nashville triad — Southern hospitality, colorful history and live music (180-plus venues) — deserves attention. When paired with such one-of-a-kind options as the Ryman Auditorium, Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, Historic RCA Studio B, Grand Ole Opry, Andrew Jackson's Hermitage and Belle Meade Plantation, no elaboration is needed.

Nancy Johnson, event director of the Brewers Association, agrees. Responsible for bringing 15,000 for its Industry Conference and Trade Show to Nashville in May, the organization's World Beer Cup

award ceremony was held with live music for the first time ever. Described as "a hit," Johnson rates the Nashville selection: "The vibe of the city fits our group demographics very well."

Adding to the appeal, "Nashville is in the midst of a major hotel boom," says Adrienne Siemers, senior vice president of sales, Nashville Convention & Visitors Cor-

poration. Details include: nine hotels with 1,219 rooms opened last year, 15 hotels with 2,714 rooms are scheduled to open this year and, overall, Nashville has more than 15,000 hotel rooms in all phases of the pipeline. Score card: Nashville's convention sales are 15 percent ahead of pace for 2019 and 11 percent ahead of pace for 2020. — CD



Credit: John Russell

Looking for a unique venue to host a meeting in Nashville? Choose the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum — it'll be music to your ears.



**“With everything within walking distance or a short ride away, it felt like (Seattle) was our venue, even with such a large number of attendees.”**

Tricia Simpson  
Manager, Education-programs  
Logistics, International Trademark  
Association, New York, NY

Late last year, the Houston Downtown Management District unveiled “Plan Downtown,” which is described as “a 20-year plan to redevelop the city’s downtown and improve visitor appeal, business climate, livability and connectivity.”

The future of Houston’s meetings world is positive and is on an upward trajectory. Since 2014, Visit Houston has seen a 40 percent increase, surpassing its 2017 goal by more than 50,000 room nights. Last year, it booked 429 conventions and meetings, representing more than 800,000 room nights for such groups as the American Dental Association (2022) and the National Association of Realtors (2025).

### MIAMI’S VICE

First impression: a turquoise ocean fronted by white-powder beaches and seasoned with a Latin American and Caribbean flair. Add to the mix a continually growing hotel market (including Hyatt Centric Brickell Miami, Mr. C Hotel in Coconut Grove and The Dunns-Josephine Hotel in Historic Overtown), the highly anticipated \$620 million expansion of the Miami Beach Convention Center, MBCC, (enhanced with a \$7.4 million bonus in art, one of the nation’s largest public art commissions) and Port-MIAMI’s new state-of-the-art cruise terminals funded by three of the city’s major lines: Royal Caribbean, Norwegian Cruise Line and MSC Cruises. The result is a planner’s dream.

Known for its multicultural neighborhoods, from Little Ha-



The highly anticipated \$620 million expansion of the Miami Beach Convention Center includes a \$7.4 million bonus in art.

Credit: Miami Beach Convention Center

vana to Coconut Grove Village West to Little Haiti, it’s not surprising that out-of-the-norm teambuilding options are the norm. Here’s only a portion of the rundown from Rolando Aedo, CDME, chief operating officer, Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau. A hands-on graffiti tour of Wynwood allows guests to tour and then paint their own murals. As the nation’s only destination with two national parks, Biscayne National Park and Everglades National Park, only there can a planner offer airboat rides through the Everglades. For wine lovers, there’s a tour of Schnebly Redland’s Winery & Brewery, the country’s southernmost winery, where teams can learn to make vino from tropical fruits.

“The outlook for meetings in Miami is positive,” says Aedo. Mentioning that the destination has secured major citywide conventions even before the MBCC’s promised completion of its expansion/renovation, among this year’s groups are the American Health Information Management Association and the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery.

### SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE

The noted headquarters of Boeing, Microsoft, Amazon, Costco and Starbucks, Seattle is no stranger to business, and by association, it’s a seamless match for meetings.

Tricia Simpson, manager, education-programs logistics, International Trademark Association (INTA), an association of more than 7,200 organizations from 191 countries, agrees: “Seattle has been very successful for us.”

Having recently conducted INTA’s fourth Seattle meeting since 1994, attendance tells the tale: 1994 had 3,475 attendees compared to 2018’s nearly 11,000 participants. Simpson explains INTA’s over-the-years’ interest by reiterating that the Washington State Convention Center is ideally located in the heart of Seattle’s downtown, its waterfront location offers remarkable mountain and cityscape views, the unique restaurant scene showcases farm-to-table opportunities, and there’s the iconic Space Needle and Pike Place Market. “With everything within walking distance or a short ride away, it felt like the entire city was our venue, even with such a large number of attendees,” says Simpson.

Her advice to planners: “Seattle is experiencing terrific growth and is changing quickly. Most planners may be pleasantly surprised.”

### BOSTON IS UNCOMMON

As one of America’s original cities, this Massachusetts capital is defined by a rich history, cobblestone pathways, abundant green space and 75 regional institutions of higher learning (including Harvard, Boston University and MIT). Its innovation, passion and welcoming ways, which attracted Reebok’s headquarters to the city last year, additionally appeal to many planners.

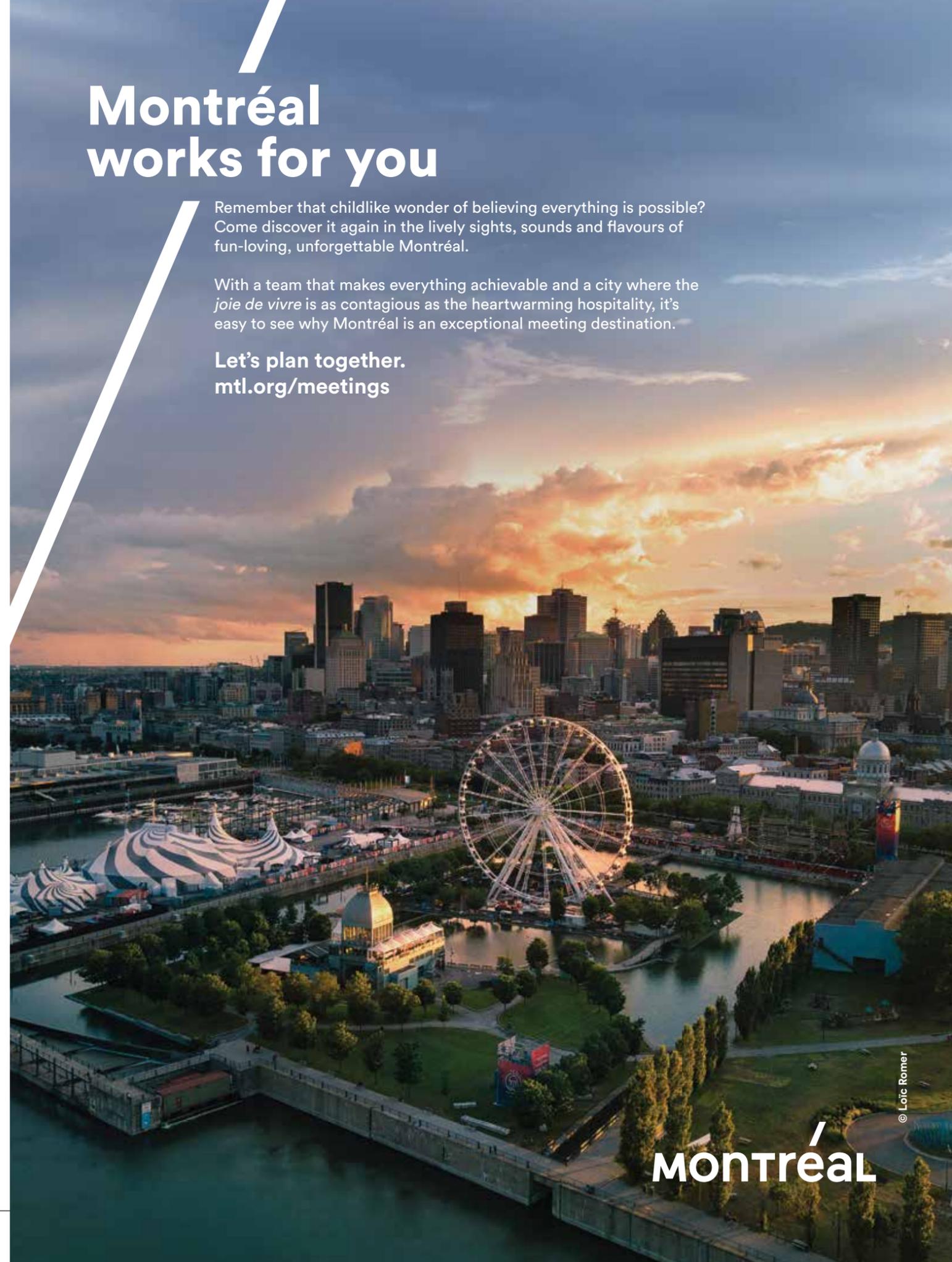
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**MONTRÉAL**



# Attendees Have a Need for Speed

Demand for State-of-the-Art Wi-Fi Technology is Driving the Market

By John Buchanan

In today's association meeting and convention market, most planners are experts at booking a hotel, planning menus and hiring speakers. They're so good at those tasks that they have almost become second nature.

