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## Focusing on Diversity and Inclusion



Our cover story "Diversity and Inclusion on the Rise" (Page 30) this month focuses on an issue long overdue as demographic changes in population and association memberships reflect the need for different perspectives. As associations seek to attract more attendees and build membership, many planners seek to reach their goals of inclusion and diversity as they move forward. A priority while planning events is to ensure that diversity is reflected in the content of the event as well as with speakers. As Leslie Wilson, CGMP, on our cover, program manager at the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges says, "If you host a meeting on women in science, technology, engineering and math, should all of your panels be populated by men? No. But you would be surprised how often that happens." Diversity and inclusion offers opportunities to learn from others with different perspectives.

Another feature story, "Events With a Focus on Food" (Page 12) highlights food and beverage trends to satisfy the preferences of today's attendees. Food allergies seem to be a big issue for planners to overcome and still satisfy all attendees. While presentation is also an important factor, some see a plant-based trend growing with those who prefer a vegan or vegetarian offering. To plan meals successfully and save on costs, planners should meet with the chef to see what is in season and buy locally rather than buying out-of-season food that must be shipped to the destination.

The east coast hot spot for coastal meetings is Atlantic City (Page 36), where more planners are seeking value options along with a beachfront vista to satisfy their needs. While the casino experience has always been a draw, many properties have been renovated to compete with the newer openings. Atlantic City has been reborn and has shown a big increase in attracting meeting business.

Planners continue to favor Las Vegas-Reno (Page 42) as the destinations with everything they could want. Las Vegas, for example, continues to grow the meeting product to satisfy association planners with the construction of CAESARS FORUM, scheduled to open next year. This one-of-a-kind facility will be a major addition in Las Vegas options and will offer a unique opportunity for association planners seeking a multi-dimensional meeting space.

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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**Caesars Entertainment Secures Over 500,000 Room Nights for Groups at CAESARS FORUM**



**LAS VEGAS, NV** — Caesars Entertainment Corporation, the world’s most geographically diversified casino-entertainment company, announces that over 500,000 room nights at Caesars Entertainment properties are booked for groups at CAESARS FORUM for 2020 and beyond, marking a reservation milestone for the conference facility opening in 2020 with the two largest pillarless ballrooms in the world. As a \$375 million conference facility in Las Vegas, CAESARS FORUM will be the first facility of this size built on one level and is equivalent in size to 27 tennis courts or three ice hockey rinks. It will also feature FORUM Plaza, the first 100,000-sf dedicated outdoor meeting and event space in Las Vegas. “CAESARS FORUM redefines meetings and events offerings in Las Vegas and will ultimately be a gateway to the brand’s unmatched network of exclusive features that our guests and groups have come to expect,” says Lisa Messina, vice president of sales at Caesars Entertainment. Michael Massari, chief sales officer at Caesars Entertainment adds, “Within walking distance to more than 20,000 Caesars Entertainment hotel rooms, connected to 5,000 Caesars Entertainment hotel rooms and adjacent to the LINQ Promenade retail district, CAESARS FORUM will truly provide a unique option for meetings and events. We’re thrilled to reach this sales milestone at the beginning of 2019 and look forward to welcoming groups, meeting planners and guests when we open in 2020.” [www.CAESARSFORUM.com](http://www.CAESARSFORUM.com)

**IMEX America Returns this September, Powered by imagination**

**LAS VEGAS, NV** — Registration is now live for IMEX America 2019 taking place Sept. 10–12 at the Sands Expo and Convention Center at The Venetian® | The Palazzo®. The show hits the Strip a whole month earlier than previous editions. Imagination, IMEX’s Talking Point for this year, underpins the show, informing its content and education, and delivering fresh and surprising experiences along the way. Expert speakers and presenters from around the world are now invited to apply to present an education session at IMEX America 2019. The IMEX team uses a stringent blind-review process to ensure that all sessions that make the cut are relevant, relatable and deliver actionable insights. This year the team is particularly interested in submissions relating to diversity and inclusion, imagination and curiosity, negotiating skills and difficult conversations, crisis management and contingency planning, networking and technology, including artificial intelligence. The popular Smart Monday precedes on Sept. 9. [www.imexexhibitions.com](http://www.imexexhibitions.com)

**ALHI Expands with Three New Member Hotels in Wisconsin**

**BOSTON, MA** — Associated Luxury Hotels International (ALHI), introduced three Wisconsin properties owned and managed by Marcus Hotels & Resorts, a leading hotel management company.

In downtown Milwaukee, the AAA-Four Diamond iconic Pfister Hotel (24,000 sf of conference and event space) joins the ALHI City Collection, and the soon-to-open Saint Kate — The Arts Hotel (featuring 13,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space) will be added to the ALHI Boutique Collection.

In Lake Geneva, the AAA-Four Diamond Grand Geneva Resort & Spa (featuring 62,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space) joins the ALHI Golf Collection.

“These new additions enhance ALHI’s curated luxury portfolio,” said Mark Sergo, chief sales officer at ALHI. [www.alhi.com](http://www.alhi.com)

**Florida’s Iconic “Pink Palace” Receives Upgrades to Meetings Spaces**

**ST. PETE BEACH, FL** — The Don CeSar has unveiled Phase II of its multistage renovations to refresh and modernize meeting spaces include new artwork, carpeting, paint schemes, lighting, drapery and furniture.

The transformation of the Grand Ballroom’s carpet will emulate the sweeping motion of a Spanish dancer’s flowing gown while crystal chandeliers will be displayed just as those in the world’s most-admired opera houses. There will be a specially curated collection of F. Scott Fitzgerald books open to pages of his famous literary style.

This renovation follows Phase I, which included a full refresh of the lobby and meeting spaces at the 70-room, all-suite Beach House Suites.

In late 2019, The Don CeSar will complete property-wide renovations with Phase III. [www.doncesar.com](http://www.doncesar.com)

**Las Vegas Celebrates 25 Years As Top Trade Show Destination**

**LAS VEGAS, NV** — For the 25th consecutive year, Las Vegas was named the country’s No. 1 trade show destination according to the Trade Show News Network (TSNN) “2018 TSNN Top Trade Shows” list. According to the list, Las Vegas hosted 48 of the largest shows held in the country last year. “It’s an incredible honor to celebrate 25 years as the No. 1 trade show destination in North America, and for Las Vegas, this is just the beginning of great things to come,” said Steve Hill, president and CEO at LVCVA. “Throughout the destination, we are seeing astonishing developments and investment you won’t find anywhere else and we look forward to continued growth and success with our partners and clients.” According to TSNN’s rankings, CES 2018 secured the top spot with nearly 2.8 million net sq ft of exhibit space spanning the Las Vegas Convention Center and several additional facilities throughout the destination. “Once again, Las Vegas has topped the 2018 Top Trade Shows list with more than double the amount of shows represented than the next city on the list,” said Rachel Wimberly, executive vice president of Business Development, Tarsus US (TSNN’s parent company). “With so much new convention and meeting space, more hotel rooms and exciting entertainment and dining options coming online in Las Vegas, there’s no doubt the city will be hard to beat in the near future.” [www.LVCVA.com](http://www.LVCVA.com)

**Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort & Spa Announces the “Texas Two-Step” Program for 2019**

**SAN ANTONIO, TX** — Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort & Spa, the premier Texas Hill Country resort located only 20 minutes from downtown San Antonio, announces the “Texas Two-Step” program for 2019 meetings. Through the program, planners are able to select one Texas-themed experience for attendees and one or two cost-saving items for their meeting depending on group size. “With our Texas Two-Step program, groups can select unforgettable activities from complimentary daily yoga or meditation classes at Windflower Spa to a s’mores and cordials reception under the stars,” said John Hernstat, director of sales and marketing at Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort & Spa. The program allows planners to select one complimentary or discounted activity for meeting attendees. The options include a complimentary one-hour group wellness class each day of the meeting, a complimentary s’mores and cordials reception, a complimentary salsa-making, team-building competition or a 25 percent discount on spa services at the onsite Windflower Spa or group golf tournament at Hill Country Golf Club. [www.hillcountry.regency.hyatt.com](http://www.hillcountry.regency.hyatt.com)

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### IAEE Announces Middle East and North Africa Chapter



**DALLAS, TX** — The International Association of Exhibitions and Events®(IAEE) announces the addition of its latest chapter, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Chapter. Based in Dubai, the chapter will serve exhibitions and events professionals in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. “We have been very pleased with the success of the IAAE CEM Learning Program in this region. We look forward to extending the services we can provide IAAE members through this chapter,” said David DuBois, CMP, CAE, FASAE, CTA, president and CEO at IAAE. “It is exciting to play a part in the fast-growing MICE industry in this part of the world,” said 2019 IAAE chairperson Tom Cindric Jr., CEM, senior vice president for Informa, Global Exhibitions. “The opportunity for professionals to join IAAE’s expansive community will present a win-win for the global outlook of exhibitions and events.” [www.iaee.com](http://www.iaee.com)

### Virginia’s Lansdowne Resort & Spa Rejoins Benchmark Resorts & Hotels Portfolio

**THE WOODLANDS (HOUSTON), TX** — BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company, announces the return of Virginia’s Lansdowne Resort & Spa to its Benchmark Resorts & Hotels portfolio. The award-winning property is located in Leesburg, VA’s bucolic wine and equestrian country, just 30 miles from Washington, DC and 15 minutes from Dulles International Airport. Lansdowne Resort and Spa introduces the Harmony Model Wellness Program in 2019. “We are delighted to expand our presence in Virginia with the return of this celebrated resort,” said Alex Cabañas, CEO at Benchmark. “Its impressive facilities, recreational options and location in one of America’s most scenic and historically



rich areas, will offer the kind of experiential and unique travel, meeting and event opportunities that Benchmark is known to provide in each of our locations.” Lansdowne features 296 newly renovated guest rooms including 14 suites, four distinct restaurant and bar concepts, 55,000 sf of meeting and event space, 45 holes of championship golf, water sports, tennis and the 12,000-sf Spa Minérale, which offers an enriching, restorative environment that emphasizes wellness and a deep connection to nature. [www.benchmarkglobalhospitality.com/press\\_media/benchmark\\_news](http://www.benchmarkglobalhospitality.com/press_media/benchmark_news)

### Skyscrapers, Massive Transit Center Could Reshape Area Around Soldier Field Development

**CHICAGO, IL** — Landmark Development plans a 34-acre mixed-use project built on a platform over Metra tracks near Soldier Field and McCormick Place. The multibillion-dollar project, One Central, includes a row of gleaming skyscrapers atop a massive new transit center. “This is an opportunity to create what I believe will become America’s most important transit hub as we look to the future,” says Wisconsin-based developer, Bob Dunn. “And it’s at a site where there’s almost no transportation to the lakefront today.” It would link the famous Metra, CTA and Amtrak trains, as well as a wheeled tram route, topped by a few floors of restaurant, retail and entertainment space. “I think this will be one of the defining projects in the U.S., as we look forward to the next generation,” said Dunn, whose previous projects include stadiums for the NFL’s Minnesota Vikings and Detroit Lions, and an overhaul of the Green Bay Packers’ Lambeau Field. <https://www.pcma.org/mccormick-place-could-be-part-of-chicagos-new-skyline>



# Today's Millennials

## Tomorrow's Leaders

By Amy Gitchell, GrowthZone AMS, Marketing Communications Specialist



### No Assembly Required?

Millennials (Born 1981-1996) are now the largest generation in the U.S. labor workforce, overtaking Generation Xers (1965-1980) with more growth on the horizon. Meanwhile, startups continue to sweep the business and tech worlds, a gig workforce is building steam and companies are recruiting in droves as workplace expectations shift.

Millennials are no longer the youngest generation, and a striking change is taking place in corporate America as more of them advance into leadership roles. A recent Gallup Poll found that only one-third of full-time employees are engaged at work — defined as being “emotionally and psychologically attached to their work and workplace.” The study also revealed millennials had the lowest percentage of engaged employees. It’s no surprise that although millennials are rapidly going into leadership roles, they represent the lowest percentage of engaged employees. In fact, it highlights a genuine need for these employees and the companies they work for to bring their approaches together.

One characterization of millennials is their intense need for continued development and education, but many find their employers lack sufficient learning resources. So, where can this generation go to fulfill their career needs? Associations.

Millennials want to believe in a mission that promotes passionate and fulfilling work; associations meet these expectations in addition to giving them the tools to advance in their careers. To set themselves apart, associations should be continually looking for new ways to offer their members better loyalty benefits and opportunities.

Associations must be able to show why millennials should want to invest their time, energy and money being involved in the organization. Here are a few benefits that associations should embrace and promote to recruit and retain young professionals:

#### JOB RESOURCES

The biggest reason young professionals seek association membership is job opportunities. Therefore, associations must be able to offer these members leadership roles and



volunteer opportunities that expand their resumes, and networking opportunities that help them make meaningful connections. It is also important to provide members with exclusive job listings that give them a leg up in the hiring process.

Associations should seek to develop programs that teach the leadership skills young professional members need to excel in their field. From the smallest engagement (answering questions in an online forum) to major participation (speaking at an event), millennials should be able to take advantage of numerous professional development opportunities.

#### MEMBER-ONLY EVENTS

Millennials are searching for new ways to connect with professionals in all stages of career development, and promoting exclusive access to networking events, guest speakers and job fairs is a great way for associations to capture their attention. Associations should organize events on a monthly basis that make learning more collaborative.

The communication strategy group Mahlab explains the importance of making millennials feel included, stressing that there is a “misconception that all you need to do is give [young professionals] a committee and a trivia night for under 35s.”

Instead, focus on planning events that get everyone in the same room sharing ideas, experiences and advice. Word-of-mouth travels fast, and engaging millennials is the key to spreading the word about an association throughout

the broader trade community — increasing interest and growing membership.

#### BENEFITS AND DISCOUNTS

Millennials are known for their love of loyalty and rewards programs. Therefore, associations should make sure to promote their members-only benefits and discounts. These may include savings on products and services tailored to their business needs, group health care, travel discounts and access to mentoring programs, young professional groups, exclusive conferences, trade shows and events.

to the groups they join. So, how can associations leverage these sites to attract new members? Start by developing a social media strategy that identifies the association’s target audience and focuses on sharing a mix of original content and relevant articles/studies. Sharing a variety of curated content will position the organization as a thought leader that all members, not just millennials, can turn to for the latest industry news.

Millennials look to join associations to share challenges and discuss common issues in a collaborative environment. An association showing off the way its members interact and exchange ideas on social media is sure to catch the attention

*Millennials have changed the workplace, technology, shopping patterns and certainly businesses. Competition for members is fierce, and meeting the demands of this young demographic is critical to survival. Associations must learn to provide what they want.*

#### ON-SITE AND ONLINE TRAINING

Millennials are always looking for new ways to grow their skill set. They know finding new ways to educate themselves is key to career advancement. Associations should strive to offer training courses and educational resources to members both on-site and online, which cater to their busy schedules and allows them to take courses at their own pace. Utilizing online portals, associations can provide members with webinars, thought leadership, reports, modules and workbooks at any time, from anywhere. Content should be updated regularly to provide relevant resources that will continuously develop skills and knowledge. By sharing educational content with millennials in more tech-savvy ways, associations can reach this network of people in their preferred mode of communication — mostly through the device in the palm of their hand.

#### SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

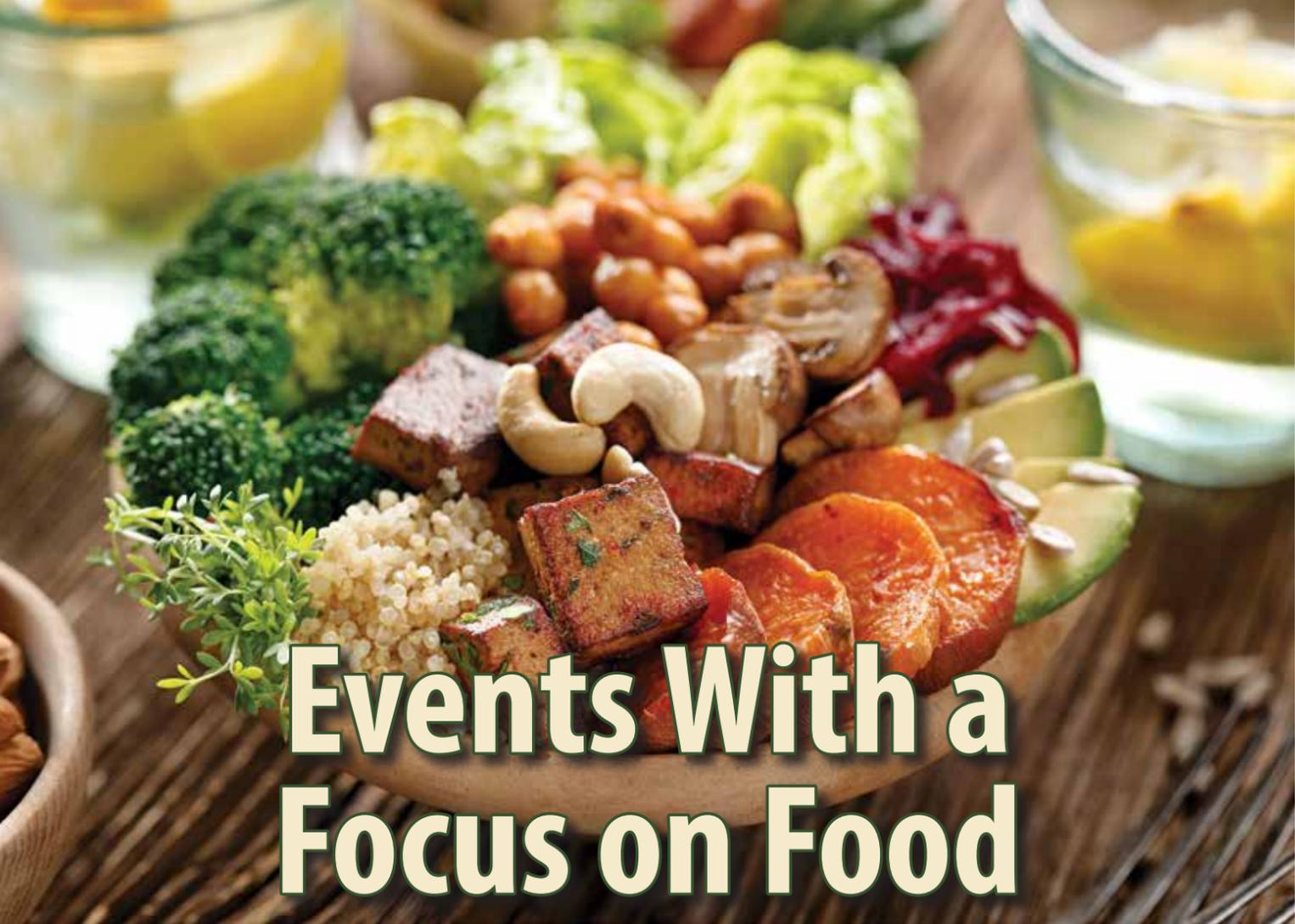
Email marketing and social media are what most entice a vast majority of millennials and how they feel connected

of young professionals looking to get involved. Associations should consider turning to social media to showcase the collaborative nature of their next meeting.

Millennials have changed the workplace, technology, shopping patterns and certainly businesses. Competition for members is fierce and meeting the demands of this young demographic is critical to survival. To stay credible and relevant, associations must learn to provide what they want.

Innovation increases annual growth and retention that will keep members engaged throughout the membership life-cycle. This list may seem daunting, but in reality most associations are already doing most things on this list — they just have to promote it. By effectively communicating key benefits of membership, associations can recruit and retain young professionals.

*Amy Gitchell is a marketing and research specialist at GrowthZone AMS with a focus on association industry research and growth. She is passionate about marketing communications and has extensive experience in digital media strategy.*



# Events With a Focus on Food

## The Proper Presentation Can Make a Meeting ... *the Wrong One Can Break It*

By Sophia Bennett

One thing Keegan Hooks has learned during her many years in the event industry is that food and beverage can be the hidden variable that makes an event highly memorable or criticized. “Even though it only passively supports your meeting success, the minute it’s reduced or removed, the overall satisfaction of the event plummets . . .” says Hooks, CMP, senior director of accounts for the event management firm i4D Events and former organizer of the Sapphire Now + ASUG annual conference. “People go for the content, but if the wrapping is broken, they don’t like it.”

When something is that important to an event, it’s critical to get it right. And that means staying up on the latest food and beverage trends so you’re delivering a culinary experience in line with



Keegan Hooks, CMP  
Senior Director of Accounts  
i4D Events  
Crown Point, IN

**“Even though [food] only passively supports your meeting success, the minute it’s reduced or removed, the overall satisfaction of the event plummets...”**

the needs and values of modern consumers. The days of delivering three plated meals and cookies at the break are long gone.

“A lot of our events are very technical education events, so you have to keep people awake in the afternoon,” Hooks says. “Giving them sodas, brownies and cookies kill the brain.”

In addition to being interested in more healthy food options, many consumers are looking for inventive cuisine that’s beautifully presented, easy to eat on the go, and served with flavorful alcoholic or non-alcoholic drinks. The caution to getting too wrapped up in food and beverage trends is that certain selections might not be appropriate for every audience.

“With all of these things, you still have to think about who your attendee is,” says Tracy Stuckrath, CSEP, CMM, CHC, owner of thrive! meetings & events in North Carolina. “A meat-and-potatoes audience is not going to like kombucha. There are a lot of stories out there about millennials and what they want from meetings, but as people continue to age and don’t retire, the baby boomers are still there. So how do you mix what baby boomers want to eat and millennials want to eat and have a good meal for everybody?”

That is the million-dollar question, and these tips can inform decision-making around the all-important menu.

### MAKE IT CONVENIENT

Convenience foods are growing in every sector of the food and beverage industry, including events.

“Convenience — the ability to very quickly grab and go or have things delivered or brought to an individual — is a huge trend,” says Andrea Streat, CMP, director of conferences for the International Foodservice Distributors Association. “I’m finding more and more that seated dinners are fading away. We’re constantly trying to figure out how to provide food that is less formal and quick; yet remains memorable.”

The move toward convenience foods is tied to several event trends. Plated dinners mean attendees are stuck at a table next to the same person for a long period. Being able to eat quickly and on the go allows participants to keep networking and learning. It also gives people more time to stand and move around, which health-conscious individuals appreciate.

“As budgets begin to decrease in food and beverage and people want to stay away from moving through a big buffet line, we really want to move toward the market feel,” Hooks says. “Within the market feel we can create menus that have hot and cold options that are more grab and go.

As conferences get bigger and space is at a premium, we don’t have thousands of [tables] for people to sit at. I can create a menu and send out one-third of the food at 11 a.m., one-third at 1 p.m. and one-third at 2 p.m. Packaged food helps the kitchen and attendees and stays fresh all day.”

Even when she does buffets for smaller events, Hooks makes the experience as convenient as possible for attendees.

“We try to stay away from one line and create an environment that’s more pleasing. We’ll do squares so people can approach the table from all sides and make it more interactive. It feels better, like you’re not just lining up to dig in a trough.”

**“A meat-and-potatoes audience is not going to like kombucha. So how do you mix what baby boomers want to eat and millennials want to eat and have a good meal for everybody?”**



Tracy Stuckrath, CSEP, CMM, CHC  
Owner  
thrive! meetings & events  
New Bern, NC

Stuckrath is also very interested in the accessibility of food and beverages at functions.

“There’s what is being served, but there’s also how people get to it and get into the room and move through the room,” she says. There are several guides online to planning ADA-compliant food and beverage service.

### PLANT-BASED FOOD TREND GROWING

“We definitely are seeing a lot of people jumping on the vegan train,” says Robin Selden, managing partner, executive chef at Marcia Selden Catering & Events in Stamford, CT. She and many other chefs have embraced new ways to get creative with entirely plant-based foods.

At a recent dinner for event planners in New York, Selden served an all-vegan meal that highlighted a different vegetable at each course. Her favorite was the “corn story.” Guests were served a bowl with a corn cake, a corn rib made from a piece of fried and spice-rubbed corn cob, grilled and dehydrated corn kernels, dehydrated corn dust and truffled popcorn. A waiter then came around and poured a corn “bisque” into each bowl on the table.

Additionally, there was a tomato tartare with colorful



Planners say food, and its presentation, has taken center stage at events and meetings. Attendees are seeking wholesome, healthier choices, and chefs are accommodating them. Chefs are also moving away from traditional, sit-down meals to serving meals on-the-go as some events are now less formal.

heirloom tomatoes, dehydrated tomato chips, avocado, shaved sourdough frizelle that was grilled and drizzled with herbed olive oil and fried basil leaves. The dish, which was assembled in a ring mold to showcase the different layers, was topped with a tomato sorbet.

As more people move to a vegan or vegetarian diet, they're looking for new sources of protein. That, as well as the general interest in healthy foods, put seeds front and center in many dishes.

"They're able to add texture to salads or cheeses," says Paul Pettas, communications director for Centerplate, a

To give the sprouts a different texture, she will fry some in tempura batter and toss them in salads for extra crunch.

Using offbeat citrus fruit such as Buddha's hand is another trend Selden sees.

"You can candy the peel and serve it as a garnish on a gin drink," she says. "You're never going to use it whole, so it becomes a topic of conversation if it's sitting on the bar. People want to hold it and smell it."

Pettas also says citrus is very popular.

"We're seeing more citrus flavors get incorporated in flavored waters. We're also seeing things like kumquats, pomelo and bergamot in drinks and desserts."

He sees fermented foods as a trend that will have great staying power in the next few years. Miso and fermented hot sauces are among the ingredients people are using for foods; for cocktails, watch for bartenders to incorporate kombucha.

Another food trend is serving traditional comfort foods at breakfast and introducing breakfast as the main meal. For example, "We'll make interesting waffles with things like falafel," Selden says. "Or cool, different frittatas that become almost the center of the plate. They can also include the starch because we'll make them like Spanish tortillas," a dish that includes thinly sliced and fried potatoes.

Selden is also a fan of toast, especially in place of the typical brunch buffet.

"Instead of bagels, muffins and a variety of different things, we'll create everything ahead of time. We'll do avocado toast with feta and pomegranate, or toast with ricotta and smoked salmon. You have this table that looks so bright and delicious, and it's easy to eat. There's not a lot of waiting in lines and dealing with condiments."

Another ingredient, shockingly, is that some chefs are trying cannabis-laced foods and drinks. Cannabis is unlikely to make it onto the main menu at most meetings or events, but Stuckrath thinks these dishes may start showing up as an option at social events. If they do, it's vital to label them and be very transparent about what they contain.

"There are two different kinds: one that will get you high

and one that won't get you high," Stuckrath says. "Chefs are experimenting with infusing [both] into food."

Some people may not want to try cannabis because it goes against their religion or they have some kind of objection to it. Also, it's not safe for people with certain medical conditions to consume cannabis.

## DIETARY AND SERVING PREFERENCES

In general, people are still looking for healthier, more nourishing food at meetings and events. The Mediterranean diet, which includes lots of lean protein, fish, fresh fruits and vegetables, healthy oils and whole grains, is very popular right now, Selden says. Hooks adds that many people are still trying to stick to a diet that's high in protein and low in carbohydrates.

Food allergies continue to be a big issue for which planners have to deal.

"What we do, because we're a global audience, is we collect dietary restrictions in the registration process and build our menus so we can feed 90 percent of the people," Hooks says. "For the remaining 10 percent, we send out a lot of pre-event communications to tell them what we're going to do especially for them. We help those folks find their way."

No matter what they can eat, people are looking to venues to invest in working with local farmers and food producers.

"I still think there is a value and interest in things that are local and speak to the region or the location of wherever the event is taking place," Streat says. "What I do in Florida is feature lots of local honey and citrus."

Planners say communication is the key.

"Meeting planners need to partner with the chef to understand what's in season to make the food more nutritious and tasty," Stuckrath says. Buying local can decrease costs in some cases because out-of-season food doesn't have to be shipped in from far away.

Another way to cut costs is to decrease the amount of food waste generated at events. That's something to which planners, chefs and sites across the country are paying a lot of attention.

## APPEARANCES MATTER

"Food needs to taste good, but it also needs to look good," Hooks says. With her grab-and-go concept, "[participants] really want to see the great packaging and displays that are also sustainable. We try to create almost a Whole Foods-like look because what we're trying to create is a Whole Foods market with flexibility for 20,000 people."

Streat agrees.

"For me, in my world, there is a desire to really showcase

the artistry of food in smaller portion sizes, along with more experiential presentations," Streat says. "So chefs actually preparing things, providing details on the food that is being served, presenting it in very interesting and natural ways instead of so much frill and flowers."

At one of Streat's recent events, the chefs prepared and served food from Boos tables. The tables — named after a butcher who in the late 1800s pioneered what's referred to as butcher-block cutting boards — have a metal frame, butcher-block top and are often on wheels. They can be used individually as serving stations or put together to make one long table.

**"... We're doing tons of shaved Brussels sprouts. They hold up really well to salad dressing, and while they have that yummy cabbage flavor, they take on the flavor of dressing or whatever you give them."**



Robin Selden  
Managing Partner/Executive Chef  
Marcia Selden Catering & Events  
Stamford, CT

"The Boos tables give a very fresh feeling and lend themselves to that local and modern feel," Streat says. "To me, it's very simplistic and clean."

Stuckrath, who once organized a camping-themed event where people could munch on turkey legs and make s'mores at meal time, thinks it's "super important" to incorporate the food into the event's theme.

