



MEETINGS AND EVENTS IN 2024: BE YOUR BEST

2024 will see a record-breaking return to business. With it will be a renewed focus on staffing, inclusivity and wellness—all of which will require focus by meeting and event pros.





AUSTIN

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The Austin Skyline is About to Change

The Austin Convention Center is preparing to make its mark on the ever-changing Austin skyline with a vertical approach to expansion and redevelopment, beginning in April 2025, that will nearly double the amount of rentable space by 2029.

Vertical Approach

In using a vertical approach to deliver a larger, more efficient facility, the goal of the Austin Convention Center expansion and redevelopment is to transform the southeast corner of downtown Austin into a community-centric destination for attendees and the community.

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Along with providing more rentable space, the Austin Convention Center expansion and redevelopment will provide a signature design, featuring state-of-the-art technologies and an industry-leading facility that is ready to exceed future clients' needs.



Community Support

“We’re so pleased to support the Austin Convention Center and the City of Austin as they move forward with the redesign project.”

Michele Flores
SXSW Chief Logistics Officer

“This announcement is an exciting one for the Austin hotel community. Not only will a new and redeveloped convention center bring more meetings and events business to Austin, but create more jobs for our industry and further positively impact the Austin hospitality community at large. This project has long been in the works and we are happy to finally see this come to fruition.”

Nenad Praporski
General Manager of Fairmont Austin and Chairman of the Austin Hotel Lodging Association

“To give the community, visitors, and attendees the true authentic Austin experience, we want the new Austin Convention Center to be an iconic, innovative, and symbolic meeting location.”

Trisha Tatro
Austin Convention Center Department Director

For more information: www.austinconventioncenter.com



SCAN ME



BE YOUR BEST 2024

Contents

7 THREE ESSENTIAL FOCAL POINTS FOR EVENT PROS IN 2024

Amidst the record-breaking return to business, staffing, inclusivity and wellness are standing out as important components on which people are increasingly focusing—and areas that will demand even more attention in the year ahead.

13 HOW ARE YOU FOCUSING ON WELLNESS FOR YOUR CLIENTS AND YOURSELF?

A diverse group of current and past MPI volunteer leaders discuss their approach to and perspectives of wellness.

17 SUSTAINABILITY TAKING ROOT

Industry leaders share impressive event sustainability efforts they've encountered recently.

21 NOW TRENDING AT CONVENTION CENTERS

Offering unique spaces, optimizing engagement and wellness and sustainability considerations are key focus areas for convention center leaders.

27 TRENDS AND OPTIMISM FOR 2024

Several MPI chapter presidents from Europe discuss industry trends and optimism for the future.

31 OPENING DOORS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

Claude Molinari, president and CEO of Visit Detroit, on developing the next generation of meeting professionals, important industry skills and how to attract students to our ranks.

33 MENTAL HEALTH: INITIATIVES MATTER

Employees need and expect sustainable and mentally healthy workplaces, which requires taking on the real work of culture change.

37 EVENT SUSTAINABILITY: 'AN EAGERNESS LIKE NEVER BEFORE'

How the higher-education landscape and MPI are evolving to support future meeting professionals and overcome workforce challenges.

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- 2 AUSTIN CONVENTION CENTER
- 4 DISCOVER PUERTO RICO
- 6 EXPLORE ST. LOUIS
- 8 LOS ANGELES TOURISM
- 10 VISIT TAMPA BAY
- 12 GRAPEVINE CVB

- 14 VISIT PLANO
- 16 VISIT GALVESTON
- 18 KALAHARI RESORTS & CONVENTIONS
- 20 VISIT LUBBOCK
- 22 VISIT CORPUS CHRISTI
- 24 LAREDO CVB

- 26 DISCOVER DENTON
- 28 VISIT SAN ANTONIO
- 30 SOUTH PADRE ISLAND CVB
- 32 NEW ORLEANS & COMPANY
- 34 DESTINATION CLEVELAND
- 36 VISIT DENVER

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Three Essential Focal Points

FOR EVENT PROS IN 2024

Amidst the record-breaking return to business, staffing, inclusivity and wellness are standing out as important components on which people are increasingly focusing—and areas that will demand even more attention from meeting pros in the year ahead.

BY MICHAEL PINCHERA



JENNIFER LAZARZ

Are you or your organization experiencing staffing difficulties? If so, can you please explain the nature of these challenges?

JENNIFER LAZARZ, events planner and tradeshow manager, Medical Informatics Corp.: “The answer to this is ‘kind of.’ We’re in a position where we need more staff, but don’t have the budget and resources to onboard more personnel at this point. We grew rapidly over the last two years as a company, so the workload increased but the personnel didn’t in a lot of areas. I will add that some jobs have been easy to fill, and yet other jobs have taken months to find the right candidate.”

MOLLY C. MARSH, CMP, director of education and events, AMR Management Services: “Our company has struggled to find, specifically, qualified individuals in the program development side of the industry. Those who work with speakers, planning committees and do our event marketing have been hard to come by, while our events team that focuses on project management and logistical execution for meetings and conferences has remained very strong. That has been an interesting challenge; many of us who typically sit more on the execution side are dipping our hands back into sponsorship relations, speaker management and depending heavily

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on emerging AI tools for marketing messaging.

“In addition, we continue to see some hotels and event venues not fully staffed, however, there has been a significant shift (for the better!) since late summer. We are starting to see less turnover in our sales contacts and convention services managers on the venue side, which is a huge help when it comes to smooth event delivery.”

Are you or your organization planning to address staffing differently in the year to come?

MARSH: “We are looking at our own staffing very thoughtfully right now and looking to leverage existing skills and talents in our team members that may not have been used or tapped in specialized roles. In addition, the opportunity to train up on some new tools and use AI to simplify some of the work we do means that we can work smarter, not harder. This will continue to be important as we feel the squeeze of rising costs in the hospitality industry not being matched by association budgets, even as the demand for association events grows.

“Creative efficiency’ is likely to be a focus for our team in 2024...we may not be understaffed or struggling to fill roles, but we will need to help existing team members use their skill sets in new, different and time-saving ways as we support growing association events with the same staff and a budget that doesn’t stretch as far.”

LAZARZ: “The executive leadership has outlined a strategic plan that has a phased approach to adding staff based on need and demand. At the

mid/lower levels, we’re all building business plans for 2024 and have initiated workflow documentation that is aimed at painting a clear picture of where the need actually exists.”