Not so, when it comes to the vitally important deployment of Wi-Fi technology. And while that knowledge gap remains a constant for many planners, especially at smaller associations, the demand from attendees for state-of-the-art Wi-Fi capabilities is driving the market.

“The need for Wi-Fi at association meetings is increasing,” says Larry Covert, senior director of information technology at ASAE in Washington, D.C. “And the increase is due to a shift in terms of how people are using online media at meetings. So, what we’re seeing is a shift to more and more demand for high bandwidth because of things like presentations, as well as general usage. Another example would be the increasing use of video for educational programs, whether that’s just material that supplements a presentation or whether it involves video conferencing at the meeting to bring in people who are not physically at the meeting.”

Lexy Olisko, MBA, CMP, CEM, vice president of expositions at the Fairfax, Virginia-based Specialty Graphic Imaging Association (SGIA), whose annual October SGIA Expo draws 25,000 attendees and ranks as the 77th largest association trade show in the U.S., agrees with Covert that ever-increasing demand for “ubiquitous” Wi-Fi at meetings and conventions is driving the market. “Attendees definitely want to have the capability to stay connected to their businesses or employers while they’re at the show,” she says. “And for that reason, Wi-Fi is more of an attendee issue rather than an exhibitor issue, because in my experience at least, exhibitors who want connectivity in their booths tend to use wired internet so they can get the speeds they need.”

Covert notes that while most of the venues ASAE uses for its meetings can accommodate its increasing needs for Wi-Fi services, that assumption cannot be made by many meeting planners. “A planner has to be able to ask the right questions and plan ahead when it comes to the use of Wi-Fi,” he says. “You need to know what your requirements are going to be, and you also need to know that your venue has the capability to meet those requirements.”

## ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

In terms of assessing an organization’s need for Wi-Fi services at a convention center, conference center or hotel, Covert says that “the key factor from a technical perspective is the number of people you put into a particular venue. That often creates challenges to the amount of bandwidth that is being supplied



Lexy Olisko, MBA, CMP, CEM  
Vice President, Expositions  
Specialty Graphic Imaging  
Association, Fairfax, VA

“Wi-Fi is more of an attendee issue rather than an exhibitor issue, because in my experience at least, exhibitors who want connectivity in their booths tend to use wired internet so they can get the speeds they need.”

“You need to know what your requirements are going to be, and you also need to know that your venue has the capability to meet those requirements.”



Larry Covert  
Senior Director, Information  
Technology, ASAE  
Washington, D.C.

to your facility and each of your attendees. And for the facilities, what they have to do is account for the total amount of bandwidth they need for the entire facility, and then plan how to divide that bandwidth up among the meetings that are in the facility at the same time. So, you end up with a situation where if you have 200 people who all want to watch an HD video at the same time, you have to have a total amount of bandwidth that will accommodate that. But you also have to be able to allocate bandwidth to other uses and attendees, as well, such as just checking email. It’s often a challenge for a venue to bring in enough bandwidth for the entire breadth of all of the activity in its building, and then allocate it based on individual needs of those using the building.”

If a planner has concerns about the capabilities of a venue to support its meeting without the risk of inadequate bandwidth, one option is to negotiate, as part of the facility’s Wi-Fi agreement, the right to bring in additional bandwidth capacity from a third-party vendor, particularly if the facility will be hosting multiple conventions during your dates.

“For example,” Covert says, “you could have a third-party vendor come in and set up Wi-Fi in certain meeting rooms or other parts of the facility and bypass the facility’s Wi-Fi network altogether.”

## PAY TO PLAY?

Another fundamental consideration for planners is whether to trust the facility’s free Wi-Fi service, if it provides that option, or pay for upgraded premium service. The industry trend is that more and more associations are opting to pay for superior service rather than risk the consequences of underperforming free service, says Matt Harvey, vice president of internet services at major event experience provider PSAV in Schiller Park, Illinois.

“For us,” says Olisko, “the decision about whether to use free Wi-Fi or pay for premium service depends on the strength of the signal we can get in the venue, including on the show floor, at no cost. So in recent years, we have used free Wi-Fi, as well as paying for better service.”

An underlying reason for such fluctuation from year to year, venue to venue, she says, is that there is still no generally accepted minimum standard for what level of Wi-Fi service a convention center must provide. That means that depending on an association’s specific needs, in some destinations it will get adequate Wi-Fi at no cost, but in others, it will have to pay for upgraded service to ensure that its needs are met.

“If there were a universal standard, that would certainly make it easier for us as planners,” Olisko says. “But for now, we still have to do our due diligence on whatever facility we’re going into.”

Unfortunately, says Lisa Aukward, an association management consultant in Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, not even paid Wi-Fi service eliminates the risk of disaster.

“One of the challenges I’ve faced in the recent past was in regard to the ability of attendees to download presentations into a PDF format at the meeting via our app,” she says. “The experience was in a second-tier destination convention center, at a conference for 5,100 attendees. And the Wi-Fi service we received was not adequate for a significant number of people to be able to download presentations at the same time. That was the result of a combination of bandwidth and the support services we received.”

Aukward attributes the crash to “the constantly evolving technology and the constantly increasing demand for the service from associations for their meetings and conventions. Apps are becoming smarter, and people are not just using one app at a time. They’re doing multiple things at the same time during the meeting. Demand and usage are increasing exponentially, but the technology is not keeping pace in terms of capacity and capability.”

## RISING COSTS

While there are concerns among many planners about the pace at which the dependability of the technology is evolving and improving — and even some major convention centers lag behind — the cost of Wi-Fi service is rising.

“The cost of premium Wi-Fi has seemed to be going up moderately,” Olisko says. “It hasn’t really been a steep increase, but the cost is going up. And what I find most interesting is that a lot of these facilities are not upgrading their capabilities or putting in new infrastructure, but they are raising their prices. I have pushed back on that sometimes and said, ‘Your price is just crazy, and I’m not going to pay what you’re asking for what you offer. It’s just an insane amount of money for what I’m getting. Sometimes, they say, ‘OK, we’ll work with you.’ Other times they say, ‘That’s the price. Take it or leave it.’”

Pricing tends to vary by facility and region, Aukward says. “But at this point, in general, I’d say that we’re at the mercy of the facilities and the vendors in terms of what Wi-Fi costs. In

other words, the quoted price is just what it is at any given facility, and it’s not something you can cut back on. You have to have it because attendees — and now some presentations — require it. And, attendee demand is growing because of the use of multiple mobile devices.”

From the perspective of most planners, except for those responsible for such major events at the Consumer Electronics Show or National Homebuilders Show, it is difficult to stay on top of costs and to understand clearly “exactly what you’re paying for, and what you’re actually getting,” Aukward says. “And that is not an area of expertise for most meeting planners.”

As a result, she says, there is often a communication gap

“Demand and usage are increasing exponentially, but the technology is not keeping pace in terms of capacity and capability.”



Lisa Aukward  
Association Management  
Consultant, Washington, D.C.  
Metropolitan Area

between the facility and the association, in terms of the organization’s precise needs and expectations. “That happens all the time,” Aukward says, “because the [association] client is not really aware of what their needs are.

“At the same time, the dynamic is further complicated by the fact that most meeting planners simply assume the Wi-Fi at the meeting will meet their needs, and their budget, without incident. We normally learn about inadequate service during the conference when we receive complaints about the Wi-Fi not working properly,” she continues. “Therefore, precise communication between the association and the venue are crucial. And, there is usually a learning curve at most associations.”

## A LACK OF TRANSPARENCY?

Yet another factor that makes informed use of Wi-Fi difficult for many planners is a lack of transparency from venues and Wi-Fi vendors.

“In my experience, there is not really a lot of transparency,” Olisko says. “They just kind of give you the fuzzy answer, ‘Oh, don’t worry, you’ll be fine.’ Or they’ll say we can’t handle a group of your size without upgrading you [to paid service]. And a lot of times, they’re just not open with the technical details of what they can and can’t do, or what I can expect.”

Covert challenges that assertion. “Coming from the information technology side,” he says, “I don’t think the issue is so



**“The decision about whether to use free Wi-Fi or pay for premium service depends on the strength of the signal we can get in the venue.”**

Matt Harvey  
Vice President, Internet Services  
PSAV  
Schiller Park, IL

many people are on their devices, and sometimes multiple devices, all the time,” she says. “I really don’t have an explanation of why that’s true, except for the fact that maybe Wi-Fi has just not yet been on their radar. Or, it’s just a matter of how they prioritize things. But, given the demand associations and their attendees are making for service, I do find that surprising.”

#### ADVICE TO PLANNERS

“The very first thing a planner needs to do is to know their use case, know the habits of the people who are coming to their meeting and what kinds of devices they will be using,” Covert says. “And that includes speakers, exhibitors and their staffs. Job No. 1 is detailed understanding of the Wi-Fi use habits of everyone at your meeting.”

“From that, a planner has to calculate his or her needs based on specific factors. For example, will attendees be doing a lot of video conferencing or online web meetings? Will speakers be using a lot of video to supplement their content? Does your meeting staff need to have connectivity back to your headquarters, and if so, what will they be doing? Will people be accessing large files or presentations? Those are the kinds of factors you need to carefully take into account to be able to accurately assess how much bandwidth you’ll need. And then finally, you get down to your individual attendees, in terms of an average, and what they’ll need.”