"What would you eat when you're camping, or what would you eat when you're sailing?" Stuckrath asks. "Using the food to enhance the theme is a really cool idea."

Letting guests play with their food just a little can also be a fun way to "present" their food. At another of Stuckrath's events, participants could make salads in a cocktail shaker. They piled in greens and other ingredients, added dressing, and gave the whole thing a good shake before placing it on their plates.

## BEVERAGE TRENDS

In a food and beverage crossover, Selden says cooking with tea is a big trend right now.

"We're doing a lot of infusions in our food with tea. We've braised short ribs in cocoa cinnamon tea. It gives it a very interesting flavor that you can't put your finger on until you're told what that is." She has also served a steamed



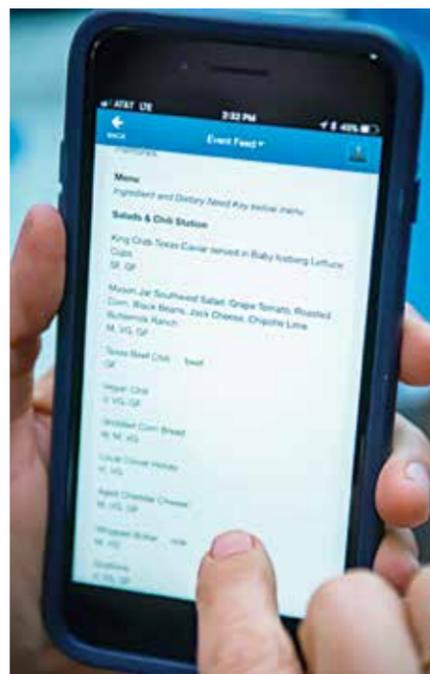
Andrea Streat, CMP  
Director of Conferences  
International Foodservice  
Distributors Association  
McLean, VA

**"Convenience — the ability to very quickly grab and go or have things delivered or brought to an individual — is a huge trend. I'm finding more and more that seated dinners are fading away."**

hospitality company that includes food and beverage service, premium dining experiences, catering, strategy and talent management and many other services. "The creative use of seeds is something we're planning to increase in the next few months."

In addition to using more traditional seeds such as sunflower or pumpkin, chefs are incorporating hemp and chia seeds into dishes.

"While kale is something people still love, what's taken over that we're doing tons of is shaved Brussels sprouts," Selden says. "They hold up really well to salad dressing, and while they have that yummy cabbage flavor, they take on the flavor of dressing or whatever you give them."



Credit: thrive! meetings & events

Meals have information cards to show the ingredients for people who may be allergic. Also, menus can be downloaded to a phone.

red snapper with a Thai curry sauce that featured coconut milk and tea.

Tea cocktails are still very popular, Selden says. In fact, tea in general seems to be having another moment (or two).

“Tea is a very big beverage on the market,” Stuckrath says. She likes to do short educational seminars at events where an expert explains the different types of teas and the benefits of each. She has also done classes and demos on how coffee is roasted, how to pair beer and wine with foods and how to mix great cocktails.

Also, cold brewed coffee is still a big trend. For cold and hot coffee bars, “it’s important to have all the right milks and all the right sugars,” Hooks says. That includes cream, non-fat milk, non-dairy beverages such as almond and soy milk, sugar, artificial sweeteners, stevia and date sugar.

“What we’ve been leaning toward for our events is less soda

and more of the healthy alternatives, such as strawberry basil water,” she says.

Pettas, with Centerplate, is seeing the same thing. “Something that our meeting planners are definitely doing more of is using blueberries, peaches, mint or rosemary in water,” Pettas says. “It’s a way to be seasonal and in line with what’s trending at the moment.”

In addition, there’s still a big move toward replacing bottled water with water stations to cut down on waste.

For people who don’t drink alcohol, mocktails are still very popular as an alternative.

“If you have a signature drink for your event, make sure you have a mocktail version too,” Stuckrath says.

For people interested in alcoholic drinks, wine from small production companies are something consumers are increasingly interested in, Selden says. Beer enthusiasts are still interested in trying local microbrews, and Centerplate is exploring opportunities to make those beers hyper-local when possible.

“If we have craft brewing partners in our local markets, we’re thinking about ways we can incorporate ingredients from our onsite farms and honey from our onsite honeybee hives and make venue-specific beers,” Pettas says.

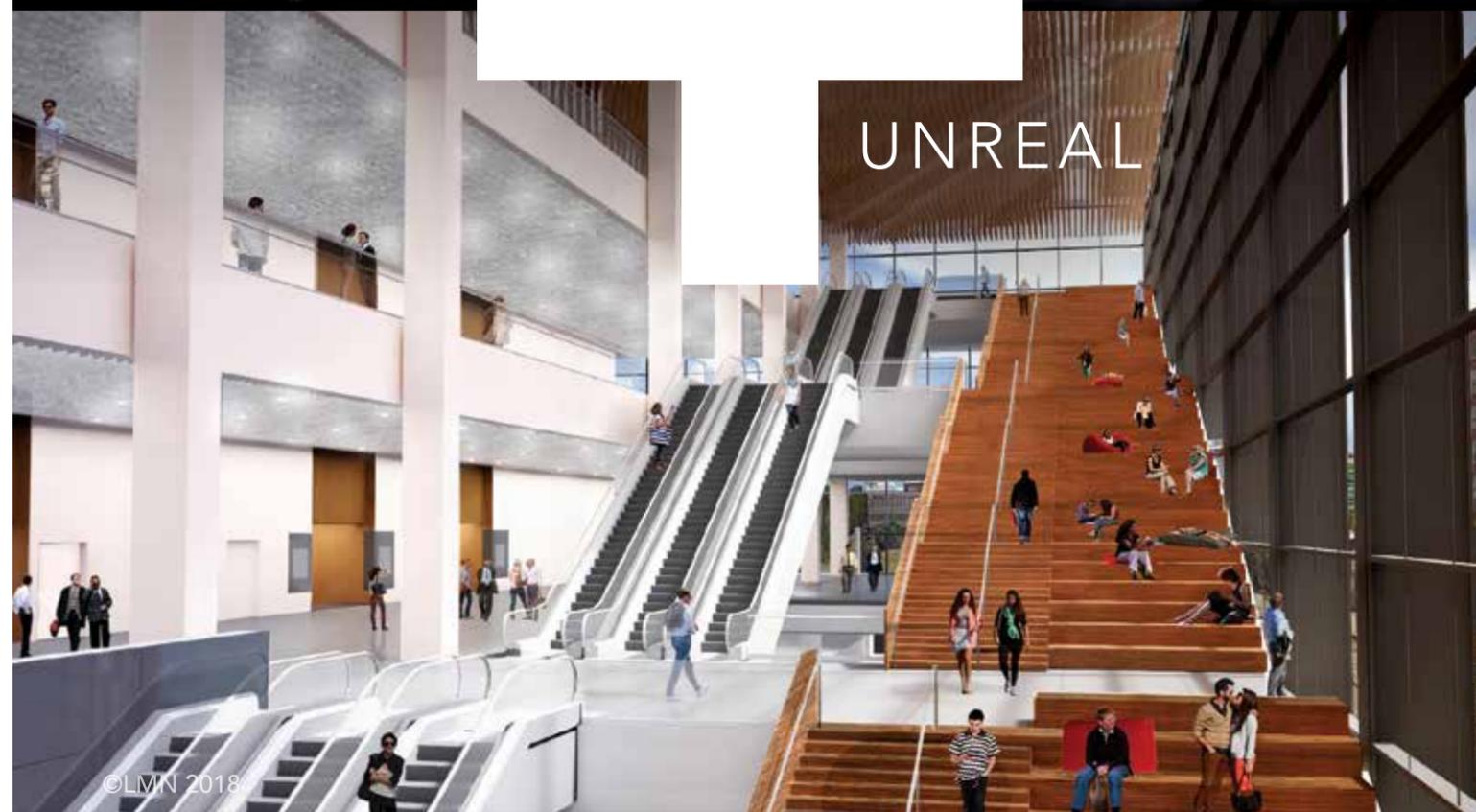
For cocktails, Moscow mules are popular right now, especially when served in a copper mug. Streat uses the versatile drink to showcase local ingredients, such as honey and citrus for Florida-based gatherings. They can also be made with different types of seasonal fruits, or spirits to give them a themed and flavorful twist.

AC&F



Paul Pettas  
Communications Director  
Centerplate  
Stamford, CT

**“Something that our meeting planners are definitely doing more of is using blueberries, peaches, mint or rosemary in water. It’s a way to be seasonal and in line with what’s trending at the moment.”**



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# Take steps to prevent accidents or injuries

If an Incident Occurs, Know Who To Call and What to Do

By Keith Loria

**W**hen a large group of people gather for a convention, the odds of some sort of mishap, illness, or injury — from scratches to serious injuries or sickness — go way up.

That's largely because of sheer numbers, of course, but then consider all the activity that goes on at conventions. People are traveling, often far distances, so they're likely arriving at a hotel tired. Then they start eating, drinking and socializing. Even dancing can lead to someone getting hurt.

A lot of people decide to explore the city they're visiting. They go out on trips, either as part of official activities at the convention, or just simple sight-seeing excursions as they explore the convention's host city.

It's a perfect scenario for injuries, illness and sickness related to food and drink.

"There is really no limit to what injuries can happen during a convention," says Jana Thompson, founder of Texas-based On Point Hospitality & Site Selection. "It's all based

on the level of activity during the trip. It can be as simple as a food-related illness, mostly due to a dietary restriction, drinking too much or heart attacks. I've also seen speakers misstep while walking up on the stage, fall and fracture their ankle. We are all human and accidents happen."

## AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

David Audrain, executive director for the Society of Independent Show Organizers, says while injuries to attendees



are quite rare, the obvious first step is to treat them, and most events and venues have trained medics on premises during events to assist.

Coming up with a game plan to put into effect in the event of an accident is an excellent idea. And that plan should begin with discussions with local organizations and first responders.

"Before a convention, it is crucial to assess the level of risk associated with hosting your event," says Jody-Ann Rowe, M.Ed. and founder of The Event Certificate. "This means working with the fire department and other essential safety services to provide feedback on proposed layouts, lighting and other design features that will need to be installed to facilitate the event."

Thompson says it's also important to develop a plan with the meeting stakeholder. Some things to discuss are to identify the person at the company who should be contacted if there's an accident, and how the company wants to handle the incident.

"The planner should also connect with the director of security and know their emergency protocol when it comes to attendee injuries," Thompson says. "Does the hotel or conference center have defibrillators? If so, how many and where are they located? How quickly can one be accessed?"

"There is really no limit to what injuries can happen during a convention. It can be as simple as a food-related illness, mostly due to a dietary restriction, drinking too much or heart attacks. I've also seen speakers misstep while walking up on the stage, fall and fracture their ankle"

Jana Thompson  
Founder  
On Point Hospitality & Site Selection  
Southlake, TX

You also need to have each attendee's emergency contact in the event of an injury before any conference so you know who to contact."

Discuss with the management of the host hotel what steps should be taken if an accident is to occur. Find out if the hotel has a point person who should be contacted — a member of the security team, for example — then consider what attendees will be doing and think proactively about what accidents could happen and how to prevent them.

"During the pre-con with the hotel, it's important to go

through the potential obstacles,"Thompson says. "For example, is the group golfing and is it going to be really hot? You want to make sure that the golfers have plenty of water and eat during their round. Is it raining and could there be any slipping hazards? Report any potential challenges to the hotel or convention center so injuries can be prevented."

Rachael Katkocin, director of marketing & creative services for CSI DMC, based in Falls Church, VA, regularly works with corporate events, meetings and associations nationwide and internationally, and has dealt with several injuries over the years. That's why she shares it's vital to be prepared.

"Prior to the start of any program, our event management team asks for the standard operating procedures of the venue or facility where their client's meeting is taking place," she says. "They also make sure they are aware of where the closest hospital is located, if there is an EMT present during the event and all emergency exits, etc. Having this knowledge ahead of time allows our team and the venue's staff to work quickly and cohesively if something occurs onsite such as an attendee getting injured."

Once the immediate needs of the emergency are tended to, the CSI event manager then updates their client so their contact is made aware of everything that occurred and the actions taken. The next step is for the event manager to update the CSI director of event management and the general manager so that leadership is in the loop. Someone fills out an accident report that day, detailing the incident, which steps were taken to mitigate the emergency and who was made aware of the situation.

Another step to consider is insurance.

"Most event insurance will cover for public liability, which includes personal injury to attendees and property damages," Rowe says. "For events that have a larger crowd such as a convention, festival or concert, there is also event-type specific insurance that will cover for bodily injuries from others as well as protect the organizers from lawsuits."

**"Meeting planners should have a written event-crisis plan. This is a plan . . . that outlines your action steps in most emergency situations. In concert with that plan, find out what your venue's plan(s) are and make sure yours is well coordinated with them."**

Joy DesMarais-Lanz  
COO

Synergos, An Association Management Company  
Indianapolis, IN

## THE BEST-LAID PLANS

Joy DesMarais-Lanz is the chief operations officer for Synergos, an association management company with offices in Indianapolis, IN and Saint Paul, MN. The company executes local, statewide, national and international events for clients, and DesMarais-Lanz says planning ahead and creating an event emergency plan is a smart step.

"Meeting planners should have a written event-crisis plan," she says. "This is a plan, carried onsite with you, that outlines your action steps in most emergency situations. In concert with that plan, find out what your venue's plan(s) are and make sure yours is well coordinated with them."

For example, the venue should have a severe weather emergency plan so integrate theirs into yours. At your pre-



CSI DMC employees discuss an emergency management plan prior to an event. Planners say going over the plan beforehand is the best policy.

con, you should also walk the venue and ensure you know where all of the emergency sites are located — e.g. the security office, or storm shelter.

She also recommends that planners receive current training and certification in first aid, CPR, and how to use an AED.

"At least two weeks before your event, make sure you review the plan with your team including how and when to document incidents," DesMarais-Lanz says.

Still, some planners may find themselves dealing with an accident and no plan of action.

"But, if they are in a situation without such a plan as back up, I would first ensure that the person's (or persons') emergency is taken care of — if that means basic first aid or calling 911," DesMarais-Lanz says. "Their safety and well-being must be the first priority. Afterwards, document everything that occurred and communicate the situation with the venue, your client and your supervisors."

Roberta A. Kravitz, executive director for the International Society for Magnetic Resonance in Medicine (ISMRM), says a protocol is, depending on the severity of the injury, to notify security to ensure medical help is secured immediately.