What do you think meeting/event professionals should be addressing most, when it comes to inclusivity, in 2024?



MOLLY C. MARSH

LAZARZ: “Our industry is poised to make a positive impact by ensuring that we work with each other to have inclusivity in our speakers and presenters event-wide [as well as] diverse representation in thought leadership to drive inclusivity in planning and strategy.”

MARSH: “In my opinion, far too many event organizers still see inclusion as an initiative or something that is done in addition to all of the event specifics and details that we execute, rather than the lens through

which we develop our event plans. There’s good reason for that...technically, an event can still happen and be successful for the majority without an attitude of inclusion, but it can’t be successful for the majority without AV, F&B, a venue, etc. And so those things that we have always focused on (and are comfortable with) take most of our focus, time and energy. But we don’t change the world through our meetings if we’re only catering to the majority. I think one of the biggest things we can address in 2024 is an industry-wide mindset shift that we don’t start or focus our work on events with RFP details, menus or a run of show, we start our work on events with the people. If that is our mindset, then implementing universal design for your meeting or educational event is a no-brainer, healthy food options and wellness breaks are no-brainers and the shifts we need to make in how we spend our time, energy and resources are plain to see.”

How, if at all, do you think wellness-related issues should be addressed in the context of the meeting and event industry?

THOMAS COUNTS, director of sales, GettinLocal: “The meetings themselves should be part of a wellness plan. If you start out the day with a light yoga class and then a walk around the block, that alone would be a plus. It is a time that people can bond with each other. How many times does a meeting start out at 8 a.m. with a heavy fat-laden breakfast, followed by a fat butter-laden lunch, same for dinner and breaks in between? Then everyone drinks until midnight and has to be back for omelets and bacon at 8 a.m. the next

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day. Let's take advantage of the fact that we have everyone together and design a healthy agenda and menu around that. The hotels are getting better at providing healthy choices, all we have to do is choose the right ones."

LAZARZ: "I love the recent trends (which I hope become norms) in wellness. Quiet rooms, works spaces, healthier food options and more—they're all incredibly impactful to the user experience within the industry. Neurodivergence is often overlooked and creating experiences that consider wellness both physically and mentally are a must. Post-COVID, employees are more accustomed to quieter or remote workspaces, and the meeting and event space can quickly become overwhelming. Wellness initiatives can help cut through the noise."

MARSH: "We are a human-centered business, and, in that sense, wellness issues must be addressed, or we won't have anyone around to come to our events! I believe we should be addressing wellness and sustainability as a whole concept, not necessarily two separate pieces. Individual and community wellness are inextricably linked, so smaller portions for meals that also reduce the overall amount of food that needs to be ordered for a group is holistic wellness."

"Offering an afternoon of walking local-business tours in your destination encourages healthy movement and connection to the community in sustainable ways. If we can, as an industry, really dig back down toward *WHY* we hold events to begin with, we'll remember that it is ultimately to bring groups of people together in meaningful ways. When

it comes time to focus on the details and execution for that purpose, wellness, like inclusivity, becomes a default rather than the exception."

What wellness trends, if any, are you looking forward to seeing spread further in the new year?

LAZARZ: "Quiet spaces at trade shows, 5k/fun run-walks. I really liked the Wellness Challenge at IMEX America that had everyone



THOMAS COUNTS

tracking their steps throughout the event. The chat in the wellness app lent an extra level of camaraderie that was valuable at such a large-scale event. I also love seeing art as a tradeshow engagement tool from both the vendor side and the 'giving back' approach. The folks at the Kalahari Resorts booth at IMEX America asked visitors to have fun with watercolor—I didn't even know it was the two-minute break I needed—and they encouraged anyone who painted to take a tiny painting someone else made. It's

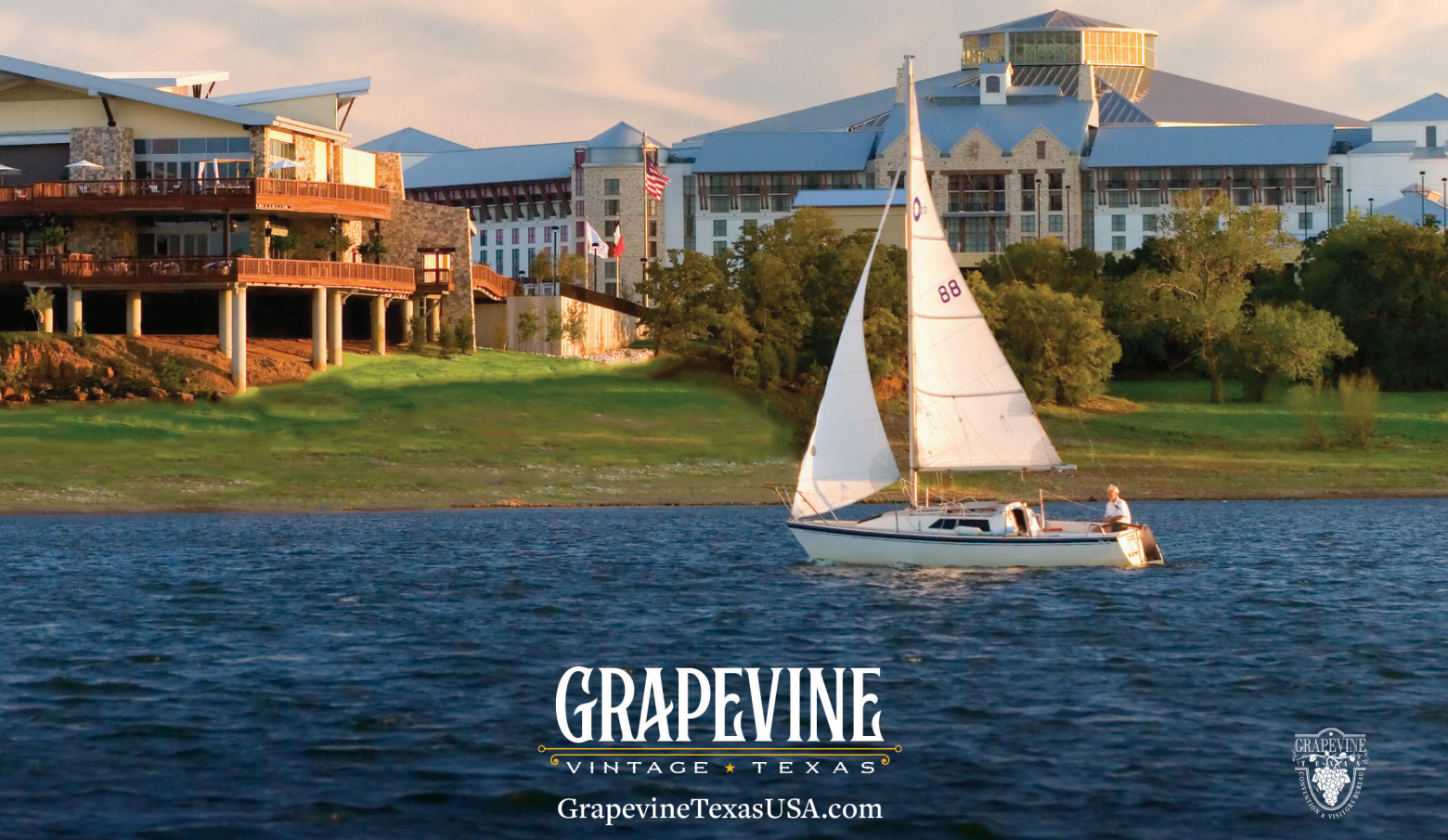
the small things that I think will have a big impact on wellness in the future."