Then, he says, the association’s needs must be measured against and compared to the connectivity of capabilities of the venue to make sure the meeting and the facility are a good match.

Surprisingly, Covert believes that less than a quarter of association meeting planners understand that they must be so granular in their planning, and then actually go to such lengths of analysis. “Based on that, what I’d like to see in the future is for planners to have a better idea of the kinds of questions they need to ask, in terms of what they’ll need, and the kinds of answers they need to get back from the facility.”

PSAV’s Harvey concurs with Covert’s analysis. “Planners have to take the time to understand the technology and also know precisely what their needs are.”

Given the complexity of the issue and the risks of an uninformed buying decision, Aukward suggests that planners “should seek assistance from a neutral technology expert, someone who can help you understand the terminology and the nuances of what you need and what you’re buying. As planners, we need to become familiar with the parameters of what is commonly offered at meeting and convention facilities, and how what we need or want differs from the facilities’ standard options. That’s the only way we’ll ever get to the point where planners and facilities can have meaningful conversations and negotiations.”

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much one of transparency as it is an issue with knowledge and expertise. For example, the salespeople at the facilities are told that they can handle a certain capacity for a meeting, but the technical knowledge may not be there to truly be able to understand and provide the level of service that will be required at the meeting. That is just my opinion, but it’s based on conversations I’ve had with people in the industry.”

He also agrees that at smaller associations, meeting planners often lack the technical knowledge and expertise to be able to effectively assess and communicate their Wi-Fi needs.

“There is a general lack of knowledge of what is possible and not possible when it comes to the equipment a facility provides and the connections they bring in,” Covert says. “At ASAE, our meeting staff often brings in our IT staff to help supplement their technical knowledge. But unfortunately, I don’t think associations have that kind of resource to draw on.”

Complicating matters even further is that there is no standard menu of services and pricing. Both technical specifications and costs vary widely from destination to destination, venue to venue, even among competing convention centers in A-list destinations.

Covert believes that a standard menu of services is possible in the future. “But, it’s something of a moving target,” he says. “If that ever existed, it would be something that would have to be re-addressed frequently because of the rate at which the technology is improving and evolving.”

It’s also important. Covert says, to understand that the Wi-Fi itself is not the bottleneck in a lot of cases. “You can always add more equipment to your facility,” he says. “What ends up being the ultimate bottleneck is the internet connectivity that comes into the facility in the first place. And that is the area of innovation that will push the field forward in terms of how much bandwidth you can bring into a facility.”

The good news at the moment, Olisko says, is that more and more convention centers have started to upgrade their Wi-Fi service. “But, I am surprised that there are centers who have not kept up with the needs of association shows like ours, where



# BREAKOUT

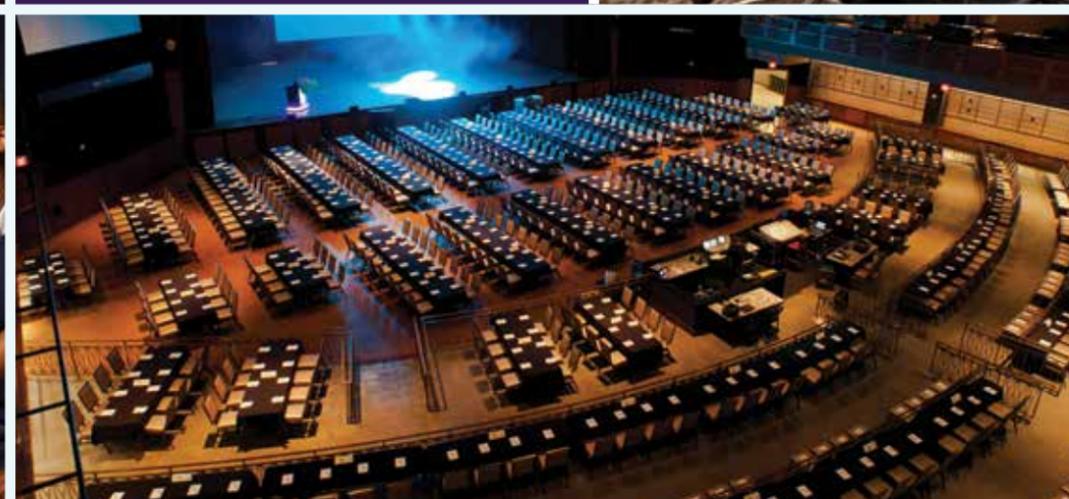
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# Working With Volunteers

## Unpaid Staffers Can Be Beneficial and Achieve Great Results for Planners

By Mark Rowh

Does anybody have enough staff? The answer is seldom positive in the association world, where human resources are often stretched. But the frequent availability of volunteers can be a real asset.

At the same time, working with volunteers is a different ball game than with paid staff. In everything from accountability to reliability, success in working with volunteers requires a careful approach.

"It's imperative to have and work with volunteers," says Rose Caple, visitor services coordinator for the Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau. "Volunteers supplement our paid staff with their enthusiasm, by sharing the workload and by delivering a greater level of diversity in background and skills."

She says that volunteers typically share their time and talents with meeting planners because they truly want to be involved in their chosen organization, which, in turn, translates into excellent service and hospitality.

"Volunteers are actually the very best people to help plan events, as long as you are selecting the right volunteers," says Steve Garguilo, co-founder of Action Surge, a training and



Rose Caple  
Visitor Services Coordinator  
Louisville Convention  
& Visitors Bureau  
Louisville, KY

"Volunteers supplement our paid staff with their enthusiasm, by sharing the workload and by delivering a greater level of diversity in background and skills."

coaching firm in State College, Pennsylvania. He used volunteers extensively over a seven-year period of planning TEDx events around the world. In addition to taking care in choosing the right people, Garguilo advises focusing on clarity.

"The key is having a vision that the volunteers are brought into, and then giving each volunteer a very clear, specific role," he says. "If it's just a general pool of volunteers and it's a free-for-all, it's very difficult to see progress. When each person has a clear plan and accountability, they can achieve remarkable results."

As a senior meeting planner and volunteer coordinator for the ANA Enterprise, which consists of the American Nurses Credentialing Center, the American Nurses Association and the American Nurses Foundation, Kate Battiste is high on the use of volunteers.

"For all of the conferences where we've had volunteers assist, it has been a positive experience," she says. "We do make sure our volunteers are attendees that are part of our hospital network, and therefore are involved and have a stake in the conference."

Volunteers from the local city where a conference is held, particularly those connected with the conference through

their organization, can be an extremely valuable resource, according to Battiste.

"They can answer attendees' questions not only about the conference but also about the area, too," she says.

Battiste recalls that last year, when the ANCC National Magnet Conference was set to be held in Houston in the wake of Hurricane Harvey, volunteers (referred to internally as co-hosts) were instrumental in helping the event take place. When planners were debating whether to go forward with the conference, association executives reached out to the chief nursing officers at the co-host hospitals.

"During the calls with the co-hosts, they overwhelmingly said yes, they wanted us to come and that the city needed us to come," Battiste says. Planners ended up incorporating stories and images from the storm in the conference's general session.

"We didn't lose any volunteers or really have to change anything in the roles that they provided," she notes.

Sometimes, working with volunteers can have long-term benefits.

Kerry Bannigan, co-founder of Nolcha Shows, an event production company for fashion designers in New York, sees volunteerism as a two-way street. Along with benefit to the organization, the work can be a career enhancer for those hoping to gain experience, earn school program credits or foster overall relationship-building.

Bannigan recalls being introduced to a potential volunteer who was hoping to gain work experience.

"After one event, I saw a lot of potential in the candidate as she handled live issues effectively and with great initiative, along with handling everything onsite with ease."

That was five years ago. Today, the volunteer is still on board in a key full-time employee role. To top it off, one part of her job is to recruit and handle event volunteers.

### SOLID COMMUNICATIONS

What's most important in managing volunteers?

"The key is having a vision that the volunteers are brought into, and then giving each volunteer a very clear, specific role."



Steve Garguilo  
Co-founder  
Action Surge  
State College, PA



Effective communication, beginning with training, may be at the top of the list.

"The proper training of volunteers and explaining their assignment is mandatory," says Greg Jenkins, a partner with Bravo Productions in Long Beach, California, who has planned meetings for a variety of associations. "I've found that recruiting at least two staff coordinators who can oversee volunteers works best." He feels that this allows a hands-on approach while the volunteers are working and can free up the meeting planner to deal with more pressing issues.

He also emphasizes the need to keep volunteers informed. "Make sure you provide all the who, what, when, where and why in addressing your volunteers," he says. "That includes everything from dress code and etiquette policy to parking, meals, breaks, where to congregate and who to see upon arrival. Be clear about your expectations for their service."

Battiste advocates keeping volunteers involved throughout the event planning process with conference calls and other communications. By the time the event is held, they know what to expect and what is expected of them.

Ideally this means staying in contact throughout the year before the conference is held. In the process, there should be a convenient means for volunteers to ask questions and for information to be shared.

"They can be your boots on the ground and informants onsite, and can help correct anything that might be going wrong," she says. "So, it's valuable for them to feel they can communicate openly with you."

At the same time, trying to communicate with too many people can lead to problems.