Jody-Ann Rowe, M.Ed.  
Founder  
The Event Certificate  
Vaughan, Ontario

**"If you have a list of possible scenarios and the likelihood of them happening, you can now think through what you will need to prevent these from happening or planning for the moments when they occur."**

"If this notification is not done through the director of meetings, which is preferred, then the director of meetings is immediately notified, who then notifies me," she says. "We work closely with the medical team to ensure our attendee's well-being, including contacting any family members, if necessary, and remain available to assist with any transportation arrangements once the situation has stabilized."

Once at an ISMRM convention, a speaker fell off the stage and shattered his elbow.

"We were outside his home country at the time," Kravitz says. "He was in the hospital beyond the end of our meeting, and we monitored and then worked with him and the airline to get him home."

## MANAGING RISK

With incidents of domestic and international terrorism, meeting planners have put safety and security on the forefront of their meeting planning activities. It is not enough to believe the venues have trained professionals to handle a crisis; today's planner needs to know and plan accordingly.

Today's meeting planners must also manage risk. They need to understand the scope of their gathering and anticipate what could happen.

A good idea is to get requests in early to begin communicating with potential venues about their safety and security requirements, as well as ascertaining from the venue and perhaps even local law enforcement agencies their plans/abilities as part of the site selection process.

In addition to life-safety concerns, meeting staff and volunteers need to be trained for emergencies. Also, they should watch for unaccompanied baggage/bags/backpacks, unauthorized personnel and/or people not wearing proper identification and theft.

Chrystal Huskey, CEO of Event Integrity in Littleton, CO, says a plan should always be in place for emergency situations and injuries as part of the event planning process.

"In a nutshell, first aid and crisis response training are great

tools to have, but if you have them and you're not putting them to use in your event plan, or if you aren't sure where to start, you're likely putting yourself and/or your client in a position of liability," she says. "This can be avoided with some simple procedures added to your event planning toolbox and internal processes."

## GETTING INFORMATION FROM THE GUESTS

The attendees themselves also can help prevent accidents with a bit of precaution. Attendees, of course, should be aware of their own medical and physical abilities. This includes food allergies and intolerances, which the host organization should ask for and provide to those who need to know.

It's also worth working with the host organization to provide food options safe for people with common food allergies. Dairy, eggs and nuts are among the top foods to which people are allergic, so make sure there are food options that don't include those ingredients in the event a participant fails to mention it beforehand.

## THREE STEPS TO SUCCESS

Rowe says all planners should develop a plan of action prior to a convention or any event. She refers to it as the "Find-It, Assess-It, Fix-It" rule.

For "Find-It," she says to consider areas of potential accidents, such as lighting and backdrop installed on a stage for presenters.

"There is always the possibility that a spotlight could fall or there could be a fire from pyrotechnics if used," Rowe says. "Think about these scenarios and make a list of them."

The time for "Assess-It" involves listing possible incidents that could result in injuries. "The next step is to assess the



"[Our event management team] makes sure they are aware of where the closest hospital is located, if there is an EMT present during the event, all emergency exits, etc. Having this knowledge ahead of time allows our team and the venue's staff to work quickly and cohesively if something occurs onsite . . ."

Rachael Katkocin  
Director of Marketing & Creative Services  
CSI DMC  
Falls Church, VA

likelihood of these happening," she says. "On a scale of 1 to 10, what is the likelihood of an attendee being injured by a falling prop?"

Finally, there's "Fix-It."

"If you have a list of possible scenarios and the likelihood of them happening, you can now think through what you will need to prevent these from happening or planning for the moments when they occur," Rowe says. "This could be getting a site inspection and event insurance prior to hosting the event and having emergency medical services and security on hand during the event," she says.

This system seems to have worked for Rowe, as she has had no serious injuries take place throughout her career.

"I've been lucky enough to never have an attendee injured at an event beyond a paper cut," she says. "This was quickly remedied by providing them with a Band-Aid from the on-site first aid station."

#### IN THE EVENT OF AN ACCIDENT . . .

So what should you do if an accident does happen during a convention?

Thompson notes that the hotel and convention staff should be notified immediately of an emergency, and also inform the meeting stakeholder. Then you need to be available as needed.

"Depending on the situation, the planner may need to be the liaison between the injured attendee and the attendee's emergency contact until a plan is in place to take care of the attendee," she says.

She adds that it's also important to notify the hotel staff.

"If an attendee gets sick during the conference, most planners will communicate that to their hotel contacts and can assist in getting them any over-the-counter medication per the attendee's request or soup if needed," Thompson says. "The hotel staff is a great resource and can help quickly when

needed since the planner is also probably assisting in running the meeting."

#### HANDLING INJURIES

Not every accident leads to an injury, but some do, and when someone does get hurt during a convention, effective and proper action needs to be taken.

What sort of injuries can happen to people who are attending a convention?

"There are three main types of injuries that can occur at a convention," Rowe says. "An attendee could get injured from a fall, from being in contact with equipment used in the event setup, or from the unintentional action of another attendee."

She adds that planners need to make sure to take care of injured parties.

"It is important that a planner not only provide an injured attendee with access to health and safety services but also be available to answer questions and follow up on the status of the attendee once they have been treated," Rowe says.

#### AFTER THE ACCIDENT

Let's say you had the unfortunate experience of an attendee getting injured during an event. It could be that a presenter was hurt while making a presentation, or a participant had a slip and fall while visiting an area museum, or someone got sick at an area restaurant. You handled the situation well, and the injured party received the attention and care they needed. They're fine, and this hiccup aside, the event went swimmingly.

"After the event, review any emergencies and/or incident reports," DesMarais-Lanz says. "You may have some additional follow up to do so make sure that is completed."

Rowe says it's an excellent idea to reach out to the injured individual and see how they're doing.

"This is highly recommended," she says. "Think of yourself as a consumer and the best and worst experiences you've had with companies. In most cases, even the worst ones, your perception was probably impacted by the level of customer service you received. Therefore it is important to reach out and check in on the injured party to see how they are doing, offer your sympathies and ask if there is anything else you can do as the organizer."

There is, however, one key exception.

"The only thing that might impact this would be a lawsuit, where your legal representative might caution against this," Rowe says.

Thompson agrees that a visit or phone call with the injured person is a nice step.

"I think that's a nice courtesy," Thompson says. "No specifics are needed on their condition, but a simple, 'Hope you are feeling better' is a nice gesture."

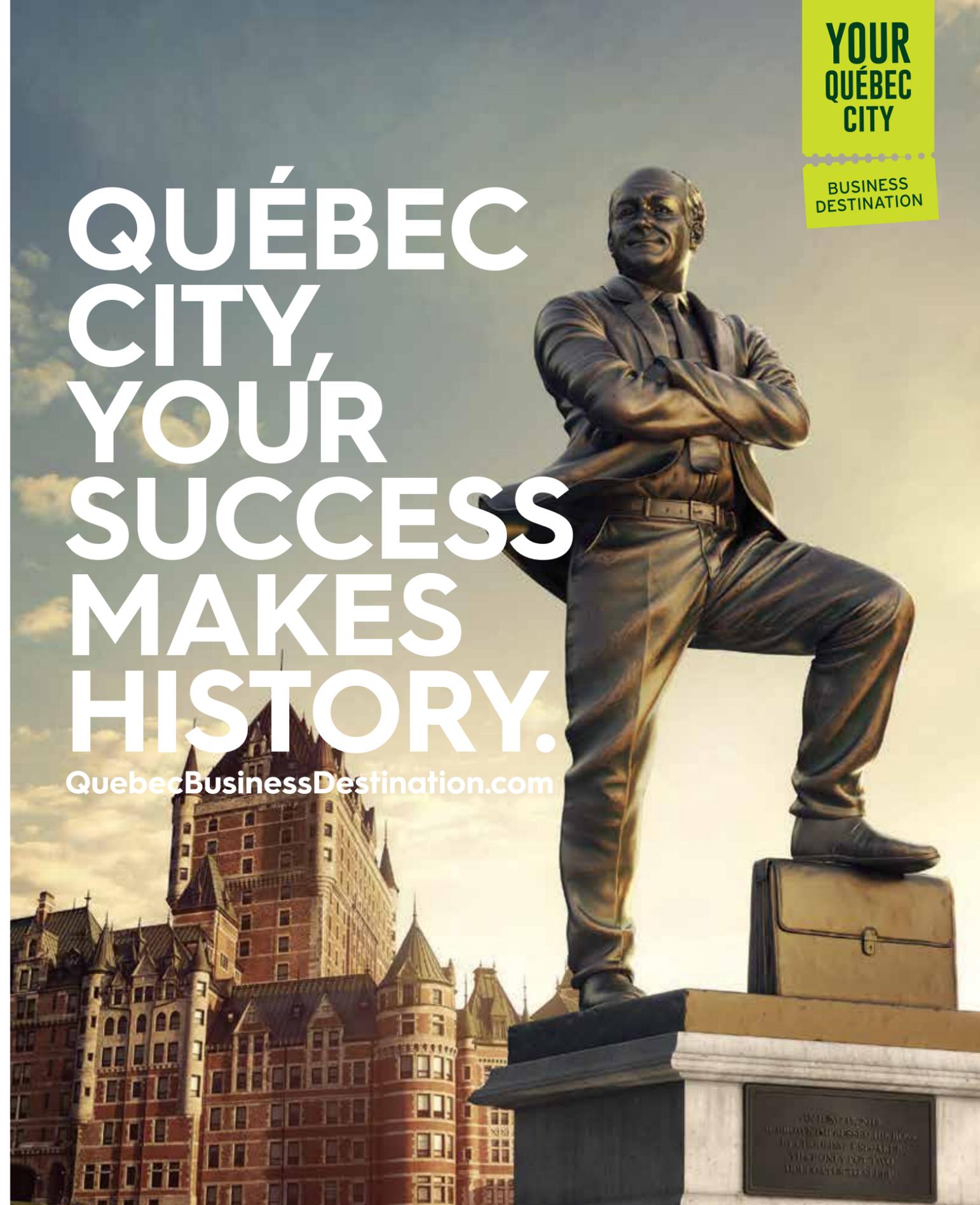
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# Youth Movement

## Build Your Leadership Pipeline by Engaging Emerging Professionals

**T**oday's young convention delegate may well become tomorrow's highly involved senior member, but only if that young professional sees value in attendance today. Understandably, associations are concerned with engaging the young professional, and the task falls in part to the convention planner. Association executives outside of the meetings department may decide on a certain initiative to engage this demographic and the planner will carry it out. Alternatively, the planners may create and implement the strategies. In either case, the challenge is that there are many engagement strategies and many ways to spark the interest of younger members. A good starting point is to define the target demographic. "Our Rising Risk Professionals are defined as 35 and under,"

By Patrick Simms

says Stuart Ruff-Lyon, vice president, events and education with RIMS, The Risk Management Society, an association that has taken many steps over the past few years to engage these professionals. In 2015, RIMS actually created a distinct event for "next generation" professionals.

"The RIMS NextGen Forum offers a younger audience a lower price point to meet, network and learn," Ruff-Lyon says. "The event attracts more than 100 rising risk professionals and offers immersive education such as tours and improv training."

Last year, RIMS created a new membership category to target rising risk professionals. "We now offer young associates on the insurance/broker side the ability to join RIMS for a lower price point."

### GROWING THE STUDENT CONTINGENT

These kinds of initiatives are certainly cultivating the future leaders of the risk management trade and the future membership of RIMS. However, it can also be fruitful to target an even younger demographic than the "emerging professional." Engaging students in the field has also been a priority for RIMS. Since 2016, the result has been a 71 percent increase in student participation at the RIMS Annual Conference and Exhibition. One means of attracting the best students to the conference is RIMS' Anita Benedetti Student Involvement Program (ABSIP), which funds scholars to attend the RIMS Annual Conference and Exhibition.

"RIMS also employs councils and advisory groups to engage the younger generations," Ruff-Lyon adds. "The Student Advisory Council and the Rising Risk Professionals Advisory Group help to guide [RIMS] in our efforts to engage these key audiences."

If an association is going to invest to increase conven-

tion attendance among students, it's worthwhile to track the conversion from student attendees to regular early career attendees.

"Very few associations have done this kind of ROI tracking," says Dave Lutz, managing director of Velvet Chainsaw, in a recent blog post. "When looking at the annual meeting repeat attendance of students into the early years of their career, we usually see conversion rates below 20 percent. I'm thinking an association would want 33 percent or higher."

However, Lutz also advises limiting the amount of student attendees to 10 percent of the overall attendance, at most. Exhibitors naturally want buyers, not students, to make up the vast majority of visitors to their booth; neither would a high percentage of student attendees be attractive to many mid- and late-career attendees, Lutz adds.

"If a 15-year industry practitioner comes to your conference and doesn't connect with enough other participants like them, they're going to walk away believing that the confer-



ence is not designed for them," he says. Moreover, "if the education or scientific program is riddled with low-level student research abstracts (poster or oral), advanced practitioners will opt out of participating in those parts of the program."

### EDUCATION SESSION DESIGN

As a relatively small amount of the session content should be geared toward the young professional, conference organizers must take care not to position these sessions as targeted to "beginners."

"Nobody wants to classify themselves as a beginner; everybody thinks they're a step above what they are," says Heather Seasholtz, director, meetings and events with Talley Management Group, Inc.

"What I've seen work is content that's driven toward emerging professionals, or people that have been in the industry one to five years." As an example, this content may include topics surrounding "the future of the profession," which will tend to spark the interest of young members who will be part of that future.

The length and format of sessions targeting this demographic are also important considerations. Drawn-out "talking head" presentations are best avoided.

"We started offering sessions called 'Essential Conversations,'" says Beth Faubel, senior manager, meeting services, HIMSS. "While these are one-hour long, the concept is a short, 15-minute presentation with thought-provoking content that leads to 45 minutes of peer-to-peer discussion afterward. It provides a formal, yet informal forum for discussing the latest and hottest topics."



RIMS, The Risk Management Society, offers several programs and events for young professionals at its Annual Conference and Exhibition.

**"I believe that younger generations crave experiences, so at RIMS, we strive to create special experiences and 'surprise and delight' moments for our guests. It is not uncommon for us to have special performances and entertainment throughout our show. These moments become social media hits as the audience shares their experiences."**



Stuart Ruff-Lyon  
VP, Events and Education  
RIMS, The Risk  
Management Society  
New York, NY

RIMS also offers shorter education sessions to appeal to the increased number of younger attendees.

"We now offer studio concepts of education. At the RIMS show, participants can wander through education experiences like the Global Studio, Wellness ZENter, Innovation Hub, Career Lab and the Thought Leader Theater," Ruff-Lyon says. "These special educational opportunities offer quick, 20-minute education presentations and unique learning experiences that attendees crave."

### NETWORKING EVENTS

A tried-and-true means of engaging the young professional is to stage a networking event exclusively for that demographic. One example is the HIMSS Millennials Reception, which the organization started hosting a few years ago.

"It has been a highly attended event," Faubel says. "We've had to find larger and larger venues to be able to accommodate the demand year after year. We advertise the reception not just toward millennials, but to all young professionals looking for an opportunity to connect with their peers."