COUNTS: "What I am seeing is that people are more aware of what products they use and are leaning towards the holistic approach and using more organic products. That alone is a big help, what we can do to add to that is to provide healthier options at company events. We are always looking to have a breakout room right next to the session room, and that makes it easy. But if it is a large hotel or convention center, how about making the attendee walk a bit, it will be good for them, and they won't even notice all the steps they are taking."

MARSH: "I would really appreciate seeing more events incorporating quiet rooms and spaces into their footprint, as well as healthy food options. These are all trends that have been moving forward, but I know for the events that we see in our association clients, the changes have been slow. We do need healthy, sustainable food options to be able to compete, pricewise, with the more traditional F&B options, particularly in order for those to be embraced in the association sector where budget often prevents groups from making changes to the 'way we've always done it.' With continuing education a primary focus for many association meetings and conferences, it is very difficult to get buy-in to take away a breakout room to use for a quiet space, or to have longer breaks to allow participants to decompress between sessions, but those are outdated ways of thinking that we really need to continue to chip away so that we can really provide healthier experiences for all."



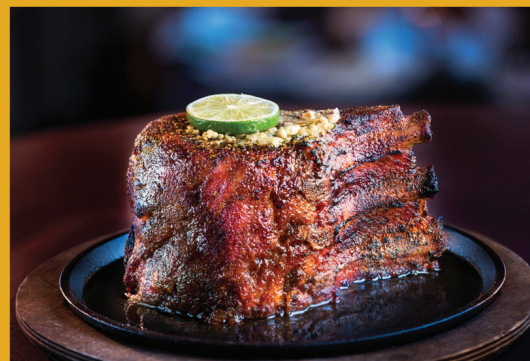
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How are you focusing on wellness for your clients and yourself?

A diverse group of current and past MPI volunteer leaders discuss their approach to and perspectives of wellness as a meeting and event professional.

BY MICHAEL PINCHERA

It's all about boundaries, my friend! I have learned this hard [and] have almost been on the verge of burnout. Some things I do are setting working hours (9 a.m.-8 p.m. for me, weekdays) and no matter what happens, not bending on those. While I do often work some weekends, I allow myself to not feel guilty if I just don't feel like it one day. Some other things I do are:

- Turn off all notifications on my phone [to prevent] interruptions.
- Set working hours and give myself a break.
- Remind myself the world will not end if I do not get back to everything right away.
- Working-hours message on my email (in case someone else's are different).
- Doing the things I love (being outside) when I have time.
- Being relational and wanting to simply help others and clients.



Tamara Adams
Founder, TA Speakers Management

Personally, one of the good things to come out from pandemic is the encouragement to take care of our wellness physically and mentally. In terms of focusing on wellness for myself and my planners, one of the focuses is on prioritizing self-care and work-life balance. This includes taking

breaks throughout the day, staying active and healthy and creating boundaries between work and personal time. As a customer service and hospitality professional, this hasn't always been top-of-mind. However, this is something I also encourage my planners to do and remind them that self-care is not selfish, as well as having conversations about how they are incorporating wellness into their meeting.

One way that meeting and event professionals are focusing on wellness is by offering healthy food options, including plant-based meals and snacks, to promote



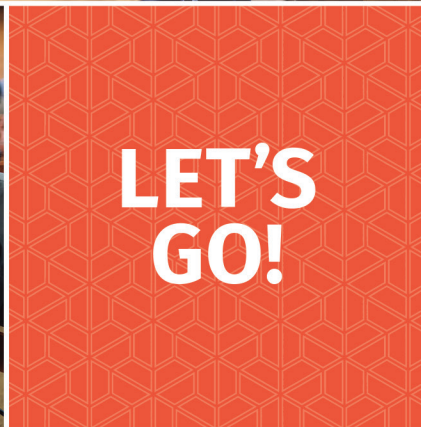
healthy eating habits and support physical well-being.

Paola Bowman, CMP, CMM
Destination services, Arlington CVB

We have really made a lot of shifts in our programming. Carving out extra time for breaks, working in more time to explore the city, incorporating the outdoors, giving clients room to breathe, ending our programs earlier and really giving attendees time to settle in the hustle of the event world again.



Rindi Cerelli, CMP, DES
Meetings and events manager, Travel Portland



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SCAN AND GO!

One of things that we are building into our agendas is breaktimes. We are encouraging at least a 30-minute break twice a day into the long agenda. Depending on the destination, we have also incorporated morning yoga for each day of our event. In our welcome bags, we offer branded water bottles with water stations in each meeting room with fewer carbonated beverages.



Shawn Clary

Manager, global sales support, Worldwide Clinical Trials

Not necessarily for our clients but for our staff we really emphasize taking advantage of the basics: take vacation, take mental health days, take comp days. Make sure you're taking time for yourself to recover. We work in a hard industry and if you're not taking care of yourself it can get pretty brutal on mental health.