"Keep everyone involved, but having one main point of contact to communicate the details can keep things streamlined," Battiste says. "Also, if you have volunteers from multiple sources, make sure you are not providing more exposure for one group than another."



Lisé Puckorius  
CEO  
OLC Education  
& Conference Center  
Rosemont, IL

**"When you work with volunteers, remember that they are indeed volunteers. They may not be available during the day, so you have to be flexible to meet with them on their time."**

In the process, taking the time to make instructions understandable is a must.

"Be very, very clear in your instructions," says Kim Lee, manager, production for ANA Enterprise and a former volunteer coordinator.

She describes an event where volunteers were asked to help with a huge celebration parade in the general session. This involved organizing and directing hundreds of attendees in groups of five to 100 to go across the stage.

"When the celebration started, we couldn't find them

**"Make sure you provide all the who, what, when, where and why in addressing your volunteers. Be clear about your expectations for their service."**



Greg Jenkins  
Partner  
Bravo Productions  
Long Beach, CA

and had to pull our staff from the audience to manage it," Lee recalls. "We were exasperated, and it turns out so were the volunteers. They were in the back of the hall waiting for instructions. Meanwhile, we were in the front of the hall and couldn't see them."

#### FLEXIBLE MANAGEMENT

Planners who manage volunteers should recognize what they bring to the table, says Noreen Sumpter, a personal life coach who serves as vice president of member engagement for the National Association of Women Business Owners. In this volunteer position, she has gained insights from the viewpoint of the volunteer, as well as the meeting planner.

"Volunteers are not like the volunteers of old," she says. "Today's volunteers bring a world of expertise. It's not like our mothers' form of volunteering in licking stamps, serving tea and so forth."

This means not only recognizing their talents, but also operating with a high degree of flexibility.

"When you work with volunteers, remember that they are indeed volunteers," says Lisé Puckorius, CEO of the OLC Education & Conference Center, a conference and training venue in Rosemont, Illinois. "They may not be available during the day, so you have to be flexible to meet with them on their time, which could be in the evening, early mornings, on a weekend and yes, even holidays."

Puckorius encourages her staff to work as volunteers to understand what some of them go through. Frequently, volunteers are under-appreciated or unrecognized, she says. Walking a mile in their shoes is helpful to identifying ways you can personally recognize and thank volunteers for their time.

It's also wise to lay out clear expectations. "It's not unusual to have a contract of sorts with volunteers," Puckorius says. Having volunteers sign a document that outlines the expectations and the time commitment can be useful to all concerned.

Adjusting communications to fit different roles and expectations is also imperative, she notes. This includes meetings.

"As part of setting expectations at the onset, communicate any meetings that require face-to-face attendance vs. those that can be participated in either virtually or by phone," Puckorius says. "You may find there are more efficient ways to communicate with your volunteers using technology — so think out of the box."

If at all possible, align volunteers' passions with their projects, Puckorius advises. "They'll be more excited about contributing to areas they're interested in or have experience with — and they may even come up with new ideas to make your meeting better."

Defining volunteer roles during preliminary planning is another helpful strategy.

"Create your volunteer schedule before recruiting so you



Meagan Tromburg  
Program Manager  
Total Event Resources  
Chicago, IL

**"Make sure they understand what your event is about and what the purpose is.... They need to be prepared to answer any questions in case they are asked."**

know how many people you need in the various roles," says Lauren Cramer, chief event planner for North Andover, Massachusetts-based Turn-Key Events. "Think about all the tasks that need to be done, not just who is working the registration desk." She warns against overlooking needs for traffic monitors, room monitors and other similar roles.

Stephanie Gimmi, senior meeting planner for ANA Enterprise, emphasizes that it's important to understand the volunteer base.

**"Sourcing local people is a great resource as they know the geography of the city to help attendees in any number of random questions."**



Stephanie Gimmi  
Senior Meeting Planner  
ANA Enterprise  
Silver Spring, MD

"Build in backups for the important jobs, and keep floaters that can fill in anywhere," she says.

"Sourcing local people is a great resource, as they know the geography of the city to help attendees in any number of random questions."

She adds that maintaining a limited number of contacts can help avoid confusion. This includes designating coordinators who are responsible for disseminating information to their staffs. A simple step, such as having volunteers wear a specific shirt in a designated color, can help make them identifiable during a conference.

Recruiting extra volunteers will pay off, notes Meagan Tromburg, program manager for Total Event Resources, a Chicago meeting and event planning company. She recommends recruiting 20 to 30 percent more volunteers than are needed.

"Chances are, some will not show up on event day," she says. "If they all show up, there is typically no shortage of tasks to help with."

She also advises taking extra steps to ensure effective management. Ideally, this will include designating an event manager to take on the role of volunteer manager. This staff member can create training documents, lead training and supervise the volunteers onsite. Training documents should cover details such as contact info, working hours, attire, parking, who to approach with questions and tasks they will complete — as well as the overall purpose for their work.

"Make sure they understand what your event is about and what the purpose is, so they know exactly why they are there," Tromburg says. "They need to be prepared to answer any questions in case they are asked."

Along with face-to-face contact, preliminary discussions can be held via conference call or services like GoToMeeting, Tromburg adds. Content should include expectations for each volunteer, such as basic knowledge about the event itself.

Garguilo is also a fan of virtual event planning, where it's not necessary to have face-to-face meetings to plan.

"For many events, we had a kickoff meeting in person to all align on the vision, then everything was done remotely using tools like Slack, which are great for keeping everyone coordinated," he says.

In working with an out-of-town client, Tromburg used detailed meeting agendas for weekly committee recon-nects that her team hosted via a real-time video confer-encing platform.

"The platform allowed us to be visually present at the meetings and not miss all of the nonverbal cues that mean so much," she says. "We were also able to screen share to collaborate on documents and plans in the moment. This led to efficient communication and, ultimately, effi- cient planning."

The planner would recap decisions, action items and next steps after the meeting, and then post them on a shared platform for all committee members and the event team to review.

"Easy is the name of the game," Tromburg says. "You need to predetermine systems and solutions to make it painless to collaborate and share information."

She points out that with committees and volunteers, you are often partnering with people who have regular jobs, family commitments and other obligations that take precedence over their volunteer roles.

"Don't hesitate to check in with them if they seem to 'check out' for a period," she says. "If they have over- committed themselves and cannot fill their volunteer re- sponsibilities, give them an out. It is better to engage a new volunteer who has the bandwidth to assist."

Regardless of the communication mode, attentive man- agement is vital, according to Bannigan.

"The most successful way to work with volunteers is to ensure they report to a key member of the core event team so they have leadership," she says. She notes that efforts to



Kerry Bannigan  
Co-founder  
Nolcha Shows  
New York, NY

**"The most successful way to work with volunteers is to ensure they report to a key member of the core event team so they have leadership."**

**"Create your volunteer schedule before recruiting so you know how many people you need in the various roles."**



Lauren Cramer  
Chief Event Planner  
Turn-Key Events  
North Andover, MA

understand each individual's strengths and interests will pay off. "This ensures that you get maximum impact out of the work, and also that they are engaged to deliver."

#### APPROPRIATE RECOGNITION

Obviously, the work contributed by volunteers is deserving of gratitude. A step that should never be missed, according to Puckorius, is extending the proper appreciation.

"Do remember to thank volunteers personally and publicly," she says. "If they are thanked on a website or social media, that then is seen by many more people today ... and forever."

She adds that social media should not replace a personal, handwritten thank-you note, but serve as an additional recognition effort.

"Keep them happy," Tromburg says. "Feed them and give them breaks. A small gift or giveaway is also always appreciated." Other measures include offering to cover their local travel costs to and from the event.

Jenkins advises making sure the volunteers feel warm, welcomed and appreciated throughout the meeting or event.

"Most volunteers want to perform well and fulfill the meeting planner's needs," he says. "If the meeting planner is cold, aloof and treats the volunteer as a second-class citizen, you will never get these volunteers back. And if it's a multi-day meeting, he adds, the planner may end up short of help.

Finally, don't overlook the possibility of learning from volunteers.

"Listen to their ideas," says Jenkins. "A meeting planner doesn't have to be the know-it-all," he says. "Volunteers may have also participated in numerous projects and bring a plethora of knowledge to your meeting."

This might include encouraging open discussion before an event, as well as fostering opportunities to provide post-event feedback through a briefing after a meeting or a brief online survey.

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The original 600,000-square-foot convention center, which opened in 1997, is set to be upgraded.

# More Than the Jersey Shore

## Everything's Up-To-Date in Atlantic City

By Thomas Rynne

If you're old enough to remember the tune "Everything's Up to Date in Kansas City," from the Broadway classic "Oklahoma," your perception of Atlantic City may be stuck in the early-2000s.

Years-old reports of its death, as the saying goes, were greatly exaggerated.

These days — finally — a happy, new reality is trumping old perceptions. Atlantic City, in fact, is once again becoming a genuine player in the meetings game. Brick by brick, street by street, neighborhood by neighborhood, it's changing its look, it's changing its feel and, yes, it's starting to really change those pesky, outdated perceptions.

And because of these changes, Atlantic City is fortifying itself against the boom-and-bust economic cycles to which it has been victim for so long.