A successful event of this kind usually requires more than a rented space and hors d'oeuvres for the participants. Dividing the group by specialty can help to encourage conversation. In addition, a conversation leader can motivate discussion among the unacquainted attendees, especially if they don't have outgoing personalities.

"Putting an experienced thought leader in that space helps guide the conversation. Or include some of the mentors, because they've been down this road already," Seasholtz recommends.

### MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS

Mentorship opportunities are attractive to many young professionals and student attendees. One type of mentorship program has "veterans" of the convention meet with

newcomers to acclimate them to the event. Seasholtz, a longtime PCMA member, has served in such a role for the association. By meeting with a first-time attendee onsite, "they at least know somebody before they show up at the conference who could introduce them to people, so that way they're not by themselves right off the bat. That seems to work really well," she says.

After a preconference exchange with the attendee, Seasholtz would typically meet the individual at the welcome reception and "spend a little time with them the first day, introduce them to some of my colleagues, and then check in with them throughout the conference. They don't have to be attached at your hip the entire time."

This type of opportunity can also be tailored to the attendee's focus area by pairing him or her with a longtime member in that specialty.

Another type of mentorship program provides the young attendee the opportunity to receive personal career development advice at the convention. This format may be a career development workshop before the meeting.

"They can have a mentor sit with them and look at their LinkedIn profile [and discuss] how to get themselves out there, how to network," says Seasholtz, who has coordinated these types of workshops. Young members will no doubt benefit from the career management insights of someone who has been in the profession for many years, if not decades.

One such robust program is the Hemostasis Thrombosis Research Society's Trainee Workshop, held over a day and a half prior to the biannual conference. Intended for those who are close to graduating from medical school, the program includes five high-profile faculty members who sit with participants to review their CVs. Faculty also select the participants who will present case studies to the audience and mentor them on giving the talk.

Overall, the Trainee Workshop delivers a lot of value to student members, and admission is competitive, Seasholtz notes. "They have to get their program director to write a recommendation for them."

Another kind of competition successfully engaging students is RIMS Risk Management Challenge, which the association introduced in 2015 and holds annually.

"This program engages universities with risk management degree programs. Teams from some 20-plus schools compete on a risk management case study," Ruff-Lyon says. "The top four schools and their students are invited to attend the RIMS Annual Conference and Exhibition to present their risk solutions to a panel of judges. One school is selected as the winner. This program engages students and helps them learn about RIMS and all that we offer. International schools compete as well."



Heather Seasholtz, director, meetings and events for Talley Management Group, Inc. highly recommends mentoring young professionals.

### MILLENNIAL-FRIENDLY CONFERENCE FEATURES

Session content, networking events, mentorship programs and workshops geared toward early-career attendees are some of the main ways to ensure they find value in the convention and, hopefully, become repeat registrants throughout their professional lives. Other elements tending to attract the younger set include convention volunteer opportunities, community service activities and a tech-enabled experience for the attendee. Of course many older attendees will also appreciate these elements, so the ROI does not only come from engaging the emerging professionals.

**"Nobody wants to classify themselves as a beginner; everybody thinks they're a step above what they are. What I've seen work is content that's driven toward emerging professionals, or people that have been in the industry one to five years."**



Heather Seasholtz  
Director, Meetings and Events  
Talley Management Group, Inc.  
Royal, NJ

Serving as a volunteer at the convention (e.g., moderating sessions, assisting with registration, welcoming and directing attendees) is a great way to get to know other members and become more recognizable within the association. As such, the opportunity can be attractive to members in the early stages of involvement with the organization.

However, Seasholtz has not seen many young members volunteering initially. "The second year [of membership] is where you see that fire ignited of wanting to participate more. I think the first year is always hard," she says. "But being

that you're an emerging professional for several years, I do see them interested in getting their name out there."

A case in point is the popularity of HIMSS volunteer Program assistant opportunity among the younger members. The role "includes, but is not limited to, being a door monitor at the education sessions or working in our tote bag areas. In exchange, HIMSS offers complimentary hotel accommodations, daily meals and most importantly, complimentary registration, which provides them access to all of the networking and education sessions offered throughout the week," Faubel says. "This year, we had over 260 applicants for the 85 positions available. Students and young professionals find a lot of value in being a program assistant. We often have repeat participants, who often turn into mentors for the first-time program assistants."

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) trend is on the rise in the convention industry, with associations offering



**"We advertise the [HIMSS Millennials Reception] not just toward millennials, but to all young professionals looking for an opportunity to connect with their peers."**

Beth Faubel  
Senior Manager, Meeting Services  
HIMSS  
Chicago, IL

numerous onsite and offsite opportunities to give back to the host community. And that fits nicely with the social values of many millennials.

"We always offer a CSR activity at our annual conference, and we see a lot of participation from our younger demographics," Ruff-Lyon says. "We usually pick activities that one can easily do from the Marketplace [exhibit hall], like building kits and stuffing packets or boxes with key items to support the charity."

RIMS has also "upped its technology game," according to Ruff-Lyon. This initiative can only make the conference experience more attractive to the always-connected young attendee.

"A few years ago, we didn't even offer Wi-Fi to our guests," he says. "Today, we not only offer Wi-Fi, but we also deliver an engaging event app, educational session response technology and social media games. It is not uncommon to find drones and AI in our Marketplace."

The HIMSS Learning Lounge is a great example of a high-tech venue that allows attendees to consume content as they choose, which is particularly attractive to the young participant. "The room has 10 jumbo screens and comfortable seat-

ing. Attendees get a remote control and headphones so they can tune into the session of their choice playing on one of the screens," Faubel says. "We're hoping this, along with a food park concept we set outside the room, will provide a unique atmosphere for education and networking simultaneously. As a society, we have grown accustomed to having everything at our fingertips and 'on demand.' So our goal is to provide our attendees, including the young professionals, with the opportunity to have additional control of the content they are consuming."

#### MARKETING TO THE YOUNGER DEMOGRAPHIC

Engagement must begin preconference if registration numbers are to be optimized. The received wisdom is that millennials dislike "being sold to," but preconference engagement is not a sales pitch for the event, it's a way of increasing their enthusiasm and leading them to perceive the value of the event for themselves.

Posting photos from last year's convention on social media is one such engagement practice, but providing young attendees an environment where they can take and post their own images may ultimately be more impactful to prospective attendees from that demographic. The younger generations are "looking for areas where they can create a memory," says Seasholtz, such as "creating that Instagram post or that Snapchat pic where others can see how great the event was. I was just at a conference not too long ago where the students said, 'Hey, there's no place for us to take any pictures,' which I thought was interesting. That's what they were looking for. So I think any place where you can capture what's happening in that space will appeal to that generation because they're visual."

Ruff-Lyon confirms this preference among millennials. "I believe that younger generations crave experiences, so at RIMS, we strive to create special experiences and 'surprise and delight' moments for our guests," he says. "It is not uncommon for us to have special performances and entertainment throughout our show. These moments become social media hits as the audience shares their experiences."

He has also found it is fairly easy to acquire testimonials from young attendees that can be used to market future installments of the meeting. "Thankfully, the younger generations are not camera shy, so getting their testimonials has been easy for us. We use these in email marketing and in social media plans. I find that the most powerful marketing tool among the younger generations is word-of-mouth. If you can get them talking (texting, tweeting, posting, etc.) about their great RIMS experience to their peers, we have a much greater chance of attracting their peers to our future shows."

Among that growing number of young attendees are surely some of the future leaders of the risk management field, as well as some of RIMS' most dynamic future members. AC&F



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# Diversity and Inclusion on the Rise

## Planners Taking Steps to Bring in Speakers With Different Perspectives and Viewpoints

By Derek Reveron

**A**ssociation programs, speakers, panelists and breakout facilitators still tend to be mostly white, even as the racial and ethnic diversity of attendees increases.

But that is changing rapidly.

Diversity and inclusion (DI) are no longer just the subject of association mission statements and speeches. Associations and their planners are ramping up efforts to increase DI in convention and conference programs.

Efforts to increase DI include workshops and task forces on the topic, speaker diversity goals, diverse marketing materials and researching membership demographics. The goal is to ensure that meeting programs reflect DI in areas such as race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion and age.

Associations and planners think increasing DI will help attract more attendees, build membership and improve engagement. Most of all, DI lets attendees know their presence, ideas, thoughts and participation are welcome.

That's the view of Krista LeZotte, CMP, CSEP, associate director, meeting operations & special events, at ASAE: The Center for Association Leadership. "One of the main focuses of hosting a conference is ensuring your attendees' experiences are considered from multiple perspectives," LeZotte says. "Adopting that orientation demonstrates your interest in creating a genuinely welcoming environment that is baked into your planning process."

LeZotte adds: "If attendees feel like they belong, they will attend, engage and want to return. Ensuring DI is implemented,

helps to guarantee your members and conference attendees understand they are valued, included and needed."

Mary Anne Dornbusch, manager of conventions and meetings at the American Psychological Association (APA) agrees.

"Offering a spectrum of topics, faces and voices allows attendees to see themselves in the conference, in what's presented, in the range of speakers and diversity of the audience," Dornbusch says. "When attendees genuinely feel welcome and valued, it makes the event experience more meaningful. Having diverse speakers, presenters and sessions also ensures that a variety of viewpoints are showcased."

### DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES FORCE ACTION

Planners say that, due to demographic changes in the population and association memberships, it's important for conference programs to be inclusive as well as diverse. However, it's still not uncommon for conferences and meetings to be diverse but not inclusive.

For example: An association consisting mostly of male and female whites, blacks and Latinos has predominately white male speakers. The group increases the number of black and Latino male speakers over a period of years. Thus, the group is more diverse, but not more inclusive due to the lack of white, black and Latino female speakers.

Leslie Wilson, CGMP, program manager at the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC), puts

it this way: "It is important to be mindful of the optics of no inclusion," Wilson says. "If you host a meeting on women in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), should all of your panels be populated by men? No. But you would be surprised how often that happens. We should all be asking what overt and covert messaging this sends to attendees and our organizations. Speaker and facilitator compositions make a difference in how attendees experience the meeting."

However, associations are starting to make progress on the inclusion front.

"Organizations that may traditionally have been diverse but not inclusive are taking steps to improve," Wilson says.

For example, the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) has long been dominated by females of various races and ethnicities. However, the PTA says it has been "increasing male presence and perspectives in PTA at all levels and in all activities."

Many associations, with the help of planners, are

adopting very specific practices and policies to ensure DI meeting programs.

The AAVMC is an example. "I work closely with our senior director for institutional research and diversity to ensure that our call for proposals clearly articulates our diversity and inclusion expectations," Wilson says. "Session abstracts are reviewed both by our senior director, and other senior content experts, against rigorous criteria that includes diversity and inclusion components."

Wilson describes the next steps after proposals are selected. "We look at session compositions and make decisions about session groupings and provide speakers guidance on how to make sure they stay consistent with our expectations," Wilson says. "We encourage panelists to consider diversity in final speaker selection. We give thought to constructing schedules that allow for a variety of speakers to be visible throughout the meeting and not just on a single day or at a single plenary."

### ASSOCIATIONS ENSURE EVENT MATERIALS REFLECT DI

Once presenters are selected, AAVMC ensures that conference promotional materials represent the DI of speakers.

"We undergo a rigorous review to make sure the images reflect our reality and our aspirational goals around diversity and inclusion," Wilson says. "We are not shy about sending drafts back to our graphic artists with specific instructions about what we would like to see."



Krista LeZotte, CMP, CSEP

Associate Director, Meeting Operations & Special Events, ASAE: The Center for Association Leadership  
Washington, DC

**"One of the main focuses of hosting a conference is ensuring your attendees' experiences are considered from multiple perspectives. Adopting that orientation demonstrates your interest in creating a genuinely welcoming environment that is baked into your planning process."**

Another organization, the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), also pursues specific practices to improve the DI of speakers.

"We have made it an organizational priority to ensure that DI is integrated in the content as well as speakers," says Christina Tushman, AAMC director of leadership development learning, leadership and evaluation, who helps plan and lead the organization's national conferences and programs. "We are developing a workshop on organizational culture which will include a DI partner on the planning and facilitation team to ensure that this important topic is presented from an expert perspective."

In addition, the AAMC constantly evaluates its speaker

line-up to ensure the representation of women and underrepresented minorities. The organization is also introducing more content related to unconscious bias, microaggressions and bystander training (teaching onlookers to observe harassment) within its conferences.

The APA is also adopting a broad DI policy. "The organization is deeply committed to diversity and inclusion in its organizational structure, governance, staffing, advocacy, education and training, communications, and in our meetings and annual convention," Dornbusch says.

Diversity and inclusion also cover the APA's 54 divisions representing the many subfields in psychology. "These divisions create a significant portion of the convention program," Dornbusch says. "Staff and governance members are involved in planning the annual convention and in training division program chairpersons to emphasize the importance of DI in their convention programming."

Some associations in related fields are teaming up to improve DI.

The American Neurology Society (ANS) and American Otolaryngological Society (AOS) have a joint "Resolution on Diversity of Meeting Presenters." The policy states that "diversity of presenters allows for cross-pollination of knowledge, perspective and experiences enabling a stronger and more robust educational experience for our members."

The policy also says, "The American Neurology Society and American Otolaryngological Society will select speakers and panel members endeavoring to balance educational goals while promoting the diversity of our respective societies' memberships and educational offerings."

According to the diversity statement of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), it will "incorporate diversity and inclusion topics into conference sessions, training workshops, webinars and eLearning resources for members and staff."



Mary Anne Dornbusch  
Manager of Conventions and Meetings, American Psychological Association  
Washington, DC

**"Offering a spectrum of topics, faces and voices allows attendees to see themselves in the conference, in what's presented, in the range of speakers and diversity of the audience."**

Several years ago, the APTA formed a diversity and inclusion council that helps shape the organization's decisions regarding meeting locations, topics and presenters. The council meets several times a year to reinforce its commitment to DI issues. The APTA also tracks its committee roster demographics to keep the group as diverse as possible.

The American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA) touts the following policy: "We have built DI into expectations for our members in the Association's Code of Ethics, and multicultural infusion is expected, as appropriate, in all association programs, products and services."

#### EVENT LOCATIONS ARE IMPORTANT

Some associations also seek locations that appeal to diverse audiences. For example, The DI policy of the Society of American Foresters (SAF) says, "Members planning events should consider activity type, locations, dates, and times that appeal to wide variety of people."

While improving DI in every area of associations is a team effort, planners play a key role. According to Norma Poll-Hunter, Ph.D., AAMC senior director of Human Capital Initiatives, Diversity and Inclusion, "Planners hold the vision of the meeting constant and play a significant role in the details of how a meeting is executed. Diversity and inclusion must be intentional. Meeting planners often help to connect the dots from planning to implementation to ensure DI integration and help navigate challenges along the way."