Seth Macchi

CEO, Live Events Media Group

For our virtual events we always have a wellness breakout session for attendees to discuss ways they deal with physical, mental and emotional health. These discussions help those looking for new ideas, me included. Along with my Peloton!



Tayhler Davis, MTA, DES

Senior manager, strategic events, Congressional Black Caucus Foundation

For myself, I make time in the day to exercise in a positive environment at Orangetheory Fitness. I love striving to achieve personal fitness goals with a group of like-minded people, all before 8 a.m. Also, when I am not traveling for work, I step away from the computer at lunch to enjoy an outdoor stroll with my two greyhounds.



Michelle Moore

Senior director of sales and meeting sales & services, Experience Kissimmee

My event subspeciality is medical conferences and it is well documented that physicians have incredibly stressful jobs and, as a result, higher rates of addiction, mental health struggles and suicide. It's incredibly important to me to design our events with this in mind. This threads through the programming elements ensuring the schedule doesn't offer too many concurrent sessions, offering longer health breaks optimized for networking and clearing at least one evening for personal use.

I also like to offer a safe space on site at the event to promote wellness. One of our conferences in 2019 offered a Wellness Lounge for the entire conference which hosted masseuses, nutrient-rich brain food, plentiful seating and puppies to cuddle.



Karen Norris

Director of strategy, programs and services for the Canadian Dermatology Association

We use open-air space for breaks and cocktail parties, local seasonal ingredients with consideration for food mileage, as well as outside activities. My hometown, Hokkaido, in the northern part of Japan, hosted the Adventure Travel World Summit this year, and I expect that many activities were developed and brushed up for business events. I



would like to incorporate such activities and forest bathing in the future.

Hitomi Otani

Manager, DMC Tokyo Co.

During the pandemic, getting out in nature was critical to my well-being and I noticed that was the same for our customers. It became an opportunity to turn those former meetings into a chance to walk and talk. Not only was it a great way to explore new trails and meet other clients' furry friends, but we generally shared more genuine conversation and felt less stressed afterwards. "Walk and talk" has now evolved to a company best practice where we are encouraging our customers to explore our Omni Hotel neighborhoods with us.



Terri Russell

Director, global accounts, Omni Hotels & Resorts

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Sustainability Taking Root

Meeting industry leaders share impressive event sustainability efforts they've encountered recently.

BY MICHAEL PINCHERA

Nearly 90% of respondents to MPI's Meetings Outlook survey this summer said it's important that events they plan and/or work are sustainable. In fact, 34% of respondents cited sustainability in events as "very important." With that in mind, we reached out to a cross-section of meeting industry leaders—including members of MPI's Sustainability Advisory Board—to learn about recent, successful sustainability trends or initiatives that have impressed them.



"The 2020 Tokyo Olympics stands as a testament to events that can produce groundbreaking sustainability initiatives. It takes ingenuity, creativity, collaboration and a willingness to break the rules. For example, the organizers turned to the Japanese citizenry, sourcing metals from donated electronic waste to create medals made entirely of recycled materials. This gesture not only showcased innovative resource utilization but also highlighted the communal involvement in promoting sustainability. In addition, Tokyo integrated renewable energy solutions and introduced hydrogen-fueled transportation, projecting a future where clean energy could be seamlessly incorporated into large-scale events.

"Waste management took center stage with Tokyo's ambitious objective to recycle or reuse a whopping 99% of the items procured for the Games. Emphasizing local and traceable produce, the catering services mirrored global trends towards sustainable food consumption, ensuring minimal waste and maximum support for local industries. Athlete accommodation was also eco-friendly, with beds constructed from recyclable cardboard and volunteer uniforms made from recycled plastic bottles. Despite unforeseen challenges, like the pandemic-induced postponement, the Tokyo Olympics set a high bar for future events, underlining that environmental stewardship can coexist with, and even enhance, large global gatherings."

MARGARET LAUNZEL-PENNES | POP EXPERIENTIAL



"One initiative that caught my eye recently within our own organization is a Carbon Emissions Calculator, built by BCD Travel's consultancy arm, Advito, and powered by GATE4 (their ISO-certified carbon emissions calculation methodology). It takes a holistic look at meetings and events to determine what levers meeting planners can pull to reduce emissions and the overall environmental impact of an event. In addition to considering traditional elements, like giveaways and food, the calculator also measures the most important contributor to overall emissions—where attendees come from and how they are getting there. It allows meeting planners to input a wide range of data, from information about the venue to the hotels that attendees are booking, helping planners understand the footprint of their meeting or event, even before the actual event begins."

ALISSA HURLEY, CMM, CED | BCD MEETINGS & EVENTS



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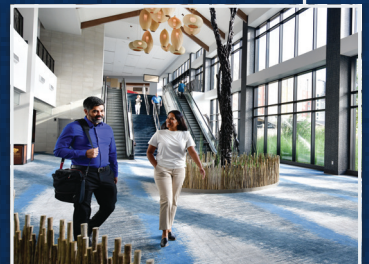
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Continued from page 17



“For our 2023 customer events we have adopted the message of ‘Step Beyond’—an effort to move beyond the traditional ways of planning and executing meetings and deploy innovative strategies to tailor the event experience and reduce our environmental impact. This includes how we look at sustainability in meetings and events, especially around decreasing food waste. One of many strategies we deployed was ‘slice on demand,’ whereby guests at fruit stations select which fruits they want to enjoy—and the attendant serves up fresh slices right before them. Thus, we decreased food waste of pre-sliced fruit by over 75%. It was a simple switch, but one that had a significant impact to help us achieve part of our overall sustainability goals.”

MICHAEL CLARKE | MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL & MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL LUXURY BRANDS



“Any wear, Anywhere is a novel wardrobe rental service intent on removing baggage from the air travel experience of business and leisure tourists flying Japan Airlines (JAL) to anywhere in Japan. It is a collaboration between JAL and the Sumitomo Corporation. The wardrobe rental service is undergoing a one-year trial phase [through] August 2024.

“Dealing with the complex challenge of climate change requires us to think differently. We need to think life cycles, think systems, think circularity—as these forms of thinking shall translate into out-of-the-box thoughts/ideas, game-changing decisions/actions and purposeful/meaningful solutions that shall maximize positive and minimize negative impacts.