Perhaps the most encouraging example of the "street by street" mantra is the Tennessee Avenue Renaissance Project. This is a civic/business effort to turn a once-blighted street into a colorful "new" street with unique shops and eateries, and to turn the once-blighted neighborhood in which it's located into a hotbed of new businesses and new visitors who may eventually become new residents.

Tennessee Avenue is already starting to come to life with interesting shops. Hayday Coffee is serving up a variety of

coffees and a dose of fierce pride in their city. If you'd like a bit of chocolate with your coffee, you can get that, too, at MADE Atlantic City Chocolate. Want to work off the calories from the coffee and chocolate afterward? Go down a few doors to The Leadership Studio, a not-for-profit business that's the only yoga studio in town.

Or, if your attendees are looking for a nice place for dinner or drinks, try the premiere dive bar now open on the "new" Tennessee Avenue called Pic-a-Lilli Pub. Or The Irish Pub. Or Mr. Steak Restaurant.

What does the Tennessee Avenue Renaissance Project tell us about Atlantic City? It says that city officials and young entrepreneurs are investing their time and money in making their city a better place. It also says that people are now patronizing new businesses in a part of town they may not have patronized before. The result? New life in a neighborhood once thought dead.

New life is coming to other neighborhoods, as well. MGM and Caesars have announced they're studying a potential hotel/casino project in the Marina District of the city.

Elsewhere in town, officials have approved \$10 million in lobby and atrium upgrades to Atlantic City's iconic Jim Whelan Boardwalk Hall, the city's original convention center (the one made famous by Miss America Pageants,

political conventions, etc.). This allocation follows \$2 million in upgrades previously approved for this historic facility, which is open for tours.

The current Atlantic City Convention Center, a 600,000-square-foot facility that opened in 1997, will also be upgraded.

Like the rest of the country, the beer and distillery craze has hit Atlantic City, too. Little Water Distillery opened last year, featuring small-batch whiskeys, rums and other artisan spirits in a city that was notoriously unfriendly to the Prohibition laws in the early-20th century.

The fact is that everything really is up-to-date in Atlantic City, particularly when it comes to meeting infrastructure, attendee amenities and interesting attractions. Actually, things are not only up-to-date, but also creating new possibilities for planners, and there's now a ton of "fun" things for attendees in addition to the casinos.

The best way to find out about Atlantic City, of course, is to ask other planners who've held meetings there. Most will quickly tell you the old perceptions are just that — old. Many say their attendees often consider Atlantic City meetings to be among their most productive ... and a great place to get to know other attendees better and have fun. Which, of course, enhances their working relationships when they're back in the office.

### SOME CHANGE, SOME DON'T

For all the momentous modifications taking place here, some things, thankfully, haven't changed. For instance, the beaches — Atlantic City still has one of the most famous (and best) beaches in America, the Boardwalk, gaming and

**"One of the things that impresses me about Atlantic City is that we see new things — new restaurants, new attractions — every year when we come. And the service ethic in Atlantic City is second to none."**



Maureen Murphy  
Director, Professional Development  
New Jersey Realtors  
Trenton, NJ

great nightspots, fantastic restaurants and a parade of well-known entertainers constantly coming to town.

Now, it also boasts one of the most booming foodie scenes in America, with excellent homegrown chefs, as well as nationally known celebrity chefs starting up new restaurants there. It currently has more beachside attractions than almost any city in America — and that number is constantly growing.

It has the most famous old convention hall in America (really, the original convention hall in America), now a fascinating museum. There is fabulous shopping right in town, with the famous Tanger Factory Outlet Center. And, it's now rediscovering — and showing great pride in — the historic buildings and sites that may have been somewhat neglected at times in the past.

There's a new service ethic here, as well, and that's obviously of great interest to meeting planners. Gone are the days when hotels would sometimes rely too much on



Once attendees leave their meetings, they can engage in the attractions, excitement and excellent restaurants around town.



Carlos Cano  
President  
New Jersey Association for  
College Admission Counseling  
Bronx, NY

**“The reason we’ve come back to Atlantic City is that we like to provide our attendees with a destination where there’s plenty to do in their downtime, good restaurants, and, in this case, the Jersey Shore and the Boardwalk attractions.”**

the entertainment aspects, sometimes at the expense of other needs. But, now there’s a recognition that a first-class meetings destination requires an ongoing effort to improve both the service and the meetings infrastructure.

These days, if you ask a planner who’s been to Atlantic City lately what he/she liked best about it, there’s a good chance you’ll hear something about the service and the attention to detail.

“We’ve been meeting in Atlantic City for 102 years,” says Maureen Murphy, director of professional development for an association called New Jersey Realtors, “and we’re going back in December!” The organization, which merged with the New York and Pennsylvania realtors’ associations in 2000, jointly stages the “Triple Play REALTOR Convention & Trade Expo” every year.

Murphy brought 8,500 attendees from the three states to Atlantic City last December, and they met at the convention center.



Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa has spent \$50 million on improvements.

Credit: STEVE REIHON.com

“One of the things that impresses me about Atlantic City,” Murphy says, “is that we see new things — new restaurants, new attractions — every year when we come. And, the service ethic in Atlantic City is second to none. Two years ago, we had our 100th anniversary celebration at One Atlantic, a glass structure which literally sticks out into the ocean at the end of the pier. And, people are still talking about it.”

Murphy adds that members of the organization contribute a substantial amount each year to the Atlantic City Rescue Mission.

### RECENT UPGRADES

The recent upgrades to Atlantic City’s meetings infrastructure have been impressive ones.

For example, Atlantic City’s historic Claridge Hotel



The renovated Pool at Harrah’s is a popular gathering spot for events.

Credit: Harrah’s Atlantic City

added 15,000 square feet of meeting space in 2016 to hit the 100,000 mark. In addition, both the ballroom and the 483 guest rooms were recently renovated. And, to top it off — literally — the hotel opened Atlantic City’s first rooftop bar, VUE, in late-2016. With superb “views,” VUE is also used for events.

Changes have been taking place at the Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa over the past two years, as well. In fact, the hotel has spent \$50 million on improvements. The results include an outdoor pool and beer garden, a Marketplace eatery and a nightclub called Premier.

Of most importance to planners, the improvements also included a brand-new Central Conference Center — which has since been expanded by 18,000 square feet. And celebrity chef Michael Symon debuted his latest restaurant, called Angeline, last year.



The Tropicana has recently completed a \$75 million upgrade.

Credit: Tropicana Casino & Resort

Harrah’s Atlantic City isn’t standing still on its considerable laurels, either. In the last couple of years, it’s renovated 450 guest rooms and the Pool at Harrah’s, a popular gathering spot day and night. One of the country’s most well-known chefs, Gordon Ramsay, opened a new steakhouse in Harrah’s this past Memorial Day. It’s his second in Atlantic City.

The Bourbon Room, a 2,380-seat entertainment venue, opened in the former House of Blues in March. It’s situated in the Showboat Hotel, which re-opened two years ago with 852 guest rooms.

Tropicana, too, has recently completed a \$75 million upgrade, which includes a new, state-of-the-art fitness center, guest rooms and gaming areas. Over the past two years, it’s added five new shows to its outdoor sound-and-light show and a new nightclub. With its purchase of The Chelsea Hotel, Tropicana now has 2,730 guest rooms.

### CASINO RESORTS

Speaking of “everything’s up-to-date” in Atlantic City, two new casino resorts have recently opened.

The old Taj Mahal became the new Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City — and Hard Rock International spent \$300 million to make it that way. You’d expect a Hard Rock to be full of superlatives and, in this case, you’d be right. Pretty much everything in the resort is new, including 20 new-concept restaurants and the meeting spaces.

The old Revel Casino Hotel re-opened as the Ocean Resort Casino. Together, the two resorts brought another 3,499 guest rooms and 310,000 square feet of meeting space to Atlantic City.

The economic benefit to the city of this double-shot of new hotels was immediate.

“The reinvestment and rebranding of the Hard Rock Hotel

& Casino Atlantic City, as well as Ocean Resort Casino, will benefit Atlantic City greatly,” says Jim Wood, president and CEO, Meet AC. “Seven thousand new jobs have been created, ensuring a significant economic impact in our community as a whole. The opening of these two properties is further testament to Atlantic City’s position as a very viable meetings venue.”

Carlos Cano is president of the New Jersey Association for College Admission Counseling (NJACAC). He brought 300 attendees to the Golden Nugget for the Annual Conference in May. It was the third time in the last four years he’s brought the group there.

“We start planning for our next meeting the day our last meeting ends,” Cano says. “We want to make sure we leave no detail uncovered. And, the reason we’ve come back to Atlantic City is that we like to provide our attendees with a destination where there’s plenty to do in their downtime, good restaurants, and, in this case, the Jersey Shore and the Boardwalk attractions. And, because, as planners, we like the Golden Nugget. The conference spaces there work very well for us. There are a lot of things for attendees to do, so they don’t have to leave the resort if they don’t want to.”

NJACAC works with dIPlan, a meeting/event-planning company located in Atlantic City.

“We like to leave some things to the experts, and we value their advice,” says Cano. “We work with them on things like logistics, contracts, pricing, securing the space and on providing the best experience — both in the meeting rooms and out of them — for our attendees.”

Atlantic City’s guest room count now exceeds 17,000. And, talk about rooms with a view — nine of the meeting hotels have water views.