A key role of planners is encouraging meeting stakeholders to pursue DI.

"Planners have a responsibility to remind and sometimes educate stakeholders on the importance of creating a truly diverse and inclusive program," Dornbusch says. "Planners often have some input regarding proposed speakers and topics and can provide guidance to program stakeholders when there is a need for greater DI. It's the planner's role to create a welcoming environment at meetings and events."

Lenay Gore, senior director, meetings and tradeshows at the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), puts it succinctly: "APTA meeting planners collaborate with others on staff to take great measures to ensure all are represented in presentations and events."



Leslie Wilson, CGMP  
Program Manager  
Association of American  
Veterinary Medical Colleges  
Washington, DC

**"If you host a meeting on women in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), should all of your panels be populated by men? No. But you would be surprised how often that happens."**



Credit: ASAE: The Center for Association Leadership  
Meeting planners are pushing to ensure their events have a diverse array of speakers and presenters as attendees are also increasingly more diverse.

Planners dedicated to DI think it adds value to attendee experiences. Dornbusch says, "Conventions and conferences that demonstrate inclusivity and diversity in many forms (gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age and disability) produce a more authentic experience that increases the perceived value of attending the conference."

Poll-Hunter agrees: "You add value to the meeting experience if you integrate diversity and inclusion as part of your overall meeting experience. Research shows that diverse groups arrive at more innovative solutions."

#### DI HELPS ATTENDEES LEARN, ENCOURAGES INVOLVEMENT

Diversity and inclusion also help planners achieve two of their most important goals — learning and engagement.

"Integrating diversity and inclusion throughout the conference experience ensures there are opportunities to learn from individuals who offer different perspectives," Tushman says. "By including diversity and inclusion in your planning, you reinforce the importance of DI as well as learning. Conference participants also feel more engaged when they perceive that the content is inclusive of their experiences and exposes them to new ideas."

LeZotte advises planners to think about how to incorporate DI into every aspect of events.

"Consider each element of the event from arrival to departure and how DI plays a role in that element," LeZotte says. "Make sure there is a diverse make up of all components, from volunteers and speakers to hosting a call for proposals for learning sessions. Ensure event themes and elements aren't boxing attendees into an assumption about their likes, culture or behaviors."

Part of DI is avoiding assumptions about the behaviors of attendees by being aware of their diverse needs and proactively accommodating them.

LeZotte offers examples.

"During site visits, ensure restrooms can accommodate attendees no matter how they identify themselves in terms of gender," LeZotte says. "A relatively easy but important

example is using closed captioning on screens for keynotes and videos. It signals that you are willing to accommodate those who need it."

Another example is ensuring reserved seating and interpreters for attendees who have indicated they are hearing impaired.

"Preparing for such examples allows attendees to navigate the conference without feeling like an outsider," LeZotte adds.

The ASAE also undertakes DI efforts not directly related to race, ethnicity or gender.

According to LeZotte, "We introduced a lounge area called the HIVE for newbie attendees at our convention. The HIVE creates a space where people can engage with other new and seasoned attendees. It's a welcoming environment that helps provide a sense of belonging and community. ASAE also offers a scholarship program for a set number of attendees to attend our annual meeting."

Attendees may also feel more engaged when planners and stakeholders consider DI-related factors beyond meeting programs and presenters.

"These elements present an opportunity to demonstrate the organization's commitment to DI," Poll-Hunter says. "When planning all aspects of a meeting, we have to consider such things as differences in learning preferences, lifestyle, access to resources and accessibility to meeting locations to foster equitable access where all can have the opportunity to benefit from our meetings."

Gore cites several DI-related factors that planners should consider, including site selection.



Christina Tushman  
Director of Leadership Development Learning, Association of American Medical Colleges  
Washington, DC

**"Integrating diversity and inclusion throughout the conference experience ensures there are opportunities to learn from individuals who offer different perspectives."**

"While locations may meet the legal requirements of being accessible, we take it several steps beyond facilities just being legally compliant," Gore says. "We do an extensive review of each property with a detailed checklist of items APTA requires. In addition to our DI council, we also have an access committee that assists with developing these guidelines."

The APTA's DI council also monitors the political climate of potential meeting destinations and notifies staff if any news

or relevant legislation is passed or is pending that may impact certain people attending an event or prevent them from doing so.

The ASAE also views site and destination selection as a part of DI.

According to LeZotte, "Selecting the right city and right venue should also play a part when making your meetings DI. When narrowing down your locations, consider the venue and the city. How accessible is it? How diverse is it? Will your attendees feel welcomed in a neighborhood where you are hosting the event?"

LeZotte also thinks planners should be able to accommodate a range of needs as part of DI.

For example, LeZotte says, planners should consider ways to make all attendees feel welcome if conflicting dates and times are unavoidable. "When thinking about date selection, it is important to consider school calendars, federal holidays, religious holidays and travel costs for locations based upon time of year," LeZotte says.

She suggests that planners be able to answer questions such as the following: "Can you adjust meal choices to accommodate someone attending over a religious holiday that requires modified diets during the meeting dates? Can you host rooms for nursing mothers, so they have somewhere to retreat and carry out any necessary practices so that attendees requiring these adjustments don't feel singled out and know their needs were considered in your planning?"

#### WHEN PLANNING, CONSIDER DI EARLY IN THE PROCESS

Planners and experts offer the following advice for increasing the DI of speakers and presenters:



Research shows that diverse groups arrive at more innovative solutions, so association leaders are looking to expand diversity and inclusion.



**Lenay Gore**  
Senior Director, Meetings and Tradeshows, American Public Transportation Association  
Washington, DC

**"... We strive to include as diverse a group as we can when putting together events. Our industry is comprised of a diverse population, so we need to be sure our presentations reflect the diversity of our members."**

- Launch DI efforts early in the planning process as part of conference planning committees.
- Beware of repeatedly choosing the same speakers and presenters or those with whom the association is familiar. Such an approach requires less work and isn't conducive to DI.
- Make the speaker selection process transparent. "The process for the community to submit content for programs needs to be transparent to all," LeZotte says. "When proposals are being reviewed and final decisions are being made, speakers need to represent different perspectives, ages, types of organizations, gender and ethnicities. This helps to guard against any form of bias or favoritism and ensure all submissions are rated equally and impartially."
- Set goals for increasing DI among speakers and presenters.
- Expand the speaker selection pool and commit to improving it. Also expand the call for presentations beyond those who have presented in the past. Ask speakers to recommend diverse experts.

Planners who help create meetings that welcome diversity and inclusion can enhance the public image of a conference and prevent negative publicity about a conference. Attendees of some association meetings have commented about the lack of diversity on Twitter and other online forums.

Some planners have taken notice of the online criticism. According to the APTA's Gore, "Unlike organizations who have made the news lately by not having a variety of presentations that reflect all members of the organization, we strive to include as diverse a group as we can when putting together events. Our industry is comprised of a diverse population, so we need to be sure our presentations reflect the diversity of our members."

As the ASAE website puts it, "The demographic shifts affecting almost every sphere of American life are likewise creating significant implications and opportunities for associations, touching everything from membership and leadership to product development and talent management."

Groups that don't follow the DI trend could be at a disadvantage. "Associations that intend to remain relevant today and long into the future recognize the strategic importance of diversity and inclusion as an association management discipline," according to the ASAE.



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Credit: American Public Transportation Association

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# Atlantic City: Gleaming Resorts With Ocean Views

## New and Renovated Facilities With Options Galore

By Sara Churchville

As above, so below? Not so. The dark stuffiness of the casino experience — where there are no windows or clocks — makes it easy for planners to forget two of Atlantic City's most persistent realities: its abundance of waterways, and its myriad venues for offering spectacular views thereof.

### ATLANTIC CITY CONVENTION CENTER

Let's begin with the obvious viewpoint for meetings in Atlantic City: the 500,000-sf, 30+-acre Atlantic City Convention Center. Opened in 1997, it was for many years the destination for convention business in the area. It's also only 1.2 miles from the beach, and reminds attendees of what awaits them with its 90-ft atrium lobby and view from the

upper-level meeting spaces, such as breakout room The Tree House with its floor-to-ceiling windows.

### HARRAH'S ATLANTIC CITY

The Waterfront Conference Center, which makes up a large chunk of Harrah's Atlantic City's 125,000 sf of meeting space and accounts for half of the \$250 million investment Caesars has made in its local properties since 2014. The conference center peers over both the ocean and the harbor, and can easily welcome some 5,000 attendees at once. The 2,590-room Waterfront Tower at Harrah's already surges 45 floors up; the current \$56 million renovation of its 507-room Coastal Tower is expected to be complete by summer.

Terry Fielden, past president/trade show chair of the

Garden State Chapter of the American Fence Association, is one planner who has been lured to the new property. In February, his association held its biannual trade show, with educational seminars and certification testing that drew more than 1,000 attendees and a networking cocktail party for 700 attendees and families.

"We moved to Harrah's in 2017 after the Waterfront Conference Center opened," he says. "We had previously held our event at three other Atlantic City locations, including the Atlantic City Convention Center."

Harrah's catered the group's two private parties hosted by exhibitors, as well as the Garden State AFA Chapter's cocktail party, held at the newly renovated The Pool at Harrah's. Attendees are excited about the space.

"Obviously the [Atlantic City] casino experience is a big attraction, but [The Pool at Harrah's] also has become a draw now that our returning attendees know what Harrah's has to offer. The cocktail party is actually growing in participation with each show because of the setting and the food," Fielden says. "Because we can compare this venue to others in town, those who have been longtime attendees love it! The Pool is a fantastic venue for a cocktail party and the Waterfront Conference Center is fresh and new. As opposed to being at the ACCC, we are now housed under the same roof as our lodging and meals. Our meal options are greater."

He says what attendees seemed to appreciate most was "the quality of the food at the cocktail party. One of the comments I hear since we've come here is how much better the food is from our past venues."

On Wednesday and weekend nights, the recently renovated space becomes a full-on LA-style nightclub around a giant pool: The Pool After Dark.

Attendees also like being in the Marina District. "If my attendance continues to increase with each event, there is no reason to change. As long as we are treated well and don't have any issues, we don't tamper with success. From

**"Resorts Casino Hotel has higher quality, and once we got used to them and them to us, the service they've given us over the years has been top-notch."**

Madeline Cook, Executive Director

New Jersey Association of Housing and Redevelopment Authorities, Iselin, NJ

my perspective as the organizer, working with my catering manager was effortless. Her attention to detail and our needs was more than I could ask for."

He advises other planners to "pay attention to location and the environment you might need to pass through to get there. Find people to work with that make you feel comfortable and confident that your event will go off as planned. That is why I am singing the praises of the team I'm working with at Harrah's."

### BORGATA HOTEL CASINO & SPA

Nearby in the Marina District, the 43-floor Borgata Hotel



Harrah's Atlantic City offered the American Fence Association all the amenities the group needed at its biannual trade show in February. Left, members enjoy their cocktail party at The Pool at Harrah's. Right, the resort, which offers 125,000 sf of meeting space, had plenty of room for the AFA's trade show.

Casino & Spa turned 15 in 2018. Its newish two-level conference center offers planners 18,000 extra sf of space, for a total of 106,000 sf that can welcome up to 3,500 attendees depending on the layout. The hotel's longevity may have something to do with how spectacularly Vegas-esque it is. Or it could be the views, especially at The Water Club at Borgata, with 43 floors, and multiple pools, including the adults-only Borgata Indoor Pool & Gardens, with actual live plants being verdant and outdoorsy around a pool that, for

Premier nightclub not only books top-flight entertainment such as DJ Tiësto and Lil Jon, but offers group meeting possibilities with its individual-table TVs and a giant, brandable LED screen. It can also be configured by day for intimate breakout sessions or board meetings. The hotel group is planning to capitalize on the new wave of esports flooding the city with a new bar dedicated to sports betting, scheduled to open in summer.

### RESORTS CASINO HOTEL

Along the Atlantic City Boardwalk, Resorts Casino Hotel, which turned 40 last May, boasts ocean vistas from 14 of its 24 meeting rooms. At the Tower Conference Level, four conference rooms feature views of the Atlantic, both ocean and city. Some 300 attendees can be accommodated within.

Madeline Cook, executive director, and Sandi Niemiec, comptroller of Iselin-based New Jersey Association of Housing and Redevelopment Authorities (NJAHRA) have held the association's annual convention at Resorts Casino Hotel for the past six years. But it wasn't the intrigue of the new that drew them in.

"The Atlantic Club was closing their doors in 2013, so we had to find another location," Cook says. "We chose Resorts



The 500,000-sf Atlantic City Convention Center has meeting and function space with Atlantic Ocean views. It's also only 1.2 miles from the beach.

**"Feedback was overwhelmingly positive on [Ocean Resort Casino] and the amenities; they appreciated the cleanliness, non-smoke smell, ocean view and friendliness of the staff."**

Lori Todd

President, Association of Student Assistance Professionals, Allenhurst, NJ

those who have the financial might, can be glassed over as a dance floor for events. The "boutique" hotel has 800 rooms, so it's a fairly large crown, the jewel in which may be Immersion, a two-story spa on the 32nd floor. With 360 degrees of floor-to-ceiling water views, attendees can maneuver around chaises facing the setting sun as a system of changing colored lights around the pool provides a friendly, otherworldly glow.

The Borgata and The Water Club share Tom Biglan, executive chef, who in February put out a sumptuous spread for the American Academy of Chefs during the American Culinary Federation's ChefConnect convention. The attendees were heavy hitters from the academy who are hard to impress, but concoctions like roasted beef bone marrow with veal cheek confiture and terrine of foie gras with kumquat compote and pickled onion petal seemed to do the trick.

For evening activities, attendees can head to The Bar at Bobby Flay for bourbon or tequila flights of three 1-oz samples or, in warmer weather, the Borgata Beer Garden.

because it was centrally located on the Boardwalk. The first year, it wasn't as good as it is now; they've improved."

For two days in September 2018, 145 attendees — executive directors of NJ's 80 housing authorities and a board of commissioners — convened to discuss industry business, network, attend workshops from HUD representatives and visit vendor exhibits. The planners made ample use of the resort's classrooms.

"When they redid some of the conference areas, they were very tech-savvy; classrooms have projectors hooked up to Wi-Fi and all the amenities to have several classes at the same time, with individual screens. There are 10 classrooms you can use for different sessions, all in one place. They recently redid the Ocean Tower, and those rooms are closer to the conference center and shopping and restaurants," Niemiec says. Resorts also set up a special room regis-



The Waterfront Conference Center occupies a large portion of Harrah's Atlantic City. The center is the largest facility of its kind on the east coast.

tration line for attendees: in short, it was easy for attendees to get where they needed to be with minimal displacement.