“Any wear, Anywhere represents an idea that effects a significant shift in the current way of thinking and traveling. Imagine the ROI from this choice of air travel: No packing, no carting baggage around, no baggage restrictions, no excess baggage expense, no lost baggage or baggage theft. Being in style, dressed for the occasion [with] no laundry... Now imagine the carbon footprint for each aspect of the travel experience...can you see the reversal of fortune at play? Now imagine if everyone attending or participating in meetings and events were to travel the same way—this would be the domino effect in play. Imagine the powerful effect/influence that this would have on realizing the 2030 ambition of cutting carbon emissions by at least 50%.

“2020-2030 is the decisive decade in which we all need to be the change we wish to see in the world. The global meetings and events calendar presents limitless opportunities to facilitate the purposeful and meaningful change required to go boldly beyond just being sustainable, because as MPI wisdom reflects: ‘When we meet, we change the world.’”

TROY REYNOLDS, CMP, EMD | IMAGINNEURS, MPI SUSTAINABILITY ADVISORY BOARD



“At Proske, we are truly impressed by and actively supporting the recent sustainability initiative known as Net Zero Carbon Events. This industry-driven effort, in alignment with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Guidelines, demonstrates a remarkable commitment to addressing climate change within the event industry. The Net Zero Carbon Events Pledge, launched at COP26 in 2021, saw over 100 initial signatories, underlining the industry’s dedication to reducing carbon emissions and reaching a net zero goal by 2050.

“Moreover, their comprehensive approach, involving stakeholders worldwide, seeks to jointly communicate their commitment, establish emission reduction strategies and promote collaboration with suppliers and customers. This initiative’s collaborative and forward-thinking ‘no-elbow’ nature is inspiring, setting a strong example for sustainability efforts across sectors.”

LARISSA STEINBÄCKER | PROSKE



“The Palais des congrès de Montréal offers a new eco-conditionality policy, conceived for its event organizers, its clients and its commercial tenants. Discounts of up to 10% will be offered to organizations that take tangible actions relating to sustainable development during their project, like hiring a ‘green team’ for an event, sorting waste, choosing environmentally responsible corporate gifts or featuring local speakers or artists.”

VIRGINIE DE VISSCHER | DESTINATION CANADA, MPI SUSTAINABILITY ADVISORY BOARD



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Now Trending at Convention Centers

Offering unique spaces, optimizing engagement and wellness and sustainability considerations are key focus areas for convention center leaders.

BY ALLAN LYNCH

As corporations and employees weigh whether to return to the office or craft a hybrid office-remote work schedule, the strength of event registrations speaks to delegate desires for face-to-face versus more facetime.

Remodelling the post-pandemic work environment is expressed in several trends that convention center management experience, chief of which is time management.

Unique spaces

“One trend we have been seeing are shorter and more compact learning sessions at conventions,” says Gordon Taylor III, chief sales officer, Destination Cleveland. “Organizations are picking up that people do not want to be in a session longer than 45-60 minutes. It’s a challenge to keep the attention of attendees for that long. Keeping sessions shorter, more to the point and loaded with powerful content increases experience in a positive way for those in the room.”

“One trend we have been seeing is shorter and more compact learning sessions at conventions.”

Huntington Convention Center of Cleveland expansion.

DESTINATION CLEVELAND

Chandra Allison, senior vice president of strategy and growth, meetings, conventions and exhibitions for Oak View Group (OVG), which works with 60 convention centers in the U.S., adds, “Meeting setups are now including unique spaces that inspire and encourage environments which spark engagement, networking and discussion. This includes spaces for micro experiences within a broader conference such as a breakout meeting in a theater or outdoor space.”

Optimized for engagement

Reconnecting with colleagues is another trend Allison sees.

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“People attend conferences with different objectives or goals, and they seek content and communities that help serve those objectives,” she says. “I have seen conferences set engagement rules ahead of time or try to create spaces for engagement discussions. Other trends are providing more downtime for networking, elevated content and interactive experiences.”

In Colorado, Richard W. Scharf, president and CEO of Visit Denver, says that networking continues to be a significant valuable aspect of meetings and events.

While no one expects the industry to go cold turkey in technology usage, Scharf says planners continue to increase “new ways of engaging with attendees with turn-key information via websites, apps and social media. Planners are also including live-streaming options or virtual components for attendees as an evolution from virtual meetings during the pandemic.”

Wellness, sustainability considerations

Hand-in-hand with the growth in technology utilization is an expansion in

wellness options, according to Scharf.

“From oxygen booths, yoga sessions, healthy snacks and more, the trend is in alignment with making sure attendees feel healthy and refreshed,” he says. “[However,] providing an opportunity for meeting attendees to give back to the community is also increasingly important. Visit Denver has created a ‘voluntourism’ program with local non-profit organizations for meeting attendees to be a part of, from keeping the city clean to working with seniors or youth in need. Attendees will not only enrich the community, they will have memories that will last a lifetime.”

Wellness and community can also act as a fuel for renewed focus on sustainability.

“Ensuring meetings are sustainable is of the utmost importance for the Colorado Convention Center (CCC) and Denver,” he continues. “While the city’s Office of Climate Action, Sustainability and Resiliency works to enable a sustainable, resilient, climate-safe future for all, Visit Denver also collaborates with venues, hotels and other partners

“Other trends are providing more downtime for networking, elevated content and interactive experiences.”

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Continued from page 23

to ensure we are offering sustainable options for a prosperous community where people and nature thrive.”

To help accomplish this, the CCC earned LEED Gold certification, is within walking distance of more than 11,000 hotel rooms and updated waste management, energy, water and air-quality systems to make every event sustainable.

Sustainability doesn't stop at the airport; it also makes its way to the plate. People want to eat local, so planners often request Colorado-themed food and beverage. Scharf says the convention center's culinary team identifies local and sustainable F&B products that are all either compostable or recyclable, aiding the venue's waster-diversion program.

“Historically, the F&B experience at convention centers has been secondary but that is changing and is a critical component to the overall attendee experience,” Allison says. “Meeting planners want authentic food experiences that reflect the local market, and a wider range of healthy and/or gluten-free options.”

OVG Hospitality, she says, partners with restaurants and suppliers to provide local food options and sustainable food sourcing as part of their standard offerings. OVG also recently acquired hospitality company Rhubarb to enhance the overall F&B experience in large environments across all of their venues.