### UNDER THE BOARDWALK

When attendees want to go out on the town, they need



The Wheel on Steel Pier is 227 feet high and offers spectacular views of the city and Jersey Shore that can’t even be measured in miles.

Credit: Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Authority



Barbara Parmese  
Chair, Annual Meeting  
New Jersey Health Information  
Management Association  
Princeton, NJ

**“The meeting spaces are reasonably priced, and they’re generally close together. The hotels are big enough so all our attendees and exhibitors can stay in the same place. We believe strongly that this enhances business relationships and networking.”**

52,000 square feet. The owner, ABC Ownership LLC, is also planning other attractions nearby, among them a zip line, extreme ninja course (“extreme” obstacle courses like the ones on TV), a state-of-the-art XD Theatre with oversized screens and sound systems, a sky-diving simulator, a bar and retail space.

Barbara Parmese, chair of the annual meeting for the New Jersey Health Information Management Association (NJHIMA), doesn’t have to be sold on Atlantic City as a place to have productive meetings. Her association has been meeting there since 2002. She brought 175 attendees and 65 exhibitors to Resorts Casino Hotel for the NJHIMA 2018 Annual Meeting.

“There are several reasons we keep coming here,” Parmese says, “not the least of which is value. The hotel rates



Credit: Resorts Casino Hotel

Associations have been returning to Resorts Casino Hotel for years because the meeting spaces are affordable and close in proximity.

are reasonable. The meeting spaces are reasonably priced, and they’re generally close together, so our attendees aren’t spread out. The hotels are big enough so all our attendees and exhibitors can stay in the same place. We believe strongly that this enhances business relationships and networking.”

This was the group’s second consecutive year at Resorts Casino Hotel, and they’re already booked there for next year. Parmese says the group books its venues well in advance — up to 18 months, in fact.

“Atlantic City is changing the old images,” Parmese says. “It’s a place to which attendees really like to go. And, as a planner, I like the reasonable prices, and I like the fact that so many attractions and restaurants — and the Jersey Shore — are right out the front door. Our attendees don’t have to take cabs to go somewhere ... and any planner would like that. And our post-meeting surveys show that our attendees think our Atlantic City meetings are very productive.”

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only walk out the door to do it in Atlantic City. Just outside are lights, colors, attractions, excitement and excellent restaurants (and new ones opening all the time).

The Boardwalk itself was recently extended and now extends more than five miles. Cyclists are as welcome as the strollers who are just taking in the salt air and ocean breezes. Recently opening on the Boardwalk was The Biergarten Atlantic City, which offers distinctive draft beers.

A boardwalk and pier that are already filled with unusual attractions recently added The Wheel on Steel Pier. It cost \$14 million, is 227 feet high and offers spectacular views of the city and Jersey Shore that can’t even be measured in miles. Riders go up in one of 40 climate-controlled gondolas, which means fun in the winter, as well as summer. Food and beverages are allowed, and there are special packages for groups.

The Wheel is enormous. But, next year, the Boardwalk’s getting another new attraction that’s even bigger; so big, in fact, it’s almost hard to (figuratively) wrap your arms around it. The new “Polercoaster” will be 350 feet high and



Credit: Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City

After a \$300 million makeover, the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City boasts 20 new-concept restaurants and new meeting spaces.



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# The Pacific Northwest

Lower Costs, Less Congestion and the Beautiful Wilderness Entice Planners to the Area

Seattle is excellent for conferences because of its plentiful meeting spaces, as well as opportunities to experience the outdoors.

By Sophia Bennett

**T**he Pacific Northwest is a red-hot destination for leisure and business travel right now, which makes it a very smart place to host future meetings and other events. “We often see that national conventions that travel the United States see record attendance when they’re in Portland because their attendees want to come here,” says Craig Stroud, executive director of the Oregon Convention Center.

There are many other good reasons to organize a gather-

ing in this beautiful region of the country. Many of the cities are less congested and more walkable than those in other parts of the country. There can be some cost savings from the lack of sales tax in Oregon and great public transportation in many communities. As airlift improves and the region expands its conference venues, it’s getting more feasible to host larger gatherings. Learn what the Pacific Northwest has to offer modern meeting planners and their guests.

## WASHINGTON

### SEATTLE

Seattle exemplifies everything that makes the Northwest such a prime place to host an event. “It’s an exciting urban city surrounded by access to nature from the ocean to the mountains,” says Rob Hampton, senior vice president, convention sales and services for Visit Seattle. It has great shopping, farm-to-table and interesting ethnic restaurants and cultural attractions. “Many of the country’s most innovative

“When you’re sourcing meeting locations for the Pacific Northwest, take a good look at the experiential outcomes you’ve set and make sure your venue lines up with that.”



Jeff Ouradnik  
Sales and Marketing Director  
Hyatt Regency Lake Washington  
Renton, WA

businesses call this region home, and it’s great to be able to tap into some of those resources.”

The city recently broke ground on the new Washington State Convention Center building, a vertically oriented structure in the heart of downtown. Unlike many communities, Seattle chose to build a second convention center rather than expanding its existing one. It’s located just a few blocks from its sister building and will add 255,000 square feet of expo space, 125,000 square feet of meeting rooms, 60,000 square feet of ballroom space and an outdoor gathering space. It’s expected to open in the first quarter of 2022.

In addition, the Hyatt Regency Seattle, located right next to the new convention center, is on track to open in December. It will be the largest hotel in the Pacific Northwest with 1,260 guest rooms and 103,000 square feet of function space.

“We’re seeing a lot of groups that could never come to Seattle because there was nowhere big enough for them,” says director of sales and marketing Danielle M. Boyles. The local owners incorporated many of the best practices they learned at other hotels to make the Hyatt a very functional and appealing place for large gatherings.

The International OCD Foundation has already booked its 2020 conference at the Hyatt. Events manager Melissa Smith, CMP, explains that their conference is somewhat unique when compared to other medical association conferences. Only about one-third of the approximately 1,900 attendees are therapists and mental health professionals. The remainder are people with obsessive compulsive disorder (or related conditions) and their families.

The conference rotates between the west coast, east coast and middle of the country. As she began looking at west coast properties, “we were really drawn to the Seattle area because we’d never been there before,” Smith says. “We try to reach areas that are less populated with therapists that treat this disorder because it builds our resource directory and allows people to have better-trained therapists to get treatment from after the event. Seattle, compared to some of the cities



Credit: Hyatt Regency Seattle

When the Hyatt Regency Seattle opens, it will be the largest hotel in the Pacific Northwest with 103,000 square feet of function space.

in California, is less expensive in terms of transportation. The fact that there's the train being built from the airport was a benefit. The location of this property, and the fact that it's surrounded by restaurants and shopping and tourist things to do, was a huge draw for us."

Smith was also attracted by the layout and construction of the Hyatt's meeting rooms. "Meetings were laid out a lot differently previously," she said. "Now there's a lot more customization of sessions. People are doing more breakouts and larger breakouts. Large rooms with airwalls — and airwalls that aren't so paper-thin you can hear through them — are very important."

Planners looking for offsite venues in Seattle will find improved facilities at both Pike Place Market, which underwent a major renovation last year, and the Space Needle, which just finished a \$100 million overhaul. Hampton also recommends directing conventioners to The Spheres, a set of enclosed conservatories located at Amazon's downtown headquarters.

"It has more than 400 species of cloud forest plants from around the world, so it's a very biodiverse building within the urban environment," he says.

### SEATTLE SOUTHSIDE

The southern region of Seattle has enough meeting facilities and attractions that it's worth considering in addition to downtown. According to the Seattle Southside Regional Tourism Authority, the area lies 15 minutes

from Seattle, 20 minutes from Tacoma and very close to the airport. It's close to major employers such as Boeing and fun attractions such as the Museum of Flight and Des Moines Beach Park. Room rates, on average, are 20 to 30 percent lower than those available downtown. And South Seattle has the second-highest concentration of hotels in the state, so there's no need to worry about availability.

The Hyatt Regency Lake Washington at Seattle's Southport is one of those hotels. It opened in July 2017, and offers breathtaking views of the Seattle skyline, Lake Washington and — on a clear day — the Olympic Mountains. "Our orientation allows our large events spaces, our dining spaces



Hyatt Regency Lake Washington at Seattle's Southport has huge windows in the meeting rooms offering attendees beautiful views of the lake and mountains.

Credit: SECO Development

and our guest rooms to have windows facing that direction," says Jeff Ouradnik, sales and marketing director. "There's a lot of natural light, but what's so cool about this hotel and that view is it feels like you're meeting in the Pacific Northwest. You really have that unique opportunity to bring the view of the city and the view of nature into the meeting environment."

The desire to experience the outdoors and unparalleled scenery is a big reason many people want to travel to this region. It leads Ouradnik to offer this advice: "When you're sourcing meeting locations for the Pacific Northwest, take a good look at the experiential outcomes you've set and make sure your venue lines up with that." It can help meeting attendees feel like they've gotten the true Northwest experience even if they don't have a lot of time to explore.

### BELLEVUE

Suburban Bellevue has many of the benefits of big-city Seattle in a less-populated setting. "You can come to Bellevue and have the Seattle experience but not need to be downtown," says Jane Kantor, CMP, director of sales for Visit Bellevue Washington. "There's a lot of variety in the things you can do downtown or a short Uber ride away."