The first night, attendees ate at the onsite Italian restaurant Capriccio, which as so much of Atlantic City does, offers ocean views. Breakfast and lunch were buffet style, plus a sit-down banquet dinner, all within a few steps from the meeting area.

"With the waitstaff, you don't even know they're there," Cook says. "We find that very homey. I've had commissioners say how comfortable they are because they get such nice service."

For the most recent event, the entertainment was a stage set up for female impersonators The Divas; in past years, it's been a 10-piece orchestra or a DJ. "Resorts has lighting people who are familiar with stage settings and sound systems," Cook says.

**"If my attendance continues to increase with each event, there is no reason to change [from Harrah's Atlantic City]. As long as we are treated well and don't have any issues, we don't tamper with success."**



Terry Fielden  
Past President, Trade Show Chair  
Garden State Chapter of the  
American Fence Association,  
Philadelphia, PA

"We're always very determined to have what we want when we want it. Resorts has higher quality, and once we got used to them and them to us, the service they've given us over the years has been top-notch. We've been so satisfied, and they get better and better as time goes on," Cook says.

The hotel is also "excellent" at working with budgets.

"We didn't spend an extra penny that we didn't have to; they can back into things to help with the finances," Cook says.

The planners sum up their experience with venue staff as "accommodating, friendly and experienced."

Resorts offers an all-inclusive meeting package that includes three daily meals, morning and afternoon breaks, meeting space with AV in the Resorts Conference Center, Wi-Fi, parking, tips and taxes for a flat fee that starts at \$239 per attendee per night.

The LandShark Bar & Grill, part of the Resorts property, is right on the beach. Planners can buy out the space, which holds about 250 and serves up bites and brews such as blue margaritas, sliders, fish tacos and such.



The Premier nightclub at the Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa books top-flight talent such as DJ Tiësto and Lil Jon, and can also host board meetings.

## HARD ROCK HOTEL & CASINO ATLANTIC CITY

A walkway at Resorts leads directly to the 2,000-room Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City. Opened in June 2018, the 41-floor space is an explosion of activity, design, color and energy. It is the antithesis of the typical, heads-down casino hotel in its spaciousness and the breadth of items at which to gawk. It's not just the signature music memorabilia to be expected of the chain, but a giant lighted staircase, a ceiling guitar and the strains of live music emanating from Sound Waves, the performance space.

For attendees who want to get to the other side of the looking glass, the resort offers as one of its Sound of Your Stay options the chance to have a Fender guitar and amp delivered to the room or even take a guitar lesson.



The Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City has 150,000 sf of meeting and event space.

Mariah Carey is just one of the performers scheduled to play at Hard Rock Live at Etes Arena, part of the resort's overall 150,000 sf of meeting and event space. Planners can use the arena to accommodate 7,000 attendees in a general session or 300 booths at a trade show. For more sectioning off, the 29,000-sf Seminole Ballroom can be divided into six spaces. Sugar Factory, home of the candy wall and the 12-person sundae, and YOUYU Noodle Bar are just two of the plethora of dining possibilities.

## OCEAN RESORT CASINO

At 57 stories, Ocean Resort Casino, which opened in June 2018, sparkles over the city. Along with "La Mesa de Jose," a chef's table of tapas offered by Chef Jose Garces, Spanish restaurant Amada, one of several fine-dining options, also has sweeping views of the ocean. America's largest Topgolf Swing Suite is ready to welcome attendees, even those who



Resorts Casino Hotel offers ocean views from 14 of its 24 meeting rooms.

won't take a swing, with a host of virtual games, blackjack tables and dizzying views of the boardwalk below.

Attendees of the Association of Student Assistance Professionals (ASAP) of New Jersey's annual Professional Development Conference experienced the resort firsthand. Some 230 counselors and administrators, plus exhibitors and speakers, arrived at the end of February.

"Having sunlight and fresh air" was one of major wow factors for Lori Todd, president of ASAP-NJ. "The Ocean Resort allows a full view of the oceanfront from every hotel room and conference area."

It was the association's first experience at the resort, and it got high marks from attendees. "Feedback was overwhelmingly positive on the resort and the amenities; they appreciated the cleanliness, non-smoke smell, ocean view and friendliness of the staff; they thought the food was delicious, as well as the snack breaks."

Todd appreciated the "exceptional conference facilities," the conference area layout and the professionalism of the team. "The staff was friendly and accommodating from the first encounter. We chose on-site catered meals for breakfast



Ocean Resort Casino is the official host hotel to Atlantic City's Arena Football League team, the Atlantic City Blackjacks.

and lunch both days which were excellent; the meal experience was flawless."

To other planners, she suggests "coming down and doing walkthroughs during the planning and decision-making process; it was very helpful to see the rooms in person."

The resort has 1,399 rooms, with another 500 projected to open in summer 2020, plus 160,000 sf of meeting and event space and complimentary Wi-Fi. For 2019, Ocean Resort Casino is also the official host hotel to the city's brand-new Arena Football League team the Atlantic City Blackjacks.

## TROPICANA ATLANTIC CITY

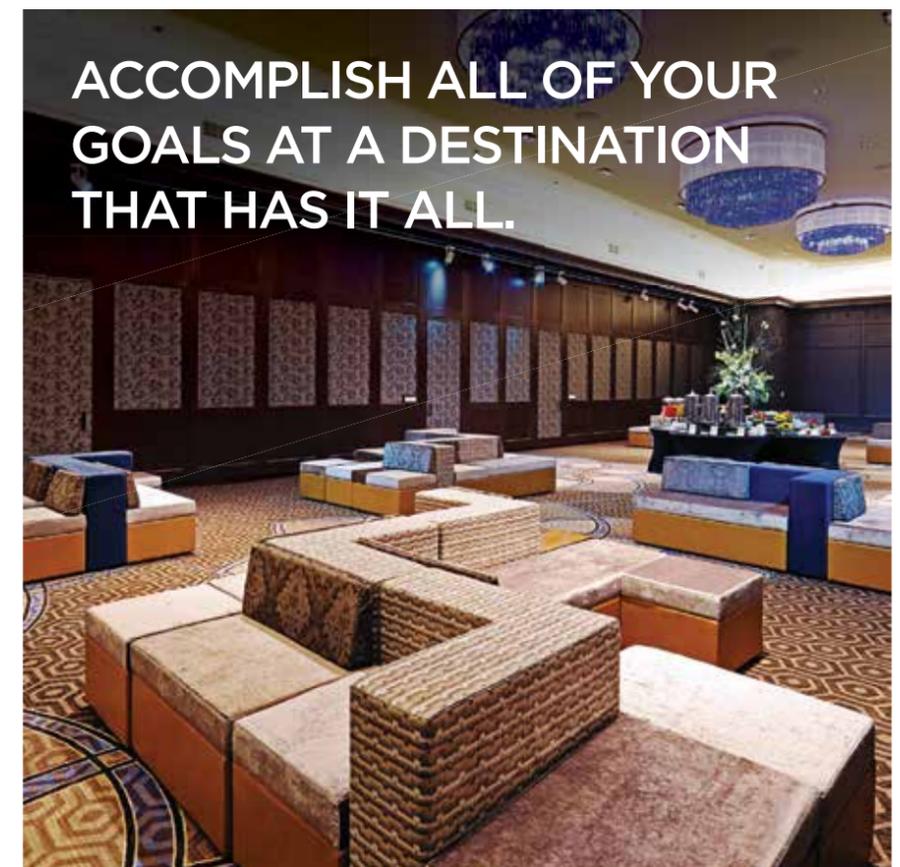
While other local hotels were celebrating milestone birthdays in 2018, Tropicana Atlantic City was finishing up some \$200 million in renovations and creations that over the past few years have resulted in a Multimedia Light & Sound Show & Fireworks; the AtlantiCare LifeCenter Fitness — where attendees can attend yoga and Zumba classes targeted for team building; and a new look for more than 900 of its nearly 2,400 guest rooms.

Planners who book attendees into the Havana Tower have access to 500 rooms, 37,000 sf of meeting space and, on the tower's 68th floor, four boardrooms and four hospitality rooms with 68 stories' worth of views of the ocean below. The tower is also connected by elevator to the 200,000-sf entertainment and shopping mecca, The Quarter. For trade shows or banquet seating for 1,000, Tropicana proposes its 20,000-sf Grand Exhibition Center with its 20-ft ceilings. Attendees can also enjoy one of the four pools, as well as Escape AC — escape rooms with one of four themes: The Poker Room, The Boardwalk, The Casino Cage or Backstage.

While the touted PolerCoaster project with its promise of unforgettable open-air views from 350 ft up seems to be on hold for the moment, the Boardwalk still offers the 227-ft The Wheel at Steel Pier, with 40 temperature-controlled gondolas that hold six people

each. The Wheel, which lights up at night, reopened March 30 for the season.

Another obvious spot for magnificent views is the 171-ft, 228-step, 162-year-old Absecon Lighthouse. Monthly "By the Light of the Moon" tours are available in warmer months, and attendees arriving near Halloween even have the option of a Haunted Lighthouse tour.



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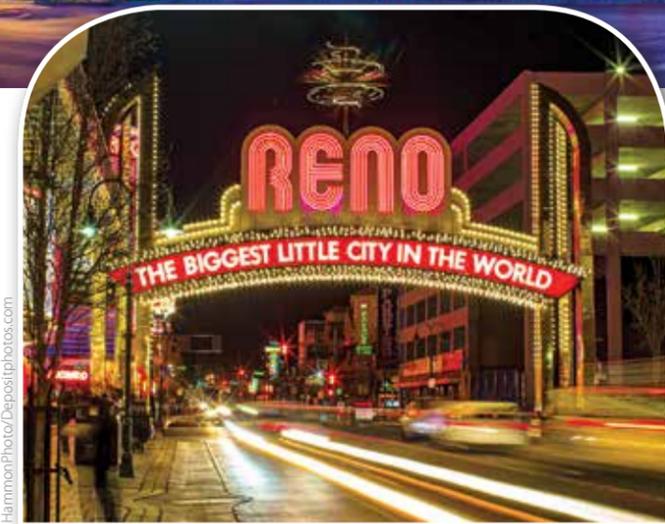
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Some planners say Las Vegas offers unparalleled amenities, while others prefer the understated Reno with its mountain views.

kobbydagan/Depositphotos.com



## Nevada Cities Offer Glitz, Glamour and Glitter

Las Vegas Remains the Crown Jewel of Event Cities; Reno Fills a Niche

By David Swanson

Catering to 22,000 meetings annually that draw anywhere from a few dozen attendees to the more than 180,000 who attend the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in January, it probably comes as no surprise that Las Vegas was recently named World's Leading Meetings & Conference Destination for 2018 by the World Travel Awards — for the sixth year in a row.

Home to three of the country's 10 largest convention venues,

the city is built to host, offering more than 147,000 hotel rooms, and drawing 6.5 million convention attendees last year.

All of this is conducted against a backdrop of 24/7 entertainment, gaming and endless nightlife — the “lost weekend” cliché for which this Sin City is also known. Needless to say, association meetings and conferences are a big business in Las Vegas.

“Planning a meeting or event in Las Vegas is not for the faint of heart,” says Cindy Nachman-Senders, senior consultant for

**“When they get done with [the Tropicana] it will be very modern, very upscale — as nice as any facility on the Strip”**

Jack Freckman

Immediate Past National Chair, Labor Professionals, Madison, TN

meetings and conventions at Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America. “Know the value of your business during the contracting phase and fully understand union jurisdictions and the costs associated with union labor.”

The Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America rotates its convention between Orlando and Las Vegas, but Nachman-Senders says Las Vegas is the bigger show because it's a natural location for a wine and spirits industry event. “Our attendees enjoy the proximity of the airport and the variety and quality of dining options in the city,” she adds.

### CAESARS PALACE MEETS GROUP'S NEEDS

For its 75th Annual Convention and Exposition in May 2018, the Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America chose 3,792-room Caesars Palace to host the 3,000-attendee event, a property Nachman-Senders says is the perfect size and, compared to other Vegas hotels, relatively easy to navigate.

“Our meeting model does not include the use of a convention center but it does require over 350,000 sf of space and 1,900 sleeping rooms on peak. We also like Caesars because the hotel is well maintained, and they are committed to putting resources back into the property on a regular basis, whether it is making improvements in room product and public spaces or introducing new and innovative dining options.”

“We require quite a bit of space,” adds Nachman-Senders. “Our attendees don't want to walk two miles to get there, and also, being that there is a lot of alcohol, we prefer not to share our space with another group. We also use suites to host meetings, so we need a hotel that is flexible in allowing us to remove bedding and other furnishings to accommodate the need for private meeting spaces on sleeping room floors.”

Nachman-Senders says her strategy is to select hotels where she has strong relationships. “Regrettably, the industry is moving towards a transactional-based experience and, as a result, many planners new to the industry don't understand the value of relationships and the difference it can make in the outcome of an event. Las Vegas seems to be one of the few holdouts that still promotes relationship-building with its customers.”

For Nachman-Senders, the secret weapon at Caesars Palace is Don Ross, vice president of catering, conventions & events.

“He's known to many as the ‘king of hospitality,’” says

Nachman-Senders. “I have known Don for too many years to count and he is my go-to for most problems.” She also commends Caesars' shipping and receiving department. “It is, hands down, the best of any hotel in any city. I am not sure how they make the magic happen, but the shipping and receiving team of Angie Barragan, George Carter and Chris Bales is exceptional. Organized, friendly, helpful and committed to excellence.”

Planners need to be prepared and informed in Las Vegas, Nachman-Senders cautions.

“Make sure you get all the space you need during the contracting phase, and don't forget to allow time for load-in and load-out. Read and understand the hotel's catering rules. For example, if you have a reception and hope to move any remaining food to your staff office, that may not be allowed.”

“Create a budget that includes an allowance for labor over-ages. The AV departments provide proposals based on labor estimates, however, it always seems to take more time than anticipated. Consider using in-house for some of your break-outs and smaller AV needs or for your exhibitor needs and leverage that into complimentary power and rigging. Roll the



Credit: Caesars Palace



Credit: Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America, Inc.

Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America, Inc. held its 75th Annual Convention and Exposition at Caesars Palace.



Cindy Nachman-Senders  
Senior Consultant, Meetings and  
Conventions  
Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of  
America, Inc.  
Washington, DC

**“We [like] Caesars Palace because the hotel is well maintained, and they are committed to putting resources back into the property on a regular basis, whether it is making improvements in room product and public spaces or introducing new and innovative dining options.”**

additional hotel rooms at the property and within the MGM family, including last-minute changes to room sets and very last-minute changes to increases in food and beverage counts,” Richter says. “But with everything going on and sell outs on various nights, the hotel still provided exceptional service on every level.”