Destination Cleveland has similar requests.

“We continue to see a demand for F&B service that prioritizes sustainable practices and local sourcing,” Taylor says. “The Huntington Convention Center of Cleveland (HCCC) meets this demand with a Grind2Energy system that allows food scraps from events to be converted into electricity and compressed natural gas.”

The HCCC also has an onsite farm where they offer event attendees the opportunity to learn about farming.



Grand Concourse at McCormick Place (Chicago), an Oak View Group (OVG) property.

OAK VIEW GROUP (OVG)

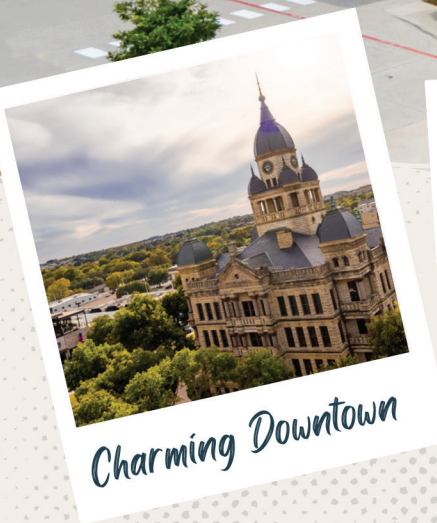
“Meeting planners want authentic food experiences that reflect the local market, and a wider range of healthy and/or gluten-free options.”

Built for hybrid

Another trend Taylor notes that's specifically aimed at options for those who opt out or have to distance themselves from an event relates to the virtual event tech we've all become more familiar with over the past three years.

“With the increase of hybrid meetings and remote attendees we've seen that the technological features and connectivity offered by meeting and event facilities are now more important than ever,” Taylor says. “HCCC offers a network capable of hosting over 15,000 devices simultaneously at speeds of 1 billion bits per second,” as well as providing streaming and videoconferencing capabilities that allow planners to include live feeds between conference rooms as well as to virtual attendees.

The bottom line is more meaningful connections to peers and places for everyone.



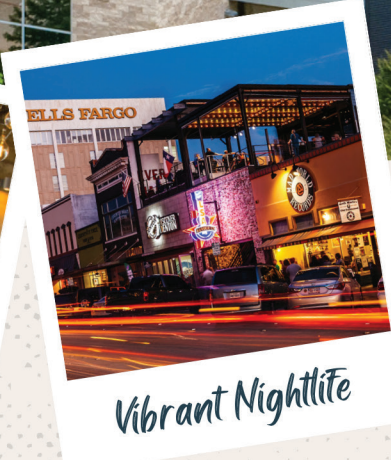
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Trends and Optimism for 2024

Several MPI chapter presidents from Europe discuss industry trends and optimism for the future.

BY BLAIR POTTER



ATTILA LASZLO

MPI Belgium-Luxembourg Chapter

As the meeting and event industry has recovered from the

pandemic, can you tell us about a trend you've witnessed or experienced?

We were probably all convinced that the hybrid solution would be dominant in post-pandemic meetings, but finally the in-person version is back in force. This is probably also due to the direct cost, which is much higher in case of the hybrid solution. Globally, the booking window is less important, with many last-minute requests—which is not very convenient in workforce management. Many corporate clients try to limit event budgets to the level of 2019 (before the pandemic), but due to the inflation and rise in wages, it's challenging to venues and event agencies to deliver the expected services with the dedicated budget.

Why are you optimistic about with the ongoing recovery of the meeting and event industry?

Despite the inflation and worsening global economic situation, corporates and associations are generating their own need to organize in-person events again. This need is also pushed by the trend that employers are authorizing more and more employees to work remotely from the home office. But they also need to create a company culture to be shared by all and therefore bring together the employees thanks to in-person events.



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VÉRONIQUE HOLVECK

MPI France-Switzerland Chapter

As the meeting and event industry has recovered from the pandemic, can you tell us about a trend you've witnessed or

experienced?

Sustainability has become a key trend in Europe. A large majority of meeting planners adopt sustainable practices like encouraging the use of recyclable and biodegradable materials or reducing waste and energy consumption. These practices benefit the environment and also improve the brand image of corporate companies, as the objective is to attract a public that is increasingly aware of their impact on the planet. For example, in Switzerland, no event is authorized unless the corporation is eco-certified.

Meeting planners carefully consider the environmental impact of their event when selecting a destination and favor those venues with sustainable policies and practices. There is a dramatic decrease in long distance travel and for events—local attendees attend onsite and those who aren't local attend on a virtual basis.

Why are you optimistic about with the ongoing recovery of the meeting and event industry?

The events market in Europe is experiencing significant growth in 2023. The pandemic crisis has allowed the actors of the MICE sector to question themselves and to find new ideas to bring out new, more modern and ambitious models. A profusion of positive signals indicates an exciting near future of the meeting industry.

In Europe, team cohesion and employee well-being have become central topics in companies. From now on, internal events have become necessary to gather and recreate links between employees. There is also a return of incentives, with a team-building program to improve team cohesion that has been battered during the pandemic crisis.



ALESSIA DI RAIMONDO

MPI Italia Chapter

Why are you optimistic about the ongoing recovery of the meeting and event industry?

Notwithstanding some risk factors which can disrupt the forecasted growth, we feel optimistic to return to pre-pandemic levels within one to two years. With many companies around the world operating with remote workforces or hybrid office environments, the need to bring employees together has never been greater nor more widely recognized. In-person meetings and events have proven to be the most effective way to drive employee wellness and retention, instill company culture and corporate values, improve team bonding and increase professional development. Prior to the pandemic, internal meetings were often an afterthought for many organizations. This shift in priority offers a clear opportunity for the meetings and events industry to expand its impact and reach. A sign of a thriving environment is the unanimous desire among clients, meeting planners and suppliers to simplify and streamline the planning process. Everyone is at capacity and searching for time efficiencies. Attendee experience technology continues to be in demand as meeting owners aim to meet attendance goals, connect in-person and virtual audiences and deliver unique experiences. A best practice we are increasingly experiencing in our industry is about sustainability and diversity and inclusion. Many organizations have publicly committed to it, and they now need to cascade their sustainability goals to their meeting programs.