These include accessing the outdoors (Bellevue has more than 2,000 acres of parks and natural areas and 92 miles of multi-use trails), visiting museums and art galleries, taking advantage of great shopping and finding great places to

eat. "Bellevue is a majority minority city, so there's lot of diversity," says Kantor. "That's true not only in the people who live downtown but also in our culinary options. Being in the Pacific Northwest, there's a big Asian influence, so there's lot of Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese options for people who are looking for something that will be a culinary delight." There are also multiple restaurants featuring foods from Russia and several African nations.

The city has made some significant additions to its hotel inventory in the past few years. A Hilton Garden Inn with 254 rooms opened earlier this year. A W Hotel and AC Hotel by Marriott were added last year. "You can get lots of personal-



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Kate Hudson  
Public Relations Manager  
Visit Spokane  
Spokane, WA

“...It takes 10 minutes from the airport to drive to downtown Spokane and get to your hotel. Within that 10 minutes, you’re checked in and getting ready to explore the city.”



The design of the Spokane Convention Center lets attendees enjoy incredible views of the downtown skyline.

The downtown core is filled with historic buildings. Inside, meeting attendees will find good shopping, dozens of breweries and wine-tasting rooms and a number of great restaurants. “The culinary scene is stunning and booming right now,” says Hudson. Most hotels have free bike rentals so guests can tool around town without the expense of renting a car.

The outdoors are closely integrated with the Spokane Convention Center, which sits at the edge of the Spokane River. Copious windows offer expansive views of the surroundings.

Besides the convention center, other notable facilities include the INB Performing Arts Center, a large theater that’s going through a major renovation; a new 127-room Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott in suburban Spokane Valley; and a Hotel Indigo in downtown that’s slated to open in 2019.

### CLARK COUNTY

Although Clark County is within Washington, it’s more closely associated with Oregon because it’s immediately north of Portland. Just a short drive from Portland International Airport along Interstate 205, it has plenty of spaces for conferences and other types of events. Vancouver, the county seat, has more than 80 different event venues to choose from, including large hotels, quaint retreats and spacious amphitheaters. Many outlying communities also have great meeting destinations.

The most notable recent addition to

Clark County’s inventory is ilani, a casino resort on the outskirts of Ridgefield that opened last year. It has 15 restaurants, bars and shops; a large gaming floor; and a 30,000-square-foot meeting and entertainment center with state-of-the-art technology. A hotel is planned for a later phase of construction. In the meantime, groups that host events at ilani can get special rates at local hotels.

“One of the advantages of hosting at ilani is the event becomes more attractive because the guest knows afterward they can enjoy dinner, slip into an amazing concert or just relax and look at views of Mount St. Helens,” says vice president of marketing Tom Teesdale. “It’s a great way to wrap up your day after an event or trade show.” Unlike many casino resorts, ilani has an abundance of outdoor seating at its dining areas, which makes it easy to enjoy nature without leaving the grounds.

Should event participants want to venture out, there’s plenty for them to do. The area offers peaceful hikes, world-class golf courses and terrific excursion opportunities. “There are day trips to wine country, the Columbia River Gorge and the Pacific coast,” says Teesdale. “Those views of the Pacific Ocean are breathtaking.” Plus, Portland’s nightlife, culture, world-class restaurants and other features are just a short drive over the Columbia River.

## OREGON

### PORTLAND

Like Seattle, Portland has excellent meeting facilities that are only getting better. “The Oregon Convention Center is the largest convention center in the Pacific Northwest and is known for world-class features, including customer service and leadership in sustainability,” says executive director Craig Stroud. “We consistently score off the charts on our catering. We’re really well-served by our public transportation system.



Hyatt Regency Portland at Oregon Convention Center will have 500 rooms available for meeting-goers when it opens in 2020.

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Desiree Everett, CMP, CGMP  
Director of Convention Sales  
Travel Portland  
Portland, OR

The MAX, Streetcar and transit lines all intersect and pass by the center, so it’s very easy to get anywhere in the region, including the airport.”

The convention center just started a \$39 million renovation that will refresh the new and old portions of the facility and improve wayfinding, among other things. Construction is expected to wrap up in early 2020. The Hyatt Regency Portland at the Oregon Convention Center, the facility’s highly anticipated headquarters hotel, will be finished in the same time frame. It will have 600 rooms, 500 of which will be made available for meeting-goers. “That differentiates this hotel from many others and is helpful particularly in the summer, when leisure travelers fill many of the hotels in the city and finding hotel blocks is difficult,” says Stroud.

Portland’s reputation as a place that’s friendly to craftsmen, locavores — and pretty much everyone, really — is a big draw for many associations. Desiree Everett, CMP, CGMP, director of convention sales for Travel Portland, says the organization’s staff is always available to help planners deliver authentic experiences to guests. “The Travel Portland team cultivates relationships with the city’s top hotels, chefs, makers and other businesses year-round. We’re there to help connect meeting planners with the best Portland has to offer, and we make it easy for planners to create authentic Portland experiences for their attendees. Our team can tell you who has the best set-up for the kind of event you want to host, as well as help you understand the best ways to get attendees where they need to go on Portland’s famous transit system, whether it’s by light rail, streetcar or using Biketown, the city’s Nike-sponsored bike share program.”

Phil McDonald, executive director of the American Association of Woodturners (AAW), says his association was so impressed with Portland that it’s taken its international symposium to the city twice — even though it doesn’t typically travel to a city more than once. When AAW had their event in Portland in 2007, they had very high attendance, which is one reason the search committee selected it again in 2018.

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Mary-Michael Rodgers  
Communications Manager  
Boise Centre  
Boise, ID

**“We’ve been going through a mini hotel boom. There are three new hotels in downtown and up to 1,200 hotel rooms within a few blocks of the Boise Centre.”**

Another was that they wanted a more intimate feel from the space, which the convention center was able to provide.

McDonald was also very impressed by the level of service the association received from the facility’s staff. “Everyone says that their attendees are a demanding crowd, but one thing about us is that we represent individuals, and they pay out of pocket to be at the event,” he says. “With that comes really high expectations that they will be well-served. In 2017 and 2016, we had massive failures with the catering and concession services. That was one of the areas we put highest on our list of things we needed from our next venue.”

When the committee met with the staff at the Oregon Convention Center, “they talked about the failures in previous years and addressed them one by one, which gave us great confidence they were listening to us and proactively working to address them,” says McDonald. “We were so well-served that we came away with attendees that probably had the best onsite service they’ve ever had.”

## IDAHO

### BOISE

Boise is one of the fastest-growing cities in the United States but hasn’t lost its small-town charm. That makes it an appealing spot to host meetings of all kinds.

The city’s largest event facility is the Boise Centre, which wrapped up a \$47.5 million expansion last year. The renovation increased its total space to 88,000 square feet. “The area surrounding the convention center is a thriving downtown,” says communications manager Mary-Michael Rodgers. “Right outside our doors there over 100 shops, 80 restaurants with lots of outdoor dining, a huge and growing microbrewing scene and several wine-tasting rooms. It’s very fun and hip. It’s very walkable. There’s lots to see, and it’s all in an environment that’s not congested. The airport is 10 minutes away, and the air service is some of the best in the west, with 20 direct flights a day from most major markets.

“We’ve been going through a mini hotel boom,” adds Rodg-

ers. “There are three new hotels in downtown and up to 1,200 hotel rooms within a few blocks of the Boise Centre.” These include the boutique property Inn at 500 Capitol with 113 rooms, a Hyatt Place with 150 rooms and the Hilton Garden Inn Downtown with 132 rooms.

Kristine Raper is a commissioner with the Idaho Public Utilities Commission and chair of the Western Conference of Public Service Commissioners, a regional association of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners. One of her responsibilities as chair was to plan the 2018 conference for commissioners in the region’s 14 states and territories. Raper had some very specific things she wanted for the event, including lots of networking space and access to the outdoors. She found everything she wanted — including exceptional service — at the Boise Centre.

“It was very collaborative, which I appreciated,” she says. “I was very particular and, in some ways, very different with what I wanted for my group. The staff at the Boise Centre was so accommodating with everything from menus to room setup.”