“The South and East Verandas inside of Primrose Ballroom in the newly renovated East Convention Center Space are beautiful areas for a meeting, group dinner or reception,” Richter says. “They especially stand out at night and can be used for a variety of purposes. In addition, the Ironwood Terrace lends itself to a beautiful outdoor space for a reception, meal function or party. And, if you operate a tradeshow in addition to your meeting, Aria is really set up similar to a con-

dice, make the ask,” adds Nachman-Senders. “Remember, it’s Las Vegas. Most things are negotiable.”

### GROWING GROUP FOUND THE RIGHT HOME

For the American MedSpa Association, making “the ask” was essential in turning its recent Medical Spa Show at the Aria Resort & Casino a success. The organization, which provides legal and business resources and training seminars for medical spas and medical aesthetic practices, faced the best kind of challenge — a surge of interest as plans came together for its February 2019 event.

“We experienced huge growth year over year,” says Mary Richter, CMP, senior events manager with AmSpa. The Medical Spa Show is a new event and 2019 represented only the second year of its existence. Further, the Medical Spa Show was held between the Super Bowl LIII party and during the Chinese New Year party — major events for Las Vegas and at Aria.

“The hotel was able to partner with us to accommodate



Credit: Wynn Las Vegas

Wynn Las Vegas is building a 300,000-sf, state-of-the-art meeting and convention center set to open in March 2020.

vention center with an on-site exhibitor services department, for electrical and cleaning, etc.”

Following a recent expansion, the convention facilities at Aria are now a sprawling 500,000 sf, consuming the space originally dedicated to a Cirque du Soleil stage show. Much of the original three-story facility is flooded with natural light by day, courtesy of a soaring glass curtain wall opening onto a landscape of native plants and trees. Aria now has seven ballrooms, ranging from the 17,542-sf Orovada Ballroom to the Bristlecone Ballroom, which measures 51,225 sf.

The 200,000-sf expansion at Aria offers versatile indoor-outdoor meeting rooms with retractable windows and dramatic views of The Park amusement center and T-Mobile Arena. Aria’s top floor offers one of the Strip’s most distinctive meeting venues: a vast ballroom with two open-air verandas that can accommodate receptions for up to 2,000 attendees.

Another facet of the approximately \$170 million expansion is the discreetly marked Cypress Executive Lounge. The



Credit: Aria Resort & Casino

Aria recently expanded, bringing its convention facilities up to a sprawling 500,000 sf.

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3,000-sf space features a fully stocked pantry, three private suites for personal workspaces and one-on-one meetings, a conference room with flexible furniture setups for up to 30 and a study for toasting to a successful event.

"The Cypress Executive Lounge in the East Convention Center space is perfect for a VIP reception or meeting," Richter says. "Not only does Aria have everything under one roof for groups — gaming, great restaurants, nightclubs and convention space — but it is the perfect atmosphere for our audience."

Furthermore, she says it felt as though the entire Aria staff worked as a team.

"They all wanted the best for our group and we could feel their support throughout the duration of the event. They really tried to accommodate everything I asked for," Richter says. "Whatever request or situation we had while on-site, their team made it happen and our group found a



The American MedSpa Association held its recent Medical Spa Show at the Aria Resort & Casino. Planners were "pleased with the exceptional service."

connect directly to the LINQ Promenade, and to the Las Vegas Monorail. CAESARS FORUM is set to open in 2020.

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) is midway through the Las Vegas Convention Center District's \$935 million expansion, which will add 1.4 million sf to the current facility, including at least 600,000 sf of new, leasable exhibit space. The expansion is slated for completion in time to welcome CES in January 2021.

Meanwhile, since its acquisition of the former Las Vegas Hilton, the closest hotel to the convention center, timeshare developer Westgate Resorts has invested \$175 million in upgrades to the property since taking over in 2014. Now known as the Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino, renovations have touched every corner of the property, which holds more than 225,000 sf of meeting space. Including the addition of 300 timeshare villas, all guest room upgrades are projected to be completed by 2020. Westgate also touts a new International Bar, a fully renovated pool deck, restaurant renovations, convention expansion, and elevator replacements.

At Wynn Las Vegas, a state-of-the-art meeting and convention center is under construction to open in March 2020. The new, 300,000-sf complex was conceived to be a desert oasis, on repurposed land previously used for the Wynn golf course. At its foundation is clean energy use — the complex will be powered by 100-percent renewable energy sourced from a new 160-acre solar energy facility, an industry first for a gaming operator in Nevada. With 18 rooms scaled for a variety of uses from small receptions to large general sessions, the complex also encompasses a one-of-a-kind, 20,000-sf outdoor events pavilion, and an 83,000-sf pillarless ballroom. The new development complements the resort's existing 275,000 sf of convention space across the 4,750-room Wynn-Encore property.

At the north end of the Strip, SLS Las Vegas Hotel & Casino

has also launched a \$100 million renovation, designed to upgrade the casino floor and hotel rooms, and renovate existing pool and entertainment venues. Alex Meruelo, founder of the Meruelo Group and owner of the Grand Sierra Resort and Casino in Reno, acquired the SLS property in 2018.

At the legendary Tropicana Las Vegas, a Doubletree by Hilton, a renovation is also underway, which includes a two-phase revamp of its 100,000-sf convention center — phase one debuts later this year — and a facelift for all 1,470 guest rooms, starting with the Paradise Tower.

"They're putting some real money behind it now to redo every single room and the convention space," says Jack Freckman, immediate past national chair of the Labor Assistance Professionals. "The hotel itself is old, it's worn. They're taking it from that 1950s orange and going into soft muted greys and dark browns. When they get done with it, the Tropicana will be very modern, very upscale — as nice as any facility on the Strip."

The Labor Assistance Professionals (LAP) promotes the development of peer-based member assistance (substance abuse) programs in the labor movement and, as such, will only meet at union properties. Additionally, as with many associations or attendees with limited budgets, Freckman says that LAP's annual National Conference in July doesn't entail a lot of spending. Separately, the group also holds a small annual Board Meeting at the Tropicana.

"When we were getting ready to re-contract, I looked at 10 properties," Freckman says. "Well, some I didn't even look at. For hotels that hold large conferences, a lot of their income comes from F&B. In a brief call, they said they would deal with us but the guarantees they asked for were way out of line with what we could afford. Some of our members are dealing with substance abuse or are in recovery, so although many of our



SLS Las Vegas Hotel & Casino is undergoing a \$100 million upgrade. The work will refresh the casino floor, rooms, pool and entertainment venues.

**"Not only does Aria have everything under one roof for groups — gaming, great restaurants, nightclubs and convention space — but it is the perfect atmosphere for our audience."**



Mary Richter, CMP  
Senior Events Manager  
American Med Spa Association  
Chicago, IL

members do drink, you don't find any open bars at our conference; no long lines at the bars."

"When we first went into the Tropicana 10 years ago I was up front," Freckman adds. "I told them, we're not an organization that is going to give you a huge liquor bill, and our food bill isn't extravagant. But for 10 years they've treated us like royalty. That's why we come in July — they know we're coming and what they're going to get, and they give us priority that week."

#### GROUP MOVED TO ORLANDO, THEN BACK TO VEGAS

Freckman says LAP has considered moving to another city besides Vegas, but the last event outside the city was held in Orlando in 2009, but the group decided to move back to Vegas the following year.

"The key factor that keeps us coming back is the staff, from Gavin Mealiffe [vice president of sales at the Tropicana], all the way on down," Freckman says. "The people we deal with have been there for years. I personally know most every server in the hotel by name — it's like they're family. The number of complaints has diminished to almost nothing. Any time we've had a problem, it's almost always corrected within five to 10 minutes."

Freckman says the Tropicana is very easy to navigate, and for most functions LAP uses the hotel's 24,742-sf Cohiba Ballroom, one of two nearly identically sized ballrooms.

"If you're coming in for a meeting I'd definitely arrange to have your rooms in the Club Tower, where the Cohiba is," he adds. "They guarantee that our people will be in that tower. We went to look at another facility and they wouldn't guarantee a certain tower — they said, 'No, we assign rooms when people come in.' At the Tropicana, I have put very few demands that they have not met." Freckman says a minor challenge for his group is the hotel's limited sit-down dining choices, though his group doesn't really complain about it.

"Neither of our two events are huge numbers, obviously, and they'd be nothing for the larger Vegas properties, where we would literally be lost in the comings and goings," Freckman adds. "Even the Tropicana gets groups in for a weekend that spend more than we do in a week, but that doesn't matter to



The LINQ Hotel & Casino is adjacent to the High Roller. At 550 feet, the High Roller, on the Las Vegas Strip, is the world's tallest observation wheel.

true partner. They went out of their way to assist us with our meeting and make us look good to our speakers, exhibitors and attendees."

#### MEETING OPTIONS CONTINUE GROWING

In addition to the expansions at Aria, meeting options on and near the Las Vegas Strip are in a huge growth phase.

Located just east of The LINQ Hotel & Casino, the \$375 million CAESARS FORUM began construction last summer. The project will build a LEED Silver-certified conference center featuring 300,000 sf of flexible meeting space, including two 108,000-sf ballrooms, a 100,000-sf outdoor plaza that will

them. I imagine that because they're independently owned they're probably given a little bit more flexibility to work with us. When we're there we seem to be the big fish in the pond."

### RENO OFFERS AFFORDABLE AMENITIES

While Las Vegas is the drawing card for associations looking to set a meeting in a city with all the bells and whistles, planners might also consider looking 430 miles north, to Reno, neighboring Sparks, and Lake Tahoe. Sure, you'll trade a desert backdrop for one defined by the Sierra Nevada mountain range, but costs are often less, and it's easier for small and medium-sized events to be a big fish in the Reno pond. And yet, the destination also boasts 10 casino-resort hotels with more than 800 rooms apiece, each featuring meeting space ranging up to 200,000 sf. All of them are located within minutes of the Reno-Tahoe International Airport.

The California Nevada Moose Association, Inc., a fraternal service organization, has been coming to Reno twice annually since 1999, for both its Mid-Year Conference in March and an Annual Convention in September. Fred Reichelt, the association's past president and current secretary, says Reno has been the order's choice for its airlift, ease of access, cost, the quality of lodging, and entertainment.

The association has based its meetings at the 824-room Atlantis Casino Resort Spa, which offers stunning views of the city and mountains. As Reichelt explains: "Atlantis was selected based on its central location, room layouts, and accessibility to break-out rooms, meals available in a room next to large meeting rooms and relatively good sound insulation between rooms."

"I consider this location to be both family and



Tropicana Las Vegas, a Doubletree by Hilton, is updating its 100,000-sf convention center and all 1,470 guest rooms.

business-orientated," Reichelt says. "The area meets the needs of family and friends that accompany many of our members. There's an arcade area for all ages, multiple swimming pools, golf within 30 minutes and fishing within an hour. And don't forget the historical landmarks within a two-hour drive."

Atlantis is the only resort directly connected to the 600,000-sf Reno-Sparks Convention Center, via sky bridge. The resort's 50,000 sf meeting space is on the second floor, and includes two ballrooms measuring up to 14,261 sf, with accompanying breakout rooms, an executive boardroom, and a business center. The AAA Four Diamond resort is located in the heart of the Reno shopping, restaurant and entertainment district.

"Good luck in finding a hotel set up as this one is for a general stay, business meetings, and the areas for family and friends to have a great time," Reichelt says. "The rooms are very nice, well equipped for families with children, LED TV, Wi-Fi and with great views of the surrounding area."

The Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority recently noted that, while major hotel groups across the United States have cut third-party commissions to 7 percent, most of the major hotel properties in Reno have remained at 10 percent.

Atlantis has retained the higher rate, along with Reno-Sparks' largest property, the 1,900-room Grand Sierra Resort & Casino, which features a full-service spa, fitness center, mini-golf, go-karts, "skydiving" experience, bowling alley, movie theater, an indoor simulated golf course and more than 100,000 sf of meeting space.

Other Reno-Sparks properties continuing to offer 10-percent commissions include the 1,382-room Nugget Casino Resort, the 928-room Harrah's Reno Hotel & Casino, the 1,621-room Peppermill Resort Spa Casino and the multiresort destination in downtown Reno, The Row. Following \$50 million in improvements, the Row includes the 814-room Eldorado, the 4,200-room Silver Legacy Resort Casino, and the 1,572-room Circus Circus Reno.



Atlantis Casino Resort Spa is connected to the Reno-Sparks Convention Center.

Credit: Atlantis Casino Resort Spa

Credit: Tropicana Las Vegas, a Doubletree by Hilton

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Steve O'Malley, Michael Guerriero, and David Peckinpaugh (pictured left to right)  
Maritz Global Events





Edwards

Visit Phoenix has promoted **Lorne Edwards** as senior vice president of convention sales and services. Edwards first joined Visit Phoenix in 2012 as the director of sales and was then promoted to vice president of convention sales and services in 2017. Previously, he enjoyed a 16-year sales career at Hyatt Hotels Corporation, where he served as director of sales and marketing at two Boston-area hotels. Edwards also spent three years as associate director of sales at the Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center. His career began with Hyatt in Orlando before being elevated to a senior sales position at one of Hyatt's iconic flagship convention hotels in Atlanta.

Accomplished broadcast journalist and communicator **Jenell Walton** has been named vice president of communications and strategic development at the Cincinnati USA Convention and Visitors Bureau. "Jenell has a deep understanding of how communication informs and motivates people to take action," Julie Calvert, president and



Walton

CEO said. "She also has built strong relationships with community leaders and organizations across the region who can work with us to spark economic vitality and build our region's reputation as a world-class destination." Walton is a respected news anchor and reporter, enterprising and sharing stories with the Cincinnati region for more than 16 years at WCPO-TV (ABC) and WLWT-TV (NBC). She also has led strategic communications for civic and not-for-profit organizations, including Cincinnati Metro and the Urban League of Greater Southwestern Ohio, and is a board member of Strategies to End Homelessness.

Beth Marchetti, executive director of the DuPage Convention & Visitors Bureau, announced that **Dee Dee McDevitt** has joined the organization as content marketing manager. McDevitt joins the team with more than 20 years of Fortune 500 Corporation and Nonprofit Brand Marketing and Communications expertise. "We are pleased to welcome



McDevitt

Dee Dee to the team as we continue to drive leads, sales, engagement, retention, visitation and positive stakeholder engagement in and for DuPage County," said Marchetti. Most recently, McDevitt served as director of marketing and sales for DuPage Children Museum located in downtown Naperville, IL.

The Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau (GFLCVB) welcomes **Tracy Vaughan** as the new senior vice president of tourism and travel industry sales. "Tracy is highly esteemed in the travel industry, and we know her impressive experience and thought leadership will help us positively grow our sales efforts across the globe," said Stacy Ritter, president and CEO of the GFLCVB. Prior to joining the GFLCVB, Vaughan served as director of global market development for the tourism division at the Georgia Department of Economic Development (GDEcD) for four and a half years. Prior to joining GDEcD, Vaughan advanced through the ranks at VISIT FLORIDA in a career that spanned over 22 years. AC&F



Vaughan



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