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Opening Doors for the Next Generation

BY BLAIR POTTER

Claude Molinari, president and CEO of Visit Detroit, on developing the next generation of meeting professionals, important industry skills and how to attract students to our ranks.

Claude Molinari believes educating students about the myriad opportunities available within the meeting and event industry is a great way to spread excitement and ensure a strong future.



“Our pilot program with students from a local high school provided a behind-the-scenes look at the diversity of opportunities the meeting and event industry offers,” says Molinari, president and CEO of Visit Detroit. “From working in convention centers to sports management, concerts, hospitality and events, there are many pathways to an exciting, impactful and fulfilling job in our industry.”

To further evidence this commitment to the meeting industry’s future, Visit Detroit is sponsoring two key forthcoming MPI Academy offerings for high schools and high school students: a Meetings 101 career exploration certificate program and the Workforce Development Toolkit (which will include a Career Exploration Guide and other tools that introduce students to the meeting and event industry, career pathways, job roles and potential opportunities).

Why was it important for Visit Detroit to support the Emerging Meeting Professional (EMP) certificate and the recruitment toolkit?

Visit Detroit believes strongly in creating opportunities for the next generation of students to discover the meeting, convention and event manage-

ment industry. The EMP certificate ensures that event professionals possess the necessary skills, fostering higher-quality events and enhancing Detroit’s reputation as a premier event destination. Visit Detroit is committed to helping train, recruit and retain the top talent in the industry, which will help drive economic growth and vitality across the state of Michigan.

Why is it important to properly educate students and young/new professionals entering the meeting industry workforce?

A well-educated workforce contributes to the growth and sustainability of the meeting industry by fostering creativity, collaboration and the development of new ideas and approaches. With new technology and trends impacting our industry, it will be even more critical that students and young professionals have the skills they need to develop and deliver high-quality meetings,

conventions and events.

Can you tell us about a specific skill that’s important for meeting professionals in the current landscape?

Adaptive technology integration is a pivotal skill for meeting professionals in the current landscape. With the increasing prevalence of augmented and virtual reality, proficiency in seamlessly incorporating diverse technological tools and platforms is essential for delivering engaging and effective gatherings. This skill empowers professionals to navigate the evolving digital landscape, enhance attendee experiences and ensure the success of events in a rapidly changing meeting industry.

What attribute is currently attracting students to the meeting industry?

Creative and engaging people continue to be attracted to the meeting, convention and event industry because of the opportunities to design unique and memorable experiences, collaborate with diverse professionals and leverage cutting-edge technologies. These opportunities align perfectly with the interests and aspirations of today’s students and young professionals. A blend of hands-on engagement, strategic thinking and the chance to shape the future of event management is drawing students to the exciting and ever-evolving world of meetings and events.

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MENTAL HEALTH: Initiatives Matter

Employees need and expect sustainable and mentally healthy workplaces, which requires taking on the real work of culture change.

BY JANICE CARDINALE

One silver lining amid all the disruption and trauma over the past few years is the normalization of mental health challenges at work.

Although employers have responded with initiatives like mental health days or weeks, four-day workweeks and enhanced counseling benefits or apps, they're not enough. Employees need and expect sustainable and mentally healthy workplaces, which requires taking on the real work of culture change. It's not enough to simply offer the latest apps or employ euphemisms like "well-being" or "mental fitness." Employers must connect what they say to what they actually do.

Over the past year, the community at [Event Minds Matter](#)—a collective focused on advocating for mental health within the event industry—has been looking at organizations who are leading the charge when it comes to creating a caring workplace culture

and putting their people first.

What we have discovered about all the companies we have researched and spotlighted is that they have one thing in common: They put their people first and provide a caring culture that many younger professionals entering the industry want to be a part of. We have even heard from a few devout followers of Event Minds Matter that they applied for opportunities because the ad they applied for promoted a workplace wellness program. Now *that's* a positive change.

The program that we have implemented called #WeCare is a brand-new



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resource for our industry, and we will be sharing all of it with the community to raise awareness and help guide solutions.

One of our early adopters, @trish-knox at @tkevents, shared her experience with #WeCare so that others could educate their employees and leadership teams.

"Recently, we undertook peer support training in mental health at [TK Events Inc.](#) It all came about through our connections in Event Minds Matter," Knox says. "Apparently, we were the first event company to take the training with [Mental Health Innovations Consulting](#), and I hope we're the first in a long line of companies—not just in events, but all industries."

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While attitudes towards employee health and well-being have improved significantly in recent years, there is still a lack of understanding and support for mental health issues in the modern workplace.

On the TK Events blog, Knox shares the learnings and insights for supporting and training her people. One thing she learned? The importance of self-care.

“We all know this in our heads, but it really does make a difference in our ability to not only live our lives but to respond to what it throws at us,” Knox writes. “It’s a part of our well-being that has been sadly ignored in these... pandemic years.”

While attitudes towards employee health and well-being have improved significantly in recent years, there is still a lack of understanding and support for mental health issues in the modern workplace. Employees who choose to divulge a mental health issue continue to face dismissal, disciplinary action or demotion.

Every two weeks, Event Minds Matter spotlights an organization to help encourage other industry leaders and professionals to follow and learn from those that have prioritized their employees—which ultimately results in refreshing and mindful solutions for creating a safe and happy workplace. Take a peek at these leading organizations with impactful mental health initiatives.

Harry’s: Work with purpose

Harry’s, a renowned men’s shaving accessory brand, prioritizes the well-being of employees and cultivates a culture of honesty and transparency. In 2021, Harry’s launched the Open Minds Initiative, a competition in search of the next great idea to change the state of mental health in the U.S.—with the winner receiving \$5 million to transform their idea into reality. The goal of the winner—a collaboration between Futures without Violence, Big Brothers

Big Sisters of America and the National Council for Mental Wellbeing—was to launch a national network of mental health responders focused on helping teens and young men recognize and overcome mental health challenges and connect them with the appropriate resources. This program will specialize in reaching young, male-identified youth, boys and men of color.

Asana: Culture as a product

Asana, a global leader in the work management software space, looks at culture as the line that connects its values, business aspirations and people. By placing culture at the centre, Asana underscores its importance. The company employs “thoughtful design,” using data to understand what works best and creating safe spaces for employees to discuss mental health as they evaluate the effectiveness of each approach. Those approaches touch just about every facet of work, including in-office nap pods to promote better sleep and quarterly real talk events that drive better conversations

around mental health. A robust live well program encourages everyone to describe what they need for maximum mental fitness.