One of Raper’s requests was that rounds be set for six to



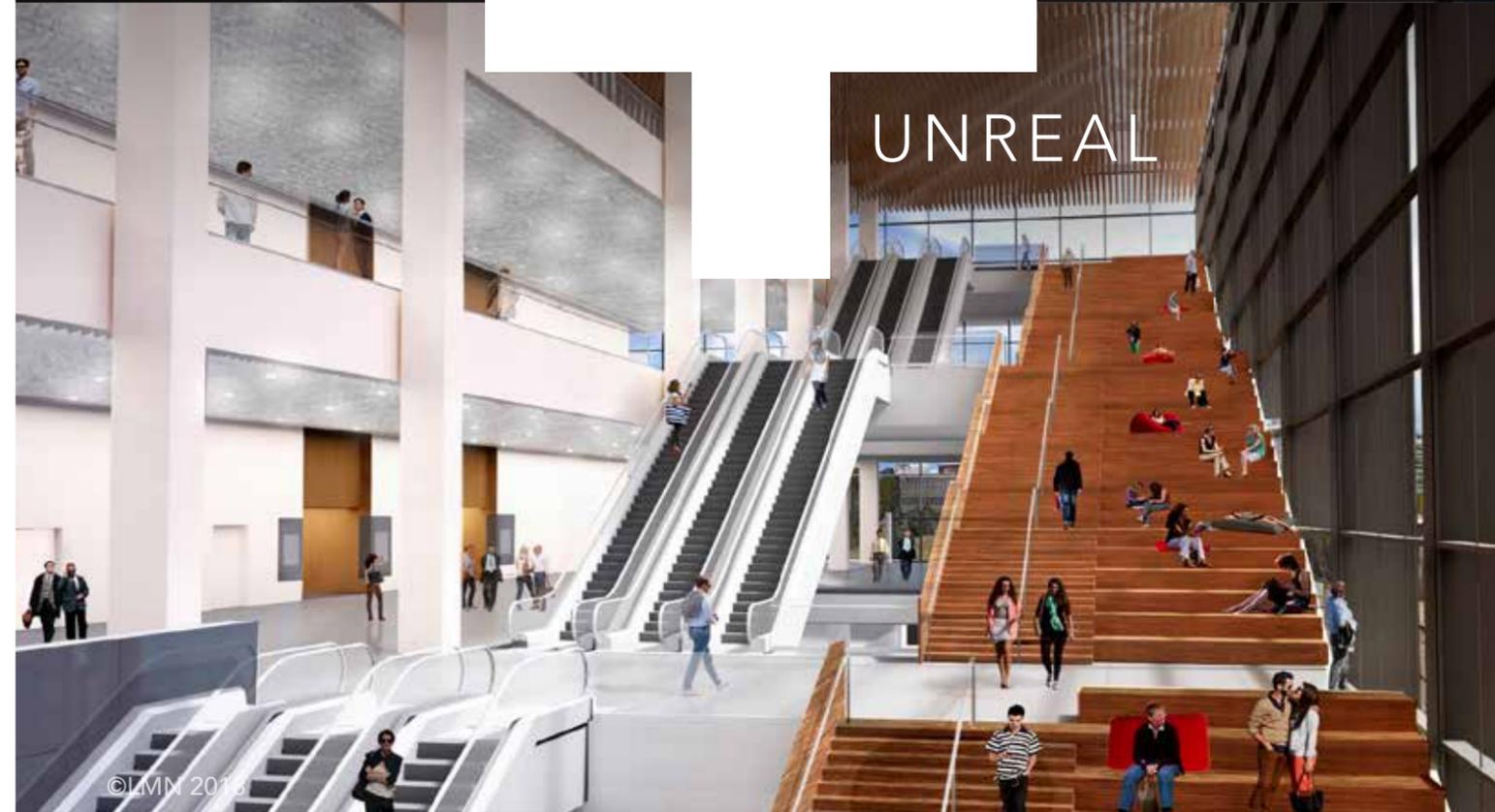
In Idaho, many conventions take place at the Boise Centre, the city’s largest event facility, with a bustling downtown scene right outside its doors.

seven people instead of the standard eight. “We have people who come in with a laptop and a bag and one or two phones, so they want space to spread out. They leave if they don’t have enough space to have a little elbow room, and that’s not what we want.” The staff was skeptical at first, but when they saw how much people enjoyed the table setup, they actually thanked her for giving them an idea they could use for future events. She also liked that Centre staff worked closely with the local CVB to connect her with services and local resources.

Conference attendees were very impressed with the event. “I don’t know how many times I heard from people, ‘The city has a vibe, and it’s so cool,’” says Raper. “People were wandering and biking around downtown, and they loved it.” AC&F



URBAN



UNREAL

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Núñez



Moon



Hibbert



Holmes



Hegwood

Visit San Antonio has promoted **Néstor Núñez** to the role of senior sales manager and **Michelle Moon**, CPCE, CTA to director of destination services. Prior to Visit San Antonio, Núñez served as sales director with Hilton Hotels & Resorts. Moon joined Visit San Antonio in 2016, as associate director of destination services.

Louisville Tourism has named **Neil Hibbert** to the position of director of southeast sales. He most recently worked at Discover DeKalb Convention & Visitors Bureau in Atlanta as the director of sales.

Visit Omaha has hired **Lindsey Holmes** as national sales representative and **Melanie Hegwood** as convention services and housing manager. Holmes started her career in the hotel industry as a business travel sales manager. Hegwood will work with meeting and event planners to coordinate their hotel room block and registration needs.

**Ellen Klesta** has joined DuPage (Illinois) CVB as market and services manager. Klesta joins the team with more than 20 years of hospitality sales and marketing experience.

Fontainebleau Miami Beach announced the promotion of **Kevin Bryant** as vice president of sales. Bryant formerly served as corporate director of revenue management at Fontainebleau's parent company, Turnberry Associates.

The Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau (DMCVB) has promoted **Andrea Cadotto** and **Sheila R. Neal**, CASE to associate directors of sales. Cadotto has worked at the DMCVB since 2012, most recently as a senior national sales manager. Neal has worked at the DMCVB since 1988, and her most recent position was also as a senior national sales manager.

VISIT DENVER, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, has hired **Sheila Provenzano** as sales director, midwest region for its Chicago office. Most recently, she served as the regional director of sales for Visit Baltimore.

AC&F



Klesta



Bryant



Cadotto



Neal



Provenzano

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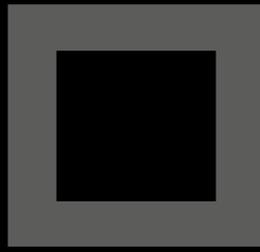
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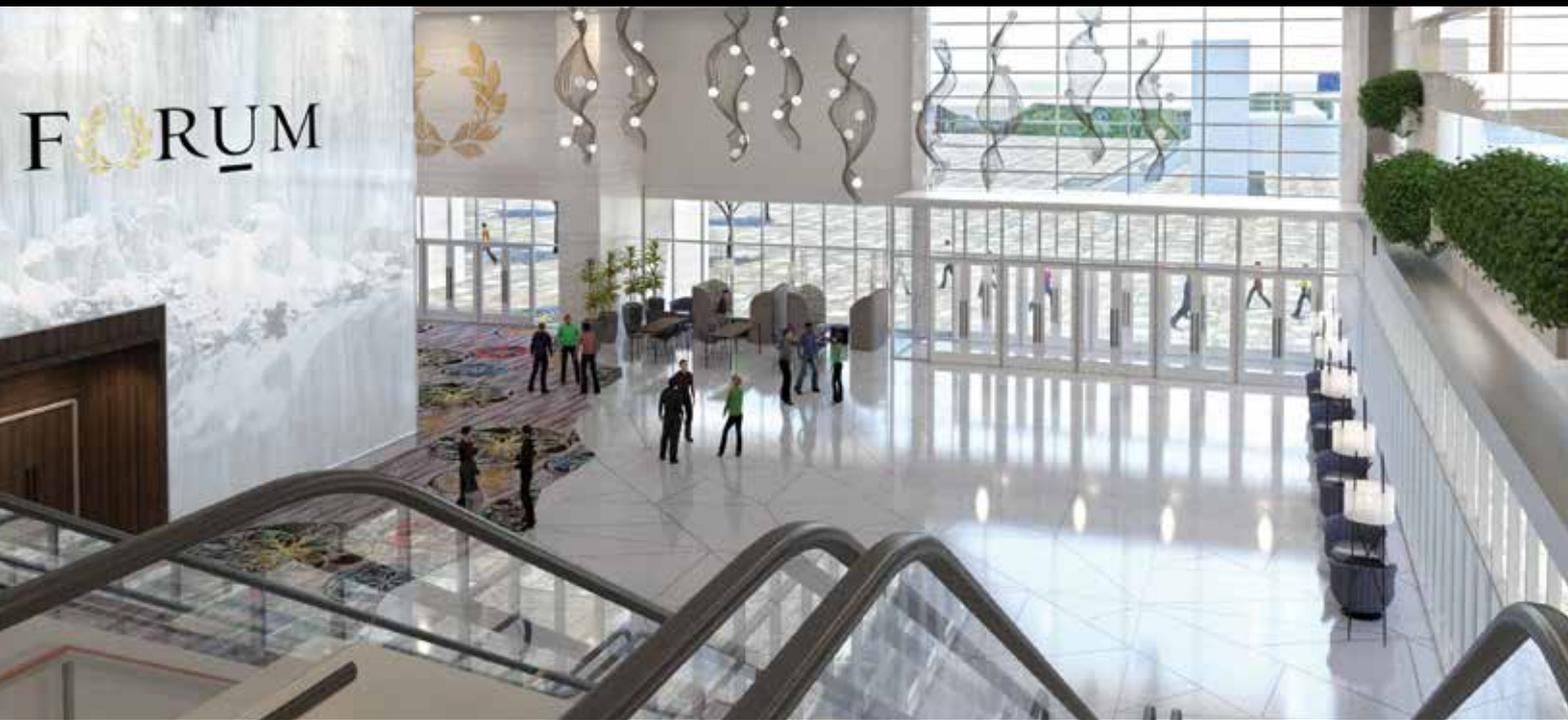
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M E E T T H E F U T U R E



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