Tangerine Bank: Shifting the culture

Tangerine Bank—twice rated one of Canada’s 10 most admired corporate cultures—approaches strong mental health as a full body experience, promoting a healthy lifestyle by offering employees a wellness subsidy and discounted rates at health clubs. They also ensure that their subsidized cafeterias provide a health-conscious, low-fat menu. Employees are encouraged to take breaks and go outside for walks during their lunch hour. Services such as personal counselling, childcare and eldercare services, crisis intervention and group support are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

We praise these organizations for their leadership, culture and people-first initiatives.

Employers that have supported their employees with the pandemic, racial injustices, return-to-office planning and/or mental health overall have better mental health and engagement outcomes. Culture change requires both a top-down and bottom-up approach to succeed.

Promoting autonomy, establishing boundaries and creating norms around

communications, responsiveness and urgency can go a long way toward building a mentally healthy culture.



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EVENT SUSTAINABILITY:

'An Eagerness Like Never Before'

Sustainability insights and networking at Marriott HQ during MPI's Regional Business Exchange.

BY BLAIR POTTER

How important is sustainability to meeting professionals in 2023? Courtney Lohmann, CMP, SEPC, is seeing "an eagerness like never before."

Lohmann, founder of Caretta Impact and a 23-year veteran of meetings, hospitality and travel, would know. She developed the curriculum for a sustainability boot camp—a partnership between MPI and Marriott International—with the inaugural edition taking place at MPI's World Education Congress in June.

A micro-certificate sustainability program was then held in Bethesda, Md., just outside of Washington, D.C., in July. The program was a component of MPI's Regional Business Exchange—a unique micro-event experience that also featured Express Connect (a networking format that allows participants to meet multiple potential partners or clients in a condensed period) and an exclusive tour of Marriott's

brand-new global headquarters.

Telling the story

Lohmann says it's clear that planners have become far more open to sustainability and are showing a willingness to change past planning practices with a more sustainable future in mind.

"Food and beverage still makes a big

splash. This section [of the program] seems to generate the most discussion," she says. "And it makes sense. This is something we have at every event. I have also seen a very interesting discussion around the role of the DMO and how the DMO can help with sustainable planning tools. I don't think most planners realize how much DMOs are doing to help define sustainability

"I really liked the three-pronged approach of the Regional Business Exchange, which allowed for planners to first meet with DMO representatives in a speed-dating setting, followed by the education on sustainability and rounding it out with a fascinating tour of the Marriott International headquarters. I would highly recommend all planners attend the program!"



*Carolyn Patterson-Kemper, M.S., CMP, DES
vice president and head of events for Chevy Chase Trust*

in their destinations. And I think DMOs need to tell that story better so that planners know to engage with the DMO prior to booking a destination. DMOs have a tremendous number of resources available for planners and can make planning a sustainable event far simpler.”

Much of the discussion coming from program attendees has centered around either attendee engagement or challenges with supplier partners, according to Lohmann.

“It’s the story of a planner implementing something but then attendees not really participating in it—or they receive negative feedback on their post-event survey,” she says. “I think this is due to planners not taking a strategic approach to their sustainability plan and not telling the story behind why they are implementing it. You have to tell the story early and often to help engage all of your stakeholders and hit maximum impact.”

Though big changes at many venues indicate a stronger focus on sustainability, a disconnect between planners and suppliers tends to linger, Lohmann says.

“Sustainability is a massive topic, and depending on what area you focus on, the sustainable solutions you offer out to a planner may vary from one venue/hotel to another,” she says. “Planners are not savvy enough in all of the venue operational elements of sustainability to know what questions to ask. So, we land in this place in the middle, which is the disconnect. I think all venues/hotels and any supplier focused on sustainability needs to tell their story better and in a very transparent way.”

Encouraging conversations

Carolyn Patterson-Kemper, M.S., CMP, DES, vice president and head of events for Chevy Chase Trust, attended the Regional Business Exchange and was particularly intrigued by stats shared during the sustainability program about the environmental impact of meetings

and events.

“Although this data was an eye opener, it presents meeting and event professionals with an inherent opportunity to graft in conversations around sustainability efforts with leadership during the inception of meeting planning,” she says.

Attendee Sharia Barksdale, MTA, CMP, DES, manager, meetings for the American Institute of Architects, appreciated Lohmann’s starting-small approach.

“Sustainability is such an important

Barksdale says her next step following the program will be conducting research into her own event history.

“Evaluating overall event spend, meal counts versus actual attendance, post-event survey responses and even hosting a focus group to ask targeted questions will give a great starting point to what efforts are important to both your organization and program,” she says. “Collecting this data allows us as planners to connect with organization leadership to establish a strategic sustainability committee tasked with

“I’m not sure what magic formula the MPI team used to curate those who attended the Regional Business Exchange, but I was very pleased to convene with such an amazing group of professionals. The suppliers present gave wonderful insights on their destinations,

but also on the efforts being made to move our industry towards more diverse and inclusive experiences. I made some new friends, learned more about MPI and the amazing services offered to its members and gained some amazing new information on sustainability. But most importantly, I left inspired and excited to contribute to our industry in a greater way.”

Sharia Barksdale, MTA, CMP, DES
manager, meetings for the American Institute of Architects



mission in our industry that executing it successfully always felt daunting,” she says. “Her advice to establish a strategic plan on which sustainability initiatives are important to your organization, earmarking three to eight to guide your focused efforts, then slowly allocating resources and adopting practices to fulfill each initiative over time was game changing! This allows an organization to gain its footing and momentum in sustainable practice adoption while adjusting expectations and gaining buy-in from all stakeholders—specifically attendees who will physically experience the changes with the implementation of your program.”

exploring the initiatives that our staffing and resources can realistically manage, and to set achievable goals and target timeframes for execution.”

Patterson-Kemper also plans to begin conducting internal research within her organization, starting with an audit of sustainability practices to ultimately improve its carbon footprint.

“Attending the MPI Regional Business Exchange has also inspired me to begin incorporating specific questions about sustainability and encourage those conversations with caterers, venues, hoteliers and other vendor partners during the vetting process,” she says.